



# Interstate Relations, Perceptions, and Power Balance: Explaining China's Policies Toward Ethnic Groups, 1949–1965

Enze Han & Harris Mylonas

To cite this article: Enze Han & Harris Mylonas (2014) Interstate Relations, Perceptions, and Power Balance: Explaining China's Policies Toward Ethnic Groups, 1949–1965, Security Studies, 23:1, 148–181, DOI: [10.1080/09636412.2014.874210](https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2014.874210)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2014.874210>



Published online: 25 Feb 2014.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 536



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## **Interstate Relations, Perceptions, and Power Balance: Explaining China's Policies Toward Ethnic Groups, 1949–1965**

ENZE HAN AND HARRIS MYLONAS

*Why do multi-ethnic states treat various ethnic groups differently? How do ethnic groups respond to these state policies? We argue that interstate relations and ethnic group perceptions about the relative strength of competing states are important—but neglected—factors in accounting for the variation in state-ethnic group relations. In particular, whether an ethnic group is perceived as having an external patron matters a great deal for the host state's treatment of the group. If the external patron of the ethnic group is an enemy of the host state, then repression is likely. If it is an ally, then accommodation ensues. Given the existence of an external patron, an ethnic group's response to a host state's policies depends on the perceptions about the relative strength of the external patron vis-à-vis the host state and whether the support is originating from an enemy or an ally of the host state. We present five configurations and illustrate our theoretical framework on the eighteen largest ethnic groups in China from 1949 to 1965, tracing the Chinese government's policies toward these groups, and examine how each group responded to these various nation-building policies.*

---

Enze Han is a lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Studies, SOAS, University of London. He is the author of *Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). His research interests include ethnic politics in China and China's relations with Southeast Asia.

Harris Mylonas is assistant professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University. He is the author of *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). His research revolves around the processes of nation- and state-building, immigrant and refugee incorporation policies, and the politicization of cultural differences.

Both authors have contributed equally to the writing of this article.

Why do multi-ethnic states treat various ethnic groups differently? How do ethnic groups respond to these state policies? We argue that interstate relations and ethnic group perceptions about the relative strength of competing states are important—but neglected—factors in accounting for the variation in state-minority relations. In particular, whether an ethnic group is perceived as having an external patron matters a great deal for the host state's treatment of the group. If the external patron of the ethnic group is an enemy of the host state, then repression is likely. If it is an ally, then accommodation ensues. Given the existence of an external patron, an ethnic group's response to a host state's policies depends on the perceptions about the relative strength of the external patron vis-à-vis the host state and whether the support is originating from an enemy or an ally of the host state. In this article we are testing this theoretical framework on state-minority relations in the Chinese context. We present five configurations and elucidate our framework on the eighteen largest ethnic groups in China from 1949 to 1965, tracing the Chinese government's policies toward these groups, and examine how each group responded to these various nation-building policies.

The official People's Republic of China (PRC) discourse holds that "China is a united multi-ethnic country."<sup>1</sup> According to the 2000 Chinese National census, there are fifty-six ethnic groups residing within the PRC. The Han Chinese core group comprises about 91.6 percent of China's population. Thus, there are 109 million non-Han Chinese comprising the remaining 8.4 percent of the population of China. The Chinese state explicitly proclaims itself to be a multi-ethnic state, having adopted the Soviet model of granting autonomy to ethnic groups and alternately permitting or sanctioning certain expressions of cultural diversity. In parallel, however, key elements of a European style nation-building project are still actively promoted by the Chinese state, as evidenced in efforts to impose a common language—Mandarin—and instill loyalty to the Chinese nation-state.<sup>2</sup>

The Chinese Constitution of 1954 made provisions for autonomous government for various ethnic groups, following the Soviet model, but the Chinese model is distinct in that it excludes the right of secession for recognized ethnic minorities. At the same time, however, the Chinese state has been trying to integrate these ethnic minority peoples into the majority Han Chinese.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in particular its Han Chinese elites, considers itself as the most economically and culturally advanced entity in China and thus has a mission to "help" the more backward ethnic

---

<sup>1</sup> Xiaotong Fei, *Toward a People's Anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Stevan Harrell, "Linguistics and Hegemony in China," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 103 (1993): 97-114.

<sup>3</sup> We use the term "integration" because despite this institutionalized perpetuation of differences, the Chinese state is actively pursuing the transformation of the whole population into loyal Chinese citizens.

minority groups through teaching them the “Han Chinese way.”<sup>4</sup> In recent years, this effort manifested itself through the gradual elimination of bilingual education programs, as well as through the encouragement of Han Chinese migration into ethnic minority regions to help the locals develop.<sup>5</sup> China has followed all three policies—exclusion/repression, accommodation, and integration—toward different groups over time.

Moreover, different ethnic groups have followed different political strategies in response to Chinese nation-building policies. Some are more rebellious, such as the Tibetans and the Uyghurs. Yet other ethnic groups have sought either limited cultural autonomy or even assimilation—the Manchus are a case in point. Its multiple large non-core groups and the apparent contradictions in its nation-building policies render China an ideal case to study. There are important studies focusing on how China’s domestic politics affect its strategic behavior in the international system.<sup>6</sup> In this article, we focus on how interstate relations and power balance dynamics impact China’s policies toward ethnic groups. In particular, we systematically examine the formative years of the PRC’s nation-building process after its founding in 1949.

The structure of the article is as follows. First, we review existing arguments on majority-minority relations before offering our own theoretical framework. We then justify our case selection and present the basic characteristics of the various minority ethnic groups in China. In the third section, we provide an overview of the nation-building policies implemented by the CCP from 1949 to 1965, right before the Cultural Revolution.<sup>7</sup> In the fourth section, we evaluate our theoretical configurations against alternative explanations by looking in greater depth at the strategic interactions between the PRC and five ethnic groups over time. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the insights gained from studying Chinese nation-building for the literature on state-minority relations at large.

---

<sup>4</sup> Stevan Harrell, “Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them,” in *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 26.

<sup>5</sup> On the elimination of bilingual programs, see, for example, Eric T. Schluessel, “‘Bilingual’ Education and Discontent in Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 2 (2007): 251-77.

<sup>6</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); M. Taylor Fravel, “Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China’s Compromises in Territorial Disputes,” *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 46-83.

<sup>7</sup> The Cultural Revolution represents a significant juncture in the history of the PRC. Mao dismantled the whole CCP party structure, and any sensitivity toward ethnic cultural expression was abandoned. The year 1965 was also when Tibet Autonomous Region was founded, symbolizing the consolidation of the PRC’s territorial and political control over its periphery.

## THEORY: STRATEGIC INTERACTION AND NATION-BUILDING

This article examines three policy options toward ethnic groups that can be pursued by states to attain social order: (1) repression/exclusion, including targeting the whole or part of an ethnic group for deportation, mass killing, or segregation; (2) accommodation, referring to policies that maintain the cultural specificities of the group and institutionalize its minority status; and (3) integration, referring to policies that aim at the adoption of the core group culture and way of life by the targeted ethnic group. Similarly, we focus on three possible response strategies ethnic groups can pursue: high-intensity mobilization, low-intensity mobilization, and no mobilization. We focus on identifying the conditions under which these different policy options are implemented toward various ethnic groups as well as the factors that explain the divergent responses of these groups to these measures. Before we present our theoretical framework, we present some arguments from the ethnic conflict and nationalism literatures that we build on to construct our strategic explanation of nation-building.

There is a long tradition in the comparative politics literature focusing on the domestic dynamics of state-minority relations. Scholars have considered a variety of factors that influence this dynamic, from access to political power, regime type, ethnic geography, and relative deprivation to ethnic antipathy and status reversal arguments.<sup>8</sup> These are all worthy explanations that help explain different aspects of inter-ethnic relations. In the context of this article, however, some are more pertinent than others. Given that ours is a subnational study that focuses on the impact of external involvement in state-minority relations over a short period of time, we consider certain group-specific characteristics to remain relatively stable. We do take into account internal regime dynamics and policy shifts at the national level, such as the imposition of direct rule, and we hypothesize that these should have a uniform impact across groups when they are applied uniformly.<sup>9</sup>

Barbara Walter has put forward two important interrelated arguments. The first one focuses on the role of reputation building and argues that a government faced by more than one large, restive, and territorially concentrated minority is more likely to crack down on it in order to preempt any

---

<sup>8</sup> Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Roger Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis," *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 87-119; Monica Duffy Toft, "Indivisible Territory, Geographic Concentration, and Ethnic War," *Security Studies* 12, no. 2 (2002/3): 82-119; Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993); Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> For more on direct rule and the emergence of peripheral nationalism, see Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

others from rebelling.<sup>10</sup> Relatedly, Walter also contends that ethnic groups learn from the experiences of other groups and may become more restive when they face a government that has a reputation for making concessions.<sup>11</sup> However, the effect of reputation and learning may indeed work differently in democracies than in authoritarian regimes. In authoritarian regimes, the government heavily controls domestic information flow. Thus, the said government can moderate the reputation effect of its current policy by controlling the information flow and adding its own spin to the events. Moreover, from the ethnic groups' perspective, in a tightly controlled information environment, groups cannot effectively communicate with each other. This significantly reduces the possibility of cross-group learning.

