Just Singing and Dancing: Official Representations of Ethnic Minority Cultures in China

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ABSTRACT: This paper uses a critical multicultural, constructivist approach to examine how the Chinese government represents minority cultures in its official discourse. Although at an abstract level the government acknowledges the contributions of minority cultures to society, our findings show a mismatched picture in terms of minority representation. Government documents and discourse recorded and obtained on the government website only highlight traditional and stereotypical cultural aspects related to minorities. These representations essentialise minority cultures, obscure their dynamism and their contributions, reinforce power hierarchies, and discourage critical reflexivity. In this context, we recommend addressing fundamental challenges undergirding this pattern in representation to develop more balanced and comprehensive understandings of minority cultures.

KEYWORDS: Culture, ethnic minorities, China, the Chinese government, representation

Multicultural education aims to empower people to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to respond to ethnic and cultural diversity in a just and effective way (Banks, 2018; Lin & Jackson, 2019; Nieto, 2017). Accurate representation of groups and their cultures is a vital goal of multicultural education and a useful method to attain other multicultural goals (e.g., equity and intercultural

awareness) (Banks & Banks, 2019). In today's world where global mobility and population shifts and changes are common, multicultural education has been promoted, critically examined, and implemented across diverse contexts. In most cases, proponents of multicultural education start with uncovering inaccurate representation of groups and their cultures and other unjust parts of structures, institutions, and environments, before developing new ways forward. For example, research reveals that minority groups in western contexts, such as the United States, Australia, and Europe, have always been under/misrepresented due to reasons such as unequal power relationships and institutional and systemic injustice (Jackson, 2014; Mahiri, 2017; Zilliacus et al., 2017). What is less commonly explored in the literature is how some countries that have been considered as homogeneous, such as the People's Republic of China, represent and respond to ethnic and cultural diversity.

Although at an abstract level the Chinese central government recognises the contributions of minority cultures to society (XNA, 2011), this positive recognition has been given less emphasis in recent years while the central government focuses more on consolidating a sense of national community (Xi, 2021). Moreover, previous research shows that in some official and institutional media ethnic minorities and their contributions to society are often misrepresented or underrated. For example, Zhao and Postiglione (2010) indicate that ethnic minorities are presented as distinctive, separate, and visible in their study of campus newspapers in Chinese universities. Hoddie (2006) investigated news items published in an official newspaper (*People's Daily*) from 1949 to 1989 and had similar findings. However, no previous research has systematically examined how the Chinese central government represents minority cultures and their contributions in its official discourse. Up-to-date research is thus needed to identify how the government endorses and promotes diversity today, and what has changed over time.

This paper uses critical multicultural education as a framework to examine how the central government represents minority cultures in documents and materials on its official website. The paper first introduces critical multicultural education and provides information about ethnic minority cultures in China and their needs for recognition. Then it discusses the concept of representation and its importance in China. Next, it explores how the Chinese government represents minority cultures in official documents and materials made public on its website. Our findings show that when it comes to minority representation, only traditional items and stereotypical cultural aspects are shown. In this context, we recommend the inclusion of more balanced and comprehensive representations of minority cultures, which recognise the contributions of minority groups to society over time. We conclude by discussing how to enable such representations in the future.

A Critical Multicultural Education Approach to Culture

Ethnic minority cultures have always been a focus of multicultural education. However, multicultural education is an umbrella term that contains numerous strains. Some of them, for example, take a naive and idealistic view of culture that demands recognizing cultural differences while neglecting institutional and systematic injustice (May, 2003; Torres & Tarozzi, 2020). Others hold an essentialist and group-based

view on culture, which sometimes seems to suggest that members identified as belonging to a culture are homogeneous (May, 2003; Torres & Tarozzi, 2020).

To distinguish our approach from such strains, in this paper we call our approach critical multicultural education (May, 2003; Jackson, 2014). In general, this approach recognises cultural hybridity, fluidity, and malleability; highlights unequal power relations; problematises cultural essentialism; and encourages critical reflexivity. In this context, "critical reflexivity" refers to the capacity to reflect on and think and act beyond one's own culture. This is essential from a critical multicultural view for people from different backgrounds to engage effectively with each other. In a critical multicultural approach, these four components — recognising cultural hybridity, fluidity, and malleability; addressing unequal power relations; problematizing cultural essentialism; and maintaining critical reflexivity — interact with and complement each other.

From a critical multicultural view, culture in mainland China is dynamic and evolving all the time. Its elements, coming from Han culture and ethnic minority cultures, continually intermingle and develop. During this process, minority cultures contribute to Chinese culture in all aspects (Wang, 2021; Zhang, 2018). However, Han people and ethnic minorities have a highly unequal status in reality. The Han group is not just the largest ethnic group in China, but also is considered the "normal" group, in that their behaviours and norms are used as a benchmark to judge other minority groups (Chu, 2015, 2018a, 2018b).

