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The Chinese Communist Party's National Minority Policies: An Analysis of Geopolitical Determinants

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**The Chinese Communist Party's National Minority Policies:
An Analysis of Geopolitical Determinants**

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Introduction

When analysts are tasked with determining what an adversary like China fears, they seldom provide an answer as nuanced as ‘ethnic division’ or a five-mile-long border dispute; instead, they point the finger at broad-reaching concepts like impending Western influence. Despite the popular narrative that the prospect of Western influence keeps CCP officials up at night, the real fear of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is division. The Chinese government hopes that when foreigners and Chinese alike look at a map, they won't see a centimeter-thick black line outlining Tibet, Inner Mongolia, or Xinjiang. To the CCP this line is a symbol of division—ripe to inspire chaos and threaten party power. Instead, they hope the world sees an uninterrupted sea of red, indivisible and intimidating.

Plagued by centuries of humiliation and foreign occupation, Chinese dignitaries, from as early as the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC), saw a relationship between national unity and a strong, impenetrable Chinese State. China has long struggled to balance the needs of national minorities with the goals of the Communist Party. As a result, swift attempts to strengthen national unity through infrastructure development and land cultivation projects in minority-dominated regions have yielded unfortunate hardships for the inhabitants. As long as national unity is the key to maintaining China's status as a global superpower, meeting national production quotas and narrowing the poverty gap will take precedence over the needs of ethnic minorities. In the United States' quest to understand and anticipate China's actions, it has incorrectly assumed that incorporating China into multilateral organizations and liberal trade treaties, would produce a change in China's social attitudes. Rather, China has used its involvement in these organizations

to take advantage of liberal world-order practices, so as to benefit from free-trade while maintaining traditional Chinese attitudes with regard to human rights and democracy. The Communist Party's treatment of ethnic and national minorities has become increasingly aggressive amid the economy's rapid growth. It is imperative that we do not mistake modern CCP national minority policies as being a race-driven political statement. Rather, we must study the historical context in which Chinese fear of dissent is based and anticipate the future moves of the CCP by seeing autonomous region subjugation through a lens that considers the geopolitical importance of autonomous region lands.

During the 20th century, China's approach in dealing with national minorities served as a function of nation-building. Plagued by a constant fear of division and invasion, Chinese officials sought ways to mobilize and unify dispersed groups in the mainland. Today, although China's fear of financial market disruption replaced its fear of physical foreign occupation, the goal remains the same – assert Chinese identity across the mainland and maintain party power.

In the last decade, the CCP has instituted numerous policies in ethnic autonomous regions aimed at progressing infrastructure development and promoting national production; the sudden and drastic nature of these policies has led the international community to label China's development strides as a repressive form of Han-chauvinism—the promotion of Han Chinese as the superior Chinese ethnicity. The CCP's progress in language nationalization and religious eradication in ethnic autonomous regions understandably supports the characterization of CCP national minority policies as race driven, however, this is not the case. In examining the tumultuous period known as the Century of Humiliation (1839-1949) two things will become clear: (1) why

national unity and the illusion of land autonomy became the central focal points of the last three decades of CCP domestic policy and (2) that national minorities and the central Chinese government have a long standing history of cooperation. I argue that modern Chinese national minority policy is the product of a nation traumatized by centuries of foreign occupation (i.e. British, Russian and Japanese), and not intended as a means of racial subjugation. The implementation of CCP policies targeting national minorities coincides with the rise of China's market based economy, suggesting that controversial unification policies are not racially motivated, but rather, are policies the CCP sees as vital steps taken to sustain economic growth and rival the US as an international powerhouse.

Chinese minorities constitute less than 9% of China's total population but occupy over 60% of the country's total landmass, primarily along international borders, disputed territory, and resource-rich regions essential to Chinese economic prosperity. The legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party depends on its ability to deliver a healthy Chinese economy, thus the protection of sea lanes critical for the transport of energy and the establishment of military facilities to protect China's growing global interests are of the utmost importance.¹ Consequently, the CCP deals with national minorities according to current party standing. Although the CCP cares more about controlling minority lands than minorities themselves, they see minority control as an essential function of the State's livelihood because of the significance of the lands on which they reside. The CCP does not hate Tibetans, Mongolians, Uyghurs or any other of the 56 officially

¹ Shullman, David O. "Protect the Party: China's Growing Influence in the Developing World." *Brookings*, Brookings, 2 Jan. 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/protect-the-party-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-developing-world/>.

recognized national minority groups in China; they hate the idea that cultural differences could lead to secession and a weakened Chinese state. In accepting the narrative that CCP attitudes towards national minorities are racially motivated, the international community risks incorrectly interpreting China's foreign and domestic policy agenda.

To denote the importance of the geopolitical factors behind CCP national minority policies, I have divided this paper into two main sections. The first section will focus on a period in Chinese history known as the Century of Humiliation, dating from 1839 to 1949. This period is characterized by one hundred years of internal and external battles which resulted in significant losses of territory, international standing, party control, and Chinese national pride. I will discuss how significant historical events such as the 1911 Revolution, and Wars of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression heavily influenced modern-day Chinese sentiments surrounding unity, nationalism, and state-minority relations. This historical background will provide context for the future development of national minority policy and explain how the CCP justifies its harsh unification tactics.

The second section will focus on how the sentiments of past generations have translated into modern-day national minority policy. I will provide an overview of national statistics on ethnic makeup, land distribution, and natural resource accumulation. Additionally, I will introduce the CCP's Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy, analyze its language, and show that this document intends to allow minorities regional autonomy in name only. Finally, I will give a detailed account of three regions with contentious minority-state relations: Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang. I will conclude the section by analyzing the historical context in which these

contentious relations began to show that the tensions incurred are the result of the Chinese Communist Party's need for geopolitical unity in order to rival the U.S. as a hegemonic world power and not an attempt to promote racial subjugation and Han-chauvinism.

Part I: The Century of Humiliation

The Century of Humiliation is best known in Chinese history as a classic underdog tale, in which the Chinese people suffered hopelessly at the hands of foreign aggressors until Mao Zedong and the Communist Party lifted China from its seemingly cemented place in history just as King Arthur liberated the sword from its stone. This period of history begins with the First Opium War (1839-42) and ends with the reunification of China under Mao in 1949. The 18th century began as promising for the Chinese; luxury goods including silk, porcelain, and tea were in high demand and the isolationist attitudes of the Qing court provided China with much bargaining power in maritime trade relations. The British, however, dissatisfied with Qing trade subjugation, began to grow and sell opium through the British India Company to Chinese smugglers, effectively reversing the Chinese trade surplus. The Qing Emperor became alarmed by the number of opioid-dependent citizens and the amount of silver leaving the country and instituted laws to crack down on illegal British opium imports. These laws sent the British into a frenzy of entitlement, demanding free trade, open access to Chinese ports, and extraterritorial privileges. In the subsequent battle, the British Royal Navy decimated Qing troops. The First Opium War culminated in 1842 with a Chinese loss and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing – the first of what became known as the “unequal treaties” for their heavy concessions. The treaty granted the British all they asked and more: indemnity, extraterritoriality, the opening of an additional five

trading ports, and the secession of Hong Kong to the British Empire. This conflict foreshadowed what would be the beginning of China's losing streak for the next 100 years.

The significance of this launching point cannot be overstated. Prior to the First Opium War China had little familiarity with the capabilities and desires of countries outside of Asia – what they came to learn shocked them and fundamentally altered their worldview. Following this event, nations across the globe began recognizing and predicting its future impacts; in 1959 an American author wrote, “The Chinese have one very broad generalization about their own history: they think in terms of ‘up to the Opium war’ and ‘after the Opium war’.”² The subsequent years of Western oppression and unequal treaties brought about civil unrest and rebellion as China was forced to open more ports, grant more extraterritoriality privileges, lost more land (Japan annexed Taiwan and parts of Manchuria), and saw more independence/separatist movements – the culmination of which led to the end of imperial rule in China.

