

# Question of Ethnic Group Formulation in the Chinese Census

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## 1. Introduction:

Census is a government work which collects demographic and social statistics on all individuals within a country at a specified time period. Census statistics provide “a critical reference to ensure equity in distribution of wealth, government services and representation nationwide...a sample frame for sample survey...[and] statistics on small areas and small population groups”(United Nations, 2008:5). Which categories to be included in a national census is a choice of each individual country and “ethnicity” is recommended for national census by the United Nations as a choice of seven options of demographic and social characteristics (United Nations, 2008). However, countries may have their own interpretation of “ethnicity” and their own decision of ways to put the question in their censuses. For example, Japan does not collect ethnic information in the census, instead only about nationality<sup>1</sup> and United States has a rather complicated system, compared with Japan, to collect race and ethnic information in its census<sup>2</sup>.

China is a country with 56 ethnic groups today, including Han which are the majority of the Chinese and then Chinese from 55 ethnic minority groups. As proportion of Han Chinese has declined over the years, the size of the minority Chinese is increasing (Table 1). In 2010, minority Chinese reached 113.79 million<sup>3</sup> a size a little less than the national population of Mexico in 2012. With the ethno-cultural characteristics of the Chinese population, China collects ethnicity statistics in its census.

Table 1 Change of Chinese Population by Ethnicity (%), 1953-2010

	1953	1964	1982	1990	2000	2010
Minorities	6.06	5.78	6.7	8.01	8.41	8.49
Han	93.94	94.22	93.3	91.99	91.59	91.51
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Sources: figures are from the official report of censuses of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/rkpcgb/>

The inclusion of specific questions (e.g. ethnicity), the way the question is worded, and the options of answers to the questions have been paid with much attention by international organizations, national governments, scholars and individuals in different social research fields. Scholars have been interested in issues

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.stat.go.jp/data/kokusei/2010/special/lecture/lecture\\_01.htm](http://www.stat.go.jp/data/kokusei/2010/special/lecture/lecture_01.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/interactive-form.php> (2011.8.16)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb/t20110428\\_402722232.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjgb/rkpcgb/qgrkpcgb/t20110428_402722232.htm)

related to ethnicity questions in surveys and censuses including measuring a dynamic and multi-dimensional concept of ethnicity by a single categorical question, different expectations about the concept or question, as well as the effectiveness of such a measure (Burton et al., 2010:1333-34). While there are many discussions and studies on ethnicity and census in the international academic field, very few or even no discussion specifically about ethnicity question in Chinese census or survey appears in Chinese academic literature. This article does not explore reason(s) of the lack of the study. Instead, the article will examine the ethnicity or ethnic group question in the Chinese census. More specifically, the article will discuss the definition of ethnicity for the census as well as for general purpose, reasons to include the ethnicity question in the Chinese census, as well as a short history of changes of ethnic groups in China related to census. The study will increase our knowledge of ethnicity in the census by a Chinese example, remind us to use the census statistics cautiously (e.g. for international comparison), and make us think about the best way to collect ethnic statistics in different countries.

In this article, we use word “ethnicity” but not other words for our discussion on the issue. We find in places where collected statistics of ethnic group, “race” or/and “ethnicity” are the most common words used to describe the different characteristics of the population by ethnicity. Countries with populations of different races may use both words today while trying to minimize the negative connotation associating with word of “race” (e.g. U.S.) or not mention race in their census (e.g. U.K.). Chinese census does not use a word equivalent of “race” (种族), but a word of *Minzu* (民族)<sup>4</sup> similar to “ethnicity”. The word of ethnicity matches the meaning of the Chinese word *Minzu* or *Zuqun*, a word that describes a socially defined category of an ethnic group. Therefore in this article, to avoid confusion, we use word “ethnicity” or “ethnic group” to describe related questions and answers in the Chinese census.

