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Social and Historical Investigation of China’s Ethnic Minorities: Based on Political Stability and National Unity

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ABSTRACT

The social and historical investigation of China’s ethnic minorities was a major national political action in 50s-60s of the 20th Century, and it was of particular significance to the governance of the frontier, the maintenance of ethnic equality, and the long-term stability of China. In the era of underdeveloped information technology, the Communist Party of China (CPC) entered ethnic minorities areas, on the one hand, to understand the living conditions of ethnic minorities, and to facilitate the introduction of relevant supporting policies. On the other hand, the investigation process also publicized the CPC’s thought on governing the country, so that the people can more understand and trust the CPC, so as to promote national unity and political stability. Although this investigation has become a history, its significance, value and effect are still prominent for China’s political stability and national development today. Therefore, it is still of important practical significance to study the social and historical investigation of China’s ethnic minorities.

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Introduction

In the 1950s, the CPC carried out a social and historical investigation of ethnic minorities, which was relevant and of special significance to the consolidation of state power and national development. The origins of the investigation are closely linked to the need for state power building and frontier governance at the time, and the investigation was instructed by Mao Zedong: ‘After the democratic reform and socialist transformation of the minority areas, the social landscape will change

rapidly. Therefore, it is time to organise a investigation quickly, to salvage and record these social and historical conditions in the minority areas as they are.' (Di&Zhang, 1999). Judging from the various documentary records of the time, the investigation of the social history of China's ethnic minorities was both a political construction work and a cultural excavation work.

Although the social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities has become history, its spiritual core and influence are still of great importance in today's society. The reason for rethinking and summarising the social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities in today's society is, on the one hand, the historical significance and relevance of the investigation itself, on the other hand, to revisit and deepen the investigation in search of historical wisdom for the study and resolution of current Chinese realities. The investigation has both contributed to intellectual innovation in Chinese academic research and to the revival of Chinese folk culture.

Despite China's rapid economic development in recent years, China is still in the primary stage of socialism, and the elimination of 'relative poverty' and the reduction of the gap between the rich and the poor are still challenges that need to be tackled urgently. These problems have a direct impact on people's lives and the long-term stability of the country. Therefore, there is an urgent need to solve these problems. However, in order to overcome these problems, not only do we need top-level national design and institutional arrangements, but we also need to have an in-depth understanding and comprehensive grasp of different groups, classes and regions in China.

With scarce resources and insufficient capital, only with a full understanding and grasp of reality can we better find a breakthrough in solving problems as well as maximising benefits, and research is an important grip to obtain information and grasp the facts. When the People's Republic of China was established, the governance of the frontier and the prosperity and stability of the country were inseparable from a large number of social investigations. Many of the policies formulated by the CPC at that time were formed on the basis of a large number of social investigations. In other words, social investigations were not only an important way for people to obtain information and grasp facts, but also an important basis for policy formulation and institutional arrangements.

Literature Review

Investigation and research is the glorious tradition and fine style of CPC. In the early days of People's Republic of China, CPC was to carry out organized social investigations on ethnic minorities, which provided a scientific basis for the implementation of CPC policies towards ethnic minorities and laid a good foundation for the construction and development of research disciplines on ethnic minorities in China (Fang, 2021). Through reviewing literature and historical studies after the founding of the New China, we can find that in the 1950s investigations of ethnic minority social nature were carried out to meet the political needs of democratic reform in ethnic regions, to enrich social theory of Marxism as well as to emphasize Chinese characteristics. More importantly, in academic perspective, social nature investigations responded to the discussion of staging ancient history in the field of historical studies, and the data and conclusions were widely quoted in subsequent arguments, which provided new

Social and Historical Investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities: Based on Political Stability and National Unity

material sources for establishing new theories (Wu, 2013). From 1956 to 1964, the Social-Historical Investigation on Ethnic Groups in China is a cognition of Chinese ethnic groups in specific period, and also the continuation and change of Chinese anthropological survey in the first half of the 20th century. Its text embodies a double infiltration by politics and academia(Wang, 2020).

The ethnic identification work carried out in China in the 1950s was a great pioneering work, which provided great help to the CPC in social management and economic development in minority areas. It is worth mentioning that through national ethnic identification, the huge population in China can be scientifically divided into 56 ethnic groups, which is conducive to both political governance and targeted institutional construction and arrangement. Some scholars believe that the work of ethnic identification should be based on scientific basis and will, among which ethnic definition is the theoretical premise of ethnic identification(Huang, 1989). However, there are many disputes about ethnic definition in the world at present, and there is no unified consensus. In China, Stalin's definition of the nation is mainly adopted. Of course, the premise of using Stalin's definition of the nation is based on China's actual national conditions, rather than dogma.

