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## **Cultural Erasure for Nationality Stability: Constructions of Uyghur and Hui Self-Identity**

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*Cultural Erasure for Nationality Stability:*  
Constructions of Uyghur and Hui Self-Identity

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## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	2
II Introduction.....	3
III Historical Background.....	7
IV Literature Review.....	10
V. Case Studies.....	17
Uyghur Case Study.....	17
Hui Case Study.....	27
V. Analysis.....	30
VI Conclusion.....	34
VII Bibliography.....	35

## I. ABSTRACT

The Chinese Communist Party enforces state stability through replacing ethnic heritage with nationalist loyalty, a unique form of cultural erasure that equates national unity with the assimilation of ethnic minorities into the Han majority. This government policy is exemplified by the variance in governmental policy concerning the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, and the Hui-minzu throughout China. Both groups share an Islamic faith and history, yet the Uyghurs incur cultural restriction and surveillance while the Hui do not. Such creates a paradox of inclusion, where the Chinese Communist Party grants the Hui larger freedoms in religious and cultural expression, while simultaneously encroaching on the linguistic preservation and heritage of the Uyghurs. The difference in governmental policy was analyzed through measures of self-identity, level of enculturation, language use, and their consequent effect on cultural restriction and socioeconomic standing. Analysis suggests that increased cultural assimilation into Han-Chinese society caused a decrease in cultural and religious restriction, indicating that the variance in political policy depended on how strongly these ethnic-minorities related to their Chinese identity. In this context, loyalty to an identity outside of Chinese nationality incurred government suspicion and cultural encroachment.

## II. INTRODUCTION

Communities rely on their native language and culture as intrinsic mechanisms of identity. They are the breathing instruments that carry the history of a people forward, the voice we give our heritage. Ethnic minorities are distinguished not only by their ethnography, but also their concepts of cultural expression. Be it cuisine or traditional clothing, these practices serve as mechanisms for community building; they are how we connect with one another despite vast personal differences, an intimate bond forged through a shared identity. We are viscerally attached to our identities, and the communities that shaped them. Cultural preservation and maintaining ethnic identity become especially vital for those who belong to threatened ethnic minorities, when culture and statehood are no longer tied-together. Ethnic minority groups attempt to navigate the retention of select aspects of their heritage, while simultaneously assimilating to the lifestyle of the ethnic-majority. In this context, we can witness the most beautiful displays of cultural exchange, as well as violent strife and consequent erasure.

Cultural identity is more than a mere intellectual device or construct, it is tangible and alive; it can be found in the faces of your grandparents, the faith you instinctively pray to, or even the shape your nostalgia takes. Ethnic minorities thereby regard their culture as the vital fabric of the community, devoted in their attempts to protect it past encroachment. Such defines the tension provoked when governments attempt to increase their assimilation efforts, their policies often targeting language first—attempting to bridge divides through a universally shared tongue.<sup>1</sup> Assimilation is not necessarily tantamount to erasure and marginalization, thus each instance must be observed through a lens of specificity, ultimately questioning the intention behind political action.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, 200, 50-65.

Assimilation efforts can be aimed to promote economic pragmatism, intending to kindle a unified and patriotic workforce striving toward a shared goal of national prosperity. It can be a mechanism to combat marginalization, such as implementing education reforms and government-sponsored pathways to university for minority students. Complete societal integration necessitates social equality. Yet the line between governmental aid and cultural encroachment is often blurred, and thereby marred with conflict. When a government restricts the capacity of a minority community from practicing its own belief system or religion or to connect with one another and engage in their shared heritage, the consequence could result in different forms of resistance and exasperated ethnic divides. When a community risks erasure, it reacts with an urgency to defend its existence.

In the aftermath of political conflict, a lack of cultural awareness can quickly dismantle any governmental initiatives to reconstruct the area, and integrate indigenous populations into broader society. It is a symptom we witness in lasting repetition, the consequences of which bleed well into modern day. Both the American and Canadian governments mirrored such behavior in their attempt to assimilate the Native American and First Nation people, respectively. Assimilation policies were most ruthlessly enforced in the creation of boarding schools, in which native children were uprooted from their communities and taught to parrot “correct behavior”—notably *white* behavior.<sup>2</sup> Henry Richard Pratt, an American army captain and founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, well-summarized the intention of North American governments regarding their indigenous communities, “*kill the Indian in him, save the man.*”<sup>3</sup> Children were categorized as especially redeemable, meanwhile the older generation were isolated to under-funded reservations. These boarding schools aimed to entirely wash away their

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<sup>2</sup> Feir, 2016, 433-480.

<sup>3</sup> Haller, 2002, 65-86.

native identity, to then replace it with national loyalty; the children were stripped of their original names, forbidden from using their own indigenous languages or engaging in their cultural and religious heritage.<sup>4</sup> The goal is to solve ethnic conflict, not through intercommunity reconciliation, but by fundamentally absorbing native heritage into the identity of their colonizers.

The last Canadian indigenous residential school was not closed until 1996.<sup>5</sup> The lasting effects of such ruthless assimilation policies did not equalize the societal standing of indigenous and non-indigenous communities. It is estimated that 61% of First Nation young adults have not completed high school, compared to only 13% of non-indigenous Canadians.<sup>6</sup> A legacy of colonialism and destabilized community are still entrenched in contemporary conflict, and we are left to question the cost of such turmoil. Inequality and ostracism persist today, the only difference being that so many of these minority communities have lost the comfort of their ancestral tongue—now burdened with desperate attempts to reconstruct and retain their now dying cultural identity.

Though we can track the damage ensued by cultural erasure across countless national histories, the mistake is nonetheless repeated by governments internationally. As such, I have studied the ways the Chinese governments employ cultural erasure as a tool of national stability against members of the ethnic minority, specifically the Uigur Muslims. Observing the ethnic relations of contemporary China as my case study, I examine how the government-led assimilation process operates at the expense of minority cultural retention.

The People's Republic of China is a vastly diverse country, composed of 56 recognized ethnic groups—despite this, China is largely perceived as homogenous by the international

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart, and Sareen, 2012, 1560-1569.

<sup>6</sup> Drummond and Kachuck-Rosenbluth, 2013, 1-22.

community, similar to the ethnic structure of South Korea or Japan. Large, consolidated nations of contrasting ethnicities often face the threat of separatism or internal ethnic strife. Yet unlike the United States, mainland China publically appears to avoid such tension. This seeming peace is a byproduct of a domestic policy by the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] that enforces national stability, and a uniform state identity, via cultural homogenization.<sup>7</sup> These conformist policies will be analyzed through two contrasting case studies, the Uyghur minority of Xinjiang, and the Hui people. Despite their shared Islamic identities and history, CCP response to these respective minority groups have proved vastly different. The variance in the way these groups are treated by the CCP is a result of how these groups self-identify, interact with the Chinese state and other Muslims in the world.

