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**AN INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ETHNIC
CONFLICT IN CHINA**

by

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AN INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Since its creation in 1949, the People's Republic of China has had to deal with problems of ethnic conflict. This is due to China's large and diverse minority population, which accounts for approximately eight percent of the total population, or nearly 100 million people. From 1949 onward, the PRC has struggled to integrate these diverse people into a unified nation. Throughout this period the relationship between the Chinese government and many of the country's minorities has been fraught with conflict. This thesis examines the role of the institutions used by Beijing to manage its relationship with minorities in China. It includes a discussion of current theoretical research on ethnic conflict, a detailed explanation of the institutional approach to the study of ethnic conflict, and the application of this institutional approach to the Chinese case. In applying the institutional framework to the PRC's experience, this thesis examines the different ethnic conflict management strategies employed by Beijing from 1949 to present and evaluates the response of China's minorities to each strategy. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that the institutions used by the Chinese government since 1949 have not been effective at mitigating ethnic conflict in China. Additionally, this study demonstrates that an institutional approach is highly useful in understanding the causes of ethnic conflict in the Chinese case.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

Since its creation in 1949, the People's Republic of China has had to deal with problems of ethnic conflict. This is due to China's large and diverse minority population, which accounts for approximately eight percent of the total population, or nearly one hundred million people.¹ This significant minority population is classified according to fifty-five distinct ethnicities, each of which has its own unique culture and history. From 1949 onward, the Chinese Communist Party has struggled to effectively integrate these diverse people into a unified nation. Nevertheless, throughout this period the relationship between the Chinese government and many of the country's minorities has been fraught with conflict. Numerous incidents of ethnically motivated violence, from the 1959 revolt in Tibet to the 1997 uprisings in Xinjiang and beyond, mar the CCP's record with China's minorities.

Institutional theories of ethnic conflict assert that the institutions employed by a government to manage its relationship with ethnic minorities significantly influence the nature and scope of ethnic conflict within a state. Therefore, this study examines the role of the institutions used by Beijing to manage its relationship with minorities in China. This is accomplished through an investigation of the different ethnic conflict management strategies employed by the Chinese government from 1949 to present. Included is a discussion of the various institutional mechanisms used by Beijing as well as an appraisal of their impact upon China's minorities. The relationship between the Chinese government and three of the country's largest minority groups the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang serves as the case studies for this analysis.

¹ June Tüefel Dryer, *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*, 3rd ed (USA: Addison Wesley Longman Inc, 2000), 277-280.

B IMPORTANCE

The significance of this study lies in both its contribution to the study of state/minority relations as well as in its application to the Chinese case study. From a theoretical perspective, this study sheds light on the complex relationship between the state and minority groups by examining how government institutions affect the formation of ethnic identity and influence the nature of ethnic conflict. Through this approach, the different strategies for ethnic conflict management will be assessed and their consequences evaluated. The purpose is to demonstrate the link between institutional mechanisms and the nature of ethnic conflict within states. In its application to China this study is relevant because it shows how those institutions that have been used by Beijing have influenced the development ethnic conflict in China. This is significant given China's large minority population and the difficulties Beijing has experienced in dealing with these groups.

The Chinese state has significant strategic and economic interests in the territories inhabited by the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang, but these groups are culturally distinct from the Han Chinese and often times have more in common with China's neighbors than the government in Beijing. The result is a state with strongly vested interests in areas inhabited by people who do not identify with that state, creating the potential for ethnic conflict. The inability of the PRC to effectively manage this conflict bears directly upon both China's domestic stability and on the stability of the region as a whole.² The significance of this research project therefore lies in enabling a better understanding of the relationship between the state and minorities in China and the role played by government institutions in intensifying or mitigating ethnic conflict.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study begins with a brief overview of contemporary research concerning the causes of ethnic conflict. The purpose of this is two-fold. One is to present the institutional approach to the study of ethnic conflict and explain why it has been chosen

² Thomas Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation?* (Armonk: ME Sharpe Inc., 1989), 3.

over other methods as the theoretical basis for this study. The other is to introduce relevant terms and concepts prior to beginning any discussion of the Chinese case study. In attempting to understand the relationship between the state and its minorities it is important to examine the role played by the institutions which structure that relationship. Beverly Crawford defines such institutions as “sets of rules, compliance procedures, and [the] moral and ethical behavioral norms embedded in those rules and compliance procedures.”³ Such institutions create the framework within which the state and society interact by determining what is both possible and acceptable for each actor. These institutions structure the incentives for compliance with the rules and procedures for participation in society.⁴ Therefore the strength of these institutions is linked directly to the stability of the state, as if such institutions are weak, the state will be incapable of ensuring compliance and will subsequently lose control over society.

It is in this regard that political institutions become relevant in the study of minority groups and the conflicts they may have with the state. Crawford argues that when these political institutions focus on ethnic classification, they legitimize it, and make it a relevant part of the political process.⁵ When ethnicity is included in political institutions it becomes a basis for inclusion or exclusion from politics and the distribution of resources. The result is that such ascriptive institutions reinforce, intensify, or even create ethnic identities, as they are the means through which participation in society is predicated.⁶ This arrangement can engender resentment towards the state on the part of minorities because of a perceived or actual political and economic inequality.

The subsequent conflict between the state and minority groups can either be channeled into effective political participation or repressed by a strong state. The potential for ethnic conflict exists when state institutions recognize ethnicity, minority

3 Beverly Crawford, "The Causes of Cultural Conflict: An Institutional Approach," in *The Myth of Ethnic Conflict: Politics, Economics, And "Cultural" Violence*, ed. Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz (International Area Studies, 1999), 17.

4 Shaheen Mozaffar, "The Institutional Logic of Ethnic Politics: A Prolegomenon," in *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*, ed Harvey Glickman (Atlanta: The African Studies Associated Press, 2004), 44.

5 Crawford, *Causes of Cultural Conflict*, 21.

6 Mozaffar, *Institutional Logic of Ethnic Politics*, 46-47.

groups perceive themselves to be disadvantaged, and no effective means for reconciliation is built into the system. The strength of these institutions are therefore important in two ways, one in that they determine how firmly ethnic classification is embedded in the political process and two they are the basis of the state's ability to channel or repress conflict. These factors combine to determine that nature and the intensity of ethnic conflict within a state.

Alternative explanations to the institutional theories of ethnic conflict include primordialism and democratic/economic liberalization. Primordialists argue that ethnic conflict is predicated on ancient hatreds that pre-date modern states.⁷ In the absence of a higher authority these ancient hatreds boil over, resulting in contemporary conflict. This argument however does not explain the influence political institutions can have in cultural conflicts by creating rewards and punishments based on ethnicity.⁸ It also does not explain how state actions can actually create certain ethnic groups, a point which is made salient when discussing the case of Zhuang in China. The Zhuang ethnic classification was created by the Chinese government in 1953 in order to organize and control the numerous tribes that inhabited China's southern regions.⁹ Prior to this period these tribes did not identify with one another as a single group, but over time they have come to identify themselves as a cohesive ethnic identity. The development of such a group cannot be accounted for within a primordial analytical framework.

The second alternative explanation for ethnic conflict centers on democratization and economic liberalization. This argument suggests that as politics and economics becomes liberalized, the focus of societal participation shifts from the ethnic group to the individual, whose rights are now protected under higher legal standards.¹⁰ This has the effect of reducing the strength of ethnic identity, and subsequently, ethnic conflict. However, the research of Beverly Crawford indicates that such liberalization more often

7 Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics" in *New States, in Old Societies and New States*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 106-107.

8 Crawford, *Causes of Cultural Conflict*, 12.

9 Katherine Palmer Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 4.

10 Crawford, *Causes of Cultural Conflict*, 15.

brings increased disparity of wealth between minority groups and the majority within a state, actually strengthening ethnic identity and giving rise to more conflict.¹¹ This point is also relevant to a discussion of ethnic conflict in China, where it appears that the current PRC policy is to focus upon economic development within minority regions in order to defuse ethnic discontent. The data on economic development within China's minority regions, however, suggest that the disparity in wealth continues to grow.¹² The inability of both primordial and liberalization theories to adequately account for the trend seen in China's relations with its minorities lends credence to the application of an institutional approach to the study of ethnic conflict in China.

Having discussed the importance of institutions in the creation and maintenance of ethnic conflict, the question then becomes what role do institutional arrangements play in the creation, intensification, or mitigation of such conflict? The research of Esman, Wolff, Schneckener, and Bercovitch suggests different strategies and institutional mechanisms that can be implemented in order to manage ethnic conflicts. Two of these strategies are the depluralization of society and the legitimization of ethnic identity.¹³ Depluralization of society is an attempt to achieve ethnic homogeneity within society. The mechanisms that can be employed to accomplish this include, genocide, expulsion, and assimilation, which may be forced or gradual. Often times, however, rather than removing ethnicity from a state, this strategy foments ethnic identity as groups cling more tightly together to avoid their destruction at the hands of the state. This breeds animosity towards the state and actually increases the chances of ethnic conflict.¹⁴

Legitimization strategies recognize the distinctiveness of minority groups and attempt to explicitly include that in the political process. The mechanisms at work can include domination, power-sharing, and minority rights. Domination entails the control of the state apparatus by a single ethnicity at the exclusion of other groups who are

11 Crawford, *Causes of Cultural Conflict*, 16.

12 Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 112.

13 Milton Esman, "Ethnic Pluralism: Strategies for Conflict Management" in *Facing Ethnic Conflicts: Toward a New Realism*, ed. Adreas Wimmer, Richard J. Goldstone, Donald L. Horowitz, Ulrike Joras and Conrad Schetter (Oxford: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 204.

14 Esman, *Ethnic Pluralism*, 205.

institutionally ordained to remain inferior.¹⁵ Power-sharing arrangements however, create a more equitable distribution of power between groups, where groups jointly administer a common polity.¹⁶ The differences between domination and power sharing can sometimes be subjective, as what may be labeled a power-sharing arrangement may in fact be a form of domination via co-opted rule or limited rule.¹⁷ This is the case when minority elites are allowed to participate politically in order to create the appearance of legitimacy, but do not provide any actual minority representation in government.

Finally, minority rights create a system where minority groups are given special legal privileges and protections in order to make them feel secure within a state. Power-sharing or minority rights arrangements can be established via negotiation between the state and minorities or by third party mediation.¹⁸ An institutional perspective however, suggests that a legitimization of ethnicity strategy has serious consequences in that it overtly includes ethnicity into the political process. As such, it creates the potential for minority groups to feel excluded from power on the basis of their ethnicity. This will cause them to mobilize around their ethnicity and become more prone to engage in ethnic conflict with the state.¹⁹

The examination of the PRC's experience with its minorities contained in this study supports the above assertions made by institutional theorists such as Crawford and Esman. In periods where the Chinese government employed a legitimization of ethnicity strategy and attempted to overtly include ethnicity in its politics, minority groups engaged in conflict with the state due to perceived inequality and mistreatment. Conversely, in periods where the Chinese government pursued a depluralization strategy and targeted minority groups for assimilation, these groups resisted the state by clinging

15 Esman, *Ethnic Pluralism* 206.

16 Ulrich Schneckener, "Models of Ethnic Conflict Regulation: The Politics of Recognition" in *Managing and Settling Ethnic Conflicts: Perspectives on Successes and Failures in Europe, Africa, and Asia*, ed. Ulrich Schneckener and Stefan Wolff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 25.

17 Ibid., 22.

18 Jacob Bercovitch, "Managing Internationalized Ethnic Conflict," *World Affairs* 166, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 56-68.

19 Crawford, *Causes of Cultural Conflict*, 22-23.

even more tightly together to avoid their destruction. This study seeks to demonstrate this through the following examination of the relationship between the Chinese government and the country's minorities in the period between 1949 and present.

D. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

This study applies the institutional approach to the Chinese case study by first dividing the time between 1949 and present into four periods based on the ethnic conflict management strategy pursued by Beijing during each period. These periods are: the early communist period from 1949 to 1957, the time of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution from 1958 to 1976, the early reform period from 1977 to 1989, and finally the post-Tiananmen Square period from 1989 to present.

Within each period a four-step process is used to break down and assess the role played by government institutions in influencing the development of ethnic conflict in China. The first step of this process is an examination of the Chinese government's intent with regards to the country's minority population during each period. This will entail a discussion of the historical domestic and international context that influenced the choice of ethnic conflict management strategy. The question here is what did Chinese leaders want to accomplish in the relationship with China's minorities through the use of the different ethnic conflict management strategies? The second step involves an assessment of how the Chinese Communist Party attempted to achieve its objectives. In short, what specific actions did the Party take in order to meet its objectives with regards to ethnic minorities? The third part of this process is an analysis of the response of minority groups to the actions taken by of the state in each period. Finally, an assessment is made of whether or not the minority response to the actions of the government was what Chinese leaders had intended. This entails a comparison between the actual minority response, the government's intended outcome, and the outcome predicted by the institutional theorists described above. The focus here is in determining whether or not minorities responded as the way intended by the state and/or in the way predicted under the institutional theoretical framework?

Through this examination two important questions about the development of ethnic conflict within the PRC can be answered. First, how effective have the strategies employed by the Chinese government been in mitigating ethnic conflict? Second, how accurately does the institutional theoretical framework explain what has occurred in China? If the institutional approach proves effective in explaining the development of ethnic conflict in the Chinese case, this then lends validity to its application to the study of other ethnic conflicts as well. Additionally, through a better understanding of the institutional causes of ethnic conflict in China, interested governments parties may be able to create new or improve existing institutions in a way that better mitigates ethnic conflict than those institutions that have been employed in the past. The application of this theoretical framework to other conflicts and recommendations on institutional remedies to China's problems with ethnic conflict lay beyond the scope of this study, but provide relevant areas for future research.

Three specific minority groups, the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang, are examined in detail through the course of this study in order to avoid generalizations about minority group responses to state actions and to underscore the importance of how the unique historical experiences of each group has influenced their interaction with the state. These three groups were selected because they are among the largest of China's minority groups at six, eight, and sixteen million members respectively.²⁰ They are territorially concentrated within China's border regions and constitute a local majority inside their individual administrative units. These groups have much more in common culturally with China's neighbors, who have often assisted them in their attempts to resist the Chinese state.²¹ Finally, these groups have widely different historical and cultural experiences that have uniquely influenced their relationship with the state. Therefore, by examining these three groups introduces a level of variation within the minority response. This allows for a more precise application of the institutional approach to ethnic conflict

²⁰ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 277.

²¹ S. Frederick Starr, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk: ME Sharpe Inc., 2004), 4-5.

in China, and help to avoid any conclusions that generically describe the responses of 'all' Chinese minority groups to the different institutional mechanisms employed by the state.

One final note on the minority groups selected for detailed discussion in this study. There is a current debate among those who study China's minorities concerning the status of the Zhuang. Some scholars assert that this group is not distinct enough from the Han to be qualified for study as a minority group, while others assert that the actions of the Chinese state in promoting the Zhuang has caused this group to develop its own ethnic identity.²² As such, the Zhuang respond to the actions of the Chinese state in the same ways as other minority groups, and therefore should be accepted and studied as a distinct minority group. This debate is relevant to an institutional assessment of ethnic conflict in China because it was through the institutional mechanisms employed by the Chinese state that the Zhuang ethnic group was created. Therefore, this study attempts to shed light on the debate over the Zhuang's minority status by comparing their response to the Chinese state to that of the Tibetans and Uyghurs. If the Zhuang did respond in similar ways to the institutional mechanisms used by Beijing, this would lend credence to the argument that they should be considered a distinct minority group separate from the Han.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

During the early communist period, from 1949 to 1957, the CCP's control over China was still weak, as it faced numerous domestic and international challenges to its legitimacy. Several of those areas in which the Party's sovereignty was most contested were the minority territories in China's far west, Tibet and Xinjiang.²³ These regions were home to the territorially concentrated minorities, the Tibetans and Uyghurs. These groups constituted a local majority in their respective territories and so in order to control

²² Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 6-8.

²³ James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political Histories and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 85, and Warren W. Smith Jr., *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder: Westview Press Inc, 1996), 159.

China's western borders the CCP had to deal with them. Additionally, these groups had enjoyed periods of independence during the political instability that occurred in China after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911.²⁴ As such, the CCP adopted a legitimization of ethnicity strategy designed to encourage the Tibetans and Uyghurs to peacefully submit to Beijing's control through promises of autonomy and self-determination. This autonomy would essentially be the reward these minority groups received for their loyalty to the PRC and their support in strengthening China's contested borders from foreign encroachment.

This period also saw the creation of the Zhuang by the CCP as a way to overcome the difficulty in administering the diverse groups of people who inhabited Guangxi. These groups all demanded recognition as a minority so that they would be entitled to the privileged status as laid out under the legitimization of ethnicity strategy used by the CCP during this period. Rather than attempt to deal with all of these groups individually, the Party encouraged them to merge together into one large group, which would then be entitled to the same level of minority rights awarded to the Tibetans and Uyghurs.²⁵ This group ultimately became known as the Zhuang and in 1958 they received their own autonomous region to govern.