In fact, not all the theories that have been formed can explain various phenomena of human society. Generally speaking, a theory often represents only the thoughts and opinions of a person or a part of people. Therefore, when people use a theory, they tend to make targeted choices based on their actual needs. In the process of using Stalin's national definition, Chinese scholars do not directly cite it, but combine it with China's actual conditions. The basic theoretical basis of Chinese ethnic identification is Stalin's ethnic definition. However, this definition has not become a dogma, but has always been used flexibly in practice(Wang, 2010). From the perspective of practical significance, China's ethnic identification work not only scientifically divides the belonging of different ethnic groups, but also provides the basis for the CPC to establish and implement the system of regional ethnic autonomy, so as to ensure ethnic unity, political stability and national prosperity. The work of ethnic identification has been recognized by the Chinese people. Meanwhile, the ethnic identities of different ethnic groups have been guaranteed by the Constitution, and the rights of all ethnic groups have been protected by law(Wang&Zou, 2020).

Through the analysis of published literature found that Chinese minority social history research mainly presents the following characteristics: first, many people involved in the investigation from the academic perspective to review process and Personal experience, it is helpful for current scholars to understand the social history survey of the past. Second, some scholars have tried to analyze the nature and significance of the investigation. Third, some scholars have analyzed the social and historical investigation process and its significance by studying individual cases. It is undeniable that the research results of many researchers have helped people to better understand the process and objectives of the investigation work. However, it is a little pity that few scholars now think about the positive impact of this investigation work on the current national unity and social stability in China. This is also an important reason why we conducted this study.

Research Methods and the Theoretical Framework

The research method of this paper is mainly the literature research method, namely summarizing and reflecting on the social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities in the 1950s and 1960s from the historical literature. Of course, other effective research methods are also adopted. The theoretical tools of this paper are mainly the theories of history, ethnology, sociology, anthropology, etc.

The Process of Social and Historical Investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities

The task, requirements and outline of the investigation

The Social and Historical investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities is an exceptional action taken by the CPC based on national and social governance. The specific task of this investigation work is to determine to vigorously carry out research work in ethnic minorities areas. This is an urgent task for China's ethnic work and scientific research. The specific requirements of the investigation are to investigate the social productivity, social ownership and class situation of the ethnic groups, to collect as much information as possible on their historical development and their particular customs and habits, and then to make a systematic study of the history of the different ethnic groups (Su, 1961).

A detailed and thorough investigation outline is essential to any major social investigation, and the same applies to the investigation of the social history of China's ethnic minorities, which required the design of a practical outline. The main contributors to the outline were Lin Yaohua, Cen Jiawu, Chen Yongling, GuBao, Shi Xiulin, Wang Furen, Lu Guangtian, Cheng Suolu, Tian Jizhou, Huang Ansen, Hu Qingjun, Chen Kehui, Wang Jingru, Luo Zhiping and others (Ling, C., et al, 2004). They wrote an outline of a investigation of the nature of society, which helped them in their work on the social history of ethnic minorities. Of course, this investigation outline is not perfect, and it will continue to be improved as the investigation progresses.

Time, space, object and content of the investigation

The social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities was divided into two main stages: the first stage from August 1956 to June 1958, and the second stage from August 1958 to early 1964. In the first stage, eight investigation working groups were set up, namely the Inner Mongolia Investigation Group, Xinjiang Investigation Group, Tibet Investigation Group, Sichuan Investigation Group, Yunnan Investigation Group, Guizhou Investigation Group, Guangdong Investigation Group and Guangxi Investigation Group.

The investigation space mainly covered the northeast, southwest and northwest regions of China, and field investigations were conducted on the Mongolian, Daur, Oroqen, Ewenki, Hezhe, Uyghur, Yi, Tibetan, Wa, Jingpo, Lisu, Nu, Dulong, Dai, Miao, Buyi, Zhuang, Yao and Li ethnic groups (The Scientific Research Management Department of the Party History Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, et al., 2009). The investigation team collected comprehensive information on the history, culture and society of the above ethnic groups.

Social and Historical Investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities: Based on Political Stability and National Unity

In the second stage, by August 1958, eight more investigation working groups were added, namely Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, Hunan, Fujian, Liaoning, Jilin and Hei Longjiang Investigation Group, and the investigation areas mainly covered the northwest, northeast and south-central regions of China, as well as the southeast. In terms of the content of the investigations, they mainly investigated the social nature, history and culture, customs and habits of the ethnic minorities, and on the basis of the investigations, they wrote a series of books on a brief history of the ethnic minorities and an overview of the ethnic minority regions. In a sense, these investigations not only provided first-hand materials for political construction and national governance decisions, but were also of great significance in enriching Chinese ethnic culture.