The Hui people predominantly use Mandarin, and their population is spread well throughout China—thus, they seamlessly integrate into Chinese society, and identify strongly with their Chinese identity.<sup>8</sup> The Uyghurs, however, have preserved their unique language and many of cultural practices that often separate them from the Chinese majority.. Their population is nearly exclusive to Xinjiang region, producing a unique sense of Uyghur identity that exists outside of Chinese Nationality. Uyghurs often identify as Uyghur first, Chinese second, and this is the very contrast that proves dangerous to the CCP.<sup>9</sup> In efforts to produce a unified national identity and loyalty to the state, the CCP enforces Xinjiang-specific policies to induce sinification of the Uyghurs. These policies range from intensive Mandarin education, what the CCP calls vocational schools, to the sponsored import of Han-Chinese to the Xinjiang province.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese Communist Party constructs state stability by replacing ethnic heritage

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<sup>7</sup> Dwyer, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Gladney, 1990, 1-28.

<sup>9</sup> Ildikó, 2002, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Tohti, 2015.



with nationalist loyalty in a unique form of cultural erasure, exemplified by the variance between the Uyghur and the Hui ethnicities.

### III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Xinjiang exists as a semi-autonomous prefecture, entitling it to legislative rights exclusive to the province. This political infrastructure facilitates civil policies unique from the rest of mainland China, particularly in its recent restriction on cultural expression. As such, ethnic minority scholars—particularly those of Uyghur and Hui background—have worked tirelessly to document the cause of ethnic strife between Islamic minorities and the Han majority, rooting this tension from centuries of imperial history to contemporary economic design.<sup>11</sup> To fully contextualize the ethnic strain within Xinjiang, we must understand its greater history, and the very basis for the Uyghur ethnogenesis. An Imperial Chinese past has influenced an industrializing Communist present, and as such, has set the foundation for political violence in the area, inspiring separatism and assimilation efforts alike.

Nations exist within delicate, deliberately assigned frameworks that are entirely artificial. All too often, mankind forgets the constantly shifting nature of a border, we neglect the influence of neighboring cultures and past occupations. Upon any shift in ownership, a national government thereby carries an expectation of conformity: your personal identity is irrelevant, assimilation to the ruling culture is mandatory.<sup>12</sup> Such is the spark that erupts Xinjiang into a lasting, cyclical history of resistance and consequent suppression.

Coveted for its geographic location and rich mineral supply, the region of Xinjiang has been coveted by countless. In the span of 8 centuries, Xinjiang would be conquered and claimed

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-30.

<sup>12</sup> Malkki, 2008, 270.

by the Ottomans, Persians, Mughals, Tsarist Russia and Qing China.<sup>13</sup> The Qing Empire assumed control of Xinjiang in 1884, in which they first expressed an intense reluctance at any attempts to assimilate the territory—fearing the fallout of protest and riots, as the Uyghur “*found more solace in Islamic identity [than Han culture]*.”<sup>14</sup> The Uyghur culture more closely resembles those of Turkic and Central Asian origin, rather than Chinese, an identitarian proximity that the ethnicity proudly cherished. Although the Uyghur society had endured multiple transitions between empires, emerging from each political conquest, the community is still unified and enduring. The hesitation of the Chinese government was brief, as the government soon found a justification for implementing dominant control over Xinjiang, citing national defense and the preservation of Chinese unity. The 1920s fostered a period of perpetual policy change, modifying the prior policy of Uyghur isolation to an intense importation of Chinese culture and Han migration into the region. Such modifications ultimately served to exploit the Uyghurs, as “*agricultural lands were seized and given to internal Chinese (Han) refugees who would become permanent residents of Xinjiang.*”<sup>15</sup> Such scrutiny punished the Uyghurs based on their religious and ethnic identities, a consequence of their failure to assimilate. Naturally, the actions of the government sparked heated tensions and provoked a rebellion.

The Uyghurs managed to establish their own country on two separate occasions within the 1900s. First in 1933, with the creation of the Islamic Republic of East Turkistan, however China resumed control over the area in less than a year. Later, in 1944, the Soviet Union directly supported the establishment of the East Turkistan Republic—however, the territory was returned to China in 1949, becoming an official part of Communist China.<sup>16</sup> Today, the term of Eastern

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<sup>13</sup> Fuller, 2016, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Fuller, 2016, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Fuller, 2016, 14-5.

Turkistan is still a residual expression occasionally mentioned, given a distinct nationalist designation. *“The term is often assumed to imply political separatism,”* says Linguistic Anthropology professor Arienne Dwyer, *“and is swiftly censored by the Chinese government.”*<sup>17</sup> Xinjiang province remains the epicenter of the Uyghur population, a strong community reinforced through ancestral ties to the territory, entire legacies of the community. Thus, mitigating the potential threat of separatism in Xinjiang remains a priority by the CCP; political policy in the region is designed specifically to subvert such concern.

Yet a history of separatism is not exclusive to the Uyghur ethnicity, the Hui have also acted in resistance to the Qing Dynasty. The Dungan Revolt of 1862 marked a violent uprising by the Hui, against the Qing-led government in the Gansu province. Religious persecution, political oppression, as well as economic exploitation, together catalyzed the Dungan rebellion—in doing so, triggered an identitarian rift between the Hui-ethnicity and their Qing rulers.<sup>18</sup> The Qing Dynasty had encroached on the heritage and Muslim faith of the Hui, endangering their capacity for cultural preservation.

The result of the Qing strategy was devastating population loss, an accumulated 21 million Hui deaths.<sup>19</sup> It is believed that the Gansu, Shaanxi, and Xinjiang provinces lost 74.5%, 44.6%, and 72.6% of their populations respectively.<sup>20</sup> The military onslaught kindled a mass demographic shift out of Northwest China, permanently altering the population densities of Hui-minzu., Now the Hui-minzu are sporadically distributed throughout mainland China. This migration of Hui to provinces beyond the Northwest fractured a previous sense of community, and naturally led to increased assimilation of the Hui into Han-Chinese society.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dwyer, 1990, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Janhunen, 2020, 357-60.

<sup>19</sup> Cheng, Gawande, Qi, 2022, 105990

<sup>20</sup> Janhunen, 2020, 359-60.

<sup>21</sup> Cheng, Gawande, Qi, 2022, 105990

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the visceral link between identity and culture, and how such concepts complicate contemporary geopolitics, we first need to recognize the diligent efforts of past scholarship. Anthropologist, Lissa H. Malkki, explored the ways trauma and memory are manifested among members of the ethnic minority, the Hutu refugees in Tanzania. Concepts of nations are held in devotional, intimate attachments to the societies that craft them, breeding a uniquely human obsession with soil, and the consequent conflation that our culture and our statehood are intrinsically tied-together. The idealistic translation being that individual cultures thereby deserve individual states, territory serving as a means of legitimizing an identity.