It was through such autonomous zones that China's territorially concentrated minorities were to exercise their right to self-determination. Within these zones minorities would exercise political, economic, and cultural self-determination with minority leadership installed in local government posts. The implementation of this strategy however, was flawed as the CCP used its position of ultimate authority within China's governmental structure to subvert minority leaders in local office and maintain real political control in the autonomous regions. This was accomplished through the manipulation of the PRC's administrative units in ways that divided minority groups, forced them into competition with each other, and made it easier to exclude them from the political process.²⁶

²⁴ June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 128-135.

²⁵ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 93.

²⁶ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 352.

Due to the way in which the CCP subverted minority autonomy, many minority groups quickly became disenfranchised with Party rule and began to resist the state. In Tibet and Xinjiang, minorities formed grassroots organizations centered around religious figures from which to make demands on the state for genuine autonomy.²⁷ In Guangxi the people resisted what they considered to be the arbitrary minority classification system, refusing to take on the newly created ethnic label of Zhuang. This was not what the Chinese government had intended when it embarked upon a legitimization of ethnicity strategy. It is however, the predicted minority group response under the institutional framework. In legitimizing ethnicity, the Party created the political space for these groups to attribute any perceived inequality to ethnic discrimination, and as such, mobilize around ethnicity to resist the state. One significant consequence of the CCP's use of a legitimization strategy was the creation of ethnically based autonomous units. By creating such units, the CCP firmly embedded ethnicity into China's political system and made it a relevant factor in the competition for power and the distribution of resources. This defined the relationship between the state and minority groups strictly in terms of ethnicity and as such, it has proven to be lasting institutional source of ethnic conflict in China.

During the time of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, from 1958 to 1976, the CCP shifted to a depluralization of society strategy that attempted to assimilate minority groups into the Han majority in order to mitigate ethnic conflict within China. This shift was undertaken for several reasons: one, it fit within the larger context of societal change occurring throughout all of China during this period; two, it brought Beijing increased control over China's borders during a time of increased international hostility; and three, it was seen as a way to speed up the political integration of minority regions into the PRC. As part of the Great Leap Forward all of China's people were organized into large communes and subject to extensive state control of their daily lives. In this regard, the collectivization and land reform seen in minority areas was not very different than what was experienced by all Chinese during this period. One

²⁷ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 373.

critical difference, however, was that in minority areas this land reform was viewed as being imposed by outsiders, which helped to reinforce the ethnic connotations of the conflict within these regions.²⁸

The shift in CCP policy to that of a depluralization strategy was also undertaken because the Party had become dissatisfied with the pace of the political and economic integration of minority regions into China. CCP leadership asserted that minority elites were using cultural diversity as an excuse to stall the imposition of communism, which had threatened their position in traditional minority society.²⁹ Communist leaders came to believe that the solution to these problems was to carry out an aggressive assimilation campaign in minority areas. This campaign involved a two pronged approach to assimilation that included: the control of minority land through collectivization as well as substantial Han migration into minority regions; and the targeting of cultural diversity, such as religion and language, so as to remove any distinction between minority groups and the Han majority.

In response to this many minority groups engaged in violent revolt against the Chinese state. Such was the case in both Tibet and Xinjiang where the People's Liberation Army had to undertake military campaigns in order to put down rebellion and restore Chinese rule.³⁰ In a marked contrast to the experiences in Tibet and Xinjiang during this period, violence in Guangxi was largely neither of an ethnic nature nor directed at the government. Instead villages that were often not only part of the same commune, but also of the same ethnic background, fought one another over access to resources.³¹ This suggests that violence seen in Guangxi was motivated by the shortages of food that plagued China after the failure of the Great Leap Forward. The contrast between what was witnessed in Guangxi versus either Tibet or Xinjiang during this period is likely due to the role the Chinese state played in promoting the Zhuang during

²⁸ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 286.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 444 describes the 1959 revolt in Tibet and Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 94 describes the 1962 riots in Xinjiang.

³¹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 59.

the early communist period. When the PRC removed this support during the time of the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution the people of Guangxi shifted the emphasis of their ethnic identity back to the clan/tribe level it had been at prior to the creation and imposition of the Zhuang ethnic label.

The high level of ethnic conflict and violence seen among China's minorities during this period was not what the Party had intended when it adopted a depluralization strategy. Chinese leaders believed that through removing minority distinctiveness these groups would more easily become integrated into the Chinese state. As the revolts and rebellions indicate however, what this strategy actually produced was more intense resistance to Chinese rule. Such a response from minority groups is forecasted under the institutional theory of ethnic conflict. Institutional theorists assert that when minorities are targeted by the state in the manner seen during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, they will cling more tightly together in order to avoid their destruction. The response of China's minorities between 1958 and 1976 again validates the application of the institutional framework to the Chinese case.

Following the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution, the PRC attempted to moderate its politics and focus upon a unified strategy for economic development. In the third time period from 1977 to 1989, labeled the early reform period, Beijing shifted its minority policy back to a legitimization of ethnicity strategy. This decision by the CCP was predicated on many of the same beliefs that had led to the use of a legitimization strategy during the early communist period, that if given a degree of autonomy, minority groups would peacefully submit to Chinese rule. As part of this plan the CCP formally implemented a program of minority rights, enumerated in the PRC's 1982 Constitution and the 1984 Law on National Regional Autonomy. These laws provided China's minorities with the broadest most well defined set of legal protections they had ever enjoyed, which included provisions against cultural and religious persecution.³² This approach combined with the end of communization formally ended many of the ways in which the PRC had attempted to assimilate minorities during earlier periods. However,

³² Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 43.

the codification of minority status in Chinese law further embedded ethnicity into China's political process. As such, minority groups would come to use their new legal status as a means to resist the Chinese state and engage in continued ethnic conflict.

Many of the same problems that hampered the PRC's use of the legitimization of ethnicity strategy in the 1950s, remained in the 1980s. For example, the CCP's role as the true seat of power in China's politics continued to be a contentious issue for minorities as they attempted to exercise the increased autonomy promised under the 1984 law.³³ Additionally, as part of the country's economic reforms the government continued to promote large-scale Han migration into minority territories.³⁴ Again, the promise of autonomy created an expectation of equitable treatment among minority groups that they did not feel was achieved in practice. As such these groups organized politically in order to make demands on the state. This was demonstrated by the proliferation of minority activists groups and their involvement in Chinese politics during this period. Therefore, much in the same way as seen during the early communist period, the use of a legitimization strategy did not produce the outcome intended by the CCP and instead confirms the predictions made by institutional theorists. Legitimization of ethnicity provided these groups with the political space to make demands on the state and express their discontent with the Chinese government.

The development of minority activist groups and their increased role in Chinese politics was a part of a larger movement within China to politically liberalize the country in the wake of economic liberalization. This push for political liberalization came to be viewed by the CCP as a threat to its control of China.³⁵ Therefore, the Party began to move away from pluralism and return to the more repressive practices of earlier periods. These tensions boiled over in the 1989 Tiananmen Square Crisis, in which government security forces brutally suppressed student protesters.

³³ Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 43.

³⁴ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 591.

³⁵ Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. Norton Company, 2004), 146.

The time after the violence at Tiananmen Square to the present makes up the final period discussed in this study. The application of the institutional framework and the four-step process in the post-1989 period is complicated by a disparity between China's official minority policy and what has been observed in practice. On the one hand, the legal protections granted to minorities during the 1980s remain firmly in place, implying that the intention of the Chinese government is to continue its strategy of legitimizing ethnicity. On the other hand, it appears that the CCP has begun to use more repressive tactics to suppress minority discontent, which is reminiscent of the government's policy during the Cultural Revolution.³⁶ This contradiction makes it difficult to deduce the intent of and conflict management strategy in use by the Chinese government in the post-1989 period. This in turn complicates any attempt to measure the effectiveness of the CCP's efforts to mitigate ethnic conflict and compare it with the predictions of the institutional framework as was done in the earlier periods. Therefore, this study will not draw any conclusions about the post-1989 period other than to point out that ethnic conflict in China appears to have escalated throughout the 1990s and into the 21 century. These issues are discussed more fully in the conclusion, but ultimately, further research into the relationship between minority groups and the Chinese government during this period is required before an institutional assessment as conducted in this study can be completed.

F. SOURCES

The sources that have been used for this study are largely secondary accounts of China's history, the history of the individual minority groups, and the development of ethnic conflict within China. Several primary documents have been used to augment the secondary accounts. One final note on the sources pertains specifically to the available research on the Zhuang minority group. Currently Katherine Palmer Kaup, a professor of political science at Furman University, is one of a very small group of American scholars who have studied the Zhuang extensively. With regards to the debate concerning the Zhuang's status as a minority, Kaup argues that regardless of the group's ethnic origin,

³⁶ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 295.

the actions of the Chinese state have caused the Zhuang to form a distinct identity and to behave in ways comparable to other Chinese minorities, such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs.³⁷ One consequence of the Zhuang's contested status is that the group has not been widely studied by English speaking scholars. This has produced a scarcity of research on the Zhuang and their relationship with the state.

It is for this reason that this study has had to rely so heavily upon the work by Kaup. Scholars from disciplines such as linguistics and education have done some research on the Zhuang, focusing on the disparity between Han and minority group education levels in China. These scholars have largely examined the way in which the Chinese government created a language for the Zhuang in the 1950s, but never officially used it or taught it in schools. Where possible this research has been used to augment the work of Kaup and provide a greater diversity of sources concerning the Zhuang. The debate over the Zhuang's minority status, their 'creation' by the CCP, and subsequent relationship with the Chinese state offers a great deal of potential for future research by those scholars who examine minority groups and the development of ethnic conflict. This study will attempt to shed some light on this debate by comparing the responses of the Zhuang to the actions of the Chinese state to that of the Tibetans and Uyghurs.

³⁷ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 6-8.

II. THE EARLY COMMUNIST PERIOD: 1949-1957

A. INTRODUCTION

The early communist period was a tumultuous time for both the Chinese Communist Party and the country's numerous ethnic minorities. The defeat of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) on the mainland, Chang Kei-Shek's flight to Taiwan, and the involvement of super-powers within China's domestic politics had important repercussions for Beijing's minority policies between 1949 and 1957. Ultimately, the domestic and international factors at play throughout this period lead Chinese leaders to adopt a legitimization of ethnicity strategy for managing the state's relationship with minority groups. The purpose of this strategy was two-fold. First, was to bolster the domestic legitimacy of the CCP by rewarding minorities with self-determination for their loyalty to the Party, and second, because these groups mainly lived in China's contested border regions their support would help to strengthen Beijing's territorial sovereignty against possible KMT resurgence and foreign encroachment.

In its attempts to legitimize ethnicity the CCP implemented minority rights policies based on territory. This entailed the creation of autonomous zones where territorially concentrated minorities were to govern their own affairs and maintain a degree of political, economic, and cultural self-determination under Beijing's supervision. The use of these ethnically oriented autonomous zones had several important implications for the development of the CCP's relationship with minority groups. First, by creating ethnically based political units, the CCP embedded ethnicity into China's political system in an overt and fixed manner that made it a relevant factor in the competition for power and resources. Second by instituting a system that in appearance provided minorities with autonomy, the CCP created political space for these groups to feel disenfranchised if they did not receive that autonomy. This in essence was what happened as the CCP often used its position in China's political organization to subvert any attempts at self-determination in minority regions. Since the relationship between these groups and the state became framed in terms of ethnicity, an expectation of

equitable treatment developed among China's minorities during this period. When this expectation was not met, minority groups increasingly began to resist the Chinese government.

B. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The creation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, symbolized the political victory of the Chinese Communist Party in its decades long struggle for control of the country. Despite this victory however, the fledgling communist government faced numerous challenges at home and abroad. One such challenge that had both domestic and international implications was the continued existence of the CCP's chief rival and adversary during the Chinese Civil War, the KMT. By 1934 the CCP had been beaten so badly by the KMT that the communist forces undertook a year long retreat termed the Long March, and took refuge in Yanan.³⁸ The war with Japan however, undercut the power and legitimacy of the Nationalist Party. Its inability to effectively resist the Japanese occupation, the economic dislocation brought by the war, and accusations of corruption severely crippled the organization's ability to govern China.³⁹ This ultimately weakened the Nationalists to the point where the CCP was able to defeat them and seize control. After his defeat in the Civil War, KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island of Taiwan and created a government in exile, which he proclaimed to be the rightful leadership of China.

The emerging hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union that came to characterize the Cold War exacerbated this conflict between the Communists and Nationalists in China, with each superpower supporting its ideological ally. U.S. support gave the KMT government on Taiwan a degree of strength and international legitimacy at a critical time when the CCP was unable to militarily capture the island. The result was a diplomatic stalemate between the Communist government in Beijing and the Nationalist government in Taipei, which created a continuous opposition to the CCP's authority.

³⁸ Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 559.

³⁹ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 38.

Another problem posed by the Nationalists was that elements of the KMT military continued to operate in the north and southwestern portions of the Chinese mainland in Xinjiang and along the Sino-Cambodian, Burmese, and Vietnamese borders.⁴⁰ So even after the establishment of a formal communist government in China, there continued to be domestic challenges to the CCP's rule.

Another factor that threatened the territorial sovereignty of the People's Republic was the extensive foreign involvement in China's border regions, the same regions that were inhabited by many of the country's minorities, including the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang. Tibet for example, had experienced extensive British encroachment, including the Younghusband expedition in 1904 where the British military marched on the capital and forced trade relations on the Dalai Lama.⁴¹ England's interest in Tibet continued until after World War II, as London sought to create a buffer between its holdings in India and perceived Russian/Soviet imperialism in Central Asia. It was only after Britain had agreed to Indian independence that its interests in Tibet waned.⁴² The United States, Britain, and India had all declined to internationally recognize Lhasa's claims of independence, instead asserting that the Tibet question was internal Chinese matter.⁴³ This decline of international interest coincided with the closing days of the Chinese Civil War, which created the opportunity for the CCP to militarily reclaim the region in 1950 after it had come to power the previous year.

In Xinjiang, Uyghur dissatisfaction with the KMT had led to open rebellion and the creation of the Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR), an autonomous region made up of the three northern districts of Xinjiang. The ETR combatants were largely trained and equipped by the Soviet Union who had extensive economic and security interests in the region.⁴⁴ Additionally, the Soviet Union assisted ETR leadership in the negotiation of a

⁴⁰ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 85 for discussion on Xinjiang and Hsu, *Modern China*, 746 for discussion on Guangxi.

⁴¹ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 159.

⁴² Lee Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Inc., 1996), 136, and Warren W. Smith Jr., *Tibetan Nation*, 246.

⁴³ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 253.

⁴⁴ Millward, *Eurasia Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, 221 – 223.

ceasefire with the KMT government that allowed it to remain largely independent of Beijing between 1945 and 1949.⁴⁵ The rise of a communist government in China however, brought an end to Moscow's support of the Eastern Turkistan Republic and the region reverted to Chinese rule under the CCP following the establishment of the PRC in October 1949.⁴⁶ The experience with independence in both Tibet and Xinjiang help to illustrate why the CCP pursued a legitimization of ethnicity strategy. The Party needed to consolidate its control over these territories and the people who lived there, but because the Tibetans and Uyghurs had for a time enjoyed autonomy, a strategy that would encourage these groups to peacefully submit to Beijing's control was required. A legitimization of ethnicity strategy and the promise of territorially centered minority rights allowed Beijing to accomplish these objectives in Tibet and Xinjiang.

In Guangxi there had been a long history of British and French intervention in the area during the Qing Dynasty, and while European colonialism in this area did not impede directly upon Chinese territorial sovereignty it did cleave off Burma and Indochina as tributaries to China.⁴⁷ Additionally, China's southwest was one of the last strongholds of the KMT on the mainland following its departure to Taiwan, making the CCP's hold on the region tenuous in the early days of the People's Republic. The continued existence of the KMT, both on Taiwan and the mainland, as well as the history of foreign encroachment in many of China's border regions, focused the CCP's attention on solidifying its domestic legitimacy and guarding Chinese territorial sovereignty.

C. EARLY CCP MINORITY POLICY IN THEORY

It was from these concerns over domestic and international security that the CCP's minority policy during the early communist period was born. Many of China's minorities live in the border regions where the CCP's rule was the most contested and the country's territorial integrity most threatened during this period. As stated, KMT military forces remained active in both Xinjiang and Guangxi, home to the Uyghurs and Zhuang

⁴⁵ Millward, *Eurasia Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, 217.

⁴⁶ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 85.

⁴⁷ Hsu, *Modern China*, 330.

respectively. Additionally, in July 1949 the Tibetan government expelled all Chinese officials from its territory due to long-standing conflicts with the KMT and concerns over how a Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War would affect Tibet's status.⁴⁸ Therefore, the CCP needed a minority policy that would solidify its control in these regions and prevent the further loss of Chinese territory following the events in Taiwan.