Contrary to the scholars discussed above, Myron Weiner has highlighted the sensitive triangular relationship among a nationalizing state, an ethnic group, and the national homeland of the ethnic group.<sup>12</sup> Building on Weiner, Rogers Brubaker points out that the fate of an ethnic group is predicated not only on the tactics employed by the nationalizing state, but also on whether or how the group receives support from its external kin.<sup>13</sup> Brubaker specifically argues that if an ethnic minority group does not have external kin, it is more likely to be targeted for assimilation.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Harris Mylonas has argued that a state motivated by a homogenizing imperative is not likely to employ a policy of accommodation toward a non-core group—an ethnic group perceived as unassimilated by the core group ruling elites—that is backed by an enemy external power because such a group is likely to operate as a “fifth column.”<sup>15</sup> Deportation, population exchange, or mass killings are more likely in such cases, depending on the time horizon available to the core group elites.<sup>16</sup>

Turning to ethnic group mobilization, Monica Duffy Toft, James Fearon and David Laitin, Donald Horowitz, and others have pointed out that ethnic demography and geography significantly structure ethnic group behavior.<sup>17</sup> In particular, they find a strong correlation between ethnic groups that are

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Walter, “Building Reputation: Why Governments Fight Some Separatists by Not Others,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no.2 (2006): 313-30.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Walter, “Information, Uncertainty, and the Decision to Secede,” *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (2006): 105-35.

<sup>12</sup> Myron Weiner, “The Macedonian Syndrome: An Historical Model of International Relations and Political Development,” *World Politics* 23, no. 4 (1971): 665-83.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>15</sup> Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Harris Mylonas, “Assimilation and its Alternatives: Caveats in the Study of Nation-Building Policies,” in *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-State Actors in Conflict*, ed. Adria Lawrence and Erica Chenoweth (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Belfer Center Studies in International Security, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 2003); James Fearon and David Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97,

concentrated and high levels of ethnic group mobilization. Moreover, there is ample evidence that terrain influences the likelihood of rebellion. All of these studies largely neglect the international linkages between ethnic demography and state policies toward ethnic groups. In our framework, settlement patterns and terrain matter immensely in three ways: first, through the traditional understanding of capabilities for group mobilization; second, by influencing state policies toward ethnic groups based on cost-benefit calculations; and, third, by affecting the likelihood that an external patron will support that ethnic group or not.

Focusing more on the international dimension, Erin Jenne points out that minority radicalization is conditioned upon signals of behavioral intent from the host government and the external patron of the minority, especially when the external patron credibly signals interventionist intent to the minority elites.<sup>18</sup> Pieter Van Houten, on the other hand, probes the nature of the external patron, as he argues that the presence of a weak external patron or a strong and highly irredentist external patron would contribute to the escalation of violence between the host state and the minority.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Enze Han has noted that the relative well-being of an ethnic group in comparison with an external kindred group shapes the former's grievance construction.<sup>20</sup>

These theories indeed point us toward examining how the presence and nature of the external patron affect state-minority relations. Much of the attention, however, is still overwhelmingly focused on violence and confrontation between the host state and the minority. The literature lacks an adequate discussion of both why and when the host state would use repression as its primary tactic and why and when the ethnic group would rebel in the first place. The theories discussed above provide little guidance on how to model the strategic nature of this interaction. We thus attempt to enhance existing understandings of state-minority relations in what follows.

We build on previous work by Mylonas and argue that both interstate relations and ethnic groups' perceptions about the relative strength of external backers vis-à-vis the host state account for the observed variation in state-minority relations.<sup>21</sup> Foremost, we suggest that whether an ethnic group enjoys external support matters a great deal for the host state's treatment of that group as well as the group's response to the host state's nation-building policies.

---

no. 1 (2003): 75-90; Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Erin K. Jenne, *Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Pieter Van Houten, "The Role of a Minority's Reference State in Ethnic Relations," *European Journal of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (May 1998): 112.

<sup>20</sup> Enze Han, *Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*.

If an ethnic group does not have an external patron, we argue that the host state is more likely to pursue integration policies toward this group—as immunization against future external agitation—and that the group is more likely to be politically inactive because of the lack of imaginable alternatives and/or lack of resources. This leads us to our first configuration:

*Configuration 1:* If an ethnic group has no external patron, then the group is more likely to be politically inactive, and the host state will pursue integration policies toward that group.

Moving forward, Mylonas has shown that the type of interstate relations between the external patron and the host state matters because the host state is likely to treat ethnic groups that are supported by enemy states differently than the ones supported by allies.<sup>22</sup> Allies are states that do not threaten a host state's territorial integrity and security, may be members of the same alliance bloc, and may even be willing to offer aid in a time of need. Enemies are states that either compete with the host state over allocation of resources or belong to opposing alliance blocs and have incentives to destabilize the host state or even attack it militarily. Logically, a host state is unlikely to tolerate the existence of an enemy-backed group within its territorial boundaries because the group constitutes a threat to the host state's survival. Thus, when an ethnic group receives military, financial, or diplomatic support from an enemy source, this group is more likely to be treated by the host state with great suspicion and handled with repressive measures. On the other hand, if the external patron of an ethnic group is an ally of the host state, then the latter is less likely to perceive this group as a threat and thus less likely to use repressive measures against it. Thus, support by an enemy power is different from that originating from an ally; both, however, involve maintaining ties with the non-core group that sustain and/or nurture the salience of the differences between the core and the non-core group. Support by an ally, however, is less likely aiming at provoking secessionist goals or providing an alternative to the host state than support by an enemy state.<sup>23</sup> Some—but definitely not all—instances of enemy support definitely have the latter goal in mind.

With this article, we introduce an important theoretical innovation to existing accounts: the role of the power ratio between the external patron and the host state in an ethnic group's calculations when responding to a host state's nation-building policies. If the external patron is a more powerful force than the host state, then the ethnic group is faced with a feasible superior option to its current state of affairs in the host state. As a result, this group is more likely to respond positively to the signals and support provided by the

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Surely there is variation in the quality of alliances between states. For the purposes of our argument, we assume that allies are less likely to agitate a non-core group than enemies.



external patron. Combining this logic with the prior discussion of interstate relations between the external patron and the host state, we derive two configurations:

*Configuration 2:* If an ethnic group has an external patron, this external patron is perceived to be more powerful than the host state by this ethnic group, and the patron is an enemy of the host state, then the group is more likely to pursue high-intensity mobilization, and the host state will pursue exclusionary policies.

*Configuration 3:* If an ethnic group has an external patron that is perceived as more powerful than the host state by this ethnic group and the patron is an ally of the host state, then we expect low group mobilization and the host state to accommodate the group.

Conversely, if the power balance between the external patron and the host state is in favor of the latter, then we expect a strategic calculation by the ethnic group that would lead it to prefer the status quo or even try to integrate into the majority society. Once again, the combination of interstate relations and relative balance of power, which in this case is in favor of the host state, leads us to two last configurations:

*Configuration 4:* If an ethnic group has an external patron, this patron is perceived to be less powerful than the host state by this ethnic group, and the external patron is an enemy of the host state, then we expect low group mobilization and the host to pursue integration policies.

*Configuration 5:* If an ethnic group has an external patron, this patron is perceived to be less powerful than the host state by this ethnic group, and the external patron is an ally of the host state, then the group will not mobilize, and the host state is likely to pursue accommodation.

The underlying logic behind these configurations builds on two more assumptions about ethnic group reactions to more or less powerful external patrons and host state perceptions. First, powerful external patrons are more likely to find enough members of the relevant ethnic group to mobilize against the host state. Alternatively, if the external patron is weak, then members of the externally backed ethnic group are less likely to get mobilized. Second, host states are likely to err on the safe side in cases of a powerful external patron and treat most of the group as suspect for mobilization. Conversely, if the external patron is relatively weak, the host state is less likely to treat the whole ethnic group as suspect and will focus on selectively targeting the few agitators that may have mobilized.

Could, however, the direction of causality be reversed? One may argue that the nature of alliances between states may in fact be the outcome of state

Group's Perceptions of External Patron Strength	Ethnic Group Enjoys External Support		
	Yes		No
	Enemy	Ally or Neutral	<b>Configuration 1</b>  Group: No Mobilization Host State: Integration
Strong State	<b>Configuration 2</b> Group: High Mobilization Host State: Exclusion	<b>Configuration 3</b> Group: Low Mobilization Host State: Accommodation	
Weak State	<b>Configuration 4</b> Group: Low Mobilization Host State: Integration	<b>Configuration 5</b> Group: No Mobilization Host State: Accommodation	

**FIGURE 1** Predictions of our theory.

policies toward ethnic groups. Theoretically speaking, this would mean that interstate relations are endogenous to state policies toward ethnic groups. This sounds unlikely, especially in light of the extensive work on alliances that either never discusses this causal path or discounts it as epiphenomenal or secondary.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, this is an interesting line of argument, and we address it empirically in our conclusion. There we show that it is hard to believe that change—in any direction—in the treatment of any ethnic group within China would have changed Cold War dynamics and alliance patterns.

In sum, the interaction of the nature of interstate relations between the external patron and the host state, on the one hand, and the relative power capabilities between them offers the five configurations described above and depicted in Figure 1.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY

The population sizes of different ethnic groups in China vary a great deal; according to China's National Census 2000, the largest one, Zhuang, has sixteen million members, and the smallest, Lhoba, only numbers about three thousand people. As we set out to examine the Chinese government's policies toward its ethnic groups and the groups' responses to these state policies, we

<sup>24</sup> Scholars such as Walt and Snyder highlight the importance of balancing and/or bandwagoning but rarely mention minority policies as a factor for alliance formation. See Stephen Walt, *The Origin of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Glenn Snyder, "Alliances, Balance, and Stability," *International Organization* 45, no. 1 (1991): 121-42. In an extensive survey of the literature on alliance formation as it relates to nation-building policies of host states, Mylonas finds that this line of argument is almost never discussed or considered plausible. See Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, 46-47.

have decided to include in our study ethnic groups that are relatively large in terms of population size. Thus we include in our study eighteen ethnic groups that have a population exceeding one million, based on the 2000 National Census. These groups are the Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uyghur, Tujia, Yi, Mongol, Tibetan, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Korean, Bai, Hani, Kazak, Li, and Dai (see Table 1).<sup>25</sup>

We study these relatively larger groups for a variety of reasons. First, many scholars have suggested that smaller groups are often ignored by the state; thus, bigger groups are generally taken more seriously than smaller ones. Second, larger groups possess more resources for political mobilization and are better able to challenge the state, which in turn makes them good candidates for external support. Finally, by looking at eighteen ethnic groups, we are able to allow for significant variation in our dependent variable and avoid the selection bias involved in studying only violent or prominent cases. This case selection enables us to correct for scholars' tendency to focus on more prominent cases such as the Tibetans or the Uyghurs while ignoring the wide variety of ethnic groups that exist in China. As a result of such a narrow focus, most of these ethnic groups have not received adequate attention in the literature. Granted, Tibet and Xinjiang might indeed have their historical and political idiosyncrasies, but focusing solely on these cases significantly biases the inferences drawn.