The Century of Humiliation brought about not only geographic transformation, but an ideological transformation as well. Chinese scholars began asking questions about the nature of foreign aggression and if there was a place for such aggression in Chinese culture. A wide range of answers emerged, some leaning towards the idea that Chinese culture was noncompetitive in nature, and others believing that in order for China to grow stronger in the international arena, it

² Kaufman, Alison A. “The ‘Century of Humiliation’ and China’s National Narratives.” *USCC.gov*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 10 Mar. 2011, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf?source=post_page

would have to adopt Western methods.³ Eventually, a consensus began to emerge that the problem lay not with China, but with the West.⁴ The CCP has since adopted this idea, purporting that China is the “perpetual and innocent victim of Western nations’ continued determination to subjugate it”, and that the CCP was, and still is, the only entity strong enough to save China from the clutches of foreign aggressors.⁵

Chinese officials constantly remind their citizens of the generational trauma they must never forget and the humiliation their ancestors faced. Propagating this sentiment does two things: first, it keeps Chinese citizens forever indebted to the Chinese Communist Party, and second, it provides a launching point for party propaganda. Chinese officials and foreign analysts have both said that during the Century of Humiliation the Chinese endured three kinds of loss: a loss of territory; a loss of control over its internal and external environment; and a loss of international standing and dignity.⁶ In the eyes of the Chinese people, these three losses represent injustices in need of rectification; in the eyes of the Chinese Communist Party these three losses now stand as pillars with which they justify harsh unification tactics and the “One China” dream.

In the coming sections, I will analyze three significant historical events that occurred during the Century of Humiliation in order to contextualize the three losses (territory, control and dignity)

³ Kaufman, Alison A. “The ‘Century of Humiliation’ and China’s National Narratives.” *USCC.gov*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 10 Mar. 2011, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf?source=post_page

⁴ *Ibid*, 3

⁵ *Ibid*, 4

⁶ *Ibid*, 5

and further assert the importance of this period in establishing unity sentiment that carries over into Chinese national minority policy today.

1911 The Chinese Revolution

The 1911 Revolution, also known as the *Xinhai* revolution, saw the end of imperial rule in China, and the beginning of a civil war between nationalists (*guomindang*) and communists (*gongchandang*) over control of the newly established Republic of China. Although the revolution succeeded in establishing a new republic it failed to unify Chinese people across ethnic and class lines for the party cause. The conflict began with a mutiny in Wuchang, and spread rapidly through China; cries for independence broke out, most notably in Mongolia and Tibet. Thousands fought to break away from what they saw as a turn towards a Han-only government. Ultimately, the revolution left China in a power vacuum filled by regional warlords at odds with the ruling nationalist government. The civil conflict between Qing loyalists and anti-Han groups began the modern Chinese tradition of ethnic unification. The 1911 Revolution did more than just draw hard lines between loyalists and nationalists, it shed light on the minute ethnic and class divisions that exist within China's provinces to this day.

In the beginning, the idea of the revolutionaries was to institute a government that would be more aggressive in pushing back against foreign demands. By 1911, China had lost the first two Opium Wars, lost Hong Kong to Britain, made foreign concessions and open treaty ports under duress, granted Westerners extraterritoriality, given up Taiwan and parts of Manchuria after the Sino-Japanese Wars (1894-95), and surrendered to Japanese claims to China's Northeastern territories following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). This combination of growing foreign aggression, frustration with the Manchu Government embodied by the Qing court and escalating

demand for a unified China created conditions ripe for revolutionary action.⁷ Under this pretext two leaders emerged who would lead much of the civil conflict between nationalists and communists until the communist victory in 1949; they were Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Yuan Shikai.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen is known today as the father of the Chinese Democratic revolution. Dr. Sun sought to rally separatist groups throughout China against the Qing government and did this by first introducing the concept of ethnicity. He introduced the term *minzu* (ethnic group) and identified the five separate ethnic/national groups in China as: Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, Hui.⁸ Dr. Sun used this distinction to determine that the Han represented the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population and mobilized them against the Qing government who were of the Manchu ethnic group. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the idea of *minzu* proved influential as it helped unify ethnic/national groups and convinced them to stay in the new China and contribute to the socialist reconstruction.⁹ However, as the CCP further developed, they drew inspiration from Russian nationality theory to further define minorities. Russian nationality theory states that, "a nation is a historically formed stable group with a common language, common region, common economic life and common psychological characteristics."¹⁰ This becomes problematic as self-identifying national groups do not always speak the same language or live in the same place as a result of long-term assimilation.

⁷ "The Chinese Revolution of 1911." *U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute*, U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/chinese-rev>.

⁸ WANG, SHUPING. "The People's Republic Of China's Policy on Minorities and International Approaches to Ethnic Groups: A Comparative Study." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 11, no. 1/2 (2004): 160. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24675260>.

⁹ *Ibid*, 161

¹⁰ *Ibid*

In the years leading up to the conflict, revolutionary leaders across China began conferring to merge groups in order to defeat the Qing government. Dr. Sun Yat-sen was the leading proponent of this movement. His unification efforts formed the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance (*tongmenghui*). On October 10, 1911, Dr. Sun Yat-sen in collaboration with the Literary Society (文學社) and the Progressive Association (共進會), formed what they called the New Army and staged a mutiny against Qing soldiers in Wuchang. By the end of the night, 500 Manchu soldiers were dead and 300 captured.¹¹ Following the success of the Wuchang Uprising, revolutionaries sent telegrams to their friends and counterparts in other provinces calling for them to follow suit. Eighteen provinces in Southern and Central China responded and agreed to support the revolutionary cause against the Qing government.¹² This event subsequently became known as the Wuchang Uprising and officially began the 1911 Revolution. Dr. Sun was then elected president of the provisional revolutionary government in Nanjing and announced the founding of the Republic of China on January 1, 1912.

The Qing government began to realize that they would not be able to stop the revolutionary forces on their own. Their armies were weak and dispersed, and their emperor at the time was an 11 year old boy. They needed someone who was well respected, had enormous military capabilities and had the ability to reason with the revolutionary forces; to this end, they elected Yuan Shikai as the new prime minister of what remained of Qing territory.

¹¹ Wei, George, et al. "China: How the Empire Fell: Joseph Esherick, C.X. George Wei: Taylo." *Taylor & Francis*, Taylor & Francis, 6 Dec. 2013,

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9780203509333/china-joseph-esherick-george-wei>.

¹² Liu, Xueyao. and China (Republic : 1949-). Meng Zang wei yuan hui. *Qing ji Min chu Zhong Meng zhi fen he guan xi / [Liu Xueyao zhuan]* Meng Zang wei yuan hui Taibei shi 2002

Yuan Shikai had a long and illustrious military career. His fame began with his participation in the First Sino-Japanese War as a commander of the Chinese garrison forces in Korea and subsequently rose to power by establishing the first modern army of China – the Beiyang Army. Additionally, he was a major sponsor of economic, education and constitutional reforms. The Qing court hoped that Yuan could reason with the revolutionaries and if that failed, they hoped his army could beat them into submission.

Dr. Sun and the revolutionary forces in the South may have succeeded in Wuchang, but their army was weaker than Yuan Shikai's Beiyang Army in the North. Dr. Sun and the Qing court negotiated, using Yuan Shikai as an intermediary, and came to the agreement that Dr. Sun would turn over his position as President of the Republic of China to Yuan Shikai in exchange for the abdication of the child emperor.

Although the Qing Dynasty was no longer in power, Yuan Shikai adhered to their plan, reasserting a policy of “imperialist sovereignty” and making active efforts to prevent regional secession. When Dr. Sun Yat-sen envisioned the new republic, only eighteen provinces were included – all of which were Han majority provinces. Places like Northeast China (Manchu), Outer and Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan), and Tibet, which had predominantly minority makeups were excluded.¹³ Yuan's vision for the new republic differed

¹³ Liu, Xueyao. and China (Republic : 1949-). *Meng Zang wei yuan hui. Qing ji Min chu Zhong Meng zhi fen he guan xi / [Liu Xueyao zhuan] Meng Zang wei yuan hui Taibei shi 2002*

from Dr. Sun's; he saw the importance of incorporating all of China's regions into the new republic and fought hard to prevent Mongolia and Tibet from declaring independence.

For now, we will take a step back and examine how the actions of Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Yuan Shikai inspired independence movements in Mongolia and Tibet. The events of 1911-1912 were monumental for these regions and provide a basis for understanding the ethnic and territorial tensions between these groups and the CCP today.