A problem is introduced when recognizing what Liisa Malkki describes as bleeding boundaries, or the inexistence thereof. A nation possesses “*no bleeding boundaries [...] One country cannot, at the same time, be another country. The world of nations is thus conceived as a discrete spatial partitioning of territory.*”<sup>22</sup> This painful disconnect between the identity and its territorial nativity introduces a traumatic provocation, as an urgency overtakes the community in preserving their now stateless conditions. The retention of an ethnic-minority history that exists in stark opposition to the state-manufactured, and majority-endorsed, narrative is not only an act of devotion—but one of deep defiance. A population living beneath a new sovereign is then expected to acquiesce and assimilate to their victor, to swallow the trauma induced by their violent overtaking. To not only live beneath the imperial, but to actively serve national prosperity.

Such coincides with the conception of an “imagined community”, how we assign our self-constructed nations as inherently limited and sovereign. The term was coined by Benedict

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<sup>22</sup> Malkki, 2008, 270.

Anderson, a widely cited historian and political scientist studying the origins of nationalism in Europe. In his own words, “*the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations; No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind.*”<sup>23</sup> Nations exist within delicate, deliberately assigned frameworks that are entirely artificial. Our constructions of nations are precisely that: constructions, inorganic and subject to change. Benedict Anderson argues that the imagined community also relies on its linguistic history to fully describe its identity, comparing how the death of Latin and adoption of French/German as languages of power “made [their] own contribution to the decline of the imagined community of Christendom,” Meaning that an aspect of the community was taken alongside the disuse of Latin, prompting a loss of unity via conscious societal manipulation.<sup>24</sup> Those without their native soil rely on language and culture to retain their community, to upkeep the intimacy created in each shared word and custom; thus, degradation to either may permanently damage a community and their ability to connect with one another. To force the assimilation of a population into the majority fold, you give them nowhere else to turn to.<sup>25</sup>

Contemporary China is a polyethnic state bound within a unified blank slate, this harmonious coexistence intended to benefit Chinese prosperity in the international court. Howard Yuen Feng Choy, a professor of contemporary Chinese culture and critical theory, dedicates his career to the analysis of Chinese and its role in modern politics. As he describes it, China’s history is the creation of a hegemonic narrative, “*a unified story that could demonstrate the bedrock truth of minzu continuity and consanguinity.*”<sup>26</sup> The 55 Chinese ethnic minzu

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<sup>23</sup> Anderson, 2006, 50.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-60.

<sup>26</sup> Choy, 2006, 687.

[nationalities] are then meant to follow the most advanced minzu, the ethnic majority of the Han Chinese, “*toward higher steps in the ladder of history.*”<sup>27</sup> This belief perpetuates the prioritization of national progress, over personal heritage and cultural distinction. The state-narrative is one of productivity, finding harmony not as an American melting pot ripe with ethnic tension, but rather a unified workforce pursuing a shared goal.

Yet this term of minzu [民族] is subject to much discourse, as its usage by the Chinese Communist Party widely contrasts with the international community. Contemporary China is referred to 中华民族, *zhonghua minzu*, Nation of China. Minzu directly translates to mean nation. There exists a word for ethnicity in Chinese, 族群 *zúqún* [ethnic group], however the CCP consciously opts to utilize the term minzu, nationality, instead. But this usage of minzu in reference to ethnic minorities, or the majority, is not to imply that their communities are (deserving of) separate nations. Rather, it reinforces the notion that every ethnicity is part of the same overall nation—merely added colors to an overall painting of China Minzu.<sup>28</sup>

Such practice can be rooted back to Joseph Stalin and his Nation/Nationality theory, ideology blended into Chinese political strategy during the Communist Revolution. Stalinist theory posits that a nation is formed on a shared basis of language, territory, economic life consolidated into a common culture; with such definition, he then takes aim against conceptions of national-cultural autonomy. He argues that conceptions of nationality and distinction would serve only to culturally and economically isolate less developed ethnicities, provoking further conflict and separatism against a unified communist state. As such, the path forward necessitates the unification of separate nationalities into a homogenous pursuit toward equality.<sup>29</sup> Therein lies

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.

<sup>29</sup> Stalin, 1929.

the implication of blended ethnicity, distinction soon erased in a communist agenda forward. If distinction only serves to exacerbate alienation, then such would consequate an affront to national productivity—an ailment the Chinese Communist Party cannot expense.<sup>30</sup>

Ilham Tohti 土赫提伊力哈木, a leading Chinese economist and impassioned voice for Uyghur protection efforts, as well as an Associate Professor at Minzu University of China, has dedicated his career to answering the question of ethnic tension within Xinjiang. Uyghur himself, Tohti is now serving a life-sentence on separatism charges.<sup>31</sup> Thus, analyzing his research becomes a study within itself. His specific expertise fixates on fiscal policy in Xinjiang, and how implementations by the Chinese Communist Party have exacerbated the marginalization of the Uyghur Chinese. An over-concentration of resources are invested into Han-dominant areas, thereby alienating Uyghurs from the urbanization of their native province and restricting their mobility throughout. Such restricts the ethnic distribution of Xinjiang, serving as a detriment to societal integration and assimilation efforts. Furthermore, such economic design worsens Uyghur unemployment and segregation. One of the largest employers in the province is the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a paramilitary organization that specifically excludes Uyghur enlistment.<sup>32</sup> His research illuminates a paradox within Xinjiang: the CCP seeks to seamlessly integrate Uyghurs into Chinese society, yet allows policies that intensify ethnic divide and alienation.

Ilham Tohti was detained on 5 January 2014, and sentenced to life-imprisonment. Yet among his criticisms of Xinjiang politics and career of humanitarian advocacy, Tohti imbeds every publication with key insight: policy recommendations, hopes for a future of Han-Uyghur coexistence within Xinjiang. His research has greatly motivated the explorative framework of

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<sup>30</sup> Choy, 2006, 687-8.

<sup>31</sup> Tohti, 2015, 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

this thesis—inspiring further questions that he was unable to answer, prior to his detainment and resulting censorship.

An instrumental voice in Uyghur folklore is 达吾提热依拉 [Rahile Dawut], Professor at Xinjiang University, and accredited by China's Ministry of Culture. Dawut is among the premier scholars in the anthropology of Chinese ethnic minorities, affectionately referred to as the guardian of Uyghur folklore.<sup>33</sup> Much of our limited knowledge of Uyghur culture comes from Rahile Dawut, her voice an instrumental source of preservation and oral history. Her anthropology publications centered Uyghur culture and the expression thereof, charting its historical development and intrinsic relationship with the Islamic faith. She outlined the ethno-cultural significance of even the smallest displays of heritage, like the Uyghur Meshrep—a dance vital to social functions and community building.<sup>34</sup> Her research is vital in documenting Uyghur culture outside of Chinese influence, and the rich history it originates from.

