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From domestic to international: the politics of ethnic identity in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia

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This paper examines two contrasting cases of ethnic-group political activism in China – the Uighurs in Xinjiang and the Mongols in Inner Mongolia – to explain the former’s political activism and the latter’s lack thereof. Given similar challenges and pressures, how can we explain the divergent patterns in these two groups’ political behavior? This paper forwards the argument that domestic factors alone are not sufficient to account for differences in the groups’ political behavior. Instead, international factors have to be included to offer a fuller and satisfactory explanation. The paper illustrates how three types of international factors – big power support, external cultural ties, and Uighur diaspora community activism – have provided opportunities and resources to make the Uighur political activism sustainable. In Inner Mongolia, its quest for self-determination reached the highest fervor in the early half of the twentieth century, particularly with the support of imperial Japan. However, since the end of WWII, Inner Mongolia has not received any consistent international support and, as a result, has been more substantially incorporated into China’s geopolitical body.

Keywords: Uighurs; Mongols; Xinjiang; Inner Mongolia; China; ethnic politics in China; international dimension of ethnic politics

International factors influence domestic ethnic relations in profound ways. As Timur Kuran observed, “Events and trends outside a country can have intended as well as unintended consequences for its own ethnic relations” (48). International factors can take various forms, such as direct military intervention, international humanitarian aid, financial support, refugee inflows, or demonstration effects (Brown; Lake and Rothchild). They can also come from different sources. Big powers have a track record of interfering in less powerful countries’ internal politics, including ethnic conflicts. Ethnic groups’ external cultural ties can also lead interested parties to show support for their cause. Finally, diaspora communities can have profound effects on interethnic politics back home. A confluence of these international factors provides resources and opportunities to reshape how groups conceptualize existing grievances as worthy of collective action and help substantiate and sustain their political activism for more rights, autonomy or even secession from the current “host” state. With regard to the international dimension, this paper compares two ethnic groups in China – the Uighurs¹ in Xinjiang and the Mongols in Inner Mongolia. It specifically focuses on the group level with regard to how these two groups interact with the international dimension. It highlights the international factors that have helped politicize the Uighurs’ existing grievances in new ways and sustain the group’s quest for more autonomy since the early twentieth century. In comparison, the international factors that encouraged Inner Mongolia’s self-determination movements in the first half of the twentieth century did not last long enough to have a similar effect.

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The Uighurs are a Turkic-speaking Muslim group that resides primarily in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). According to China's 2000 National Census, Xinjiang is home to 13 ethnic groups, of which the Uighurs are the most numerous, at 9.65 million. The Han Chinese, the majority group in China, are the second largest in Xinjiang, at 8.24 million ("Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2008"). The People's Liberation Army entered Xinjiang in September 1949 after the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949). In October 1955, Xinjiang was officially renamed the XUAR and the Uighurs were designated as the titular nationality of the region. After a few decades of hard-line rule from Beijing, Xinjiang has experienced waves of political activism among the Uighurs, who demand political rights and cultural autonomy from the Chinese state.² During the 1990s, sporadic incidents, often violent in nature, continued to surge. The first major occurrence was the Baren Incident of 1990, during which a rebel group called "The Islamic Party of East Turkistan," led by Zeydin Yusuf, carried out a series of synchronized attacks on government buildings, ambushed police forces, seized weapons, took hostages, and exchanged fire with the police (Millward, *Violent Separatism* 14). After the Baren Incident, political activities among Uighur separatists became increasingly violent. On 5 February 1992, there were two bus bombings in Urumqi. From February to September 1993, there were several explosions in Yining, Urumqi, Kashgar, and several other cities (Millward, *Violent Separatism* 15–16). On 27 February 1997, bombs exploded on three buses in Urumqi, coinciding with the memorial ceremony for Deng Xiaoping's death. In February 1997, a large riot occurred in Yining, known in Uighur as Ghulja, during which "rioters torched vehicles and attacked police and (Han) Chinese residents; their banners and slogans included calls for Uighur equality and independence as well as religious sentiments" (Millward, *Violent Separatism* 17). Years of strident repression occurred in Xinjiang afterwards, but Uighur grievances and discontent continue to simmer. Most recently, on 5 July 2009, hundreds of Uighurs staged a demonstration in Urumqi that soon grew into the deadliest riots in Xinjiang in recent memory. Rioters, angered by perceived injustice in the way the Chinese government handled a factory brawl in southern China that led to the deaths of two Uighurs, attacked Han Chinese civilians in the city. About 200 people were killed during the riot, and more than 1000 were injured (Millward, "Introduction"). Following the Chinese government's repression of the riot, a global wave of protests organized by the overseas Uighur diaspora and their supporters grabbed significant international media attention.

To the east of Xinjiang lies Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR). According to the 2000 National Census, the IMAR has a total population of 23.3 million, of whom 79.2% are Han Chinese. The titular national group, the Mongols, constitute about 17.1% ("Inner Mongolia Statistical Yearbook 2008"). The IMAR was first established in 1947, two years before the founding of the People's Republic of China. The Mongols were promised certain levels of cultural autonomy, but in reality, they have experienced great pressure from the Chinese state and society to assimilate culturally and linguistically. Fast-paced economic development and marketization within China have been particularly detrimental to the Mongolian culture and language. Recent attempts by the Chinese government to ban grazing and settle Mongol herders have also fed into grievances. Nevertheless, Inner Mongolia has not been highlighted in the international news, and the Mongols have not mounted any significant political movements in recent decades. There was one big student movement in Inner Mongolia in 1981 (Jankowiak). Most recently, a large-scale protest movement occurred in Inner Mongolia in May 2011, targeting the Chinese government's grazing-ban policies and environmental

degradation in Inner Mongolia. Yet, in contrast to the situation in Xinjiang, the Mongols in Inner Mongolia have not done much to contest the PRC's sovereignty over Inner Mongolia.³ As Uradyn Bulag comments, "[the] Mongols apparently exhibit no such independent spirit . . . the Mongols aspire not only to maintain an ethnic political entity but also to live as normal citizens of the Chinese state" ("Inner Mongolia" 84–85).

The Uighurs and the Mongols face similar domestic political, economic and social challenges. Both groups have experienced tremendous political turmoil in the past half century, and have suffered from repressive Chinese state policies. In addition, both groups have faced significant pressure from the Chinese state and society to assimilate culturally and linguistically. Given similar challenges and pressures, how can we explain the divergent patterns between the two groups? This paper forwards the argument that domestic factors alone are not sufficient to account for differences in the groups' political behavior. Instead, international factors have to be included to offer a fuller and satisfactory explanation. The paper illustrates how three types of international factors – big power support, external cultural ties, and Uighur diaspora community activism – have provided opportunities and resources to make Uighur political activism sustainable. In Inner Mongolia, its quest for self-determination peaked in the early half of the twentieth century, particularly with the support of imperial Japan. However, since the end of WWII, Inner Mongolia has not received any consistent international support and, as a result, has been more substantially incorporated into China's geopolitical body.

