Ethnic Conflict in China: Characteristics, Causes, and Countermeasures

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Ethnic problems are widespread in contemporary world affairs and China is no exception. China's primary ethnic conflicts have always taken place in the peripheral provinces, where ethnic minorities are concentrated, and occur between Han Chinese and minority nationalities. These conflicts are rooted in a wide range of factors: domestic, regional, and international. Domestic factors include historical hatreds, Han chauvinism, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) destruction of minority areas, the authoritarian political system, economic reforms, and misguided minority policies. Generally, Chinese governmental countermeasures to ethnic conflicts are a combination of political repression and economic development. For the CCP, a successful independence movement in one place raises the threat of independence movements elsewhere. Thus, the wisest choice for China's central government is to maintain stability by adopting less provocative ethnic minority policies and thereby avoiding the demonstration effect in China's minority regions.

KEYWORDS: ethnic minority; conflict; policy; identity

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Ethnic problems are widespread in contemporary world affairs, and China is no exception. As Michael E. Brown has stated, "the prospects for ethnic conflict in . . . China cannot be dismissed."[1] China is relatively ethnically homogenous. Well over 90 percent of China's population is Han Chinese. China's ethnic minorities, however, make up only a small part, 8 percent, of the total population according to the national census in 1990 (see table 1). Brown argues that China is ethnically unipolar in character: "The good news for countries with unipolar settings is that forming national identities is comparatively easy and nationwide ethnic wars are less likely to develop. The bad news is that countries that are dominated numerically, politically, economically, and culturally by one ethnic group are prone to discriminate against ethnic minorities because the latter are small and weak."[2]

As part of its *shaoshu minzu* (minority nationalities) policy, Beijing has, in addition to the Han, officially classified some fifty-five minority groups, while "wholly denying the validity or even the existence of others" in order to effectively manage minority groups throughout China.[3] Nonetheless, China is struggling to contain outbreaks of ethnic conflict. Although the population of China is overwhelmingly Han, substantial ethnic minorities spread across the country generally resent the rule of the Han.

Recent reports from Xinjiang suggest violence on an increasing scale. Several thousand Uygurs (Uighurs, Uyghurs), a Turkish ethnic group who outnumber Han Chinese by two to one in their province, were said to have been involved in one particular riot. The conflict took place in Yining, a town in Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, close to the border with Ka-

[1]Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

[2]Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly, eds., *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 522.

[3]John Lipman, "Hyphenated Chinese: Sino-Muslim Identity in Modern China," in *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain*, ed. Gail Hershatter (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 97.

Table 1
China's Ethnic Demographics*

Nationality	Location	Number (1,000)	Percentage
Han	Throughout China	1,026,050	91.94
Zhuang	Guangxi, Yunnan	15,490	1.34
Manchu	Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang	9,821	0.88
Hui	Ningxia, Gansu	8,603	0.77
Uygur	Xinjiang	7,214	0.65
Yi	Sichuan, Yunnan	6,572	0.60
Mongol	Inner Mongolia, Liaoning	4,807	0.43
Tibetan	Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai	4,593	0.41
Korean	Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang	1,921	0.17
Kazakh	Xinjiang, Qinghai	1,112	0.099
Dai	Yunnan	1,025	0.092
Wa	Yunnan	352	0.032
Tajik	Xinjiang	34	0.003
Uzbek	Xinjiang	15	0.0013
Total		1,116,000,000	100.0

*Only thirteen relevant ethnic minorities of China's fifty-five are listed here.
Source: The PRC's Fourth National Census in 1990.

zakhstan, with ten people, both Uygurs and Han Chinese, perhaps being killed.[4]

Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly point out that, as China moves into the post-Deng era, the country's rulers face a seemingly intractable policy dilemma: accommodationist policies may lead to secessionist demands, but assimilationist crackdowns will almost certainly lead to violent backlashes and perhaps even open rebellions.[5] Important therefore is for Chinese decisionmakers to understand the dynamics of ethnic relations, the causes and characteristics of China's ethnic conflicts, and what the government has done and should do to deal with those problems.

This paper focuses on the characteristics and causes of China's ethnic conflicts and the countermeasures pursued thus far by the Chinese government. It then draws upon this experience to suggest policy reforms.

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[4]"China's Rebellious West," *The Economist*, February 15, 1997, 33-34.
[5]Brown and Ganguly, *Government Policies*, 1.

Characteristics

China's ethnic conflicts are distinctive. Generally, the main charac-
teristics of China's ethnic conflicts can be classified as follows.

First, China's ethnic conflicts are primarily centralized in the peri-
pheral provinces, especially the provinces where many of China's ethnic
minorities are concentrated. Although all part of Chinese society, the
various ethnic communities are linked with Han China by little more than
geography and the policing power of the central government. China's ethnic
conflicts are relatively limited and are not spread throughout the whole
country.

Second, the Han Chinese are nearly always involved in China's ethnic
conflicts. The other side of the conflicts are multiple and variable, involving
Tibetans, Uygurs, Huis, Mongols, and Koreans, among others. The Han
are China's dominant ethnic group in both numerical and political terms. In
contrast, China's fifty-five ethnic minorities are all subordinated ethnic
groups. Consequently, China's ethnic conflicts occur between Han Chinese
and some ethnic minority or minorities. Inter-minority conflicts are not
significant in number. China's ethnic conflicts therefore also are called
Han-minority tensions or Han-minority conflicts.

Third, rebellious minorities have never formed a united alliance.
Most of China's ethnic conflicts have not created a demonstration effect.
Because many minorities live near China's borders, they have seldom com-
municated well across ethnic lines. China's ethnic conflicts have always
occurred as sporadic and uncoordinated events even though some ethnic
conflicts have taken place simultaneously.

Fourth, China's ethnic conflicts often take on strong religious con-
notations. As known to all, Confucianism (which has always been seen as
one of the five "world religions" along with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism,
and Buddhism) is the major component of Chinese civilization.[6] However,
China is both a multiethnic and a multi-religious society. Confucianism is
neither the only religion existing in China nor is it embraced by all Chinese

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[6]Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New
York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 45.

people. In addition to Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are also prac-
ticed in China. Generally speaking, ethnic minorities, which have their
own religions, do not accept Confucianism. For example, Tibetans and
Mongols believe in Lamaism, an offshoot and a variant of Therevada
Buddhism. Uygurs and Huis believe in Islam, and some other minorities ad-
here to Christianity, Orthodoxy, or Hinduism. Generally, the Han Chinese
and ethnic minorities practice different religions and both sides often resort
to their respective religions as an instrument of struggle when ethnic con-
flict becomes inevitable.

For example, most Muslim insurgencies have resulted from Han
disrespect of Muslim religious habits. Note also that monks and nuns have
led most demonstrations in Lhasa. In 1995, Tibetans were outraged when
the boy whom the Dalai Lama had selected as the reincarnation of the Pan-
chen Lama, another religious leader of Tibet, disappeared and was replaced
by a child of Beijing's choosing. The monks and monasteries in Tibet had
become the focal point of separatist activities.[7] Some local officials even
maintained lavish shrines in their own homes for the performance of re-
ligious rituals, although Beijing criticized the practice.

