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Changing Approaches to Ethnic Governance

From Loose Rein to Ethno-territorialism

This chapter focuses on the changing strategies of ethnic governance in China's transition from empire to modern nation state. That is, evolution from a maintenance-oriented strategy aimed at pacification and stability in imperial times, to increased incorporation in modern times, and to a transformative strategy aimed at integration and egalitarianism in the socialist era.

The new system of ethnic governance, I argue, created the second set of institutional dynamics for ethnic discord in the long run. That is, a uniform and direct form of ethnic governance based on titular ethnic status, known as the system of autonomous regions. Historically imperial China had a three-tiered approach to ruling its extensive domain: direct rule over a core region, indirect and diverse rule over inner peripheries, and elite alliances in outer peripheries. This pre-modern "minimalist state" (Crone 1989: 47) came under serious challenge in modern times, when the ideas of sovereignty and nation state arrived in China in the late 1800s. Late Qing and Republican regimes failed to construct a new institutional order to redefine the relationship between the center and peripheral regions, thus opening the way for Soviet doctrine and the CCP. The CCP's approach to ethnic governance, characterized by political centralization and ethno-territorialism, served to incorporate frontier regions and to complete China's institutional transition to the modern state. In the process it departed from pre-modern Chinese practices of diverse and de-ethnicized rule. The contradictions therein – promoting political integration but also ethno-territories to fit that goal – would render the autonomous system as another key source of institutional tensions in contemporary times.

This chapter covers the follows topics: (1) relevant legacies of pre-modern China's strategies of frontier governance; (2) relevant legacies of modern China's attempts at nation state building; and (3) the establishment of the CCP's system of ethnic governance and its institutional repercussions.

ONE EMPIRE, THREE TIERS

For China's transition to the modern nation state, the most relevant legacy of pre-modern times was a three-tiered structure and strategy of rule in the Chinese Empire. There was more direct rule in the core region, but various forms of indirect and ritualistic rule over the semi-frontier and frontier regions. Differentiated rule entailed varying types of central–peripheral relations. This diversity rendered it challenging to build the nation state in modern times.

The differentiated rule of imperial times, concomitant with Confucian universalism, involved a graded and concentric hierarchy under the celestial empire. This empire may be understood restrictively to denote a type of "agrarian state that controlled multiple urban centers and extensive hinterlands, significantly adapted its methods of rule to peoples of different ethnic origins, and, due to its limited pre-modern infrastructural capacity, exercised only indirect rule over local communities and frontier areas" (Zhao 2015: 4). The nature of this rule may be understood through Michael Mann's concept of "compulsory cooperation." Pre-modern empires relied on such cooperation to maintain rule over their subjects, due to their limited infrastructural capacity to establish direct rule over an extended domain (1986: ch. 5).

The three tiers of rule entailed differentiated types of compulsory cooperation in imperial China. A form of direct rule applied in the central zone, the Central Plains, or agrarian regions populated largely by Sinic communities. These areas were governed by the bureaucratic and legal rules of the imperial bureaucracy, entered into the official household registry, and obligated to pay imperial taxes. Despite the diverse origins of the Celestial Emperor, be they Sinic, semi-nomadic, or nomadic, rulers mostly relied on Confucianism as a ruling ideology and on the imperial bureaucracy run by the Confucian elite. The merger of political and ideological power in the Chinese state structure motivated new rulers, indigenous or nomadic, to seek the cooperation of the Confucian elite, to adopt the Confucian-Legalist political arrangement, and to embrace Chinese culture (Zhao 2015: 4, 324). Confucian universalism facilitated nomadic acculturation and de-ethnicized rule.

Various forms of indirect rule applied outside the central zone, that is the tribal and peripheral territories. They relied on ritualistic obligations and titles in a system of "loose rein." Voluntarily or militarily surrendered, the peripheral areas differentiated between an inner and outer peripheral zone. Cultural and geographical distances made a key difference in their relationships and cooperation with the central authority. The inner peripheries, or "familiar aliens" (*shu fan*), were geographically, culturally, and administratively closer to the central zone. Tribal leaders here were obligated with annual tributes and periodic pilgrimage trips. Due to their agrarian and sedentary ways, communities here would be partially taxed as they became increasingly incorporated into the regular governance system. Internal affairs were left to

the tribes themselves, though internal rebellions and misrule had sometimes required central intervention. Traditionally these areas consisted of "semi-barbarian" tribes to the east, south, and near west of the Central Plains. At various times they included the Hmong-Mien tribes of central and central south China, the Ba-Shu habitat of Sichuan, the Daic and Mon-Khmer tribes of the southeast and southwest, and the Qiangic hub of western Sichuan.

The outer peripheries, or "unfamiliar aliens" (*sheng fan*), were geographically, culturally, and ethnically more distant. Nomadic or semi-nomadic, communities here were not formally entered into the official household registry nor required to pay imperial taxes. Tribal chieftains were obligated to acknowledge the Celestial Emperor but were required to make less frequent pilgrimage trips (Liu 2009b; Zhao and Wei 2003; Yang 1999; Peng 2004). Internal affairs were left to themselves. At various times these outer peripheries consisted of "barbarian" tribes to the far north and the far west, that is, the four Eurasian frontiers, including the Mongolic north, the Tungusic northeast, the Turkic west, and the Tibetan far west.

The system of loose rein, under which ethnic regions of the two peripheral zones were administered, resulted from cycles of core–periphery rivalry that have taken place throughout Chinese history. As an institution it took shape under the united dynasties of Qin (221–6 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE), appeared in the historical chronicle of the Han dynasty for the first time, reached its peak during the preeminent Tang dynasty (618–907) and declined during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) eras. Sinic dynasties tended to use it as a defensive mechanism against tribal rebellions and nomadic intrusions, while nomadic dynasties tended to use it as an offensive mechanism against frontier rivals rising on their flank. Not surprisingly, the loose rein system experienced the greatest growth under the semi-nomadic dynasty of Tang and the nomadic dynasties of Yuan (1271–1368) and Qing. Tang's founders were of mixed Xianbei and Han origins, while the founders of Yuan and Qing were Mongol and Manchu respectively.

At its height, Tang's loose rein system exemplified pre-modern China's institutional arrangements for differentiated rule: more "rein" in the inner peripheral than in the outer peripheral zone. After an ethnic tribe or region was militarily defeated, self-subdued, or naturalized, a variety of loose rein territorial units were established. In the inner peripheral regions, loose rein structures consisted of administrative hierarchies mirroring the regular prefectures, while some loose rein counties were established under the jurisdiction of regular prefectures if they bordered the Tang proper, such as in the southwest. In the outer peripheral areas, with large and remote frontier regions, loose rein protectorates were established, such as in the Turkic khanates of the western regions (Liu 1998: 120–3; Peng 2004: ch. 3). Security concerns were key motives behind Tang's extensive loose rein system (Peng 2004: ch. 3). To neutralize the Turkic threats on the western frontiers, Emperor Taizhong opted for loose rein territorial units along the

lines of individual tribes, or the eastern and western Turkic khanates. Within the more powerful western khanate, a further division was made between a left and right district, each with a Tang command area seated in them.

As a conquest dynasty, the Mongols' Yuan court enforced greater centralization of interior lands and greater incorporation of borderlands, but its territorial span still consisted of three tiers. They included the Central Region (*fuli*), the en-route provinces (*xingsheng*) or much of the inner peripheral areas, and outer peripheral regions managed by the Grand Protectorate (*Daduhufu*) (i.e., Uighur areas in the western regions) and the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs (i.e., the kingdom of Tibet). In the inner peripheral areas, the Yuan court initiated the *Tusi* system, or native chieftaincy, which formally incorporated native ethnic chieftains into the Chinese administrative hierarchy and conferred official posts upon the chieftains with Chinese-style rankings (Took 2005: 44–5). After conquering the Nanzhao kingdom, the Mongols turned it into the province of Yunnan in the thirteenth century. They submitted the kingdom of Tibet to a "patron–priest" relationship, the nature of which remains contentious between China and Tibetan exiles over the former kingdom's sovereign status (Norbu 2001: 139).