One method by which the CCP could achieve these two objectives was to pursue a minority policy that distinguished it from the KMT. Due to its western conception of nationalism, which emphasized allegiance to the state above all else, the KMT had pursued a minority policy that used a deppluralization of ethnicity strategy through assimilation.⁴⁹ This was because the KMT was unwilling to allow minority groups to maintain any identity that competed with the national identity they were attempting to build in China. The result was widespread attempts to assimilate minority groups using educational programs such as Han language training and citizenship classes. In many minority areas however, these actions by the KMT government provoked minority dissent and caused them to cling more tightly to their traditional customs.⁵⁰ This led to an overall increase in the level of ethnic identity among China's minorities as well as an increase in the level of conflict between these groups and the central government.

Aware of the way in which KMT minority policy had alienated many groups and stirred resistance to Chinese rule, the CCP crafted a minority policy that emphasized legitimization of ethnic identity. By recognizing ethnicity politically, the CCP hoped to win the favor of minority groups through the promise of protected legal status. This set of minority rights would be territorially based, allow for political and economic self-determination, and place minority leaders into local offices. Evidence of this was seen in Xinjiang, where after the Eastern Turkistan Republic was disestablished, many local leaders were promoted to positions of authority within the provincial government.⁵¹ Additionally, the Party pursued what it called a 'United Front' in minority areas, a move

⁴⁸ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 265.

⁴⁹ June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵¹ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 88.

to create a more inclusive dialogue between the Chinese government and minority leaders. United Front movements were seen in both Xinjiang and Tibet, where the CCP allowed non-Party organizations to remain in place as a sign of goodwill towards the existing minority leadership and to broaden the discussion concerning the political and economic integration of these regions into the PRC.⁵²

The CCP also allowed minority groups to retain a high degree of religious freedom, despite the overtly anti-religious tenants of Communism. In Xinjiang, the CCP included Islamic leaders in governmental bodies such as the United Front, and allowed Islamic education to continue via the numerous mosques and madrasas located throughout the region.⁵³ Support of the local Islamic elite was viewed as necessary by Beijing in order to reduce resistance to Chinese rule and curb the demands for the region's secession. Therefore, the Party permitted membership drives and the opening of new prayer halls of the Sufi branch of Islam, in both the urban and rural areas of Xinjiang during this period.⁵⁴ Similarly, in Tibet this involved the inclusion of Buddhist leaders in governmental organizations as well as large-scale tolerance of Buddhism itself. During the early Communist period the Party permitted the Buddhist monasteries to proceed with the many religious and secular functions that they preformed within Tibetan society. This included the hosting of extravagant festivals like the annual Monlam festival held in Lhasa. The Party allowed the festival to proceed in 1951, despite concerns that such a large gathering of Tibetans could quickly turn anti-Chinese and result in massive demonstrations and violence.⁵⁵ While there where some anti-government demonstrations, the festival remained largely peaceful, with the Party itself participating in some of the traditional practices of Tibetan Buddhism, including providing monetary gifts to monks.⁵⁶

⁵² Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 238 for discussion of Xinjiang United Front and Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 354 for discussion of Tibet.

⁵³ Millard, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 246

⁵⁴ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 89

⁵⁵ Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 101.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

However, such religious tolerance and the inclusion of Tibetan leaders in governmental decision-making came on the heels of direct military conflict between Tibet and the PRC in 1950. Tibet was a much more complicated region for the CCP to deal with given its claims of independence and the expulsion of Chinese officials in 1949. Beijing's military effort to reclaim control of Tibet began in October 1950, but throughout the invasion the PRC continued to press Lhasa for a negotiated settlement between Tibet and China. Feeling diplomatically isolated, Lhasa decided that its only option was to negotiate the best possible arrangement with Beijing.⁵⁷ The result was the 17-Point Agreement signed in May 1951 between the local government of Tibet and the CCP. In the agreement Lhasa acknowledged that Tibet was part of China and that the Chinese government would handle all external relations for Tibet. In return, the 17-Point Agreement promised the Tibetans cultural and religious freedom as well as political and economic self-determination.⁵⁸ In this sense, despite the military invasion of Tibet, the CCP did make an attempt to win over the Tibetan people through a legitimization of ethnicity strategy using minority rights as laid out in the 17-Point Agreement.

One major challenge to the CCP in enacting its strategy of legitimization was that it had to determine what groups were classified as ethnic minorities and would therefore qualify for an autonomous region and the associated minority rights. In order to accomplish this they adopted the Stalinist Model for the definition of a nationality. This model defined a nationality as a group that shared a common language, territory, economic life, and culture.⁵⁹ It was by this measure that Moscow had established the Soviet Union's minority groups and created the corresponding Soviet Republics. The CCP used this standard to determine which groups were distinct minorities and therefore eligible for the political, economic, and cultural autonomy.⁶⁰

The adoption of the Stalinist Model for minority classification helped to put China on the path toward the use of ethnically oriented autonomous regions, similar to the

⁵⁷ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 278.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 298-300.

⁵⁹ Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 30-31.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 35.

Soviet Republics. The use of the Stalinist Model led to the identification of fifty-six separate nationalities including the Han majority. Of those fifty-five nationalities considered minorities, the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang are three of the largest. Additionally, these groups constituted a local majority due to high population concentrations in their particular territories. Therefore, because of each group's overall size and regional concentration the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang were each given their own autonomous region to administer, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Guangxi, respectively. The Chinese system differed from that of the Soviets in that the minority regions were not politically separate from the Chinese state, but instead autonomous under the overarching control of Beijing with minority officials allowed to govern at the local and regional levels.⁶¹ The adoption of the Stalinist Model and the creation of ethnically based political units within China effectively built ethnicity into the Chinese political system. As such, ethnicity assumed political significance, incentivizing groups to politically mobilize and place demands on the state.

One problem with the use of the Stalinist Model in China was that many minority groups did not fit the Stalinist definition of a nationality. The Tibetans came the closest with a common language, territory, economic life, and culture. Additionally, given Tibet's experience with independence from the Chinese state, Tibetans had joined together as a single political unit, with a recognized political and spiritual leader in the Dalai Lama. However, Tibet was and is a vast and sparsely populated territory where many different dialects are spoken and where many groups remained outside Lhasa's control even during the territory's independence.⁶²

The Uyghurs also did not fit completely into the Stalinist definition of a minority. While as a whole they shared a common religion and language, they were also widely dispersed across Xinjiang with many diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. Some Uyghurs were farmers, while others were herdsmen, with each group having their own 'economic lives' and associated cultural traditions.⁶³ Additionally, while Xinjiang was

⁶¹ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 91.

⁶² Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 34.

⁶³ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 87-88.

designated the Uyghur autonomous region, the area was and is home to many other minority groups such as Kazaks, and the Hui. Each of these groups were further subdivided by religion, with some practicing Sunni, Shia, or Sufi Islam, and others different forms Buddhism.⁶⁴ With so much diversity the majority Uyghur often competed amongst themselves as well as with other national minorities for local office in Xinjiang. The same diversity that made the region difficult to administer for the CCP also complicated the situation of the local leaders, who had to contend with the Chinese government as well as one another for political control.

Guangxi Province and the large number of disparate minority groups in the region provided the CCP with one of the largest challenges in implementing its minority policy. The region had been one of the last strongholds of KMT resistance, which required the CCP to use a military force to take the province in November 1949. After it had defeated the Nationalists however, the CCP found itself faced with administering a region with over four hundred separate local minority groups, difficult terrain, and multiple language barriers.⁶⁵ These groups did not share a common language, territory, economic life, or culture, and more importantly, they did not identify with one another as a single ethnic group, such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs did.

Due to this, the CCP was not able to classify these people under the Stalinist Model, and yet each of these groups demanded recognition as a minority so that they could receive the protected status laid out under early communist minority policy. In response, the CCP leadership crafted an inventive way to manage these groups. Instead of attempting to govern all of them individually, the CCP encouraged them to merge together into one large group, with promises of minority status and consequently territorial autonomy.⁶⁶ As part of this effort the Party used specially created ethnic survey teams made up of linguists and historians, as well as Communist officials, who

⁶⁴ Donald H. McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949-1977*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 8-9.

⁶⁵ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 73.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

subsequently identified the Zhuang as a distinct ethnic category.⁶⁷ Additionally, the Party established universities in Guangxi dedicated to the study of the Zhuang and specifically to the development of their written language, a process that was complete by 1954.⁶⁸ Through such informational campaigns and propaganda the CCP convinced the majority of these groups in Guangxi to band together and form the single ethnic group, the Zhuang. In this sense the legitimization strategy used in the early communist period, the adoption of the Stalinist Model, and the CCP's need to consolidate its power over the territory and people of Guangxi, came together to 'create' the Zhuang minority group. This provides a stunning example of how state institutions can help to create an ethnic identity where none had previously existed.

By the end of the early communist period in 1958, the CCP had established the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region with sixty percent of the province's population designated as members of the Zhuang minority.⁶⁹ So despite the lack of a common language, territory, economic life, or culture the CCP had created a titular ethnic group, given it an autonomous region to govern, and made it similar promises of political and economic self-determination as those given to the Tibetans and Uyghurs. The purpose of doing so was to consolidate the CCP's control over the region, but by creating the Zhuang, the Party had set this group down a path that would lead to increased ethnic identity and subsequent demands on the state in future periods.

D. EARLY CCP MINORITY POLICY IN PRACTICE

The CCP minority policy during the early communist period had been developed in response to the domestic and international political factors present in China when the Party first came to power. The history of foreign intervention and independence in minority regions, the virulent response of minorities to KMT attempts at assimilation, the continued existence of the KMT, and the adoption of the Stalinist Model for ethnic

⁶⁷ Liu Xingwu and Alatan, "China's Policy Towards Her Minority Nationalities," in *Social Scientist* 16, no. 1 (January 1988): 136-59.

⁶⁸ Minglang Zhou, "Language Policy and Illiteracy in Ethnic Minority Communities in China," in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 21, no. 2 (2000): 129-48.

⁶⁹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 93.

identification, all came together to create a minority policy that legitimized the role of ethnicity in politics and promised protected legal status for minorities. In Guangxi, the CCP adapted its minority policy to fit the local conditions in a way that created the Zhuang. With each minority group the Party used a legitimization strategy that offered minorities a degree of autonomy in their political, economic, and cultural lives. The purpose was to win over these groups by recognizing and protecting minorities in stark contrast to the attempts at assimilation by the KMT. By gaining the support of the minorities in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Guangxi the CCP hoped to strengthen its domestic legitimacy and secure China's borders against foreign encroachment.

During the early Communist period however, the CCP often used subtle methods of social and economic control to maintain its dominance and impede minority self-determination. These methods included: the use of the Party's unique position in the structure of the Chinese government to undermine minority autonomy; the organization of the country's administrative units in ways disadvantageous to minorities; and the subversion of traditional leadership in minority communities. While promising minorities protected legal status and autonomy within the system, the CCP often used the structure of the Party itself to sabotage minority autonomy. Within China's political system, the state government and the CCP exist as separate entities, but each state organization has a corresponding Party equivalent, with the Party component exercising ultimate authority.⁷⁰ This arrangement allowed the CCP to appoint local minority leaders to state posts, but because these offices were subservient to their Party counterparts, they possessed no real power. In this sense, the CCP's legitimization strategy gave the appearance of safeguarding minority rights under the communist system, but the strategy's implementation provided these groups with no real protection. Additionally, the PRC's 1954 Constitution did not include any mention of minorities or the special status that had been promised by the CCP, and without a legal foundation there was no way that minority rights could be realized.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 172.

⁷¹ Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 41.

Another means by which the CCP was able to undermine minority autonomy was to organize the country's administrative units in ways disadvantageous to minority groups. For example, the Party organized the individual counties that made up the province of Xinjiang in a way that divided the Uyghur population between districts containing a majority of other nationalities.⁷² The purpose of this was to dilute Uyghur predominance within Xinjiang's leadership by creating a system in which the Uyghurs had to compete directly with other minority groups for political office. As a result, despite being a local majority within Xinjiang, the Uyghurs came to possess a disproportionately low number of local offices, only 40 percent of a potential 80 percent of such offices in 1951.⁷³ So while the Uyghurs accepted CCP rule because minority leaders could hold office within Xinjiang, the system that the Party created locked them in competition with other groups. This aided the CCP in its efforts to control Xinjiang by providing the appearance of autonomy, but simultaneously allowing the Party to remain dominant as minority groups struggled amongst themselves.⁷⁴

While promoting the Zhuang and encouraging the people of Guangxi to adopt the Zhuang ethnic identity, the CCP was simultaneously taking steps to undercut the influence and power of minority leaders within the region that were similar to those taken in Tibet and Xinjiang. The CCP manipulated the size and shape of Guangxi's administrative units in order to limit the involvement of minority leadership in local government. This entailed the combination of the eastern and western portions of the region into a single administrative unit. This was significant because the Zhuang population of Guangxi made up 67 percent of the total population in the western territory, but only 38 percent of the region as whole.⁷⁵ So by combining the east and west into one administrative unit, labeled the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the Party

⁷² Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 352.

⁷³ McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 43.

⁷⁴ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 92.

⁷⁵ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 92.

significantly lowered the percentage of the total population made up by minority groups. This subsequently reduced the number of local offices reserved for minorities and aided the CCP in limiting the involvement of minority leaders within the region.

Another way in which the CCP was able to mitigate the influence of Zhuang leadership was to manipulate the classification process in a way that promoted the Zhuang, while simultaneously preventing them from becoming an overwhelming majority within any single administrative unit. Similar to the way in which this was carried out provincially, as discussed above in terms of the combination of eastern and western Guangxi into one unit, the Party would only classify certain portions of the population of particular counties as the Zhuang, while classifying other groups as Buyi or Dai, so that the Zhuang would not become an overwhelming majority in that county as well as have to compete with the other minorities for local office.⁷⁶ Again, in the same way that administrative units were designed in Xinjiang to dilute Uyghur influence and force Uyghur leaders to compete with Kazaks and Hui for office, so too was Zhuang power diluted in Guangxi as Zhuang leaders competed with Yi and Dai for local control.

The CCP further restricted the autonomy of minority groups by organizing Production and Construction Corps (PCCs), sometimes termed Bintugan State Farms in minority areas. The PCCs resembled military organizations in their structure and were designed to carry out infrastructure construction and improvement projects in China's remote minority territories. The CCP used these groups to undermine minority autonomy by employing them as a tool to promote large scale Han migration into regions where national minorities were concentrated, such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Guangxi. In 1952, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps began an active recruitment campaign where it sent hundreds of cadres into eastern China to encourage Han migration into Xinjiang. As a result, by 1954 the Xinjiang PCC had grown to almost 300,000 settlers, of which 90 percent were Han.⁷⁷ The Production and Construction Corps engaged in numerous infrastructure improvement projects in China's western regions, but largely employed only the Han migrants and demobilized PLA soldiers. These biased

⁷⁶ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 89.

⁷⁷ McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 61-65.

employment practices brought disproportionate economic development to the Han enclaves that developed around the PCCs, which in turn fueled minority claims of unfair treatment by the Chinese state.

In addition to the introduction of Production and Construction Corps, the CCP used other administrative and organizational methods to control the population of Tibet. For example, the Chinese government divided what the Tibetans considered their historical homeland between the Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region (the official Chinese administrative name for Tibet) and the neighboring provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. This was done for the same purpose as the gerrymandering of the counties in Xinjiang, to divide the numerically superior ethnic minority across a large number of differing administrative units. By dividing Tibet in this manner the CCP removed a large portion of the Tibetan population from direct control of the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa and placed it under standard Chinese provincial control.⁷⁸ Under this plan only those Tibetans that resided in central Tibet, now labeled the Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region (XTAR), would constitute a regional majority and qualify for minority rights as laid out under the 17-Point Agreement. Those Tibetans that lived in the eastern portion of historical Tibet then became residents of normal Chinese provinces and therefore were not entitled to the same level of minority rights as the Tibetans who lived in the XTAR. As in Xinjiang with the Uyghurs, this situation made it difficult for Tibetans outside of central Tibet to effectively participate in government, which was the intended result when the CCP carried out the division of Tibet in this manner.⁷⁹

In order to limit the ability of Tibetans to exercise autonomy within central Tibet, or the XTAR, the Party fostered competition among the political factions of the Dalai Lama's government. The structure of Tibet's theocratic and secular governments facilitated the CCP's ability to divide and conquer. The Dalai Lama, as the spiritual and political leader of Tibet, maintained his government in Lhasa, while the secular government maintained its headquarters in Chamdo. Additionally, the Panchen Lama,

⁷⁸ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 361.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 362-363.

the second highest ranking Tibetan leader after the Dalai Lama maintained a third government in Shigatse and often disagreed with both those in Lhasa and Chamdo over how to deal with the Chinese. The CCP exploited these divisions within Tibet's leadership by negotiating with all three factions, playing one off against the other in order to reduce resistance to Chinese rule.⁸⁰ This combined with state/Party arrangement that kept real authority in the hands of the CCP greatly reduced Tibetan autonomy.