Fifth, the great disparity of power between the Han and all ethnic
minorities constrains the level of ethnic conflict. Nonviolence is the main
form of China's ethnic conflicts. Although these conflicts become violent
in some cases, minority groups in China usually manage to resolve their
differences without resorting to violence.

Nevertheless, the situation in today's China is changing. Almost
every demonstration by ethnic minorities has been suppressed by the mili-
tary force of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Moreover, the young
generations of China's ethnic minorities have threatened to initiate a cam-
paign of terrorism against the Han Chinese and they may be beyond the
control of their "god-kings."[8] The young generations are learning from the

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[7]Ni Banggui, "Paying Attention to Politics Should Be Closely Linked with Tibet's Reality,"
Xizang ribao (Tibet Daily) (Lhasa), May 13, 1996, 4, in Foreign Broadcast Information
Service (FBIS), *Daily Report: China* [hereafter *FBIS-CHI*]-96-107 (June 3, 1996): 35-39.

[8]Jackie Sam, "Tibetan Radicals Put a High Price on Independence," *Hong Kong Standard*,
April 8, 1988.

conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda.

Four or five years ago, the rumblings of discontent in northwestern China could be heard in the voices of ethnic and religious separatists in Kashgar and Turfan. Today those voices have been displaced by bombings, whose aftereffects have reverberated both throughout the region as well as Beijing. On February 25, 1997, three bombs erupted on public buses in the northwestern border city of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. This attack left nine people dead and seventy-four wounded. Bombs also exploded on two Beijing buses on March 7, 1997, killing two people and injuring thirty; on May 13, 1997, another bomb detonated in a city park in Beijing, killing one person.[9] These bombings, like more than thirty others that occurred in 1997, are believed to be related to demands by Muslim and Tibetan separatists.

Sixth, the goals of China's ethnic minorities are different. Much of the ethnic population resists majority domination and agitates for greater autonomy and even independence from Beijing. Most of the minority groups that became comfortable with Han culture and norms before 1949 do not wish to secede. Other minorities, including those unwilling to accept Han culture, simply desire to obtain a more meaningful autonomy. However, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia have generated genuine separatist movements.

The exiled Tibetans once demanded the creation of a "Greater Tibet" that would include not only political Tibet (the Tibet Autonomous Region), but also the ethnic Tibetan areas in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces.[10] In 1987, several days after the Dalai Lama delivered his Five-Point Peace Plan in Washington, D.C., which was denounced fiercely by the Chinese government as a declaration of independence, a small group of monks in Lhasa demonstrated in support of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan independence. Later, a full-scale riot erupted. During the following two years, three other riots occurred in Lhasa, the last of which (in 1989)

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[9]Dru C. Gladney, "Rumblings from the Uyghur," *Current History* 96, no. 611 (September 1997): 287-90.

[10]See A. Doak Barnett, *China's Far West: Four Decades of Change* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 290-91.

compelled Beijing to declare martial law in Tibet for over a year.

During the Cultural Revolution, the rebels in Xinjiang tried to establish an independent East Turkestan Republic, just as their forbears had done several times in the past under other Chinese governments. In Inner Mongolia, since there are only 4 million Mongols in a total population of 24 million, some of the residents consider neither independence nor reunification with Mongolia to be likely. Instead, what they really desire is genuine regional autonomy.[11]

Disgruntled residents of China's border regions were able to resort to another option: emigration to neighboring countries; for example, Tibetans to India or Nepal, Uygurs and Kazakhs to the ex-Soviet republics, Huis to the Central Asian Islam countries, and Koreans to either South or North Korea. After the 1958-59 Xinjiang rebellion, 70,000 Uygur and Kazakhs fled across the border and into the Soviet Union. In another case, the inhabitants of an entire Uygur commune simply disappeared across the border into the neighboring Soviet Kirghiz Republic during the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution.[12]

The prospect of economic gain was the main reason that China's Koreans from Liaoning and Jilin provinces have tried to emigrate to South Korea. For example, Korean "tourists" from China in South Korea simply disappeared from hotels; a few fishing boats loaded with illegal Chinese Korean immigrants attempted to enter Pusan Harbor.

In May and June of 1989, there were several demonstrations in Inner Mongolia. The democracy movement in the Mongolian People's Republic attracted Mongols in Inner Mongolia, some of whom also wanted democracy and others who began to desire reuniting the two Mongolias.

Seventh, China's conflicting ethnic minorities typically lack organization. There are no powerful parties that can lead various minorities to accomplish their goals in China's minority areas. Although a few nongovernmental organizations exist, they lack the capacity to play a substantial role in the conflicts with the Han. While discontent may be widespread, in

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[11]Nicholas Kristof, "Restlessness Reaches Mongols in China," *New York Times*, July 7, 1992.

[12]June Teufel Dreyer, "Assimilation and Accommodation in China," in Brown and Ganguly, *Government Policies*, 371.

practice no single person or organization has become the core able to agglomerate various groups with the same cause.

For example, there are many Uygur separatist organizations based both outside and inside Xinjiang. Outside Xinjiang there are Uygur separatist organizations located in Istanbul, Ankara, Almaty, Munich, Amsterdam, Melbourne, and Washington, D.C.[13] With different political goals and strategies, they all share a common vision of a unilateral Uygur claim on the Xinjiang region. Within Xinjiang, there are also many organizations such as the Regional Uygur Association, the Organization for the Liberation of Uygurstan, the East Turkestan National Salvation Committee, the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan, and the United National Front of Turkestan. None of these has, however, stepped forward as a strong, integrative leader. Some of the organizations dedicate themselves to researching and promoting traditional culture and identity, while the general tendency is for separatist groups to compete against each other.

Eighth, most of China's ethnic conflicts are supported internationally. China's ethnic minorities depend on external rather than internal forces. The support and influence of international society has been very important for China's minorities. Ethnic minorities have frequently used differences between the neighboring countries and China to achieve their own goals. Similarly, a few neighboring governments have used Chinese refugees to contain, threaten, or put pressure on the Chinese government. For example, in 1959, Soviet leaders welcomed the refugees of the Xinjiang rebellion, and immediately enlisted them in the propaganda war that had developed between Moscow and Beijing. Refugee complaints against the Chinese party and government were broadcast into the PRC, along with commentaries on how much better life was in the Soviet Union.[14] Thus, the refugees became the tools of some foreign governments, and vice versa.

In the 1959 rebellion, Tibetans were better armed and trained than the earlier uprising in 1950 due to help from sympathetic outside powers including India, the United States, and Taiwan. Tibetan exiles made northern

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[13]See note 9 above.
[14]Dreyer, "Assimilation and Accommodation in China," 371.