Another conquest dynasty, the Manchus' Qing court, faced great challenges of governing all of the surrounding prairies and plateaus it had conquered, with inevitable reliance on diverse and indirect rule. In the inner peripheries, Qing consolidated effective control with greater centralization of the native chieftaincy system. In localities already governed under this system, largely in the southwest, Qing instituted bureaucratization reforms, which transformed a majority of the localities into regular administrative units (Took 2005: 229–32; Yang 1993; Li S. 2001). This reform marked a major step in the historical incorporation of the inner peripheral regions.

In the outer peripheral areas of Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, Qing ruled with greater centralization but also differentiation. Security concerns, rather than internal control per se, were paramount. In Mongol tribal areas, Qing co-opted local chiefs with military and marriage alliances and retained the banner system, a form of military organization based on tribal and lineage units. But Qing differentiated Inner and Outer Mongolia: in the former, Qing assumed more direct control and did not allow appointed chieftainship to be inherited; in the latter, Qing left more autonomy and allowed inherited appointments. In Uighur areas, Qing improved upon the *beg* (native chief) system by defining the powers of local chieftains, banning them from serving as religious leaders, and requiring imperial approval for their appointment and promotion. In Tibet, Qing used the Galoon system, by which four Galoons (Tibetan aristocrats) would take charge of Tibet's administrative affairs. To reduce the power of elite lamas, only one of the four Galoons could be from the monastery, and later even the sole clergyman was dropped. Beyond the political arrangements at the top, various spheres of local life were left to ethnic chieftains, including

economic, religious, commercial, fiscal, and penal affairs (Yang 1993; Li S. 2001).

Qing's separate methods of rule for outer peripheral regions cannot be overemphasized. In fact Qing used a separate central agency, the *Lifan Yuan*, to administer them. Originating from the Manchus' Office for Mongol Affairs, this agency had roots in the Manchus' military alliances with Mongol banners. Its wording in the Manchu language, Office for Managing Affairs of Outer Provinces, provided the accurate meaning of *Lifan Yuan* (Zhang 2004: 26). The agency's jurisdiction covered Inner, Outer, and Western Mongolia, Muslim Xinjiang, Manchu banners, Tibet, and western (Tibetan) Sichuan (Xu and Jin 2008: 43). Qing referred to three of these regions as *waifan* (external fences or aliens), namely Mongolia, Tibet, and Muslim Xinjiang, but distinguished them from foreign countries by treating them as internal aliens rather than external aliens. Qing mandated annual pilgrimages of native chiefs from those internal alien tribes, but used the voluntary tributary system for the external or foreign aliens. This was the essential difference between the two systems (Zhang S. 2010: 106–14). The annual pilgrimages from the internal aliens were part of their "compulsory cooperation," formalistic as they may have been.

In short, three broad patterns of Chinese imperial rule may be characterized: Confucian universalism, administrative diversity, and de-ethnicization. The Celestial Emperor ruled universally in name across three tiers of the imperial domain, but with diverse approaches and ethnic neutrality. This legacy presented formidable challenges in modern times for nation state building, when shared identities and administrative structures were demanded.

TRANSITION TO THE NATION STATE

From the onset of the modern era in China, marked by the arrival of Western powers, imperial rulers were epistemically constrained to understand the concept of the sovereign nation state. For millennia, the Sino-centric order at home and abroad precluded the assumption of sovereign equality among political communities. Rather, a core–periphery hierarchy was presumed. Constituent members were not considered sovereign equals but culturally graded tributaries. The modern concept of sovereignty did not exist. There was the Chinese state, with undefined boundaries (*youguo wuji*). Chinese governance reached where security concerns mattered and imperial capabilities matched. But the foundations of this celestial empire were shaken by China's defeat in the two Opium Wars, and along with it the relationships between the imperial court and frontier regions.

For China's transition to a nation state, the most relevant legacies from modern times were its embrace of the concept of the nation state and the ineffective responses of late Qing and Republican regimes to meet the challenge of nation state building. However, one legacy that made a critical contribution in the long run was the promotion of frontier farming by Han

immigrants, which helped to change the demographic and ecological orientation of two of China's four Eurasian frontiers: Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.

Influx of the Sovereign State

As with the concept of the nation, historical exigences played a key role in China's embrace of the idea of the sovereign nation state. Late Qing rulers gradually acquiesced to the idea of equal sovereigns, after being forced to sign a series of unequal treaties in the wake of the Opium Wars. Treaty concessions to the foreign powers formally signified the collapse of the Sino-centric worldview, or the longstanding conception of the world as a concentric hierarchy with China at the top. In this context, reform-minded officials and thinkers began to view the world as a multi-state system and China as one among equals. Difficult negotiations with Western governments allowed them to see how Western powers utilized the concept of sovereignty to protect their national interests.

Ironically, a deep appreciation of the injustice of the treaty concessions facilitated Qing elites' acceptance of the concept of sovereign nation states. It provided Qing reformers with an ideational and legal weapon to recover China's losses made in the unequal treaties, namely, concession of extraterritorial rights, commercial privileges, and territories to foreign powers (Cao and Liu 2004: 87, 88; Guan 2004: 86, 87; Si 2003: 48–9). By the late 1860s and 1870s, the Qing court began to adopt policy measures in the direction of a sovereign state, such as dispatching diplomatic missions abroad and establishing the ambassadorial system overseas. Long accustomed to receiving foreign envoys, such moves signified that China had finally joined the communities of the world as an equal member, thus abandoning the idea of the celestial empire (Si 2003: 50).

Domestically the Qing court made nascent efforts at modern state building, focusing on the outer peripheral regions. Since the late 1880s, the far-flung borderlands had become the targets of vying powers – Russia in Mongolia, Manchuria, and Xinjiang; Japan in Manchuria; and Britain in Tibet. Taking advantage of late Qing's weakness and the rise of the national discourse, those foreign powers made a point of referring to the borderland communities as "nations" and encouraged them to seek self-determination. In response, the Qing court tried to strengthen administrative and cultural incorporation with reform measures. To curb Russian penetration in the north, Qing lifted bans on Han immigration to Manchuria, organized Han immigrants to undertake frontier farming in Inner Mongolia, and established administrative units at local levels in both regions. These policies played a significant role in changing the demographic composition and orientation of the local populations in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. They paved the way for these two regions to become inner peripheral ones in subsequent decades.

The Qing court did attempt state-building reforms in the remaining outer peripheral regions: Xinjiang and Tibet. In Xinjiang, Qing reduced local autonomy by turning it into a regular province in 1884, formally implementing the political system of the rest of China. In an interesting twist, Qing's reconstruction programs – after Xinjiang's provincialization – resulted in helping Uighurs to migrate from southern Xinjiang to northern and eastern Xinjiang. These areas used to be inhabited almost completely by Han Chinese (Millward 2007: 151). In Tibet, high commissioners Lian Yu and Zhang Yintang promoted "new deal" policies (*xinzheng*). Treating the region no longer as a frontier security matter, the new policies targeted the more fundamental problem of economic development. In western Sichuan or Kham, Qing sped up the incorporation of Tibetan chieftains into the regular bureaucracy during 1905–8, under the stewardship of Governor Zhao Erfeng. Zhao's brutal suppression of monastic and other resistant forces is usually criticized in Chinese histography, but he is also credited with improving the livelihoods of Tibetan serfs and laying the administrative foundations for Xikang province, which was established two decades later in 1928 in the former Kham area.[1]

The Qing dynasty's reforms may be viewed as part of a historical transition from empire to a modern nation state. But they did not amount to a new system of ethnic governance. Nor did they resolve the issue of the ambiguous status of the outer peripheral lands, whose historical relationships with the central state did not accurately fit the modern concept of sovereignty.