## 2. Definition of Ethnicity in the Chinese Census

In the Chinese census, “ethnicity” status or identity has been asked in one question since the first census in 1953. There was no definition of ethnicity for the census, and the definition seems redundant since its meaning should be as natural as categories of name, age or place of residence in a census. Or, without a definition of ethnicity for census, there should be no dispute or confusion to the individuals answering the question and to the individuals reading the statistics from the census. This situation, without an overt definition, means that Chinese are accepting a classification of ethnicity at social as well as at individual level. It leads to a question of what is the definition of ethnicity in Chinese society.

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4 Rong Ma, a leading sociologist, proposed to use “Zuqun 族群” instead of “Minzu” to describe or refer an ethnic group since *Minzu*, translated as “nation” related to political movements while *Zuqun* “refers to groups of people within multiethnic countries who have different histories of social development, different cultural traditions (including language and religion), who possess strong internal identities, and who may, to a certain extent, be classified as subcultural groups” (2010: 32)

The word ethnicity or *Minzu* was not a Chinese native word. It is not clear when and who used the word of “*Minzu*” (ethnicity) in China first, but most people agreed that the word has been used in China since around 1900 probably first by philologist, philosopher and revolutionary Zhang Tai-yan or reformist and philosopher Liang Qi-chao (e.g., Jin and Wang, 1981; Huang, 2002a), or even imported from Japan in the latter part of 1900 since the two countries share some Chinese characters in their languages (e.g., Ma, 2010: 32).

By having the word appear and used in China, meaning of the word or definition of ethnicity became an issue. Liang Qi-chao considered ethnicity as a product of evolution of folk customs with eight characteristics: same residence, descent, physical features, language, written words, religion, custom, and livelihood (cite from Lin, 1990: 102). Or people belonging to one ethnicity should share the eight characteristics. The most popular and authoritative definition of ethnicity in China, especially after 1949, was that of Stalin. According to Stalin, ethnicity is “a historically constituted community of people having a common language, a common geographical residence, a common economic life and a common psychological make-up which expresses itself in a common culture” (1979:64).

With changes in understanding and discussion of ethnicity in China over the years, we find an official definition of ethnicity today by The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences which is very similar to that of Stalin. Ethnicity represents “a group of people who share a common language, geographical location, economic life as well as same psychological quality based on same culture” (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Linguistics, ed. 2002:884). This definition adds more requirements to be an ethnic group from the United Nations definition, or added required elements of culture, economics and language. According to the United Nations, ethnicity can be broadly defined as an entity whose members have “a shared understanding of history and territorial origins (regional and national) of an ethnic group or community, as well as on particular cultural characteristics such as language and /or religion” (United Nations, 2008: 139). And in 2005, the State Council of Chinese government explained ethnicity in an official document as a stable community of people with common characteristics in history, production mode, language, culture, customs and psychological identity; for some groups, religion has played an important role in the formation of the group.<sup>5</sup> This latest official explanation of ethnicity omitted geographical or territorial requirement but emphasized the role of religion for certain ethnic groups. With these last two definitions of ethnicity in mind (by the Chinese Academy of Social Science and the State Council), we discuss ethnicity question in Chinese census.

### **3. Question on ethnicity in the 2010 census, purpose and answers of the question**

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<sup>5</sup> “About further strengthening the ethnic work, accelerating economic and social development in ethnic regions” [http://www.lawyee.net/Act/Act\\_Display.asp?RID=836601](http://www.lawyee.net/Act/Act_Display.asp?RID=836601) (2013.5.30)

There is only one question for ethnicity in both the short and long census form<sup>6</sup> of 2010 Chinese census. The question is very simple, represented as “R5 Ethnicity”. Over the years, Chinese government never clearly stated about reason(s) of collecting ethnic statistics in the census, or made a statement about it directly. However, indirectly, the information seems important serving the general purpose of the Chinese census: politically, the census will provide information for voting registration for representatives at various levels of the People’s Congress; economically, the census provides accurate population information for national economic planning (Wang, 1986:97). To achieve these goals, ethnicity of the population should be a category in the census.