International factors and ethnic-group mobilization

Conflicts between ethnic minority groups and the majority state are not necessarily isolated events within a domestic setting. Some conflicts have proven to have spillover effects on regional stability as they can spark ethnic or civil war in neighboring countries, as in the case of Rwanda, where fighting between Hutus and Tutsis led to conflicts in the neighboring state of Congo. Similarly, ethnonational movements can have demonstration effects on movements elsewhere by offering inspiration and successful operational strategies (Beissinger). Meanwhile, many such conflicts can also trace their initiation and/or escalation to external sources. In particular, the external support an ethnic minority group garners can substantially affect the security dilemma between the group and the majority state. As Lake and Rothchild note: "The possible presence of ethnic alliances . . . increases the likelihood that one or more strategic dilemmas will arise, and increases the probability of violence" (30). In particular, this article focuses on three types of external support sources an ethnic group can potentially receive: big power patron-states; the group's external cultural ties; and the group's immediate diaspora community.

In the case of big power patron-states, big powers, due to ideological or strategic reasons, offer support for an ethnic minority group. During the Cold War, the USA and USSR supported opposing groups in many Third World civil wars. The support the Tibetans in China have received from the USA since the 1950s is one such example. As Goldstein notes: "A case can be made that U.S. active involvement in the 1950s, particularly from 1956, played a significant role in destabilizing Tibet and inadvertently fostering the uprising in 1959" (216). The CIA trained and armed Tibetan guerrilla fighters from 1956 until the operation was aborted following rapprochement between Beijing and Washington in the early 1970s (Grinfeld; Knaus). China itself also supported various ethnic rebels in Burma in the name of supporting the Communist Party of Burma (Lintner). Most recently, Russia's support of South Ossetia even prompted a brief war between Russia and Georgia in the summer of 2008. Thus, due to their relative abundance

of financial and military resources, big powers' interference in ethnic conflicts can have significant, if not decisive, consequences.

There are also scholars who examine how external cultural ties affect ethnic minority groups' relationships with the state they inhabit (Saideman). For example, Weiner highlights the sensitive triangular relationship among a nationalizing state, an ethnic group, and the ethnic group's "national homeland." In this conceptualization, there is a nationalizing state, where the "core nation" – represented by the ethnic majority – uses state power to promote its specific interests in ethnocultural terms, such as the promotion of its own language, culture or religion as those of the nation as a whole. There is also the minority group, which tries to defend its cultural autonomy and resist the nationalizing and assimilating force of the majority. Furthermore, there is also an external country (or countries) that shares cultural or ethnic ties with the minority group and purports to "monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support the activities and institutions, assert the rights, and protect the interests of 'their' ethnonational kin" (Brubaker 6). Here scholars have endeavored to unravel the strategic interaction among these three actors and seek explanations for conditions under which ethnic movements would be mobilized and whether violence would break out and/or escalate (Jenne; van Houten). Examples along this line of research are plentiful, such as Serbia's relationship with the Serb minority in Croatia, and Russia's relationship with ethnic Russians in the former Soviet republics.

Finally, there is also the ethnic group's diaspora community. Diasporas and their effect on homeland politics have garnered substantial research attention in recent decades (Shain and Barth; Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics, Modern Diasporas*). In particular, diasporas forced to leave their homeland due to political repression or foreign domination tend to be more politically organized and more nationalistic or extreme (Saideman and Jenne 265). For many stateless diasporas, their main goal is to politicize their cause so as to achieve more autonomy or even independence for their "lost" homeland. The exiled Tibetan community under the leadership of the Dalai Lama is one such case. Diaspora communities that reside in wealthy countries in the West can use their economic resources to their advantage. For example, money accumulated by the Tamil diaspora in North America and Europe has been channeled to support military campaigns against the Sri Lankan government (Wayland). Furthermore, the democratic nature of the Western governments also means diaspora communities can influence these countries' foreign policies toward their homelands. Prominent cases are the Armenian lobby in the US targeting Turkey and the Albanian lobby targeting Kosovo. Globalization and the information-technology revolution further add power to these stateless diasporas and their transitional networks to publicize and promote their political agendas (Adamson).

In sum, international factors can influence ethnic conflicts and ethnonationalist movements in various ways and through a range of channels. With this theoretical guidance in mind, let's proceed to the empirical cases of the Uighurs and Mongols in China to see how the confluence of domestic and international factors favors the former's political activism instead of the latter's.

Comparing Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia

The literature on ethnic conflict and mobilization tends to focus on groups that are already in conflict. Explorations and comparisons between groups that are politically active versus those that are not are lacking. As pointed out by James Fearon and David Laitin, only a small fraction of the vast number of ethnic groups worldwide are actually in conflict,

which means that the majority of ethnic groups in the world are perhaps not politically active. It thus seems necessary for scholars to study “active” cases together with “non-active” ones, compare systematically, and probe the reasons for such divergence. This paper takes on such a comparative analysis of the politically active Uighurs versus the lukewarm Mongols in China. It roughly follows John Stuart Mill’s method of difference, whereby these two cases share several similar features yet they diverge significantly in the outcome (Lijphart). Through such a comparative method, our analysis aims to control some similar variables while highlighting where these two cases differ so that we can explore alternative explanations for why the Uighurs and the Mongols have embarked on different political trajectories.

The Uighurs and the Mongols are good cases to compare for a number of reasons. First, both the Uighurs and the Mongols are two of the five ethnic groups in China – the other three being Tibetans, Huis, and Zhuangs – that were granted titular nationality status for an autonomous region at the provincial level (Dreyer; Mackerras). Thus, due to historical and political reasons, both groups are politically significant and strategically crucial for the Chinese government. Second, compared with the Tibetans, the Mongols are much less politically active, which makes comparing them as a contrast case with the Uighurs appealing. Finally, and most important, in the early half of the twentieth century the Mongols experienced tremendous self-determination movements with significant foreign support, primarily from Japan. However, foreign support was not sustained after the founding of the PRC. Consequently, no major internationalization of the Inner Mongolia cause materialized. In this way, the Mongols are a good parallel case to compare with the Uighurs so that we can see longitudinally how changes in international factors affect the political activism of ethnic groups in China.

A comparison of these two cases is carried out in the following way. First, this paper goes through the similar features that both cases share. Then, it zooms in to discuss where these two cases differ and offer an explanation that ties together with the theoretical framework outlined above. The caveat here is that this comparison is between only two cases. With so many variables at work, a comparison of two cases is tentative at best. Acknowledging this limit, the purpose of this comparison is not to confirm or refute any existing theory, but to shed light on a possible alternative explanation that has not been previously examined much in the Chinese context.

