

Political Mobilization of ‘Regional Ethno-territorial Minorities’: the case of Han Chinese
in Xinjiang

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Since the early 1990s, Uyghur mobilization in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China has repeatedly attracted media and academic attention. These protests came to no surprise as they are compliant with the orthodox approach to minority mobilization that claims that the discriminations inflicted by the majority on national minorities strengthen the salience of their collective group identity, instill collective grievances and, once the above factors are aggregated, propel them to act collectively in an attempt to reshuffle the balance of power existing between minority and majority groups (Harff and Gurr 2004). Defying this perspective are the -albeit relatively rare but nevertheless occurring- instances of Han mobilization and protests in the XUAR. From the Anti-Rightist Campaigns of the late 1950s, to the Cultural Revolution, and the Democracy Wall protests of 1979-1980, the highly heterogeneous Han Chinese residing in the XUAR have similarly mobilized and voiced their grievances vis-à-vis the provincial and national governments. What factors may explain and influence the mobilization of a group that consists of the national majority?

To answer this question, it will here be argued that the mobilization of a group residing within a territory attributed to a minority group is influenced by its 'regional ethno-territorial minority' (RETM) position which occurs as a national minority becomes (regionally) the local majority, and the nation-wide majority becomes the demographic minority. This peculiar position poses a series of critical problems to the orthodox approach of minority mobilization. Unlike the discrimination-based mobilization of the Uyghurs and other 'traditional' minorities, RETM typically reap advantageous differentials from their close(r) connection to the main organs of political and economic power, which challenges the claim that factual discriminative practices are the root cause

of their mobilization. First, in order to better conceptualize and understand RETM's peculiarities, Kaufmann's Dominant Ethnicity Theory (2004, 2006) will be utilized. Indeed, this theory rightly stresses that both regional ethno-territorial minorities and majorities are no less engaged in the process of reviving, constructing and adapting their identities and political strategies to the evolving context of late modernity, and are arguably more central to explaining cultural and political development than their subordinate counterparts. Then, in an attempt to shed a new light on the issue of Han mobilization in Xinjiang, it will be advanced that Gurr's theory of Relative Deprivation (1970) has potent explanatory power as to why RETM feel a subjective threat to their dominance, which causes them to mobilize and voice their grievances. In order to further examine the mobilization of Han RETM in the XUAR and roughly sketch prospects for future Uyghur-Han and Han-Han interactions, three questions will be examined: 1) Do Han Chinese residing in Xinjiang perceive themselves, or are thought by others, to be a minority or a majority? 2) What accounts for this (lack of) awareness? 3) How has this factor influenced their actions and behaviors vis-à-vis the Uyghurs and the central Chinese government?

There are several reasons as to why these questions should be answered. Considering China's recent rise to international prominence and the resurgence of ethnic tension and conflicts in the 1990s in the XUAR, it is particularly appropriate to examine ethnic relations between the two largest ethnic groups in the autonomous province: the Uyghur majority and the Han Chinese minority. In turn, other –and proportionally smaller- ethnic groups residing in the XUAR will not be examined. Finally, and most importantly, the necessity of examining the peculiarities of the Han RETM condition is

made all the more indispensable given the fact that no large scale study has been conducted on the Han Chinese in the XUAR. Indeed, as Frederick Starr, the editor of one of the most eminent works done to date on ethnic relations in the XUAR, admits, his study, like most others done on ethnic relations in Xinjiang, has dwelled mainly with the attitudes and actions of Xinjiang's indigenous people rather than with the rapidly expanding population of Han immigrants who are transforming and redefining the territory (2004:24). This may be due to the fact that data examining the socio-economic situation and political mobilization of the Han Chinese in Xinjiang has been exceptionally sparse -the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) being extremely wary that superfluous attention to the ever-increasing Han migration in Xinjiang may ignite Uyghur mobilization. Still, a few overall conclusions on the position, grievances and resources of the Han Chinese may nevertheless be reached from the information available, although more field research on this topic is undeniably needed.

Previous Minority Approaches to Mobilization

Despite the growing attention 'minorities' receive in the medias and in academia, there is no consensus on who exactly minorities are. In the Western literature on social science, 'minorities' are typically construed as a group numerically smaller than the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, and whose members are distinguished by particular 'ethnic' attributes (see Hannum 1999). Albeit widely adopted, three general propositions, non-applicable to the case of RETM, have generally been inferred from such a definition. First, focusing on a group's demographic proportion at the state level blurs the fact that it may wear two hats at once: that is, a group may be in a