Political and economic considerations are behind the purposes of census taking; however, the general goal of the censuses has been changed from one to another. For example, the fourth census in 1990 wanted<sup>7</sup> to examine changes in population size, structure, geographic distribution and characteristics since the third census in 1982. Demographic changes over the years were considered important. The fourth census also wanted to get reliable information for the national economic and social development strategy and plan, co-ordinate material and cultural life of Chinese, as well as examine how well the implementation of Chinese population policy was progressing. During the 1980s and 1990s, population policy was a significant as well as a controversial national policy and the Chinese government used the census to check or track progress or effect of the policy. Since the Chinese population policy is an ethnic sensitive policy (minority Chinese were under a more relaxed population regulation in terms of number of children a couple may have compared to Han or majority Chinese), the ethnic group and population data from census helped the government to monitor the effect of its population policy. Again in 2010, Chinese government stated the purpose of census taking as “taking the census regularly will identify changes of population in size, structure, distribution and living environment...will provide scientific and accurate statistics for making policies of population, labor and employment, education, social welfare and ethnicity”<sup>8</sup>. It seems that the 2010 census was the first time that the Chinese government clearly mentioned the purpose of census taking related to ethnicity: data collected in the census will be used for the development of ethnic group’s regions in China.

As of choices or answers to the question of ethnicity in census, there is no list of ethnic groups for individuals to choose one as an answer. However, today China acknowledges 56 ethnic groups, including “Han” (91.51% of total population in 2010) and other 55 ethnic minority groups (8.49% of the total population)<sup>9</sup>. Every census respondent needs to write down the name of the ethnic group he or she belongs to within the blank space provided on the census form. Since ethnicity status cannot be

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<sup>6</sup> 10% Chinese households filled long form of census in 2010

[http://www.stats.gov.cn/zgrkpc/dlc/zs/t20100419\\_402635495.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/zgrkpc/dlc/zs/t20100419_402635495.htm).

<sup>7</sup> “On Fourth National Population Census” (by The State Council, 1989.10.25)

<http://www.people.com.cn/item/flfgk/gwyfg/1989/112103198904.html> ()

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.stats.gov.cn/zgrkpc/dlc/zs/t20100419\\_402635507.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/zgrkpc/dlc/zs/t20100419_402635507.htm) (2013-4-2)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/jdfx/t20110428\\_402722253.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/jdfx/t20110428_402722253.htm) (2013-7-9)

changed in one's life in China and children from parents with different ethnicities choose only one ethnic group as his or her lifelong ethnic group, Chinese will not get confused with the ethnicity question in the census and will give a definite answer to the question. This way the census answer is similar to the type of "open-text" answer or "write-in" answer of census, but differs from the choice of answer in that one needs to choose one category from a pre-defined list or pre-designated categories.

As to the number of ethnic group one may answer in the census, Chinese can only write down one but no more than one ethnic group on the census form, according to the rules of answering the census<sup>10</sup>. It consists with ethnicity status in Chinese society that one only belongs to one and there is only one ethnic group in one's life. However, we still may get wrong answers for the question.

People may make mistakes intentionally or unintentionally when answering the census ethnicity question in China (Shi, 1995). First, some people confuse their ethnic group name with others. An ethnic group may have several names to call themselves in daily life. However, only one of the self-called names is listed officially as one of the 56 ethnic groups. The other self-claimed names are still used locally and may sound similar to a name of other ethnic group. This leads to answering the census question mistakenly with a name from the name of the official 56 ethnic groups, or the name belongs to another ethnic groups but only sound similar to their group in spoken language. An example will be *Buyizu* (布依族) (Table 2). There are several local names for the ethnic group. Few of them, e.g. *Yijia* and *Shuijia* sound similar to other ethnic groups, namely *Yizu* and *Shuizu* respectively. Thus in the census we find people did not answer the question according to their ethnic identity but followed the name that was similar to their locally used name or the ethnic group which they do not belong to.