Because of the dominant status of Han people, they have the power to represent ethnic minorities, while minority people's social-political status and positions in society depend on their similarities with Han people. At the same time, cultural essentialism is a common strategy that the Chinese government uses to categorise ethnic minorities (Hoddie & Lou, 2009). This strategy promotes the idea that minority cultures are inherent and unchanging, while minorities are expected to reflect typical and fixed cultural patterns. This paper challenges these problematic assumptions as it analyses official government discourses on cultural diversity and ethnic minorities.

Ethnic Minority Cultures in China

China's internal diversity is not particularly caused by the recent arrival of immigrants. *Ethnic minority groups* in China instead refers to groups which have always been in what is now Chinese territory. Who can be counted as ethnic minority groups has been different in different times, as Chinese territory has changed. For example, many ethnic minorities in Ancient China, such as the Xianbei and Baiyue, have died out or been assimilated into the Han group. During the early Republican (1912–1927) and Nationalist (1928–1949) periods, the Chinese Nationalist Party only recognised four ethnic minority groups: the Man (Manchus), Meng (Mongols), Hui (ethnic groups of Islamic faith in Northwest China), and Zang (Tibetans). After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, 38 ethnic minority groups were recognised in the first national census in 1954. Recognised ethnic minority groups increased to 53 in 1964, 54 in 1965, and 55 since 1979.

Currently the population in mainland China officially consists of 56 recognised ethnic groups, including the Han group and 55 minority groups (e.g., Zhuang, Hui, Manchu, Urghur, Miao, Tibetan, and Mongol). The Han constitutes 91.11% of the

population, and other ethnic minority groups constitute 8.89% (NBSC, 2021). Although there are five autonomous regions in China (Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Ningxia), ethnic minorities live across all provinces in China and engage in all kinds of careers and lifestyles (NBSC, 2021).

With various interactions among different ethnic groups throughout history, both voluntary and forced, minority cultures have significantly influenced and contributed to Chinese culture and society in many ways, enriching the diversity and achievements of the more large-scale Chinese culture. This includes contributions in terms of language, religion, philosophy, literature, art, architecture, science and technology, sports, law, military, and politics. Languages in China include at least nine families, the Sino-Tibetan, Tai–Kadai, Hmong–Mien, Austroasiatic, Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic, Indo-European, and Austronesian (Dan, 2012; Zhao, 2011a). Mandarin is one branch of the Sino-Tibetan family (Dan, 2012; Zhao, 2011a). Many religions in China now, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, were introduced by ethnic minorities (Dan, 2012; Wang, 2017; Zhao, 2011a). Ethnic minorities also fostered the integration of foreign and indigenous religions, such as Theravada Buddhism (Dan, 2012; Wang, 2017; Zhao, 2011a). Today ethnic minorities continue to play a role in bridging the development of religions across China and the rest of the world (Dan, 2012; Zhao, 2011a). Indigenous philosophies of living in common among ethnic minorities advocate sustainable development and harmony of humankind with nature. These ideas overlap with contemporary philosophies across the world which are considered valuable for creating a better future (Dan, 2012; Zhang, 2018; Zhao, 2011a).

Ethnic minorities have also created vast literature, which includes myths, legends, heroic epics, narrative poems, folktales, fictions, poetry, operas, and dramas. Some types of minority literature, such as,

> historical literature, biography, and religious literature of Uyghur, Mongol, and Tibetan; philosophical poetry of Uyghur and Kazak; Gnomic poetry of Tibetan; religious literature of Yi and Naxi, and case story of Dai, are absent or lacking in Han literature. (Dan, 2012, p. 48)

The Tibetan Epic of King Gesar is the longest epic in the world and an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: "In terms of length or breadth of content, no literature of Han can compare with it. It is a glorious page in the history of Chinese literature, which greatly enriches the connotation of Chinese culture" (Dan, 2012, p. 42). *Dream of the Red Chamber,* one of China's four great classic novels and one of its major achievements, was created by a Manchu writer (Dan, 2012). Many well-known writers in contemporary China, such as She Lao and Congwen Shen, are ethnic minorities. They have created popular literature depicting normal lives of minorities and Han people in contemporary China.

Minority arts, including music and architecture, also enhance Chinese culture and that of the world (Dan, 2012; Zhang, 2018; Zhao, 2011a, 2011b). Mongolian Long Tune and Khoomei, Tibetan Opera, and Uyghur Muqam Art of Xinjiang, among others, are inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Minority architecture, such as the Potala Palace and Jokhang Temple in Tibet and the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan, are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Many well-known artists (e.g., Jian Cui, Xing Jin, Wei Wei, Zuying Song, Tengger, and Liping Yang) and architects and designers (e.g., Sheguang Hu) are

ethnic minorities. Some inherit and revive traditional styles, while others mix diverse minority elements and create new styles.