From these eighteen groups, nine either had external patrons during the period under study or have external kin relations with neighboring countries, and the other nine are indigenous to China alone and did not enjoy any external support. For example, the Uyghurs and Kazaks have kin relations with Central Asian states. Mongolia is a kin state for the Mongols, as are both North and South Korea for the Koreans. Minorities located in the Southwestern border areas—such as the Miao, Yao, Hani, and Dai—all have external kin in mainland Southeast Asia. The Tibetans have extensive relations with groups in Bhutan, Nepal, and India.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Tibetans and Uyghurs have received external support by great powers.

These eighteen groups also have distinct historical and political relations with Han-Chinese political powers. The Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Dai had quite significant autonomous political experiences in the past, whereas the Manchus and Mongols both can claim imperial status, as each has previously ruled over all of China. In particular, the Manchu were the imperial group that ruled China during the Qing Dynasty. Thus, through hundreds of years of interaction with the majority Han Chinese, by the time of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, many Manchu had already adopted the Chinese language. Many members of the group tried to hide their Manchu identity

---

<sup>25</sup> We use the 2000 census data because it is the most recent and earlier PRC data tends to be spottier.

<sup>26</sup> Enze Han, "External Cultural Ties and the Politics of Language in China," *Ethnopolitics* 12, no. 1 (2013): 30-49.

when there was strong anti-Manchu sentiment during the Republic of China period.

On the other hand, several of the groups were historically considered as mountain peoples and never enjoyed significant political autonomy, at least institutionally. Many of these mountain peoples—the Miao, Yi, Buyi, Hani, and others—are located in mountainous areas with difficult-to-pass terrain in Southwestern China, at least before the advancement of modern transportation technologies. Furthermore, because of the scattered nature of some of these groups, there was also a fair amount of ethnogenesis that took place when many subgroups were put together into one as a result of the CCP's Ethnic Identification Project.<sup>27</sup> Many of these mountain peoples were then given a script designed by CCP scholars as part of the effort to standardize their languages and control their loyalties.

These ethnic groups further vary in terms of geographic concentration. Some groups—such as the Uyghurs, Tibetans, Koreans, Zhuang, Kazaks, Li, and Dai—are relatively concentrated, despite the recent mass-migration of Han Chinese into the peripheral regions. In contrast, the rest of the groups are more dispersed. In addition, many ethnic groups in China are located in the peripheral border regions, and therefore the area these groups inhabit can be considered as geopolitically important.

Another important factor to keep in mind is the stance that each group took during the Chinese civil war between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the CCP. The different ethnic groups have had different relations with these two competing forces. Especially during the CCP's forced Long March, it is alleged that the CCP managed to build alliances with many ethnic groups along the way. However, some ethnic groups, such as the Tibetans and the Hui, were considered particularly anti-CCP. Perhaps these past relations explain the variation in state policies.

In sum, these eighteen groups vary in many ways from one another. These differences permit us to see how well our independent variables of primary interest—interstate relations with the external patron and relative strength of the patron—perform in explaining Chinese nation-building policymaking and ethnic groups' reaction to these policies relative to these other factors.

A final word of caution before proceeding to our empirical discussion of China's nation-building policies is necessary. Treating these groups as unitary actors and assuming that there is one state policy pursued toward each group at a particular point in time are both tricky assumptions. Many ethnic groups are agglomerations of different related ethnic groups; different segments of a particular group might also have had different prior political allegiances toward the CCP and thus might receive different treatment. We

---

<sup>27</sup> To be sure, there were cases of territorially concentrated groups such as Nuosu in Liangshan that were lumped together with other linguistically related groups to form the Yi group.

**TABLE 1** Ethnic Groups above 1 Million People in China

Groups	Population (2000)	External Kin	Mobilization prior to 1949	Perception of past alliance		Past involvement with CCP	Past autonomy	Terrain	Group concentration	Strategic location	Natural resources	Language	Religion
				with the Nationalists	with CCP								
Zhuang	16.2 m	no	no	no	no	yes	no	mountainous	relatively concentrated	yes	no	Own language but no scripts	Confucianism
Manchu	10.7 m	no	no	no	no	no	imperial power	flat	spread	no	no	Heavily assimilated	Buddhism
Hui	9.8 m	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	flat	spread	no	no	Chinese	Islam
Miao	8.9 m	yes	yes	no	no	yes	no	mountainous	spread	no	no	Own language but no scripts	Christian
Uighur	8.4 m	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	desert	concentrated	yes	yes	Own language	Islam
Tujia	8 m	no	no	no	no	no	no	mountainous	spread	no	no	Borrowed heavily	Folk religion
Yi	7.8 m	no	occasional rebellions	no	no	yes	yes	mountainous	spread	no	no	Chinese	Folk religion
Mongols	5.8 m	yes	occasional rebellions	no	no	yes	imperial power	steppe	spread	yes	no	Own language	Buddhism
Tibetan	5.4 m	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	mountainous	concentrated	yes	no	Own language	Tibetan Buddhism
Buyi	2.97 m	no	no	no	no	no	no	mountainous	spread	no	no	Own language but no scripts	Folk religion
Dong	2.96 m	no	no	no	no	no	no	mountainous	spread	no	no	Own language but no scripts	Folk religion
Yao	2.64 m	yes	occasional rebellions	no	no	yes	no	mountainous	spread	border area	no	Own language but no scripts	Daoism
Korean	1.92 m	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	flat	concentrated	border area	no	Own language	Confucianism
Bai	1.86 m	no	no	no	no	no	no	mountainous	relatively concentrated	no	no	Borrowed heavily from Chinese	Folk religion
Hani	1.44 m	yes	occasional rebellions	no	no	yes	no	mountainous	spread	border area	no	Own language but no scripts	Folk religion
Kazak	1.25 m	yes	occasional rebellions	no	no	no	no	steppe	relatively concentrated	border area	no	Own language	Islam
Li	1.25 m	no	occasional rebellions	no	no	yes	no	island	relatively concentrated	no	no	Own language but no scripts	Folk religion
Dai	1.16 m	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	mountainous	relatively concentrated	border area	no	Own language	Buddhism

acknowledge that these assumptions might not hold true empirically, as there are certainly tremendous intra-group differences and states often pursue mixed strategies toward ethnic groups. However, for the sake of parsimony and for the purposes of this article, we proceed as if these assumptions hold true.

### EMPIRICS: EXPLAINING CHINA'S NATION-BUILDING POLICIES, 1949-65

Influenced by the Soviet model on nationalities and autonomy, efforts were made to set up a similar system in China when the PRC was founded. Drafted in September 1949, Article 53 of the provisional constitution for the PRC—the Common Program—states that ethnic minorities have the rights to develop and use their native languages and scripts. Article 53 of the Common Program also promised to create writing systems for those minorities who do not have a written language and to standardize oral and writing languages where various forms exist within the same ethnic minority group.<sup>28</sup>

The 1952 General Program of the PRC for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy, the 1953 electoral law, and the PRC Constitution of 1954 all specifically provided for proportional minority membership in the legislatures; they pledged both that ethnic minorities should have equal rights with the majority Han Chinese and that Han chauvinism toward ethnic minorities should be prohibited.<sup>29</sup> Also in the 1954 constitution, ethnic minorities were accorded the rights to use and develop their native languages and the obligation of their local governments to use their languages.<sup>30</sup> By looking at the official discourse and the CCP's declarations of intent, one would think that all ethnic groups in China were accommodated.

As is clear from the discussion above, during the early years of the PRC, the CCP's policies toward ethnic minorities were relatively pluralistic and tolerant. First, as noted previously, the government standardized several ethnic minority written languages and created new scripts for groups that did not yet have a written language.<sup>31</sup> Second, the government prepared policy guidelines about minority language usage and started to promote bilingual education. In 1952, the government's Implementation Program of

<sup>28</sup> Minglang Zhou, "The Politics of Bilingual Education in the People's Republic of China since 1949," *Bilingual Research Journal* 25, nos. 1-2 (2001): 153.