Republican Efforts

After the revolution of 1911 that overthrew the Qing dynasty, the Qing empire was nominally transformed into a modern nation state in the Republic of China. However, the Republican regimes – Beiyang (1912–28) and the KMT (1928–45) – faced great difficulties in incorporating the outer peripheral regions. Here the disintegration of the Qing dynasty had resulted in much stronger centrifugal forces than in the inner peripheral regions. With their brief rule, plagued by warlordism at home and invasions from abroad, neither regime had sufficient time or experience to construct a viable new institutional order.

The demise of the Manchu dynasty had left in particular institutional vacuums in outer peripheral regions, along with a legacy of institutional and personal loyalties vested in the imperial order. These regions had not gone through the system of native chieftaincy or bureaucratization reforms, in contrast to inner peripheral regions. The Manchu court, as a minority dynasty with semi-nomadic origins, had ruled its vast empire by aligning with the political and military elites of frontier regions, especially the Mongols. This

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[1] See a summary account, "Zhuzang dachen Zhao Erfeng and Xizang" [Governor Zhao Erkang and Tibet], June 10, 2010. http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/14562/11843783.html.

peripheral alliance, "encouraged Mongol leaders to see themselves as part of a greater Qing elite" (Barfield 1989: 276). Qing's demise ended the privileged positions of Mongol elites and their roles in the empire, leaving them discontented and uncertain about their status. Nostalgic about the imperial system and hostile to the new Republic, some Mongol elites turned to independence movements (Chang 2011). Separatist movements surged in outer and eastern Mongolia after the 1911 revolution. Other outer peripheral regions also saw rising ethno-nationalism, compounded by encroachments of foreign powers into those regions: Japan in Manchu and Mongol areas; Russia in Manchu, Mongol, and Uighur areas; and Britain in Tibet. In the northwest, Japan also wooed Hui Muslim elites, with whom the Qing court used to align for local rule.

Top-down approaches characterized the Republican regimes' strategies to hold on to those outer peripheral regions, especially when compared to the CCP's emphasis on lower social classes later on. One Beiyang strategy was to strengthen central mechanisms of control over Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim regions. Pressured by separatist movements in Mongolia and Britain's conversion of Tibet as a protectorate in 1904, Beiyang created the Commission on Mongolia and Tibet in 1912, with ethnic officials serving at its helm. The agency was to maintain political liaison with and supervision over local aristocracy and elite lamas. To avoid alienating Mongol elites, Beiyang initially refrained from applying the provincial system to Mongol regions and curbed frontier farming by Han farmers. However, after consolidating his presidency by early 1914, Yuan Shikai established special administrative districts in three major Mongol domains, asserting jurisdiction over their military and civilian affairs. In the northwest, Yuan established regional commander systems to strengthen central control over Tibetan, Hui, and Mongol areas of Qinghai, Ningxia, and Gansu provinces, and appointed regional commissioners to Tibet and Xinjiang to administer local affairs. But regional warlordism, rampant across China at the time, made central control fragile and at the whim of regional warlords.

Another Beiyang method of integration, frontier state farming, enriched ethnic elites at the expense of local herdsmen. While banning private encroachment, Beiyang set up state agencies to sponsor frontier farming. In collaboration with Mongol aristocrats, it encouraged Han landlords and farmers to encroach into Mongol areas through claiming uncultivated land or pushing off poor herdsmen. The process allowed Mongol elites to collect fees for the claimed land, but it caused a massive loss of grazing land for local herdsmen. Rather than strengthening integration, frontier state farming infuriated the local communities that opposed it (Chang 2011: 10–11). This opposition drove some Mongol elites to the cause of self-determination, while pushing many Mongol youths to the class universalism of the CCP.

The KMT regime, after assuming power in 1928 under Chiang Kai-chek, attempted a more institutional approach in outer peripheral regions, but it was even more ineffective and unpopular. The KMT de-emphasized the ethnic nature of frontier regions, treating them as a matter of administering borderlands rather than ethnic lands. Mongol intellectuals who were attracted to the KMT's earlier ideas of self-determination were soon disappointed by Chiang's policies (Li 2004a: 84, 85). The KMT placed the Commission on Mongolia and Tibet, inherited from Beiyang, under the executive branch so as to exert greater control over the two regions. Special administrative districts in Mongol areas, established by Beiyang, were replaced with three en-route provinces.[2] Two Mongol banners in the northwest were incorporated into Ningxia, historically a county or en-route province, now made into a regular province in 1928.[3] Although the Mongol banner systems were preserved within the newly created provinces, the fragmentation of Mongol territorial units across several provinces caused fierce opposition from Mongol elites and tribes. But the fragmentation made it difficult for them to mount any united resistance.

The fragmentation of Mongol areas was compounded by the deeper encroachment of frontier farming, which was changing the demographic composition and ecological orientation of Inner Mongolia. The newly created provincial system made it easier for provincial governments and regional warlords to aggressively promote frontier farming by Han immigrants. The consequences – poor herdsmen being forced off prairielands and opium poppy growing on the former grazing land – ignited an intense sense of ethno-nationalism among Mongol elites and educated youths, spurring an autonomy movement led by Prince Demchugdongrub (also known as Prince De) (Chang 2011: 11). Chastised in conventional CCP historiography as a separatist and a collaborator of Japanese forces, he is viewed more positively in recent Chinese scholarship as a champion of Mongols' rightful interests and self-strengthening (Li 2004a: 86). In this new perspective, the real villain was the KMT's oppressive policy.

Indeed, Mongol elites did not allow their native land to turn into an inner peripheral region without a fight. In 1933 the KMT compromised by granting more Mongol autonomy through new legislation and established the Mongol Local Autonomy Political Affairs Committee. This led to the coexistence of a provincial and an autonomous system. Mongol princes were appointed to the new committee. Prince Yondonwangchug (also known as Prince Yun), also a leader of the autonomy movement, served as its chairman. But he soon grew frustrated with the limited power of the committee vis-à-vis the provincial

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[2] These included Rehe (at the intersection of Hebei, Liaoning, and Inner Mongolia), Chaha'er (parts of Hebei, Shanxi, and Beijing), and Suiyuan (central Inner Mongolia).

[3] For details of the KMT's administrative changes in the northeast and northwest, see Dreyer (1976: 18–29).

administration and a lack of support from the central government in Nanjing. Autonomy fell apart in just three years, when Prince De responded to Japanese wooing. Since Japan encroached into China's northeast in 1931, some Mongol areas had already been incorporated into the Japanese-created state of Manchukuo (Manchurian state). After war broke out between China and Japan in 1937, the Mongol prince declared the independence of the remaining parts of Inner Mongolia, serving as the head of the new state of Mengkiang, or Mengkukuo, renamed as the Mongolian Autonomous Federation in 1941.

Compounded by the domestic turmoil and foreign encroachments of the 1930s, the KMT fared poorly elsewhere in its nation-building project. In Xinjiang, Uighur nationalists agitated for the first East Turkestan Republic (1933–4), with British support in the south and Japanese support in the north. Only Soviet backing for Sheng Shicai, the KMT warlord ruler, helped to suppress the Uighur movement. But Soviet motives were aimed at preventing pan-Turkish Islamism and a British presence on its border (Xue 2008), betraying a prioritization of its own national interest over the ideologically correct movement of national liberation. The point was not lost on the CCP. On the northwestern front, the Japanese had set up a "Greater Hui State" by combining Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia provinces. Alienated by the KMT, many Mongol and Hui elites here were indifferent to the ongoing anti-Japanese war in interior China and vulnerable to Japanese inducements. In the southwest, the traditional inner peripheral zone, the KMT were unable to dismantle the system of native chieftaincy despite intentions to do so. Instead it had to rely on the system to maintain rule there.

The policies of the Republican regimes, in short, failed to hold off centrifugal tendencies in the three decades since the disintegration of the Qing empire. June Dreyer characterizes the KMT's ethnic policy as "neither very good nor wholly bad," placing blame on political treachery and administrative inexperience on the one hand and foreign meddling on the other (1976: 39–40). In contemporary Chinese scholarship, some analysts make a social class argument, attributing Republican failures to the pampering of ethnic elites and the assimilationist policies that alienated ethnic masses (Li 2004a and 2004b). Others make a nationalistic argument, praising the KMT's promotion of national and territorial integration while explaining away its failures (Zhou 2005). Still others point to the brevity of the KMT's rule, interrupted by two major wars (the Sino-Japanese war and the civil war). From the perspective of this study, the Republican failures were due fundamentally to a lack of an institutional order for nation state building.