India and Nepal their bases from which to cause trouble for the PRC. They organized a monthly magazine in these areas, through which they criticized the Chinese party and government. In Xinjiang, many of those who resisted the Cultural Revolution were heavily armed, having stolen weapons from military storage sites or having been equipped by the Soviet Union. With this support, the Uygur challenged the authority of the Chinese central government. There were also tales of Kazakh guerrilla bands with thousands of members being supported by the Soviet Union.

After Deng Xiaoping came to power, foreign investment in minority areas was welcomed and cross-border exchanges were permitted. However, considered solely on the basis of return on capital, direct investment in China's far west has not proven the best option for foreign investors. Some investors could, however, be induced to help China's ethnic minority groups for nonfinancial reasons. For example, wealthy foreign Muslims might want to help their co-religionists in Ningxia or Xinjiang. Businesspeople often make donations directly to mosques or to the charitable foundations of minorities, thus giving those entities more autonomy from the central government.

Cross-border trade has brought similar problems. As a result, bombs and firearms have entered Xinjiang, scriptures and proscribed pictures of the Dalai Lama have come into Tibet, and drugs from the Golden Triangle have passed into Yunnan. Tourism has also brought locals into contact with foreigners who heard about minority grievances and reported them to international human rights organizations. While most tourists harbor no ulterior motives, others have been supporters of separatist movements, foreign intelligence agents, or members of terrorist groups. This fact has posed a particular problem in Muslim areas of northwest China.

In addition, China's minorities were attracted by the lifestyle of ethnic brethren who live abroad. The Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan became a popular destination for tourists from Thailand. The Dai took note of and envied their fellow brethren's stylish clothing, expensive cameras, and freedom to express themselves politically and culturally. This reinforced their ethnic consciousness, and some Dai began to emulate the Thai.

China's ethnic rebels try to induce Western nations to renounce their

acceptance of Chinese sovereignty over minority areas and to pressure China into making concessions. Nevertheless, outside support is still very limited. For example, the United States has no vital strategic interests in China's minority areas and will not allow the Tibetan issue to create unnecessary complications and irritants in Sino-U.S. relations. Therefore, according to June Teufel Dreyer, "given the present lack of support for Tibet's independence among sovereignty states (as distinguished from individuals and groups within those states), it is difficult to imagine that Tibet could attain independence from China. In essence, the issue of Tibetan independence is stalemated."[15]

Causes

Ethnic conflicts in China are rooted in a wide range of factors. At the domestic level, these include historical hatreds, Han chauvinism, China's minority policies, the political system, economic reforms, and governmental policy initiatives such as educational and demographic policies. At the regional level, cross-border ethnic complications and the actions of neighboring states can influence China's ethnic problems. At the international level, developments in the economic arena and the actions of foreign powers and international organizations can impact the course of events as well.

At the Domestic Level
    Historical hatreds: At the domestic level, the roots of China's ethnic conflicts can be traced back hundreds of years. The deep historical discrepancy between the agricultural society of the Han Chinese and the nomadic societies of ethnic minorities has triggered internal conflicts and wars. Since the Han were agriculturists, they tended to migrate southward and along riverbanks rather than toward the cold and arid north. In the course of this lengthy migration, the Han naturally encountered previous inhabitants as they entered new areas. Proud of their own culture and technology,

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[15]June Teufel Dreyer, "Unrest in Tibet," *Current History* 88, no. 539 (September 1989): 273.

the Han tended to consider other groups to be barbarians. They showed little interest in learning about or from them, unless a group posed a direct military threat to their survival. In the words of an American missionary, "the Chinese have never taken a great deal of trouble to find out about the history of these different tribes, and while willing that the aboriginal shall come to them, learn of them, and share their privileges, they have never been keen on learning from the aboriginal."[16] Some ethnic groups were pushed from their homes into mountain terrain or other areas unsuitable for cultivation. Other groups were assimilated to Confucian principles.

Such historical hatreds have been expressed again and again. During its legendary Long March to escape annihilation by Kuomintang (KMT) forces in 1934-35, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) passed through several areas populated by minorities. The Yi looted what few possessions the marchers had been able to bring with them. Tibetans rolled boulders down at the communists as they attempted to traverse narrow mountain passes, and shot at them from behind tall grass. Hui cavalry charged at swords' points.[17]

Han chauvinism: Many ethnic conflicts were caused by Han chauvinism. China is overwhelmingly composed of Han, a race that is apt to regard their group as the core of China's national identity, disrespecting the identities of other minorities and viewing manifestations of other ethnic identities as subversive.

After the formation of the PRC, the Han began to see themselves as superior to ethnic minorities. The party portrayed itself as the grand savior of the minority nationalities and the protector of minority cultures; these claims must surely have been unconvincing to minorities, even generating great antipathy from the latter. In the view of the ethnic minorities, the party was not a protector and nurturer, but rather a destroyer of their cultures, just as it had been in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Some minorities regarded the Han with great suspicion, and greeted with utmost skepticism efforts to convince them that communists were different

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[16]Samuel Pollard, *In Unknown China* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1921), 56.

[17]Dreyer, "Assimilation and Accommodation in China," 368.

from and superior to the Han they had previously known. Minorities would simply walk away or run off rather than listen to the presentation of local cadres. There were worse manifestations of this hatred: Yunnan's Wa minority believed that their crops grew better if fields were fertilized each year with a fresh Han head.[18] Several other minorities, such as the Yi, also objected to the Han.

Sometimes, the media portrays minorities as Han in terms of their language, costume, and political outlook. Moreover, Han writers often portray minorities in an offensive manner in their books and plays. In the spring of 1989, Uygur and Kazakh demonstrations and upheavals in Xinjiang were directly ignited by the publication of a book in Shanghai that contained material offensive to Islam beliefs.

The CCP's destruction of minority areas: The immediate determinant of China's ethnic conflicts is the Han's destruction of minority areas. After the CCP took power, China's central government made "numerous mistakes" in minority affairs. In particular, the key mistakes were continued Han chauvinism and the mechanical application of Han experiences in minority areas. For example, Han cadres had tried to turn a traditional Yao trysting place (local cattle market) into a cabbage patch. Other officials, appalled by the wasteful Tibetan practice of burning butter as incense, tried to stop the practice. Moreover, in 1952, the government summoned Hui prayer leaders in Henan province to a meeting, at the end of which the Huis were invited to perform ritual ablutions in a dirty bath. Those who refused were criticized as "too stubborn to accept new ideas."[19]

The "Preliminary Report on Minority Work" in 1956 stated that insufficient attention had been paid to training cadres from minority groups and promoting them to leadership positions; there has not been enough support for devising and promoting written minority languages; there have been restrictions on the rights of minority peoples to manage their own business; and Han cadres have usurped the work of local cadres.[20]

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Kao Han-jen, *The Imam's Story* (Hong Kong: Dragonfly Press, 1953), 21.