<sup>29</sup> Barry Sautman, "Ethnic Law and Minority Rights in China: Progress and Constraints," *Law & Policy* 21, no. 3 (1999): 287-88. Originally, in the constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic, founded in 1931, there is a statement saying that all minorities living within the territory of China enjoy the full right of self-determination. However, this explicit right of secession was dropped from the Chinese Soviet Constitution in 1935. See Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>30</sup> Zhou, "The Politics of Bilingual Education," 153.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

Autonomous Governance in Minority Regions required local autonomous governments to use minority languages in official business, education, and cultural activities.<sup>32</sup> Also, the government issued guidelines about practices of bilingual education in three different types of minority communities, depending upon the contemporary scale of language usage and whether writing systems were available for teaching.<sup>33</sup> Third, the land reforms carried out by the CCP in most Han areas were not immediately carried out in minority areas. Instead, a different set of democratic reforms was carried out in ethnic minority areas that were met with less violence than the land reforms in most Han areas, where landlords struggled and were violently persecuted.<sup>34</sup>

Starting in 1956, however, the Chinese government started to switch gears from its more gradualist policies during the past half decade and began to push for more integration of the various ethnic minority groups into the Chinese state and society. This coincided with a general left turn in China's policies from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. First, it set up a systematic autonomous area system from the autonomous region level down to autonomous township.<sup>35</sup> Second, the government initiated the Ethnic Identification Project, spanning several years, for the purpose of systematically investigating and categorizing ethnic groups throughout China.<sup>36</sup> Also in 1956, the Hundred Flower Movement expanded into the ethnic minority areas to solicit opinions from group elites about the Chinese government's ethnic minority policies. The immediate outcome after the reversal of the Hundred Flower Movement was the CCP's vehement campaign targeting local nationalism, that is, ethnic minority groups' complaints and their emphasis on ethnic differences to prevent further implementation of government policies. Many of the ethnic groups' elites were subsequently purged during the party's rectification movements. The purge was most significant in Xinjiang, where many Uyghur and Kazak political and cultural elites were sentenced to labor camps.<sup>37</sup> In Tibet proper, no mass condemnations or purges were carried out, but these did occur in other Tibetan-populated areas, such as Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai.<sup>38</sup> Since the mid-1950s, ethnic Tibetans from

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>34</sup> Stevan Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 50.

<sup>35</sup> June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 140.

<sup>36</sup> Ralph A. Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 167. Ethnic Tibetans also live in Chinese provinces out of Tibet, in particular in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan (Amdo and Kham in Tibetan), a.k.a. the ethnic Tibet.

Sichuan fled into Tibet as refugees, a development that set the stage for the eventual revolt in Lhasa in 1959.<sup>39</sup>

Further radicalism occurred when the Great Leap Forward was launched in 1958, during which the CCP actively pushed for integration because of the belief that ethnic diversity was a hindrance to Mao's goal of total social transformation. There were attacks on ethnic minority language provisions, and many religious and cultural traditions were also banned. The radical economic policies implemented during the Great Leap Forward period also caused tremendous hardship among ethnic minority groups.

After the disastrous Great Leap Forward, the CCP started to readjust some of its radical policies. Many of the elites who were purged during the previous years were now rehabilitated. This period, however, did not last very long. One of the main catalysts for changes in policies was the Sino-Soviet Split and the mass exodus of Uyghurs and Kazaks into the Soviet Union that climaxed in 1962. After the exodus, the party launched a "glorious patriotic movement" in which ethnic minority groups were called upon to dissociate themselves from the Soviet Union and its policies.<sup>40</sup> There was a renewed emphasis on Mao's slogan that the nationalities problem was essentially a class problem that paved the way for class struggles among the ethnic minority population. In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was founded, and the Chinese state furthermore secularized Tibet's administration by dismissing the Panchen Lama and other high lamas from the government. In Xinjiang, after the mass exodus into the Soviet Union, the PRC sealed off the Sino-Soviet border and boosted its propaganda against the Soviet Union for its revisionist and subversive policies.

To sum up, there are some major changes in the CCP's nation-building policies toward ethnic minorities since the founding of PRC. The overall moderate policies transformed into radical ones starting in the mid-1950s. This shift has been well documented in the literature and often explained away as a solely domestic story. However, scholars have also focused on the impact of external factors—especially relations with the USSR—in this radicalization process.<sup>41</sup> Our argument is in agreement with the latter body of literature and does not minimize the importance of the domestic developments or Mao's personality in this process. Now, we will focus on five typical cases of ethnic groups in China to examine how international factors influenced state-minority relations during this period.

<sup>39</sup> Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Abingdon, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 193.

<sup>41</sup> Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).



Group's Perceptions of External Patron Strength	Ethnic Group Enjoys External Support		
	Yes		No
	Enemy	Ally or Neutral	
Strong State	Tibetans (USA 1956-65) Uyghurs (USSR 1960-65) Kazaks (USSR 1960-65)  Group: High Mobilization Host State: Exclusion	Tibetans (USA 1949-56) Uyghurs (USSR 1949-59) Kazaks (USSR 1949-59)  Group: Low Mobilization Host State: Accommodation	Zhuang, Manchu, Yi, Hui, Miao, Tujia, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Bai, Hani, Li  Group: No Mobilization Host State: Integration
	Weak State	Mongols (MPR 1960-65)  Group: Low Mobilization Host State: Integration	

FIGURE 2 Cases.

### Ethnic Groups without External Patrons

Now that the trajectory of China's nation-building policies has been outlined, we will first present a typical case of an ethnic group in China that does not have an external patron. In our theoretical framework, the first configuration involves an ethnic group that does not have an external patron. This is generally true for most ethnic groups in the southwest of China. For the purposes of illustrating the logic of our argument and testing its plausibility, we focus on one of these groups, the Yi. In many ways the Yi is representative of Southwest China groups because the very category of Yi is a patchwork of many loosely similar sub-groups. This sort of ethnogenesis, brought about through the Ethnic Identification Project, created over-arching identities such as the Yi. This holds true also for the Miao, Yao, Dai, and others.<sup>42</sup> In the Yi case, although the official census data in 2000 indicates a total population of almost eight million, this number includes various groups that spread across the mountain areas in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces.

The Yi people are only indigenous to China, and the group does not have an external kin or any external patron. In his discussion of the Nuosu, a subgroup of Yi in Sichuan's Liangshan area, Stevan Harrell characteristically notes, "Nuosu belong to no nation at all unless they belong to China, and

<sup>42</sup> On Miao, see Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000). On Yao, see Ralph A Litzinger, *Other Chinas*. On Dai, see Hsieh Shih-Chung, "Ethnic-Political Adaptation and Ethnic Change of the Sipsong Panna Dai: An Ethnohistorical Analysis" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1989).

in fact the main oppositional historical narrative of various Yi scholars has been one that sees the Yi as the founders of the Chinese nation whose pride of place has been usurped by the Han, rather than as a separate nation of their own.”<sup>43</sup>

Regardless, in Liangshan, when the CCP started its land reform in the mid-1950s, its efforts faced serious resistance from the Yi, leading to large-scale revolts. Thomas Heberer, commenting on this period, informs us that “[u]p to the beginning of the 1950s the Yi attempted to preserve their relative independence within the Chinese state. After this attempt failed, they had to adjust themselves to the new political situation. Revolts in consequence of the Democratic Reforms in the middle of the 1950s were suppressed relatively quickly and led to a strengthened Han Chinese presence.”<sup>44</sup> We should also note that the revolts among the Yi were not so much directed against the Chinese nation, but rather against the radical implementation of socialist policies by the CCP, not an uncommon reaction to state centralization.<sup>45</sup> However, the lack of external support for groups like the Yi precluded any sustained resistance movements among them. Overall, the CCP’s policies toward the Yi, and other similarly situated groups, aimed at the minority’s integration into the majority Han Chinese way of life. To be sure, repression of dissidents existed in parallel.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the constitution’s proclamations, there was no systematic effort undertaken by the Chinese government to promote these ethnic minority languages or establish a sophisticated bilingual education system.<sup>47</sup> Institutionally, various autonomous areas for the Yi were set up across Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces, but they were all in the prefectural or county levels, lacked autonomy, and were subject to different provincial administrations. The PRC strategy was thus integration through nominal accommodation. In response to these integration policies, these ethnic minority groups took to one common approach and asserted their rightful status within the Chinese nation, just as the example provided above by Harrell on the Yi (Nuosu) case describes. Many mythical stories detailing these groups’ origins have emerged and usually unfold in the following way: In ancient times there were several brothers. The Han Chinese are the descendants of the older brother, and the ethnic minority groups are the descendants of

<sup>43</sup> Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China*, 329.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Heberer, “Nationalities Conflict and Ethnicity in the People’s Republic of China, with Special Reference to the Yi in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture,” in *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China*, ed. Stevan Harell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*.

<sup>46</sup> There is a paucity of research in English on the Yi rebellion in the mid-1950s. Those rebellions were localized and references to them can be found in local gazettes in the Liangshan region. Stevan Harrell, University of Washington, personal communication. More primary research is necessary to conclusively reconstruct these events.

<sup>47</sup> Matte Halskov Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

the younger siblings.<sup>48</sup> Framed in this manner, these narratives allow these different ethnic minority groups to reconcile their differences with the Han Chinese majority and simultaneously pave the way for their gradual integration into the Han Chinese majority.

Therefore, as our theoretical framework indicates, the ethnic groups in Southwest China that are indigenous only to China and are not supported by an external patron were targeted with an overall policy aiming at their pacification and integration into the Han Chinese identity. On the demand side, no sustained movement among these ethnic groups has developed to express demands for a competing national vision apart from being Chinese citizens. The cases of the Tibetans or the Uyghurs were quite different in this regard, as we will see below.

### Strong External Patron: From Ally to Enemy

#### TIBETANS

When the CCP came into power in 1949, the international status of Tibet was uncertain.<sup>49</sup> During the period from 1949 to 1956, the Tibetans enjoyed minimal support from external powers, and the CCP was still consolidating its power. Washington had no interest in overtly provoking Beijing, at least not during the Korean War. At the same time, Chiang's government in Taiwan, an ally during World War II, also opposed Tibetan independence. For these reasons, "the United States . . . [was] willing to recognize Tibet only as an *autonomous* part of China, that is, not independent with the Dalai Lama as head of state."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the Indian government was not willing to jeopardize its relationship with Communist China to help the Tibetans—a choice that Britain more or less respected. To encourage Tibetan resistance without appearing to be involved, the British gave incentives to the Indian government to funnel arms to the Tibetans.<sup>51</sup> According to Tsering Shakya, "On coming to power, the Communists made it clear that the last remaining task for the victorious People's Liberation Army was the liberation of Tibet."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For example, on the creation myth of the Miao, see Nicholas Tapp, "Cultural Accommodations in Southwest China: The 'Han Miao' and Problems in the Ethnography of the Hmong," *Journal of Asian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2002): 77-104.