Table 2. Types of Misreporting of Ethnic Groups in China

Type of mistakes	Officially listed name	Self-called name(s) or name(s) called by others	Mistakenly listed as another ethnic group in the census
Confusing one's name with name of other ethnic groups	<i>Buyizu</i> (布依族)	Self-called names: <i>Buyi</i> (布依) <i>Tiantouzhongjia</i> (田头仲家) <i>Yijia</i> (夷家) <i>Shuijia</i> (水家)	-- -- <i>Yizu</i> (彝族) <i>Shuizu</i> (水族)
Using a name called by others which happen to be an official name for the ethnic group	<i>Miaozu</i> (苗族)	Names called by others: <i>Gaoshanzu</i> (高山族) <i>Gaoshanmiao</i> (高山苗) <i>Duanqunmiao</i> (短裙苗) <i>Heimiao</i> (黑苗)	<i>Gaoshanzu</i> (高山族)
Without a name yet but tried to be included	--	<i>Nanjingren</i> (南京人)贵州	<i>Jingzu</i> (京族)

Source: Rearranged according to the explanation by Shi (1995)

<sup>10</sup> One may answer ethnic category in the census differently from one's officially recognized ethnicity identity, however, the answer will not change or replace one's ethnicity in real life (Population and Social Science/Technology Statistics Division of National Bureau of Statistics, 2000:11)

Second, people adopt an ethnic group name called by others which happens to be on the list of 56 ethnic groups. In Guizhou province of China, we find people answering ethnicity question as *Gaoshanzu* (高山族) instead of *Miaozu*(苗族) the ethnic group they actually belong to. An important reason for this is that the Miao group in this area is called by others as “*Gaoshanmiao, Duanqunmiao, Heimiao*(高山苗、短裙苗、黑苗)”. One of the name “*Gaoshanmiao*” is very similar to the official name of *Gaoshanzu*, an ethnic group is very different from *Gaoshanmiao*. However, some local *Miao* people in Guizhou province claimed themselves as *Gaoshanzu* instead of *Miao* in the census.

And third, people without a clear ethnic identity who try to claim themselves to be in an ethnic group. For different reasons, especially practical reasons, some of them answer ethnicity question as one group of ethnic groups on the list of 56 ethnic groups in China. For example, we find few people of *Jingzu*(京族) in Guizhou province are not *Jingzu*, but belongs to an unidentified ethnic group of “*Nanjingren*(南京人)” who adopted the middle name of *Jing* as the name of their ethnic group following the name of *Jingzu*(京族) in the ethnic group list (Table 2). In population of *Dulongzu*(独龙族) in Guizhou province, we also find some of them are in unidentified group of *Longjia*(龙家), who tried to fit into the list of ethnic groups by deleting the latter word of their group name and add “*Du*” in front, thus a name equal to the name of *Dulongzu*(独龙族) in the official ethnic group list. These confusions are especially observed in areas with mixed ethnic groups. There are unidentified ethnic groups in China today (Table 3) and the number is smaller compared to the total population in China and the number is getting smaller each census.

Table 3 Unidentified Ethnic Group Populations from Six Censuses in China

Year	Total Population	Unidentified Ethnic Group Populations	Naturalization	Unidentified/Total Population (%)
1953	577856141	1017299	1004	0.18
1964	691220104	32411	7416	0.00
1982	1003913927	799705	4937	0.08
1990	1130510638	752347	3498	0.07
2000	1242612226	734438	941	0.06
2010	1332810869	640101	1448	0.05

Source: Population Census Office under the State Council and Department of Population, Social Science and Technology Statistics of National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2012 (for 2010 data, p.54), 2002 (for 2000 data, p.46), 1993 (for 1990 data, p.319), 1985 (for 1982 data, p.20); Department of Population Statistics of State Statistical Bureau and Economic Department of State Nationalities Affairs Commission, 1994 (for data of 1953 and 1964, p.2).