One final method that the CCP used to subvert the autonomy of minority groups was through land reform and cadre recruitment policies that undermined the power of traditional elites in minority societies. In Xinjiang the Party used land reform as a way to seize the holdings of powerful Islamic clerics. It was through these lands that the clerics raised revenue, via rent and taxes, which they then used to fund charities and public works projects.⁸¹ Without their land, the clerics were unable to fund such efforts that were the basis of their status within Xinjiang's Muslim community. These efforts by the CCP to undermine traditional elites was undertaken in Tibet as well, where the landholdings of powerful monasteries were seized for same purpose of depriving the traditional elite of their privileged place in Tibetan society.⁸²

In Tibet the PRC also undermined the role of traditional elites by attacking serfdom, which was sanctioned by the Dalai Lama's Buddhist government and practiced extensively throughout the region. The CCP argued that the practice of serfdom amounted to slavery and it was therefore the duty of the Party to bring democratic reforms to Tibet in order to liberate the abused peasantry from the regions feudalist elite.⁸³ As such, the Party recruited heavily from Tibet's lower classes, placing them supervisory positions over their former landlords.⁸⁴ This elevation in status was

⁸⁰ Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 135.

⁸¹ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 248.

⁸² Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 404.

⁸³ Xingwu and Alatan, *China's Policy Towards Her Minority Nationalities*, 138.

⁸⁴ Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet*, 152-153.

accompanied by the redistribution of land as discussed above, which taken together was highly disruptive to Tibet's traditional society, but proved partially successful at winning the Chinese government support among the Tibetan peasantry.

The decision by Communist leaders to create the Zhuang out of the region's diverse peoples left the Party with a unique problem in Guangxi. On the one hand they had to actively promote Zhuang ethnicity and encourage the locals to adopt that identity. On the other hand they had to prevent local minority leaders from becoming too powerful and exerting too much influence in regional decision-making. The result was an odd mix of active Zhuang recruitment combined with the same methods used to maintain control over the Tibetans and Uyghurs. As part of its plan to promote the group, the CCP created a number of organizations designed to study the Zhuang and advance them culturally. One such organization was the Guangxi Nationalities Institute, the purpose of which was to train minority cadres, coordinate minority research, and translate books into minority languages.⁸⁵ The equal emphasis placed upon Communism and the promotion of ethnicity within the Institute's mission, helps to demonstrate the importance the Party placed on the successful adoption of the Zhuang ethnic identity by the people of Guangxi.

Another way in which the CCP was able to promote the Zhuang was to simply force the label upon otherwise unwilling residents of Guangxi. In doing this, the Party would often lump the diverse people of one town or another into the category of Zhuang and explain to these people that they misunderstood the government's classification system.⁸⁶ Following such moves the people could either accept the Zhuang classification and elect local leaders on that basis or reject it, only to have a Han CCP member appointed to local office, who would then treat them as Zhuang anyway. In this regard, the CCP used its administrative powers to coerce the people of Guangxi to accept the Zhuang ethnic identity, as it was only through such acceptance that they could participate politically or enjoy other services, such as access to educational institutions like the Guangxi Nationalities Institute discussed above.

⁸⁵ Julia Kwong and Hong Xiao, "Educational Equality among China's Minorities," *Comparative Education* 25, no. 2 (1989): 229-43.

⁸⁶ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 90.

E. MINORITY GROUP RESPONSE

Many Tibetans and Uyghurs were disgruntled at the loss of independence that accompanied integration into the Chinese state. The Tibetan response to Chinese rule can be evaluated in two ways, from the perspective of the region's traditional elites and from that of the masses. With regards to Tibet's traditional elites, feudal landowners and Buddhist monks, the Party initially provided these groups with stipends and honorific titles when they first moved into the region in 1950.⁸⁷ The purpose of this was to co-opt these leaders and pacify them as the Party increased its control over Tibet. However, as the Party carried out land reform and recruited the local peasantry into cadres, the power base of these elites was eroded, leading them to become increasingly dissatisfied with the CCP. As such, many began to agitate against the Chinese government, forming anti-Chinese groups throughout central Tibet.⁸⁸ Eventually, these groups would become so frustrated at the Chinese presence in Tibet that they would take up arms and engage in open rebellion.

Throughout much of the early communist period it appears that the Dalai Lama made a good faith effort to cooperate with Beijing and negotiate an equitable agreement between Tibet and the Chinese government. This is reflected in Tibetan acceptance of the 17-Point Agreement as well as the Dalai Lama's meetings with top Communist leaders, Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai.⁸⁹ In 1954 he traveled to Beijing for the Chinese National People's Congress where the PRC's constitution was to be formally approved. The Dalai Lama remained in Beijing for almost a year and met with Mao Zedong often and was elected the Vice-Chairman of the NPC's Standing Committee.⁹⁰ The breakdown of the Dalai Lama's efforts to cooperate with Chinese government and his flight to India precipitated the rebellion led by Tibetan elites and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 356.

⁸⁸ Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet*, 155.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

⁹⁰ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 123-124.

The resistance against CCP rule within the Tibetan masses took the form of grassroots organizations that focused on the immediate needs of the community. For example, a group known as the People's Assembly formed in Lhasa and actively protested the presence of the PLA in the city.⁹¹ They argued that the large number of PLA soldiers in Tibet was causing inflation and food shortages. However, the People's Assembly was poorly organized and had no unified leadership, so it proved ineffective at petitioning the Chinese government for change.⁹² The Chinese government proceeded to label the group as unlawful and threatened to arrest anyone who repeated their actions.⁹³

The resistance to Chinese rule in Xinjiang during the early communist period was similar to that of the People's Assembly in Tibet, organized at the grassroots level with an emphasis on Islam. Having undermined the power of many Sunni and Shiite clerics through land reform, as discussed earlier, many Muslims in Xinjiang turned towards Sufism. Different from Sunni and Shia Islam, Sufism deemphasizes the importance of Mosques and land and instead focuses on the importance of Muslim fellowship.⁹⁴ As such, under Sufism Muslims can meet practically anywhere to discuss their faith and listen to religious teachings. Therefore, by practicing Sufism the Uyghurs were able to maintain their Islamic faith despite attempts by the Chinese state to undermine it.

Aside from the role that local Muslim clerics played in resisting Chinese attempts to weaken Islam, no unified anti-Chinese movement emerged in Xinjiang during this period. This may have been due to the diverse and dispersed nature of the regions population as well as the large PLA presence within the region. As discussed the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps brought in literally hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese into the area, many of whom were demobilized soldiers. Additionally, pressure from Moscow on the leaders of the former Eastern Turkistan Republic to cooperate with the CCP removed the support that had allowed the Uyghurs to resist the KMT government prior to 1949. Therefore, many Uyghur leaders cooperated with the

⁹¹ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 373.

⁹² Shakya, *The Dragon*, 195.

⁹³ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 373.

⁹⁴ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 89.

CCP during the early communist period at the direction of Moscow. On such Uyghur leader was leader, Saifudin, who had been trained in the Soviet Union, was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and was instrumental in the revolt against the KMT that led to the creation of the Eastern Turkistan Republic in 1944.⁹⁵ Already trained in the tenants of Communism, Saifudin began to work with Chinese communists in 1950 to help integrate Xinjiang into the PRC. Consequently, the CCP awarded Saifudin with important posts in the Party and in the government of Xinjiang, which helped to reduce Uyghur resistance to Chinese rule.⁹⁶

Due to the lack of any common bonds or group identity across Guangxi, resistance to the Chinese government during the early communist period was not unified and occurred sporadically at the local level. Much of this resistance was due to the ethnic classification system imposed by Beijing on the region in its efforts to create the Zhuang. Many of the people of Guangxi did not identify themselves as Zhuang and therefore refused to accept such classification. As discussed however, the Party used its administrative powers to coerce people into accepting the Zhuang ethnic identity by refusing access to government resources to those who did not. Residents of Guangxi also protested the arbitrary manner in which classification was carried out, as often times members of the same tribe or even family would be classified as different minority groups.⁹⁷ This was done as part of the Party's effort to prevent any single minority in Xinjiang from becoming an overwhelming local majority that would subsequently bring increased representation and control over the region's government.

F. ASSESSMENT

The response of the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang to the CCP's minority policy during the early communist period was largely influenced by the experiences of each group in earlier times. The exposure to independence for the Tibetans and Uyghurs influenced not only the way the CCP treated these groups, but the way in which they

⁹⁵ McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 34

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁹⁷ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 88-89.

responded to the Party. Beijing understood that these two groups had governed their territories as independent entities and as such, had to recognize that in order to peacefully bring the Tibetans and Uyghurs back into the Chinese fold. On the part of the minority groups, the lack of international support forced them to concede to Chinese rule. The result was a minority policy in which the state offered to recognize the ethnicity of these groups and provide them with a degree of territorially based autonomy in return for their loyalty to Beijing. The groups accepted this and allowed the CCP to consolidate its control over the people and territory of Tibet and Xinjiang.

In Guangxi, the large number of diverse minority groups presented the CCP with serious administrative problems, which they overcame by coercing those groups into forming one large group, the Zhuang. The people of Guangxi allowed this to happen in order to reap the benefits of territorially autonomy that would come with recognition as a minority group within the Chinese state. So in each case, the minority groups accepted the rule of the Party and permitted Beijing to consolidate its control over their territory. However, there are two critical issues that must be addressed in this assessment. One is that this acceptance of the CCP was predicated on promises of political, economic, and cultural self-determination. In short, minority support for the CCP was conditional on autonomy. The fact that this autonomy was never formalized legally or adequately implemented in practice, created the potential for minority discontent and conflict with the state that was realized in later periods. In this sense, the legitimization strategy pursued by the CCP was not successful. It did win the Party the support of minorities, but it did so by creating an expectation of equal treatment that was never achieved.

Second, the use of the ethnically based political units explicitly incorporated ethnicity into the Chinese political system. The classification of national minorities and the subsequent creation of autonomous regions based on ethnicity formally institutionalized ethnicity as a relevant component of Chinese politics. By framing political competition in terms of ethnicity, the CCP inadvertently strengthened the ethnic identity of these groups because this came to be the way in which their relationship with the state was defined. So while the CCP intended its legitimization strategy to result in the peaceful acceptance of Chinese rule by China's minority groups, it actually helped to

lay the foundation for increased ethnic conflict in subsequent periods. Rather than decrease the importance of ethnicity in politics, the legitimization strategy pursued by the CCP strengthened the importance of ethnicity in politics and gave minorities the opportunity to use it as tool to make demands on the state. When these demands were not met, these groups increasingly resisted the Chinese state.

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III. THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION: 1958-1976

A. INTRODUCTION

During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution the Chinese government's policies towards minorities shifted dramatically. International hostility and isolation forced China down a path toward economic ruin and political instability that persisted all the way into the 1970s. The Great Leap Forward brought on massive societal change and disruption that required the Chinese government to abandon the legitimization of ethnicity strategy it had pursued during the early communist period. Instead, in its attempts to exert greater control over Chinese society, the CCP employed a depluralization of society strategy that targeted minority groups for assimilation into the Han majority. The shift in CCP strategy to assimilatory practices was undertaken for several reasons: because it fit within the larger context of the societal change that was occurring throughout China during the Leap and Cultural Revolution, it brought the CCP greater control over the country's borderlands during a time of heightened hostility with China's neighbors, and it was seen as a remedy for the slow pace of socialist reform in minority regions. However, the result was to largely produce violent ethnic conflict throughout minority regions during this period. The inclusion of ethnicity in the PRC's political organization that had occurred during the early communist period facilitated the politicization of ethnicity. The subsequent attempts by the CCP to assimilate these groups led them to cling more tightly together and violently resist the state's attempts at assimilation during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.

B. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

In March of 1959 amid a growing storm of unrest in Tibet, the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and took exile in India. Subsequently, the region exploded as Tibetans all across China's western territory took up arms against the state. At its height, the Tibetan resistance had over 5,000 guerilla troops operating from Tibet's southern region, who

where covertly supplied by the American Central Intelligence Agency.⁹⁸ The roots of this rebellion went all the way back to Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 and subsequent division of historical Tibet between the Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region and the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. In dividing Tibet in this manner the CCP was able to restrict the terms of the 17-Point Agreement and the secular position of the Dalai Lama's government to only the Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region. As such, those Tibetans who resided outside the autonomous zone were not guaranteed the same level of minority rights and were largely excluded from local government. This angered many of the region's traditional elite, whose power was further undercut by land reform and collectivization. Additionally, as the poor economic policies of the Great Leap Forward began to produce food shortages anti-Chinese sentiment was roused among the Tibetan masses. As disenfranchised Tibetans in the east began to clash with Chinese security forces, many fled west into the Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region, concentrating around Lhasa.

Even without the influx of refugees from eastern Tibet, tensions were heightened within the autonomous zone for many of the same reasons. Collectivization had upset the region's traditional society and as China progressed deeper into the Great Leap Forward attacks on Tibetan culture and religion were also increased. The Dalai Lama attempted to keep the peace as he had promised to cooperate with the Chinese government and facilitate Tibet's integration into China. However, as the situation deteriorated and suspicion mounted, the Dalai Lama decided to flee out fear that the Chinese government intended to kidnap and remove him from Tibet. The reports of the Chinese intention to kidnap the Dalai Lama and his flight served as the catalyst that sparked open fighting between the Tibetan resistance and the Chinese. The rebels proved to be poorly trained, equipped, and organized, and within several weeks the PLA was able to put down the revolt. The CCP subsequently dismantled the Tibetan government and stepped up those very programs that had motivated the resistance in the first place.

⁹⁸ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 170-175.

The role of the United States and the support it provided to the Tibetan rebels is an important factor in understanding Chinese history and the relationship between the government and minority groups during this period. The assistance offered to Tibet by Washington was a small part of a larger objective in American politics to weaken and harass the communist government of China during the Cold War. The development of the Cold War throughout the 1950s and Beijing's role in the Korean War had led the United States to target the PRC and attempt to politically and economically isolate communist China from the rest of the world. As such, Washington formally recognized Chiang Kei-Shek's regime on Taiwan as the legitimate Chinese government and signed a mutual defense pact with Taipei in 1954.⁹⁹ Additionally, the United States worked to deny the PRC reconstruction loans from the World Bank and prevented its admission to the United Nations.¹⁰⁰ It was also during this period that Washington became increasingly involved in Vietnam, bringing the super-power to China's doorstep in the south.

The high level of U.S. involvement along China's periphery, the challenge that Washington's support of Taipei presented to the PRC's legitimacy, and the international animosity and exclusion directed at Beijing left it sorely in need of allies. As such, the Chinese Communists turned to their ideological brethren in Moscow for support. The alignment between Moscow and Beijing culminated in the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, signed in 1950. As a part of this alliance the Soviet Union provided the PRC with much needed financial assistance in the form of loans as well as technical experts to assist China in its industrialization and military modernization.¹⁰¹ In return the Soviet Union maintained access to important strategic and economic resources in China, specifically in Manchuria and Xinjiang.¹⁰² In Manchuria this included privileges like the continued use of Port Arthur and Darien for Soviet warships and merchants, while in Xinjiang this meant sustained access to the region's natural resources

⁹⁹ Hsu, *Modern China*, 748.

¹⁰⁰ Lieberthal *Governing China*, 90.

¹⁰¹ Hsu, *Modern China*, 661.

¹⁰² Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 52.

including oil and precious metals.¹⁰³ The concessions in Xinjiang were similar to those that the Soviet Union received in return for its support of the Eastern Turkistan Republic prior to 1949 and helps to explain Moscow's persistent interest in the region even after the rise of a friendly communist government in China.

For China the Sino-Soviet Alliance also helped to bolster the country's deteriorating security situation in a period of growing Western hostility as well as provided Beijing with its only avenue towards some degree of international legitimacy and economic support. As early as 1954, however, relations between Moscow and Beijing became strained.¹⁰⁴ Disagreements over the basic principles of communist ideology combined with more concrete economic disputes to fuel a growing rift between the PRC and USSR. Ideologically, the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's subsequent de-Stalinization campaign caused severe problems for Mao. At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's cult of personality and criticized many of his actions and beliefs. Mao, who himself practiced a cult of personality, believed that he and not Khrushchev was the true standard-bearer for the international Communist movement and therefore became less inclined to cooperate with the Soviet leader.¹⁰⁵

Economically, Moscow had objected strongly to Beijing's decision to embark upon the Great Leap Forward, and when the CCP went ahead with the Leap, Khrushchev responded by recalling his advisors and canceling Soviet aid to the PRC.¹⁰⁶ As the Sino-Soviet rift deepened, Xinjiang became a fault line as both countries considered the region economically and strategically significant. Moscow wanted to maintain its exclusive access to the region's natural resources, while Beijing considered the Soviet concessions in Xinjiang unfair and therefore sought to end them.¹⁰⁷ Between 1959 and 1962 collectivization, food shortages, and the suppression of Islam led thousands of Xinjiang's

¹⁰³ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 255.

¹⁰⁴ Hsu, *Modern China*, 678.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Jian, *Mao's China*, 78-82.

