

Modernity and the Violence of Global Accumulation: The Case of Ethnic Question in China

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The modern nation of People's Republic of China (PRC) has more or less inherited the Qing empire's geographic and demographic configurations. It is immensely diverse with 55 officially recognized, autonomous minority nationalities besides the Han majority, which constitute about 9 per cent of a national population of 1.35 billion people.¹ The PRC is, thus, a multiethnic, multicultural and quasi-federal state of 'one country, many worlds'. A conspicuous feature of these multiplicities is the coincidence of ethnic makeup and regional divisions mostly in west China, and of poorer and often naturally more resourceful hinterland being strategically critical by the nation's interior borders. Since such regions are either dominated by one ethno-religious group or shared by a constellation of several minority identities, in over half of the PRC territories 'ethnicity' and 'region' overlap, geographically as much as sociologically. Regional disparities, therefore, easily have an ethnic dimension or appearance, which can be deceptive and manipulated in a contentious identity politics.

There is a large, strong and variously controversial literature in the field. There is also a highly ideological global media oftentimes engaged in a fierce propaganda war not so much with Beijing's policies directly as with their misrepresentations by local actors, outside observers and Chinese officials themselves. The internationalisation of China's ethnic problems in an information age is not only an effect, but also a causal factor in understanding the proliferation and explosion of antagonisms in Tibet and Xinjiang, the country's largest minority entities. In the larger background is the neoliberal phase of global integration, in which China has become a willing participant since the early 1990s.

This chapter aims at clarifying a few confusions in the relevant debates by addressing questions concerning the relationship between ethnicity and modernity. What explains the rise of cultural nationalism and worsening ethnic tensions in China in recent years, and the formation of a vicious circle of resistance and oppression? Why have certain institutional arrangements and policy decisions had more positive or negative results than others? How might the impacts of external agitation and domestic catalyses on ethnic relations be properly delineated and compared? Where could necessary repairs begin to redress the most serious and urgent problems? Is the advocacy, claimed to be in the interest of the whole nation of all nationalities, for departing from minority regional autonomy and ethnically based affirmative actions morally and practically sound? Pondering on these questions, the central argument will be threefold: that intensified ethnic strains are only symptomatic and part of China's general crisis of capitalist developmentalism; that relentless accumulation of capital in the name of modernisation threatens to destroy not only minority cultures and ethnic peace but also the entire edifice of socialist fundamentals required for achieving popular power and welfare across ethno-religious divisions; and that an alternative imaginary of modernity against the chimera of

global and modern standardization is both imperative and achievable as a matter of transformative politics.²

This analysis is set in its historical and theoretical contexts first. The next section then critically assesses the guidelines of communist revolution and post-revolutionary institutional arrangements and policy initiatives regarding minority rights and protection. The causes of their erosion leading to the present predicament are examined in the third section. The last section depicts missing links in a cul-de-sac framing of contentious politics and explains the focal point of a broader social movement than can unit sites of resistance. The chapter concludes that it is not modernity as such but the horrors of both capitalist polarisation and homogenization that must be rejected.

Global Modernity and China's Lost Alternative

Is there such a thing as 'global modernity' based on capitalist globalization and its ideological claim for integration – 'the world is flat'? Concerning its most superficial signification, so called global modernity is illusory in the face of the perpetuation of poverty and inequalities, dispossession and deprivation, wars and conflicts, as well as environmental disasters affecting the economically disadvantaged more severely. Such discrepancies are evident both within and without nations, and continue to spread transnationally. Trade and other privileges of rich countries are guarded to endure the quandary of unachieved 'surplus retention' in the poor ones. Within the poor countries, globalisation has enlarged rather than reduced income and other gaps. While any development seems now to be subordinated to market convergence, the process is one of extraction and profits, not equalising. Instead of integrating the peripheries, the global expansion of capital and its profit-making machines rather marginalise the marginal and deprive the deprived still further, creating new beneficiaries but also many more victims along the way. As capitalism keeps polarising and inflicting calamities upon societies and nature, the lack of minimal levelling reveals the deception of global modernisation.

Meanwhile, market greed does entail certain consumerist integration, which obliterates some indigenous ways of life. The latter could be of a more humane, less wasteful and ecologically better fitting character than those engendered by crude industrialisation and urbanisation. Culturally, while fetishism of money, market and private property together with electoral democracy (which is in a functional crisis the world over of representation and plutocracy) conquer the globe, wiping out non-confirming traditions, what modernity supposed to stand for in its enlightenment origin – freedom, rationality, secularism and progress – have certainly not. The overwhelming temporality of the modern ranks and controls spatially divided communities and localities, with time being 'the principal tool of power and domination' (Bauman, 2000: 9).

In a very different conceptualisation, 'global modernity' captures genuinely globalising tendencies without the arrogance and teleological message of 'globalisation'. It recognises commercial homogeneity as much as social disparities, underscoring the contradictions of modernity and their transnational and cross-regional universalisation (Dirlik, 2003). At issue is then not just Eurocentrism or modernity being generically parochial yet pretending to be universal. Nor is it merely about acknowledging 'the heterogeneity out of which this universalism is produced' (Mitchell, 2000: viii), as non-European sacrifices for and contributions to the constitution of the modern are

extensively recorded as commonsense. That is, modernity has to be global from the outset. In the present conjuncture of world history, the most relevant question is rather if there remains any opening for a truly modern alternative to the existing model of 'imperial modernity' characterised by imperialist financial-military monopoly as well as discursive hegemony.