Similar features – Xinjiang versus Inner Mongolia

The People’s Republic of China, since its founding in 1949, has proclaimed itself a “united multi-ethnic country (*tongyi duominzu guojia*)” (Fei). Following the Soviet model, the Chinese government granted autonomy for its various ethnic minorities by setting up layers of autonomous governments – from the regional level down to the county level. However, those autonomous areas are considered inalienable parts of the country, and any acts to undermine the unity of China are prohibited and severely punished. Despite claims about the “sham” nature of regional autonomies in China (Bovington, *Autonomy in Xinjiang*), at least on paper both the Uighurs and Mongols enjoy certain cultural rights, such as language usage, cultural expression, and certain preferential policies in family planning and tertiary education (Benson, “Education”). Both groups have been permitted to have separate systems of “ethnic schools” serving students of all ages in which Uighur and Mongolian are languages of instruction along with Mandarin Chinese. In addition, by law, the governors of the autonomous regions must be Uighur and Mongol, respectively. In reality, real political power is in the hands of the Chinese

Communist Party secretary, who is often Han Chinese. Other than these similar institutional provisions, both the Uighurs and Mongols share the following five crucial traits in their relationship with the Chinese state and the majority Han Chinese: political repression from the Chinese state, economic grievances, cultural grievances, demographic pressure, and grievances related to the PRC's elimination of the autonomy they historically enjoyed.

Political repression

One commonly cited factor to which Uighurs' continual grievance is attributed is the repressive tactics employed by the Chinese state. Chinese state policies toward political dissent have always been harsh, particularly when ethnic separatism is involved. For example, at the end of April 1996, the Chinese government launched its first "Strike Hard (*yanda*)" campaign. In Xinjiang, the campaign was designed to crack down not only on criminal activities in general, but also on targeted political dissents, particularly Uighur separatists (Dillon 87–88). Following the launch of the US-led War on Terror in 2001, China also started its own anti-terrorism campaign that specifically linked Uighur pro-independence movements and organizations with the Taliban and terrorists. As a result, a wave of "justified" repression against Uighur dissidents has occurred across the region. One pitfall of this widespread approach is its indiscriminate nature, which treats all Uighurs as potential separatists or terrorists, and thus potentially feeds discontent on a wider scale.

However, when we look at the Mongol case, the Chinese state minority policies are overall the same in Inner Mongolia as they are in Xinjiang. Its tolerance for Mongolian political dissent is still similarly low. During the Cultural Revolution, persecution of Mongols allegedly connected with the Inner Mongolian People's Party (Neirendang) led to large numbers of fatalities and injuries (Sneath 114–15). The Neirendang incident and associated ethnic persecution left a great scar on the Mongol population and created bitter resentment among many Mongols toward the Chinese state. Ethnic Mongol dissidents are also severely silenced by the Chinese state, for example with the case of Hada ("Biography of Hada"). Mr. Hada, the organizer of the Southern Mongolian Democracy Alliance, was arrested and jailed in 1995 along with several other Mongols after they staged peaceful demonstrations in Hohhot.

Economic grievances

Oil extraction and cotton production form the two main pillars of Xinjiang's economy (Becquelin 80). Xinjiang is estimated to have 35.7 billion tons of oil and 22 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, which are about 30% and 34% of China's total terrestrial oil and gas reserves, respectively (Zhao 212). China's current strategy is to ship oil and natural gas from Xinjiang to its eastern provinces. However, because China considers natural resources state property, all revenues from natural resource extractions are in the hands of state-owned enterprises and the central government. Although Xinjiang does receive subsidies from the central government, local people complain that they have benefited little from the extraction of these natural resources.⁴ On the other hand, the cultivation of cotton is supposed to benefit the local farmers by providing a stable income. However, according to some research, local Uighurs do not profit much from this because they have to sell to state-owned cooperatives at fixed prices, and often they do not have a choice in what to cultivate (Bellér-Hann, "Peasant Condition").

If natural resource extraction feeds into Uighurs' economic grievances, in Inner Mongolia it is the Chinese government's draconian measures to ban grazing that have caused economic loss for Mongol herding communities. The Chinese government started to ban grazing in many parts of Inner Mongolia in early 2000 (Han). Although the idea was to prevent over-grazing and protect the environment, the Mongols have been particularly affected because of their pastoral tradition. In various locales, the Chinese government has promulgated policies ranging from periodic grazing bans to year-long bans. Furthermore, the government wants herding families to raise their animals in stables, and encourages pastoral groups to settle in urban areas. The implementation of these policies has caused great financial losses for ordinary Mongol herding families, and the pressure to move to urban areas and abandon their traditional pastoral way of life poses a serious threat to the survival of their culture.

Cultural grievances

The Uighurs' cultural grievances mainly result from two factors. The first is the Chinese government's strict control of Islam in Xinjiang. Islam, due to its resurging popularity among the Uighurs after the Cultural Revolution, deeply worries the CCP because it fears that Islam could become a rallying point for the Uighurs in political mobilizations. As a result, the Chinese government cracks down on "illegal religious activities" by "defrocking suspect clerics, breaking up unauthorized scripture schools (*madrassa*), and halting the construction of mosques" (Bovingdon, *Autonomy in Xinjiang* 33). The government also strictly controls clerics' activities, and only those "judged patriotic and politically sound could continue to serve" (Bovingdon, *Autonomy in Xinjiang*). The government specifically targets two groups: CCP party members and students, two groups that are officially banned from attending religious activities.⁵ The second factor is the chipping away of Uighur-language education from the school curriculum in Xinjiang. Originally, Uighur pupils would only start studying Mandarin Chinese in middle school. Then, in 1984, introduction to the language was pushed down to third grade, and now, they start studying it in first grade (Dwyer 36–37). In addition, all the universities in Xinjiang today use only Mandarin Chinese in most classroom instruction and textbooks (Schluessel, "'Bilingual' Education" 257). Furthermore, in March 2004, the Xinjiang regional government issued a new set of policies, which state that in ethnic-minority primary and secondary schools, all science subjects should gradually be taught in Mandarin Chinese and that eventually, all other subjects should be as well, with the exception of ethnic-minority languages taught as separate subjects (Yimin). Because of the need to conduct all instruction in Mandarin, ethnic Uighur school teachers are required to pass the Chinese Proficiency Test, or *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK). This has put a lot of pressure on Uighur teachers, whose Mandarin Chinese is often very limited. At the same time, there have been concerted efforts to merge Uighur schools with Han Chinese schools to "improve" interethnic interaction and assimilation. However, these policy measures are extremely controversial among the Uighur community, and many Uighurs are worried that their mother tongue will not be able to survive these changes to the educational system.

In Inner Mongolia, Tibetan Buddhist institutions have been substantially eliminated during various revolutionary movements, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Certainly, while one can argue that the Chinese state's repressive measures against Islam among the Uighurs are much more severe, religious repression targeting the Mongols is still very real. Like the Uighurs, the Mongols also face great challenges in protecting

their language. During the past three decades, the number of schools that use Mongolian as a language of instruction has decreased a great deal. In 1980, there were 4,387 Mongolian primary schools, but by 1995, the number had decreased to 2,978, a loss of 32.1% (Wulantuke 12). In 1980, there were 501 Mongolian middle and high schools, but by 1995, that number had decreased to 359, a loss of 28.3% (Wulantuke 12). By 1995, half of the Mongol students in IMAR already had to go to Han Chinese schools instead. Continuing this trend, by the end of 2005, the percentage of ethnic Mongols enrolled in Mongolian schools was only 38.2% (Inner Mongolia Bureau of Education). As a result, many Mongols, especially certain intellectuals, worry about the survival of the Mongolian culture and language and whether the Mongols are on a path of total sinicization. According to comments by Bulag, “[as] more Mongols lose their language, arguably the last bastion of their ‘nationality’ status, they face the prospect of becoming a deinstitutionalized, depoliticized, and deterritorialized ‘ethnic group’ in a racialized ‘Chinese nation’” (“Mongolian” 753).