<sup>49</sup> The empirical sections on Tibet and Xinjiang draw on Harris Mylonas, "Assimilation and its Alternatives: The Making of Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2008), 232-40; Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, 175-80.

<sup>50</sup> Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm Before the Storm: 1951-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 121.

<sup>51</sup> See the relevant Foreign Office documents at the British National Archives: "Supply of arms for Tibet," January 1950, FO 371/84465; "Assistance for Tibet to help combat the Communist Threat," January 1950, FO 371/84451.

<sup>52</sup> Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 3.

Mao's government therefore resolved to incorporate Tibet. When the Tibetan government in Lhasa resisted, Mao used force to induce Tibet's leaders to accede to Chinese suzerainty, sending troops into political Tibet in October 1950.<sup>53</sup>

The United States encouraged the Tibetan resistance, but avoided more direct lobbying on behalf of the Tibetans against the Chinese government.<sup>54</sup> For example, the United States tried to prevent the Tibetan government from signing the 17-Point Agreement in Beijing,<sup>55</sup> but even after the signing of the agreement and the full annexation of Tibet by China, US intervention remained limited to an "unofficial and unsigned" supportive letter urging the Dalai Lama to denounce the agreement and seek asylum abroad.<sup>56</sup> Having fled to Yadong, a town across the border from India, the Dalai Lama sent a telegram to Mao several months later indicating his formal acceptance of the agreement. Melvyn Goldstein explains the Dalai Lama's decision as driven by "his perception that the United States, though it might express sympathy for Tibet and offer some limited support, was unwilling to endorse Tibetan independence and would not provide substantial military aid or political backing for a government-in-exile headed by the Dalai Lama that would aspire to independence."<sup>57</sup>

In the fall of 1951, the Chinese military peacefully occupied the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. The Tibetans became a minority with loose ties to external powers. From that point forward, the Tibetan government had an uneasy but functioning coexistence with the Chinese until 1958-59.<sup>58</sup> Despite its strong-arm tactics, the CCP's transitional policy toward Tibetans was one

---

<sup>53</sup> The area that constitutes Tibet is a controversial issue. In the 1950s, the Dalai Lama's government controlled an area that roughly corresponds to present day Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). This has often been referred to as "political Tibet." There are, however, areas inhabited by people perceived to be ethnic Tibetans in other Chinese provinces such as Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan (traditionally called Amdo and Kham by Tibetans), and this is referred to as "ethnic Tibet." For more, see Enze Han, *Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> There is ample evidence that the US strategy during the Cold War was heavily focused on containing the spread of Communism. This involved measures that aimed at both immunizing non-Communist states that were possible targets (e.g., Greece) and undermining the strength of existing Communist states (e.g., China, USSR). Despite Tibet's unique historical status, extensive research indicates that the United States would not have invested so much energy in aiding the Tibetan resistance as it not for the Cold War. For a general but classic account, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>55</sup> The agreement's full name is Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. Melvyn C. Goldstein, "The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 3 (2006): 148. On the signing in Beijing, see Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Tibet, China, and the United States: Reflections on the Tibet Question," Occasional Paper (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council of the United States, 1995).

<sup>56</sup> Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2*, 119-21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>58</sup> For a description of this period, see Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Lixiong Wang, "Reflections

of accommodation, although the terminal goal was full integration. Beijing allowed Tibetans to run their own affairs through the first half of the 1950s. Why would the CCP initially accommodate rather than fully integrate the Tibetans? State capacity is probably relevant to understand this policy choice. Tibet's location is also an important factor.<sup>59</sup> Because of its geographic distance, and more importantly its high altitude, Tibet had been penetrated by fewer Han Chinese than any other area of China. The rough terrain of the Tibetan plateau has been a significant impediment for Han Chinese settlement. Lixiong Wang describes the arrangement as follows: "Although the number of Chinese military and civilian personnel stationed in Tibet after 1951 was vastly increased from the Qing era, political and social relationships were still mediated through de facto 'connectors.' Local affairs continued to be administered by the Tibetan authorities, and a 'one country, two systems' mechanism was set in place."<sup>60</sup>

However, the accommodative policies that Beijing implemented toward Tibet, as stipulated by the 17-Point Agreement, did not apply to ethnic Tibetan areas outside of political Tibet. Thus, in these areas, reforms to collectivize and redistribute land and restructure class relations were carried out.<sup>61</sup> These radical policies immediately led to widespread revolts in Kham and Amdo, ethnic Tibetan regions, in 1956.<sup>62</sup> The rebels could not match the military capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and retreating rebels and refugees started crossing into central Tibet and heading to Lhasa. There, a pan-Khampa resistance movement called Four Rivers Six Ranges was formed and fought a guerilla war against the Chinese government.<sup>63</sup> These revolts once again reignited the US interest in Tibet, and the CIA decided to support the Four Rivers Six Ranges movement by airdropping arms for the rebels and sending agents into Tibet to disrupt Chinese efforts to control the region.<sup>64</sup>

Certainly, the Khampa rebellions occurred independently of external intervention. The CCP's implementation of radical policies greatly disrupted

---

on Tibet," *New Left Review*, no. 14 (March-April 2002): 79-111; Tsering Shakya, "Blood in the Snows," *New Left Review*, no. 15 (May-June 2002): 39-60.

<sup>59</sup> Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*.

<sup>60</sup> Wang, "Reflections on Tibet," 83.

<sup>61</sup> Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 68.

<sup>62</sup> Although we acknowledge that the 1956 revolts in Kham and Amdo (ethnic Tibet) can count as "high mobilization," scholars have contended that these rebellions at the time cannot be counted as "Tibetan" rebellions in an unproblematic manner. A uniform Tibetan national identity was instead the product of the late 1950s, rather than the cause of these rebellions. See McGranahan, *Arrested Histories*.

<sup>63</sup> Khampa is an ethnic sub-group of Tibetans residing in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu. See Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 169.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-84.

the local social structure and thus was singularly responsible for the commencement of these rebellions. Accommodation policies, however, continued in political Tibet. Soon the Khampa rebels' flight to central Tibet and the support they garnered from the United States did play a significant role in sustaining the fighting and ultimately transforming China's perception of the resistance.

US involvement was a crucial factor in sustaining the Tibetan resistance since 1956 and was primarily motivated by a desire to contain the influence of Communist China in the region and around the world.<sup>65</sup> 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."<sup>66</sup> From 1956 to 1974, the CIA trained and armed Tibetan resistance fighters.

Given this context, and consistent with our argument, the Chinese government adopted more exclusionary policies toward the Tibetan leadership and resistance. As soon as Mao learned that the rebellions in Tibet enjoyed the assistance of outside powers—and that the United States figured prominently in this process—he tightened Beijing's grip over the internal affairs of Tibet, leading the Dalai Lama and his supporters to flee into exile in 1959. As M. Taylor Fravel puts it, "Although the CIA's support never came close to altering the balance of power between the rebels and the PLA in Tibet, the Chinese leaders' knowledge of external support, especially from the United States, no doubt had a strong psychological impact on their sense of China's internal vulnerability to external influence."<sup>67</sup>

Having occupied Lhasa militarily, the PLA began to bomb Tibetan monasteries and spread propaganda against the Tibetan aristocracy and religious establishment. China also embarked on an extensive program of land redistribution and abolished serfdom in the province. Tsering Shakya writes, "From the Chinese point of view the American involvement in Tibet transformed the entire situation. It was no longer a question of revolt by some troublesome Tibetans but an international conspiracy to undermine the victory of the Communist Party in China. Moreover, it presented a direct threat to China's security. This may explain the ferocity of Chinese suppression of the Tibetan revolt."<sup>68</sup>

Our argument is not that the conflict in Tibet was the outcome of interference by interested external powers. It was not. The conflict had its roots in the aversion of the Tibetans toward Han Chinese domination as

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 149-51; Tom A. Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* (London: Zed Books, 1987); John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999); Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 348-50.

<sup>66</sup> Goldstein, "The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War," 149.

<sup>67</sup> Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 81.

<sup>68</sup> Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 171.

well as the interest of the Tibetan aristocracy and the religious establishment to preserve traditional Tibetan social structures and religious practices. For example, years before the United States decided to interfere, the Tibetan government had expelled all Chinese as well as Tibetan Communists in anticipation of Chinese plans to incorporate Tibet after the end of the Chinese civil war.<sup>69</sup> Our argument is that the external support Tibetans enjoyed against the Communist Chinese state both provided the Tibetans with an additional incentive to rebel and triggered a more violent reaction from Beijing, which perceived the US support as especially threatening.

#### UYGHURS

The Uyghurs—a Muslim Turkic-speaking group living in the northwestern province of Xinjiang—did not have an external “homeland” as such.<sup>70</sup> They had ethnic ties to Muslim Turkic-speaking groups (Uzbeks in particular but also the broader Turkic community) in Central Asia; but, as we will see, their most significant support came from the Soviet Union.<sup>71</sup>

The Qing Dynasty conquered Xinjiang in the eighteenth century and officially turned it into a province in 1884. Around the same time, Uyghur elites were also exposed to the Jadidist movement that spread amongst Muslims in the Russian and Ottoman empires.<sup>72</sup> In general, modern Uyghur leaders were schooled in Pan-Turanic (or Pan-Turkism) and (later on) Leninist ideas and were therefore strongly oriented first toward Central Asian Pan-Turanic movements and later toward the Soviet regime.<sup>73</sup> During the Republican China period, Xinjiang was loosely ruled by a succession of Chinese warlords with substantial Russian—and later Soviet—involvement. Following World War II, China reasserted its control over Xinjiang with the tacit and necessary approval of the USSR.<sup>74</sup> With the Chinese Communist Party having risen to power, the Soviets put aside the Uyghur independence movement and encouraged the Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR) to be absorbed by the PRC. Moreover, the military personnel of the ETR were also incorporated in the PLA Fifth Army. In 1955, the territory was given the status of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

<sup>69</sup> Melvyn Goldstein, Dawei Sherap, and William R. Siebenschuh, *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phüntso Wangye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang - China's Muslim Far Northwest* (Abingdon, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Geoffrey Wheeler, “Sinkiang and the Soviet Union,” *China Quarterly* 16 (December 1963): 56-61.