Ethnic minorities have also made important contributions to science and technology, including astronomy, geography, biology, and medicine (Dan, 2012; Zhang, 2018). Many well-known scientists (e.g., academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences/Engineering) in astronomy, geography, biology, and medicine are minorities (Dan, 2012). Like Han people, many of them graduated from world-famous institutions and are leading figures in their fields. Jixi Wang (Bai) was the chief designer of China's first sounding rocket (T-7), its first space launch vehicle (Long March 1), and its first recoverable satellites. Wang is an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the International Academy of Astronautics and was inducted into the International Astronautical Federation Hall of Fame in 2016. Other examples include Lizhu Zhang (Bai gynecologist), Jianxuan Zheng (Zhuang physicist), Guangxue Zhang (Hui entomologist), Jingshan Jiang (Chinese Korean aerospace engineer), Chongben He (Manchu physical marine scientist), and Ji Duo (Tibetan geologist). The Ten-Month Solar Calendar of Yi is considered "the oldest calendar in China" (Dan, 2012, p. 263).

In geography, "Ethnic minorities laid the foundation of territory of contemporary China" (Dan, 2012, p. 265). The Map of China and the Barbarian Countries made by minorities represented the highest achievement of Chinese cartography in the Middle Ages (Dan, 2012). Minority geographers (e.g., He Zheng and Tulišen) broadened Chinese territory and developed Chinese understanding of geography (Dan, 2012). As to biology, ethnic minorities "deepen[ed] the understanding of ways to use animals and plants for different purposes, which is a crucial perspective for understanding the formation of Chinese culture" (Dan, 2012, p. 268). In respect to medicine, ethnic minorities have taken advantage of local resources and established systematic medical and pharmaceutical sciences (Dan, 2012). Medical sciences of Tibetan, Mongol, Uyghur, and Dai groups are independent disciplines contributing to Chinese medicine in many ways (Dan, 2012).

Ethnic minorities also contribute to the development of sports. They have invented various sports and developed diverse modes of production (e.g., hunting, fishing, and herding) (Dan, 2012; Zhang, 2018; Zhao, 2011a). Examples are horse racing, wrestling, dragon boat racing, archery, hockey, and boxing. In contemporary sports, many national athletes and world champions are ethnic minorities, such as Mengke Bateer (Mongol basketball player) and Ning Li (Zhuang gymnast). Last but not least, many figures in law, military, and politics are ethnic minorities. Dayuan Han (Chinese Korean) is the President of the Chinese Constitutional Law Society, and Duanmu Zheng (Hui) is the Vice President of the Supreme People's Court. Among Generals of the People's Liberation Army since 1949, at least 35 have been ethnic minorities (China Central Television, 2020). Ethnic minority politicians include Ying Fu (Mongol, current Chairperson of the National People's Congress Foreign Affairs Committee), Chaowen Wang (Miao, former Governor of Guizhou Province), Qiufa Chen (former Governor of Liaoning Province), Liangyu Hui (Hui, former Vice Premier of the PRC in charge of agriculture), Jingren Yang (Hui, former Vice Premier of the PRC and Chairman of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission), and Chengyu Li (Hui, former Governor of Henan Province).

Positive recognition of ethnic minorities can be found in some statements of the Chinese central government and political leaders. For instance, the *"Decision" of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee* states that,

> Minority cultures are important parts of Chinese culture… Cultures of different ethnic groups influence and interact with each other. Diverse cultures constantly enrich the connotation of Chinese culture, enhance the vitality and creativity of Chinese culture, and increase the cultural identity and cohesion of the Chinese nation. All ethnic groups have made their contributions to the development and progress of Chinese culture. (XNA, 2011)

The Chinese President Xi Jinping said at the National Working Conference on Ethnic Affairs in 2014 that,

> It should be repeated to the people of all ethnic groups in China that all ethnic groups have contributed to the formation and development of Chinese culture, and that all ethnic groups should appreciate and learn from each other.... Chinese culture is the collection of cultures of all ethnic groups. Minority cultures are integral parts of Chinese culture. (NEACPRC, 2019)

However, the central government has downplayed this positive recognition in recent years, with a greater focus on consolidating a broader sense of community for the Chinese nation. For example, positive messages regarding minority cultures are not found in the latest *"Decision" of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee* issued in 2021. In fact, the latest *decision* does not even mention ethnic minorities and their cultures; it only discusses cultivating the Chinese nation. This trend can also be found in the shift of Xi's focus. For example, he said at the latest National Working Conference on Ethnic Affairs in 2021 that,

> We should guide all ethnic groups to always put the interests of the Chinese nation before their interests, and their ethnic consciousness should be subordinated to and serve the sense of community for the Chinese nation.... Chinese culture is the backbone, and the cultures of all ethnic groups are the branches and leaves. Only when the backbone is deep and strong can the branches and leaves flourish. (Xi, 2021)

Again, minority cultures are mentioned here to promote the sense of community for the Chinese nation.