Tibet

In February 1910 the Qing army invaded Lhasa, Tibet. The Dalai Lama was forced into exile in British India and the anti-Han sentiment was high among Tibetans. As the 1911 Revolutions unfolded, Tibetan troops defeated the Chinese Sichuan Army and the 13th Dalai Lama was able to return to Lhasa by the end of 1912. The fall of the Qing Dynasty inspired the Tibetan independence movement and the nationalist wave brought the Dalai Lama publicly to question the Tibetan government's relationship with the Qing Dynasty and the new Republic of China. After the revolution, PRC interim president, Yuan Shikai, used the phrase "the Republic of Five Races", including Manchurians, Hans, Mongolians, Muslims and Tibetans as a way of establishing unification. He asked the Dalai Lama to participate in the Republic and in exchange the Dalai Lama would be given back the title that the Qing rescinded during the Dalai's exile in India.¹⁴ The Dalai Lama responded as follows:

¹⁴ Kobayashi, Ryosuke. *Tibet in the Era of 1911 Revolution*. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 28 Mar. 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2014.11869072>.

After serious consideration you have decided to restore my rank and titles and to stop fighting in Tibet, and also to prosper the happiness of the five nations... I never asked him for any rank or title either there or on any subsequent occasion. The real truth is that Tibet is the Priest of China, but China, with intent to bring Tibet under subjection, destroyed many monasteries and countries. Now, at the time of the actual withdrawal of the Chinese troops (from Tibet), it is not agreeable to the people of Tibet to allow the Chinese and Tibetans to combine, after explaining matters which have been in dispute.¹⁵

The 13th Dalai Lama's response not only openly rejected Yuan Shikai's offer, but also drew attention to the insidious way in which Yuan Shikai tried to change the Tibet-China relationship from one of priest-patron to that of subjugator-subjugated.

Although the Dalai Lama officially spoke for the Tibetan people, there remained a large network of unofficial leaders in Tibet's borderlands whose political opinions directly clashed with the Lama's. *Tusi*, meaning native chieftain, ruled relatively autonomously in Tibet's border regions, specifically Eastern Tibet. The geographic barriers of Tibet's Eastern borderlands made it difficult for the Qing court to exert its influence consistently, as such, they heavily relied on their good standing with *Tusi* to maintain favorable trading conditions and guarantee safe passage. This network of Eastern Tibetan merchants provided animals and labor to aid in the transportation of people, goods and information across major routes, making them critical in the connection between the Qing, the new republic of China and the Dalai Lama's government.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kobayashi, Ryosuke. "Tibet in the Era of 1911 Revolution." *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2014, pp. 91–113., <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2014.11869072>.

¹⁶ Ibid

The post-Qing period brought about the dismantling of the *Tusi* system; the Dalai government replaced indigenous leaders with government appointed officials. Some *Tusi* retreated to inner Tibet and others remained in the border region, seeking Chinese recognition to reaffirm their power. This began a complicated situation for *Tusi* as they were forced to admit suzerain status with either the Qing, the new republic or the Dalai Lama.

Tibetans' attitudes during this period differed greatly depending on their proximity to inner Tibet, but the PRC's attitude towards Tibet remained consistent with the idea of Chinese suzerainty. Some *Tusi* adhered to the new republic and Yuan's call for "the Republic of Five Races", not because they believed in the power of ethnic unity, but because it was the only way for them to regain autonomy and power in the borderlands. Similarly, other *Tusi* pledged allegiance to one side or the other in an opportunistic move to reassume their power.

Wavering allegiances and declining Sino-Tibet relations drew the attention of international governments, namely Britain and Russia. Britain feared closer Russia-Tibet relations would threaten British India; conversely, Russia sought to expand its empire into neighboring Tibet and Mongolia on the basis that Russia would be useful in protecting Bhuddist interests. In 1913 a conference took place known as the Simla Conference in which Indian, British, Tibetan and Chinese representatives gathered to determine the exact border areas that would makeup Tibet and what parts would remain independent as opposed to under Chinese sovereignty. Prior to the 1911 Revolution, the Dalai Lama had approved of the overlap in authority between the Qing and the Dalai government over border territory; however, after the Qing collapse, the Dalai Lama changed his position and demanded exclusive authority over these territories. In order to find

common ground between the demands of the Dalai Lama and Yuan Shikai, Henry McMahon, foreign secretary of British India and the chief British negotiator of the conference at Simla, proposed dividing Tibet into “Outer Tibet”, which would be under the control of the Dalai



Lama’s government, and “Inner Tibet”, to function as a buffer zone against the Chinese mainland.¹⁷

This disputed line separating Tibet and British India became known as the McMahon line as seen in Figure 1¹⁸.

Neither the new Chinese government nor India agreed to this proposal, leaving the draft to be signed by only Britain and Tibet. The threat of foreign acknowledgment of Tibetan independence weighed heavily on the republic. In 1912 the British presented the Chinese Foreign Office with a memorandum declaring their recognition of Tibet’s sovereign rights:

¹⁷ Kobayashi, Ryosuke. “Tibet in the Era of 1911 Revolution.” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2014, pp. 91–113., <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2014.11869072>.

¹⁸ Khan, Amir Ullah. “McMahon Line; Disputed Border.” *Research Gate*, Mar. 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/fig1_321715208.

His Majesty's Government, while they have formally recognized the suzerain rights of China in Thibet [Tibet], have never recognized, and are not prepared to recognize, the right of China to intervene actively in the internal administration of Thibet [Tibet], which should remain, as contemplated by the treaties, in the hands of the Thibetan [Tibetan] authorities.¹⁹

The British were conflicted about Tibetan independence. They worried that Tibet would seek Russian backing as Mongolia had done and threaten their ability to secure India's northern border.

Ultimately, Tibet's claim of independence failed because it was not recognized by China or the international community. Still, the effects of the 1911 Revolution in Tibet highlighted the ease with which foreign powers, in this case Britain, could exercise their dominance over domestic affairs in China. This incident solidified Chinese fears of foreign powers using minority areas for self serving interests.

Today, we see this fear reflected in policies dealing with land autonomy in minority dominated regions. In the past, speeches made by CCP spokespersons that addressed concerns about stability and welfare in minority autonomous regions, rarely circulated beyond the community in which the speech was directed. Today, however, these speeches attract worldwide attention. Last year, at an event marking 70 years since the People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet (or as the

¹⁹ Tenpa, Lobsang. "The 1913 Mongol–Tibet Treaty and the Dalai Lama's Proclamation of Independence." *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2012, pp. 3–29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/tibetjournal.37.2.3>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

CCP describes it, a “peaceful liberation of Tibet”), a senior Chinese official, Wang Yang, noted in his speech, “[O]nly by following the CPC leadership and pursuing the path of socialism, can Tibet achieve development and prosperity.”²⁰ Additionally, he asserted that all religions in China are “Chinese in orientation”. Speeches like this have begun attracting harsh criticisms from outside reporters and denoting ethnic tensions as the Achilles’ heel of the Chinese Communist Party.

Today, we can see remnants of this traumatic period reflected in CCP policies in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The idea of “the Republic of Five Races” is at the core of every policy decision made by the Communist Party, meaning they firmly believe that the loss of even one region could mean the destruction of the entire party’s legitimacy. Speeches like the one above are made regularly by the Party and display clear signs of post-Qing trauma.



Mongolia

Situated between Russia and China with over 2,000 miles of border land on either end, the Mongolian struggle has always been one of competing foreign influences (Figure 2)²¹. As with Tibet, which

²⁰Yang, Wang. “Full Text of Speech by Wang Yang at Meeting Celebrating 70th Anniversary of Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.” *Full Text of Speech by Wang Yang at Meeting Celebrating 70th Anniversary of Peaceful Liberation of Tibet*, 19 Aug. 2021, http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2021-08/20/c_653372.htm.

²¹ “Inner Mongolia Map.” <https://balance10.blogspot.com/2020/09/Inner-Mongolia-Drama.html>.

threatened enormous border conflicts, the Republic of China sought to maintain control over Mongolia because of its proximity to Russia.