<sup>72</sup> Jadidism was “[a] drive for cultural and social renewal among Muslims in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century.” See Daniel Kimmage, “Central Asia: Jadidism - Old Tradition Of Renewal,” 9 August 2005, available at <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1060543.html>.

<sup>73</sup> James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 171.

<sup>74</sup> Xinjiang was made a province in the 1890s, and then part of it formed the Eastern Turkistan Republic in 1944. By 1945, Stalin forced the ETR to form a coalition provincial government with the Republic of China, after he signed a friendship treaty with Chiang Kai-shek.

Sino-Soviet relations largely drove the Chinese government's policies toward the Uyghurs.<sup>75</sup> Initially, the relationship was a cooperative one. The Soviet Union was involved in the industrialization of the province, and the PRC permitted Soviet access to Xinjiang's oil and minerals.<sup>76</sup> In the early 1950s, the CCP's strategies were relatively tolerant toward the Uyghurs. The CCP's United Front policy counseled the establishment of links with "progressive members" of social and religious elites, limiting Beijing's interference with business, religious practice, and social norms.<sup>77</sup> The Chinese authorities also approved the adoption of a Cyrillic-based Uyghur script in 1954 on the advice of the region's Soviet advisors. Usage of this script in Xinjiang "reached its peak between 1955 and 1958, when it was introduced into a number of schools and employed in academic publications."<sup>78</sup>

Consistent with our expectations, cooperative ties between China and the minority's external patron between 1949 and 1957 led to a fairly accommodationist state policy. During this time, "many Uyghurs were pleased with progress on autonomy-related issues, including government by Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, the regulation of the economy to benefit the region and its inhabitants, control over cultural and linguistic matters, and freedom to practice their religion."<sup>79</sup> Also during this period, the PRC tolerated the gradual emigration of pro-Soviet Uyghurs and other Turkic people from Xinjiang.<sup>80</sup> Consistent with the empirics above, our argument predicts that when a strong ally supports an ethnic group, its members will be accommodated by the host state, and the group will exhibit low levels of mobilization.

In the late 1950s, Sino-Soviet relations took a turn for the worse as suspicions grew on both sides. The countries diverged ideologically—mainly due to the de-Stalinization of the USSR by Khrushchev—to the point that in 1961, during the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Zhou Enlai criticized Khrushchev over his comments against the Albanian Communists.<sup>81</sup> Following this confrontation, the CCP formally and publically

---

<sup>75</sup> Enze Han, "From Domestic to International: The Politics of Ethnic Identity in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia," *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 6 (2011): 941-62.

<sup>76</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 225.

<sup>77</sup> The CCP did, however, gradually assume control over the region's religious institutions under the China Islamic Association. It also confiscated mosque property and replaced the religious courts with "People's courts." McMillen *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang*, 113-14.

<sup>78</sup> Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict*, 18-19.

<sup>79</sup> Gardner Bovingdon, *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>80</sup> Sean Roberts, Director of the International Development Studies program at the Elliott School for International Affairs, George Washington University, personal communication. Roberts conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork among the Uyghur people of Central Asia and China during the 1990s. See also Qing-li Yuan, "Population Changes in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (1949-1984)," *Central Asian Survey* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 49-73; Robyn Iredale et al., *Contemporary Minority Migration, Education, and Ethnicity in China* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 128. See also "Communists: One-Third of the Earth," *Time*, 27 October 1961.



denounced the Soviet leadership as “revisionist” in various pieces published in *People’s Daily*.<sup>82</sup>

The Soviets pulled out of the region and economic cooperation across the border was brought to a halt.<sup>83</sup> The USSR began to distribute Soviet passports to residents in the area and used its influence in the region to destabilize the PRC.<sup>84</sup> As Ablet Kamalov puts it, “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.”<sup>85</sup> For more than twenty years the border between the PRC and the Soviet Union was closed down and guarded by PLA troops.

With the Soviets openly supporting the Uyghur minority and engaging in hostile action toward Beijing, we would expect an exclusionary Chinese policy toward the Uyghurs. Indeed, the Chinese government implemented a policy of purging pro-Soviet Uyghur elites and engaged in widespread persecution of anyone suspected of having ties to the Soviets. The crackdown intensified in the spring of 1962, with more than sixty thousand Uyghurs and Kazakhs fleeing across the border to the Soviet Union. Following the exodus, the CCP sealed the border to prevent future problems. Also, a major purge against the Uyghurs, and other Turkic peoples, immediately ensued, as our argument would predict. Finally, after the Sino-Soviet Split, China stopped using the newly adopted Cyrillic script for the Uyghur language and instead introduced a new writing system that was similar to the Chinese Pinyin system.<sup>86</sup>

It is worth mentioning that in the cases of the Tibetans and the Uyghurs, where repression was employed, ethnic differences and animosities as well as wide economic differences vis-à-vis the Han Chinese cannot really explain differential Chinese policies toward the two groups over time since these factors remained more or less constant during this period. Both groups had a history of insurrection, and they were both located on the periphery of the country, thus posing a similar security threat. This constant security threat does not, however, explain the difference in the timing of repression across the two cases. The PRC treated the regions differently at the same point in time—accommodating one minority while repressing the other. Therefore, regime type and composition of the host government cannot explain variation in nation-building policies toward the Tibetans and the Uyghurs.

<sup>82</sup> Jerrold L. Schecter, “Khrushchev’s Image inside China,” *China Quarterly* 14 (April-June 1963): 212-17.

<sup>83</sup> The USSR also sided with India in the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

<sup>84</sup> Sean R. Roberts, “The Uighurs of the Kazakhstan Borderlands: Migration and the Nation,” *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 3 (1998): 511-30.

<sup>85</sup> Ablet Kamalov, “Uyghurs in the Central Asian Republics: Past and Present,” in *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21st Century*, ed. Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke (London: Routledge, 2009), 117.

<sup>86</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 235-36.

## Weak External Patron : From Ally to Enemy

## MONGOLS

In contrast to most ethnic minority groups in China, the Mongols used to be an imperial group and were deeply embedded in the history of China. One just needs to consider the Mongol Yuan Dynasty during the thirteenth century and the deep alliance between the Mongols and the ruling Manchus during the last Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).<sup>87</sup> During the modern period, part of historical Mongolia, Outer Mongolia, declared independence following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and became the Mongolia People's Republic. The other half of historical Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, was instead integrated into China throughout the Republican Era (1911-1949) and more conclusively since the founding of the PRC.<sup>88</sup>

Subgroups of ethnic Mongols were allied closely and early on with the Chinese Communist Party. As early as 1947, the inter-ethnic alliance between Ulanhu's force and the CCP became victorious in Inner Mongolia. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Government (IMAR) was established, with Ulanhu as the chairman, two years before the official founding of the PRC.<sup>89</sup> Because of his revolutionary credentials, Ulanhu took on quite significant political positions within the CCP and the Chinese government.<sup>90</sup> In fact, the CCP used the ethnic Mongols' participation in the founding of the PRC as a crucial model in its effort to demonstrate its legitimacy in the eyes of other ethnic minority groups.

Despite this initial stage, once again we find that the relationship between China and the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR)—an external kin state and potential external patron for the Mongols in China—significantly influenced both the CCP's treatment toward the Mongols and the Mongols' responses to the CCP's nation-building policies. In this case, MPR's relationship with China changed from friendly/neutral to hostile, tracing the changes in Sino-Soviet relations. It was no secret that MPR was a satellite state of the Soviet Union. However, despite support from the Soviet Union, as a buffer state between the Soviet Union and China, the MPR was significantly weaker than China and thus had to rely upon the Soviet Union hopefully to balance China. In addition, the Soviet Union abandoned its active support for MPR's irredentist activities in Inner Mongolia

<sup>87</sup> David Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia: Pastoral Mongolian Society and the Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> Sechin Jagchid, *Essays in Mongolian Studies* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, 1988).

<sup>89</sup> Xiaoyuan Liu, *Reins of Liberation: An Entangled History of Mongolian Independence, Chinese Territoriality, and Great Power Hegemony, 1911-1950* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 223.

after 1945, and subsequently MPR did not challenge Chinese control in Inner Mongolia.<sup>91</sup>

As our theoretical framework lays out, in situations where a weak external patron is an ally or neutral state to the host state, then the latter is more likely to accommodate the ethnic group, and the ethnic group is more likely to be loyal and exhibit low levels of mobilization. When this weak external patron turns into an enemy state, then we are expecting to see the host state using more repressive measures against the ethnic group—aiming for further integration of the group within the majority society—and the ethnic group is likely to exhibit low levels of mobilization. The ethnic Mongol case exhibits these dynamics.

