

Our Country's Ethnic Minorities and Their Geographical Distribution

I. Overview of the ethnicity of our country

- Our country is vast and diverse, home to 56 officially recognised ethnic groups.
- Because the 55 ethnic minorities other than the Han are relatively smaller in population compared to the Han, they are commonly referred to as 'ethnic minorities.'
- The distinguishing features of the distribution of different ethnic groups in our country are large-scale dispersion, small-scale clustering, and intermingled habitation. In Han-dominated areas, there are settlements of ethnic minorities; in ethnic minority regions, there are also Han Chinese residents. This distribution pattern has been formed through the long-term historical interaction and mobility among the various ethnic groups. Although the ethnic minority populations in our country are relatively small, they are widely distributed.

II. Demographic profile 人口統計概況

- As mentioned, the Han Chinese are the largest ethnic group in our country, with a population of over 1.2 billion in 2020. While the Han Chinese comprise most of the population, accounting for around 91.11% as of the Seventh National Population Census in 2020, the remaining 55 ethnic minority groups contribute significantly to our country's cultural richness and mosaic ([國務院第七次全國人口普查領導小組辦公室, 2020](#)).
- Following the Han, the next largest ethnic minority groups are ([Table 1](#)) ([國務院第七次全國人口普查領導小組辦公室, 2020](#)):

Table 1 Population of the major ethnic groups in our country

Ethnic group	Population (2020)	Percentage of our country's total population
Zhuang	19,568,546	1.39%
Uygur	11,774,538	0.84%
Hui	11,377,914	0.81%
Miao	11,067,929	0.79%
Manchu	10,423,303	0.74%
Yi	9,830,327	0.70%
Tujia	9,587,732	0.68%
Tibetan	7,060,731	0.50%
Mongolian	6,290,204	0.45%
Bouyei	3,576,752	0.25%

Source: 中國人口普查年鑑 2020

- The ethnic minority groups are not evenly distributed throughout our country. They are primarily concentrated in the western and northern regions of our country (Table 2), which are characterised by:
 - Mountainous terrain: Regions such as the Xizang Zizhiqu, Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu, and Nei Mongol Zizhiqu are dominated by high mountain ranges, including the Himalayas, Kunlun Mountains, and Tian Shan Mountains. These rugged landscapes have shaped the traditional lifestyles and livelihoods of ethnic groups like the Zang, Uyghurs, and Mongols.
 - Grasslands: The northern regions of our country, including Nei Mongol Zizhiqu and Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu, are characterised by vast steppes. These landscapes have supported the traditional pastoral and nomadic lifestyles of ethnic groups such as the Mongolians and Kazaks.

Table 2 Distribution of ethnic minority groups in our country

Region	Number of ethnic minority groups	Ethnic minority groups
Northeast and Nei Mongol	7	Manchu, Korean, Mongolian, Daur, Ewenki, Oroqen, Hezhe
Northwest	14	Hui, Uygur, Kazak, Dongxiang, Tu, Xibe, Kirgiz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Russian, Yugur, Bonan, Tatar
Southwest	25	Miao, Yi, Tibetan, Bouyei, Dong, Bai, Hani, Dai, Lisu, Gelo, Lahu, Va, Shui, Naxi, Qiang, Jingpo, Blang, Pumi, Achang, Nu, Jino, De'ang, Drung, Moinba, Lhoba
Central-south and Southeast	9	Zhuang, Tujia, Yao, Li, She, Gaoshan, Mulam, Maonan, Jing

III. Cultural diversity

- Our country's ethnic minority groups possess diverse cultures, languages, customs, and traditions, contributing to its rich cultural tapestry.
- One of the most visible expressions of this cultural diversity is the traditional costumes worn by different ethnic groups. In addition to traditional clothing, the ethnic minority groups have distinct religious beliefs and artistic traditions, such as music, dance, and handicrafts.
- These cultural elements are deeply rooted in the histories and identities of the various ethnic groups and are often sustained through festivals, cultural events, and educational programmes.