Professor Rahile Dawut has been missing since 2017, detained by the Chinese government.<sup>35</sup> Both scholars mentioned so far have been detained by the CCP, their life's work promptly censored and existence practically erased. The circumstances of Ilham Tohti and Rahile Dawut are not extraordinary, and through the research of this thesis, it grew alarmingly difficult to find a scholar of Uyghur-ethnicity who has not been detained.

Further contextualizing the cultural landscape for Chinese ethnic minorities is 张承志 [Zhang Chengzhi], a leading voice in contemporary Muslim-Chinese literature, his historical narrative *History of the Soul* was the second-most popular book within China, following its 1994

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<sup>33</sup> Dawut, 2017, 232-255.

<sup>34</sup> Pawan, Dawut, and Kurban, 2017, 81-90.

<sup>35</sup> Harris and Dawut, 2021, 111.



release.<sup>36</sup> Zhang writes of the trepid history of Islamic ethnic minorities within an ever-evolving China. Of the Hui minority, himself, his publications grant a personal introspection on Hui-ethnic and linguistic development. Raised as an atheist and member of the Red Guard during the height of the 1966-7 Cultural Revolution, Zhang surprisingly reverts to Islam later in life. His literature contests ethnocentrism, and explores the religious conflict faced by Muslims in the Chinese northwest—provinces including Xinjiang.

Zhang's literary career also emphasizes the complexity of intellectual dissent in communist China, showcasing a direct contradiction to Western presumptions about Chinese resistance as an inevitably anti-Communism, pro-Liberalism phenomenon. His stance is especially rebellious in the context of contemporary politics, as Zhang openly criticizes the CCP promotion of the market economy since the 1990s, as well as hegemonic Chinese bureaucracy. He endorses popular resistance and protest in a way that is discordant with a state policy focused on quelling unrest in Xinjiang.<sup>37</sup> Yet unlike Tohti and Dawut, the rebellious publications and open criticisms of Zhang have not resulted in his detainment. Rather, he proudly advertises his Islamic faith, traveling to Palestine and endorsing Muslim solidarity.

Zhang's historical accounts are entwined with his own upbringing and lived experiences, as he describes the degradation of Hui heritage and standalone culture. He fixates on the aphasia of a mother tongue; as other scholars studying Hui-minzu note, this linguistic death provokes a visceral loss of identity.<sup>38</sup> The aphasia of a mother tongue as a loss of identity, the birth of a new nationality, as scholars studying Hui heritage note.<sup>39</sup> Zhang's documentation of

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<sup>36</sup> Choy, 2006, 680.

<sup>37</sup> Lovell, 2016, 892.

<sup>38</sup> Choy, 2006, 689.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Hui assimilation, and consequent integration into Chinese society, presents fascinating implications for Uyghurs within Xinjiang. The Hui have lost their native language, and are distributed sporadically throughout China, thus identifying entirely with Chinese nationality. Most alarming is what the Hui Muslims may represent to the CCP: a goal.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE**

The argument of this thesis specifically addresses the variance in political policy, by the Chinese Communist Party, on its Muslim ethnic minorities. Strategies employed by the CCP to restrict religious expression target constructs of identity, rather than faith, as a mechanism for state stability. The Uyghur and the Hui ethnicities share an Islamic heritage, though their capacities to practice their religion are starkly different. What separates these ethnic groups is their fundamental construction of self-identity, and the extent to which they relate to Chinese nationality. This distinction of identity is precisely what motivates CCP behavior, thus kindling contrasting state responses to their respective religious practices. The Hui-minzu largely have no dissonance with their Chinese identity, often seamlessly integrated into greater Chinese society. As such, they are permitted a greater amount of freedom to express their Muslim faith; no restriction on hijab is imposed, the government sponsors the construction of mosques, and Hui-children are also allowed to engage with their Islamic heritage.<sup>40</sup> Whereas in Xinjiang, the Uyghurs are met with CCP suspicion of separatist sentiment, consequating rigid governmental control over their ability to practice Islam. Furthermore, Xinjiang-specific policies target key aspects of Uyghur identity that differentiate them from the larger Chinese population, such as their unique language, traditional customs, and cultural engagement.<sup>41</sup> Establishing the source of

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<sup>40</sup> ul Ain, 2018, 43-56

<sup>41</sup> Tohti, 2015, 14-6

CCP cultural restriction on Chinese ethnic minorities is vital in understanding this conflict. The model minority is meant to identify as Chinese above all else, thus illuminating how Contemporary China endorses its cultural diversity *only* when that ethnicity is unquestionably loyal to the Chinese state.

## V. CASE STUDIES

### 维吾尔民族 [Uyghur Ethnicity]

#### FACTORS LEADING TO OPPRESSION

##### **Self-Identity and Distribution**

Governmental encroachment on the Uyghur minority provides a stark variance from an otherwise harmonious Chinese ethnic environment. The catalyst behind such persecution can be found within how the Uyghurs choose to self-identify. This harmonious coexistence between the Han-Chinese other 55 ethnic minorities seems to resonate beneath a shared ideal: Chinese nationalism, a prideful loyalty toward Chinese success and geopolitical dominance.<sup>42</sup> As such, the integration of most Chinese ethnic minorities appears seamless—an act of perfect parroting.

As aforementioned, the 56 six other minorities recognized by the Chinese government exist without the scrutiny and rigid policing so commonly enforced upon the Uyghurs. The other Chinese ethnic minorities are scattered through China, and often geographically closer to the nation's center—such has resulted in fluid assimilation and peaceful coexistence, allowing them to exist without risk of persecution.<sup>43</sup> Xinjiang is geographically isolated in the Northwest, insulating Uyghurs, and allowing a distinct cultural heritage to blossom. Along with it, a Uyghur-specific language that was alive and preferred over standardized Mandarin. It was fear

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<sup>42</sup> Evans, 2010, 84

<sup>43</sup> Fuller, 2016, 16

that incentivized the Chinese government to employ rigid control over Xinjiang, concern over potential Uyghur separatism.<sup>44</sup>

Despite constant alterations in ownership, Xinjiang's Uyghur population found its identity within Islam—a byproduct of the spreading Muslim empires, and the Arab merchants travelling through Xinjiang along the Silk Road. Uyghurs are ethnically Turkic in origin, speaking a language that better resembles Turkish than it does Mandarin; couple that with their religious attachments, Uyghurs are a historically Islamic people, while the majority of Han Chinese practice a mix of Buddhism, Taoism, or reverence to Confucianism.<sup>45</sup> This shift towards Islamism was an ethnogenesis for the Uyghur people, ultimately serving as a catalyst to distinguish Uyghur culture from the Han Chinese, prompting Uyghurs to cite their identities as Uyghur first, and Chinese second.<sup>46</sup>