position of numerical majority at the state level, while being numerically inferior at the local one. Second, this definition also produces a ‘victimology’ complex, as noted by Schermerhorn (1970). Thereby understood, minorities are invariably assumed to suffer from discrimination at the hands of the nationality in control of the state. In fact, not only are minorities sometimes benefiting from advantageous differentials (such as the Tutsi in Burundi, or the Mainlander Chinese in Taiwan) but the previous examples also show that the sacro-saint rule of ‘ruling likes by likes’ can sometimes be encroached and a demographically smaller group may rule a state (see Rothchild 1986). Finally, the emphasis put on a minority group’s ‘ethnic’ diacritical markers has led to the mistaken assumption that ‘ethnicity’ was solely a marker for ‘minorities’. From the Greeks to the Chinese, the latter conceptualizing minorities as being numerically small groups that differs from the Han by certain ethnic characteristic (Heberer 1989:12), the quasi-invariable connection of ‘minority’ with either ‘discrimination’ or ‘ethnicity’ has conversely generally disconnected majority studies from matters of ethnicity, and minority studies from matters of power.

Studies examining minority mobilization attempt to explain why and how ethnic groups organize for political actions and enter into open and often violent conflict with the government that claims to rule them. Often paired with this line of research is an assessment of what determines government’s responses to these contentions. According to the modernization theory, greater political and economic interactions among people, compounded with widespread communication networks, would break down people’s parochial identities and replace them with loyalties to the larger communities. These tenets clearly do not apply to the case at hand, as the minority population in the PRC has

continuously been on the rise, in part because a large proportion of Chinese citizens have voluntarily adopted -and sometimes even switched to- one of the 55 ethnic minority identities when the option was given to them five years after the onset of the PRC (Gladney 2004:20).

Instead, Harff and Gurr's mobilization model consisting of seven interrelated and interconnected concepts will be utilized for comparative purposes (2004: 103-108). As they argued, 1) discriminations, 2) ethnic group identity, 3) group cohesion, 4) political environment, 5) use of violence by the government, 6) external support and 7) economic status of the state are all determinants of mobilization that may lead to either conflict or accommodation. Given that factors 4), 5) and 7) are consistent for all minorities in China, a change in any of these elements would be expected to affect the mobilizing power of all minorities, not just the Han's. Moreover, the only form of 'external' support Han Chinese residing in the XUAR could possibly expect is from their co-ethnic residing in China proper (*neidi*). As such, an assessment of the ties binding Xinjiang's Han to *neidi*'s Han is expected to appropriately cover this factor. This leaves us with three specific elements whose shifts are expected to affect Han's mobilization. First, the greater the economic, social and political discriminations Han experience, the more likely they are to organize for actions against the very sources of discriminations. Second, the more commonalities a person share with other members of an ethnic group, and the more strongly a person identifies with that same ethnic group subjected to discrimination, the more likely he/she will be motivated into actions. Finally, as groups are regionally concentrated and their autocratic leadership come to be widely accepted, group cohesion increases, which in turn increases a group capacity for mobilization.

Theoretical Models: Dominant Ethnicity Theory and Relative Deprivation

The Dominant Ethnicity Theory (DET), proposed by Kaufmann and his collaborators (2004), circumvents the aforementioned lacunas arising from previous approaches to minority mobilization. Understood as a phenomenon whereby a particular ethnic group exercises dominance within a nation-state, whether in its demographic, cultural, economic or political form, the concept of dominant ethnicity helps emphasize the preponderance of the Han Chinese throughout the PRC, although this position is fiercely challenged in some regions, including Xinjiang. Originally conceived in response to the 'hidden' ethnic and racial identity of the dominant group in the United States (Wimmer 2004; Kaufmann 2004), DET's main relevance for mobilization studies lies in its explanatory power as to how the status and resources of a mobilized group influence its propensity for collective actions¹.

Given this new socio-political context, the DET brings forth two important elements to the study of minorities: cultural indigenusness and political power. First, by suggesting that nations are built around an indigenous ethnic core, Smith's concepts of 'core *ethnie*' (1986) and 'dominant *ethnie*' (1991) provides the nation with indigenous legitimacy and 'de-minoritizes' ethnicity by widening its application to both minority and majority groups; a necessary transformation considering the fact that political space is not a fixed concept, and that a dominant group at the state-level may at times be in a local minority context. Second, by adopting Schermerhorn's typology of political groups based on a matrix of size and power (1970:13), the DET allows us to reconcile numerical minority with the concepts of state apparatus and political dominance. To illustrate this connection, Schermerhorn construed dominant groups as being collectivities, either

numerical majority or minority, that have a preeminent authority to function as both the sustainers of the value system and the prime allocators of political, economic and cultural rewards in society. The state is often an important actor in this process, as it is often unconsciously biased towards the interests of the dominant *ethnie* who, in virtue of their great numerical majority or political hegemony -or both- appeared to receive a disproportionately high share of jobs and resources (Smith 2004:24). Therefore, in the event that a minority is part of the dominant *ethnie*, it significantly enhances its resources and power by gaining control over the major economic, communication and, most importantly, political networks, which in turn makes this group better apt at defending its position, while influencing (positively or not) that of other's. In addition, the close(r) connection mentioned earlier between RETM and the state apparatus simultaneously underlines why, despite being a numerical minority, RETM may hardly rely on factual discriminations to forge group mobilization.