- This diversity is celebrated and preserved through various government policies and initiatives aimed at protecting the rights of these minority groups:
 - Languages – In our country, all ethnic groups shall have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages. Except for the Hui and Manchus, who share Chinese, the other 53 ethnic groups in our country speak their ethnic languages. Also, there are 21 ethnic groups with written languages, and there are a total of 27 written languages. Thirteen of them were developed or improved with government assistance, including Zhuang, Bouyei, Miao, Naxi, Lisu, Hani, Va, Dong, Jingpo, and Tu.
 - Religions – Following the provisions of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China on citizens’ freedom of religious belief, our government has developed specific policies to protect the freedom of ethnic groups joining legitimate and normal religious activities.



Traditional costume of Zhuang in Guangxi



Traditional costume of Miao

Acknowledgement is given to Guangxi Guigang Jiangnan Middle School (廣西貴港市江南中學) and Guangxi Guigang Menggongxiang Nationality Junior High School (廣西貴港市蒙公鎮民族初級中學) to provide the photos.

IV. Regional autonomy and policies

- To address the unique needs and concerns of ethnic minority groups, our government has implemented a system of regional autonomy ([中華人民共和國中央人民政府, 2005](#)). This system grants certain regions, such as the Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu and the Xizang Zizhiqu, a degree of self-governance.
- Our country's government has sought to strike a balance between national unity and the preservation of ethnic diversity with success.
- Our country's ethnic autonomous areas are classified into three categories: autonomous regions (zizhiqu), autonomous prefectures, and autonomous counties (banners). The establishment of ethnic autonomous areas consists of the following types:
 - Autonomous areas are established mainly with one ethnic minority inhabited area, such as the Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu, and so on.
 - Autonomous areas were established jointly with two ethnic minority inhabited areas, such as Qinghai Province Haixi Mongol and Zang Autonomous Prefecture, and so on.
 - Autonomous areas are jointly established by multiple ethnic minority areas, such as Guangxi Longsheng Ethnic Autonomous County, and so on.
 - Within a large ethnic minority autonomous area, autonomous areas are established in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, such as Gongcheng Yao Autonomous County in Guangxi Zhuang Zizhiqu.
 - If an ethnic group resides in multiple locations, multiple autonomous areas are established, such as Ningxia Hui Zizhiqu, Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province, Hebei Provincial Dachang Hui Autonomous County, and so on.
 - Our country's government has established ethnic townships in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities that are too small and have too few populations to be suitable for establishing autonomous areas and autonomous agencies. This allows ethnic minorities in these areas to exercise their autonomy rights. Ethnic townships supplement the ethnic regional autonomy system.

V. Ethnic group distribution across various autonomous regions

- The dominant presence of certain ethnic minorities in specific autonomous regions highlights our country's cultural diversity ([國務院第七次全國人口普查領導小組辦公室, 2020](#)):
- Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu
 - Uygur: 44.96%; Han: 42.24%; Kazak: 5.96%; Hui: 4.27%
- Xizang Zizhiqu
 - Tibetan: 86.01%; Han: 12.15%; Hui: 0.70%; Moinba: 0.29%
- Nei Mongol Zizhiqu
 - Han: 78.74%; Mongolian: 17.66%; Manchu: 1.95%; Hui: 0.89%
- Ningxia Huizu Zizhiqu
 - Han: 64.05%; Hui: 35.04%; Manchu: 0.39%; Miao: 0.15%

- Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu
 - Han: 62.48%; Zhuang: 31.36%; Yao: 3.36%; Miao: 1.15%

VI. Conclusion

- Our country's rich ethnic diversity is a testament to its long history and the coexistence of various peoples within its diverse physical landscapes. Understanding the unique cultures, challenges, and contributions of ethnic minority groups is crucial for gaining a comprehensive perspective on the diversity of our country.
- Further information about each minority group in our country can be obtained from the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China (<https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/ztzl/zgmzjs/index.shtml>).

References:

1. 中華人民共和國國家民族事務委員會. (2024) “中華各民族.”
<https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/ztzl/zgmzjs/index.shtml>.
2. 國務院第七次全國人口普查領導小組辦公室. (2020). “中國人口普查年鑑 2020.”
<https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/pcsj/rkpc/7rp/zk/indexce.htm>
3. 中華人民共和國中央人民政府. (2005) “中國的民族區域自治”
http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/zwgk/2005-05/27/content_1585.htm