Demographic pressure and job competition

China’s developmental strategy toward Xinjiang has been accompanied by waves of migration by Han Chinese to Xinjiang. In 1953, Han Chinese were only about 6% of Xinjiang’s total population, but by 2000 the percentage of Han Chinese had jumped to 40%. In the meantime, the Uighur population dwindled from 75% in 1953 to 45% in 2000 (Toops 246–48). Today, Han Chinese are concentrated in urban areas and the northern part of Xinjiang, while the Uighurs are mostly concentrated in the southern and rural areas. In the capital city of Urumqi for example, 73% of residents are now Han Chinese. The Uighurs have so far been reduced to absolute minorities in the northern part of Xinjiang. Only in southern cities like Kashgar and Khotan do they still constitute an overwhelming majority. One direct outcome of demographic change in Xinjiang is the increasing hegemony of the Mandarin language in the job market. In Xinjiang, because Han Chinese are predominant in the urban private sector, job hires are clearly in favor of Han Chinese or ethnic minorities who can speak Chinese well. For example, many job advertisements explicitly state that only Han Chinese can apply. Thus Uighurs who have gone through the Uighur education system have a tremendous disadvantage in finding jobs in the private sector. Even in the public sector, where the government still has quotas for ethnic minority candidates, often preference is given to those Uighurs who have done their schooling in Chinese. As a result, unemployment among the Uighurs is claimed to be widespread, and many Uighur university graduates cannot find jobs.

A similar but more dramatic demographic change has also occurred in Inner Mongolia.⁶ Inner Mongolia, like Xinjiang, has experienced waves of Han Chinese migration, so much so that Mongols now make up only about 17% of the region’s total population. Today, there are only a few places where Mongols live in sizable concentrations, such as Tongliao Municipality (previously called Jirim League) and Chifeng Municipality (Juuda League). Even in these places, the Mongols make up less than half of the local population. Again, the demographic imbalance has also led to the predominance of Mandarin Chinese in the job market. This linguistic hegemony has hit the Mongolian-educated students the hardest, because they have to compete head-on with Han Chinese students and other Mandarin-educated Mongol students in a job market that predominantly favors people who have a command of the Chinese language. As Naran Bilik points out, the demographic and economic dominance of Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia has effectively generated a linguistic hierarchy, whereby “Mongolian is mainly used in local areas and for

much less challenging public and private functions like ethnic symbolism and family chat; [while] Chinese is the omnipotent medium across the country for political promotion and economic procurement” (73).

Certainly, job discrimination against the Uighurs and Mongols is not purely due to the changing demography and the increasing linguistic hierarchy favoring Chinese. Interethnic prejudice between both groups and the Han Chinese plays a significant role in perpetuating existing social divisions (Smith). However, one needs to note that the most recent Han Chinese immigrants tend to hold stronger prejudices against local ethnic minority populations than earlier Han Chinese settlers, particularly in the Uighur case (Bellér-Hann, “Temperamental Neighbours”). In addition, the growing Han Chinese migrations into both Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia are often blamed for not only “stealing” jobs from the locals but also for “diluting” local cultures. Thus, demographic pressure is one significant component that has led to despair on the part of both groups with regard to their future economic and cultural well-being.

Historical autonomy

Other than the set of contemporary grievances we discussed above, both groups also share similar past autonomies that were taken away by the PRC government. Both groups were located on the peripheries of Chinese dynasties, and before the twentieth century they mostly had their own governing institutions. The Uighurs originated in the steppes of modern-day Mongolia and migrated to the oases in the Tarim Basin between the seventh and ninth centuries (Gladney 210). These early Uighurs practiced Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Nestorian Christianity. Those in the oases in the western Tarim Basin, especially Kashgar, started to convert to Islam en masse in the tenth century. As a result, local people stopped identifying themselves as Uighur.⁷ The name Uighur was only revitalized after 500 years of non-usage in the early twentieth century, when Soviet ethnologists decided to call the oasis people of Xinjiang Uighurs. Xinjiang, as a territory, was officially proclaimed a province by the Qing Dynasty only in 1884, and the name Xinjiang literally means “new territory” in Chinese. Without going too far back into history, both groups experienced periods of self-determination in the first half of the twentieth century. In Xinjiang, the first East Turkestan Republic was set up in 1933 in southern Xinjiang, where Muslim scholar Muhammad Amin Bughra proclaimed the establishment of the Turkish Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (Forbes 113). Again, in the fall of 1944, another major rebellion broke out in northern Xinjiang, which was backed by the Soviet Union, leading to the establishment of the second East Turkestan Republic (ETR) (Benson, *Ili Rebellion*; Wang). Although both ETRs were short lived, they constitute part of the Uighurs’ nationalist memory and continue to serve as inspirations for many Uighurs to regain their past glory of self-determination.

Compared with the Uighurs, the Mongols seem to enjoy a much more glorious past. Genghis Khan’s grandson Kublai Khan established the Yuan Dynasty in China in the thirteenth century. During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the Mongols were also in close alliance with the ruling Manchu court. The other part of historical Mongolia, Outer Mongolia, seized the opportunity of the Qing Dynasty’s collapse in 1911 to proclaim itself an independent country, later named the Mongolian People’s Republic, and now simply Mongolia. Also, in the 1930s and 1940s, Mongol Prince Demchugdongrub (Prince De) set up a series of Inner Mongolian autonomous governments with support from imperial Japan.

In sum, when we compare the Uighurs and Mongols, both enjoyed significant historical autonomy before the PRC. More often than not, these past autonomies not only serve

the purpose of inspiring potential nationalists, but also make the Chinese state suspicious of these two groups' loyalty.