Finally, in order to fully depict the peculiarities of RETM mobilization, one modification should be made to Harff and Gurr's original model, which expects mobilization to crystallize around a specific discriminatory practice and to target, either directly or indirectly, via a powerful ally, the source of these discriminations. Instead of focusing on the factual socio-economic and political discriminations some minorities are subjected to, it will be demonstrated here that, in the case of RETM, it is more appropriate to stress the perception of discriminations. Not only is this permutation necessary because RETM have overall benefited from advantageous differentials and hard evidence of discrimination is difficult to find, but also because a given practice or policy may easily be mistakenly perceived as a challenge or a threat to a group's

dominance. For instance, a modification in a group's demographic and/or politico-economic power, such as that involved in a transition from a majority to a minority position, may influence a group's perception of its position and entitlement, and may be perceived as an important threat of group dominance. Consequently, just like actual discriminations, a perceived threat to a group's privileged position is expected to shape this group's grievances and potential for acting on it (Gurr 1993).

Although this is not to deny that several national minorities are severely affected by factual discriminatory practices, this essay argues that instead of focusing on the discriminations per se, one's analysis should focus on the subjective quality of most differentials practices. Indeed, as Horowitz mentioned, 'to be backward is first and foremost to *feel* weak' (1985: 167; emphasis mine). Gurr's concept of relative deprivation rightly sheds a light on the perceived discrepancy between the value expectations and the value expectancies in a society (1970). The mere feeling of being entitled to more could therefore be considered a trigger for mobilization. Gurr's distinction is particularly useful when attempting to explain the rise of ethnic political mobilization not only among what Horowitz's called 'backward' group (1985), but also among relatively 'advanced' or dominant ethnic groups which may see themselves as rightly deserving more than their share. However, it is important to remark that people's perception of their group's and other groups' position is highly context-dependent: a practice considered 'just' at the national level (for instance, affirmative actions) may be considered unjust or discriminatory at the local level when 'we' are the ones being discriminated against. In the same vein, a policy that was implemented several years ago may suddenly be resented by a group who, given the larger socio-political context, now

sees it as a threat to its identity and existence. Lastly, the ‘volatility’ and subjectivity of perceived discrimination and/or threat of dominance is an important factor to examine as it crucially accounts for both inter and intra group differences in mobilization participation.

The Han ‘Regional Ethno-Territorial Minority’ in Xinjiang

The latest Chinese census revealed that nearly 92% of China’s population belonged to the Han nationality, a loosely defined term that came to embody most, if not all, of China’s sino-speaking communitiesⁱⁱ, while the remaining 104 million belonged to one of the 55 national minorities (*shaoshu minzu*) (Chinese Statistical Yearbook 2005: 487). Retracting from its initial recognition of minorities’ self-determination and complete separation that was granted in article 14 of China’s first Communist Constitution of 1931, the CCP replaced those rights by nominal self-rule of ‘regional autonomy’ (*zizhi*) in the 1954 Constitution and in the 1984 Law for the Regional Autonomy of Minority Nationalities (LRAMN). In order to appease some of the claims made by the national minorities, an ethnoterritorial framework was adopted which created, besides the several autonomous counties, cities, and townships throughout the PRC, five autonomous regions: Ningxia (for the Hui), Tibet (Tibetans), Guangxi (Zhuang), Inner Mongolia (Mongolians) and Xinjiang (Uyghurs)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Yet, the greatest influence of China proper (*neidi*) on the XUAR was arguably not in regard to the political structure it imposed on this northwestern region, but in regard to the policies it has actively implemented and which have strongly affected Xinjiang’s demographics. Beginning as a timid encroachment during the Han dynasty, and

intensifying until the official annexation of Xinjiang as a province of the Qing Empire in 1884, China has (sporadically) exerted a potent centripetal force on Xinjiang, mainly through its policy of '*yimin shibian*' or 'move people to strengthen the frontier' (Toops 2004, Wang 1998, Millward and Tursun 2004). Although the redistribution of Han to the northwestern border was highly influenced by politico-economic developments occurring at the national and local level, the statistics available are proof of its extensive achievements. From 1949 to 2005, Xinjiang's total population spiraled from 4.3 million to 20.10 million, a staggering increase of over 365% (Xinhua, April 7, 2006). The largest part of this augmentation was attributed to inter-provincial migration, which was estimated at a net 3.209 million between the years 1953 to 1982 alone (Li 1989: 524). Since then, the autonomous province has become, with the compounded effects of the relaxation of the household registration system (*hukou*) and Xinjiang's emergent economic and trading opportunities, the fourth province of choice for migration in the PRC, after Guangdong, Shanghai and Beijing, respectively (Liang 2001:515). For instance, from 1995 to 2000, Xinjiang received an estimated 926,000 migrants (Fan 2005: 300), most of them being unofficial or blind (*mangmu*) migrants who came to Xinjiang temporarily to work in the cotton fields and the oil industry.