In this context, one of the challenges in recognising diverse aspects of minority cultures and their contributions over time is the prevalence of strong stereotypes (Chu, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). The most typical one is associating ethnic minorities with exotic aspects (e.g., minority clothes and singing and dancing) and traditional items (Lin & Jackson, 2021). This trend reflects an outdated stereotype and impedes a dynamic view of minority cultures. At the same time, this stereotype connects with another: that minorities' non-agriculture-based cultures are primitive and backward. Given that agriculture-based culture has been promoted by different governments throughout Chinese history as superior, minority cultures and their contributions are often seen as less advanced and significant.

These stereotypes join with another significant barrier in appropriately recognising minority cultures: assimilation (Lin & Jackson, 2021). Many minority groups have been integrated into or influenced by the Han throughout Chinese history, voluntarily or by force (Zhang, 2017). Given the unequal power relationship between the Han people and ethnic minorities in China, the people in power often misrepresent

minority cultures and downplay their contributions to promote assimilation (Lin & Jackson, 2021). As a result, today many minorities, especially in the younger generations, live a "normal" assimilated Chinese life (e.g., they do not wear minority clothes, or sing or dance often), like Han people. They have become, to some extent, indistinguishable from Han people, and so their achievements are often confused with the Han's. Hence, the influences and contributions of minority cultures are further undervalued. For example, many Chinese people do not know that any leading figures in society are ethnic minorities.

The Importance of Official Representations in Education

Representation is crucial for constructing and promoting shared meanings and understandings of culture (Hall, 1997). On the one hand, how members of a culture represent it constructs shared meanings of a culture. On the other hand, how a culture is represented by outsiders influences the understanding of people both within and outside the group about the culture. For example, how minority cultures are represented by the Han people not only shapes how Han people perceive minority cultures, but also influences how minority groups understand their cultures. This is particularly the case when representation connects with power; that is, people in power often decide what and how to represent and influence people's perceptions (Foucault, 1980).

Given the importance and complexity of representation, in this paper, we follow a constructivist approach, exploring how Chinese minority cultures are represented by people in power (i.e., the central government). Following the constructivist approach, we perceive the government's representation as a "signifying practice" that produces meanings (Hall, 1997, p. 24). The meanings that the government gives to minority cultures link people's understanding of the *signifier* (i.e., inaccurate written words and images of minority cultures) with the *signified* (i.e., the concept of minority culture in people's head) (Culler, 1985). Put differently, every time the government delivers the signifier to the public, it encourages people to connect the signifier with its signified, and vice versa. During this process, the connection between inaccurate representation of minority cultures and the concept of minority culture is established and reinforced.

The central government's paramount power in China for controlling and constructing representation about minority cultures is a significant influence in many areas. Here we use education as an example. In China, education is defined and regulated by the central government. Most students are required to attend public schools and receive nine-year compulsory education. Major universities in higher education are funded and regulated by the government. Many fields related to education, such as publishing, newspapers, and other media are government-run. They produce and reinforce government-endorsed information and viewpoints (Meng, 2018; Repnikova, 2017). Given that education is largely influenced and shaped by politics, the central government position on minority cultures plays a decisive role in shaping teaching content in national textbooks and procedures in public schools.

In basic education, national textbooks all follow curriculum guidelines from the Ministry of Education. According to the *Regulations of Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools*,

> Primary and secondary school textbooks must reflect the will of the Party and the state, embody the basic requirements of the Party and the State for education, and reflect the basic values of the state and nation. At the meantime, they must fully implement the Party's educational policy. (MoE, 2019)

This situation was tightened as the unified national textbook system was introduced and implemented in 2012. Currently the system is mainly applied to subjects with strong ideological nature or involving national sovereignty, security, ethnicity, religion, etc. (e.g., *History* and *Moral and Political Education*). Under this circumstance, students are supposed to know, learn, and remember what the central government promotes for understanding and interacting with society and the world.

The government position is also promoted in education resources as authoritative. Teaching content regarding ethnic minorities and their cultures in the national curriculum are updated and modified by curriculum designers and publishers to match the central government position. A similar situation exists in higher education and related fields. All students in major universities are required to take two types of courses prepared and issued by the central government: *Marxist Theory Courses* and *Ideological and Moral Courses*. These courses promote government positions on fundamental issues, such as interpreting significant historical events and understanding the relationships between groups. Other education resources, such as various kinds of state-run media, also modify their content regarding ethnic minorities and cultures to match the government position (Repnikova, 2017).