Where Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia differ

The brief comparison of the Uighurs and Mongols in China shows that the two groups share several important features, to which great import is often attached in explaining the Uighurs' political activism. Certainly, political repression from the Chinese state, economic and cultural marginalization by the majority Han Chinese society, demographic pressure, and history of past autonomy are all important factors that constitute sources of the Uighurs' grievances over incorporation and subjugation by the Chinese state. And certainly, for anyone who wants to explain the Uighurs' quest for more autonomy, these factors are crucial and should not be and in fact have not been neglected. However, the paired comparison between the Uighurs and the Mongols has shown that these factors alone are perhaps not sufficient to cause ethnic political activism. It makes us wonder whether there are other factors at play that either strengthen the Uighurs' or dampen the Mongols' conviction and ability to be more politically active in their pursuit of more political rights and cultural autonomy from the Chinese state. Following the theoretical focus on the international dimension, we can see that in the Uighur case, all three types of external support have been present. The former Soviet Union supported and helped sustain Uighur separatist movements in the past. Soviet Central Asia, later the independent Central Asian republics, together with Turkey, harbored and supported much of the politically active Uighur exile community due to cultural ties. In recent years, Uighur diaspora communities based in Europe and North America, with at least the tacit support of their host states, have waged a series of international campaigns for the cause of Eastern Turkestan. In the case of Inner Mongolia, by contrast, the peak of its self-determination occurred in the first half of the twentieth century with the support of the imperial Japan. However, after WWII, its external kin state, Mongolia, has not shown significant desire or capacity in helping its ethnic brethren to the south. Finally, the diaspora community of Inner Mongols is much less powerful and visible than their Uighur counterparts and thus less capable of internationalizing and politicizing the Inner Mongolian cause.

External factors and the case of the Uighurs

Historically, Xinjiang's economic, political, and cultural orientation has always been toward its west, particularly in the pre-Qing period (Karrar 20). In modern times, the Soviet Union, as the emerging superpower, played the most significant role in Xinjiang's political and socioeconomic development starting in the 1930s. With its fast industrialization and modernization, the Soviet Union attracted many Uighurs from Xinjiang who sought their education in Soviet Central Asia (Schluessel, "History"). For example, some estimate that by 1935, 10,000 Uighurs from Xinjiang had studied in the USSR, Turkey, and Egypt (Rudelson 56–57). Modern ideologies such as Marxism and Leninism also traveled from the Soviet Union to Xinjiang and greatly inspired the local population to pursue progress and self-determination.

The USSR was also actively involved in disseminating propaganda in Xinjiang. Soviet publications and other propaganda materials were widely circulated in Xinjiang in the 1930s and 1940s. Russian schools were established in Xinjiang with Soviet textbooks, and Soviet films were frequently shown (Wang 93). One of the main messages of the Soviet propaganda was the claim that "China was a colony of imperialism, Xinjiang

was a colony of a colony” (Wang 95). These propagandas significantly “influenced the national liberation movement of the Xinjiang people in the 1930s and 1940s” (Wang 92). In addition to propaganda, the USSR was directly involved in the 1944 rebellion in Ili that led to the establishment of the second ETR. The USSR not only provided weapons and military training for the Muslim population in Xinjiang, but also had close ties with many of the rebellion’s leaders (Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads* 215–17). Forbes specifically points out that “It is now possible to state with certainty that the Soviet Union was deeply involved in the establishment of the ETR” (Forbes 170).

After the CCP emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War, the USSR abandoned the ETR and forced its absorption by the newly founded PRC. However, after the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s, the USSR again started using propaganda to attract Uighurs and other Turkic peoples to emigrate to Soviet Central Asia. In the context of the Great Leap Forward in China, “the Soviet Union, at least according to its propaganda, appeared to be a land of plenty where Uyghurs lived well and thrived” (Roberts, “Uyghur Neighborhoods” 226). Also during this period, many participants of the ETR regime were invited to emigrate to the Soviet Union. It all came to a dramatic climax in the spring of 1962, when the Soviet consulate in Xinjiang started to hand out passports and immigrant papers to Uighurs and other Turkic people, and virtually opened up its borders for “refugees” to come to Soviet Central Asia. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and other Turkic people fled to the Soviet Union from the Ili and Tarbagatay area (Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads* 264). According to Kamalov, “Before leaving Xinjiang the Soviets arranged a political action, which was to demonstrate the failure of the Chinese national minorities policy and cause internal problems for Chinese rule in Xinjiang” (117). The highest estimate of the number of Uighurs who emigrated to Soviet Union between 1954 and 1963 is 200,000 (Roberts, “Uyghur Neighborhoods” 228).

After the Sino-Soviet split, Soviet propaganda in Xinjiang intensified, and during the Cultural Revolution, propaganda aimed at Xinjiang’s Muslim population was intense, focusing on “the progress of the U.S.S.R. towards socialism and about the history of the Uyghurs’ struggle for independence from Chinese rule” (Roberts, “Uyghur Neighborhoods” 297). Thus, although the Soviet Union’s policies toward ethnic minorities in Central Asia were equally assimilative and russification of its Central Asian subjects was very high, the Soviet Union was politically and economically more stable and modern than Maoist China. These differences probably gave positive incentives for greater loyalty toward the USSR among local populations. In Xinjiang’s case, China could not match such positive incentives for its Turkic population during the early formative years of the PRC. No systematic education was provided for the Uighurs. Lack of resources and industrialization threw local people into great poverty. Political chaos and repression also further alienated local populations. Therefore, compared with the Soviet Union, China failed substantially in integrating the Uighurs into its socialist system. For the Uighurs in Xinjiang, Soviet Central Asia was the model of modernity and progress that many deemed China unable to provide.

Despite the ulterior motive behind the USSR’s support for the Uighurs and East Turkestan, such support was essential in providing the opportunity and resources necessary for Uighur self-determination movements to come into existence and sustain themselves. Other than support from the USSR, the cultural ties that the Uighurs have with Central Asia and Turkey are also significant factors. Historically, Xinjiang’s western oases were economically and culturally integrated in the city-state system of Islamic Central Asia (Karrar 20). Starting in the late nineteenth century, Uighur merchants who traveled to the Ottoman Empire brought back Enlightenment ideas and set up modern education in

“subjects outside the traditional Islamic school curriculum, including mathematics, history and geography” (Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads* 171). This so-called *jadidist* movement represented the first wave of efforts to push for reform and modernization among the Uighurs in Xinjiang. For example, in 1913, a delegation from Kashgar was sent to Istanbul to request teachers to be sent to Xinjiang to “promote pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ideas” (Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy* 7). Most recently, the independence of the five Central Asian republics and the strong appeal of self-determination ideology once again had a great demonstration effect on the Uighurs in Xinjiang. The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union raised hope for many Uighurs that they might be the next to achieve independence because China would not hold itself together for long either (Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs* 91). There was a belief among some Uighurs that now the Kazakhs have Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz have Kyrgyzstan, and the Uzbeks have Uzbekistan, so it was time for the Uighurs to have Uighurstan (Roberts, *Waiting for Uighurstan*).

Other than this demonstration effect, the political and economic transitions in Central Asia during the 1990s also opened up some opportunities for Uighur political activism. In particular, the civil war in Tajikistan and the insurgency in Uzbekistan bred militant Islam as a challenge to the newly formed states (Karrar 122). The Ferghana Valley between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which had become a haven for radical Islamists, is not far from Southern Xinjiang. Also, the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan during this period has provided opportunities for military training and ideological indoctrination for some Uighurs.⁸ For example, Dillon notes that “There is evidence that Uyghurs fought with Juma Namangani’s Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan based at Mazar-e-Sarif in northern Afghanistan” (Dillon 139). Worried about the possibility of infiltration from Central Asia, the Chinese government put great effort into setting up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 1996 (originally called Shanghai Five),⁹ with a joint statement emphasizing the need to “take steps to fight against international terrorism, organized crime, arms smuggling, and trafficking of drugs and narcotics and other transnational criminal activities” (Dillon 148). Although scholars have disputed China’s accounts as exaggerations of Uighur terrorist activities (Roberts, “Statement”), and certainly it is difficult to unravel the specific operations of many clandestine organizations, the point made here is that political changes in Central Asia during this period were closely tied to the rise of political activism among the Uighurs in the 1990s (Ong).