Historically, the overwhelming majority (nearly 90%) of the inter-provincial migration in the XUAR has consisted of Han Chinese (Wang 1998: 38-39). From a meager 6.1% of Xinjiang's population in 1953 (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2005), the Han population totaled 7.99 million, or 39.74% of the region's permanent population, in the latest Chinese census (Xinhua April 7, 2006). According to the same census, although the Uyghur population simultaneously witnessed an augmentation from 4 to slightly over

10 millions, it was no match for the remarkable increase in Han migration, and its overall proportion dropped by over 30%. Moreover, given that Chinese population census for provincial level unit do not include military personal nor unofficial migrants, it may be argued that once these two categories are taken into account, the total Han population, is probably closer to 10.3 million (Toops 2004: 249), which almost perfectly match the total Uyghur population in Xinjiang. This expansion of Han's proportion of Xnjiang's population along with the preponderance of Han in the province's largest cities^{iv} may lead us to assume that the Han's numerical minority position is holding only by a thread (personal communication with Merle Goldman, March 10, 2007). Still, two important elements have to be kept in mind before one dismisses the fact that the Han form a 'minority', be it dominant or not, in the XUAR. As they first moved to Xinjiang, the Han faced a permutation from a majority to a minority status. While we may now be witnessing a shift of the pendulum that would rectify Han's loss of numerical dominance, this process is not occurring thoroughly and evenly in the XUAR. In fact, in the southwestern part of Xinjiang, Uyghurs still consist of the majority, while the Han remain in a numerically inferior position. Secondly, the Han may have recently become the largest ethnic group in certain parts of the XUAR, but once all of Xinjiang's 47 *shaoshu minzu* are taken into account, they still do not consist of the majority of the population; a situation that contrasts sharply with the ethnic composition of any other province in China, with the exception of Tibet (China Statistical Yearbook 2005). As a result, considering the geographical unevenness of the Han settlements and the comparatively unfamiliar minority position in which Han Chinese settlers find themselves as they move to the XUAR, one is still be justified in qualifying Han Chinese as a local 'minority'.

As Han migrants from the east moved to Xinjiang, they brought with them their own culture and customs, and helped establish *Putonghua* as the migrants' lingua franca (Toops 2004). Yet, despite their ascription to the same nationality and their command of the same dialect, the Han in Xinjiang do not form a cohesive and homogeneous category^v. Geographically-speaking, Han Chinese came from every corner of the PRC and more often than not, speak different Mandarin dialects^{vi}. In addition, the growth in temporary migration throughout China has naturally had important repercussions in the XUAR. The economic opportunities now available in Xinjiang due to the implementation of the 'Develop the West' policies and the opening of cross-border points with several of the former Central Asian republics have lured a floating population of Han entrepreneurs and private businessmen to move for a short-period of time to the region and once their financial goals obtained, return to their province of origin (Dorian, Wigdortz, and Gladney 1997: 475).

This shift from mainly permanent to temporary migrants brings us to distinguish another important distinction within the Han 'nationality' in Xinjiang: that is, the distinction between 'old' and 'new' Xinjiang people (ie: Han Chinese). Some long-standing Han residents have developed a sense of regional identity and, due to their good command of the Uyghur language and their adoption of some Uyghur customs, are better integrated in the local society. On the other hand, the 'new' Han migrants, living in predominantly Han area and sometimes residing only temporarily in Xinjiang, are often unwilling to adopt the local culture and instead expect the Uyghurs to adapt to theirs (Smith J. 2002:173). What is more, an internal boundary seems to have been created – and since maintained- between 'old' Han and 'new' Han. With limited access to China

proper (*neidi*), ‘old’ Han have come to differ from other Han, who has occasionally made them the victims of discrimination at the very hand of their fellow Han Chinese (Heberer 1989). Conversely, those ‘old’ Han who integrated to the local culture do not see with a good eye the inexorable flow of migrants coming from *neidi* since increased migration is associated with a threat to the fragile inter-ethnic, economic and ecological equilibrium the ‘old’ Han have maintained, sometimes with difficulty, with their environment and with the Uyghur population (Becquelin 2000, Yee 2003, Dorian, Wigdortz, and Gladney 1997).