¹⁰⁷ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 255.

minority residents to flee the region, taking refuge inside the Soviet Union. Moscow welcomed the refugees as Beijing attempted to exert stricter control over the border.¹⁰⁸ The conflict came to a head in May of 1962 when the CCP formally closed the Sino-Soviet border, prompting a riot among minorities in the town of Yili. The PLA was able to put down the riot and seal the border, but by that point over 60,000 minority residents of Xinjiang had already relocated to the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹

During the same period that China's relations deteriorated with the Soviet Union, its relationship with India broke down as well. During the early years of the Cold War India had become a prominent member of the Non-Aligned movement, joining with neither the United States nor the Soviet Union as each sought to increase its influence around the world. As part of this New Delhi maintained positive relations with Beijing and agreed to respect China's borders.¹¹⁰ This decision was partially motivated by problems in India's border regions similar to those in China, where pro-independence minority groups were making administration by the central government difficult.¹¹¹ By 1962 however, long-standing border disputes between India and China erupted into open conflict in which the PLA soundly defeated India forces.¹¹² This problem was exacerbated by the conflict in Tibet, as the 1959 revolt produced a large number of Tibetan refugees who fled with the Dalai Lama into India. One indication of how much Sino-Soviet relations had deteriorated was that in this border conflict between China and India, Moscow had supported New Delhi over Beijing.¹¹³

Confrontation with the United States and growing hostility with its neighbors led Beijing to feel surrounded and isolated from the international system. As a result, China's politics became more radicalized throughout this period as the Party attempted to exert greater and greater control over all aspects of Chinese society. This began with the

108 Dryer, *China's Political System*, 288.

109 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 264.

110 Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 313.

111 *Ibid.*, 313.

112 Harry Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," in *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng*, ed Roderick MacFarquhar (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156.

113 Hsu, *Modern China*, 680.

implementation of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, which was envisioned as a way for China to become self-sufficient through rapid industrialization. In order to do this, the Great Leap called for the total collectivization of China's agriculture, so that agricultural surplus could be quickly drawn off and pumped into industrial expansion.¹¹⁴ To accomplish this collectivization the CCP undertook a massive land reform campaign where private holdings were seized and converted into communes. The communes then became the center of existence for the Chinese populace as it was only through the state controlled communes that people could obtain the essentials for survival, such as food, shelter, and healthcare. The Party enforced this collectivization through a strict population registration policy that denied families access to government services anywhere other than their assigned commune. This prevented large-scale migration as the CCP could ensure that people would not be able to eat or find housing if they attempted to leave their commune.

While such a high level of collectivization gave Beijing the ability control society and resources, the Leap itself was fundamentally flawed as it was not an effective method for agricultural production.¹¹⁵ This produced a massive famine that lasted into 1962 and resulted in an estimated 25-30 million deaths in China.¹¹⁶ The failure of the Leap and the related political upheaval was enough to create a temporary period of retrenchment in which reform-minded leadership took control of the CCP.

After several years of moderation the Party again began to pursue more radicalized policies and renew China's communist revolution in what came to be known as the Cultural Revolution.¹¹⁷ In the turmoil that ensued, many senior CCP leaders were purged as the Red Guards, young members of the Party who were enamored with Mao, attacked the 'old' customs and habits of their predecessors.¹¹⁸ The radicalism of the Cultural Revolution began to taper when Mao himself became dissatisfied at the way in

114 Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 56.

115 *Ibid.*, 71.

116 Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 108.

117 Hsu, *Modern China*, 694-695.

118 *Ibid.*, 701.

which the Red Guard movement had grown violently out of control. This repudiation of the Red Guards and Mao's death in 1976 was finally enough to conclusively end the Cultural Revolution. Ultimately, the Cultural Revolution led to a decade of political and civil strife that further exacerbated the negative impacts of the Great Leap. With much of its leadership purged, the Party itself was barely able to govern the country and the economy ground nearly to a halt.¹¹⁹

C. CCP MINORITY POLICY DURING THE GREAT LEAP AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION

During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the CCP pursued a depluralization of society strategy in which it attempted to assimilate minority groups into the Han majority. The Party shifted its strategy during this period for several reasons. The new approach fit within the context of the societal change that was occurring throughout China during the Leap and Cultural Revolution, it brought the CCP greater control over the country's borderlands during a time of heightened hostility with China's neighbors, and it was seen as a remedy for the slow pace of socialist reform in minority regions. A depluralization of ethnicity strategy, and the attempts to assimilate minority groups, fit within the larger trends of the Great Leap Forward, as all of China's peasants and workers were organized into communes and subject to extensive state control of their daily lives. In this sense, the collectivization of minority agriculture was no different than what was experienced by Han peasants throughout the rest of China.

However, this communization proved to be difficult for minority groups as often times, their means of subsistence also contained important cultural relevance. For example, Uyghur herdsman in Xinjiang watched as ever-growing state farms consumed their pastures. Under the Leap, up to 72 percent of these herdsmen were forced to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and join the communes.¹²⁰ Additionally, in Tibet and Xinjiang the power of traditional elites was largely rooted in control of land. As discussed in Chapter Two, the land holdings of Muslim clerics in Xinjiang and of feudal

¹¹⁹ Hsu, *Modern China*, 703.

¹²⁰ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 88.

landlords in Tibet were the basis of each region's social order. Therefore, with the confiscation of land there came severe social disruption and discontent. This frustration with Communist rule grew during the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution as the CCP abandoned all policies and pretenses of accommodating the traditional elites in both Xinjiang and Tibet. In each region the dissatisfaction with Beijing eventually led to armed conflict between these groups and the Chinese government during this period.

The strategic situation in the minority territories along China's borders was also a reason behind the PRC's shift to depluralization and the assimilation of minorities. As discussed, China's security situation deteriorated throughout the period of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution to the point where it became militarily engaged with the Soviet Union and India on its northern and western borders respectively. Likewise, the presence of U.S. troops in Taiwan and in Vietnam did not improve the PRC's security in the east and south either. Throughout this period the CCP came to believe that the minority groups who lived along the country's borders were not loyal to the Chinese state. This belief was fueled by the alliance between the Indian and Soviet governments with large Tibetan and Uyghur refugee groups who fled China during the Great Leap and were openly hostile to Beijing.¹²¹ The failure of the CCP's legitimization strategy in minority regions, combined with the growing antagonism between China and its neighbors, facilitated the adoption of a depluralization strategy by the Chinese government. The Party hoped to better control minority groups, and consequently their territory, by assimilating them into the Han majority. The goal was to achieve the integration of these groups with the Chinese state through cultural uniformity.¹²²

One final reason for the shift in the PRC's minority policy was that the CCP had become dissatisfied with the pace and scope of change within minority regions. Despite the Party's efforts to accommodate minorities, they were still largely resistant to integration into Communist China. This had become evident during a brief period of openness in China that came to be known as the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Under this campaign the CCP allowed its leadership to be openly criticized, believing that honest

121 Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 288.

122 Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 160.

feedback would allow the Party to improve itself and gauge China's progress towards socialism. However, when the tone of the criticism directed at the Party became too severe, it immediately clamped down up the Hundred Flowers Campaign and labeled those who had spoken out against the Party as dissidents. These dissidents were then removed from society and sent off for 're-education.'

Through the Hundred Flowers Campaign the CCP discovered the extent to which minorities were dissatisfied with Party rule. Many minorities felt that Beijing had failed to follow through on the promises of autonomy made during the early communist period and therefore sought to secede from China.¹²³ The expression of this opinion within minority areas caused a fundamental shift in the way the CCP dealt with these groups. Previously, the Party had believed that through accommodating minority differences and providing them with a degree of political, economic, and cultural autonomy it could ease resistance to Beijing's rule and make these groups loyal members of the Chinese state. The Hundred Flowers Campaign however, proved this not to be the case, and therefore the Party moved away from the legitimization of ethnicity to a depluralization of society strategy that entailed comprehensive attempts at assimilation.

The CCP carried out its plan to assimilate minority groups through a two pronged approach that included: an intensification of the methods of control that had been more subtly carried out during the early communist period; and through attacks upon the cultural diversity of minority groups in order to remove any distinction from the Han majority. Chapter Two discussed the impact of land reclamation and large-scale Han migration into minority territories during the early communist period. Both of these practices were stepped up during the time of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, as minority farmland was increasingly collectivized and state sponsored Bintugan Farms continued to grow. In Tibet collectivization was carried out through the creation of Mutual Aid Teams. The Mutual Aid Teams organized Tibetans into the work unit structure discussed above that allowed the state to exert such a high degree of control over Chinese society. They brought labor, land, and production under the jurisdiction of

¹²³ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 286.

the state and introduced a level of collectivization in Tibet unseen in the early communist period.¹²⁴ The formation of the Mutual Aid Teams was accompanied by the seizures of land and property, which was then redistributed in the form of state-owned communes.

Mutual Aid Teams and larger Agricultural Production Cooperatives (APCs) had been created during the early communist period in Xinjiang, but during the time of the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution collectivization was expanded to include both the herdsman and urban residents of the region. The creation of pastoral communes forced some 2 million herdsmen spread across Xinjiang, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces to relocate to specially constructed resettlement villages.¹²⁵ The purpose of this move was both economic and social. By organizing the herdsmen of Xinjiang in this way the Party hoped to divert them and as much of their resources as possible into agriculture, as was the purpose of collectivization throughout all of China. However, through communization the Party was able to gain greater control over the group by shifting it away from a clan-based organization, further undermining the traditional elites and social structure of the Uyghur herdsmen.¹²⁶ Similarly, in Xinjiang's urban areas, such as the capital Urumachi, the CCP also undertook a comprehensive collectivization campaign. By instituting urban communes the Party was able to gain control over the region's intellectual elite, who had made up most of the Eastern Turkistan Republic's leadership prior to 1949.¹²⁷ These leaders had largely remained loyal to the Soviet Union even after the PRC was established and enabled Moscow to continue to exert influence in the region despite the rise of the CCP. The high level of social control granted by communization therefore provided Chinese communists with the opportunity to clamp down on Uyghur leaders and weaken the Soviet Union's role in Xinjiang.

Mutual Aid Teams and Agricultural Production Cooperatives were also introduced into Guangxi as part of the CCP's push to communize the country's entire population. Chapter Two discussed the ways in which the CCP created the Zhuang and

124 Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 472-473.

125 McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 158.

126 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 252.

127 McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 159.

encouraged many diverse minority groups to combine under that banner, while simultaneously taking steps to undercut the autonomy of the very group they were creating. With the onset of the Great Leap Forward the Party shifted its strategy in dealing with the people of Guangxi and the ethnic classification of the Zhuang. During the Leap the CCP began to focus on the necessity of economic development over the promotion of the Zhuang ethnic identity.¹²⁸ As such, the people of Guangxi were placed into massive communes of up to 10,000 households, regardless of ethnic classification.¹²⁹ While the Party did not remove institutions like the Guangxi Nationalities Institute during the Great Leap, the de-emphasis of ethnicity in Guangxi along with the communization that lumped so many different minorities together economically, politically, and socially did a great deal to undercut the Zhuang ethnic identity that the CCP had worked to create during the early communist period.¹³⁰

As land reform and communization was stepped up throughout China's minority regions as part of the Great Leap, so too was Han migration. This migration was largely state sponsored, carried out by the Production and Construction Corps discussed in Chapter Two.¹³¹ In Xinjiang, for example, the Han population of the region ballooned from a little over six percent in 1953 to nearly forty percent by 1973.¹³² This period saw massive growth of the Xinjiang PCC with the incoming Han migrants taking positions in industry, infrastructure improvement, and agriculture. They helped with the construction of rail lines that connected Xinjiang with the rest of China and allowed the CCP to penetrate even further into the region. However, this population explosion in Xinjiang only exacerbated the problems with the Great Leap that began to manifest. Unrealistic

128 Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 102.

129 Ibid.

130 See Chapter Two for an explanation of Guangxi Nationalities Institute and its role in the promotion of minority studies in the region.

131 See Chapter Two for a discussion of the PCCs and their role in promoting Han migration into minority territories.

132 Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 93.

production targets led to exaggerated production reports that in turn created even more unrealistic targets in a vicious circle that culminated in the massive famine discussed above.

With so many more mouths to feed and the large demographic shift created by extensive Han migration into Xinjiang not only deepened the famine there but also gave it ethnic connotations.¹³³ To make matters worse, the CCP siphoned off grain from the Uyghur areas of the region and shipped it to the Han areas in order to compensate for the grain deficit among the Han residents. This prompted the massive migration of Uyghurs and other minority groups from Xinjiang into the Soviet Union.¹³⁴ As discussed, it was the CCP's attempt to stem this flow of migration into the Soviet Union, that led to the violent clash between Uyghur protestors and the PLA in the northern town of Yili. Despite these efforts by the CCP however, by late 1962 upwards of 60,000 people had fled Xinjiang for the Soviet Union, leaving many counties depopulated and further heightening tensions between Moscow and Beijing.¹³⁵

Similar problems with famine and unrest occurred in Tibet during this period as well. Throughout 1959 and 1965 there were massive food shortages in Tibet and the CCP adopted comparable grain appropriation techniques, where produce was extracted from Tibetans via taxes and then redistributed to the Han population of the region.¹³⁶ What is interesting to note is that during this period agricultural productivity in Tibet actually increased, demonstrating that the food shortages cited above were a result of population growth that occurred because Han migration into the region.¹³⁷ The food shortages further intensified the brewing conflict between the Tibetans and the Chinese state. It became one of the points around which the rebels rallied mass support for the revolt of 1959. In addition to contributing to the revolt, the food shortages also produced

¹³³ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 263.

¹³⁴ McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 122-123.

¹³⁵ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 264.

¹³⁶ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 287.

¹³⁷ Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet*, 167-168.

a large refugee movement from Tibet into neighboring countries. Between 1959 and 1965, the height of the food shortage, an estimated 50 to 70 thousand Tibetans fled into India, Nepal, and Bhutan.¹³⁸

The situation in Guangxi with regards to Han migration was much different from what was seen in either Tibet or Xinjiang. This was due to the close proximity of Guangxi to the Han population centers in China's east as well as the already large percentage of Han resident's in the region.¹³⁹ The Han and the minorities of Guangxi were much more evenly dispersed and therefore intermingled with one another prior to the introduction of the CCP's migration policies. As such, when the Party undertook communization as part of the Great Leap, the Han and minority populations were often combined into the same collectives. This experience was radically different from that of Tibet and Xinjiang, where the Han residents were confined to the Bintugan State Farms and the subsequent collectivization in those regions primarily effected only the minority populations.

The second prong of the CCP's approach to assimilate China's minorities was to remove the cultural diversity of these groups in order to eliminate any distinction from the Han majority. They attempted to do this through targeting those elements of minority society that were culturally significant and distinct from the Han such as religion, and in a related manner, language. The Party justified this attack on minority culture by asserting that minority leaders where simply using religion and language as an excuse to restrict socialist reforms.¹⁴⁰ In Xinjiang the Party attempted to use language policies in order to overcome the position of Islam in the region. Chapter Two discussed the role Islam played in bolstering Uyghur resistance to the Chinese state. By shifting toward Sufism over either Shia or Sunni Islam, the Muslims of Xinjiang were able to maintain their religious faith in a way that evaded the state's attempts at control via land reform. During the Great Leap Forward however, the Party changed the official script of Xinjiang's minorities to one using the Latin alphabet and incorporating elements of the

¹³⁸ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 538.

¹³⁹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 160.

Han language.¹⁴¹ In doing this, the CCP intended to undermine the importance of Islam and Muslim clerics in Xinjiang by moving the population away from Arabic. By reducing the significance of Islam and its leaders in the region the CCP hoped to remove minority religion as a means of resistance to Chinese rule and expedite Xinjiang's political and economic integration into the rest of China.

Likewise in Tibet, the Party targeted Buddhism as an aspect of regional diversity that needed to be eliminated in order to facilitate integration with the Chinese state. The motivation behind this was political, just as in Xinjiang, in that religion was singled out as means of gaining increased political control in Tibet. Given his role as both the political and religious leader of Tibet, this made the removal of the Dalai Lama's influence a critical objective of the Chinese state. As such, Beijing ended its efforts to negotiate with the Dalai Lama and officially dismissed him from his duties in the PRC.¹⁴² Additionally, the CCP dismissed the Panchen Lama, who had been formally appointed by the Chinese government to lead Tibet in the Dalai Lama's absence. With these moves Beijing had essentially eliminated the most effective secular and religious Tibetan leaders from direct participation in the region's politics.¹⁴³ Concurrently, the Party moved to reorganize the Tibetan government in a way that excluded religious leaders and other traditional elites from local office, formally concentrating political power in the hands of Han CCP members.¹⁴⁴

Having undermined Tibet's political and spiritual leadership, the Party next focused on the grassroots organizations of Tibetan Buddhism, the monks and their monasteries. As part of their campaign to destroy the 'four olds' (old ideas, old culture, old tradition, and old customs), over three thousand Red Guards were sent to Tibet in 1966.¹⁴⁵ Their mission was to overturn the institutions of Tibetan nationalism that had prevented the region's socialist transformation. Consequently, the Red Guards began

¹⁴¹ McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 119.