Making Social Class Alliance

The KMT's failures thus far made an important impact on the CCP's adjustment of political strategies. They alerted the CCP to the paradox of the doctrine of self-determination: if minorities were not given autonomy, they

would be vulnerable to incitation of separatism, yet self-determination would also entail secessionism. To overcome the dilemma, the CCP adjusted its political strategy to emphasize a distinction between secessionist ethnic elites and the oppressed ethnic masses. Class universalism would serve this new strategy by appealing to a broad base of ethnic masses while transcending the party's earlier doctrine of self-determination. Moreover, it would help buttress a new institutional order of ethnic governance.

As movements for self-determination raged in outer peripheral regions in the midst of China's anti-Japanese war, abandoning the concept became imperative for the CCP. As the war drew to a close in the mid-1940s, the prospect of a revolutionary victory changed the CCP's perspective from state destruction to state building. Repudiation of the idea of self-determination was explicitly made in the party's decrees on Inner Mongolia in the 1940s. In instructions to Mongol communists, the CCP urged regional autonomy and advised against independence (MUF 1991: 1034). The party contended that the Mongol independence movements had little to do with the liberation of the Mongol people, but had instead subjected their homeland to Japanese imperialism. Ulanfu, a native of central Inner Mongolia and an early communist activist, played a key role in taming those movements. Among native activists for self-determination, some agitated for high autonomy while others for independence and self-rule, but Ulanfu managed to dissuade the secessionists (Xu and Jin 2008: 69–70). As a political comprise, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was established in May 1947 under Ulanfu's stewardship. Thereupon China's first autonomous region came into being, two years before the founding of the PRC itself. It was a historical solution for a major outer peripheral region that had effectively become an inner peripheral region in the demographic sense, with Mongols as a numerical minority in Inner Mongolia (Table 2.1).

In Xinjiang as well, the CCP also relied on class universalism to diffuse ethnic separatism. In response to Uighur uprisings in the 1930s and 1940s, the CCP downplayed their ethno-national tone and actions, framing Uighur revolts as opposition to the KMT's oppressive rule. In 1944, the tri-region uprising (Yili/Ili, Tacheng/Qoqek, and Aletai/Altay) by the Uighurs began with local wrath at Governor Sheng Shicai's excessive levies and harsh rule, cumulating in the establishment of the second East Turkestan Republic (ETR, 1945–9). Despite the separatist implication of the ETR and its brutal efforts to cleanse the Han people (Wang X. 2003), the CCP characterized the uprising as a social revolution, backed rightfully by the Soviet Union. In recent years, the release of Soviet archives has allowed Chinese scholars to learn about the twists and turns in Soviet motives (Xue 2008). Initially the Soviets supported a Uighur national revolution and a communist Soviet in Xinjiang. But the unfolding of the Uighur uprising led Soviet officials to view it differently. To their dismay, few of the uprising's leaders were true revolutionaries, but were aristocratic and religious elites. Worried about an independent Islamic state on its border, the Soviet Union forced the Uighur rebels to negotiate with the KMT.

TABLE 2.1 *Shares of Han population in five autonomous regions (%)*

Autonomous region	1953	1964	1982	1990	2000	2010
Inner Mongolia	85.6	87.0	84.5	81.6	77.2	79.54
TAR	N/A	2.9	4.9	3.7	2.9	8.17
XUAR	6.9*	31.9	40.4	37.6	39.2	40.1
Ningxia Hui	66.44	69.2	68.1	66.7	65.4	64.58
Guangxi Zhuang	62.1	58.9	61.7	60.9	61.6	62.06

Source: For 1953–2000, see SEAC Economic Bureau (1991: 43–4) and SCCO and SBS (1985: 218) and (2002: 18). For 2010, see www.stats.gov.cn.[4]

* The Han and Hui population was an estimated 30 percent in the early 1800s (Millward 2000: 122–3).

The Soviets' change of mind served [4]both Soviet and CCP interests at the expense of Uighur self-determination. For the Soviet Union, its role in stemming the tri-region rebellion allowed it to pressure the KMT into accepting the independence of Outer Mongolia, according to Shen Zhihua, an independent Chinese scholar who used personal funds to purchase and study Soviet achieves (Shen 1999). The independence of Outer Mongolia, unlike Xinjiang, did not present a religious threat to the Soviet Union. For the CCP, the Soviet retreat from supporting Uighur self-determination conveniently strengthened its version of the Uighur uprising as an anti-KMT movement. It also allowed the CCP to sidestep the question of rebel leaders' political preferences and to emphasize ethnic masses' socioeconomic grievances. Ideological purity would have entailed that the CCP support the Uighur rebellion as a movement for national liberation, not just a social revolution. In recent years, greater academic freedom has allowed Chinese scholars to debate the motives of the tri-region rebellion and to challenge the CCP's characterization of the event as a proletarian uprising against the KMT's oppressive rule. One study characterizes the rebellion and the second ETR as brutal campaigns to cleanse Han residents by massacring them on a massive scale (Wang X. 2003). Another study finds the direct role of the Soviet Union in leading the tri-region revolution, not so much for Uighurs' independence but for greater pressure on the KMT to allow more Soviet influence in Xinjiang (Yang et al. 2019).

The doctrine of self-determination took a further retreat as CCP leaders faced the reality of governing ethnic regions after prevailing in the civil war in 1949. Contrary to the suggestion that Mao never intended to honor the party's commitment to self-determination and downgraded the idea once the CCP

[4] Census data for the autonomous regions are available individually from the official census website. For example, the 2010 census data for Xinjiang are available at *Guojia tongjiju* [State bureau of statistics], "Xinjiang weiwu'er zizhiqu 2010 nian diliuci renkou pucha zhuyao shuju gongbu" [Announcement of major data from the XUAR's 6th census]. February 28, 2012. www.stats.gov.cn /tjsj./tjgb/rkpcgb/dfrkpcgb/201202/t20120228_30407.html.

came to power (Gladney 1991), Mao and other CCP leaders were undecided initially (Wang 2014: 33–4). The hesitation stemmed from the party's past commitment to self-determination. After all, earlier on the Soviet idea of self-determination had influenced the CCP and served it well during its revolutionary years (Connor 1984: 81–3; Dreyer 1976: 77, 91). More pertinently, the retreat from self-determination may be attributed to the impact of foreign powers on China's borders, where most minority communities were concentrated (Mackerras 1994: 72; Pye 1976). On the eve of the CCP's takeover of China in 1949, Mao consulted Li Weihan, the party's expert on ethnic issues, as to whether China should adopt the Soviet ethno-federal system. Li advised against it after giving a thorough analysis of China's history and realities. Citing Stalin's elaboration of "four degrees of autonomy" – contractual autonomy, greater autonomy, political autonomy, and administrative autonomy – Li recommended the last one, or the lowest form, as the most appropriate for China. Mao and the CCP Central Committee concurred. The retreat from the idea of self-determination marked a key divergence from the Soviet approach, defining the frame of ethnic discourse in China since then.

In the end, the national imperative trumped the CCP's ideological agenda of national liberation, though not its class universalism. In fact, class universalism helped to justify this turnaround. Imperial powers, the CCP contended, were the common enemies of China's oppressed peoples, including those of the borderlands. When Zhou Enlai announced the party's choice of the system of autonomous regions in September 1949, at the first meeting of the CPPCC attended by many minority representatives, he justified the party's retreat from self-determination by citing the forces of "imperialism" in Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang (MUF 1991: 1267). Among these three regions, Tibet and Xinjiang were the only ethnic majority regions and outer peripheral regions. Their political incorporation into the modern Chinese state, which was a daunting task for the Republican regimes, would remain formidable for the People's Republic.