Considering the aforementioned cleavages existing within the Han community, it is not surprising that such group heterogeneity has significantly affected the cohesion and salience of their group identity. In two surveys conducted by Yee in 2000 and 2001, only 67.4% and 71.1% respectively of the Han respondents claimed to be ‘proud of their nationality’, a rate significantly lower than the Uyghurs, who instead made the same claim at 90.6% and 88.7% respectively (2003: 437, 2005: 44). As Han do not strongly identify with their co-ethnics, both inside and outside the XUAR, and group cohesion is limited, these findings seem to dismiss two of Harff and Gurr’s factors of mobilization. However, Han’s internal differentiation makes one ponder on the process of group boundary maintenance delineated by Barth (1969), and on the impact of distance and temporality^{vii} on the self-perception of the Han residing in Xinjiang. Once distanced from their cultural core, do Han Chinese develop a distinct, hybrid identity? Conversely, it has also interesting to remark that the characteristically crucial issue of land as a ‘homeland’ for minority groups (see Alcock 1979) does not awaken the same intensity for Han Chinese since a large of proportion of this group is only temporary, or has only recently

settled, in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, to generalize this lack of attachment to the land to the entire Han population in Xinjiang would be misleading, as some 'old' Han have been residing in Xinjiang for several generations and now consider the XUAR as their home. Does time alone bring additional legitimacy to 'old' Han's claims and grievances, and increase their propensity for collective actions and mobilization? Although fascinating, the lack of studies and data specifically pertaining to the Han population in the XUAR entails that these questions will have to be resolved in a future research.

Explaining Han's Mobilization

While the previous section has addressed the lack of cohesion of the Han RETM in Xinjiang, a lacuna that is expected to significantly impede their mobilizing power, it is now turn to examine whether their relative deprivation and consequent threat to their domination may be considered potent forces acting as mobilizing agents. After a closer examination, if one was to assess Han's potential for mobilization by solely looking at the discriminations inflicted upon them that result in lower social, economic and political achievements, one would be hard pressed to find corroborating evidence. In the social sphere, Han have been credited with better return for education and lower illiteracy rate than the Uyghur population (Hannum and Xie 1998). The one-child policy has also dramatically reduced Han fertility rate, while lower mortality rate and longer life expectancy have also been recorded (Wang 1998). Economically speaking, the Han have, as a group, significantly prospered by their greater inclusion in the oil industry, the most prosperous sectors of the economy (Bovingdon 2004, Pannel and Schmidt 2006) and by residing in the most urban and industrialized regions of Xinjiang (Wang 1998). In

addition, several employment fairs and positions are directly targeting the Han Chinese, at the expense of other *minzu* in Xinjiang (see the non Han ‘need not apply’ practices in Gilley 2001), while recruitment for the thousands upon thousands of road and rail-building jobs are mainly targeting Han Chinese in other parts of the country (Green 2006: 107). Finally, and despite its inaptly named Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, most of the important political positions in the government were ascribed to Han CCP members (Bovingdon 2004: 16). Hence, one may assume from this brief overview that Han Chinese are not socially, economically and politically deprived; that is, there is no socially derived inequalities in group members’ material well-being or political access in comparison with other social groups –a factor that was pointed at by Harff and Gurr to explain ethnopolitical mobilization.

Yet, despite their (diminishing) numerical inferiority and their socially, economically and politically advantageous position, Han Chinese in Xinjiang have not been utterly complacent. They rebelled during the Anti-Rightist campaigns of 1955 and 1957 (see McMillen 1981), and the Han political factioning of the Cultural Revolution that occurred in Shihezi in December 1966-January 1967 (Millward 2004, Millward and Perdue 2004) and later on in the wave of the Democracy Movement of 1979-1980 (see Spence 1990). Considering the fact collective disadvantages, threat to dominance and the salience and cohesion of group identity, three markers that have previously been attributed to group mobilization, seem to be absent in the case of the Han Chinese, what other factors may explain these relatively rare, but nevertheless occurring, instances of Han mobilization?

The explanation to Han mobilization may lie in their subjective perception of discriminations, which they see as a threat to their dominant position, instead of its objective occurrences of discrimination. Since the PRC's implementation of minorities' affirmative action (*youhui zhengce*) that aimed at reducing the disparities among China's nationalities by excluding the minorities from the most stringent applications of the one-child policy while giving them preferential access to the education system and official positions, a number of Han have claimed that these policies have backfired and have instead created greater inequality among nationalities. In Yee's survey (2003), 38% of the Han believed that the Uyghur's standard of living has been rising faster than the Han's, and only 9.4% agreed that the (undeniably real) large income gap existing between the Uyghur and the Han existed (443-444). As a result, Han's perception of their limited room for advancement has in the past pushed people to 'vote with their feet' and go back to their province of origin where they would not be at the 'discriminated' hand of affirmative actions^{viii}. As was argued by Bonneuil and Auriat (2000), this truncated social mobility also constitutes a 'push' factor for group mobilization, as has been observed in several instances of Han mobilization, most famously in the Aksu protests, where thousands of rusticated youths from Shanghai occupied CCP and government offices for 40 days, making it the largest and certainly the longest popular demonstration in Xinjiang's modern history (Millward 2004: 7, Heberer 1989).

