ABSTRACT: The Paradigmatic Crises in China’s Minzu Studies: Reflections from the Perspective of Human Development

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The field of minzu 民族 studies is currently in a state of disarray. This article proposes to discuss three paradigmatic crises—the one-dimensional interpretation, problematization, and de-ethnicization of the term minzu—from the perspective of human development. Although the meaning of minzu is, as this article argues, ambiguous, it has mostly been reduced to its political and ideological meaning. To solely rely on this one-dimensional interpretation in an academic discussion has led to a paradigmatic crisis in minzu studies. From the perspective of human development, minzu is the carrier and basic cultural unit of a pluralistic global culture. Although the concept of minzu is not inherently problematic, the word is being problematized by subsuming a number of extraneous issues. Problematization thus constitutes another paradigmatic crisis in current minzu studies. Opposing the current trend of de-ethnicizing the minzu question, this article proposes to de-problematize the concept of minzu instead, thereby preventing it from being used as a political tool. This article intends to shed light on the current state of crisis in China’s minzu studies, discuss a suitable research methodology, and provide an academic basis for ethnic research and policy implementation.

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