People, departments, methods of investigation

Liu Geping served as the leader of the leading group of the investigation, and Liu Chun and Fei Xiaotong served as deputy leader. From the personnel structure that participates in this investigation work, have government official, academic experts. In terms of government officials, there are both central leaders and local officials; In terms of academic experts, there are mainly experts in history, ethnology, sociology, linguistics, archaeology and so on. This investigation is mainly based on the interview records and participation in the field investigation. Of course, the methods used in this investigation are diverse. As Fei Xiaotong, who participated in the investigation, said: 'The investigation of ethnic society and history adopted a comprehensive investigation method, and the investigation team included researchers from history, ethnic groups, languages, archaeology, art and other disciplines'. (Fei, 2006).

The historical significance and academic value of the investigation of the social history of China's ethnic minorities is undeniable, but we have also found some shortcomings and flaws in this investigation work. From the relevant documents of the 1950s and 1960s, it can be seen that the investigation work had strong political overtones because it was conducted in a special historical background. Although this investigation work lasted for several years, the strength and depth of the research on ethnic minorities was far from adequate. Due to the limited time available for the investigation, much of the research work was not in-depth and detailed enough, which were some of the shortcomings of this investigation and research work. In fact, many experts and scholars who participated in this research work were aware of these problems, so that after this research work was completed, many experts and scholars returned to the field sites that had been investigated many times.

Although the social-historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities ended early in the 1960s, scholars can still draw inspiration from this investigation work. However, the methodology of the Social-Historical investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities can still serve as an effective tool for the current study of real-life issues. In addition, this investigation work has produced many good research results that have helped contemporary scholars to study the history and culture of China.

The Academic Value of Social and Historical Investigation of Ethnic Minorities in China

Enriching the ethnic theories of China

Applying marxism's ethnic theories and adapting marxism theory to China's national conditions is the innovation point of social and historical investigation of ethnic minorities in China. The main theoretical tool used in China's ethnic identification work is Stalin's ethnic definition, which takes 'common language', 'common region', 'common economic life' and 'common psychological quality' as the theoretical basis of ethnic identification. It is well known that Stalin was a representative of the Marxists, and to use Stalin's ethnic definition is to inherit and develop Marxism.

Chinese scholars not only use marxism's ethnic theories to analyze and carry out ethnic studies, but also put forward ethnic policies in line with China's development through a large number of investigations and studies combined with China's national conditions. Among them, the system of regional ethnic autonomy is a vivid embodiment of the knowledge innovation of the historical investigation of Chinese ethnic minorities. Whether it is the use of Stalin's ethnic definition as a theoretical tool for ethnic identification, or the construction of regional ethnic autonomy system and other ethnic policies through knowledge innovation and combining with China's national conditions, they have always enriched Marxism.

Reconstructing the theory of stages of ancient social process

In the field of ethnology and anthropology, Morgan was one of the representatives who paid attention to and studied the ancient human history earlier. The book *Ancient Society*, published in 1877, describes Morgan's thoughts on the study of ancient societies. He studied primitive society from the perspective of materialism, and divided the development of human beings into the process of ignorance, barbarism and civilization. His research results attracted the attention of Marx, who not only affirmed Morgan's research results, but also had his own thoughts about the original social history. *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* by Engels is also a classic Marxist work on the development law of ancient society and the origin of the state. Chinese research on ancient society was also influenced by Morgan, Marx, Engels and others, especially in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Does China have its own intellectual innovations and theoretical tools regarding the study of ancient societies? The answer is yes. In the field of primitive social history research, Chinese scholars have proposed a new framework for the study of primitive social history based on relevant Marxism theories and through extensive empirical research, and have divided primitive social history into the primitive group period, the blood family commune period and the clan commune period (Ling, 1978). They believe that the first stage of the development of primitive society (primordial stage) should begin when the apes first diverged. The second stage (blood family commune period) is marked by the beginning of tool-making and the use of fire, and then the transition to the clan commune stage (Ling & Cheng, 1981). On the one hand, they inherited the thoughts of Morgan, Marx and Engels on the study of ancient social history. On the other hand, they created theories. In general, they reconstructed the theory of stages of ancient

Social and Historical Investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities: Based on Political Stability and National Unity

social processes and provided a new research paradigm for the study of ancient social history.