¹⁴² Shakya, *The Dragon*, 299-300. See Chapter Two for a discussion of the Dalai Lama's role as Vice-Chairman of the NPC.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 537.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 542

destroying Tibetan monasteries and other religious symbols.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, the Red Guards replaced pictures of the Dalai Lama with those of Mao Zedong, and forced Tibetans to study Mao's writings and teachings on communist philosophy.¹⁴⁷ The campaign against the four olds in Tibet reached its zenith when the Red Guards issued edicts that in essence completely banned the practice of Buddhism and even went as far as demand that Tibetans remove all religious material from their homes.¹⁴⁸ This demonstrates that by the time of the Cultural Revolution the CCP had abandoned all pretenses of legitimizing ethnicity and was instead carrying out a whole hearted attempt to assimilate Tibet through the destruction of its native culture.

Due to the close proximity of minority groups and the Han as well as the reduction in state support for the Zhuang ethnic identity that occurred during the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution, the attacks on minority groups were much more passive in Guangxi. For example, Chapter Two discussed how the CCP created a Zhuang language, which it then used as tool to promote the adoption of that identity by the people of Guangxi. However, as part of the effort to end regional diversity and assimilate minority groups, the CCP kept Mandarin Chinese the official language.¹⁴⁹ As a result of this Mandarin remained the language of the media, business, politics, and education. Therefore there was no real motivation for the people of Guangxi to learn the Zhuang language because it provided no tangible benefits.¹⁵⁰ By keeping Mandarin the official language the Party was able to curb any desire in Guangxi to truly embrace the Zhuang minority identity. Additionally, interest in minority culture was also deterred by the campaign against the 'four olds' discussed above. As part of this campaign the Guangxi Nationalities Institute was finally shut down in 1969 and other efforts at the advancement and study of minority ethnicity was also halted.¹⁵¹ This demonstrates that the CCP was

¹⁴⁶ Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet*, 177.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 543.

¹⁴⁸ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 320-321.

¹⁴⁹ Jing Lin, "Policies and Practices of Bilingual Education for the Minorities in China," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 18, no. 3 (1997): 193-205.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁵¹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 104-106.

no longer interested in promoting ethnic diversity and the Zhuang identity and therefore those people that the state had so recently classified as the Zhuang during the early communist period distanced themselves from that label so as not to become a target of the Red Guards.

As with all of China's politics during the Cultural Revolution, minority policy became heavily radicalized. This radicalization was basically a codification and intensification of the subtle attempts at control carried out during the early communist period. This included the official declaration that China was not a multinational country, the designation of minority territories as 'special' and 'autonomous' were removed, and the formal abolition of minority schooling and their languages.¹⁵² These policies created a situation in which the CCP officials and the Red Guards could treat minority groups in anyway they saw fit, regardless of how it might impact their culture or livelihood. In many minority regions the chaos brought on by the poor economic and agricultural practices of the Great Leap and the intensity with which the Party and the Red Guards attacked their culture caused the resentment of minority groups to lead into violent conflict with the state. Both Xinjiang and Tibet witnessed violent clashes between the indigenous populations and the Chinese government that precipitated large refugee migration out of China. Violence also erupted in Guangxi during this period as the division and class struggle promoted by the Red Guards grew out of control. These events and the response of minority groups to the state's actions during this period are the topic of the next section.

D. MINORITY GROUP RESPONSE

The attempts at assimilation of minority groups carried out by the Chinese state during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution provoked a great deal of backlash on the part of these groups. The structuring of the relationship between the state and minorities that occurred during the early communist period with the creation of ethnically based autonomous regions and promises of political, economic, and cultural self-determination took on new significance when the PRC shifted to policies of

¹⁵² Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 25-27.

assimilation. These promises had been the basis for minority group cooperation with Beijing during the early communist period, but as the Chinese government intensified collectivization and Han migration during this period it was perceived by minorities as an attempt by outsiders to destroy their way of life.¹⁵³ This prompted increased resentment and frustration at Chinese rule that deepened as the CCP increasingly targeted minority cultural diversity in order to speed up assimilation into the Han majority. As a result many minority groups during this period engaged in violent conflict with the state.

Such was the case with both the Tibetans and Uyghurs who became so disenchanted with CCP rule that they engaged in violent clashes with the Chinese state. The 1959 revolt in Tibet was the culmination of numerous factors that included disagreements between Beijing and the Dalai Lama's government; growing unrest in Tibet among both the traditional elite and the masses of the region; and foreign influence. The division of historical Tibet among numerous administrative units within the Chinese state was one particular point of contention between Lhasa and Beijing.¹⁵⁴ In negotiating the 17-Point Agreement the government of the Dalai Lama assumed that the tenants of the treaty would apply to all Tibetans.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, when Beijing divided Tibet between the Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan and applied the 17-Point Agreement only to the autonomous region the government of Lhasa vehemently protested. This move effectively cut off large portions of the Tibetan population from the leadership of the Dalai Lama and instead placed them directly under the CCP's provincial governing bodies. While ultimately there was very little the Dalai Lama could do to resist this attempt by the CCP to divide and rule Tibet it became a constant source of tension between Lhasa and Beijing.

Another point of contention between Lhasa and Beijing was the growth of the Tibetan resistance movement. Despite promises from the Dalai Lama of cooperation with the Chinese government, neither he nor the CCP had ever been able to quell Tibetan

¹⁵³ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 288.

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter Two, for a discussion concerning the division of Tibet.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*.

resistance to Chinese rule.¹⁵⁶ This resistance movement was largely led by the disenfranchised traditional elites of Tibet, the formal feudal landlords, who had lost their place in society due to the CCP sponsored collectivization and recruitment of local leadership from the peasantry. These leaders fomented popular resistance among Tibet's masses by highlighting the CCP's role in the creation of food shortages and attacks on Buddhism discussed above.¹⁵⁷ The failure of the People's Assemblies to effectively petition the Chinese government for change and the threat of imprisonment if such a move was ever repeated left many Tibetans feel they had no choice other than fight given the intensity of the CCP's efforts to assimilate them.¹⁵⁸ One final factor in the growth of the Tibetan resistance movement was the covert support provided by the United States. During this period the CIA provided weapons, supplies, and training to the Tibetan rebels as part of plan to harass and distract the Chinese government.¹⁵⁹

Due to these factors the Tibetan resistance had grown to approximately 5,000 guerilla fighters concentrated in Tibet's southern territory by 1959.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, those Tibetans that did not actively fight the Chinese government largely offered their support to the resistance, providing shelter, supplies and weapons.¹⁶¹ This led to violence in 1959 when the people of Lhasa began to demonstrate against the Chinese presence in Tibet, fearing that Beijing intended to kidnap the Dalai Lama.¹⁶² The resulting violence prompted the Dalai Lama's departure from Tibet. The Tibetan resistance seized the opportunity to act out against Communist rule, but within several weeks the revolt was put down and the local government of Tibet was disbanded.¹⁶³

The end of the 1959 revolt and the flight of the Dalai Lama was not however, the end of Tibetan resistance during this period. Following the Dalai Lama's departure to

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 444.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 436.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 442.

¹⁵⁹ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 201-202.

¹⁶⁰ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 444.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 446.

¹⁶³ Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 168.

India, the CCP appointed the Panchen Lama as the official leader of Tibet. This was done because Beijing believed that the Panchen Lama would be more accommodating than his predecessor, which would facilitate the integration of Tibet into China. However, the Panchen Lama continued to resist Chinese rule much as the Dalai Lama had. The Panchen Lama's efforts to prevent the total assimilation of Tibet culminated in what is known as the 70,000 Character Petition, in which he criticized the CCP for its attacks on the Tibetan nationality, specifically those targeted at Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁶⁴ Infuriated by the Panchen Lama's statements, the CCP dismissed him, dismantled the Tibetan government, and officially revoked the promises of autonomy made during the early communist period.¹⁶⁵ However, from his exile in India the Dalai Lama and the large Tibetan émigré community began to undertake a campaign to raise international awareness of Tibet's plight, which would become a hallmark of the resistance movement following the Cultural Revolution.

Similarly in Xinjiang, many Uyghurs responded negatively to CCP rule, violently clashing with the Chinese government or fleeing into the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁶ As discussed, tensions between the CCP and the minorities of Xinjiang became violent in the town of Yining in 1962 in a riot between protestors and the PLA. The immediate cause of the riot was Chinese attempts to seal the Sino-Soviet border and prevent further Uyghur migration to the Soviet Union. The deeper cause of the riot was the reason why so many Xinjiang's residents wanted to flee in the first place, these groups had chafed under the Chinese attempts at control. The collectivization seen in Xinjiang had proved highly disruptive to the region's farmer, herders, intellectuals, and religious leaders. This situation was only made worse by the massive Han migration and corresponding food shortages that occurred during this period. For many Uyghurs the preservation of Islam formed the basis of grassroots resistance to Chinese domination. When the CCP stepped up its program to undermine Islam, many Uyghurs then attempted to flee China altogether, as demonstrated by the incident in Yili.

¹⁶⁴ Shakyas, *The Dragon*, 271.

¹⁶⁵ Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, 169.

¹⁶⁶ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 94.

For Xinjiang's elite, resistance to Chinese rule proved to be more complicated. This was due to the way in which the relationship between these leaders and the CCP developed from their association with the Soviet Union. Many of Xinjiang's leaders had been trained in the Soviet Union during China's Republican Era. As such they were communist and often times were inducted directly into the Chinese Communist Party from the Communists Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This was done during the early communist period by CCP in order to co-opt Xinjiang's leadership into the newly established PRC's government structure under the belief that this would facilitate the region's integration into China. Also during the early communist period the Soviet Union decreased the amount of support it provided to these leaders in effort to encourage them to cooperate with the CCP. However, as the rift between Beijing and Moscow grew, the Soviet Union began to reassert its influence in Xinjiang. Fully aware of this the CCP undertook the urban communization program discussed above in order to limit Moscow's influence and increase Beijing's control over the region's elite.

In this sense then, Xinjiang's leadership served two masters, one in Beijing the other in Moscow, and by the 1960s the CCP was no longer willing to tolerate this arrangement. As such, this period saw the purge of many influential Uyghur leaders, who had risen in Xinjiang's local government despite their minority status.¹⁶⁷ Even Saifudin, the prominent Uyghur leader whose association with the CPSU and induction into the CCP was discussed in Chapter Two, was unable to escape some persecution by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. As part of the campaign against the four olds in Xinjiang, Saifudin was targeted and his house was ransacked by radical youths.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, Saifudin survived the purges, but he was one of only a few Uyghurs who remained in a prominent position in Xinjiang after the Cultural Revolution.

In total there were 42,000 Uyghurs removed from public office during the period of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, with only Saifudin and one other previously politically unknown holding high formal office in the region by 1972.¹⁶⁹ The

¹⁶⁷ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 272.

¹⁶⁸ McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power*, 225.

¹⁶⁹ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 272.

dismissal of so much of the region's leadership and the radicalism of Cultural Revolution politics aggravated the ethnic tension caused by the collectivization campaigns and food shortages, resulting in continuous violence and migration in Xinjiang that persisted up until the 1970s.¹⁷⁰ It was only with the moderation of the policies of the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution that Xinjiang began to settle down.

The small amount of research located for this project on the impact of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution specifically upon the people of Guangxi suggests that the experience of the Zhuang during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution was markedly different from that of the Tibetans and Uyghurs. At a time when other minority groups banded more tightly together to defend themselves from assimilation by the state, the Zhuang largely abandoned their ethnic identity. As across the rest of China, the people of Guangxi were forced into communes and suffered from the subsequent famine that accompanied the failure of the Great Leap. Throughout this period, the institutions created by the state to promote Zhuang awareness were not disbanded, but de-emphasized, which reduced the level of state sponsorship provided to the Zhuang ethnicity.¹⁷¹ The violence that was seen in Guangxi during this period did not necessarily occur across ethnic lines or even with the state, but often between neighboring villages with similar ethnic compositions.¹⁷² This suggests that conflict in Guangxi during this period was more over access to resources, such as food and water, as the large sizes of the communes often combined very poor villages with the wealthy.¹⁷³ This redistribution of wealth in a time scarcity caused a great deal of resentment, which ultimately led to violence.

E. ASSESSMENT

The period of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution was perhaps the most difficult and tumultuous time in the PRC's recent history. International

¹⁷⁰ Millward and Tursun, *Political Histories*, 96.

¹⁷¹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 102-103.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 102.

diplomatic and economic isolation, exacerbated by openly hostile relations with the super-powers and India, forced Chinese leadership to look inward and attempt to make China self-reliant. The resulting collectivization placed too much of a strain on the country's agricultural system and led to one of the largest famines in history. The instability brought on by the failure of the Great Leap Forward, allowed China to be swept up in an outpouring of radicalism that further stunted the country's development and hampered effective governance. The Cultural Revolution perpetuated the downward spiral in China's economic and political capabilities for almost an entire decade. It was not until Mao himself died, that the damage of the Cultural Revolution could be repaired and China could be put on the path towards reform, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

With regards to the Chinese government's treatment of minorities during this period, the extreme changes that took place throughout the rest of Chinese society were also reflected in the government's treatment of minority groups. This period saw a dramatic shift away from legitimization and minority rights to depluralization and assimilation. Additionally, as China's politics became more radicalized with the failure of the Leap and the onset of the Cultural Revolution, so too did Beijing's minority policies. In order to more rapidly integrate minority areas into the PRC, the CCP officially revoked the promises of self-determination, increased collectivization, and intensified Han migration. The change to depluralization was also motivated by CCP frustration with the scope of socialist reforms in minority areas as well as the need to exert greater control over the strategically important borderlands inhabited by minority groups.

For their part, minority groups during this period responded by organizing themselves politically to resist the state, sometimes violently. This process began between 1949 and 1957 when the CCP incorporated ethnicity into China's political system by creating ethnically based administrative units, the autonomous zones, to accompany the promises of self-determination. This facilitated the politicizing of ethnicity and created an expectation among minority groups of a certain level of autonomy that was not delivered in practice. Subsequently, when the CCP shifted

towards assimilatory policies it further collided with these minority groups as they clung more tightly together to defend themselves from the state. The result was an increase in ethnic violence between minority groups and the state during the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution. This is demonstrated by the experiences of both the Tibetans and Uyghurs throughout this period as these groups bound more tightly together to resist their destruction at the hands of the state.

For the Zhuang, however, there was not an increase in conflict with the state, and to a large extent, the level of ethnic identity among this group actually receded during this period. This was because prior to the Leap and Cultural Revolution the Zhuang existed largely as a creation of the state, fueled by CCP propaganda and mobilization campaigns. When the CCP changed its stance on minorities groups during this period, the removal of government sponsorship caused a drop in the number of people identifying themselves as Zhuang. In short, without the CCP coercing people to be Zhuang, many stopped identifying as such and shifted their identity back to the clan/tribe it had been before the government introduced the concept of the Zhuang.

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IV. THE EARLY REFORM PERIOD: 1977-1989

A. INTRODUCTION

With the end of Cultural Revolution, came the rise of more moderate and reform minded leadership in the CCP. These leaders sought to move away from the radicalism of the preceding decades and instead focus upon China's economic development. As such, they introduced massive economic reforms that brought a great deal of growth to China. However, this growth was not evenly distributed throughout the country, as the coastal provinces rapidly developed, the interior lagged further and further behind. The disparity of wealth became a large problem for many of China's minorities, as they were concentrated in west, far away from boomtowns like Shanghai. For example, during the period between 1978 and 1989, China's per capita GDP more than doubled.¹⁷⁴ In minority regions however, growth rates had actually dropped to approximately 48 percent of the national average over the same period.¹⁷⁵ This helped to fuel minority discontent with the Chinese state during the early reform period. In an attempt to more evenly distribute the country's growth and mitigate the subsequent social unrest, Beijing began large development projects designed to improve the economic situation of China's minority regions.

One problem with this development plan however, was that it maintained the trend of large scale Han migration into minority regions that had been such a contentious issue in earlier periods. The CCP argued that such relocation was necessary in order to complete infrastructure improvement projects, but to many minorities it appeared that the state was continuing the assimilatory policies of the Cultural Revolution, only in a more subtle form. The critical difference in the early reform period however, was the moderation of China's politics, which provided these groups with the political space to organize and engage with the state in a more pluralistic way. Under minority law reform such groups were awarded a higher degree of participation and freedom of expression

¹⁷⁴ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 129.

¹⁷⁵ Dryer, *China's Political System*, 294.

that reduced the need for these groups to resort to violence in order to be heard. As such, many minority groups during this period developed effective political organizations so that they could participate in government and articulate their demands to the Chinese state. This was demonstrated by the proliferation of pro-minority activist groups, institutes, and other organizations during the 1980s.

The change in the CCP's approach to minority groups during the early reform period meant that many of the demands made by these groups were not only tolerated, but often accommodated, as a wave of political liberalization swept the country subsequent to the economic reform. The efforts of the state to legitimize the role of ethnicity in politics during this period is reflected in the inclusion of minority rights in 1982 Constitution and 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy. These laws provided minorities with the broadest and most well defined set of legal protections they had ever enjoyed in China. However, as the 1980s progressed, the push for democratic reforms came to threaten the Party's control of the Chinese state. In response, the CCP began to move away from pluralism and return to the more repressive policies of earlier periods. These tensions boiled over in the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, in which state security forces violently cracked-down on student protestors. Following this, the CCP halted China's economic liberalization in order to stabilize the country and reassert its rule. This negatively impacted minority groups, as their political activism became a target for state suppression.

B. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT

During the late 1960s, the PRC's international position started to improve as Washington and Beijing moved towards rapprochement. The Nixon Administration began to quietly reach out to Beijing, in the hopes that improved relations with China would help the United States bring an end to the Vietnam War.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, President Nixon believed that alignment with China would allow the United States

¹⁷⁶ Mann, *About Face*, 39.

greater leverage over the Soviet Union in negotiations over strategic arms.¹⁷⁷ In order to accomplish this, Nixon was willing to overlook the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution and fundamentally alter the U.S. position on the People's Republic of China. The greatest of these changes was the shift in Washington's policy towards Taiwan. In negotiating the rapprochement between the United States and China, both sides agreed that there was only one China and that Taiwan was part of that China.¹⁷⁸ While there was still disagreement over whether Beijing or Taipei was the rightful government of that one China, this shift in policy was enough to accommodate leaders in both the United States and China, permitting the restoration of diplomatic relations.¹⁷⁹

For Beijing, the diplomatic recognition of Washington and the goodwill of the Nixon Administration solved a multitude of strategic and economic problems. Domestically, the change in U.S. policy regarding Taiwan was considered a major step towards the eventual reunification of the island with the mainland.¹⁸⁰ More importantly, this change ended the United State's decades long diplomatic boycott of the PRC, which then permitted Beijing to restore its relations with much of the world. Additionally, by repairing its relationship with Washington, Beijing was able to more effectively balance and deter Soviet aggression. This was a major concern given the violent clashes along the Ussuri River in 1969 and massive build up of troops on both sides of the Sino-Soviet border that had followed.¹⁸¹ So, by achieving rapprochement with the Washington, Beijing had made important gains in its objectives regarding Taiwan, removed the threat posed by the United States in Vietnam, and made an important ally in its conflict with the Soviet Union. China was now in the position to re-integrate politically and economically into the world system.

¹⁷⁷ Steven W. Hook and John Spanier, *American Foreign Policy since World War II*. 17th ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2007), 142.

¹⁷⁸ "Shanghai Communiqué," February 27, 1972, in Cheng, et. al., *The Search for Modern China : A Documentary Collection*, (1999): 436-40.

¹⁷⁹ Jian. *Mao's China*, 266-267.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Hsu, *Modern China*, 725-726.

By 1971, the PRC had formally taken possession of the China seat on the United Nations Security Council, had negotiated peace with the United States, and was no longer internationally isolated.¹⁸² All of this fundamentally altered the political and economic situation in China that had given rise to the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. As such, more moderate members of the CCP were able to rise to power and these new leaders then set out to stabilize China politically and remake its economy. They began by undoing much of the agricultural collectivization that had been at the center of China's economic problems since the 1950s. This involved returning the responsibility for agriculture back to individual farmers and by 1984 China was growing enough grain to feed its entire population.¹⁸³ This was well received in minority areas, where collectivization had been a particularly contentious issue between groups like the Uyghurs and the Chinese government. However, while reforms brought an end to the collectivization of minority territory, they did not bring an end to Han migration, which continued to be a critical source of conflict between many minorities and the state.

Another important aspect of the economic reforms was the creation of Township-Village Enterprises (TVEs) and Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The TVEs were locally owned and operated Chinese factories that were allowed to make a profit off a certain percentage of their products. They often partnered with foreign companies enticed to operate within the Chinese economy because of incentives provided as part of the SEZs. The result was tremendous growth in the Chinese economy with the country's GDP more than doubling in the decade between 1978 and 1988.¹⁸⁴ One problem however, was that much of this growth was confined to China's coastal regions, where the TVEs and SEZs were concentrated.¹⁸⁵ This created a large disparity of wealth between China's coast and the interior, which is significant in the discussion of the state's

¹⁸² Jian, *Mao's China*, 239.

¹⁸³ Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 89.

¹⁸⁴ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 128-129.

¹⁸⁵ Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 132.

relationship with minority groups, as these groups reside mostly in the interior. This economic disparity helped to fuel conflict between the state and minority groups during this period.

An unintended consequence of the economic liberalization was subsequent attempts at political liberalization. As China opened its doors to the West economically, foreign ideas and popular culture also entered into Chinese society. Many Chinese students became especially impressed by Western democracy, and touted such change as a necessary 'modernization' for China.¹⁸⁶ These ideas challenged the Communist ideology of the Party and threatened its leadership of the country. As a result the Party made an effort to suppress such ideas and curb the demand for democratic reform. Student unrest over the lack of political liberalization boiled over in a wave of protests and demonstrations that began in April 1989. The students gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, and by May, the number of protesters had grown to over one million people.¹⁸⁷ Increasingly embarrassed and threatened by the demonstrations, the CCP leadership instituted Martial Law on May 20, 1989. The Communist elders believed that the student protestors represented a genuine threat to their power and felt it necessary to take decisive forceful action.¹⁸⁸ As such, on June 4, they ordered the PLA to clear Tiananmen Square by dawn and authorized the shooting of the demonstrators, if necessary.¹⁸⁹ The PLA did use violence to break up the protests: estimates of those killed range from 900 to 3,000 in the approximately eight hours from when the military crackdown began to when the square was cleared.¹⁹⁰

The response from the international community to the Tiananmen Square Massacre was swift. The CCP was condemned for its oppressive practices and economic sanctions were imposed immediately.¹⁹¹ Once again, China was largely ostracized

¹⁸⁶ Hsu, *Modern China*, 872-873.

¹⁸⁷ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 144.

¹⁸⁸ Hsu, *Modern China*, 934.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 936.

¹⁹⁰ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 145.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

diplomatically from the rest of the world. However, with the government having demonstrated its willingness to use force to quell dissent, the domestic protests died down quickly.¹⁹² Communist leaders quickly attempted to return domestic and international attention back to China's economic development.¹⁹³ This combination of tough domestic policy and emphasis upon continued economic growth appeared to work, as by 1992 China's economy had recovered from the dip it suffered in response to the Tiananmen Square Massacre.¹⁹⁴ In this regard the CCP was able to continue its economic liberalization without carrying out much in the way of political reform. The balance between reform and retrenchment in the Chinese economy and the need to contain popular demands for political liberalization became the focus for the CCP's domestic policy agenda after the incidents of 1989.

C. MINORITY POLICY DURING THE EARLY REFORM PERIOD

During the period between 1977 and 1989, the pendulum of Chinese minority policy took another dramatic swing back towards a legitimization of ethnicity strategy. This change in strategy was undertaken as part of the larger trend away from the extreme policies of the Cultural Revolution in an attempt by the CCP to restore political stability to China. Therefore, in returning to a legitimization of ethnicity strategy the CCP hoped that it could redeem itself with minority groups who had become embittered with Party rule during the previous decades.¹⁹⁵ In executing this shift in policy the Party took several important steps: the implementation of formal legal protections for minority groups; the termination of collectivized agriculture; efforts to economically develop minority areas; and a renewed effort to promote minority cultural diversity. The purpose of these moves was to win over China's minority groups through a more genuine attempt at autonomy in order to focus the entire country's attention on economic development. This renewed effort at minority rights went further than what was seen in the early

192 Lieberthal, *Governing China*, 145.

193 Hsu, *Modern China*, 943.

194 Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 98.

195 Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 29.

communist period in that the policies were more pluralist and suggested a long-term acceptance of the ethnic distinctiveness of minority groups by the Chinese government.¹⁹⁶

The attempts at legitimization of ethnicity by the CCP were reflected in the 1982 PRC Constitution, which provided increased legal protection to minority groups, and the 1984 Law of Regional Autonomy of the Nationalities. This law provided minority groups with the broadest and most well defined set of legal protections ever seen in China.¹⁹⁷ These protections included: increased self-administration, definitions and obligations of administrative organizations, definition of the relationship between the central government and autonomous zone, requirement that the leadership of the autonomous zone be from a minority group, and increased responsibility for planning and economic development. The changes embodied in these laws were designed to mitigate the supremacy of the CCP in the functioning of the autonomous zones that had restricted real self-determination for minority groups in earlier periods.¹⁹⁸ By creating more rigid legal standards for the protection of minorities, Beijing believed that it could guarantee them more equitable treatment and facilitate the peaceful coexistence of these groups within the Chinese state.

Another method by which the Chinese government attempted to improve relations with minority groups during this period was through the termination of collectivized agriculture combined with increased economic development in minority areas. As part of the overall economic reform undertaken by the Chinese government in the 1970s, agricultural collectives were officially disbanded and farmlands returned to individual families to work. This was well received in minority areas where collectivization had been a particularly contentious issue. In addition to controlling agriculture, communization allowed the Party to control society, which during the Leap and Cultural Revolution they used to dismantle minority culture. Since minorities had seen collectivization as a deliberate attempt to destroy their culture they welcomed the

¹⁹⁶ Dreyer. *China's Political System*, 292.

¹⁹⁷ Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 42.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

abandonment of this practice. For example, in Tibet de-collectivization simultaneously relieved the regions food shortages and allowed Buddhists to resume their religious practices.¹⁹⁹

The de-collectivization in minority agriculture was combined with substantial efforts to bring economic development to minority areas. This was because the CCP believed that a primary reason for minority discontent with Chinese rule was due to the disparity of wealth between these groups and the Han majority.²⁰⁰ This disparity was not only nationwide, but also in minority areas for themselves. For example, in 1982 Guangxi was the third most impoverished province in all of China, but also within Guangxi itself, the Zhuang were comparatively poorer than their Han neighbors.²⁰¹ The Party recognized that the inequality between the coastal regions where the SEZs were located and the interior where the minority groups were concentrated was also fueling minority discontent. In order to balance the growth between the coast and interior, as well as improve the economic conditions of minorities, the CCP introduced massive development programs in minority areas.²⁰² These included infrastructure projects and infusions of capital to facilitate transportation in and out of these regions and encourage the development of local industries.

One final component of the legitimization of ethnicity strategy pursued by the Chinese government in the 1980s was to allow, and in some cases promote, ethnic diversity among China's minorities. This included allowing minorities to freely practice their religions and speak their native languages. The 1982 Constitution included a provision to protect religious freedoms despite the Party's commitment to atheism, asserting that as long as the success of China as a country could be put first, minority religion would be tolerated.²⁰³ As a result, when religious leaders were freed from the communes they were allowed to return to work and holy sites throughout China's

¹⁹⁹ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 570.

²⁰⁰ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 292.

²⁰¹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 150.

²⁰² Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 292.

²⁰³ Liu Xingwu and Alatan, *China's Policy Towards Her National Minorities*, 152.

minority regions were restored.²⁰⁴ Additionally in Xinjiang, the Chinese government permitted Uyghur Muslims to undertake the Islamic Pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁰⁵ CCP cadres in Tibet were similarly instructed to avoid interfering in the observance of Buddhism. As such, the work of the Red Guards in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution was quickly undone, as Mao's pictures came down and the Dalai Lama's went back up in their place, with Buddhism resuming its central role in the lives of Tibetans.²⁰⁶

The Party's efforts to promote ethnic diversity also included the reintroduction of the minority studies institutes that had been founded in the 1950s. As discussed in Chapter Two, these associations were originally created to train minority cadres, coordinate minority research, and translate books into minority languages. Such organizations had been shut down during the Cultural Revolution as part of the CCP's efforts at assimilation. In bringing them back, Beijing hoped to demonstrate its acceptance of minority diversity by sponsoring institutions dedicated to the examination of and preservation of minority culture. Therefore, once these institutions were reinstated they again began to promote minority history and culture, publishing book and hosting regional conferences on minority studies. With time, these groups took on a political aspect, examining ways in which political and economic reform could be better facilitated in minority areas. This was the case in Guangxi, where researchers from the Guangxi Zhuang Studies Association undertook an examination of the region's economic development.²⁰⁷ Through such work these groups came to form the center of minority activism during the 1980s.

Despite the legal reforms undertaken by the CCP in an effort to offer minorities more genuine autonomy during this period, the legitimization of ethnicity strategy used by the Party was frustrated by many of the same problems that occurred during the early communist period. In ways similar to that seen in the 1950s, the legitimization

²⁰⁴ Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 109

²⁰⁵ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang" in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2004), 330.

²⁰⁶ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 392

²⁰⁷ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 128.

strategy created political space for minority groups to vent their dissatisfaction at Beijing when they felt the Party did not deliver on its promises of self-determination. This was exacerbated by other issues that had persisted into the early reform period, such as, the continued monopoly of control enjoyed by the CCP within China's government structure, and the perpetuation of large-scale Han migration into minority regions. These issues produced continued resistance to the PRC, despite the efforts of the Party to be more accommodating towards minority groups.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the CCP technically exists separate from the state governing structure of PRC. However, each state organization has a corresponding CCP counterpart, which exercises ultimate authority. As a result of this, the Party can override any decision made by the state government including the minority governing bodies in the autonomous zones. So while Communist Party leadership asserted that the protections implemented under the 1982 Constitution and 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy were sufficient to guarantee minority rights, many groups still felt that their autonomy had been undermined by the Han dominated CCP and its role in China's government.²⁰⁸ In Tibet for example, the Party reinstated the United Front and appointed numerous Tibetan cadres to local office. However, the years of instability in Tibet caused by the Cultural Revolution had left the region without an educated workforce and therefore a shortage of qualified Tibetan recruits for government posts.²⁰⁹ Due to this, the Party considered the Tibetan cadres ineffective administrators and therefore, the help of the Han was needed in order to keep the regional government functioning.²¹⁰ This excuse prevented any real transfer of power from taking place between the Han dominated CCP and the local Tibetan government.

Additionally, minorities were fearful of the government because of intense effort at assimilation made during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore despite the Party's attempts at reform, minority groups remained leery of the Chinese government, because ultimately their fate still rested in the hands of the CCP. These groups feared that if the

²⁰⁸ Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 43.

²⁰⁹ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 391.

²¹⁰ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 582.

Party were to return to the radical policies of the preceding decades, they would once again be targeted by the state for assimilation.²¹¹ This influenced minority political activism during this period, leading many groups to push for political liberalization as they believed this was the only a way they could be protected from future attack by the Chinese government. As part of the effort at continued reform, minority groups attempted to force the state to better define their rights as laid out in the 1984 law and further reinforce that law with more regulation. During this period, Zhuang political activists from the Guangxi Nationalities Research Institute challenged the state to better define minority rights with regards to economic self-determination that were promised under the Regional Autonomy Law.²¹² The Party however, obstructed this initiative and continued to monopolize economic decision-making in Guangxi throughout the early reform years.

These problems were exacerbated by continued Han migration into minority areas throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Major infrastructure projects undertaken in minority territories, like Xinjiang for example, employed primarily Han workers, which further encouraged Han migration into these regions.²¹³ As a result, the Han population in minority territories continued to grow, reaching 41 percent of Xinjiang's total population by 1982.²¹⁴ While such infrastructure projects did help to bring economic development to minority regions, the employment practices of the Chinese government and the ongoing Han migration disproportionately benefited the Han residents of those regions.²¹⁵ As a result of these failures not only did minority provinces remain among the poorest in China but also, the minority residents of those areas became even poorer relative to their Han neighbors. For example, during this period most of the Xinjiang's production and subsequent wealth was located in the north and east, where the Han

211 Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities*, 43.

212 Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 117-118.

213 Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 591.

214 Stanley W. Toops, "The Demography of Xinjiang" n *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2004), 246.

215 Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 293.

population was concentrated, with per capita GDP reaching between 20000 and 35000 Yuan. Meanwhile, in the Uyghur dominated west and south per capita GDP was only 1245 to 2999 Yuan.²¹⁶

A similar pattern was seen in Tibet, where the Chinese government dispatched thousands of Han workers to the region to engage in development projects.²¹⁷ Most of these workers were semi-skilled or unskilled and were sent to Tibet originally on short-term contracts. However, large numbers of these workers remained in Tibet after their contracts expired, taking advantage of the CCP's preferential hiring policies for the Han. The large influx of Han migrants into the region sparked inflation, again making it difficult for Tibetans to buy basic commodities.²¹⁸ This ongoing migration of the Han into minority areas and the persistent disparity of wealth between these migrants and the indigenous minorities led to continued minority resistance to Chinese rule even after the CCP adopted a legitimization of ethnicity strategy.

D. MINORITY RESPONSE DURING THE EARLY REFORM PERIOD

The efforts to reform and moderate China's minority policy undertaken by the CCP in the 1980s essentially restored the state/minority relationship to what it had been in the early communist period. Ethnicity once again took on political significance, not as the target for assimilation, but rather the criteria for participation. The CCP hoped that through legitimizing ethnicity and incorporating it back into China's political structure the government could win over minority groups and finally bring them into the Chinese fold. This had also been the purpose of the legitimization strategy pursued by the Party during the 1950s, but after twenty years of aggressive assimilation, China's minorities were much more cautious in dealing with the state. This was demonstrated in the growth of minority group political activism and the large role those activists played in

²¹⁶ Toops, *The Demography of Xinjiang*, 261.

²¹⁷ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 591.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 592.

challenging the state during the early reform period. Minorities consistently challenged the CCP to produce the level of self-determination and economic development it had promised under reform.