Yet, it is very clear that if Han Chinese in Xinjiang feel discriminated against, they do not equate this unjust status to a full-blown minority position. Instead, the so-called discriminatory practices inflicted on the Han are perceived as a blow to their 'rightly earned' dominant status. As was previously mentioned, in China, 'minorities' are

those exotic ethnic groups depicted in tourist brochures (Gladney 1994), not the Han majority. Portrayed as primitives afflicted by pathologies such as poverty, illiteracy and superstitions, minorities serve both as curiosities and opportunity for the majority to characterize themselves as superior (see Hoddie 2006: 4, Blum 2001). Centuries of Confucian practice has helped to reinforce this assumption. The *Xia-Yi* doctrine that clearly contrasts the rulers to the subjects, the civilized core to the uncivilized periphery, and the Han Chinese to the minorities, is particularly revealing in explaining the Han's inability to picture themselves as a minority. This Confucian practice, officially repudiated as 'Great Han Chauvinism'^{ix} by the CCP, still made its mark on the Party's dealings with the minorities. Indeed, the references to 'little brother' for minorities and 'older brother' for the Han Chinese is reminiscent of the Five relations advocated by Confucius and clearly determines who is to learn from whom (He 2005). Given this sharp distinction between the Han and 'the rest', for the Han to voluntarily embrace its 'minority' position while dealing with the government in Beijing or in Urumqi would be equal to seeing themselves as part of China's uncivilized fringes, a position that does little to promote group's worth.

Therefore, given Han's presumed 'cultural superiority', it seems as if Han Chinese residing in the XUAR are only partially aware of their (numerical) minority status. Their recriminations, instead of being based on their objective relative deprivation vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in China, are grounded in their inherent and ingrained belief that Han Chinese rightly represent the dominant ethnicity of the whole country. As the CCP has extensively argued that Xinjiang has been an inseparable part of the Chinese 'geo-body', to use Winnichakul's expression (1994), since the Han dynasty (206 BC-220

AD) (see White Papers 1999: 451, Xinhua May 26, 2003), Han Chinese do not seem the least surprised that, given their adherence to the dominant ethnicity, a large part of Xinjiang's economic, social and political positions must fall upon them. As a result, it is threats to this dominant position –that is, failure to have access to educational, political and economic opportunities- that seems to trigger Han mobilization. Having been promised economic, political and social opportunities by the CCP as they settled in the XUAR, Han Chinese are thus voicing their grievances to the central government in an attempt to reconcile their value expectations with their value expectancies, as was previously quoted by Gurr (1970).

Interestingly, Han's instances of collective actions have bypassed the local government and have directly appealed to the central power in Beijing. Although circumventing the local government may be a reflection of the limited amount of power transferred to the provinces, it may also be strategic, as the representation of Xinjiang's several ethnic groups in the local government –albeit limited to its lower rungs of the ladder – may nevertheless make the government in Urumqi less receptive to the claims of the already privileged Han^x. Naturally, this constant targeting of the central state underlines the necessity to assess Beijing's perception of its Han 'minority' in Xinjiang, and the actions it takes in this respect. Although the central government, just like the Han themselves, could not fathom the Han being a 'minority' in the Chinese sense of the term, by their policies, officials in the PRC clearly showed that they were aware of the Han's numerical minority, which explains their constant involvement in government-organized migration schemes and recruitment trips in the pre-reform era, a policy that was nothing short of Hanicization according to Becquelin (1999) and Kurlantzick (2004).

The CCP's emphasis on the demographic rationale for Han migration in Xinjiang was twofold: first, migration in this 'new border' would be a mean to relieve the population burden of coastal cities, such as Shanghai (see White 1979). But most importantly, the CCP also believed that organized migration schemes to Xinjiang would enhance national security in several ways. Since Han Chinese, they thought, were more loyal to the Chinese country and would better protect the borders against foreign invasions: the more Han there were in Xinjiang, the more secure the northwest border was to be. In addition, their role in educating the local elites and winning the hearts and minds of the local population was considered of utter importance. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to assume that a sheer increase in Han population in Xinjiang was the sole basis guiding CCP's policies. Rationales for government migration initiatives in the northwest were also developmental. For instance, when Xinjiang began to develop at full-throttle after the onset of the first Five Year Plan in 1953, the central government deemed that the local population would be insufficient to open up and extensively exploit Xinjiang (Heberer 1989, Li 1989). Lastly, Han settlement in Xinjiang was also adopted for its ethical prospects: the reported 450,000 'bourgeois' urban youth settled in Xinjiang by 1975 (Millward and Perdue 2004: 90) being expected to 'reform' themselves by doing manual work in the fields, while they propagated the CCP words to the minority peasants.