CONSTRUCTING A NEW INSTITUTIONAL ORDER

The system of autonomous regions, an ethno-territorial entity with a higher population of a particular (or titular) minority ethnic group, was the CCP's institutional response to the transition from empire to the modern state. Late Qing and Republican regimes tweaked and adapted in piecemeal ways, but the CCP created a new institutional order of ethnic governance. It transformed the pre-modern methods of diverse and indirect rule in two ways: first, a uniform system across ethnic regions, and second, an alignment of the (titular) ethnic, political, and territorial. It redefined the relationship between the central state and peripheral regions, along with formal prerogatives, obligations, and administrative structures.

Class Universalism and Political Integration

The drive to establish the autonomous system, which lasted from 1949 to 1954, spared no efforts to balance the ideals of autonomy and equality, the realities of multiethnic communities, and the imperative of national integration. The classification project was itself carried out to achieve equality and equity in this process. Class universalism both justified and served the twin goals of integration and equality.

Among the evidence for promoting these twin goals was a number of redistricting efforts. The purpose was to redress the wrongs of the KMT era and to accommodate ethno-territorial demarcations. Several cases were illustrative. First, Mongol areas that were carved into different provinces by the KMT were now remerged with Inner Mongolia. Second, redistricting was done in Ningxia and Gansu to congregate Hui areas into the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Hui autonomous prefectures within the region. Third, Guangxi and Ningxia acquired provincial autonomous status despite being very weak cases. During consultations with local groups leading up to the establishment of those two autonomous regions, some expressed misgivings, because the Huis were a numerical minority in Ningxia while the Zhuangs of Guangxi lacked ethnic distinctness. Zhou Enlai persuaded the doubters that these two groups were large enough to deserve their own autonomous regions, so they could see themselves as full members in the family of the Chinese nation (He 2010).

This assembly of disparate groups with little historical cohesion or aspiration for autonomy, however, raises questions as to whether they obscured the more complex national questions in the other autonomous regions. That is, Tibet, Xinjiang, and to a lesser extent Inner Mongolia, all historically outer peripheral regions. In these three cases, argues a Taiwan-based scholar, highly developed local cultures and histories of self-government entailed sufficient conditions for independent statehood (Wu 2013: 26). In this contention, the autonomous system was designed to achieve "divide and rule," that is, to turn the more separatist regions into just another set of minority regions (Wu 2009: 1–2). This reading of the CCP's intent contrasts interestingly with that of Zhou Enlai's critics in contemporary China, who blame Zhou's good intentions and naivety for the (unnecessary) creation of the Zhuang and Hui autonomous regions. Zhou's stated intention was to "pay debts" for past discrimination suffered by minority groups. However, to his critics the Han majority too suffered from oppression under the Republican regimes, so that past sufferings should not be ethnicized.[5] Zhou's intentions, in the context of the CCP's early rule in the 1950s, was likely driven by revolutionary idealism or equality for the ethnic proletariat. Indeed, the redistricting done to congregate Mongol and Hui areas represented strategies of "combine and rule," rather than "divide and rule." Centrifugal forces were strong in Mongol and Huis areas during the Republican

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[5] This is a frequent point I have heard in private conversations with Chinese scholars in the field of ethnic studies.

period, but both received enhanced ethno-territorial units under the CCP, not diminished ones. But the Taiwanese scholar raised a valid point that the creation of autonomous regions was only necessary in the three historical outer peripheral regions.

Institutionally, the autonomous system incorporated China's three-tier topography in a uniform way as never before in Chinese history. After the first autonomous system was founded in Inner Mongolia in 1947, three more were established at the provincial level in the 1950s: Guangxi, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. Tibet would come in 1965. By the end of 1958, eighty-seven autonomous territorial units were established in fifteen provinces, including four provincial-level autonomous regions, twenty-nine autonomous prefectures, and fifty-four autonomous counties or banners. A total of thirty-five ethnic groups were represented in titular autonomous units. The autonomous units were recognized in the Chinese Constitution and legally granted a range of powers and rights not accorded to the rest of the country. These rights included the protection of ethnic languages, customs, and religion as well as demands on the central state to aid the development of ethnic regions. In the reform era, one more autonomous prefecture and sixty-six more autonomous counties or banners were established in the early 1980s.

Politically the new system incorporated China's three-tier topography in a centralizing way never before attempted. It has behooved that all autonomous areas accept the institutional frameworks and public policies under the PRC's unitary political system. Most importantly, the autonomous regions, like all other administrative units in CCP-led China, must follow the "centralized leadership of the party." This entailed that a party apparatus system would be superimposed on the state bureaucratic one, the head of the party would be superior to the head of the state at the same level, party directives would set the direction of any national and local policy, and all officials at the subnational levels would be appointed by the party apparatus at a higher level.

Together, the new institutional order completed China's transition from empire to the modern state. But it also departed from pre-modern legacies of ethnic rule, resulting in built-in institutional tensions. These tensions, as in the classification project, derived from the mix of political centralization and ethnic particularism, again with unintended consequences for ethnic mobilization, especially for the remaining outer peripheral regions, Tibet and Xinjiang.

Uniformity and Its Discontents

Above all, the creation of the autonomous system across all ethnic regions deviated from the pre-modern legacy of administrative diversity. Most important was the blurring of the historical differentiation between the inner and outer peripheral zones. Wide differences existed among ethnic communities in these two zones, rendering it questionable as a uniform form of political incorporation. This uniformity reduced the autonomy of outer peripheries more than for inner

peripheries, inhering the built-in tensions of the autonomous system: excessive centralization tempered by ethnic particularism to offset its centralizing tendencies.

The five autonomous provinces had very different relationships with the central state in Chinese history. Guangxi and Ningxia had attained the status of en-route provinces seven centuries earlier, under Mongol rule. This contrasted with Xinjiang, with just seven decades of provincial status since 1884. Inner Mongolia had been under provincial administration for less than half of Xinjiang's length, though its ties to Sinic areas varied across Mongol communities that spanned several provinces. In both Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, separatist impulses were checked by the CCP's class alliance with the ethnic proletariat. Tibet presented a yet more challenging case. The core of modern-day Tibet, the traditional Ü-Tsang area, had never been under provincial administration. Not surprisingly, its political status remains controversial and epitomizes the flaws of uniform incorporation.

The exact nature of the so-called patron–priest relationship between Mongol rulers and the Tibetan theocracy remains contentious. Of the two imperial dynasties with the closest relationship with old Tibet, the Mongol and the Manchu dynasties, both used a special central agency to deal with it.[6] Among Tibetan exiles, a typical argument contends that Mongol dominance was "indirect" and that their occasional military interventions were "external," notwithstanding the Mongols' political clout and a "Tibetan-Mongolian diarchic structure" (Norbu 2001: 139). In China's official view, the establishment of the central agency to manage Tibetan affairs marked the first time that the Chinese state administered Tibet, hence the latter's formal incorporation into China (State Council of the PRC 1992). The Mongols' garrisoning of permanent troops in Ü-Tsang is cited as additional evidence.

Under the Manchus, the Qing dynasty also used a special central agency, *Lifan Yuan*, to administer the outlying regions.[7] The agency's jurisdiction covered Inner, Outer, and Western Mongolia, Muslim Xinjiang, Manchu banners, Ü-Tsang, and western Sichuan (Kham) (Xu and Jin 2008: 43). Except for Kham, the Qing court referred to these areas as *waifan*, or outer peripheral regions: Mongolia, Ü-Tsang, and Xinjiang. But Qing also distinguished them from foreign countries by treating them as internal *waifan* rather than external *waifan*. Annual pilgrimages by native chiefs were mandatory for the internal *waifan*, while tribute from the external *waifan* was voluntary (Zhang S. 2010: 106–14). The requirement signified an obligatory albeit loose relationship between the imperial court and the internal *waifan* areas.

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[6] Under the Mongols, a special central agency called *Xuanzheng Yuan* (Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs) managed Mongol rulers' relations with Ü-Tsang, through the power of executive appointment and supervision (Wylie 1977: 104; Norbu 2001: 139).