[20]Ulanfu, "Preliminary Report on Minority Work," trans. in United States Consulate General in Hong Kong, *Current Background*, no. 418 (1956): 18.

In the 1950s, the anti-Rightist struggle was launched throughout China. Some minorities were accused of having separatist and secessionist impulses, and others were criticized for wanting to expel all Han from their areas. Most dissenters were subsequently purged. As a result, ethnic minorities complained that the party and government were using both covert and overt means to assimilate minorities, and exploiting minority areas for the benefit of the Han. Local cadres were branded as traitors, and the practice of autonomy was denounced as a sham. Many minority leaders spoke out against collectivization as being incompatible with their culture and traditions. In addition, many claimed that the true leaders of minority groups were their traditional leaders; in other words, local critics did not accept the legitimacy of party-appointed officials.

During the period of the Great Leap Forward, minority areas were also swept into the maelstrom of class struggle. Herdsmen were convinced that the land on which they grazed their animals would be more productively used if sowed with grain and vegetables. Other minorities were said to have realized that their traditional customs were not conducive to efficient labor in the field and also wasted cloth. Hence, the wide sashes of the Dai were replaced with leather belts, and the Gansu Tibetans substituted standard cotton Mao caps for their cumbersome turban-like headgear. With the money saved, they supposedly vowed to buy wheelbarrows. Tibetan lamas, who could normally spend their days in prayer and contemplation, allegedly clamored to take part in productive labor. And the Huis, whose aversion to pork had previously led the government to provide them with separate restaurants and butchering establishments, were now described as enthusiastic about joining multinational communes and eating in mess halls where they would be treated like everyone else. Minorities would no longer receive favored treatment; their special privileges were deemed to be manifestations of local nationalism. There was even an attack on the autonomous area system.

The party had undertaken this drive in order to increase economic production. However, the campaign had precisely the opposite effect. Tremendous anger and resentment generated by the party's blatant reversal of its promises on minority rights led to a drastic decrease in production. Herdsmen slaughtered their animals instead of turning them over to com-

munes. Grazing areas turned out to be unsuitable for raising corps, just as herdsmen had argued. The Huis were in fact angry at being forced to use what they considered to be unclean dining and bathing facilities. Thus, several small rebellions occurred, as well as a few major ones in Tibet and Xinjiang.

The Cultural Revolution was a disaster not only for the CCP and the government, but also for all the Chinese people, including of course ethnic minorities. In 1966, the Red Guards, the vanguard of the Cultural Revolution, following the admonition of Mao Zedong, began to "destroy the four olds": old ideas, customs, cultures, and habits. This policy was a blow particularly to the minority communities, partly because the party had specifically promised that minorities would be allowed to retain their traditional ways. Red Guards ripped down pictures of the Dalai Lama from the walls of Tibetan homes and replaced them with pictures of Chairman Mao. Lhasa's central temple was desecrated, as were a number of lamaseries and mosques. Wearing traditional dress became dangerous, as did performing folk dances, even those based on such apparently innocuous themes as bringing in the harvest. Since traditional celebrations of successful harvests implied that prosperity predated the communist revolution, performing them was said to denigrate the importance of the communist revolution. Broadcasting and publishing in minority languages all but ceased.

Much damage was done. Religious institutions were looted and destroyed; individuals were tortured and killed; and antagonisms between the Han and minorities were exacerbated. Attacks went beyond the destruction of buildings and icons, however, focusing on the entire structure of the party's minority work. The autonomous area system came under attack for the same reason. Fortunately, however, the institution of autonomous areas survived.

Localized rebellions occurred, although nothing on the scale of those during the Great Leap Forward. The most serious seems to have been in Xinjiang, where provocation included the desecration of mosques, public burning of the Koran, and forcing Muslims to eat pork. Ethnically armed resistance to the Cultural Revolution also occurred in Liaoning, Gansu, Ningxia, Tibet, and Yunnan.

In 1974 and 1975, several Muslim groups in Yunnan in the extreme

south and Xinjiang in the far northwest rebelled. The riots broke out after Muslims were told to work on Friday, their Holy Day. A Western reporter who visited the Yunnan area, Shadian, was told fifteen years later that communist officials had tried to force Muslims to raise pigs. The army had been sent in, and several hundred people were reportedly killed.[21]

Political system: One source of China's ethnic conflicts is China's political system, which is central and authoritarian in nature. In China, state power is highly centralized in the hands of both the central government and the CCP. Local power is relatively very limited. In the eyes of ethnic minorities, this kind of political system results in the government's incompetence and corruption.

Although the autonomous area system was built to guarantee the rights and benefits of ethnic minorities, dissident minority groups insisted that the system did not provide them with meaningful self-government. The first party secretary of each autonomous region was rarely a native person. [22] The traditional leaders of small groups were often given lower-level titles in the Chinese bureaucratic hierarchy, preceded by the character "*tu,*" meaning "earth," to denote their separate and inferior status. The leaders of some larger and potentially troublesome barbarian groups were given imperial titles in return for pledges of peace.

In 1984, a special law on regional autonomy went into effect. The law required that the administrative head of an autonomous area should be a member of the nationality or nationalities exercising regional autonomy in the area of self-government. Nevertheless, there were no corresponding stipulations for party leadership in autonomous areas.[23] Other policies devised for Han areas caused problems for minority communities. For example, a ban imposed on recruiting cadres from rural areas had the unintentional effect of negating the party's promise to recruit more cadres from ethnic minorities, since very few of them lived in urban areas.[24]

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[21] Sheryl WuDunn, "The Perfect Union Still Eludes China," *New York Times,* March 28, 1990.

[22] See note 9 above.

[23] "Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities of the PRC," *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), June 4, 1984, in *FBIS-CHI*-84-116 (June 14, 1984): K3-13.

[24] Li Jiguo and Qian Zhixin, "Leading Comrades of Minority Nationality Areas in Yunnan

Reports held that just because a Hui had not been appointed vice-governor of Qinghai, the Huis went on to demonstrate against the party, government, and military in 1989. Their attacks on trains caused a several-day suspension of service on the Gansu-Qinghai rail line.[25] Thus, ethnic minorities can win some concessions only by means of rebellion, albeit at considerable human cost. Furthermore, some minorities—the Tibetans, for example—did not welcome the autonomous area system at all. The over-whelming majority of the land area of Qinghai, a province neighboring Tibet, is composed of Tibetan autonomous prefectures. In Sichuan, another neighboring province of Tibet, several Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties are directly contiguous to the territory of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Tibetans consider these areas to be parts of Tibet. The CCP's decision to incorporate them into other provinces was seen as a "divide and rule" effort, and is bitterly resented.

Administrative boundaries divided many minority groups arbitrarily, and pressures for reunification have been strong in several areas, including Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia. Xinjiang's ever-restive Turkic Muslim majority has ethnic ties to several ex-Soviet republics, which the Chinese elite feared could be used to goad China's Turkic Muslim into rebellion. Note that Moscow had already helped Mongolia attain its independence from China.