Regardless of the official rationale for promoting Han migration to Xinjiang, the policies adopted by the CCP once these Han had resettled reveal the close connection of the Han RETM to the state apparatus. In several instances, the CCP went to great lengths to satisfy the demands of its Han minority. When the rusticates complained about the lack of recognition at home, party leaders emphasized the glory of their actions, awarded

medals and promised moral-raising parties for the families during the spring festival (White 1979: 493-502). Criticisms on the absence of female companionship for the Han migrants were met by recruiting (Han) female volunteers from Hunan and Shandong provinces (Toops 2004: 245). In 1979, when Han protested against the low standards of living and the lack of social amenities, the central government requested that local units improve conditions for Han settlers (Bovindgon 2004). It was even pointed out that to meet rusticated Shanghai youth's demand for milk, the bureaucracy exported 298 cows to Xinjiang (White 1979: 505). Finally, on a political note, Grunfeld argued that the substitution of 'Criticize Great Han Chauvinism' policies by the more Han-friendly 'Criticize Local Ethnic Chauvinism' platform of the late 1950s has been shaped by local Han officials' concerns and unhappiness (1985:63). The above examples illustrate that, if the CCP is no longer directly and actively promoting Han migration to change the balance of power in Xinjiang, by its accommodative policies and the economic incentives it promotes (Li 1989:517), it is nevertheless trying to meet some, if not most, of the demands made by the Han in an effort to convince them to stay permanently.

As the aforementioned examples seem to infer, the Chinese state makes economic, political and cultural resources within Han arm's reach, hence providing them access to, and allowing them to tap into, resources otherwise unavailable to other ethnic groups in the XUAR and in the rest of China. This conclusion simultaneously highlights the fact that the state is rarely an innocent bystander in ethnic matter. Even Brass, who saw the state as a relatively autonomous entity, nevertheless acknowledged its role in resource distribution among different classes and ethnic groups (1991). Finally, this conclusion is also in line with the claim made earlier by Harff and Gurr (2004) that

‘external support’, here understood as the central government, is an important factor in ethnopolitical mobilization. Although CCP’s policies should not be thought as determining Han mobilization in the XUAR, they certainly provide Han Chinese with the means, save the will, to adequately mobilize and lessen the threat made on their dominant position.

Conclusive Remarks on Future Implications for Inter-Ethnic Relations in Xinjiang

Considering that Han Chinese internal migration is continuously growing^{xi} and that it has brought its share of problems even when both parties are Han (Toops 2004: 259), it is becoming imminently important to include an analysis of RETM mobilization in order to understand - and hopefully limiting - current and future ethnic conflicts in this multinational country and in other contexts where ethno-territorial autonomy arrangements have been adopted. Nowhere have those predicaments arisen to the same extent as in Xinjiang, where massive unrestricted Han migration is perceived by the Uyghurs as the greatest single threat to their religion and national culture (Fuller and Lipman 2004, Gladney 2004, Starr 2004, Heberer 1989). This feeling has intensified in recent years as the growth in temporary workers simultaneously meant a growth in ‘new’ migrants who do not try to integrate to the local culture^{xii}. Resentment against the Han and their preferential treatment has been mobilized in several instances in the 1980s and 1990s (see Bovington 2004, Millward 2004). Ironically, the fear of widespread Han migration has also expanded to the neighboring Central Asian states (Dillon 2004, Starr 2004). Thus, as the above examples illustrate, omitting to allocate greater attention to the integration of the Han migrants to their new place of work or residency, and failing to

assess their self-perception on their relative position and access to resources are expected to be highly detrimental in the long-term.

However, until now, there has been a general reluctance to examine the advantageous position of 'false' or non-conventional minorities, such as the RETM. Yet, in order to explain the factors triggering ethnopolitical mobilization of dominant *ethnie* placed in situation of numerical minority, this peculiar status needs to be fully examined. Given the conclusions reached earlier, subjective perception of threat to dominance seems to be a critical factor explaining the mobilization of RETM. One could further conclude that the Han did not (in fact, could not) perceive themselves as a full-blown 'minority'. The rejection of their minority status comes in sharp contrast with the stance adopted by the central government in Beijing. Indeed, through its Hanicization quest and subsequent accommodative policies implemented towards its Han minority in hope to convince them to permanently stay in the XUAR, the central government seemed fully aware that Han settlers in the region were not numerically dominant, and needed special attention and nurturing.