[7] Its rendering in the Manchu language, Office for Managing Affairs of Outer Provinces, provided the most accurate meaning of *Lifan Yuan* (Zhang 2004: 26).

Of those *waifan* areas, Ü-Tsang, or Tibet, had the most distant relationship with the central government during imperial times. China's formal assertion of sovereignty over the region came as late as 1951, when the 17-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet was reached between Mao's new China and the envoys of the fourteenth Dalai Lama. As the dissident scholar Wang Lixiong writes, "For China the 17 Point Agreement means that the nature of the relationship between China and Tibet has changed from one based on 'rites' to one based on legalistic sovereignty. The agreement entails that Tibet acknowledges for the first time that it belongs to China, making it the only legal document to that effect" (Wang 2001). Importantly, although this agreement sanctified Tibet's incorporation, it also pledged to preserve the "existing political system in Tibet." Beijing would not alter "the established status, functions and powers of the Dalai Lama" and other leading personnel of Tibet; it would not compel social reforms in Tibet or change the lamas' income; and it would protect the Tibetan ruling strata and monasteries. In other words, Tibet was to retain high autonomy.

Tibet was rendered even more different by the flight of the Dalai Lama and his entourage in 1959. This has rendered contentious the validity of the agreement and Tibet's legal status. After fleeing to India in March, the Dalai Lama explicitly repudiated the agreement in June. For Beijing's part, the agreement remains a legal contract affirming Chinese sovereignty. But its own failure to honor the agreement in its entirety – namely high autonomy – has also helped to render hollow Beijing's commitment to the agreement. The creation of the TAR in 1965 did not formally resolve the issue of its sovereign status. In fact, Ü-Tsang's tenuous ties with interior China were taken into consideration from the beginning. The TAR was constituted from historical Ü-Tsang and two areas of western Kham from the Republican era, Chamdo and Nyingchi. These two areas, being adjacent to inland provinces, had undergone bureaucratization reforms during the late Qing period. Some local cadre reportedly did not want to lose these two areas to the TAR but were persuaded to concede by central authorities, who wanted to strengthen Ü-Tsang's ties with interior China.[8] With the flight of Ü-Tsang's old ruling class, the CCP relied on solidarity with former Tibetan serfs to justify its governance and social transformation of Tibet.

As in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, social class alliances helped to achieve political incorporation and regime consolidation in Tibet's case. For these regions, the uniformity of the new system inhered a built-in structural tension: its stability and rationale would be put to question once class universalism waned.

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[8] Conversations with Chinese and Tibetan scholars at the China Tibetology Research Center in Beijing, summer 2011 and fall 2013; and at Sichuan University, summers 2015 and 2017.

Titular Status and Its Discontents

The creation of titular ethnic groups – that is, naming territorial units after the appellation of its main inhabitants – deviated from pre-modern practices of ethnic neutrality. But this bumped up against the historical reality of multiethnic communities in a majority of China's ethnic regions. Thus the state was forced to apply a compromised definition of an autonomous unit: it would be a territorial governance division with a higher population of a particular minority group (SEAC 2007b). That is, a plurality among various local minority groups. By aligning the (titular) ethnic, political, and territorial, the titular status also contributed to the built-in tensions of the autonomous system: political integration by associating a titular group with territorial governance, yet parcellation of groups to pit them against one another, thus undermining cohesion and inclusiveness.

Nationally the titular stipulation appeared to diffuse the importance of major groups in the outer peripheral regions. In population shares, as Table 2.1 shows, Tibet and Xinjiang were ethnic majority regions at the provincial level. Even by the plurality principle, a majority of the autonomous units established at all levels did not have over 50 percent of minority populations; and among the rest, just two-thirds of them had an ethnic population of over 60 percent (Tian 2010: 14). Most of these, moreover, were in Tibetan regions, Xinjiang, and pastoral Inner Mongolia. This suggests that the creation of autonomous regions, indeed, may not have been necessary in areas outside the three regions with highly developed local cultures and histories of self-government. Yet the plurality principle elevated many groups in inner peripheral regions to titular status, on a par with the major historical groups of Mongols, Uighurs, and Tibetans. This equalization would have significant impacts on the representation of titular ethnic groups in political institutions at the national level, namely, by diffusing the weight of the large outer peripheral groups. The overrepresentation of inner peripheral groups would entail policy priorities that may not always suit the outer peripheral groups.

Another effect of the titular principle was to pit groups against one another within an ethno-territorial unit. This was so even in the outer peripheral regions with ethnic majorities at the provincial and local levels. In Xinjiang's case, Uighur Marxists trained in the Soviet Union played a key role in promoting an Uighurstan, to be modeled after Soviet ethno-federalism. But the leaders of this group died in Soviet space while flying to Beijing in 1949. The remaining Uighur Marxists still pressed for the name Uighurstan during their discussions with Beijing about an autonomous region in Xinjiang. But representatives of Xinjiang's smaller minority groups opposed the idea, arguing that they were entitled to parts of Xinjiang's territory, especially northern and western Xinjiang. Although Uighurs made up 70 percent of Xinjiang's population at the time, over 90 percent of them resided in southern Xinjiang. It was not the Uighurs but the western Mongols, under the Dzungar state, who had been the "predominant power" in Xinjiang since at least 1670s, before their elimination

by the Manchu Qing dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century (Millward and
Perdue 2004: 50, 54).

Dzungaria or northern Xinjiang, the areas depopulated by the Dzungars,
were filled by various groups of settlers. Brought in by the Qing court to
repopulate the area, they included Han Chinese peasants, Manchu
bannermen, settlers from Turkestani oases, Huis, and others (Perdue 2005:
285; Millward and Perdue 2004: 59). Mass Kazakh migrants from the
Kazakh Khanates were also among the peoples who moved into the
depopulated Dzungaria.[9] The settler descendants, who formed the smaller
minority groups of Xinjiang, felt as entitled as the Uighurs to Xinjiang
because their forefathers had safeguarded the frontiers for the Qing empire.[10]
Zhou Enlai thus explained the eventual compromise:

> When we were establishing the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, we did not agree
> to using the name Uighurstan. Xinjiang did not just have one ethnicity, but there are
> twelve others. We cannot have thirteen "stans" (land) for all thirteen minority groups.
> The party and government in the end decided to establish the Xinjiang Uighur
> Autonomous Region, and comrades from Xinjiang consented to this. The region's title
> still has the word Uighur in it, because the Uighurs are the main ethnic group in Xinjiang,
> comprising over 70% of its population; but the title is shared with the other ethnic
> groups. . . . Tibet and Inner Mongolia's names have double meanings, one geographical
> and one ethnic. A name in itself seems to be of secondary importance, but on the issue of
> China's autonomous regions, it is very important, because it carries the connotations of
> interethnic cooperation. (Zhou 1957b)

The retention of Xinjiang as part of the province's new name, the Xinjiang
Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), was thus intended to be more inclusive. It
was implicit in Zhou's passage that Xinjiang's smaller minority groups resisted
the dominance of the demographically weighty Uighurs. But it was also the
CCP's effort to territorialize ethnicity that effectively pitted minority groups
against one another. Bovingdon argues that the system of territorial
parcellization dilutes the already meager influence of the Uighurs and gives
other groups disproportionate power in the system (2004: 28). Yet small
groups had strong incentives to secure their autonomous status against the
perceived threats of bigger groups. This could explain why Xinjiang's
Mongols, despite being a numerical minority locally, secured two
autonomous areas. Alternatively, Bovingdon views this as an intentional
design to counterbalance the Uighurs (2010: 46, 47). However, nationwide
such parcellation was common: a majority of the newly created autonomous
areas contained titular minorities that were not numerical majorities locally.

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[9] See Anar Smagulova, "Xviii–Xix Centuries: In the Manuscripts of the Kazakhs of China." East
     Kazakhstan State University. Date unknown.
[10] Conversations heard from local Mongol, Kazakh, Sibe, Daur, and Han participants at an
     academic forum in Urumqi, July 2011.