To ensure political correctness, most (if not all) education policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and other educators refer to the central government position on ethnic minorities and their cultures for guidance. They adjust pedagogy and teaching processes based on the shift of the government position. In this sense, official representations of minority cultures impact many fields in education, shaping people's understandings regarding minority cultures.

Methodology

In this paper, we focus on text and images within all types of documents on the official website of the Chinese central government (www.gov.cn), including guidelines by different departments to guide work in sports, arts, and medicine; white papers and other official reports on important occasions, such as the *Reports on the Work of the Government* delivered at the National People's Congress; and reports on what the government and government leaders have done.

Although the website has Chinese and English versions, most documents only have a Chinese version. We used 少数民族 (ethnic minorities) and 民族文化 (minority cultures) as keywords and "anywhere" to search documents. For "date range," we chose "anytime from 1960 to 2020." We found 763 documents. Then we read them one by one to select content substantially relevant to the representation of minority cultures. Although some items contained the keyword(s), they were not relevant to this study. For example, some items talk about ethnic minorities in Taiwan, or just indicate that reports or quotations from political leaders were published in minority languages. In total, we identified 116 relevant documents published between 1999 to 2020, and 52 documents with pictures representing ethnic minorities. A full list of documents

used is provided in the appendix.

For relevant documents, we applied summative content analysis for data coding. Summative content analysis is effective for systematic and objective examination of the frequency and pattern of content (e.g., text and visual content) through consistent and replicable coding rules (Lin & Jackson, 2019; Riffe et al., 2019). We applied three principles in coding to maintain reliability and validity: comprehensiveness, transparency, and neutrality. By comprehensiveness, we examined and coded as much relevant content as possible. We coded all content that was related to the representation of ethnic minorities in China and their cultures. Transparency means that we tried to ensure that anyone doing the coding and analysis in a similar way will draw similar conclusions. Regarding the principle of neutrality, we noticed that coding and interpretation of documents can be subjective. Thus, we have taken some measures to reduce subjectivity and establish validity. First, we used the following techniques in data collection and analysis.

(1) Key Words in Context: 50 characters immediately before and following references to minority cultures-related content were transcribed and analysed to understand the context of the content.

(2) Text coding: For each document that contains text content about minority cultures, the content was transcribed and analysed. References to minority cultural items were coded in category tables (e.g., traditional music, cloth, and literature). The aim was to identify what types of minority cultural items were the focus, and how they were represented.

(3) Pictorial coding: Visuals are important complements to text (Chu, 2018a). In our research, they vividly reveal the lifestyles associated with ethnic minorities. Each picture or image that referred to minority cultures was coded for analysis. Pictures and images were coded in category tables (e.g., traditional cloth, singing, and dancing). The aim was to identify what types of minority cultural items and lifestyles were presented and how.

Then we followed the principle of using two coders to reduce subjectivity and increase validity (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). After translating all relevant content into English, an initial analysis of 20 documents was conducted in parallel by the authors, and then compared to establish basic interpretative validity and reliability. Any discrepancies in analysis were examined to evaluate any possibility of potential differences in interpretation.

All cultural items covered in texts have been coded and presented here. Given that one of the purposes of pictorial coding was to identify common themes associated with ethnic minorities, we summarised three categories: "wearing minority clothes," "singing and dancing," and "others" to show how lifestyles of ethnic minorities are represented through images. The process of coming up with the categories was easy because all imagery related to ethnic minorities depicted them in traditional clothes and/or singing and dancing. To clearly present findings, relevant content has been translated into English, and representative content is cited as "(No. + Number)" from the appendix.

Findings

Although at an abstract level the Chinese government acknowledges the varied contributions of minority cultures to Chinese culture, our findings show an unmatched picture at the level of representation. In general, documents equate minorities with traditional cultures, and only represent aspects stereotypically associated with ethnic minorities, which are widely considered less normal, useful, or relevant to contemporary society.

Table 1 shows the types of minority cultural aspects covered and frequency. *Frequency* here refers to how many documents cover different types of minority cultures. Hence, even if an item appears in a document several times, it was only counted once for each document.