The Uyghur-minzu is native to the territory of Xinjiang, regarding it as an ancestral heartland. They are the largest ethnic group within the region, comprising half the overall population of the province. Of the 12.8 million Uyghurs within mainland China, 11 million reside exclusively within Xinjiang. Within the province, the Uyghur population is most dense in the south, and the east, with cultural strongholds found in the cities of Hotan, and particularly Kashgar.<sup>47</sup> An estimated 5,000 Uyghurs reside in Hunan province, having migrated to the area back in the 14th century; scholars contest if the Uyghurs of Hunan practice or identify with the Islamic faith, as they are known to consume pork, and engage in ancestor worship.<sup>48</sup> Few statistics have been released regarding the distribution of Uyghur migrant workers throughout broader China, though the statistical majority remain settled in their native homeland. Thus, the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>45</sup> Dwyer, 1990, 40

<sup>46</sup> Fuller, 2016, 10

<sup>47</sup> Howell, Fan, 2011, 119-39

<sup>48</sup> Mingqing, Zeng, 2018, 89

remote and ancestral nature of Xinjiang kindled an intimate unity among the Uyghur community, having withstood transition between multiple empires. As mentioned in the historical overview, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang have been resistant to assimilation attempts, often inciting rebellions in protest to cultural encroachment.<sup>49</sup>

With the rise of the internet, ethnic consciousness within the Uyghur community has further bloomed, due to increased commercial exchange and cultural diffusion between Xinjiang province and the Turkic nations of Central Asia. As ethnic tensions rise between the Uyghur and Han ethnicities, a consequence of economic inequality and racial prejudice, Uyghurs have begun to look outward in their conception of identity.<sup>50</sup>

### **Level of Enculturation**

Language is often the fabric of cultural history, the very mechanism that builds a community. To kill a culture, destroy its language. The Uyghurs of Xinjiang understand the importance of linguistic preservation, and thus cling to their native tongue with fierce dedication; as such, their culture remains unique and standalone in the backdrop of Chinese diversity. However, it is precisely this quality that the CCP seeks to rectify through assimilation.

The current structure of the Xinjiang education system mandates all subjects exclusively be taught in Mandarin—regardless of proficiency level.<sup>51</sup> This means vital subjects like physics, chemistry, and mathematics, all integrally related to better job opportunities, are taught in a language that most Uyghur students are already struggling to learn; thus, these students are left unable to even comprehend what they are being taught. Such a policy is largely responsible for increasing dropout rates among Uyghur students, worsening their career prospects in an already

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<sup>49</sup> Fuller, 2016, 15-6

<sup>50</sup> Zang, 2011, 141-55

<sup>51</sup> Tang, Hu, Jin, 2016, 346-366

competitive industry.<sup>52</sup> Those that do stay in the school system inevitably fall behind Han Chinese students, impacting educational statistics and test scores between the ethnicities. This information is too often utilized in a false equivalency, assuming those of Uyghur descent as primitive or incomparable to the success of the Han-minzu, further dividing ethnic strife in the region.

Data from the 2012 China Labor-Force Dynamics Survey [CLFDs] demonstrates a concerning correlation between Mandarin proficiency and level of socioeconomic equality.<sup>53</sup> The observable financial gap between the Han majority and Uyghur minority could be traced to their language ability: Uyghurs fluent in Mandarin attained higher socioeconomic status than their monolingual counterparts. Leading industries within China solely conduct business in Mandarin, effectively barring non-Mandarin speakers/those with lower level of fluency from pursuing certain careers.<sup>54</sup> This manner of exclusion allows China to filter out whom they deem to be uninvestable: Uyghur citizens unwilling to blend seamlessly into Chinese culture, and thereby Chinese industrial productivity. Such perpetuates socioeconomic inequality, exacerbating the ethnic divide within Xinjiang.

## OUTCOMES

### **Restriction on Dress and Worship**

Recent years have witnessed increased restriction on Islamic practice within Xinjiang, especially targeting the visibility of Muslim heritage. In an effort to minimize the threat of terrorism and radical subversion, CCP officials have banned Islamic veiling—most notably: the hijab. The sweeping decision dramatically alters the daily dress of most Uyghur women, as 66% of the population wears some form of Islamic veil. 43% wear a headscarf, 19% wear a hijab, 3%

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<sup>52</sup> Tohti, 2015, 10

<sup>53</sup> Tang, Hu, Jin, 2016, 346-366

<sup>54</sup> Tohti, 2015, 7

wear a niqab, and 34% do not veil.<sup>55</sup> The hijab ban targets the central most relationship a Muslim woman can share with worship, impeding her capacity for modesty in a faith that upholds purity—most ironic when government initiatives publicly advertise attempts to showcase Uyghur beauty.

A government initiative entitled 靓丽工程 [Project Beauty] sought to modernize Uyghur women via investing in the cosmetic industry. A 2012 government editorial wrote “*veils and long robes block a woman's splendor and beauty. [This] is a backward and regressive trend that deviates from modern development and thus is incompatible with the vast beauty of Xinjiang.*”<sup>56</sup> Officials in Xinjiang have instead promoted alternative forms of modesty. Such includes the Uyghur *ätläs*, *doppa*, or simply braiding their hair in traditional styles, all described as a means of praising Uyghur ethnic beauty.<sup>57</sup> Yet such efforts not only prove logically flawed, but also paradoxical. Islamic veiling is meant to preserve modesty, to shift focus away from superficial beauty—ironically, it is meant to distinguish oneself from secular culture and expressions of beauty. Furthermore, the province-promoted styles of dress are publicly deemed both unfashionable and old-fashioned by Uyghur women, as current fashion is inspired heavily by modern Middle Eastern, as well as Central Asian, Muslim women.<sup>58</sup> Muslim women domestically and abroad consider modern styles of hijab as sleek and elegant, with no indication to political radicalism or Islamic fundamentalism.

In 2014, women wearing any style of Islamic dress were banned from entering certain buildings, or even boarding public transit, violators of which would be immediately reported to police. This policy was not exclusive to women, it extended to Uyghur men with noticeable

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<sup>55</sup> Leibold, Grose, 2016, 78-102.