Other than Central Asia, Turkey has also played significant role in sustaining the Uighurs’ self-determination movements. Since the 1950s, Turkey has provided political asylum for thousands of Uighurs and other Turkic people from Xinjiang (Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy* 15). From the 1950s through the 1980s, key Uighur diaspora leaders and organizations were based in Turkey (Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs* 138). In particular, two prominent leaders of the ETR, Mehmet Emin Bugra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin, fled from China to Istanbul in the 1950s.¹⁰ Both became leaders of various Uighur nationalist organizations in Turkey to preserve Uighur collective identity within the exile community and promote the cause of East Turkestan independence (Shichor, “Virtual Transnationalism” 288). Organizations founded by the two leaders include the Eastern Turkestan Fund, the Eastern Turkestan Refugee Committee, and the National Center for the Liberation of Eastern Turkestan (Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs* 138). Finally, efforts to form a transnational umbrella organization representing Uighurs across the globe came to fruition in 1992 with the establishment of the Eastern Turkestan World National Congress in Istanbul (Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy* 19). The Uighur diaspora community in Turkey also works closely with the Turkish government, and in return, Turkey remains highly critical of Beijing’s Xinjiang policy and the most sympathetic toward the plight of the Uighurs.

For example, after the Urumqi riot in July 2009, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan labeled the event as “tantamount to genocide.”¹¹ Although officially Turkey acknowledges China’s sovereignty over Xinjiang and vows not to support Uighur separatists, unofficially Turkey still tolerates Uighur-nationalist activists who stage anti-Chinese demonstrations, distribute publications, and meet with government officials (Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy* 49).

The Uighur diaspora community in Central Asia has become more active since the early 1980s. The largest Uighur diaspora community lives in Central Asia, predominantly in Kazakhstan and in its former capital of Almaty (Shichor, “Virtual Transnationalism” 286). Because of their large numbers and the historical support they garnered from the Soviet Union, the Uighurs in Kazakhstan have been politically well-organized, and many used to help with the Soviets’ propaganda efforts in Xinjiang (Kamalov 120). The first official Central Asian Uighur organization, the United National Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan, was set up in 1984 in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, with a mission of “restoration of the Uyghur state on the territory of the so-called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” (Kamalov 15). With the beginning of perestroika, many legal public organizations were also formed to promote Uighur education and culture (Kamalov 127). After the collapse of the USSR, a series of organizations was set up to coordinate political activities among Uighur organizations in Central Asia. Due to its proximity to Xinjiang, the Uighur diaspora in Central Asia was able to monitor the situation in Xinjiang closely and propagate information to the outside world. During the Yining riot in 1997, Uighur organizations in Kazakhstan were the most active in disseminating information about the riot to the outside world (Roberts, “Uyghur Neighborhoods” 298).

However, in recent years the Chinese government has managed to put heavy pressure on various Central Asian governments to restrict the activities of Uighur diaspora organizations in their countries. Through international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and close bilateral economic and political cooperation, the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have all started to clamp down on Uighur political organizations and have shown low tolerance for any Uighur diaspora activities that might harm their relations with Beijing (Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs* 145). As a result, the center for Uighur diaspora political activism has gradually shifted to wealthy democracies in the West, where funding for such political organizations is more readily available and the capacity of the Chinese government to pressure these governments is relatively low. With the help of modern information technology and social-networking tools, Uighur diaspora communities in the West have managed to raise public awareness of their cause (Vergani and Zuev).

The most prominent contemporary Uighur diaspora organization is the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which was first founded in April 2004 and is based in Munich, Germany.¹² The current president of the WUC is Rebiya Kadeer, who since her exile to the US in 2006 after several years in a Chinese prison has become a symbol in the West of Uighur resistance to the Chinese regime. As a nominee for several Nobel Peace Prizes and a winner of the Norwegian Rafto Prize, Rebiya Kadeer has managed to raise international recognition for Uighurs around the world (Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs* 155). At the same time, Uighur organizations have received funding from various sources in the West to promote their cause. For example, the National Endowment for Democracy funds several Uighur organizations in the US (“China (Xinjiang)”). Lobbying efforts by the Uighur diaspora community in the West have also generated opportunities for meetings with politicians and have influenced Western governments to

exert pressure on China. For instance, since 1996, the US Congress has held 24 hearings related to the Uighurs and Xinjiang and discussed more than 50 bills on similar topics. The United States has funded Uighur-language radio broadcasts in Xinjiang through Radio Free Asia. US politicians have also increasingly brought up the Uighur issue during meetings with their Chinese counterparts. The Uighur issue has similarly gained more visibility in legislative discussions in Europe (Chen). Thus, through tacit consent and active funding, rich democracies in the West have provided a stage for the Uighur diaspora to actively mobilize and sustain the cause for self-determination in Xinjiang.

In sum, we have seen all three types of international influence working in the Uighur case – big power support, ethnic and cultural ties and diaspora activism – during the past century. The support from the USSR was crucial for the Uighur self-determination movements to take root. Later, international factors further provided opportunities and resources for the Uighurs to sustain their cause in their efforts to resist China's control both inside and outside of Xinjiang.

International factors and Inner Mongolia

The fate of the Mongols' self-determination movements has also been tied closely with international factors, albeit on a different trajectory from the Uighurs discussed above. After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Outer Mongolia took the opportunity to declare its independence. However, due to its relative weakness, Outer Mongolia could not maintain its independence without the support of Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet Union.¹³ While the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) was able to solidify its independence with Russia's backing, Inner Mongolia and its self-determination movements were less fortunate. Only with the support of imperial Japan did Inner Mongolia manage to set up a series of autonomous governments under the leadership of Prince De from the 1930s until the end of WWII.