Although these are some of the possibilities of making mistakes in census answer by individual respondents, if we do not consider mistakes of the answers or misclassification of one’s ethnicity in the census, we can group the answers of census question R5 in 2010 into three groups: 1) one definite ethnic group of the 56 ethnic groups, coded from 01-56; 2) “others”, coded as 97; and 3) “naturalization”, coded as 98 (The State Council National Office of Sixth Census ed., 2010: 137). Answers of

“others” means that the individual’s ethnic identity is not finalized yet as a result of ethnic classification project started in 1950s; if one answered as “others”, the census does not require one to write down reason for the answer. The category of “naturalization ‘入籍’ ” means that the individual was a foreigner, became a Chinese citizen now but does not belong to any one ethnic group officially recognized in China. For some individuals naturalized in China, especially those moved in near the borders of China, they may determine their ethnic identity since the country they came from has similar or identical ethnic groups as those in China. According to figures in Table 3, the size of individuals in categories of “others” or “naturalization” was small. It was a little over 640 thousands and only 0.05% of the total population in 2010.

#### **4. Changes in and finalization of number of ethnic groups in the Chinese censuses**

Since the first census in China (1953), “ethnicity” has been a question on the census form. Although China has asked ethnicity question in all its censuses without changes in format of the question, type or category of ethnic groups in the census is different in 1953 from that of 2010. Early censuses covered more ethnic groups and later censuses accepted only 56 ethnic groups as choice of answer to the ethnicity question. The finalization of 56 ethnic groups was a result of an ethnic classification project since 1950s which ended in 1979. To understand the current framework of ethnic groups in China as well as in census, an examination of changes in categories of ethnic group in China, categories used in previous censuses and principles of inclusion of individual ethnic group into the census will serve one’s purpose.

Categories or numbers of ethnic groups in the census are a reflection of the acceptance of the categories in a society. What are the accepted ethnic groups in Chinese society so far? As mentioned earlier, China started to use word of *Minzu* or ethnicity to refer to people with different ethnic characteristics a little over 100 years ago compared with its long history over 5000 years. In the hundred years, we find the categories of ethnicity changed from an umbrella term to specific groups and from more groups to a well defined number of groups. Here we do not attempt to explore history of the use of concept of ethnicity in China, but try to find the categories of ethnicity used in recent Chinese history, especially by authoritative figures.

Before the Republic of China, Liang Qi-chao in his general theory of ethnicity (“大民族主义”) proposed that China to the world is a nation with six ethnic groups: Han, Manchus, Mongolian, Hui, Miao and Tibetan (Liang, 1989: 75-76). Six ethnic groups, the most populous groups, were used to represent his vision of ethnic groups in China as well as a nation with different ethnic groups in the world. The exclusion of many other smaller ethnic groups in Liang’s general theory of ethnicity reflected the lack of a concept of ethnicity, fuzzy classification of ethnic groups, or even lack of interests in issue of ethnicity in Chinese society then.

During the period of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen, who fought the Qing Dynasty as well as foreign invasion and was the founder of Republic of China,

declared in the Declaration by the Provisional President of the Republic of China in 1912 that “foundation of a nation is people...To combine ethnic groups like Han, Manchus, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan into one unit is the unification of ethnicity” (1982: 2). Ethnic groups in Sun’s declaration reduced to five. Unlike Liang’s definite number of ethnic groups used in his writing, Sun used a word “etc.” to give room to include or recognize more ethnic groups into Chinese ethnicity. However, too many works to be dealt with for a new government in 1910s, Sun did not pay enough attention to the ethnicity issue, especially number or groups of ethnic groups to be recognized in Chinese society.

Mao Zedong, as a successor of Chiang Kai-shek and leader of People’s Republic of China (PRC), realized the issue of ethnicity in China even before the establishment of PRC. He mentioned in 1939 that “China has a 450 million population, about one fourth of the world population. In this population, over 90% are Han Chinese. Other than Han, there are dozens of ethnic groups including Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, Uighur, Miao, Yi, Zhuang, Zhongjiaren [Buyi], Chaoxian etc. Even at a different stage of cultural development, they all have a long history. China is a nation with various ethnic groups and a vast population” (1991: 622). Compared with number of ethnic groups in China expressed by different authoritative figures, Mao counted more ethnic groups while at the same time he put forth a limited number of ethnic groups in China. It is not hundreds but only dozens. Since the Chinese Communist Party came into power in 1949, the government followed its earlier policy on ethnicity and emphasized the equal opportunity for development of different ethnic groups.