<sup>56</sup> Kehoe, Wielander, 2021, 5-21

<sup>57</sup> Leibold, Grose, 2016, 100

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-102

facial hair as well. Furthermore, clothing or jewelry that featured the Islamic crescent and star were also prohibited from public wear.<sup>59</sup>

The religion restrictions extend beyond self-expression. As part of a campaign designed to contain particular aspects of Uyghur culture, such as their devotion to Islam, the CCP has launched a sweeping closure of mosques throughout the province. The closures are sometimes met with demolitions, buildings torn down in the name of modernization—as the torn down religious sites become metropolitan hubs, trendy cafes, or tourist attractions.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the *أَذَان* [Adhan], the Islamic call to public salah [prayer], has been banned from blaring on the loudspeakers of the few permitted mosques—an act that deviates from Muslim countries, as the call to prayer stands as integral in Islamic community building.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, entry to the few remaining mosques is prohibited for males below the age of 18.<sup>62</sup> Such is a policy meant to encourage the engagement of young Uyghur boys into secularized Han society, before they can develop attachments or loyalty to their Islamic heritage.

### **Right to movement**

Albeit monitored, the movement and migration of the Uyghur-minzu is permitted. Recent policy particularly encourages Uyghur movement throughout mainland China, aimed to diversify ethnic distribution. Within Xinjiang, however, the province is the subject of increased surveillance and rigid governmental control; most notable are reports of facial recognition technology, and the compulsory tracking of all individual movement within the region.<sup>63</sup> Surveillance efforts included locational tracking, machine learning algorithms, voice and facial

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Thum, 2020, 48-61

<sup>61</sup> Thum, 2020, 48-61

<sup>62</sup> Mackerras, 2018, 59-84

<sup>63</sup> Leibold, 2020, 46-50



recognition software, as well as an increase of physical guards and officials on guard throughout the largest cities in the province—particularly, Urumqi and Kashgar.<sup>64</sup> Such efforts are a mechanism to delineate correct thought and behavior among its Uyghur citizens, behavior that is precisely Han. The surveillance protocol has served to degrade the concept of social trust within Xinjiang society, in turn reducing ethnic-minority capacities for social mobility.

International travel presents greater difficulty for the Uyghur community. Uyghurs report having their existing passports confiscated by authorities, and new applications being consistently denied despite multiple attempts. Meanwhile others have been detained at the airport, or deported back to China, when attempting to leave the country.

### **Detainment**

As a semi-autonomous region, Xinjiang possesses unique legislative policies and specific methods of enforcement. Thus, Han Chinese and other ethnic minorities outside Xinjiang are insulated from conflict and policies aimed specifically to target Uyghur identity.<sup>65</sup> The scene of the nation is proudly presented as inclusive, allowing Hui women to veil themselves as they like, Muslims within Xi'an and Gansu congregate in their Mosques freely, meanwhile the obscene reality is a policy of deliberate exclusion. Publicly, Uyghurs are equal citizens, while they live in private harassment invisible to the surrounding Han Chinese. Such dramaturgy is so effective, that the issue of potential re-education camps detaining Uyghurs remains a hotbed of debate—this allows for international focus to remain on disputing an argument of existence, rather than generating a response of action. Semi-autonomy of Xinjiang allows these constraints of self-expression, and surveillance of Uyghurs, to remain out of sight from broader China. Thus,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>65</sup> Ildikó, 2002, 57

Han Chinese are unaware of the aggressions within Xinjiang, ignorant of what this dramaturgy is actually hiding.

Overview of diplomatic conferences will showcase an avoidance by the CCP from the label of any separatism—as a separatist is too capable of warranting sympathy. A Uyghur revolutionary rallying support for liberation is too likable, and would appeal too heavily to other new republic nations. As such, the Chinese government employs a shift in nomenclature, converting the separatist into a terrorist. It is a clever transition in public image, all to appeal toward very popular concerns over Islamic terrorism. Such is exemplified in the statements made from Chinese diplomat, Zhu Bangzao, following 9/11. The Foreign Ministry spokesman states: “China [...] has reason to ask the United States to give its support and understanding in the fight against terrorism and separatists..”<sup>66</sup> The CCP has escalated its attempt to converge Uyghur identity to inherently mean religious extremist, to conflate Islamic faith and cultural preservation into threat of terrorism. Zhu Bangzao further cites the prior separatist movements in Xinjiang as an attempted holy war.<sup>67</sup>

The Chinese government claims that the detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang was necessary for the global fight against terrorism. Yet this assertion has repeatedly been rejected by UN rights experts, claiming it as a false narrative meant “to deflect allegations of gross rights violations,” undermining Beijing’s claim that these schools are voluntary re-education meant to combat extremism.<sup>68</sup>

Ilham Tohti, as aforementioned in the literature review, was arrested and promptly sentenced to life imprisonment in January 2014. In lieu of his arrest, his final article was published on 大象公会 [Elephant Guild], a popular self-media website dedicated to knowledge

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<sup>66</sup> Dwyer, 1990, 55

<sup>67</sup> Dwyer, 1990, 56

<sup>68</sup> Charbonneau, 2020

dissemination on topics such as history, urban planning, and politics. Albeit politically divisive and subject to repeated censorship, Elephant Guild has survived multiple banned accounts by the CCP. This final article, a prescription to the economic improvement of Xinjiang, was curiously in response to a 2011 request made by high-level officials within the Chinese government.<sup>69</sup> Only able to complete a draft of his proposal in October 2013, the incomplete article was published following his detainment just 3 months later. Tohti's economic strategy targeted nine distinct fields he categorized as detrimental to Uyghur-ethnic equality. Such fields were: unemployment among ethnic minorities, bilingual education, religion, ethnic alienation and segregation, distrust of ethnic minority officials, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps [XPCC], government competence and credibility, Han-Chinese chauvinism, and finally ethnic regional autonomy and anti-separatism.<sup>70</sup> Yet his article sought not to separate Xinjiang from the rest of mainland China, but instead to quell the unrest rampant within the province. Tohti imbeds every publication with key insight: policy recommendations, hopes for a future of Han-Uyghur coexistence within Xinjiang.

Mention of Xinjiang cannot be made without acknowledging international concern for the province, following a mass string of arrests and rampant censorship by the CCP to minimize backlash. Numerous scholars cited throughout this thesis, all of which of Uyghur-ethnicity, have been imprisoned and thereby censored. The legacy of their research and publications can only be found through foreign translations prior published, and the few data leaks that manage to surface. The CCP classifies their detainment beneath charges of separatism, as instilling anti-CCP rhetoric and thereby inciting violence in Xinjiang. Thus, their imprisonment is an effort to maintain civil unity within the province. Such claims have been subject to eager debate and full

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<sup>69</sup> Tohti, 2015, 1

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-5

tribunals conducted by the United Nations. However, referencing geopolitical tension and diplomacy is only meant to further contextualize growing controversy. It emphasizes the urgency required in attending to the true heart of the issue: cultural erasure, the very death of an ethnogenesis. Losing focus to Sino-American relations and the arguments thereof serve only as a distraction. What is undeniable is that the CCP is persecuting Uyghur intellectual and cultural producers, censoring works vital to the cultural fabric of the Uyghur ethnicity.