As a last remark, it is important to reiterate that this essay did intent to de-dramatize the sometimes severe discriminative spell several minorities are under, but instead wished to broaden the field of minority studies by extending it to groups that a) are nationally or locally in numerical inferiority and b) perceive themselves to be unjustly discriminated against by the local or central majority, which they see as an unjust threat to their dominance. Thereby understood, minorities belonging to the dominant ethnic group that constitute RETM, such as the Han in Xinjiang, would receive the attention they deserve. Using Horowitz's 'positional group psychology' (1985: 184) one could

ponder if RETM worldwide and throughout time act or have acted in a similar way. Are RETM constantly unable to think of themselves as ‘just’ a minority? Conversely, are the policies adopted by the central government vis-à-vis the local RETM continuously shaped by its sharp awareness of the minority status of the group in question? Although this paper cannot offer a full comparative study, in order to probe the field and verify the general applicability of the conclusions hereby reached, it would be interesting to draw a parallel with other instances of RETM’ mobilizations and demands, such as the historical examples of new English in Virginia and Ireland, and the more contemporary example of the English Canadians residing in the province of Québec.

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ⁱ It is important to note that Kaufmann was not the first, nor the lone, author to examine dominant minorities: Harff and Gurr (2004: 29-30) are among those who have also briefly looked at advantaged or dominant minorities. Grounding their argument on the (in)famous Afrikaneers, Tutsis, and North Indian Muslims, they concluded that this distinct type of ethnoclass has recently been in decline. A similar conclusion was also reached by Moore (2002:82) who declared that the passing of the colonial era has greatly reduced the number of cases of majority victimization. However, if one is to slightly shift the focus of study to multinational states where groups may concurrently be a 'national' majority and a 'local' minority, such as the Han Chinese, one would agree with Kaufmann that such 'dominant' minorities are not disappearing, but have instead been forced on the defensive due to global (and inter-provincial) migration and growing cultural exchange (2006).

ⁱⁱ For an account of the loose definition of the Han majority in China, see Gladney 1998

ⁱⁱⁱ Unlike the liberal definition of autonomy that typically involves locally elected bodies with some form of independent power (see Hannum and Lillich 1980), regional autonomy for ethnic minorities in China represents a form of 'democratic centralism', where the executive, legislative and judiciary powers are exercised under the 'unified leadership of the state', and where autonomous areas form 'inseparable parts

of China' (White Papers of the Chinese Government 1999: 464). Despite the evident shortcomings of the PRC's depiction of autonomy, Cornell argued that the study of autonomy in (former) authoritarian and centralized socialist states is still necessary considering that one of the mechanisms through which autonomy operates with relation to conflict is in the realms of institutional structure and symbols (2002: 256). Whether or not full regional autonomy by national minority rule is actually implemented is not the crux of the problem. What matters is that, albeit imperfect, regional autonomy was conceived and constructed as the form of minority protection implemented in the PRC.

^{iv} The capital, Urumqi accounts for nearly 74% of Han (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2005)

^v Which is not without reminding us that the heterogeneity of the Han in the PRC as a whole has repeatedly been advanced, most notably by Gladney 1998. However, given the various timing of Han's settlements in Xinjiang and their minority condition leading some to integrate to the 'new majority culture' and some not, have forcibly added additional layers of distinction within the Han population in the XUAR. For instance, in an attempt to illustrate their impressive socio-economic, and political diversity, Dillon (2004:75) catalogued five different groups of Han migrants to Xinjiang: descendants of early settlers, defected Goumindang troops, re-assigned CCP professional and administrative personnel, rusticated young people transferred to Xinjiang, and prisoners from the Labor Reform and Education camps.

^{vi} While early migrants first came from Gansu, or later, from cities with which Xinjiang had official connections, such as Shanghai and Tianjin, the bulk of migration is now occurring from the poorest and most populous provinces of the PRC, such as Sichuan and Henan (Xinhua August 22, 2006).

^{vii} Examining ethnic and linguistic minorities other than the French in Québec, Juteau declared that, although temporality is often invoked as part of the legitimation process, it is not the determining factor in understanding specific political demands (2004: 88)

^{viii} The net loss of population in Xinjiang after the Cultural Revolution is an example of this phenomena (see Li 1989; Liang 2001)

^{ix} Grunfeld (1985) explained that Han Chinese feel the need to see themselves as 'culturally superior' as a mean to intellectually compensate for the Han's inability to maintain physical control over the non-Han people. To mentally compensate for their subordination to Mongol and Manchu dynasties (55)

^x Indeed, the CCP has repeatedly claimed that officials from minority ethnic groups account for 51.8% of the total in the XUAR (Xinhua October 1st, 2005)

^{xi} The astounding scale of the Chinese 'floating population' is estimated between 50 to 90 millions (Liang 2001: 502)

^{xii} See Becquelin (2000) for further assessment of the threat Han migration causes to the fragile ecological equilibrium in the region