For Tibetan regions, the CCP also faced difficult balancing acts between the ideal of titular autonomy and the reality of ethnic diversity among those who were classified as Tibetans. Initially there were proposals for one autonomous region to combine all Tibetan concentrated areas. Such a project would have required combining regions that had been historically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously divided. Among the three historically Tibetan regions, Kham and Amdo had not been ruled by Lhasa (Ü-Tsang) since the Tibetan Empire (sixth–ninth century) fell apart in the ninth century. Political control since then alternated between Tibetan, Mongol, Han, Manchu, and other rulers (Yeh 2003; Petech 1990; Pirie 2005), along with the influx of non-Tibetan soldiers, administrators, merchants, and other immigrants. The fourteenth Dalai Lama himself was born in a hamlet of Qinghai province in the 1930s, which was then under the control of the Muslim warlord Ma Bufang. He was not released to assume the official title until Beijing made compensation to secure him.

Given such complexities, the CCP rejected suggestions for one autonomous region to combine all Tibetan-inhabited areas. Instead, emphasizing the needs of economic development and national integration, Beijing decided to set up Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties in four surrounding provinces, with which Amdo and Kham had historically shared ties: Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan, and Sichuan. These provinces were wealthier than the TAR during the Mao era. The economic justification for separate Tibetan autonomous units continues to be emphasized by leftist defenders of the autonomous system in China today (Wang X. 2009: 6). However, because the TAR has received massive state aid in the reform era, it is the Tibetan regions in the surrounding provinces that now feel disadvantaged.

For Mongol groups, historical scattering made it difficult to place disparate communities of the same ethnicity into one titular autonomous unit at the provincial level or local levels. This effectively reduced the political weight and policy prerogatives of those who did not reside in a titular territorial unit. Despite a number of redistricting actions during the establishment of autonomous units, it was impossible to include all Mongol members in their respective titular territories. While two-thirds of the Mongols were included in their titular province of Inner Mongolia, amounting to about a million in the early 1950s, the remaining third were scattered around the country, including small Mongol communities in the Muslim northwest (Xinjiang and Qinghai), the Tungusic northeast (Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang), and even the Daic and Mon-Khmer southwest (Yunnan). Although some of these communities also acquired their autonomous prefectures or counties, others had to share the titular status with another group or did not have a titular status at all.

For the remaining two autonomous regions, Ningxia and Guangxi, the titular status correspondingly elevated their political weight and policy prerogatives. The Huis were only concentrated in a number of counties in Ningxia and a numerical minority overall in the province, accounting for just a third of its population in the 1950s (Table 2.1). Moreover, Ningxia's Hui

population represented only a fraction of the Hui population nationwide, or about one-seventh of the 3.5 million Huis in China at the time. Unlike the three large outer peripheral groups, the Huis' roots were relatively recent in Ningxia and in several local subunits in Qinghai and Gansu that named the Hui as the titular group. These territories were largely coextensive with the West Xia dynasty (1038–1227 CE), established by the Tanguts. When the Mongol conquest annihilated West Xia in the thirteenth century, large numbers of Mongols, Turks, Iranians, and other Central Asians arrived in the region. The end of Mongol rule allowed other migrants from areas west of the region to come. These diverse sources of population became the ethnogenesis of the Muslim Hui in the northwest (Dillon 1999; Lipman 1998). What remained of the Tanguts may have been pushed to Tibetan regions further west. In Guangxi's case, Han representatives objected to a Zhuang titular province during their discussions with central authorities, out of concerns for the privileged position of the titular group and the diminished weight of Han residents once the autonomous region was established. Their objection was strong enough that they asked for a territorial division of Guangxi into a Zhuang autonomous region and a regular province for Han residents. Central authorities rejected such a division, citing the benefit of integration for economic development (Zhou 1957b).

Associating a titular group with territorial governance and privileges continues to create ethnic bickering in autonomous regions that are multiethnic. The titular group is institutionalized to play a key role in local public policy decisions and resource allocation, which may adversely affect smaller minority groups and local Han residents. Geographic and demographic factors would limit the options of the smaller ethnic groups in any event, but the imposition of such options by the state politicizes their resentment.

Titular Status and Ethno-nationalism

Another consequence of titular status is to strengthen the titular group's proprietary claim. In outer peripheral regions, this claim can be significant as it fuels ethno-nationalism that undermines the state's intended goal of integration. Bovingdon writes of the Uighur case: "formalizing the boundaries of Xinjiang and naming it the Uighur Autonomous Region gave a convenient territorial shape to Uighur political imaginings" (2010: 43). Shakya writes of the Tibetan case: the typological fixity given to "Tibetanness," by the CCP's classification of the people across the Tibetan plateau, has now come to form the basis of contemporary Tibetan ethno-nationalism and concept of territoriality (2012: 24).

This proprietary sense pits the titular group against smaller minorities as well as the Han majority over territorial entitlements. Whether these entitlements are legitimate is beside the point, for it was not among the

original aims of the autonomous region. In the words of Zhou Enlai in 1957, the establishment of the autonomous regions was to serve "ethnic autonomy on the one hand, and interethnic cooperation and mutual assistance on the other" (1957b). Yet the effect of the system was more centrifugal than centripetal. Ronald Suny's observations from the Soviet case fit the Chinese case closely:

Related to the process of nativization during the Soviet period was the territorialization of ethnicity. Formerly, many ethnic and religious communities had much greater loyalty to and identity with either the area in which they lived or, in the case of many Muslims, the worldwide Islamic community (the 'umma). Supranational and subnational loyalties competed with the more specifically national ones. For certain ethnicities, most notable those of Central Asia, the establishment of territorial administrative units on the basis of nationality in the early 1920s was unprecedented and provided clear political and territorial identities as alternatives to earlier religious and tribal solidarities. Following Stalin's own definition of nation, Soviet authorities promoted an idea of nation fixed to territory. (1993: 110)

While territorial proprietorship based on indignity may be persuasive, historical details tell a complex story. In the case of the Uighurs, their ancestors were migrants to Xinjiang, following a famine and a civil war at the end of the Uighur Khanate (744–840) based in Mongolia. They settled in the Tarim Basin in the ninth century, eventually displacing and assimilating the earlier settlers of Xinjiang, the Tocharians and Kushans. Uighurs established a series of oases-based kingdoms and statelets, each with distinctive identities, until the Mongol empire brought the area under its control in the thirteenth century CE. Only after Qing armies annihilated the Dzungars and massively massacred the western Mongols in the late 1750s, did the Uighurs have an opportunity to fill in the power vacuum. Until the Qing conquest the whole region embraced in the borders of XUAR "rarely constituted a unified political entity" (Millward and Perdue 2004: 27). The demise of the Buddhist Dzungars in Xinjiang also allowed Islam to become the dominant faith, to which Uighurs had converted in recent centuries. In the standard Chinese account, the territory was named Xinjiang by the Qing emperor Qianlong to signify the "recovery of former territories" or *gutu xingui*. But this did not capture the history of a region where "parts were controlled either by oases rulers of southern Xinjiang or by outside forces based to the north, northwest, east, or the south" (Millward and Perdue 2004: 28). Indeed, a large part of Xinjiang was once under the control of the Han and Tang dynasties, and the history of Xinjiang, as Bovingdon (2010: 27–39) deftly puts, is complex enough that competing territorial claims can all founder on some historical evidence. A related problem was the patterns of ethnic distribution on the ground. The vast majority of Uighurs were concentrated in southern Xinjiang when the autonomous system was established. The second largest ethnic group, the Kazakhs, was concentrated in northern Xinjiang. The Mongols had a history of ruling Xinjiang since the thirteenth century CE, especially the eastern and northern parts. The Sibe people,

dispatched to Xinjiang by the Qing court in 1764, played a special role in defending the frontier region. In various conversations with local minority scholars during my field trips in Xinjiang, all of these groups spoke of their unique claims to Xinjiang.