Among the detained artists is 依敏古丽尼沙 [Gulnisa Imin], a poet accused of promoting separatism. Even a cursory glance of her publications would suggest a conflicting narrative; Imin writes of cultural erasure, and growing disappearance of those closest to her. Her poems are a witness to CCP policy.

Where the words are banned to be said  
The flowers are not allowed to blossom  
And the birds cannot sing freely

– 依敏古丽尼沙 Gulnisa Imin, excerpt from 《一千零一夜》 2014-8  
《中国当代诗人代表作名录》全国1200名<sup>71</sup>

Her poem references CCP encroachment of Uyghur-language use, mandating use of Mandarin in public spaces and academia; depriving Uyghurs from their own language, “where words are banned to be said.”<sup>72</sup> Gulnisa Imin disappeared in 2017. On December 6, 2021, she was publicly issued a 17 year, 6-month sentence on officially undisclosed charges, having already served 4 years in detention.

Contesting the purpose of these detainments is the CCP and its supporters, citing the extrajudicial detention as necessary to foster vocational training and assimilating education—vital in alleviating Uyghur poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, legislative publications from

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<sup>71</sup> Serhan, 2022

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

2017-18 indicate a shift in domestic policy, focused on preventative repression. The Uyghurs within Xinjiang are designated as vulnerable subversion by jihadist networks. As such, this potential vulnerability is being treated as an operational reality: if Islamic radicalism is the infection, inoculation is preemptive cultural suppression. This strategy shift includes mass detention, creation of re-education facilities to mandate assimilation, and widespread surveillance on the Uyghurs within Xinjiang. Counterterrorism becomes tantamount to cultural repression.<sup>73</sup>

回民族  
[HUI ETHNICITY]

Self-Identity and Level of Enculturation

Joseph Stalin defines an ethnicity through four criteria: common territory, language, economy, and culture. The Hui fail to meet such a definition.<sup>74</sup> They share no unique language amongst themselves, as the Hui-Chinese predominantly speak Mandarin. Islam appears to serve as the foundation for the Hui ethnogenesis, the descent that loudly distinguishes them from the Han-majority. Furthermore, Hui identity itself is entrenched in contrasting variance. Hui-Chinese, unlike the Uyghurs, lack a distinct native soil; as such, the population is widely dispersed throughout mainland China, and occupy a range of socioeconomic positions within society. Even the core distinction of the Hui, their Islamic faith, is widely varied across the ethnicity—several Hui spending their entire lives in secularized environments, uninterested in religious practice.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Greitens, Lee, Yazici, 2019, 36-40

<sup>74</sup> Choy, 2006, 6

<sup>75</sup> Gladney, 1989, 21-6

Though public perception of the Hui orient heavily on their religious background, it is vital to note that the Hui, themselves, distinguish their identity by more than their religious faith. To be Hui is to be part of an integrally ethnic community, entirely separate from the history and ethnology of the Han Chinese.

As mentioned in the literature review, Zhang Chengzhi warns that such a classification is double-edged. Firstly, it ethnicizes the Islamic faith, a designation inherently antagonistic to the atheistic CCP. Secondly, it objectifies those same Muslim as some antithesis to the Han majority—as Islam naturally conflicts with state nationalism.<sup>76</sup> If these conditions are true, the Hui ethnogenesis is birthed in innate ideological opposition to the Han majority—a reality that ought to raise CCP-concern for potential separatist subversion. Yet the Hui do not arise such suspicion, nor do they conjure existential panic over Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>77</sup> Of all the 55 ethnic minorities in China, 10 groups are predominantly Muslim. Of the 10, only the Uyghurs provoke such extents of governmental restriction.<sup>78</sup> Left to wonder then, is why China's other Muslim populations can exist without the same behavioral constrictions as the Uyghurs, a comparatively smaller Muslim group.

The answer begins at the sporadic distribution and entrenched enculturation of the Hui minority, resulting in an indistinguishable identity from the Han Chinese, a variance of easy oversight. Zhang's documentation of Hui assimilation, and consequent integration into Chinese society, presents fascinating implications for Uyghurs within Xinjiang. The Hui have lost their native language, and are distributed sporadically throughout China, thus identifying entirely with

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<sup>76</sup> Choy, 2006, 7-8

<sup>77</sup> Chua, 2004, 155-62

<sup>78</sup> Israeli, 2010, 296-323

Chinese nationality.<sup>79</sup> This dispersity of the Hui-minzu prevents a strong, integral sense of community, thus necessitating this integration between Hui- and Han- populations. The seamless nature of their national unity allows Hui to have a larger presence through the form of societal contributions, specifically in regard to culture and history. Vital to understand is that the function of Hui culture, in Han society, acts as a supplement to the overall Chinese identity—rather than a distinct separation of heritage. It is in this narrative of supplementary identity, and a prioritization of national loyalty, that the Hui can interact with their Islamic roots without the scrutiny or disapproval of the CCP. Furthermore, due to this advanced integration into greater Chinese society, the Hui-ethnicity predominantly speak Mandarin, a skillset that serves to better promote their social mobility and ascension in the Chinese economic sector.

## OUTCOMES

### Restrictions On Dress and Worship

The Chinese government awards the Hui-minority a greater extent of personal freedom than their Uyghur counterparts, namely in more relaxed legislation and expanded religious autonomy.<sup>80</sup> Though forms of Islamic veil are banned within Xinjiang, this policy does not extend to greater China. Thus Hui women, the majority of which live outside the province of Xinjiang, are free to wear their hijabs with minimal scrutiny.<sup>81</sup>

The political policies of the Chinese government regarding religious expression vary widely, however in recent years the CCP have taken immense efforts in not only supporting, but actively protecting the cultural traditions of the Hui-minzu; the goal is a sense of balance

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<sup>79</sup> Choy, 2006, 687

<sup>80</sup> Durneika, 2018, 429

<sup>81</sup> Chua, 2004, 155-62

between social stability and maintaining control over cultural expressions. The expression of heritage appears contingent on political loyalty, and active contribution to nationalistic identity.

### **Right to movement**

Hui-minority families show minimal variance in socioeconomic status as Han-majority, demonstrating neither a gap in average disposable income, nor in poverty rates.<sup>82</sup> Such equity is often linked back to mobility, as several young Hui males migrate to urban areas in order to secure a higher income to send to their family back home. This trend is further facilitated by language abilities, as the Hui-minority predominantly speaks Chinese—the only retention of their native language found in a few retained phrases of Arabic.<sup>83</sup>

## **VI. ANALYSIS**

### **LEADING TO OPPRESSION**

#### **Self-Identity and Distribution**

Observance of the variant policies regarding the Uyghur and Hui ethnicity suggests that minority inclusion within China rests on the basis of potential assimilation into Han culture, and greater society. Such assumes that this construction of a national Chinese identity views Han culture as a purified default, to which minority ethnicities must acquiesce and assimilate into. A unified nation then necessitates a unified conception of culture. Howard Y.F. Choy describes contemporary Chinese history as “*the creation of a hegemonic narrative, a unified story [to demonstrate the truth] of minzu continuity and consanguinity.*”<sup>84</sup> Such would mandate each

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<sup>82</sup> Gustafsson, Sai, 2015, 517-535.