Contributed to the theoretical construction of ethnology and sociology in China

The intellectual innovation of the social-historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities is not only reflected in the two dimensions of enriching marxism's ethnic theories and reconstructing the theory of the staging of ancient social processes, but also in the field of the theoretical construction of ethnology and sociology in China.

During the lifetime of scholars such as Fei Xiaotong, Lin Yaohua, Wu Zelin, Cen Jiawu, Li Youyi, Li Shaoming and Song Shuhua, they all did a great deal of research in their fields of study and produced a large number of research results, which laid the foundation of Chinese ethnology and sociology. In the 1960s, despite the relatively slow development of ethnology and sociology in China, they kept on doing research and actively explored and constructed the disciplinary theories and methods, and made every effort to maintain the status of ethnology and sociology in China. After the reform and opening up in 1978, they took the lead in proposing and demanding the restoration of ethnology and sociology as disciplines. Although this process was difficult, they never gave up, and finally ensured the status of ethnology and sociology.

In terms of the historical contribution of the social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities, it can be summarised in the following three aspects: Firstly, the investigation has contributed to the building of the democratic revolution in ethnic minority areas, maintaining the unity of the Chinese nation and consolidating the political power of the CPC. Secondly, this investigation has promoted the cultural construction and rejuvenation of China, especially the discovery of a large number of excellent traditional culture of ethnic minorities. Thirdly, this investigation work has collected, collated and published a large amount of information and books on ethnic folk culture, which to a certain extent has provided a reliable empirical research basis for the development of Chinese disciplines such as history, ethnology, sociology and anthropology.

Conclusion

Firstly, the investigation on the social history of China's ethnic minorities is a national action. In fact, any social investigation of a national character has a certain degree of relevance and purpose. This investigation is also closely related to the needs of national construction. Serving socialist construction was not only a requirement of the state for intellectuals at the time, but also an inherent spiritual pursuit of intellectuals themselves.

'If we are to build a socialist spiritual civilisation, then we must have our own system with the traditional Chinese history, suitable for our national characteristics, serving the socialist system and with communist ideology at its core. It boils down to serving the people and working selflessly' (Fei, 1982). In talking about ethnic studies work, Gu Bao believes that Chinese ethnic studies work should serve national unity, ethnic unity and the modernisation of ethnic

minority regions (Gu, 1994). It is evident that Chinese scholars have always closely related their academic research to the needs of the real society and the development of the country, and always with a pragmatic spirit and the integration of personal destiny into national destiny in the process of intellectual innovation.

Secondly, the Social and Historical investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities has contributed to the economic development of ethnic minority regions. In Fei Xiaotong's view, the targeted training of talents should be based on what is needed and what is trained, not on step by step according to a fixed textbook. (Fei, 1999). He believes that to solve the problem of China's modernisation, people should help ethnic minority regions to develop economically and culturally and to achieve equality among all ethnic groups in order to truly achieve common prosperity (Fei, 1983).

Thirdly, the social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities has promoted the reform of China's ethnic policy. In terms of ethnic identification, Fei Xiaotong, Lin Yaohua, Wu Zelin and others went deep into ethnic minority areas and carried out a lot of investigation and research work, and they made important contributions to China's ethnic identification work. In particular, their research results provide reference for the people's republic of China to formulate ethnic policies. With regard to the protection of the rights and interests of ethnic minorities, preferential policies are granted in accordance with the law to highlight and ensure the rights of ethnic minorities (Chen, 2009). The implementation of ethnic policies has not only realized ethnic equality, further enhanced ethnic unity, greatly promoted the rapid economic development of ethnic minority areas, and protected the legitimate rights and interests of ethnic minorities.

Fourth, it is the mission of Chinese scholars to serve the people and promote national development. Fei Xiaotong defined Chinese anthropology as 'anthropology for the people', and he believed that the first thing to make a country strong is to enrich the people, and if the people are rich, the country will be strong (Fei, 1992a). He put forward the idea of 'category, level, rise and fall, distribution and development' for China's township construction at that time (Fei, 1992b), and he provides theoretical support for urban and rural construction in contemporary China. The investigation of the social history of ethnic minorities in China is a model of theoretical innovation, which has stimulated the enthusiasm of Chinese intellectuals committed to the unification of academic research and national development. In short, the social and historical investigation of China's ethnic minorities has profoundly influenced political stability, national unity and the process of China's modernization.

Social and Historical Investigation of China's Ethnic Minorities: Based on
Political Stability and National Unity

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