Table 1

Types of Minority Cultures Covered in Texts

Type	Number of Documents	Number of Documents/Total Number of Documents
Traditional Dancing	61	61/116
Traditional Music	60	60/116
Traditional Clothing	39	39/116
Traditional Musical Instruments	21	21/116
Traditional Sports	19	19/116
Traditional Languages	16	16/116
Traditional Handicrafts	14	14/116
Traditional Embroidery	12	12/116
Ancient Books	12	12/116
Traditional Painting	11	11/116
Traditional Opera	11	11/116
Traditional Literature	11	11/116
Traditional Architecture	9	9/116
Traditional Drama	9	9/116
Traditional Food	8	8/116
Traditional Religion	5	5/116

Traditional Written Characters	5	5/116
Traditional Cultural Relics	5	5/116
Traditional Medicine	5	5/116
Traditional Festivals	4	4/116
Traditional Acrobatics	1	1/116
Traditional Funeral Customs	1	1/116

As Table 1 shows, documents cover the following aspects: traditional dancing, music, clothing, musical instruments, sports, languages, handicrafts, embroidery, books, painting, opera, literature, architecture, drama, food, religion, written characters, cultural relics, medicine, festivals, acrobatics, and funeral customs. These are items which have a long history, but they are generally considered less useful or relevant to contemporary life. Among these items, traditional dancing (61) and music (60) receive the most attention. More than half of the documents mention them. Other frequently mentioned items include traditional clothing (29), musical instruments (21), sports (19), languages (16), and handicrafts (14). Although these aspects are important, other parts are missing. As mentioned, minority cultures include other aspects, such as science and technology (e.g., astronomy, geography, and biology), military science, politics, and law. However, none of these items are mentioned in any documents representing minorities or minority cultures. This omission risks delivering a message that minority cultures have nothing to contribute to contemporary society in these aspects.

The most typical occasions in mentioning minority cultures are ethnic minority-based sports meetings, arts festivals, drama festivals, and exhibitions of clothing, folk arts, intangible cultural heritage, dance works, and music. All of these occasions are specifically for and of ethnic minorities, and thus depict a limited sphere in which minorities and minority cultures play a role. Minorities are not mentioned in representations of mainstream occasions, such as science and technology and academic forums, and festivals of a cultural nature generally. This coverage reflects and reinforces the stereotype that minority cultures only appear in exotic events.

Table 2

Ethnic Minorities Covered in Pictures

Type	Number of Documents	Number of Documents/Total Number of Documents
Wearing Minority Clothes	51	51/52
Singing and Dancing	39	39/52
Others	0	0

In all representations of minority cultures, text associated ethnic minorities with traditional lifestyles, especially wearing traditional clothes and singing and dancing. A representative text states, "Ethnic minorities can sing as long as they can talk, they can dance as long as they can walk" (No. 20). This theme is also found in visual analysis. As Table 2 shows, ethnic minorities in almost all pictures wear minority clothes and in 75% of pictures they sing and dance. Some typical examples are reports on sports meetings and festivals. Ethnic minorities in pictures all wear minority clothes and sing and dance. No other lifestyles of ethnic minorities are indicated.

Associating current generations of ethnic minorities with traditional cultural items and lifestyles does not reflect the full picture. Today most minorities live a life beyond historical tradition. Very few regularly wear ethnic clothes and sing and dance at festivals and special events (let alone daily life), just as very few Han people wear traditional Han clothes (e.g., cheongsam and Han Chinese clothing) at festivals and events. The majority wear "normal" clothes while doing sports and celebrating festivals. Yet these lifestyles are absent from representation. This enables a simplified understanding, that ethnic minorities mostly or only have traditional cultures and lifestyles.

Discussion

Although ethnic minorities and their culture significantly contribute to Chinese culture and society, this paper shows that current documents on the government website only cover traditional and exotic items of minority cultures normally exhibited in museums, defined as cultural heritage, which are barely seen in everyday life. These findings concur with previous research that ethnic minorities and their culture are often misrepresented (Chu, 2015, 2018a, 2018b; Hoddie, 2006; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010), and extends their research in several aspects.

First, although the government's perspectives are partially reflected in school textbooks and newspapers, these documents are still second-hand resources for examining what the government wants the public to perceive regarding minority cultures because they are not written or compiled by government officials. Meanwhile, the government's perspectives on minority cultures are spread across school subjects and grades and newspapers, and different versions of textbooks or different newspapers may hold different positions regarding minority cultures. In this sense, examining selected newspapers or textbooks does not provide a full picture about the government's position. This study contributes to the field through conducting a direct and relatively comprehensive examination of the government's representation of minority cultures.

Second, previous research examined news items and school textbooks published before Xi came to power in 2012. In this paper, we found that, although stereotyping minority cultures could be found across periods, this misrepresentation has reached a new height in recent years. Quantitatively, 62 documents from 1999 to 2012 represent minority cultures in a biased or stereotypical way. This number has been exceeded in the seven years since Xi became President. Qualitatively, when minority cultures were mentioned before 2012, documents highlighted diversity. Yet, this focus has been rare since 2012, with more emphasis on unity and consolidating

a Han-dominant Chinese nation. In this sense, we show that in today's China, not only have biased representations of minority cultures remained, but the broader context to unequal power relations between groups is becoming worse.