Economic reforms: The economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping have become a new cause of China's ethnic conflicts. Under Mao Zedong, Chinese policies toward ethnic minorities alternated between accommodation to and assimilation of minority languages, traditions, and other characteristics. Deng reversed many of those policies. In an effort to rapidly modernize China, he decentralized economic power and replaced Mao's redistributive policies with measures that channeled investment into areas where economic gains would be greatest. Almost invariably, these areas were on China's coast. Deng's policies worked: the economies of these areas boomed. However, this made local economies in minority areas lag

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Call for Selecting and Promoting Minority Nationalities Cadres," *Renmin ribao*, November 8, 1979.

[25]Beijing Radio, June 10, 1989, in *FBIS-CHI*-89-111 (June 12, 1989): 90.

far behind, and have exacerbated Han-minority tensions.

During the Cultural Revolution, state subsidies to minority areas were cut by approximately one-third between 1968 and 1975.[26] At the end of 1979, television sets were produced in every province in China except Tibet, Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Qinghai—three of the five autonomous regions and one province whose territory is overwhelmingly composed of minority autonomous prefectures.[27] Efforts to develop industries in minority areas had apparently made little progress. A subsequent effort to privatize the economies of minority areas by replacing state subsidies with loans also caused problems, since people in these areas did not know how to make good use of the new loan opportunities.[28]

Reform efforts notwithstanding, the economies of minority areas continued to fall further behind those of coastal China. This contributed to the minorities' sense of exploitation by the Han. A few areas, including Xinjiang, even set up economic blockades against goods coming in from Han China. Thus, the economic gap between the Han and ethnic minorities —rather than class struggle as Cultural Revolution radicals have argued— was and is the main cause of Han-minority conflicts. Therefore, Brown wrote, "the net effect of China's economic boom . . . is that many of China's minorities are both dissatisfied with the central government and more capable of pursuing their own political agendas."[29]

Fallacious policies: Fallacious and excessively variable minority policies of China's central government have also contributed to ethnic conflicts. It was reported that a severe famine occurred in the Tibet Autonomous Region in the late 1970s, and many Han had to evacuate because of the food shortage. This, in fact, was caused not by natural disasters but by human folly. The government had forced Tibetans to grow wheat rather than the barley that formed the staple of their traditional diet. After a few years of

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[26]Liu Xianzhao and Wei Shiming, "On the Protected Nature of the Nationalities Problem in the Socialist Period," *Renmin ribao,* April 6, 1979.

[27]Xinhua, November 14, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-230 (November 28, 1979): L16.

[28]Wang Rong, "Drive Helps Minorities Adjust to the Market," *China Daily,* October 27, 1992.

[29]Brown and Ganguly, *Government Policies,* 531-32.

promising results, the soil became depleted and grain had to be sent into the region to avert famine. Han occupation had brought the region to the brink of ecological disaster. The army had slaughtered a huge number of yaks, animals crucial to the economy, and forests had been cut down indiscriminately.[30] In Yunnan, problems arose over land and water rights. In the course of setting up rubber plantations, for example, state farms had taken land, and the rubber trees thereon, away from the minority nationalities.

The central government's policies of increasing the human and cattle population of the grasslands in Inner Mongolia are said to be causing serious land erosion. This has generated local complaints, ethnic unrest, and even gun battles between local herdsmen and government military forces in 1992 and 1995.[31]

In the realm of culture and education, China's ethnic minorities have also been made to feel second-class. The education systems of minority areas have been controlled by the central government, as were their economies. In 1952, a national minority nationalities education conference was held that stressed that training cadres from minority groups would be the main goal of minority education policy. Six nationality academies and one minority nationality institution of higher learning (the Central Institute of Minorities in Beijing) were formed and more than four thousand individuals, some Han and some from minority groups, were trained to serve in minority areas. In addition to training personnel to introduce and develop the party's programs in ethnic minority areas, these institutions conducted research on minority histories, cultures, and languages.

Although a promising start, this program was terminated by the Cultural Revolution. The Central Institute of Minorities in Beijing did not reopen until January 1972. At this time, the number of schools specifically for minority students, and presumably using their languages, increased. There was also a renewed effort to train minorities as cadres.

However, economic backwardness could be attributed, in part at least,

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[30]Dreyer, "Assimilation and Accommodation in China," 380.

[31]Didi Tatlow, "Government Policy Said to Destroy Grasslands," *Eastern Express* (Hong Kong), July 1-2, 1995; Human Rights Watch/Asia, *Continuing Crackdown in Inner Mongolia* (New York: Human Rights Watch/Asia, 1992), 5.

to poor schools. There was little interest in educational work in minority areas. Because Deng Xiaoping's effort to raise educational standards in the PRC included the establishment of a difficult examination for admission to universities, the number of minority students in universities dropped precipitously.[32]

China's ethnic minorities often complain about migration and population issues as well. For example, in their own monthly magazine and in other publications, Tibetan exiles charged the Chinese party and government with committing genocide through sterilization as well as with assimilation through compulsory intermarriage. They also described the destruction of temples and scriptures, forced labor, and the seizure of food and other resources.[33]

Beginning in 1956, young city dwellers were sent from their homes to places such as Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. This was part of Mao's effort to alleviate population pressures in crowded cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, while diluting the concentration of ethnic minorities in outlying regions. The movement was known as "*shangshan xiaxiang*" in Mandarin, and sometimes translated as "rustication" in English. Millions of people took part and a portion of these went to minority areas.[34] However, life in those regions was harsh, even those who had "gone to the countryside" with great enthusiasm found the adjustment to rural life quite difficult. Because this movement was generally involuntary, return was nearly unthinkable. As a consequence, many young Han that were part of the rustication movement thus attributed their misfortune to ethnic minorities.

After reforms were adopted, tourism and more economic opportunities in ethnic minority areas impelled a new wave of voluntary migration. For example, many young Han people from impoverished areas of nearby Sichuan province flooded into Lhasa to profit from the tourist trade and

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[32]Xinhua, December 4, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-241 (December 13, 1979): P4.

[33]Dreyer, "Assimilation and Accommodation in China," 382.

[34]See June Teufel Dreyer, "Go West Young Han: The *Hsia-fang* Movement to China's Minority Areas," *Pacific Affairs* 48, no. 3 (Fall 1975): 353-69.

take advantage of the preferential taxes that had been given to the Tibet Autonomous Region. Most tourists probably had no idea that the peddlers they were buying trinkets from were not Tibetans, but the locals knew and resented this intrusion. Reports hold that a group of Tibetan-speaking Americans discovered the waitresses at Lhasa's Holiday Inn spoke no Tibetan despite the traditional costumes they wore. Others, who interviewed workers constructing Dai-style building in different sectors of the capital of the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, found that there were no minorities or even any permanent residents of the areas among the work crews. No matter the reason for immigration, ethnic minorities resented the Han influx. For instance, Tibetans complained that the benefits of tourism were not going to Tibetans but to Han immigrants in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

China's favorable demography policy is not an unambiguous blessing to ethnic minorities. The burgeoning of the minority population is making raising living standards in minority areas more difficult. In 1990, the minority population exceeded 90 million, constituting no less than 8 percent of the total population. The rapid growth of minority population levels is part of the reason for the gap in living standards between the Han and minorities. In addition, respect for minority customs—for example, the Yi tradition of marriage between cousins or the Hui practice of same surname and intra-lineage-group marriage—is impairing the quality of life in minority areas.