The enactment of the 1982 Constitution and 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy gave minority group's a stronger legal base from which to challenge the Chinese government during this period than what was seen in earlier times. As mentioned above, the Guangxi Nationalities Research Institute used China's legal reform as the basis for its demands of increased economic self-determination for the Zhuang in the region. Zhuang activists zeroed in on issues of natural resource use, foreign trade, and tax exemptions, which they considered too vague in the Regional Autonomy Law and challenged the government to more specifically define minority rights in such areas.²¹⁹ Similarly, in Xinjiang scholars from the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences used their position to assert Uyghur distinctiveness and criticize the CCP for its attempts to undermine the region's autonomy.²²⁰ In this regard, the scholars of Xinjiang in Guangxi became the new political entrepreneurs of these regions during this period, using their knowledge of the law and academic standing to mobilize resistance to the state. This was particularly acute in Xinjiang where the region's traditional elite, like Saifudin discussed in Chapter Two and Three, had been co-opted by the CCP for so long that they were no longer trusted by the Uyghur masses.²²¹ Therefore during the 1980s, Uyghur academics and students became a powerful force in mobilizing Xinjiang's minorities against the Party, denouncing Han migration and lack of minority representation in government.²²²

Also in Xinjiang, as the restrictions on the practice of religion eased, Islam's popularity resurged. This led to the reconstruction and reopening of the region's madrasas and mosques, which then became centers for popular resistance to the state and challenged the state not only on issues of religious freedom, but also political

²¹⁹ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 117.

²²⁰ Gardner Bovingdon, "Contested Histories" in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2004), 361-362.

²²¹ Gardner Bovingdon, "The Not-So-Silent Majority: Uyghur Resistance to Han Rule in Xinjiang," *Modern China* 28, no. 1 (January 2002): 39-79, 59.

²²² Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 281.

liberalization, the economy, and migration.²²³ As such, Islamic traditions became a central feature in Uyghur political activism and heavily influenced the nature of their demands on the state.²²⁴ The economic liberalization that occurred in Xinjiang during the 1980s also had important consequences for the revival of Islam in the region. Economic reform permitted increased contact between the Uyghurs and Central Asia's other Muslim communities, such as those in Kazakhstan. This allowed Uyghur activists to link their cause to the larger Islamic movement that swept through Central Asia in the 1980s and 1990s, and brought the Uyghurs an international source of support in their resistance to Chinese rule.²²⁵ This came not only in the form of political and financial aid, but also in terms of military training and weapons, leading to increasingly violent Uyghur resistance.²²⁶ Due to this violence the PRC renewed the prohibitions on Islam in the late 1980s, which included 'monitoring' Islamic leaders and limiting cross-border travel among Xinjiang's minority communities.²²⁷

Tibet saw a similar revival of Buddhism that after the Party eased the restrictions on religion, which prompted the return of the region's traditional elite, the Dalai Lama, to Chinese politics. As part of its political moderation, in 1984 the CCP reopened its dialogue with the Dalai Lama in an attempt to negotiate a settlement that would provide Tibet with a higher level of autonomy and return the Dalai Lama from his exile in India. However, one of the terms that Beijing was not willing to concede was that if the Dalai Lama returned to China, he would not be allowed to live in Tibet or hold any office in the regional government. The CCP asserted that this was because there were younger and more qualified Tibetans who should be allowed to remain in the region's leadership positions, but the Dalai Lama would instead be appointed to national office, reside in Beijing, and be able to visit Tibet as often as he liked.²²⁸ The Dalai Lama recognized

²²³ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 282.

²²⁴ Dru C. Gladney, "The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978-2001," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2004), 109.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 288.

²²⁷ Fuller and Lipman, *Islam in Xinjiang*, 330.

²²⁸ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 385.

that this was an attempt by the CCP to limit his authority and therefore refused to return to China if he could not reside in Tibet and retain local office. This stalemate effectively brought to an end the attempt at settlement between the Dalai Lama and Beijing.

The revival of the dialogue between the Dalai Lama's government and exile and the PRC brought the issue into the international arena, which provided the Dalai Lama with an opportunity to campaign for the Tibetan cause on the world stage.²²⁹ This was exactly what he did and as a result in 1987 the US Congress passed a resolution condemning the actions of the Chinese government in Tibet. Along with this, the US Congressional leaders invited the Dalai Lama to attend Human Rights Caucus, where he used the forum to promote his own peace plan that avoided the contentious issues that had halted the Sino-Tibetan dialogue in 1984.²³⁰ Shortly after the Dalai Lama's visit to the United States however, the Chinese government executed two Tibetan 'criminals,' who many Tibetans considered to be political prisoners. This resulted in mass protests and riots in Lhasa that resulted in a government crackdown throughout Tibet.²³¹ Such protests and demonstrations were the way in which the Tibetan masses expressed their discontent at Chinese rule during this period. They felt that the PRC had failed to deliver on meaningful autonomy and the large influx of Han migrants had produced severe inflation and food shortages. The public executions and the conflict with the Dalai Lama caused these tensions to boil over in violent protest among the Tibetan masses.

E. ASSESSMENT

The early reform period began with a turn away from the radicalized assimilatory policies of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution and a return to the legitimization of ethnicity and minority rights. This shift was part of the larger trend in Chinese politics to promote political stability and increase economic development throughout the country. The result was tremendous economic growth, especially along China's eastern coast, which Beijing attempted to export to the interior minority regions

²²⁹ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 597.

²³⁰ Shakya, *The Dragon*, 415.

²³¹ Smith, *Tibetan Nation*, 597.

through work projects and development aid. These projects were somewhat successful at bringing economic growth to minority regions, but the disparity of wealth between China's coast and interior continued to increase. Additionally, the CCP's development project spawned massive Han migration into minority areas, giving rise to fears among minority groups that the Chinese government had simply shifted to less overt attempts at assimilation rather than genuine autonomy.

Therefore, minority groups organized to defend themselves and make demands on the state. The way in which they did this during the early reform period however, was different from what had been seen before. The process that began in the 1950s with the creation of ethnically based autonomous zones, and had been interrupted by the violence and extremism of the 1960s and 1970s, matured during this period. By the mid-1980s, effective political organization developed among the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Zhuang, with recognizable leadership that articulated a well-defined set of demands to the Chinese state. In this sense, the system finally began to operate as intended. The Chinese state had structured its relationship with these minority groups by including their ethnicity within the structures of government. As such, political movements built up around ethnicity and during this period reached maturity, becoming capable of effectively interacting with the state.

This arrangement between minorities and the state was not perfect, as many groups felt that the CCP deliberately subverted their autonomy and prevented their economic growth. However, during this period, these groups were able to effectively challenge the Chinese government in ways that had not been possible during earlier periods, either because the groups themselves were not organized or because of repressive state practices. The challenges levied at the central government by minorities were part of a larger push for political liberalization swept through China in the wake of economic reform. The call for democratic reform was to a certain extent permitted, until the CCP came to view this movement as a direct threat to its leadership. These tensions erupted in June 1989 with the government crackdown in Tiananmen Square. Despite international condemnation, Beijing turned back towards more repressive government policies. In response, many minority groups engaged in higher levels of ethnic conflict

with state, as demonstrated by an increase in violence across minority regions throughout the 1990s and into the 21 century. These developments will be discussed in the conclusion as part of a discussion on current trends in Chinese minority policy and the response of minority groups to the central government in the period after 1989.

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CONCLUSION

In March of 2008, riots erupted in the streets of Lhasa as a group of Tibetan demonstrators clashed with Chinese security forces on the forty-ninth anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight to India. The protests were organized by Tibetan exile groups, although not sanctioned by the Dalai Lama himself, in order to call attention to their cause in the run up to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.²³² The protests spread to Tibet's neighboring provinces, which continue to possess considerable Tibetan populations, and ultimately somewhere between sixteen and eighty people were killed and 170 arrested in order to quell the violence.²³³ The Chinese crackdown on Tibetan protestors brought renewed international criticism for Beijing, including the approval of the Feinstein-Smith Resolution in the US Senate, which condemned the violence in Tibet and called for talks between Beijing and the Dalai Lama.²³⁴ Similarly, the Uyghurs have increasingly turned to violence in order to express their dissatisfaction with Chinese rule. Throughout the 1990s Xinjiang witnessed violent protests and clashes between Uyghur separatists and Chinese security forces. One of the largest occurred in February 1997, in the town of Yili when, following a large riot, the government rounded up thousands of Uyghurs, convicted them of terrorist acts, and sentenced many to death.²³⁵

The escalation of ethnic conflict between the Chinese state and minority groups in the post-Tiananmen period has occurred despite an apparent continuation of the legitimization strategy used by the CCP in the 1980s. It could be argued that this is due to a shift back to more repressive practices by the Party even though it still technically subscribes to a policy of ethnic inclusion in China's politics.²³⁶ The PRC's minority

²³² Voice of America News, "Tibetan Activists Begin March From India to Tibet to Protest Chinese Rule," 10 March 2008.

²³³ Anita Chang, "China Moves to Tamp Down Widening Unrest," *Virginian-Pilot*, 20 March 2008, p. A7.

²³⁴ Congressional documents and publications, "Tibet: Senate Approves Feinstein-Smith Resolution Condemning Violence in Tibet, Calling for Talks Between China and Dalai Lama," US Senate Documents, 9 April 2008.

²³⁵ Dru C. Gladney, *Responses to Chinese Rule*, 375.

²³⁶ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 295.

policy remains legitimization in name because the minority rights enumerated in the 1982 Constitution and 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy remain in place. As such, China's minorities continue to have a legal basis from which to challenge the state to deliver on its promises of self-determination. However, at the same time, the Party has stepped up its methods of control in minority areas. For example, the Party used its position as the ultimate authority in China's government to enact a criminal law in 1997 that makes it unlawful to use ethnic and religious problems to attack to the state.²³⁷ Subsequently, the CCP has suppressed dissent by arresting and prosecuting minority activists under this law.²³⁸ The Party has also continued to promote Han migration into minority territories as part of its economic development program. By 2000 the Han had come to account for forty three percent of Xinjiang's total population, up from just five percent in 1949.²³⁹

This disparity between China's official minority policy and what has been observed in practice complicates the application of the institutional framework to the post-1989 period. On the one hand, the legal protections granted to minorities during the 1980s remain firmly in place, implying that the intention of the Chinese government is to continue its strategy of legitimizing ethnicity. On the other hand, it appears that the CCP has begun to use more repressive tactics to suppress minority discontent, which is reminiscent of the government's policy during the Cultural Revolution. This contradiction makes it difficult to deduce the intent of any conflict management strategy in use by the Chinese government in the post-1989 period. This in turn complicates any attempt to measure the effectiveness of the CCP's efforts to mitigate ethnic conflict and compare it with the predictions of the institutional framework as was done in the earlier periods. Therefore, this study will not draw any conclusions about the post-1989 period other than to point out the apparent escalation of China's ethnic conflict throughout the 1990s and into the 21 century as discussed above. Ultimately, further research into the

²³⁷ Dreyer, *China's Political System*, 296.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 307.

relationship between minority groups and the Chinese government during the time following the violence at Tiananmen Square is required before an institutional assessment as conducted in this study via the four-step process can be completed.

In Guangxi however, there has not been an increase in violence between the Zhuang and the Chinese state. There are two possible reasons for this; one is that the created nature of the Zhuang ethnic identity has never really taken a strong enough hold among the people of Guangxi for them to mobilize around it to resist the state.²⁴⁰ Another is that the central government's economic development plan proved to be highly successful in Guangxi throughout the 1990s and into the 21 century. For example, by 2000 Guangxi had achieved a level of development consistent with most of the rest of China, with only the economic boom towns like Shanghai, Beijing, and Tainjin had higher levels of development.²⁴¹ This brought benefits like an increased standard of living and better healthcare to the people of Guangxi, perhaps removing any desire among the Zhuang to resist the Chinese state. It is likely that it is a combination of both of these factors that have produced a reduction in ethnic conflict between the Chinese government and the Zhuang in the post-1989 period.

What this thesis has attempted to demonstrate the importance of the institutions employed by the Chinese government in influencing the scope and nature of ethnic conflict within China. This was done through a four-step process used to break down and evaluate the role played by government institutions in influencing the development of ethnic conflict. The first step of this process involved an examination of the Chinese government's intent with regards to the country's minority population during each period. The second step involved an assessment of how the CCP attempted to achieve its objectives. Thirdly, the analysis focused on the response of minority groups to the actions taken by the state in each period. Finally, an assessment was made of whether or not the minority response was what Chinese leaders had intended. This included a comparison between the actual minority response, the government's intended outcome, and the outcome predicted by the institutional theorists described above.

²⁴⁰ Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, 179.

²⁴¹ Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 224.

This evaluation revealed the following with regards to the different ethnic conflict management strategies employed by Beijing. One, in both the early communist and early reform periods, the CCP wanted to achieve the peaceful submission of minority groups to Chinese rule. It therefore adopted a legitimization of ethnicity strategy that promised minority groups a degree of political, economic, and cultural self-determination. In each period however, this \ strategy was poorly implemented, as the CCP used its authority within the Chinese political system to largely subvert minority autonomy. In response, minority groups rallied around their ethnicity and used this as the basis for their demands on the state. This was made possible by CCP's actions, as in adopting a legitimization strategy in the first place the Party made ethnicity a relevant part of the political process. Once the relationship between the state and minority groups becomes defined in terms of ethnicity in this way, these groups become more likely to engage in ethnic conflict with the state. So rather than produce peaceful submission as the Party had intended, the legitimization strategy led to resistance to Chinese rule in both the early communist and early reform period. This outcome however, does align with the predictions made under an institutional theory of ethnic conflict.

Two, during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, the CCP shifted its minority policy to depluralization of society via assimilation. This shift was undertaken in order to remove minority distinctiveness as an obstacle to the Party's control over Chinese society and territory. The CCP attempted to do this through aggressive attacks on minority culture, religion, and way of life. In response however, minority groups largely intensified their resistance to Chinese rule during this period. The time of the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution in China was filled with examples of violence between the state and minority groups. In Tibet and Xinjiang there was revolt and exodus, but this type of resistance was not seen in Guangxi. This contradiction between the response of the Zhuang and the other minority groups is discussed below. The overall intensification of resistance to Chinese rule was not what the CCP had intended. However, this exact response from minority groups is forecasted under the institutional theory of ethnic conflict. Institutional theorists assert that when minorities are targeted by the state in the manner seen during this period, they will cling more tightly together in

order to avoid their destruction. The response of China's minorities between 1958 and 1976 again validates the application of the institutional theory to the Chinese case.

Third, in the comparison between the responses of three specific minority groups reveals some limitations of the institutional approach to ethnic conflict. Throughout the different time periods both the Tibetans and the Uyghurs responded to the state's actions consistently in the way described under the institutional framework. When ethnicity was legitimized, these groups mobilized in response to perceived inequalities and resisted the Chinese state. When Beijing attempted to aggressively assimilate these groups, they only intensified their resistance and often resorted violence in order to avoid destruction. During periods of legitimization the Zhuang also responded by mobilizing to place demands for autonomy and self-determination on the state. However, when the PRC shifted to assimilatory and repressive practices during the Cultural Revolution and again following Tiananmen Square, the Zhuang largely receded and engaged in less conflict with the state. This demonstrates that during periods of increased repression, the Zhuang responded exactly in the way the Chinese government intended, by retreating from their ethnicity and placing fewer demands on the state. So, while the application of the institutional approach to the experiences of the Tibetans and Uyghurs proved accurate, such was not the case in terms of the Zhuang. This indicates that in certain cases the institutional framework must be augmented or an alternative explanation must be found in order to understand the causes of a particular ethnic conflict.

With regards to the debate concerning the Zhuang's minority status, this study seems to refute the assertion that the Zhuang behave in ways similar to other minority groups because they have developed a distinct ethnic minority. Instead, the data suggests that the people of Guangxi have embraced the Zhuang ethnic identity when it has benefited them to do so, and rejected that identity when it has become too costly. This flexibility indicates that the Zhuang ethnic identity is much more instrumental than it may appear on the surface, as the people of Guangxi are able to shift their ethnic identity away from the Zhuang classification when it becomes disadvantageous in ways that the Tibetans and Uyghurs cannot.

This evaluation of the importance of institutions in the development of China's ethnic conflict ultimately yields two conclusions. First is that overall, those institutions employed by the Chinese government between 1949 and the present have not been completely effective in mitigating ethnic conflict within China. Throughout the entire period both the Tibetans and Uyghurs engaged in some level of conflict with the state, along with additionally resistance from the Zhuang in the 1950s and 1980s. Second is that, with the exception of the Zhuang during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, the institutional approach accurately described the development of ethnic conflict within China. This is significant because it lends validity to the application of the institutional approach to the study of other ethnic conflicts as well. Additionally, this assessment of the institutional causes of ethnic conflict in China has the potential to inform future attempts to improve the institution that form the foundation of the relationship between the Chinese government and its minorities. It is possible that such work could result in the creation of new, or the improvement of, existing institutions in China in order to better mitigate ethnic conflict.

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