According to critical multicultural education, desirable representations should recognise cultural hybridity, fluidity, and malleability; highlight unequal power relationships; problematise cultural essentialism; and encourage critical reflexivity. However, although the current government's representation captures some important aspects of minority cultures, it equates minorities with traditional cultures and essentialises them, failing to acknowledge their dynamism and fluidity. In this context, associating current minorities with traditional items and lifestyles does not reflect the full picture. The development of minority cultures and ethnic minorities that have other lifestyles also should be recognised within a more balanced view.

As the central government is mainly comprised by the Han people, it is unlikely to challenge this uneven and unbalanced treatment of ethnic minorities and cultures. Instead, it is likely to continue to subjugate alternative representations and reinforce biased portrayals to serve its interests. Furthermore, by overlooking contributions of minorities to mainstream culture and society, current representations discourage people from developing critical reflexivity. As mentioned, minority cultures significantly contribute to Chinese society in nearly all aspects. While many participate through positions of all kinds (e.g., lawyers, scientists, and actors), no contributions in terms of such aspects are shown in government documentation. This disables Han people in challenging their assumptions and appreciating minority perspectives when interacting with others. Worse, it risks leading to personal conflicts or cultural arrogance when the government misleads people in thinking that the contributions of minority cultures are limited to insignificant aspects.

A more updated and comprehensive official representation of minority cultures is needed to attain the goals of critical multicultural education. However, such representation is unlikely to appear without the government's willingness to acknowledge and address more fundamental issues behind the representations (e.g., the unequal power relationship across groups). Here we propose recommendations for the government to create an environment that can nurture more balanced and positive minority cultural representation.

First, if the government aims to develop ethnic minorities' attachment to the nation, it should more fully acknowledge the unequal power relations between the Han and minorities. Correcting past inaccurate and unjust representations is a good start here. In addition, the government can invite minorities who are experts in relevant fields to be involved in the process of government communication (e.g., documents and speeches) through various channels (e.g., serving as consultants). Meanwhile, the government can initiate and encourage projects (national and regional) to help people know more about minority cultures and their contributions. Such projects, which can include films, songs, and literature, should be prepared and produced in an inclusive and just way. That is to say, Han people should welcome ethnic minorities to lead this process and express their views and voices. Such projects can help people recognise the contributions of ethnic minorities to Chinese culture and society, and be open-minded while engaging with ethnic minorities in daily life.

Applying critical multicultural education in Chinese education, especially in textbooks and teaching processes, will also be helpful. Specifically, the government should revise textbooks to better represent minority cultures and recognise their

contributions. Teacher education also has a vital role to play in training qualified teachers with necessary knowledge, skills, and values to effectively engage with students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Hence, the government should develop localised critical multicultural education programs and apply them in teacher education. In these programs, planners should equip teachers with accurate information about minority cultures, skills to apply critical pedagogical methodologies in classrooms, and values to address misrepresentations or other unjust treatments of ethnic minorities and their cultures in school settings. As a result, changes of educators' attitudes, teachings, and actions towards minority cultures can also help reduce stereotypes.

Although this paper focuses on China, it has international implications. Many issues identified in this paper exist in other contexts, and our recommendations also provide a reference for facing similar problems in other contexts. Moreover, this paper adds new perspectives to literature about multicultural education. The features that we found in this case, especially in terms of the definition of ethnic minorities, the purpose for misrecognising minority culture (e.g., consolidating the nation), and the influence of the government on other areas of life, are less obvious, but nonetheless worth further considering, in many other contexts, Asian, western, and elsewhere around the globe. Thus, this paper provides fresh perspectives to understand the commonalities and complexities of multicultural education across societies.

Conclusion

Minorities have contributed to Chinese culture and society in all aspects over time. Their importance at an abstract level is recognised by the central government and political leaders in official documents and speeches. Yet our findings show that when it comes to concrete representations, only traditional items and stereotypical cultural aspects are represented. Drawing on the constructivist approach to representation and the critical multicultural approach to culture, we argue that this representation obscures the dynamism of minority cultures across generations and their contributions in contemporary life. Meanwhile, promoting Han stereotypes regarding ethnic minorities through government official channels reinforces Han privilege and dominant status.

People need accurate and balanced knowledge about different groups to question their own assumptions and engage with others on the basis of equality and mutual respect. However, the government's biased representation and its significant influence in many areas discourage Han people from reflecting and confirm stereotypes towards ethnic minorities and their cultures. A more updated and comprehensive representation is needed here to ensure that positive recognition goes beyond being an abstract idea. To enable such representation, we recommend the government more fully acknowledge the unequal power relations between the Han and minorities, include minority perspectives in government communication, initiate minority-led projects, revise school textbooks, and enhance teacher education through localised critical multicultural education programs.