Perhaps most troubling of all, many Han have registered as minorities to evade China's one-child policy and to ease the path of their children into higher education. Thus, many original ethnic minorities have complained that they were being "Hanized" and their ethnicity had become impure. In Xinjiang, for example, locals resent Han immigrants, who are said to get the best jobs on the construction sites and in the oil fields that are being developed. They are outraged at the forced sterilization of women and they worry that the influx of non-minorities is changing the ethnic character of minority areas. For example, the economic strategy of the CCP pulled in a large number of Chinese entrepreneurs and laborers to Tibet to work, increasing the size of the non-Tibetan population in Tibet. In the Dalai Lama's words, "due to an influx of Chinese settlers, Tibetans are becoming

a minority in their own land."[35]

At the Regional Level

At the regional level, cross-border ethnic complications and the actions of neighboring states also influence China's ethnic problems. Under Mao Zedong, despite the proximity of several minority nationality areas to foreign countries, external contacts with and influence from abroad were minimized, often to the point of being effectively eliminated. Under Deng Xiaoping, this situation has changed. Deng's reforms have left inland provinces, and in particular the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, far behind. Minorities have been permitted to trade across borders to redress this imbalance and assuage minority feelings of majority Han exploitation. Tourism from abroad has been encouraged as well. Foreign contacts have brought foreign influence and created new channels through which minorities can express their grievances. Minorities have also created new economic linkages with their kinsmen from neighboring countries, which have weakened the ties between minority areas and Han China.

These centrifugal forces are strongest in the case of Tibetans, Mongols, and several minorities who adhere to the Muslim faith such as Uygurs and Huis. There have also been attempts by ethnic Koreans in both Liaoning and Jilin provinces to immigrate to South Korea, and some Dai in China's far southwest have had their sense of ethnicity heightened through contact with citizens of Thailand. These latter cases have involved attractions to the cultures and systems of more prosperous states that border China. The winning of independence by the former Soviet Central Asian republics in 1991 has encouraged all of the Uygur organizations in their hopes for an independent Turkestan.

At the International Level

At the international level, the disintegration of the bipolar international system and the advent of regional power vacuums have played a part

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[35]The Dalai Lama, "Critical Reflections: Human Rights and the Future of Tibet," *Harvard International Review* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1994/95): 49.

in China's ethnic conflicts. The demise and subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union has instilled even greater hope in China's minority separatist groups. Due to the centrality of the idea of self-determination and the increasing concern with human rights in the West, ethnic minorities have begun to lose faith in the CCP and even challenge the central authorities. Centrifugal forces in China's minority areas have been further encouraged by a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, as well as ethnic nationalist forces unleashed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The immediate determinant of China's ethnic conflicts today has to do with the demand in many parts of the world for democratic change and self-determination; see, for example, the impacts of the democratization movement in the Mongolian People's Republic on the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in 1989. According to Samuel P. Huntington, between 1977 and 1990, some thirty countries made the transition from nondemocratic to democratic political systems.[36] The global communication system has amplified these factors.[37] With the development of the information revolution, borders are more porous, and directives from the central authorities can more easily be ignored. With the spread of voice and fax communications in minority areas, China's ethnic minorities can keep abreast of world developments as never before.

Countermeasures

Brown and Ganguly argue that government policies almost always have a significant impact on the course and trajectory of ethnic relations in a country.[38] In general, Chinese governmental countermeasures to ethnic conflicts include hard-line political strategies plus soft-line economic ones:

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[36]Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 38.

[37]Richard H. Schultz, Jr., "State Disintegration and Ethnic Conflict: A Framework for Analysis," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 541 (September 1995): 75-88.

[38]Brown and Ganguly, *Government Policies*, 1.

a combination of military force and economic prosperity. This overall policy involves developing new and effective security measures to prevent political demonstrations from turning into riots. It also involves accelerating economic development—the increasing integration of ethnic minorities with the rest of China and, over time, "modernizing" minorities so that they will be less influenced by religious and separatist movements.

The Autonomous Area System

Part of the CCP's promise to ethnic minorities was that in "the new China" they would be allocated specially designed regions—"autonomous areas"—in which they could practice a limited form of self-government. Local languages, customs, religions, and other traditional practices would be allowed. The party made it clear that Beijing would control foreign relations and would tolerate no opposition to communist principles; secession was prohibited.

In China, there are five autonomous regions, each equivalent to a province. The first autonomous region, Inner Mongolia, was founded in 1947, two years before the PRC was established. The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was formed in 1955 followed by special areas for the Guangxi Zhuang and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions in 1958. Tibet attained autonomous region status in 1965. In addition to those autonomous regions, twenty-nine autonomous prefectures were also established over time, as were sixty-nine autonomous counties and several hundred autonomous townships.

The Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference proclaimed the equality of the PRC's nationalities in terms of both rights and duties. The Common Program made illegal the discrimination against or oppression of minorities, but also prohibited "national splittism," that is, any effort by ethnic groups or minorities to leave the PRC. Minorities were given the right to have what the party described as autonomous government in areas where minorities were concentrated, and guaranteed a number of representatives in other government bodies proportional to their numbers. They were free to preserve dialects, languages, customs, habits, and religious beliefs. The 1954 PRC Constitution warned that there should be no mechanical application of Han experience in mi-

nority areas.[39]

The 1978 PRC Constitution and the Third Plenary Session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee were the turning point for China's ethnic minority policy. In 1978, China embarked on a more liberal policy under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Beijing shifted its minority policy away from the assimilationist/class struggle policy of the Cultural Revolution, instituting in its place a policy that emphasized accommodating the ethnic sensibilities of minority nationalities while improving their economic situation.

Administrative territorial adjustments that were beneficial to minorities were also made after the Third Plenary Session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee. The portion of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region that had been detached during the Cultural Revolution was returned.[40] An autonomous prefecture that had been abolished during the Cultural Revolution was revived, and several new autonomous areas were created. For example, Yunnan's Mojiang County became the Mojiang Hani Autonomous County on July 30, 1979.[41] The autonomous township system, defunct since the Great Leap Forward, was re-created. A fifty-fifth nationality, the Jinuo, was officially recognized.[42]

In the 1980s, official administrators generally believed that the autonomous area system was developing well, with five autonomous regions, thirty-one autonomous prefectures, eighty-three autonomous counties, and more than eight hundred autonomous townships established. The 1978 constitution also stated that all nationalities would have the right to use their own spoken or written languages in court proceedings and that courts would be required to provide interpreters for any party unacquainted with the spoken or written languages commonly used in the areas.[43]

The 1978 constitution proclaimed the equality of all of China's na-

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[39]*Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1954), Preamble.