As the newly instituted president of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yat-sen sought to transition from dynastic rule to a republic as smoothly as possible. He relied on the “the Republic of Five Races” campaign, particularly in Mongolia as a means of ensuring a smooth transition. Within two months of the Wuchang Uprising, however, on December 1, 1911, the Outer Mongolian region declared independence from the Qing.

The call for national unity did not resonate well, particularly with Mongolians. During the Qing Dynasty, Mongolians did not view themselves as a part of China; their cultural differences were too severe. After the Qing collapse, Mongolians were even less inclined to establish relations with a new Chinese government; they viewed the new Republic of China government as a government for the Han Chinese and the Han Chinese only. Additionally, similarly to *Tusis* in Eastern Tibet, the idea of a “Republic of Five Races”, under which all would have equality, was not appealing to Mongolian nobles who enjoyed special privileges under Qing authority.

On March 12, 1912, the Interior Minister of the Bogd Khaan Government (Mongolian Government) responded to a telegram from a Republic of China official stating that, “Mongolians and the Han people have different philosophies and religions, and they speak different languages. One is in the sky and the other is on the ground. They never become one.”²² This response from

²² Tachibana, Makoto. “The 1911 Revolution and ‘Mongolia’: Independence, Constitutional Monarchy, or Republic.” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 28 Mar. 2014, pp. 69–90., <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2014.11869071>.

the Bogd Khann disturbed Yuan Shikia and other representatives of the new republic. Not only had their legitimacy been publicly challenged, as had also happened with the Dalai Lama in Tibet, but the master plan for a unified China grew increasingly distant. China's loss would become Russia's gain, as their enemy to the North sought to capitalize on the instability created by the Qing collapse, and gain access to crucial resources including gold, rare furs and valuable minerals.

In 1881, Russia and the Qing Dynasty signed a treaty known as the Treaty of Saint Petersburg. The treaty promised the return of Russian occupied lands, known as Ili, in Northern Xinjiang, to China, and granted Russia favorable trading privileges in Mongolia.²³ When the Qing government collapsed, Russia worried about the future of their long-standing trade agreement; as Russia pushed for more control in the Inner and Outer Mongolian regions, the Republic of China sought to rid Mongolia of Russian influence and terminate the treaty. Negotiation talks reached a stalemate in the period between 1901-1911. The inauguration of Yuan Shikai as president of the Republic of China reignited discussions aimed at revising the 1881 treaty. The issue of Outer Mongolia became a nominal Russian victory, as Russia's right to free trade in Outer Mongolia was confirmed, however the issue of Inner Mongolia remained.

When Yuan Shikai took over as president of the Republic of China, he made many efforts to persuade Inner Mongolia to join the republic, including appealing to Mongolian nobles. He did this by setting up the Mongolian and Tibetan Secretariat. The Secretariat, among other things,

²³ Williams, E. T. "The Relations between China, Russia and Mongolia." *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1916, pp. 798–808., <https://doi.org/10.2307/2186929>.

produced the “Articles on Treatment of Mongolians”; it consisted of nine articles, granting Mongolian nobles the following: the right to govern their original jurisdictions (Article 2); privileges of nobilities and banners (Article 3); payments for nobilities (Article 7); and other rights they had enjoyed during the Qing Period.²⁴ Despite these incentives, facts on the ground pointed to growing discontent for Chinese presence by middle class Mongolians and farmers.

According to incomplete Japanese population estimates from 1915, 28.3% of the land in the Inner Mongolia region was cultivated, 10.2% in the Mongol areas and 18.1% in the Chinese areas. Additionally, 129,000 people lived in the Mongol areas, whereas 2,493,000 lived under Chinese jurisdiction; the 1:19 ratio meant that Mongols were being dispossessed in their own land by the Chinese, thus making the prospect of independence tempting.²⁵

The Inner Mongolian princes were divided: independence or republic? The princes agreed to accept a constitutional monarchy, but warned that if a republican government formed in China, the Mongols would declare independence. One Mongol prince, Darkhan, summed up Mongol attitudes by saying, “If the Manchu court were destroyed and a republic established, all the Mongol princely families which have been subordinate to the Manchus would be under no obligation to continue their relationship with the Chinese form of government.”²⁶

²⁴ Tachibana, Makoto. “The 1911 Revolution and ‘Mongolia’: Independence, Constitutional Monarchy, or Republic.” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 28 Mar. 2014, pp. 69–90., <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2014.11869071>.

²⁵ Valliant, Robert B. “Inner Mongolia, 1912: the Failure of Independence.” *Mongolian Studies*, vol. 4, 1977, pp. 56–92. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43193048>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

²⁶ *Ibid*

The situation in Inner Mongolia was growing tense. The majority of Mongol princes were simultaneously publicly declaring their intent to submit to the republic while also building armies and purchasing Japanese ammunition as if preparing for battle. Mongol princes debated the feasibility of fighting for independence given that the Chinese occupied the majority of their essential farm lands, had a larger and more willing army and given that Outer Mongolian attempts to provide aid to Inner Mongolia were being curtailed by the Russians. Intelligence reports from all sides gathered confusion. At a meeting of the Juu-uda League, the Mongol princes ultimately decided that it was best that they work with the republic to preserve nobility privileges rather than fight for independence. They realized that without foreign aid and united leadership a war against the Chinese would be short lived and have devastating economic and social impacts for the Inner Mongolian region.²⁷

The division of Mongolia weighed heavily on the new Republic of China. Yuan Shikai and the rest of China did not officially recognize Outer Mongolia's independence until after WWII in January 1946. The issue of Inner Mongolia occupied every newspaper and household conversation in China in 1912-1913. As reported in China's first and short lived modern magazine, *North-West Magazine (1912-13)*, "the issue of bringing together the Republic of Five Races was crucial to the success of the new republic"; without Mongolia, Chinese officials and citizens alike feared the collapse of their new government.²⁸

²⁷ Valliant, Robert B. "Inner Mongolia, 1912: the Failure of Independence." *Mongolian Studies*, vol. 4, 1977, pp. 56–92. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43193048>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

²⁸ Tighe, Justin. "The Short Life of North-West Magazine: Five Races and Inner Asian Anxieties at the Dawn of the Chinese Republic." *Inner ASIA*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2012, pp. 365–381., <https://doi.org/10.1163/22105018-90000010>.

War of Japanese Aggression

The 1911 Revolution proved significant in instilling a fear of foreign influence into the Chinese psyche. Ravaged by unequal treaties, British, Russian, and Qing occupations and a devastating blow to Chinese confidence after WWI, many thought things could not get worse. Unfortunately, the period between 1930 into the late 1940s came to be an equally devastating chapter for China during its Century of Humiliation. The period from 1931-1946 is known formally in Chinese history as the War of Japanese Aggression. The significance of this period in Chinese history is in the deep betrayals China faced at the hands of Japan and the foreign countries comprising the League of Nations. During this period autonomous regions were able to form local governments and encouraged to establish military forces in order to combat the Japanese. This period sparked great debate over the issue of ethnic minority identities and privileges as well as solidified China's distrust for multilateral institutions.

The two major events of this period are the Mukden Incident (1931) and the Lugou Bridge Incident (1937). To the Chinese, both of these cases represent instances where the international community deliberately turned a blind eye to atrocities committed by the Japanese to the Chinese. Tensions between China and Japan were so severe that both Communists and Nationalists agreed to end their civil war and form the United Front against Japanese Aggression. Despite their best efforts, both parties were unable to rally enough support for the cause and relied on the newly formed League of Nations to come to their aid. When the League refused to interfere, a precedent of distrust in both Western allies and multilateral organizations was established that is still reflected in Chinese policy today.

The Mukden Incident occurred in 1931 when a small explosion destroyed a section of Japanese owned railway track near the city of Mukden. The Japanese took this opportunity to blame Chinese nationalists for the incident and justify invading Manchuria. After Japan invaded the northern Chinese province they claimed all of its resource wealth. The Japanese declared the area to be an autonomous state and renamed it *Manchukuo*.