Within about 100 years, Chinese society accepted a rather new concept of ethnicity, interpreted meaning(s) of ethnicity by different scholars and authorities, and promoted a clear definition of ethnicity by stating qualifications to be an ethnic group. Also, over the years, Chinese started to specify the numbers of ethnic groups from fewer but larger size to more but smaller size of ethnic groups. Up to 1950s, other than the major ethnic groups mentioned publically by the politicians, Chinese government was aware of the existence of different ethnic groups within China. Census taking is one way to reveal the complex structure of ethnicity and is a way to push the government into gradually making the number of ethnic groups fixed and stabilized.

Regarding census taking and ethnicity question between 1910 and 1950, first, there were only attempts of census taking. He (何) considered the 1911 population survey as the first population census in Chinese modern history (2000, 86-87). However, according to the definition of census by the United Nations, we have to conclude that they were only efforts to collect regional population information (e.g. in Yunnan Province in 1939 and 1942; Chen, 1981: 22) and national demographic information (e.g. in 1912 and 1928 by the National Government; Li and Mo, 1993: 242); they were not a national population census. Second, even with the efforts of census taking, the National Government did not collect any ethnicity information prior 1949. Therefore, the first modern Chinese census took place in 1953 since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. China only had 6 censuses with the

last one that finished in 2010.

Questions in the first census of China in 1953 only had six items: name, gender, age, ethnicity, relationship to household head and household address. Ethnicity clearly was an important question. According to self-reported answers of the ethnicity question, the government received more than 400 ethnic groups that year<sup>11</sup>. It is hard to differentiate if all the reported ethnic groups were individual ethnic groups, names of the place that the group lived, names for different groups within one ethnic group, names called by the group or other groups, or names translated from local dialect to Han Chinese (Fei, 1980:147). This large number of ethnic groups indicated the self-recognized ethnic identity; however, the size was not practical to promote equality among ethnic groups in economic and social development, which was a goal of the Chinese government. Therefore, since 1950s, initiated by the government, experts in ethnology, language and history as well as local influential people have been working together for an ethnic classification project. Goal of this project was to implement policies of the Chinese Communist Party for ethnic groups when the government wanted to balance personnel in government offices by ethnicity or to have clear understanding about characteristics of the ethnic groups in the ethnic autonomous region.

Principles of the ethnic classification were two, characteristics of ethnic groups and willingness of the group (e.g., Shi, 2005; Lin, 2005). Characteristics of the ethnic groups were an objective character which was basically evaluated by criteria of common geographical location, language, economic life and psychological make-up. These evaluation criteria were heavily influenced by the definition and explanation of ethnicity of Stalin. However, during the classification process, Chinese also made detailed studies on name(s) and historical origin of the ethnic groups to be identified. Names of the ethnic group may come from self-called name, names called by others, or names called by each other. Thus the name provided some hint of the characteristics and relationship of each ethnic group as well as among the groups. On top of this, studies of historical origin also provided strong or weak evidence to prove or disprove the recognition of the group as an official ethnic group.

Willingness of the ethnic groups means the intension of individual ethnic group to be listed as an independent ethnic group officially. One group may be qualified as an ethnic group in China according to the objective evaluation. However, people of the group may not want to be listed independently, or listed as this but not that ethnic group. Therefore, during the identification process, ethnicity intension of an individual group was very important. The willingness of the group was considered and respected. The name of an ethnic group was determined by the local group ( “名从主人” ) and the name of the group is acceptable to those being described.