Between 1949 and 1959, when China and the Soviet Union still enjoyed a friendly relationship, MPR and China also had cordial diplomatic relations. The PRC recognized Mongolian independence in a joint communiqué following the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance signed in 1950.<sup>92</sup> During this period, Chinese assistance reached MPR, and trade between the two sides was frequent.<sup>93</sup> As predicted, China's policies toward Inner Mongolia during this period were accommodating. In agricultural areas, where land reform was the most pertinent, the official IMAR policy guideline was to struggle against Han Chinese landlords first and Mongol landlords second. Furthermore, in terms of land redistribution, Mongol peasants were to receive 10 to 20 percent more land than their Han Chinese counterparts.<sup>94</sup> Pastoral areas experienced different policies from agricultural areas. There was no effort to collectivize property as the herds remained the property of their owners; instead, they were to be herded jointly by the members of the community.<sup>95</sup> Inner Mongolia also expanded its territory to include several Mongol-populated areas in the northeast provinces in China. Contacts between the Mongols on both sides of the border were encouraged, and China adopted the Cyrillic script used in MPR for the Mongolian language in IMAR.<sup>96</sup> In the meantime, China also allowed MPR to set up a consulate in Hohhot, the capital city of Inner Mongolia, and permitted cross-border grazing for Mongol herdsmen.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Christopher P. Atwood, "Sino-Soviet Diplomacy and the Second Partition of Mongolia, 1945-1946," in *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan*, ed. Stephen Kotkin and Bruce A. Elleman (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 156.

<sup>92</sup> Elizabeth Green, "China and Mongolia: Recurring Trends and Prospects for Change," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 12 (1986): 1137-63, 1145.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Rupen, *How Mongolia is Really Ruled: A Political History of the Mongolian People's Republic, 1900-1978* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), 183.

<sup>94</sup> Hao and Qimudedaoerji, *General History of Inner Mongolia* (Beijing: Renmin Press, 2006), 571.

<sup>95</sup> Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 70.

<sup>96</sup> Green, "China and Mongolia," 1347.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

Sino-Soviet relations, however, began to deteriorate significantly in the late 1950s. As a satellite state of the Soviet Union, MPR joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance under the leadership of the Soviet Union, and its foreign policy toward China became more hostile. In 1963, MPR demanded that China recall its assistance laborers and followed the Soviet Union in attacking Mao.<sup>98</sup>

With these international developments as a background, China's policies toward Inner Mongolia also changed. Political movements gained momentum in Inner Mongolia, demanding the purge of ethnic Mongol cadres who were suspected to be Mongolian nationalists.<sup>99</sup> Ulanhu's policies also started to attract more and more criticism; they were branded as anti-class struggle and interpreted as an attempt to build an independent kingdom and promote ethnic separatism. Needless to say, Ulanhu was eventually purged from power. The Chinese government pursued policies that would increase the distance between the IMAR and the USSR. For example, the Cyrillic script was banned and the traditional Mongolian script revived by the late 1950s.

Ethnic Mongols' responses to the CCP's policies were also quite consistent with our theoretical prediction. Because MPR, as the external patron, was a relatively weak power, there was no major political mobilization by ethnic Mongols in China during this period. More importantly, in contrast to the Uyghur case in which the USSR supported separatism in Xinjiang after the Sino-Soviet Split, the Soviets did not actively pursue such a policy toward Inner Mongolia.<sup>100</sup> As a result, ethnic Mongols focused primarily on maintaining a certain level of cultural and linguistic autonomy and preserving their pastoral tradition. Also consistent with our expectations were Ulanhu's preferential policies that tried to maintain the distinctive nature of Mongolian society. In fact, the only major popular movement in Inner Mongolia emerged in 1981 after the Cultural Revolution.<sup>101</sup>

Overall, the ethnic Mongol case further supports the validity of our theoretical framework. Although domestic factors such as Mao's radicalization policies did play a significant role in shaping the conditions in Inner Mongolia, we also demonstrated that the close ties between MPR and the

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1350.

<sup>99</sup> Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia*, 76-77.

<sup>100</sup> We recognize that MPR was a satellite of a very powerful state, the USSR. It seems, however, that since the Sino-Soviet Split, Moscow intended primarily to keep the independence of MPR, rather than aiming for the unification of MPR with Inner Mongolia. See Sergey Radchenko, "Mongolian Politics in the Shadow of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2005/6): 95-119; Sergey Radchenko, "The Soviets' Best Friend in Asia: The Mongolian Dimension of the Sino-Soviet Split" (working paper, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, November 2003).

<sup>101</sup> William R. Jankowiak, "The Last Hurrah? Political Protest in Inner Mongolia," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, nos. 19-20 (1988): 279-80.

USSR had an important impact on the Chinese government's perception and policymaking in Inner Mongolia during the period under study.

#### KOREANS

Ethnic Koreans are relative newcomers to China. Most of the ethnic Koreans today can trace their ancestry to waves of Korean migration into Northeast China (Manchuria) since the mid- to late nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup> Early migrants were poor peasants fleeing famine in Korea and settled in Northeast China. The Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 also drove many Koreans into China in an effort to escape Japanese colonial rule. Despite their recent immigrant status, large numbers of ethnic Koreans participated very early on in the Communist movement that developed in Northeast China and were also the first to join the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>103</sup>

Ethnic Koreans' history in China is relatively short, and as a group they maintain strong emotional as well as cultural ties to their kin group residing in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>104</sup> Since 1948, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea) gained its independence, ethnic Koreans in China enjoyed the support of an external kin state. Given the Communist origin of Kim Il-song's regime and its links with the CCP, the two countries have had a friendly relationship ever since their founding. Also, compared to China, North Korea was a much weaker power. Thus, in this situation, we have an ethnic group that enjoys the support of a friendly and weaker external patron. As our theoretical framework would predict, in this configuration the host state is more likely to use accommodationist policies toward this ethnic group, and the ethnic group is more likely to be loyal and exhibit low levels of mobilization. This is exactly what happened.

To begin with, the PRC negotiated with North Korea to settle the ethnic Koreans' citizenship issue. At the PRC's founding in 1949, the key problem regarding the Korean migrants in China was whether they should be given Chinese citizenship or be repatriated back to North Korea. Because of the brotherly relationship between Beijing and Pyongyang, this issue was settled through diplomatic negotiations between the two countries. Beijing decreed that all Koreans living in the three northeastern provinces would automatically be granted Chinese citizenship, and those living outside of these three provinces (only a small number of people) would become citizens of the

<sup>102</sup> Zhehuan Lin, "Studies on the Social Changes and Development among the Chinese Koreans," (PhD diss., Central University for Nationalities, Beijing, China, 2007), 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> Bernard Vincent Olivier, *Implementation of China's Nationality Policy in the Northeastern Provinces* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 33-34.

<sup>104</sup> There is also a settlement pattern for the ethnic Koreans in China relative to the group's ancestral homes in Korea. In Yanbian, most ethnic Koreans can trace their ancestors to North Korea, and the ancestors of many ethnic Koreans in Heilongjiang were from South Korea.

DPRK, although they could still legally reside in China.<sup>105</sup> Thus, the overwhelming majority of Korean migrants in China became Chinese citizens, were officially recognized as one of the fifty-five ethnic minority groups in China, and granted autonomous status. In 1952, Yanbian was designated as an autonomous region for the ethnic Koreans.<sup>106</sup> In the meantime, ethnic Koreans were also granted quite substantial political privileges within China. They were represented by several high-profile officials within the upper echelons of the CCP, the Chinese government, and the Chinese military.<sup>107</sup>

The PRC also allowed significant space for cultural autonomy for ethnic Koreans in China. With regard to education, ethnic Koreans were permitted to set up a school system from primary school to university with the Korean language as the main language of instruction—something unusual for an ethnic group given the number of Koreans. Indeed, Yanbian University started operating in 1949 and was the first minority university in China with Korean as the main language of instruction. In the National University entrance exam, ethnic Korean students also had the option of being tested in Korean. Outside of Yanbian, Korean schools were set up in other ethnic Korean-populated areas in the northeast.<sup>108</sup> Circulating in Yanbian and the three northeastern provinces were many Korean-language magazines and newspapers, with the *Yanbian Daily News* and *Heilongjiang Daily News* being the two biggest newspapers published in Korean in China.

Meanwhile, the ethnic Koreans also demonstrated enthusiasm and loyalty toward the CCP and its various political and military movements. Most significant is the active participation of Chinese Koreans in the Korean War. Many ethnic Koreans joined the People's Volunteer Army of China to fight against the US-led UN troops. In Yanbian, about six thousand young Koreans joined the army and more than one hundred thousand people overall were involved in the logistics of the war.<sup>109</sup> Bernard Olivier points out that for the ethnic Koreans in China, "[i]t was their duty to defend the People's Republic of China, their adopted country, and was also their moral obligation, as Koreans, to help their brethren in their ancestral homeland, Korea."<sup>110</sup>

The ethnic Koreans also welcomed the land reforms carried out by the CCP in Yanbian. They joined the Mutual Aid Teams for wet paddy rice cultivation, and collectivization proceeded more smoothly in ethnic Korean

<sup>105</sup> Jing Li, "Studies on Chinese Koreans' Self-Identification" (PhD diss., Central University for Nationalities, Beijing, China, 2007), 61.

<sup>106</sup> The name "region" was later changed to "prefecture" to reflect its relatively small size compared to the provincial level autonomous regions, such as Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang.

<sup>107</sup> Chae Jin Lee, "The Political Participation of Koreans in China," in *Koreans in China*, ed. Dae-Sook Suh and Edward J. Shultz (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

<sup>108</sup> Olivier, *Implementation of China's Nationality Policy*, 92.

<sup>109</sup> Li, "Studies on Chinese Koreans' Self-Identification," 58.

<sup>110</sup> Olivier, *Implementation of China's Nationality Policy*, 59.

areas than in many Han Chinese areas.<sup>111</sup> They also reported a high percentage of CCP party membership. Seventy-eight percent of party cadres at all levels in Yanbian were ethnic Koreans in 1952. This was an impressively high percentage, especially if one considers that the actual percentage of Koreans in Yanbian was lower.<sup>112</sup> Even during radical upheavals, such as the Great Leap Forward, ethnic Koreans kept their faith in the socialist system, and people still expressed revolutionary enthusiasm. One reason for this, as Olivier notes, is that “the socialist system granted the Koreans a feeling of equality and security no competing capitalist market economy could give a politically and economically dependent minority nationality.”<sup>113</sup> Another explanation is that for ethnic Koreans there was no clear alternative to China. Socialism and the Communist Party were the only things imaginable because ethnic Koreans were only exposed to China and North Korea, both Communist countries. The other Korea—South Korea—was no ally with China. In fact, South Korea did not establish diplomatic relations with China until 1991. Communication with South Korea was banned as it was branded a “puppet state of the American imperialist.” Thus during this period, South Korea’s policies were not as relevant as North Korea’s for the Chinese Koreans.