[40]Beijing Radio, July 20, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-141 (July 20, 1979): R1.

[41]Kunming Radio, October 17, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-206 (October 23, 1979): Q3.

[42]Xinhua, September 28, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-190 (September 28, 1979): Q1.

[43]Art. 4 of the PRC Constitution, *Beijing Review*, March 17, 1978, 6-7.

tionalities and enjoined them to help and learn from each other. Discrimination against or oppression of any nationality was expressly forbidden, as was the commission of any act that would undermine the unity of nationalities. Both Han chauvinism and local nationality chauvinism were to be opposed. All nationalities were given the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own customs and ways.[44] The constitution affirmed the principle of regional autonomy, and organs of self-government were empowered to draw up specific regulations that reflected the political, economic, and cultural characteristics of their areas and submit them to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for approval. The head of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission warned cadres not to force Muslim minorities to raise pigs, and added that "no administrative decree is allowed to enforce reform."[45]

In the PRC's fourth constitution, which was promulgated in 1982, all nationalities of the PRC were also declared equal; discrimination against and oppression of any nationality was prohibited, as were any acts that undermined the unity of the nationalities. In addition, any words and acts that would instigate secession were banned.

Economic Preference

After the Third Plenary Session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978, the party and government decided to embark on reform and opening-up to the outside world. This consisted of drawing up a series of measures to help minorities develop their economies and cultures. The central government believed that reform and foreign investment in the minority regions would help assuage minority antipathy toward China. Because the economic gap between Han and ethnic minorities is believed to be the main cause of Han-minority conflict, the economic development of minority areas is seen as a solution to minority problems.

Responding to the charges of exploitation, the party pointed out that

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Xinhua, October 28, 1978, in *FBIS-CHI*-78-214 (November 3, 1978): L10-11.

it had frequently supplied seed, grain, and tools to needy areas, and had underwritten Xinjiang's budget. In June 1958, the Chinese central government announced a few new regulations, giving autonomous areas all revenues from certain taxes that had previously been shared between the central and local governments.

After the Third Plenary Session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee, minority areas were to receive substantially larger allocations of vehicles, tractors, and rolled steel. State investment for capital construction and subsidies to minority areas were to be increased "by a big margin."[46] Provinces and cities in the interior were to make manpower, material, and technical support available to ethnic minorities.[47] Herdsmen were to be allowed to keep more animals for private use and set aside more land for growing their own fruit trees; later, these would become completely privatized.[48]

Since the 1980s, border minorities have been urged to develop their economies through cross-border exchange. Hence, Tibetans could trade with Nepal and India, Yunnan minorities with Laos and Burma, Inner Mongolia Mongols with the Mongolia People's Republic, and Kazakhs and Uygurs with the peoples of the Central Asian republics. Foreign investment in minority areas was welcomed. The government also welcomed soft loans from international development agencies to minority areas.

At the suggestion of Fei Xiaotong, one of China's most eminent anthropologists, tourism was also encouraged. By attracting foreign visitors —who would spend large sums of money to reside in Mongolian tents, dine on yakburger in Lhasa, or examine the exotic flora and fauna of the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in southern Yunnan—China's minority areas would gradually become prosperous.

The 1982 PRC Constitution proclaimed that the state would "help areas inhabited by minority nationalities to speed up their economic and cultural development in accordance with the peculiarities and needs of the

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[46]Xinhua, June 9, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-115 (June 13, 1979): L17-18.
[47]Ibid.
[48]Xinhua, June 4, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-111 (June 7, 1979): T6.

different minority nationalities."[49] The law of 1984 gave autonomous areas the power to administer local finances, though adding, "revenue and expenditure of the national autonomous areas are determined in accordance with the principle of the State Council."[50]

Policy Appeasement

Regarding cultural and educational levels, the Chinese government carried out many reforms which have favored ethnic minorities. In 1978, the Ministry of Education announced that six junior colleges in minority regions would become four-year institutions in order to train more medical personnel and teachers for work in those areas.[51] The state vowed to expand minority education and teach in the minority children's own language. Liaoning province announced the establishment of new elementary and secondary schools for Mongols and Koreans, respectively;[52] standard Yi scrip was introduced in Sichuan; and a newly developed alphabet for the Tu of Qinghai was tested.[53]

In the 1980s, an affirmative action program was instituted to facilitate minority admission into universities: quotas were established to ensure that a fixed number of minority students were able to enter universities. In addition, the minimum entrance standards were set lower for minorities. Several new nationality institutes were established, and remedial classes were set up to help minorities who had graduated from senior middle school prepare for the university entrance examination.[54] In 1984, minorities constituted 6.2 percent of those taking university entrance examinations, which was fairly close to their 6.7 percent population share.[55]

In the area of demography, China's ethnic minorities received whole

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[49]*Beijing Review*, December 27, 1982, 38.

[50]"Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities," K8.

[51]Xinhua, October 19, 1978, in *FBIS-CHI*-78-204 (October 20, 1978): E22.

[52]Shenyang Radio, September 24, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-188 (September 26, 1979): S4.

[53]Xinhua, January 8, 1980, in *FBIS-CHI*-80-016 (January 23, 1980): L5.

[54]Xinhua, December 4, 1979, in *FBIS-CHI*-79-241 (December 13,1979): P5.

[55]Xinhua, July 7, 1984, in United States Technical Information Service, Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), *China: Political and Social Report*, August 15, 1984, 61.

or partial exemptions from the PRC's stringent new family planning regulations. While Han couples faced heavy pressure to have just one child, even minorities who lived in crowded areas were permitted two children. This policy applied, for example, to Manchus, Koreans, and Zhuang who lived in urban areas. Nomadic Kazakhs and rural Tibetans could have as many as four children.[56] In practice, such groups could often ignore family planning regulations altogether.

Military Suppression

Despite the economic strategy noted above, the Chinese government relies heavily on a hard-line, military strategy. For the CCP, the threat of a successful independence movement in any one area increases the threat from independence movements everywhere. The CCP cannot afford to concede to any separatist demands. Consequently, the party is likely to use all available means to keep intractable regions subdued.

The Chinese army plays a vital part in Beijing's ability to govern minority areas. In addition to serving as a bulwark against foreign invasion, the PLA was called upon many times in the past to restore domestic order. Military suppression can be seen as China's last resort to resolve ethnic conflicts. In addition to housing PLA troops, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia all have powerful public security forces. Consequently, China can easily put down any popular uprising. In the spring of 1989, the rebellion in Tibet was quenched by the PLA, and Lhasa was subsequently placed under martial law for more than a year. From then on, the central authorities have taken a harder line with regard to any public manifestations of ethnic grievances, let alone full-blown conflicts. Military and public security personnel are ready to quell demonstrations at any time.