Two groups of ancient inhabitants have also become sources for asserting claims about original settlement as a way to undermine Uighur claims. Known as the Rouzhi and Diqiang, the two groups were first chronicled in Chinese historical texts of the Han dynasty (206–220 BCE). In a book series on Xinjiang's history, a senior historian at Xinjiang University links the Rouzhi to the ancient Tocharians and the modern-day Tajiks of Xinjiang, a people of eastern Iranian origin. The Diqiang, on the other hand, is linked to the ancient Qiangic people (Liu W. 2010 and 2011: 27, 28). Recent DNA research corroborates the two groups' early settlement (Zhao et al. 2011). Nevertheless, all this does not invalidate Uighurs' claim to settlement in recent centuries. Mindful of the sensitive subject, university officials seemed unenthusiastic about providing financial support for this book series, though the initial publication was reported in the local media and celebrated in a small symposium (field observations, July 2011). Interestingly, if a Uighur scholar were to write a book disputing the above claims, he or she would likely be accused of separatism and the book would be banned.

Even for groups without indigenous roots, the titular status may fuel ethno-nationalism. Most members of the Korean communities were recent immigrants to northeastern China when the Yanbian Korean autonomous area was established in 1952 (as an autonomous prefecture in 1955). Koreans crossed the Yalu and Tumen rivers to the Chinese side during the 1850–1945 period, particularly from the 1910s to the 1930s, when Chinese border controls were weak and Japan ruled Korea. They came to escape famine, to resist Japanese colonial rule in Korea, or were induced by Japan's migration policy in the late 1930s. Due to geographic concentration and social insulation, many Koreans had not fully assimilated by the early 1950s. By all evidence, the establishment of the Korean autonomous prefecture served to protect and prolong the insulation and isolation of Korean communities. Six decades later, "a major debate" still rages among China's Korean intellectuals as to the "real identity" of ethnic Koreans in China, as both ordinary and elite Koreans remain ambivalent about it (Kim 2003: 121).

Both research studies and field observations confirm this ambivalence. Based on survey data, researchers from the Minzu University of China report that ethnic Chinese Koreans routinely identify with South Korea's cultural and economic influences. However, when they work in South Korea as immigrant workers and encounter discrimination their Chinese identity is strengthened (Li 2009: 99–134). This was corroborated by my conversations with ethnic Koreans who worked in South Korea.[11] During my visit on the

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[11] Conversations with five ethnic Koreans who were returning from South Korea, Capital Airport, Beijing, fall 2013. Conversations with five salespersons who worked in gift shops and restaurants catering to Chinese tourists, Seoul, June 2015.

campus of Yanbian University, non-Korean faculty members complained about an atmosphere of strong Korean identity that routinely disadvantaged non-Korean faculty in appointment and promotion matters.[12] Key positions at the university, as well as in the Yanbian prefecture as a whole, have been held by Korean ethnics.[13] A campus award ceremony, which I attended, was held in the Korean language, something that would become a political issue on a Tibetan or Uighur campus. There are more bilingual street signs in Yanbian than I have encountered in other ethnic regions.

There is a growing interest among ethnic Korean intellectuals to rediscover and reconstruct history, especially Korean claims to the Goguryeo kingdom (37 BCE–668 CE). The demise of this ancient kingdom had led its territory to be divided among two other Korean kingdoms and China's Tang dynasty (Li 2009: 116–17). The rising nativism among China's ethnic Koreans has led some analysts in China to worry that a unification of the two Koreas will prompt ethnic Koreans to join Yanbian with a united Korea. In this view, the autonomous system has nurtured a sense of proprietorship that serves as its own gravedigger. Meanwhile, the sentiment among ethnic Koreans seems to be one of continued ambivalence, wavering between "not sure" about a united Korea to "genuine autonomy would be good."[14]

SUMMARY

This chapter focuses on changing approaches to ethnic governance in China's transition to a modern nation state. I have argued that pre-modern methods of rule differentiated a three-tiered topography, but the ancient approach could not withstand the challenge of the concept of the sovereign nation state in modern times; yet, late Qing and Republican failures opened the way for the triumph of the system of autonomous regions under the CCP. This new system helped to complete China's incorporation of ethnic territories as sovereign land of the new nation state, but it also built institutional dynamics for ethnic discords in the long run.

Historical legacies and modern strategies of nation state building impacted patterns of transition and their unintended consequences in two major ways. First, the pre-modern structure of three-tiered rule entailed great challenges for incorporation of the outer peripheral regions in modern times. Under imperial dynasties, the three-tiered approach recognized the graded levels of center–peripheral relationships and corresponding prerogatives, obligations, and administrative structures. Most ethnic groups lived as tribal groupings in

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[12] Conversations with five non-Korean faculty members on Yanbian University campus, fall 2013. Conversations with two local SEAC officials, January 2018.

[13] Conversations with three local officials (including a deputy mayor of Korean descent) and five university faculty members, Yanbian, fall 2013.

[14] Conversations with a SEAC official, Beijing, January 2018.

loosely defined communities and fluid territorial units. Local autonomy was maintained through negative rights – that is, internal autonomy as long as they did not pose security threats to the imperial state – and it was achieved through a variety of institutional arrangements, depending on geographical and cultural distance. There was greater political integration in the inner peripheries, as they were gradually incorporated into the state bureaucratic system through native chieftaincy. The outer peripheral regions, spanning the Eurasian frontiers of Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet, were left with a variety of alliance- and rite-based arrangements. The prevailing historical patterns survived well into the late Qing.

Those informal arrangements were not conducive to a transition to a modern nation state, as they ill fitted the concept of the nation state. The idea of sovereign state entails the full rights and power of the central governing body over its constituent parts, which did not accurately describe the relationship between the imperial state and the peripheral regions. Late Qing and Republican attempts to increase administrative incorporation bumped up against ethnic separatism in flux. Their policies of frontier farming did increase the incorporation of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia in a demographical and cultural sense, but Xinjiang and Tibet remained the peripheral holdouts. This modern legacy entailed that these regions would remain challenges for nation state building in contemporary times.

Qing and Republican failures paved the way for the CCP to embrace the Soviet doctrine of ethno-nations. This idea had as its corollary the equality of ethno-nations and a linkage of the ethnic to the political. These ideas, too, did not accurately describe the core–frontier relations in pre-modern China. Yet they were initially embraced, largely by virtue of being perceived as viable responses to historical imperatives at the time; that is, to rally minority support against the KMT and to counteract ethnic separatism. Only a retreat from the idea of self-determination and greater reliance on class universalism tempered the CCP's full adoption of the Soviet model. This was a legacy that made a difference in the new institutional order created by the CCP: the system of autonomous regions adopted the Soviet model of ethno-territorial units, without the stipulation of self-determination.

Second, the autonomous system helped to complete China's transition to the modern state, but it also inhered a number of institutional dynamics for ethnic strife in contemporary times. Those dynamics stemmed from two key features of the autonomous system: political uniformity and ethnic titularity. Uniform governing structures were implemented across minority regions, in a dramatic departure from pre-modern legacies of diverse and indirect rule. It also demarcated ethno-territorial units by making an explicit alignment of the (titular) ethnic, political, and territorial, in a dramatic departure from pre-modern legacies of loose and de-ethnicized rule. This new institutional design reoriented the way the sovereign status of ethnic regions would be defined and

their territorial domains would be governed. Rather than loose constituents of a "minimalist state" in the imperial times, ethnic regions became nominally equal members of the modern (multi)nation state under the centralized leadership of the party.

A paradox of centralization and ethnicization characterizes the built-in institutional tensions of the new system. On the one hand, political uniformity brought to fruition the new state's leadership over the political direction and policy platforms of ethnic regions, hence political integration. On the other hand, the titular status, on which autonomous units were based, strengthened ethno-territorial identities and claims, contrary to the goals of national integration. These tensions were further heightened by the failure of the new system to accommodate historical diversity in China's three-tiered topography. The inner peripheral regions, historically more integrated, posed few problems for the new state's assertion of sovereignty. But Tibet and Xinjiang posed significant problems, as their local autonomy had been considerably reduced.