As we have seen in the ethnic Korean case, a weak external patron—North Korea—that was an ally of China led to accommodationist policies by the Chinese government. In the meantime, ethnic Koreans also showed their loyalty toward the Chinese regime while trying to maintain some level of cultural autonomy.<sup>114</sup>

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

We found evidence that the existence of external support for a non-core group has a significant impact on the nation-building policies followed by the host state. Moreover, the interstate relations between the external power and the host state significantly impact the nature of the nation-building policies pursued by the latter toward the non-core group in question.

PRC policies toward ethnic groups were indeed quite mild and accommodating in the beginning. From 1949 to 1956, China’s priority was to consolidate its power, and for that it needed support from ethnic group elites. This is a major reason why no radical policies were carried out during these

---

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>114</sup> In fact, South Korea did not act as an external homeland at all for this population until the collapse of the Soviet Union. See Harris Mylonas, “The Politics of Diaspora Management in the Republic of Korea,” *The Asian Institute for Policy Studies, Issue Brief No. 81* (2013): 1–12.

early years. Thus, CCP policies toward ethnic groups in this period were less intense than the ones toward the majority Han Chinese.

After the consolidation of power, however, we can see a convergence in policies toward ethnic minority areas and Han Chinese ones. Mao's regime followed more radical policies starting in 1956, after the Hundred Flower Movement, and then again in 1958 with the Great Leap Forward. During these two periods, we can speak of radicalization of the CCP's policies toward its ethnic minority population.

Nonetheless, the most dramatic repressive measures toward the Tibetans and the Uyghurs were employed only after the externally supported rebellion of the former and the Sino-Soviet split followed by the great exodus to the Soviet Union of the latter. Similarly, the CCP's policies toward the Mongols also underwent the biggest change after the Sino-Soviet Split and MPR's full embrace of the Soviet Union. Chinese Koreans in Yanbian did not experience repression and in fact were accommodated, despite the radicalization of the CCP policy, because of the role of DPRK as an ally and the absence of policy toward the ethnic Koreans in China from South Korea.

One may argue that Chinese nation-building policies were causally prior to the interstate relations with external patrons of various ethnic groups in China. In other words, our argument may suffer from endogeneity. According to this logic, Sino-US relations might have been better during the 1950s and 1960s if only China had treated the Tibetans better. However, we do know that US-PRC relations during this period were primarily dictated by the Cold War dynamic and US policy of containing Communism. Moreover, Sino-US relations did improve dramatically in the early 1970s, during the Nixon administration's rapprochement toward China, but without any positive change in China's policies toward ethnic groups preceding it. Similarly, the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations did not hinge upon China's treatment of ethnic minorities; rather, it was a result of an ideological rift between Mao and Khrushchev starting in the late 1950s.

Another point of contention may be that our proposed explanation does not take into account the potential impact of reputation and learning that was discussed in our theory section. The reputation dynamic refers to a government's current state policy choice toward a minority being based on an anticipation of future problems from other minorities. The empirical record on this point is blurred. The PRC treated the most restive ethnic group, the Tibetans, with initial concessions by signing the 17-Point Agreement; but it is unclear how publicized this was to other groups across large, multiethnic China. Furthermore, the state propaganda machine controlled the presentation of this agreement. Over time, there was pressure by some CCP elites in Tibet—but not exclusively—against the special treatment of political Tibet and a push for radicalization of policy. It would, however, be hard to argue that this elite pressure was merely aiming at a reputation effect. It was



rather a push originating from an ideological conviction and/or attempt to demonstrate revolutionary fervor.

Relatedly, a case has been made that ethnic groups learn from the experiences of other groups and become more restive when they face a government that has a reputation for making concessions. Again, turning to the empirical case, the flow of information was heavily controlled by the state during Mao's rule. More importantly, communications were still underdeveloped. China was a vast country with poor road infrastructure, thus rendering the spread of information across groups harder—especially if the CCP did not want that to occur. From the discussion above, it becomes clear that the roles of both reputation and learning are conditioned by a state's information environment. In this sense, liberal regimes may be more likely to experience such dynamics. In the context of mid-twentieth century China, the information environment was heavily controlled and manipulated by the CCP moderating the effect of these dynamics.<sup>115</sup>

Important policy implications follow from our argument. In recent decades, the CCP is increasingly relying upon its growing economic power to entice or subdue its otherwise “rebellious” ethnic minority people so as to foster its national integration process.<sup>116</sup> With the increasing expansion of China's infrastructure and transportation system, Beijing encourages the movement of goods and people in and out of its otherwise isolated inland provinces, which comes with large waves of Han Chinese migration and settlement. Tibetans and Uyghurs, however, continue to challenge the CCP's rule and the Chinese state's claim of sovereignty, as seen in recent events of riots and unrest in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009.<sup>117</sup> Such “internal colonialism” policies therefore appear to have their limits and might actually inflame local conflict if they are not accompanied with more opportunities for social mobility. However, the main takeaway for external powers (like the United States) that may want to support certain ethnic groups (for humanitarian or strategic reasons) is that their support—more often than not—may lead to more troubles for these groups. Indeed, as one scholar of Tibet laments, “A decade of American belligerence has not produced much tangible benefit to the majority of Tibetans in exile, except for those

---

<sup>115</sup> To be sure, reputation and learning processes are relevant for both the host state and the ethnic group. Unfortunately, learning and reputation arguments cannot say much about when a government or an ethnic group will choose to focus on past behavior of an actor, current signals during a bargaining game, or future expectations from an interaction. This realization complicates the picture. There is no theory to help us determine these choices a priori.

<sup>116</sup> Barry Naughton, “The Western Development Program,” in *Holding China Together: Diversity and National Integration in the Post-Deng Era*, ed. Barry Naughton and Dali Yang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>117</sup> For an analysis of the Tibet unrest in 2008, see Tsering Topgyal, “Insecurity Dilemma and the Tibetan Uprising in 2008,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 69 (2011). For an analysis of the Xinjiang riot in 2009, see James A. Millward, “Introduction: Does the 2009 Urumchi Violence Mark a Turning Point?” *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 4 (2010).

on Washington's payroll. And for the vast majority of Tibetans—those in China—American belligerence has done the opposite of what was intended, strengthening the power of hard-line officials whose policies have resulted in a serious long-term threat to Tibetan culture.”<sup>118</sup>

Understanding the foundations upon which contemporary Chinese policies build is key to proposing reforms. Such an understanding can also inform the lively discussion on China's national interest in Beijing, Washington, and beyond. Tibet and Xinjiang both present issues that are part of China's core interest and a major part of US-China relations. Perceptions of unnecessary meddling by the United States or other external powers on these issues unfortunately only lead to further recalcitrance by the Chinese state in pursuing hard-line policies to defend those core interests. Both external powers and China should consider the impact of their current policies and recalibrate them. However, for the United States and the West in general, it seems the best way to work on these issues is first to improve interstate relations with China and only then lobby for human rights improvements.

This is not solely an issue relevant in Sino-US relations; it is embedded in a general debate over the effects of external military intervention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine on state-minority relations.<sup>119</sup> Although the developments discussed here may look unique, there are important theoretical implications for the analysis of contemporary cases—which go beyond the Sino-US case—that flow from this article. In our search for a solution to state-minority problems, we can no longer ignore the role that external involvement (covert or overt) on the side of a non-core group may play;<sup>120</sup> the nature of the relationship between the external actor supporting that non-core group and the state hosting it;<sup>121</sup> and, last but importantly from our perspective, the importance of the relative power balance between the external backer and the host state in the

---

<sup>118</sup> A. Tom Grunfeld, “Tibet and the United States,” in *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development, and Society in a Disputed Region*, ed. Barry Sautman and June Teufel Dreyer (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 341.

<sup>119</sup> For more, see Alex J. Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect: The Global Effort to End Mass Atrocities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Julia Hoffmann and André Hollkaemper, eds., *Responsibility to Protect: From Principle to Practice* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2012); Timothy W. Crawford and Alan J. Kuperman, eds., *Gambling on Humanitarian Intervention: Moral Hazard, Rebellion, and Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2006); Alan J. Kuperman, “The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (March 2008): 49-80; Stephen J. Solarz and Michael O'Hanlon, “Humanitarian Intervention: When is Force Justified?” *Washington Quarterly* 20 (1997): 3-14; William Demars, “Waiting for Early Warning: Humanitarian Action After the Cold War,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 8, no. 4 (1995): 390-410.

<sup>120</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001); Daniel Byman, Taylor Seybolt, “Humanitarian Intervention and Communal Civil Wars,” *Security Studies* 13, no. 1 (2003): 33-78; David Carment, Patrick James, and Zeynep Taydas, *Who Intervenes? Ethnic Conflict and Interstate Crisis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006).

<sup>121</sup> Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*.

planning of state policies toward this non-core group. Taking into account these dynamics can help the international community prevent exclusionary policies and make wiser decisions surrounding the politics of military interventions.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their helpful comments on previous drafts of this article, the authors would like to thank Navin Bapat, Wilder Bullard, Tim Crawford, Bruce Dickson, Taylor Fravel, Sheena Greitens, Henry Hale, Lisel Hintz, Jeehye Kim, Mark Kramer, Kendrick Kuo, Colin Mackerras, Corine Sprigle-Fesler, Sean Roberts, and the editors and anonymous reviewers of *Security Studies*.