The situation of Inner Mongolia during the Republic of China era (1912–1949) was extremely complex. Various alignments cut across international, ethnic and ideological lines, which were all intertwined with Inner Mongolia's aspiration to more autonomy (Liu). Some sided with the KMT government in Nanjing, while others sided with the CCP in Yan'an. Prince De's self-determination movements, on the other hand, received active support from the expanding Japanese Empire. The Japanese colonial discourse during its expansion into Northeast Asia emphasized the racial ties between the Japanese, the Koreans, the Manchus, and the Mongols (Bulag, *Collaborative Nationalism* 41). In the case of the Mongols, Japan even went so far as to claim Genghis Khan as a Japanese hero so as to legitimize Japan's colonial expansion, based on the belief that the Mongols were crucial to its imperial project (Tanaka). Accordingly, Japan found in Prince De an ideal candidate to gain the cooperation of the Mongols for its Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

Prince De was born in Shilingol to an aristocratic family that claimed descent from Genghis Khan, which gave him great legitimacy among his followers to pursue Inner Mongolian autonomy (Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince* 8). Responding to political pressure on Inner Mongolia,¹⁴ in October 1933, Prince De organized a conference at Beyile-Yin Sumu (*Balingmiao*) calling for Inner Mongolian autonomy. Later, in April 1934, he formed a Mongolian Local Autonomous Political Affairs Council (*Mengzhenghui*) and sent a list of demands to Chiang Kai-shek (Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince* 101). However, due to the weakness of the Mongols, this first attempt at Mongolian autonomy failed. As a result, Prince De was pushed to seek assistance from the invading

Japanese army in Manchuria. Supported by the Special Service Offices of the Japanese Kwantung Army and Japan's Good Neighbor Association (*Zenrin Kyokai*), Prince De managed to set up a Mongolian Military Government (*Menggujunzhengfu*) on 12 May 1936 (Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince* 149). In November 1937, the Japanese put him in charge of the newly formed Mongolian Allied League Autonomous Government (*Mengjiang*) (Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince* 189). Since then, a series of Inner Mongolian autonomous governments existed while Japan played the role of "supreme advisors." However, when the Japanese were defeated in 1945, Prince De's Mongolian autonomous government immediately collapsed. By then, he had administered Inner Mongolia for almost ten years, despite the Japanese occupation (Jagchid, *The Last Mongol* 318). After the PRC's founding in 1949, Prince De fled to Ulaanbaatar, but the MPR soon extradited him back to China due to the alliance between the Soviet Union and the new communist regime in Beijing. The Inner Mongolian self-determination movements that Prince De led exemplified the peak of Inner Mongolian nationalism.¹⁵ Due to the weakness of the Mongols, their chance to achieve political autonomy depended heavily on the amount of external support they could find. Yet, the support from Japan during the 1930s and 1940s proved to be the only time a big power was willing to help Inner Mongolia's cause, despite Japan's own imperial motives.

Inner Mongolia also has not enjoyed much support from its external kin state, Mongolia.¹⁶ During the 1950s, because of the friendly relationship between China and the USSR, the MPR and China had a cordial diplomatic relationship. The PRC recognized Mongolia's independence in a joint communiqué following the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in 1950 (Green 1145). In return, China also provided aid to the MPR, and trade and exchanges between the two sides were frequent (Rupen 183). However, after the Sino-Soviet split, the MPR adopted a more hostile foreign policy toward China and started to attack China's ethnic-minority policies, particularly regarding Inner Mongolia. Despite the fact that Mongolia is the external kin state for the Mongols in China, the MPR's prior concern was protecting its own independence against any possible Chinese aggression, rather than extending support to Inner Mongolia (Green 1151). This perhaps has to do with there being more ethnic Mongols living in China than in the MPR,¹⁷ and there had always been a concern on the part of the MPR of being outnumbered by their brethren to the south. Furthermore, the national identity construction in the MPR had also followed a different trajectory. Instead of seeking pan-Mongolianism, the MPR constructed its national identity based on the core Halh Mongols, the dominant tribe in the country.¹⁸ This exclusive construction of the national identity in the MPR thus shut off the chances for Mongols outside the MPR to be considered as proper and pure Mongols (Bulag, *Nationalism*). Since the collapse of the USSR, Mongolia has suffered significant economic hardship due to the loss of Soviet aid, and China has stepped up to fill the vacuum. Since 1999, China has been Mongolia's largest trading partner – that is, China has become the largest recipient of Mongolian exports and Mongolia's second-largest source of imports (Nalin). As with the case of the Central Asian republics discussed earlier, Mongolia also has less political leeway or capacity to support the Inner Mongols' political aspirations, even if it wanted to.

Finally, the Inner Mongolian diaspora community is also less powerful and not particularly visible internationally. It is indeed difficult to determine exactly why the Mongol diaspora community is not politically active, which probably has to do with the fact that the issues regarding Inner Mongolia are not as politically charged as Xinjiang to begin with. However, there are still a couple of diaspora organizations that claim to represent the Mongols in Inner Mongolia. One of the most prominent organizations is the Inner

Mongolian People's Party (IMPP), and the other is the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC).¹⁹ Every year, these groups organize certain campaigns and protests. However, one has to point out the small scale of their activities and the lack of visibility of their campaigns if comparing them with the ones associated with the Uighur cause. As a result, the Inner Mongol diaspora community has less capacity to politicize its cause and generate enough support from its host states.

Conclusion

In this paired comparison of the Uighurs in Xinjiang and the Mongols in Inner Mongolia, we have seen that these two ethnic minority groups have taken very divergent paths. The Uighurs have exhibited significant levels of political activism through both non-violent and violent means, yet the Mongols in Inner Mongolia have not. Important domestic factors alone are insufficient to explain the full picture of the Uighurs' political activism and the Mongols' lack thereof. In the Uighurs' case, we have seen three types of international factors that have been working in tandem to make the Uighur political activism for more autonomy sustainable. In Inner Mongolia's case, it was only during the 1930s and 1940s that the Mongols managed to achieve a series of autonomous governments with the support of Japan. However, after that time, no consistent international factors such as in the Uighurs' case have been present for Inner Mongolia.²⁰ This comparison thus points to the crucial role international factors can play in making and sustaining an ethnonational movement.

Certainly, Mongols and Uighurs are not the only actors with agency with regard to political activism. The Chinese state, through both its domestic policies and international diplomacy, has profoundly shaped the political trajectories of its ethnic subjects. How the Chinese state manages its international relations based on its domestic ethnic "problems" is in fact a crucial aspect that this paper does not have the space to address fully. In addition, the emphasis on the international dimension of China's ethnic politics should not be read as a dismissal of domestic factors. The Chinese government's policies toward ethnic minorities and its repressive measures against dissent have significant effects on how various ethnic minority groups develop discontent and rage against the Chinese state. Specific historical experiences of group identity construction also inform how a certain group perceives its contemporary relationship with the majority group and the state. However, explanations focusing purely on these domestic factors are not totally satisfactory either. This comparison also makes us think about the other politically active ethnic minority group in China: the Tibetans. Granted, Tibet has its own set of historical specifics and its theocratic political structure surrounding the Dalai Lama is unique. Nonetheless, a cursory comparison between the Uighur case and the Tibetan case makes us see that the two most politically active ethnic groups in China are also the two that have received substantial external support from the beginning and have successfully internationalized their cause. In fact, the international prominence of the Tibetan cause is what the Uighur nationalists and diaspora community aim to emulate.

So how can we understand theoretically the international dimension of ethnic politics in general and ethnonational self-determination movements in particular? As we have seen from the Uighurs' case, international factors prove crucial in getting such a movement going. This is not to say that grievances do not exist or do not matter. They do. However, grievances alone are not sufficient to generate a sustainable political movement for self-determination. Grievances need to be politicized with the right opportunities and resources to make a meaningful movement. This finding is certainly nothing new, as it has

been explored in great detail in literature on social movements (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly). For scholars focusing on China's ethnic politics, more attention should be directed to how grievances are politicized and mobilized rather than how they are generated alone. Future research on the Uighurs and the Tibetans should thus pay more attention to the role of external factors in the actual mobilization of these ethnic minority groups, such as how they mobilize resources, how they frame the issue, and how they take advantage of various opportunities provided by changing international and domestic structural factors.