Current categories and numbers of ethnic groups in the census were a product of the ethnic classification project. From the easiest to the hardest, in 1949-1954, China identified 38 ethnic minority groups or the most accepted ethnic groups in the

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<sup>11</sup> “About Chinese Nation (中华民族概况)” <http://www.seac.gov.cn/col/col110/index.html> (2013-4-6)

past. In 1954-1964, between the first 2 censuses, China added 15 more minority groups, plus another 2 groups in 1965-1982<sup>12</sup>. Since the 1982 census, China accepted 56 ethnic groups, including 55 ethnic minority groups. Therefore, 56 ethnic groups have become a framework for the ethnicity question in the Chinese census. We may conclude that numbers of ethnic groups in Chinese census have changed from unlimited to limited and from more to fewer categories. This change is for better development of all Chinese without any difference in ethnicity, favoring the development of ethnic minority Chinese.

## 5. Conclusion

Ethnicity has been a question in Chinese census since 1950s when China started to take the census. Many other countries have longer history of census taking and have similar practice of asking ethnicity related questions in their census. According to Simon's detailed study (2012), about half of European countries collect ethnicity information in the census. These countries adopt their own strategies to collect the information, for example using country of birth, citizenship, mother tongue, religion or directly on "ethnic group" (e.g. the United Kingdom). The way some questions are asked may not seem related to ethnicity, however, we are able to translate or convert the questions into the information of ethnicity. Or, we may collect ethnicity statistics by direct or indirect question. China is asking the question directly and by one question in its census. Wording of the question is straightforward and without any change over the years; however, answers to the question have been changed. In 1950s, people answered the census ethnicity question by their own classification of their ethnic group; since 1980s, individuals answered the question within a framework of 56 ethnic groups. One belongs to only one of the 56 ethnic groups. The framework was developed by experts, officials, local influential people and local residents. It was finalized in 1980s and has been stabilize since then.

Due to changes in the number of ethnic groups accepted by Chinese census, ethnicity statistics in 1950s and today are a little different. Statistics in 1950s represented a confusion and loose definition or concept of ethnicity by ordinary Chinese, a different understanding of ethnicity among Chinese from that of the government or elites, and a need to deal with ethnicity issue in a more organized or widely accepted way. However, we believe that the confusion of ethnicity in the first census of 1953 was a treasure for the development of a framework of ethnic groups later in China. It provided vast information on ethnicity, especially names and numbers of different ethnic groups used and accepted by ordinary people. It collected the information within a very short time period (census time), thus the first census also served as a survey of names on ethnic groups in China. Also it enhanced consciousness or identity of ethnicity among Chinese. Statistics of ethnicity today is limited to 56 ethnic groups, different from that of 1953. Thus, a comparison of population by ethnicity at different time points may pose a problem. We may not be able to study a specific ethnic group in China by census statistics over years since the

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<sup>12</sup> ("About Chinese Nation") <http://www.seac.gov.cn/col/col110/index.html> (2013-4-6)

definition of ethnic groups changed until 1980s. This reminds us of the use of ethnicity statistics cautiously even within a nation, or we need to know the history of census taking of a country in order to interpret the data accurately. This also applies to studies by ethnicity statistics from different countries (Simon, 2012: 1368). To make a good study on ethnicity by census statistics, we have to understand the system of census taking on ethnicity in different countries. This article makes one effort to the goal by exploring definition of ethnicity in Chinese census, by examining goals of collecting ethnicity statistics in China, and by analyzing the short history of finalization of 56 ethnic groups in China.

Different factors may lead to a change of ethnic boundaries or including or excluding of an ethnic group in a country, using Wimmer's words and by his explanation (2008), "exogenous shift" (such as changes of institutional frameworks, power distributions, or political alliances), "endogenous shift" (changes endogenously by various actors), or "exogenous drift" (new strategies diffused into a social field and are adopted by certain actors). However, in China, social change, changes of population size by ethnicity (some may become a larger ethnic group while others may disappear), and increasing volume of international migration may introduce a gradual but slow change in the current framework of ethnic groups. Experiences, including lessons, of countries as host country of international migrants in inclusion or exclusion of an ethnic group in census (such as issues discussed by Aspinall, 2002) will worth further study to better construct the census as well as the use of census statistics for social development.

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