<sup>83</sup> Chua, 2004, 155-62

<sup>84</sup> Choy, 2006, 2



minority minzu to follow the steps of the more advanced minzu, the majority Han, toward the goal of higher society. By this metric, the Communist Chinese Party justifies their assimilation policies as necessary for promoting economic prosperity and national stability. Expression of minority culture, in supplication to an overall national Chinese identity, earns starkly different government reactions than loyalty to a unique heritage, and active resistance to government restriction—as we see in the Hui and the Uyghurs, respectively. To the Chinese government, minority cultural pride and preservation are tantamount to separatism, a threat in dire need of correction.

### **Level of Enculturation and Language Use**

Ethnic boundaries coincide with linguistic boundaries, as the very mechanism language provides a living instrument for cultural preservation. A shared language imbues a shared history and heritage, entire legacies of mutual understanding—it is how we build our communities, and identify ourselves to one another. Thus, minority languages become especially integral to this concept of ethnic distinction. Such is why the Uyghur community perpetually resists assimilation attempts, and regards such government policies as an encroachment on their culture. Assimilation so frequently serves to splinter the community, to remedy ethnic strife through compulsory absorption into a majority identity. We witness such governmental behavior in the rift between Uyghur and Hui in political attitudes and permission. What arises is a concerning suspicion that CCP initiative aims to equalize the cultural status between these two Islamic groups, through targeting Uyghur language use and consequent level of enculturation.

Methods of inclusion fixate on Uyghur children. Efforts to assimilate the young ensure a patriotic—and more importantly, predictable—future generation. The goal is to produce children

that will identify as Chinese first, Uyghur second. In 2004, the Xinjiang local government announced that “*ethnic minority schools must be merged with ethnic Chinese schools and ethnic minority students must be mixed with ethnic Chinese students. Teaching should be conducted in Chinese language.*”<sup>85</sup> Full Chinese instruction is required to begin upon entry of first grade, meanwhile Uyghur is to be taught as if it were a second language.<sup>86</sup>

Government-sponsored initiatives aim to finance and facilitate university education for Uyghur students, through the implementation of lowered admissions standards, remedial training courses, and organized post-graduation career placements.<sup>87</sup> As a result, there is a growing population of Uyghur students throughout universities within mainland China. Such a policy has particularly extended to Uyghur middle school students, through the formation of 新疆内地高中班, otherwise known as Xinjiang Class. The program funds the transfer of adolescent students from Xinjiang to attend schools throughout eastern China, in cities predominantly populated by Han-Chinese.<sup>88</sup> The initiative is meant to promote ethnic unity and nationalism, the efficacy of which is more prominent in younger children, rather than older teenagers with an already-established sense of ethnic identity and pride.

Ilham Tohti regards bilingual educational efforts in Xinjiang as blighted in degradation, having devolved into a monolingual, Mandarin-exclusive curriculum meant to inhibit Uyghur youth from accessing their native language.<sup>89</sup> He warns that the majority of Uyghurs perceive such education as concerning, perhaps not an accidental devolvement—but rather, a deliberate mechanism to erase Uyghur language entirely. Mandarin instruction should not be equated to

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<sup>85</sup> Dwyer, 1990, 38

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 39-40

<sup>87</sup> Guo, et al, 2018, 480-495

<sup>88</sup> Grose, 2010, 97-109

<sup>89</sup> Tohti, 2015, 10-4

compulsory assimilation, nor should it be misappropriated into career barriers, thereby discriminating against those lacking Mandarin proficiency. This fear is further exacerbated by the stalinist Nation Theory, often enacted by the CCP to promote the concept of “one language, one origin.”<sup>90</sup>

### OUTCOMES

In recent years, the CCP has endorsed a policy of optimizing the population of Xinjiang through a government-sponsored migration of Han-Chinese into the province.<sup>91</sup> Such optimization argues that establishing substantial populations of Han-Chinese into Uyghur majority areas will cleanse the Uyghur resistance to societal integration, and allow a model for correct Chinese behavior. This argument arises due to CCP implication that high ethnic minority population concentrations are an inherent national security threat.<sup>92</sup> Support for this mentality is evidenced by the societal presence of the Hui-minzu, often regarded as a model minority—a paradigm of a ‘good Chinese muslim.’<sup>93</sup>

As referenced in the second case study, the supposedly seamless assimilation of Hui-minzu into Han, and greater Chinese society is contingent upon their ethnic distribution. Unlike the Uyghurs, the Hui no longer possess an ancestral heartland, nor a strong cultural presence in any given city. Though large populations of them exist in Gansu province, their Mandarin proficiency affords them a large degree of social and economic mobility, serving to further diversify the ethnic makeup of these regions.<sup>94</sup> The cost of regional economic

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<sup>90</sup> Stalin, 1913

<sup>91</sup> Zenz, 2021, 291-312.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Adams, 2015, PhD diss.

<sup>94</sup> Gustafsson, Sai, 2015, 517-535.

development in Xinjiang is expensed through political and cultural restrictions. However, when an identity is inherently ethno-religious, the dilution of Islamic faith is tantamount to diluting that very ethnicity.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

The Uyghur ethnic minority experiences religious restriction and cultural encroachment, not on account of their Islamic faith, but rather for their retained sense of self-identity that is unique and entirely separate from their Chinese nationality. Their retention of a unique Turkic language and independent heritage prevents them from fully integrating into Chinese society, and contributing to economic industries—thereby arousing the disapproval and concern of the Chinese Communist Party. Other Chinese Muslim groups, like the Hui Chinese, integrate seamlessly into greater Chinese society—particularly because they lack a native language and territory—allowing them to fully contribute to the Chinese economy. Of the 10 Islamic ethnic minorities in China, only the Uyghurs endure such restrictions and specialized policies against religious, and cultural expression. Therefore, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang are targeted for their unique self-identity, as well as their committed preservation of their heritage and history. To this extent, cultural erasure of the Uyghur identity by the Chinese Communist Party becomes a tool of national stability. The CCP and overall Chinese government still retain an opportunity to garner minority ethnic support, through implementing policies that endorse a pluralistic cultural identity for the nation, as well creating an inclusive environment for Uyghur, and other minority languages, to embrace their cultural and religious heritage without such rigid restrictions.

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