At the same time, we can also argue that the international politicization of an ethnic group's cause provides a sense of hope and an alternative vision of national belonging that other groups without such international support do not enjoy. In Inner Mongolia's case, the lack of international attention for the past half-century has to some extent made the Mongols face the reality and come to terms with the fact that they are now part of the Chinese state. Wurlig Borchigud points out that for many Inner Mongols, their regional identity has already replaced their previous pan-Mongolian transnational dream, which in a way "enhanced the national boundary of the Chinese state to which it belongs" (178–79). The same can also be said about many other ethnic groups in China that do not have any external ties, and thus cannot have an alternative national belonging other than China. As Stevan Harrell points out in his discussion of the Nuosu Yi in Sichuan, the Nuosu cannot imagine themselves as belonging to any nation unless they belong to China (329). This paper thus hopes to pave the way for future analysis along such a line of inquiry about the international dimension of the imagination of groups' national belonging.

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Notes

1. There is no standard spelling for names relating to the Uighurs and East Turkestan. Uighur is sometimes spelled as Uygur or Uyghur. East Turkestan is sometimes spelled as Eastern Turkestan or Eastern Turkistan. In this paper, I use Uighur and East Turkestan unless in direct quotation.
2. By political activism, I mean either violent or non-violent activities engaged in by an ethnic group to pursue political goals, such as more political rights, more autonomy, or even secession. It can include a range of activities, such as rebellions, riots, demonstrations and so forth.
3. For example, during the most recent protest movement in Inner Mongolia, nowhere did the sovereignty issue come out during the protests. Instead, Mongol people's grievances were mainly on issues such as environmental degradation and diminishing pastoral way of life.
4. Most recently in June 2010, the Chinese government introduced a 5% tax that the country's energy companies must pay on oil and natural gas produced in Xinjiang. It indicates that the Chinese government is aiming to address this commonly held local grievance. See "China Launches Energy Tax in Xinjiang."
5. For example, at school students are required to be taught atheism and forbidden to perform daily prayers or fast during Ramadan. Many still do despite the official ban.
6. One difference between the IMAR and XUAR is that the Han Chinese in-migration occurred earlier and in larger numbers. Indeed, the main demand of the student movement in 1981 in IMAR was for the Han Chinese to move out (Jankowiak).

7. Until the sixteenth century, only the Buddhist Uighurs around Turpan still called themselves Uighurs. However, when local people around Turpan finally converted to Islam in the sixteenth century, "the term Uighur now completely dropped from the region in reference to the local inhabitants" (Gladney 214).
8. For example, Wahhabism has gradually come into Xinjiang and gained popularity in certain areas (Waite).
9. Certainly, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization serves China's multiple foreign policy goals as it enables China to make strategic inroads into Central Asia and compete with the United States and Russia for influence in the region. However, the Xinjiang problem still features prominently in its function, as exemplified by series of military exercises among member states aimed at combating "Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism."
10. Mehmet Emin Burga was the prime minister as well as the military Ccommander of the Turkish Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan in 1933. Isa Yusuf Alpetkin was the secretary general in the coalition government between ETR and the KMT provincial government in Xinjiang in 1946.
11. In response to the Turkish criticism, China released the ethnic breakdown of the riot casualties, as many victims were in fact Han Chinese. Later, Turkish Foreign Ministry officials apologized. See "China Demands Turkish Retraction."
12. There is also an Eastern Turkestan Government in Exile based in Washington, D.C.
13. For example, in 1945 the Soviet Union's first condition for entering the war against Japan was for the Republic of China to accept the independence of the Mongolian People's Republic, which led the Chinese side to agree on a plebiscite in October 1945.
14. The KMT government passed a "Draft on the Organizational Law of the Mongolian Leagues, Tribes, and Banners" in 1930 that did not protect the feudalistic privileges of the Mongol ruling class. In 1931, the Manchurian Incident led to the Japanese occupation of Jehol province in what is now eastern Inner Mongolia. As a result, various Inner Mongol leaders were pressed to call for a united front to deal with Japanese aggression as well as various Chinese warlord governments (Jagchid, *Essays in Mongolian Studies* 290).
15. Eventually, Ulanhu also managed to set up an autonomous region for Inner Mongolia. However, this autonomous region was set up under the premise that it would be incorporated into the PRC.
16. Alternatively, one can argue that the Uighurs do not have such a specific external kin state as the Mongols. Thus, there is no "Outer Uighurstan" for Xinjiang in the way that there is an Outer Mongolia and an Inner Mongolia. However, historically, there was the so-called division between Chinese Turkestan and Russian Turkestan, which essentially corresponds with the contemporary division between Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics.
17. The total Mongol population in China is about 5.8 million, but Mongolia's total population is only around 2 million.
18. The Mongols are traditionally divided along tribal lines. In Mongolia, people are primarily of the Halh tribe; in Inner Mongolia, there are Horchin, Harchin, Chahar, Bagar, etc.
19. The IMPP was founded on 23 March 1997 in Princeton, New Jersey, United States. According to its constitution, its guiding principles are: "The IMPP upholds the principles of democracy and peace in fighting to end the Chinese Communist Party's colonial rule in Inner Mongolia." Its ultimate goal is to achieve independence for Inner Mongolia, and the immediate goal is to establish a "confederated union with China in the course of the future social development in China" ("Constitution of the Inner Mongolian People's Party." The SMHRIC is an organization based in New York with the following principles: "To gather and distribute information concerning Southern (Inner) Mongolian human rights situation and general human rights issues; to promote and protect ethnic Mongolian's all kinds of rights, such as basic human rights, indigenous rights, minority rights, civil rights, and political rights in Southern Mongolia; to encourage human rights and democracy grassroots movement in Southern Mongolia; to promote human rights and democracy education in Southern Mongolia; to improve the international community's understanding of deteriorating human rights situations, worsening ethnic, cultural and environment problems in Southern Mongolia; and ultimately, to establish a democratic political system in Southern Mongolia" ("Main Goals of the SMHRIC").
20. One can think of multiple reasons why the set of international factors present in the Uighurs' case is absent from the Mongols' case. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that communist revolutionaries in Inner Mongolia had close ties with the CCP, so one can argue that Inner Mongolia was willingly incorporated into the PRC. This probably explains why the Mongols at the time

did not actively seek international support for their cause. Furthermore, the contemporary demographic balance in Inner Mongolia greatly favors the absolute majority Han Chinese, which perhaps leads to the opinion that Inner Mongolia is already a lost cause, so international support should instead go to causes that might have a reasonably good chance of success, such as in Xinjiang or Tibet. These are of course speculative conjectures, which should be addressed in a different paper.

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