China, being a founding member state of the League of Nations, appealed to the League for aid in removing and sanctioning Japan. The U.S. did not feel their interests in the area were strong enough to warrant sanctions given that they had just entered the Great Depression. Instead, the U.S. issued the Stimson Doctrine, a borderline insulting gesture stating the United States would not recognize any treaty or agreement between Japan and China that violated U.S. rights or agreements.²⁹ Other member states were similarly unwilling to commit to military force against Japan and made empty gestures. The League's lack of action during this incident allowed for the success of Japanese Aggression, the dismemberment of Chinese territories and subsequent second Sino-Japanese War in 1937.

In 1937, the Lugou Bridge Incident (also known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident) began the Second Sino-Japanese War and signaled the start of WWII in Asia. The Marco Polo bridge was the only road and rail link between Beijing and Nanjing – the city from which Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalist party governed. In the summer of 1937 the Chinese garrison at Wanping, unaware of Japanese military training happening near the bridge, believed they were under attack

²⁹ Birdwell, Ian. *Issue Brief League of Nations: Japanese Aggression in East Asia*. Old Dominion University, 2020, <https://odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/mun/docs/ib-league-japanese-aggression-updated.pdf>.

and fired on the Japanese. From there tensions between the two countries rose. By September of 1937, the Chinese has suffered the loss of over 200,000 Chinese soldiers and the Naging Massacre (also know as the Rape of Nanjing) in which as estmiated 200,000 and 800,000 women were raped and others suffered beheading, bayonet, drowning, mass execution, and being buried alive at the hands of the Japanese.³⁰ The newly formed League of Nations, created to maintain peace in the aftermath of WWI, was composed of states who were deeply scarred by the war's atrocities and apprehensive to sacrifice more young men and resources. The whole world watched as the League of Nations sat on their hands as tensions between the two nations appeared to be escalating to a point where all-out war was inevitable.

The 1911 Revolution and War of Japanese Aggression cemented in the mind's of Chinese citizens general distrust for foreign powers and multilateral organizations. Today, Chinese policy makers react to these past betrayals by forging their own rules in spite of established foreign policy agreements. Years of battling Chinese intellectual property theft, territorial disputes in the South China Sea and Taiwan and moves to establish a new world order under a Chinese sphere of influence are indicative of China's fundamental distrust of today's liberal world order. This applies equally to liberal ideas of gender, ethnic equity and land autonomy. The Communist Party dictates policy as these best for China without regard for the expectations of foreign observers.

³⁰ Yang, Daqing. "Convergence or Divergence? Recent Historical Writings on the Rape of Nanjing." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 3, 1999, pp. 842–65, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2650991>. Accessed 23 April 2022.

Part II: CCP-Minority Tensions & Land Autonomy Policies

The Century of Humiliation laid the foundation for Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) modern national minority rationalizations, paranoias and subsequent policies. As we have learned, the 1911 Revolution brought down a centuries-old way of life. Imperial rule fell forever and brought with it a changing tide in the part *minzu* (ethnic groups) would play in China's national politics. The idea of "the Republic of Five Races", as introduced by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, professed that the evolutionary melding of China's people and cultures would give rise to a new organic *Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nationality/race) with a distinctly Han cultural and racial core.³¹ Frequent foreign invasion, particularly by Japan, and nationalist independence movements solidified fears of Chinese Republic officials that ethnic division would be the achilles heel of the Chinese State. In the following pages we will see how these traumas have metastasized into modern day Chinese national minority policy that reflects tension and hostility around issues of territorial autonomy.

Statistical Overview of National Minority Makeup

After the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, the Chinese government began formulating a series of ethnic policies intended to promote ethnic equality and prevent secession. These policies include: (1) ways to identify and classify ethnic groups, (2) a system of regional ethnic autonomy, and (3) a set of preferential treatment policies.³² By 1965, the PRC had established five autonomous regions based on ethnic majority makeup –Inner Mongolia,

³¹ Leibold, James. "Positioning 'Minzu' within Sun Yat-Sen's Discourse of Minzuzhuyi." *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 163–213. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41933382>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

³² Wu, Xiaogang, and Guangye He. "An Empirical Assessment of Ethnic Policy in Urban China." *China Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2018, pp. 185–216. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26435652>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

Xinjiang, Guangxi, Hui, and Tibet as highlighted in pink (See Figure 3)³³. The population of

Percentage of ethnic minorities



1. Tibet	91.8%
2. Xinjiang	65.6
3. Guangxi	39.0
4. Ningxia	37.4
5. Inner Mongolia	23.1

Note: Around 8.4% of China's total population are minorities. Figures are for 2018 except Tibet, which is for 2016, latest available.

Source: National Bureau of Statistics

national minorities practicing regional autonomy accounts for 71% of the total population of national minorities, and the areas in which regional autonomy is practiced accounts for 47% of the entire territory of China. Today, of China's 56 officially recognized national/ethnic groups, the Han make up over 92% of the total population while Mongols, Tibetans and Uyghurs collectively constitute just over 1.6% of the total population.³⁴

The Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy

Adopted in 1984, the Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy is the document from which all modern ethnic autonomous region policy stems. Its origins are in the struggles both Chinese minorities and Han Chinese faced during the Century of Humiliation, particularly during the period of Japanese Aggression. The Long March between 1934-1936 occurred through much of minority dominated territory, allowing the Red Army to collect substantial information on the Mongol and

³³ Xiao, Eva, et al. "Beijing Accelerates Campaign of Ethnic Assimilation." *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 1 Jan. 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-accelerates-campaign-of-ethnic-assimilation-11609431781?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_5&cx_artPos=2&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s.

³⁴ "Libguides: Chinese Ethnic Groups: Overview Statistics." *Overview Statistics - Chinese Ethnic Groups - LibGuides at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, 25 Mar. 2022, https://guides.lib.unc.edu/china_ethnic/statistics.

Hui minority regions. From this, two important documents came: the *Outline of Questions Concerning the Hui Minority* and the *Outline of Questions Concerning the Mongol Minority*.³⁵ These documents set the precedent for the importance of national minority representation and jurisdictional authority.

The Law dedicates numerous articles to ensuring equitable conditions in minority autonomous regions, in theory, giving minorities considerable freedom within their autonomous regions. Articles 17 and 18 mandate that regional government positions are reserved for minority community members; Article 23 mandates hiring practices that prioritize national minorities and Articles 27 and 28 afford inhabitants of autonomous regions the right to protect the land's natural resources. Additionally, minorities receive special considerations including exemption from the One-Child policy (1979-2015) and receive preferential consideration on the college entrance exam (*gaokao*).³⁶ Over the years, however, the gap in economic development, literacy and poverty between autonomous regions and coastal cities has continued to grow. Consequently, in 2001, a series of new amendments were added to address this gap. The preamble makes clear that issues of regional liberties will come second to national progress; it begins:

Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory, **the people of various nationalities in the ethnic autonomous areas shall..., adhere to the people's democratic dictatorship, support reform and opening, follow the construction of a socialist road with**

³⁵ Zheng, Qian. "Policies of Regional Ethnic Autonomy in China: China's Ethnic Policy through the Eyes of Trudeau." *Omnilogos*, Cengage Learning, 2011, <https://omnilogos.com/policies-of-regional-ethnic-autonomy-in-china/>.

³⁶ Wu, Xiaogang, and Guangye He. "An Empirical Assessment of Ethnic Policy in Urban China." *China Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2018, pp. 185–216. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26435652>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2022.

Chinese characteristics...develop socialist market economics... speed up the economic and cultural development of the ethnic autonomous areas...and diligently strive for the common prosperity of all nationalities by transforming the motherland into a socialist country that is prosperous, democratic, and culturally advanced.³⁷

This document, like many others in Chinese history, reflects Soviet influence; however, there is one fundamental difference: the decision to adopt a system of regional autonomy rather than federalism to ease conflict. In comparing their minority population situation to the Soviet Union's, China found that (1) the ethnic minority population of the Soviet Union accounted for 47% of its total population vs. in China, where the ethnic minority population accounted for only 8% of its total population and (2) following the February and October Revolutions, Soviet minorities split into neighboring states vs. in China, where all national groups united during the Chinese democratic revolutions.³⁸ The PRC preferred a method of governance in which the prospect of secession was nonexistent and national unity was the driving force of the nation.