More important is the role of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), which was organized in 1950, officially disbanded in 1975, then reinstated in 1982 in response to the continued unrest in Xin-

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[56]Melvyn C. Goldstein and Cynthia M. Beall, "China's Birth Control Policy in the Tibet Autonomous Region: Myths and Realities," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 3 (March 1991): 285-303.

jiang.[57] The XPCC has played a great part in every "Strike Hard" campaign. A few years ago, Zhu Rongji, now China's premier, reaffirmed "the irreplaceable role of the Corps in consolidating border defense, stabilizing the border, fostering ethnic unity, and developing regional economy."[58] Clearly, "assisting the Public Security Bureau and the People's Armed Police (PAP) in maintaining internal security among Xinjiang's ethnic minorities also remains an important mission of the XPCC."[59]

International Cooperation

In international communication, the central government has claimed again and again that no countries should interfere in China's internal affairs. Undoubtedly, the Chinese government views ethnic problems as an internal affair. The Chinese government seeks support from neighboring states by signing bilateral or multilateral agreements which aim at preventing "external forces" from stirring up ethnic trouble in China.

In late April 1996, and again on April 24, 1997, the Chinese government hosted meetings of high-level representatives from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to gain their assent to clamp down on the movement of terrorists into and out of Xinjiang. All of these neighbors of China promised to neither harbor nor support separatist groups.[60]

Beijing has also pressured Central Asian governments to withhold support from exiled groups. At the same time, the central authorities have attempted to discourage foreign governments from giving aid or succor to dissident minorities. Official media continue to rail against foreign interference in China's domestic affairs.

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[57]June Teufel Dreyer, "The PLA and Regionalism: Xinjiang," in *Chinese Regionalism: The Security Dimension*, ed. Richard H. Yang (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 151-53.

[58]Xinhua, September 14, 1995, in British Broadcasting Corporation, *Summary of World Broadcasts: East Asia*, September 25, 1995.

[59]*World Bank Projects in Xinjiang, China* (Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relation, U.S. Senate, July 25, 1996) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1996), 7.

[60]Michael R. Gordon, "Russia-China Theme: Contain the West," *New York Times*, April 24, 1997; and "Russia, China, [Central] Asia States to Limit Border Forces," Reuters, April 24, 1997.

Conclusion

The realities of China's ethnic relations demonstrate that the Chinese government's two-pronged policy—political repression and economic development—is effective and successful. For example, Manchus have been all-but-completely assimilated by Han, and thus do not present many problems. Other minorities, including the Bai of Yunnan province and China's largest minority group, the Zhuang of Guangxi, have long since accommodated to Han ways.

Many years ago, Sun Yat-sen argued that, to create a strong state, the government "must facilitate the dying out of all names of individual peoples inhabiting China, i.e., Manchus, Tibetans, etc. . . . We must satisfy the demands of all races and unite them in a single culture and political whole."[61] Although relations among ethnic minorities are good on the whole, the efforts to maintain stability in China's minority regions are still the focus of the CCP. In the long run, it is wise for the CCP to adopt policies that are less provocative toward ethnic minority groups.

However, as China enters the post-Deng era, central officials are facing a difficult challenge. They consider that granting true autonomy would lead to calls for further concessions and freedom by minorities and, ultimately, to demands for independence. The central government may therefore be tempted to bring minority areas more firmly under central control. Such a move, however, is liable to provoke more resistance and violent reaction.

The Chinese government must pay more attention to ethnic problems. Ethnic problems rarely go away on their own; on the contrary, they become worse if ignored.[62] Even when remaining nonviolent, ethnic conflicts in China can interfere with political and economic development, and undermine civil society.

At least three principal attributes make minority areas vital to China:

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[61]Sun Yat-sen, *Memories of a Chinese Revolutionary* (Taipei: China Culture Service, 1953), 180.

[62]Brown and Ganguly, *Government Policies*, 514.

their potentially rich hydrocarbon, mineral, and agricultural assets (especially in Xinjiang[63]), their strategic locations, and their relationship to the national legitimacy of the CCP regime. Thus, carefully devised policies toward ethnic minorities are essential for economic reasons. Note that most of China's meat- and milk-producing animals are raised in minority areas, regions which also contain important hydroelectric and mineral resources. China also has unresolved border issues with several neighbors, the most important involving India. China's claim to administer those areas could be directly affected by the actions of minority groups in border regions.

The Chinese government must also understand that force should not be the Chinese government's preferred solution to ethnic problems. The use of military force is highly problematic in itself. Although having been able to suppress most manifestations of ethnic discontent by force, the central government has not been able to prevent their regular recurrence and growth in strength and organization. Brown warns that national leaders should be wary of relying on coercive policy instruments: escalation is easy, de-escalation is hard, and the radicalization of ethnic groups is extremely difficult to reverse.[64] Once ethnic minorities are treated harshly, they will not see the government as a trusted partner. Since ethnic conflict is inherent in multiethnic societies, ethnic problems cannot be eliminated —only managed.[65]

The Chinese central government must also resolve ethnic problems with minority nationalities through negotiation. In 1979, when Deng Xiaoping met the Dalai Lama's personal emissary, he stated that, "except for the independence of Tibet, all other questions can be negotiated."[66] Nevertheless, negotiations must be based on mutual trust, which is very difficult to regain once lost. Without trust, the party and the government will never win over the hearts and minds of ethnic minorities.

In any case, the special characteristics of minority groups must be ac-

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[63]Felix K. Chang, "China's Central Asian Power and Problems," *Orbis* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 401-25.

[64]Brown and Ganguly, *Government Policies*, 514.

[65]See Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 261.

[66]The Dalai Lama, "Critical Reflections," 47.

knowledged, and many of the exemptions and affirmative action privileges they enjoyed before must be reinstituted. The reform of nationality habits and customs must be carried out according to the free will of the minority nationalities. Thus, the central government should encourage research on China's ethnic minorities, for only such a step can provide confirmed scientific rationale for governmental decisionmaking. Moreover, ethnic minority theories must be integrated with the actual situations in minority areas. Resulting policies should try to address the underlying causes of ethnic discontent and conflict while lessening the economic development gap between minority areas and coastal China.

Minority nationalities will not simply disappear and solutions to nationality problems must function over the long term. To manage China's ethnic issues, the central government should also do its best to prevent these issues from becoming internationalized. In fact, considering China's ethnic conflicts, the worst-case scenario is for serious disturbances in Tibet, for example, to spread to other minority areas such as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Muslim (Hui) areas in Gansu, through the demonstration effect. Granting independence, or even further autonomy, to Tibet, for instance, might well prompt a similar demand from China's other minority groups.