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Appendix

List of documents used in the study

No.	Date	Author	URL
1	14/10/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-10/14/content_5439651.htm#1
2	26/9/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-09/26/content_5433734.htm
3	18/9/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-09/18/content_5431066.htm#allContent
4	9/9/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-09/09/content_5428415.htm
5	9/9/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-09/09/content_5428427.htm
6	8/9/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-09/08/content_5428390.htm#1
7	7/8/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-08/07/content_5419569.htm
8	16/7/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-07/16/content_5410020.htm
9	20/6/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-06/20/content_5401793.htm#allContent
10	3/6/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-06/03/content_5397190.htm
11	12/4/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-04/12/content_5382005.htm
12	2/2/2019	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-02/02/content_2325723.htm
13	22/9/2018	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-09/22/content_5324550.htm#1
14	12/7/2018	Chinese Medicine Council	http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2018-12/31/content_5429167.htm
15	2/2/2018	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-02/02/content_5263258.htm

16	15/6/2017	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-06/15/content_5202671.htm
17	21/2/2017	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-02/21/content_5169891.htm#allContent
18	7/12/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-12/07/content_5144664.htm#allContent
19	21/11/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-11/21/content_5135609.htm
20	15/9/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-09/15/content_5108712.htm
21	19/8/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-08/19/content_5100554.htm
22	19/8/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-08/19/content_5100852.htm
23	18/8/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-08/18/content_5100546.htm
24	18/8/2016	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-08/18/content_5100545.htm
25	18/8/2016	Guangxi Daily	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-08/18/content_5100294.htm
26	13/10/2015	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-10/13/content_2945685.htm
27	9/8/2015	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2015-08/09/content_2910411.htm
28	9/8/2015	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-08/09/content_2910239.htm
29	11/7/2015	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-07/11/content_2895429.htm
30	8/6/2015	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-06/08/content_2875263.htm
31	17/4/2015	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-04/17/content_2848781.htm
32	9/1/2015	National Ethnic Affairs Commission	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/09/content_2802451.htm
33	18/11/2014	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-11/18/content_2780419.htm
34	23/9/2014	Ministry of Culture	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-09/23/content_2754792.htm

35	13/8/2014	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-08/13/content_2734143.htm
36	26/5/2014	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-05/26/content_2686909.htm
37	20/5/2014	Xinjiang Daily	http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-05/20/content_2682639.htm
38	24/12/2013	National Ethnic Affairs Commission	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-12/24/content_2553622.htm
39	23/12/2013	National Ethnic Affairs Commission	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-12/23/content_2552918.htm
40	19/12/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-12/19/content_2550665.htm
41	12/8/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-08/12/content_2465649.htm
42	28/6/2013	National Ethnic Affairs Commission	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-06/28/content_2436040.htm
43	26/6/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-06/26/content_2434535.htm
44	5/6/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-06/05/content_2420030.htm
45	31/5/2013	Ministry of Culture	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-05/31/content_2415750.htm
46	28/3/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-03/28/content_2364960.htm
47	28/3/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2010-03/21/content_1561147.htm
48	22/3/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-03/22/content_2359685.htm
49	21/3/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-03/21/content_2359356.htm
50	16/3/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/2013lh/content_2355715.htm
51	18/1/2013	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-01/18/content_2315523.htm
52	23/12/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-12/23/content_2296804.htm
53	10/12/2012	National Ethnic Affairs Commission	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2012-12/10/content_2287117.htm

54	7/11/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-11/07/content_2259119.htm
55	30/9/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-09/30/content_2236773.htm
56	9/9/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-09/09/content_2220397.htm
57	27/8/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-08/27/content_2211625.htm
58	22/8/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-08/22/content_2208654.htm
59	7/7/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2012-07/07/content_2178256.htm
60	5/7/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-07/05/content_2177271.htm
61	2/7/2012	National Ethnic Affairs Commission	http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2012-07/02/content_2175024.htm
62	13/6/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/13/content_2159464.htm
63	13/6/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/13/content_2159509.htm
64	13/6/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/13/content_2160054.htm
65	13/6/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/13/content_2159841.htm
66	12/6/2012	People's Daily	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/12/content_2158632.htm
67	12/6/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/12/content_2158634.htm
68	4/6/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-06/04/content_2152508.htm
69	29/5/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-05/29/content_2148060.htm
70	11/3/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/2012lh/content_2088891.htm
71	5/2/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2013-05/02/content_2394461.htm
72	31/1/2012	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-01/31/content_2055048.htm

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104	6/10/2009	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2009-10/06/content_1433345.htm
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108	20/8/2009	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2009-08/20/content_1396902.htm
109	19/8/2009	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2009-08/19/content_1396674.htm
110	13/8/2009	General Office of the State Council	http://www.gov.cn/test/2009-08/13/content_1390565.htm

111	26/1/2009	Xinhua News Agency	http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2009-01/26/content_1215810.htm
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