Recently, the CCP has taken steps to assert greater party control over autonomous regions and limit resistance to economic development plans by appointing non-representative persons to head autonomous regions. In September of 2021 the party appointed Wang Lixia to serve as the head

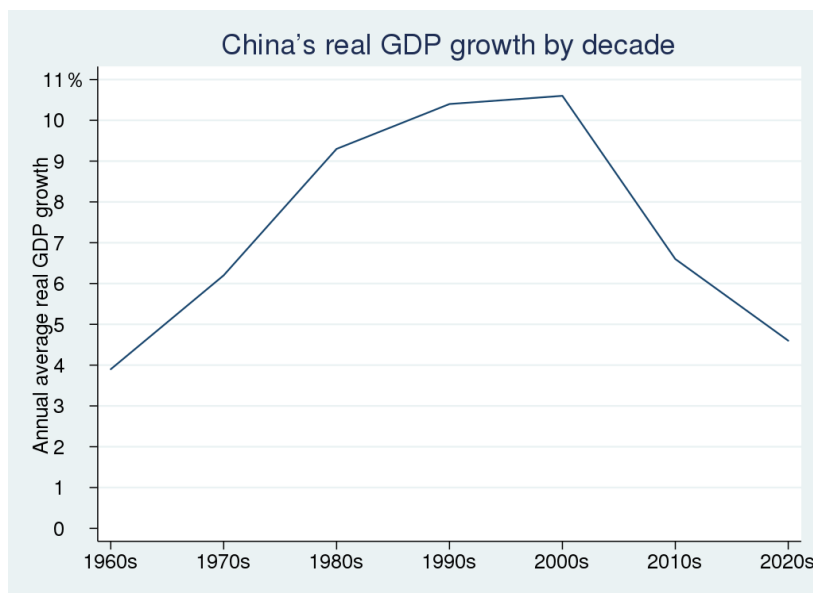
³⁷ "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (Chinese and English Text)." *Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (Chinese and English Text)* | Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 14 Feb. 2006, <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>.

³⁸ "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (Chinese and English Text)." *Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (Chinese and English Text)* | Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 14 Feb. 2006, <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>.

of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) – although she is an ethnic Mongolian, Ms. Wang was born in China’s northeast province of Liaoning, making her the first ever head of the IMAR to be born outside of the region.³⁹ Also in recent months, the party has replaced the ethnic Mongolian head of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission with a Han Chinese director, Mr. Xi, for the first time since 1954.⁴⁰

China’s Market Economy and Autonomous Region Policy

In the late 1980s and early 90s the development of China’s market economy drastically progressed and certain leniencies once afforded to ethnic autonomous regions were being reconsidered. The 7th Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China (1986-1990), called for a 44% increase in gross national output and a



35% increase in total import and export volumes within the next five years. By the 8th Five Year Plan China’s economy was experiencing an average annual growth rate of 10%. Figure 4 shows that the period between the 1980-1990 saw an exponentially higher growth rate

³⁹ Zhai, Keith. “China’s Communist Party Formally Embraces Assimilationist Approach to Ethnic Minorities.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 8 Oct. 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-communist-party-formally-embraces-assimilationist-approach-to-ethnic-minorities-11633702544>.

⁴⁰ Ibid

as compared to the period between 1960-1970.⁴¹ Around the same time, in the early 2000s, a prominent Chinese economist, Hu Angang, and a counterterrorism researcher, Hu Lianhe, began pushing for what they called a “second generation” of ethnic policies inspired by the American melting pot. They claimed that the give-and-take nature of the American melting pot “helped maintain the U.S.’s national unity, development vitality, and social order by minimizing cultural divisions and creating a shared identity.”⁴² The significance of this information is that the implementation of modern policy affecting national minorities coincides with the rise of China’s market economy. A process of prolonged assimilation was one the CCP could no longer afford; quick and seamless Chinese unity became a matter of national security. New policies began to limit the privileges exercised in ethnic autonomous regions, allowing the CCP to move forward with developmental projects with little resistance.

CCP policies targeting national minorities coincide with the rise of China’s market based economy; prior to this era, Chinese national minorities had a long standing history of cooperation (i.e. in their collective efforts to ward off foreign aggressors during the Century of Humiliation) this suggests that unification tactics including language nationalization may appear race-driven on the surface but actually stem from the need to control territory, resources and prevent secession to rival the US as an international power. Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang are among the main autonomous regions where Chinese national minority policy currently

⁴¹ “File:China's Real GDP Growth by Decade.svg.” *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:China%27s_real_GDP_growth_by_decade.svg.

⁴² Xiao, Eva, et al. “Beijing Accelerates Campaign of Ethnic Assimilation.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 1 Jan. 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-accelerates-campaign-of-ethnic-assimilation-11609431781?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_5&cx_artPos=2&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s.

reflects the difficulty analysts have in distinguishing racially driven policy from economically driven policy– I will briefly discuss current conditions in these areas.

Tibet II

The unique geographic nature of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) poses problems for national resource production, border delineation and governance. In recent years, the CCP has been accused of demographic “swamping” – the idea of swamping, elaborated on by the Dalai Lama in 2008, “holds that China’s government has been seeking to solve its problems in Tibet and other ‘ethnic minority’ areas such as Xinjiang by turning local indigenous ethnic groups (such as Tibetans or Uyghurs) into minorities in their own land through a coordinated program of Han Chinese in-migration.”⁴³ Those opposed to a future where China is the premier economic power assert that this is a form of cultural genocide and phrases like “linguistic discrimination” and “forced assimilation” regularly appear alongside discussions on China. The CCP has undoubtedly encouraged Han saturation of the TAR, however, their rationalization has been that this is a means of rectifying the insufficient amount of skilled laborers in the region to meet development quotas, an issue in most remote regions around the world.

The saturation of Han migrants into the TAR has raised concerns regarding participation and representation of Tibetan people within the autonomous region. Efforts to encourage Han immigration to Tibet largely failed in the 60s and 70s because (1) the high elevation and scarcity

⁴³ Fischer, Andrew M. “How Much Does Beijing Control the Ethnic Makeup of Tibet?” *ChinaFile*, ChinaFile, 3 Sept. 2021, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/how-much-does-beijing-control-ethnic-makeup-of-tibet#:~:text=The%20idea%20of%20swamping%2C%20which%20the%20Dalai%20Lama,like%20settle%20colonialism%20in%20the%20Americas%20or%20Australasia.>

of oxygen made many Han physically ill (2) transportation in the TAR was still relatively inconvenient and (3) education levels and development of science and technology was generally lower in the TAR than in other parts of China.⁴⁴ From 2000-2010 the CCP decided to try offering large economic subsidies to encourage Han immigration to the TAR, the total of which exceeded 100% of the TAR GDP from 2010 onwards.⁴⁵ While this policy did succeed in creating economic opportunities to drive people to the TAR, the unintended consequence was that these employment opportunities were almost exclusively dependent on fluency in Mandarin of which only 20% of rural Tibetans possess.⁴⁶ Literacy and education discrepancies between TAR natives and Han are an ongoing issue. The 2019 population survey measured an illiteracy rate of 33% in the TAR (for the population 15 years old and older).⁴⁷ To combat this discrepancy, the CCP announced a policy of “bilingual education” for all schools in minority dominated regions of China. Officially, the policy in the TAR is that both Tibetan and Mandarin languages are prioritized; however, Human Rights Watch’s research suggests that TAR authorities are using a strategy of “cultivated ambiguity in their public statements while using indirect pressure to push primary schools... to adopt Chinese-medium instruction at the expense of Tibetan...”.⁴⁸ Other

⁴⁴ Fischer, Andrew M. “How Much Does Beijing Control the Ethnic Makeup of Tibet?” *ChinaFile*, ChinaFile, 3 Sept. 2021, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/how-much-does-beijing-control-ethnic-makeup-of-tibet#:~:text=The%20idea%20of%20swamping%2C%20which%20the%20Dalai%20Lama,like%20settle%20colonialism%20in%20the%20Americas%20or%20Australasia.>

⁴⁵ Fischer, Andrew M. “How Much Does Beijing Control the Ethnic Makeup of Tibet?” *ChinaFile*, ChinaFile, 3 Sept. 2021,

⁴⁶ “Tibetans.” *Minority Rights Group*, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 5 Feb. 2021, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/tibetans/>.

⁴⁷ Fischer, Andrew M. “How Much Does Beijing Control the Ethnic Makeup of Tibet?” *ChinaFile*, ChinaFile, 3 Sept. 2021,

⁴⁸ Drengbu, Do-lho. “China's ‘Bilingual Education’ Policy in Tibet.” Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch, 22 Aug. 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/03/04/chinas-bilingual-education-policy-tibet/tibetan-medium-schooling-under-threat#>.

criticisms of CCP national minority policy in the TAR center around threats made to parents who allow their children to participate in religious rituals and visit monasteries. In May 2017 a notice was sent to parents at Jebumgang Primary School ordering them to ensure that their children don't "engage in any superstitious or religious activity"....⁴⁹

These policies undoubtedly exacerbate the hardships Tibetans living in the TAR face, however it is important not to mischaracterize these policies as race driven as opposed to economically driven. Drastic gaps in literacy and productivity within regions of the same country historically leads to violent conflict, and with violent conflict comes a decrease in economic productivity. The CCP has sought to eradicate this possibility through language nationalization and resettlement incentives so as to maintain its ambitious plans for economic growth. Although the implementation of the policies falls outside the lines of accepted methods by democratic standards, the CCP has and will continue to disregard those standards if it means protecting national interests.

Mongolia II

Ecological resettlement programs in China have a dual purpose: preventing further environmental degradation and alleviating poverty; interestingly, the World Bank's policy of resettlement, similarly, promotes treating resettlement operations as opportunities for

⁴⁹ Halder, Ben. "China Weaponizes Education to Control Tibet." *Around the World*, OZY, 15 Oct. 2019, <https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/china-undercuts-tibetan-monastery-education-to-control-the-regions-future/96486/>.

development.⁵⁰ However, not all involved in the program feel this way. Mongolians living in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) view this policy as forced removal of indigenous peoples from traditional pastoral lands into Han dominated cities where language barriers are great and economic opportunities for indigenous peoples are scarce. The CCP, however, views this policy as an advantageous opportunity for locals and the state, in which grasslands are given time to recover while pastoralists are given new economic opportunities and livelihoods. Environmental resettlement is widespread in China; in addition to the IMAR, provinces including Qinghai, Tibet and Gansu – where 20,000 herders have been relocated in response to severe soil erosion – are experiencing the CCP’s attempts to safeguard China’s future through environmental protection and development.⁵¹

From the 1970s, when research of ecological impacts in the IMAR began, until the 90s, the CCP’s focus remained on the impacts land degradation would have on local production. However, a sudden increase in natural disasters affecting China, including the flooding of the Yangtze River in 1998 and dust storms from the North wreaking havoc in Beijing, forced the CCP to switch their focus to environmental impacts in the 2000s. These events began a repositioning of state interests.

Similar to Tibet, migration of Han Chinese into the IMAR beginning in the 1970s has strained local resources resulting in mass land degradation in northern China and an increase in disruptive

⁵⁰ Rogers, Sarah, and Mark Wang. “Environmental Resettlement and Social Dis/Re-Articulation in Inner Mongolia, China.” *Population and Environment*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2007, pp. 41–68., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-007-0033-x>.

⁵¹ Rogers, Sarah, and Mark Wang. “Environmental Resettlement and Social Dis/Re-Articulation in Inner Mongolia, China.” *Population and Environment*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2007, pp. 41–68., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-007-0033-x>.

dust storms through Beijing. Today, the IMAR faces environmental policy resembling ecological resettlement, wherein pastoralists are compensated monetarily to stop using their contracted rangelands and to move from the rural pastoral areas to newly constructed neighborhoods. Over 6,000 people were resettled in the pilot phase between 1998 and 2001, and nearly 650,000 more between 2002 and 2008.⁵² This effort by the CCP is meant to curb land degradation and desertification issues.

The human population in the IMAR has increased significantly since 1949, and with them the number of grazing animals – cattle and sheep – has increased eighteen-fold.⁵³ Current estimates conclude that over 90% of Inner Mongolian grasslands are experiencing varying degrees of degradation.⁵⁴ In addition to ecological resettlement, the CCP has made efforts to combat land degradation and preserve the economic interests of the IMAR through billion dollar “green projects” by planting trees in arid regions and cleaning Beijing’s air, but this is not enough.

Undoubtedly the issues that arise with forced resettlement are significant; national minorities feel increasingly threatened at the prospect of abrupt transition from rural to urban living and isolated when they learn how debilitating a language barrier can be. Currently, the disparity in poverty between inland territories like the IMAR and industrial coastal cities like Shanghai are 10% and

⁵² Zhang, Qian. “The Dilemma of Conserving Rangeland by Means of Development: Exploring Ecological Resettlement in a Pastoral Township of Inner Mongolia.” *Nomadic Peoples*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2012, pp. 88–115., <https://doi.org/10.3167/np.2012.160108>.

⁵³ Jiang, Gaoming, et al. “Restoration and Management of the Inner Mongolia Grassland Require a Sustainable Strategy.” *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2006, pp. 269–270., <https://doi.org/10.1579/06-s-158.1>.

⁵⁴ Ibid

0.15% respectively⁵⁵. The CCP views the 10X increase in poverty in inland territories as justification to implement harsh land control policies that are often mischaracterized as policies of forced assimilation. These effects, while damaging, are not the intent of CCP policy makers. The hardships national minorities participating in forced ecological resettlement are experiencing are the unfortunate consequences of CCP efforts to alleviate poverty in primarily minority dominated regions, promote environmental security and increase market production in inland regions.

Xinjiang

The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) remains the focal point in discussions of controversial CCP national minority policies. The XUAR is a vital component of China's trade relations, border security and foreign investment. Residing on China's north-west border, Xinjiang borders eight countries – Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Mongolia, India, and Afghanistan – making it a critical entry point for China into Central Asia, West Asia, and Europe. Additionally, Xinjinag is resource-rich; the XUAR is responsible for producing 30% of China's oil reserves, 34% of its natural gas, 40% of its coal and 87.3% of its cotton.⁵⁶ The XUAR has become a critical hub for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); three of the BRI's six major projects run through Xinjiang, including the “controversial and sensitive”

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Zhou, Qian, and Zoey Zhang. “Investing in Xinjiang: Economy, Industry, Trade, and Investment Profile.” *China Briefing News*, China Briefing News, 29 Apr. 2021, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/investing-in-xinjiang-economy-industry-trade-and-investment-profile/>.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the XUAR is also housing an estimated one million Uyghur Muslims in concentration camps.

Preservation of unity and order within the XUAR is vital in order for China to continue to grow as an international power. Bouts of contested histories of separatist movements and occasional violent extremism began a ‘cultural aggression’ towards the Uyghurs through the 2014 ‘Strike Hard Campaign’. In 2017, President Xi called for a “great wall of iron” to be built to protect China’s national unity and solidarity in the XUAR.⁵⁸ This announcement prompted the CCP to reinforce territorial control and minimize security threats through authoritarian means.

The critical turning point for modern Sino-Uyghur relations occurred in 1986 when the Karakoram highway that connects Xinjiang with Gilgit-Baltistan (an autonomous region administered by Pakistan) was opened for public use. This led to an influx of cultural and religious influences from Muslim countries into China. On one end, Pakistani Muslim preachers began spreading Islamic teachings to the Uyghur communities in Xinjiang and on the other the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan allowed the *mullahs* (Muslim mosque leaders) to interpret *jihad* – while *jihad* has adopted a connotation of violent extremism and terrorism, the word actually means the struggle to overcome one’s own ego and vices to find G-d. As a result of the new access afforded to both communities, some Uyghurs joined the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan

⁵⁷ Wani, Ayjaz. “China’s Xinjiang Policy and the Silence of Islamic States.” *Observer Research Foundation*, ORF, 28 Aug. 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-xinjiang-policy-and-the-silence-of-islamic-states/>.

⁵⁸ “Xi Jinping Wants Building ‘Great Wall of Iron’ for Troubled Xinjiang.” *The Economic Times*, 11 Mar. 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/xi-jinping-wants-building-great-wall-of-iron-for-troubled-xinjiang/articleshow/57594725.cms?from=mdr>.

to fight on behalf of the Northern Alliance or the Taliban.⁵⁹ Throughout the 1980s Uyghur Muslims held numerous anti-China gatherings culminating in 1990 with the Baren incident. Accounts of the Baren incident vary; the official Chinese account is that the attack was initiated by 200 Uyghur terrorists armed with advanced weaponry who attacked Chinese local police forces, while the official Uyghur account is that 200 men marched to the local government office and demanded an end to the mass immigration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang. The 'Strike Hard' campaign began following this incident. However, Sino-Uyghur relations continued to worsen; in February 1997 the largest public anti-China protest in the region occurred near the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan border and the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks prompted China to use the global War on Terror as further justification to target Muslims in Xinjiang.

CCP efforts to reorient Uyghur Muslims in the XUAR have largely failed. The belief that closing the economic gap between XUAR residents and inland Han Chinese through large infrastructure development projects would largely diffuse tensions is long gone. Since 2017 the PRC has spent upwards of \$700 million to construct 1,200 detention camps across Xinjiang where Uyghur Muslims are sent to detention for infractions including wearing a veil, growing a long beard, and violating the government's family planning policy.⁶⁰ Once it became clear to the CCP that it could no longer deny the existence of the detention centers, it adopted a defensive stance, calling the detention centers "vocational schools" that were helping combat extremism, terrorism and provide Uyghur youth with economic opportunities. Chinese officials publicly maintain that the

⁵⁹ Wani, Ayjaz. "China's Xinjiang Policy and the Silence of Islamic States." *Observer Research Foundation*, ORF, 28 Aug. 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-xinjiang-policy-and-the-silence-of-islamic-states/>.

⁶⁰ Wen, Philip, and Olzhas Auyezov. "Tracking China's Muslim Gulag." *Reuters Investigates*, Thomson Reuters, 29 Nov. 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/muslims-camps-china>.

camps have two purposes: “to teach Mandarin, Chinese laws, and vocational skills, and to prevent citizens from becoming influenced by extremist ideas.”⁶¹ Numerous Western countries have spoken out against China’s minority policies in Xinjiang, calling China’s acts “genocide”; at the same time, however, authoritative Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Iran and the Central Asian republics, have supported China’s claims. In the same day that 22 countries wrote a joint letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights calling for action to be taken against China, 37 other (mainly Muslim) countries drafted a joint letter commending China’s efforts in “protecting human and promoting human rights through development”.⁶²

Based on current events, it is difficult to make the claim that CCP policies targeting Uyghur Muslims are not race-based. In Tibet and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region a reasonable argument can be made that indigenous language repression and religious crackdowns are the unfortunate consequences of ambitious government development policy; in Xinjiang the case is more complex. The critical point of assessment here comes from a reflection of the traumas the Chinese faced during the Century of Humiliation. Decades of foreign aggression and occupation, rapes and massacres, have instilled in modern China a zero-tolerance policy for dissenting ideologies, especially those with a proven history of aggression. Additionally, the claim can be made that the CCP equally distrusts all religion; current policies fixated on Uyghur Muslims

⁶¹ Maizland, Lindsay. “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 1 Mar. 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>.

⁶² Berlinger, Joshua. “North Korea, Syria and Myanmar among Countries Defending China’s Actions in Xinjiang.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 15 July 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/15/asia/united-nations-letter-xinjiang-intl-hnk/index.html>.

operate in tandem with those targeting Tibetan and Mongolian Bhuddists as well as the small portion of Catholics and Christians. The Communist Party is an equal opportunity offender, leaving no group apart from agnostic communists untouched.

Conclusion

Chinese national minority policy remains as it did a century ago, a crucial function of securing international power with a featured emphasis on geopolitical control. The period between 1980-2000 saw the largest increases in Chinese national production and the largest decreases in autonomous region land rights. The correlation of the two suggests that China's growing market economy motivated controversial unification policies. With over 47% of Chinese land exercising regional autonomy, the Chinese Communist Party risks dissent and secession from nearly half the country, and with this, the loss of critical resources. From studying the Century of Humiliation, we learned that the threat of division and invasion does not rest lightly on the shoulders of CCP leaders. The weight of this fear necessitates an uncompromising approach to policy application at the first signs of dissent. The CCP's two-pronged approach to preserve national unity, that is to first subdue foreign influence and dissent and second to maintain favorable international trade relations in order to rival the US for international prestige, has resulted in the implementation of policies that rarely consider the implications upon minority-state relations. The brutal enforcement of CCP national minority policies leads many to mischaracterize China's national and regional motives as race-driven rather than driven by economic and geopolitical considerations. Although policies of forced resettlement, language nationalization and religious subjugation are focused in regions with particular ethnic

concentrations (i.e. Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia), these policies are enforced throughout China. The influence of religious figures like the Dalai Lama, the infiltration of radical religion and the pressure to sustain national production quotas are factors that, individually, place enormous strain on national unity, and altogether threaten the power of the Chinese Communist Party.

Inspired by Soviet application, CCP national minority policies allowed political autonomous regions nominal autonomy and preferential treatment (i.e. exemptions from family planning policies and extra points on the national college entrance exam), and depended on these policies to bring about “ethnic fusion” – the integration of national minorities into modern, industrial Han dominated culture. However, incidents from the past two decades have left CCP officials feeling like a new and more aggressive approach toward ethnic unification is in order. Since the Communist Party assumed power in 1949, the Dalai Lama has fled to exile, effectively causing a rift in political loyalties in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, and from the 90s through 2009, hundreds of Uyghur Muslims and Han Chinese have died in and around anti-China protests in Xinjiang. The belief that national minorities would naturally assimilate if given the space and economic opportunities, is now a hope of the past. The new wave of CCP national minority policies, or what President Xi Jinping refers to as the “second generation of ethnic policy”, takes a more aggressive approach, relying heavily on geopolitical control to finally bridge gaps in literacy, poverty and production between autonomous regions and China’s more industrialized and coastal cities. Mr. Xi, the first Han Chinese head of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission since 1954, re-emphasized this idea at a 2020 government conference on ethnic policy. He stated, “forging a collective consciousness of the Chinese nation is central to achieving the Chinese dream of the

great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” with analysts noting that “His nationalist China Dream rests on the notion that the country’s 1.4 billion people share a common identity.”⁶³ Installing a common identity in a country with over 1 billion people is no small feat and cannot be accomplished with gentle nudges.

Interestingly, just as in the year 2000, today the international community continues to misjudge and mischaracterize the actions of the CCP. During his presidency, former President Bill Clinton, sought to bring China into the World Trade Organization (WTO) because he believed closer economic ties between the U.S. and China would bring more cooperation and greater freedom for Chinese citizens. Former President Clinton once said, “[T]he more China liberalizes its economy, the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people”.⁶⁴ He could not have been more wrong. Today, an increasing number of people are asking the question: “Who got China wrong?” and an overwhelming majority point their fingers at the U.S.. Our decades-long hope of convincing China that engaging with liberal economics was mutually beneficial, was nothing more than a gamble, and a bad one at that. The U.S. and many others assumed that the development of China’s market economy would lead them to political liberalization and social transformation, when in actuality, all that has happened is China has taken advantage of the liberal economic system and abused its slow bureaucratic process. China continues to ignore the rules-based order and progress its vision for a new world order by militarizing the South China

⁶³ Xiao, Eva, et al. “Beijing Accelerates Campaign of Ethnic Assimilation.” *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 1 Jan.

2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-accelerates-campaign-of-ethnic-assimilation-11609431781?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_5&cx_artPos=2&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s.

⁶⁴ Davis, Bob. “Who Got China Wrong?” *Foreign Policy*, Foreign Policy, 24 Apr. 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/24/china-review-engagement-economy/>.

Sea, and expanding its sphere of influence under the pretext of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as proposing new global institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). What allows for these bold international moves is the reassurance that major internal threats are contained. The long history of cooperation between China's national minorities and the State show that modern disputes over territorial control are not rooted in a racially subjugating agenda. Modern minority-State disputes have risen as a result of the Communist Party's ambitious expansion plans, the related policies of which have no regard for the feelings of those residing on geopolitically valuable land. China is a country unconstrained by the rules and limitations of the liberal economic order and will continue to enforce brutal internal policies they feel bring them closer to surpassing the U.S. as the global economic power.

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