If modernity has become a heterogeneous global civilization (Domingues, 2012), socialist modernity must still be a creative political ambition rather than a merely modern cultural variant. In other words, socialism is not about pluralising globality. It implies a negation of capitalism, not the west; and construction of a socially more desirable world, not preservation of national specificities – unless in concurrence with socialist preference. There is hardly any unified culture of any nation, certainly nothing of mythical Chineseness, in the first place. After all, the singular capitalist modernity cannot be effectively countered by any particularistic alternatives; and the global nature of capitalism and its main contradictions necessitate universality of any genuinely post-capitalist project. Nothing less, and nothing of an ethnocentric disposition, can beat a pervasive system of epochal dominance. This is then where the world-historical significance of the communist revolution and socialist experiments in China can be appreciated. The case of Chinese anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles is not among capitalism's local modifications or 'multiple modernities'; they instead have broken the ideological equitation between modernity and capitalism, thereby redefining the modern. Taking into account such attempts and their normative articulations in the modern perspective as a move in both history and theory means an intellectual undoing of not exactly Eurocentrism but capitalist centrism.

In stark contrast to crippled colonial modernity, China's 20th-century revolutionary transformations enabled the country to rapidly modernise its human and physical infrastructure through public investment and mass mobilisation. Despite grave errors and limitations, the People's Republic took the lead in the third world in meeting basic needs, poverty alleviation, life expectancy surge and educational attainment for both genders.³ The revolution's internationalist aspiration and intrinsic sympathy for oppressed peoples also nurtured a united agency of all ethnicities in building a new society. The moral commitment to fundamental ethnic equality was a prerequisite for an institutionalised system of minority regional autonomy and socialist nationality policies in the 1950s. Retreats from that system in an age of *jiegui* (global integration) are among the signs of capitalist triumph in China, where socialism has been tried, advanced, and then more or less abandoned. The outcomes of this enormous loss are catastrophic, and even more acutely so for the national minorities.

Minority Rights in Chinese Socialism: Commitment, Institutions and Policies

Traditionally, China's imperial rulers managed ethnic, religious and regional diversities through a sophisticated mix of methods, from local autonomy, integrated socialisation, political marriage and mutuality within a tributary fold to various forms of repression. The governing crisis in late Qing following the Opium Wars resulted in an increased distrust between the Han and the Manchu ruling class as well as among other 'racial' communities as perceived at the time. Colonial exploitation and destruction along with warlords and local bullies at home since the mid-19th century deepened the crisis

and wreaked more collides. Only in view of foreign and domestic imperialism and anti-imperialist movements can the evolving ethnic relations in modern China be adequately understood.

The political formation of a modern *zhonghua minzu* or Chinese nation, and that of the Chinese nationals disregarding individual ethnicity as citizens with a common national identity, was a foremost outcome of collective struggles involving all the ethnic groups for national and social liberation. China's oppressed 'class' position in the global power structure has since been reversed,⁴ bringing the country into the modern world as an equal with other nations. Consequently, national sovereignty makes every sense in a China baptised by an epic revolution which, in turn, has to be simultaneously nationalist and internationalist. Amalgamating the majority and minorities alike into a cohesive, sovereign 'Chinese people' as a supreme political entity and identity is a classical case of 'we the people' arising as a historical subject from great social revolutions. A core legacy of the Chinese revolution is thus also the unwavering insistence on national integrity and independence.

Concerning the status and rights of minorities, the PRC constitution promotes autonomy but forbids secession. In the earlier stages of the revolution, the communist party faithfully followed Marx to believe that 'no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations'.⁵ One of the 'ten great demands' of the party was to 'unify China and recognise... [minority] national self-determination' (1928). The red regime in Jiangxi (1931–1934) emulated the Soviet model to pledge for the non-Han 'tolling masses' to 'have the right to determine for themselves' whether they wish to establish their own state, or join the socialist Chinese union, or form a self-governing unit inside the union (1931). Mao told Edgar Snow in 1939 that after revolutionary victory Tibet, Mongolia, Burma, Indo-China and Korea could become autonomous republics voluntarily attached to a Chinese confederation. The party formally envisioned a democratic 'federal republic based on the free union of all nationalities' in 1945. In power, the communists shifted their position on right to secede (Connor, 1984: 68, 74, 82–83; Yahuda, 2000: 27–30; Harding, 1993: 679).⁶ The 1954 constitution makes it clear that the PRC is a unitary state (while utilizing semi-federal organisations). Accordingly, 'acts which undermine the unity of the nationalities are prohibited'; and the 'national autonomous areas are inalienable parts of the PRC'. The hostile international and geopolitical conditions imposed on a new regime in need of consolidation and in fear of disunity only reinforced this stance.

One of the first tasks new China assigned to itself was to redress past wrongs of discrimination against minorities. To do so, the central and local governments dispatched to the minority regions hundreds of work teams to carry out a painstaking identification program for personal ethnic identities to be decided or differentiated at the grassroots. This work certainly had nothing to do with the familiar colonial techniques of 'divide and rule', since it aimed at a policy framework in which historical injustice would be corrected to enable all the ethnic communities to flourish. The process turned out to be also an effort to rescue disappearing languages, cultures, artistic traditions, and quite a few tinier groups themselves. However artificial or excessive the project might have been with hindsight, it was necessary and instrumental for the socialist formulation of egalitarian policies.

None of the major constitutional amendments since has ever touched Article 4: 'All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops a relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance'. Minority rights stipulated in the constitution are ideologically and legally protected by the socialist mandate. A key concept of national cohesion is 'amalgamation' (*ronghe*) or mutual absorption as opposed to majority 'assimilation' (*tonghua*) (Dreyer, 1999: 591). Mao, more than any other leaders, stressed the need of fighting against Han chauvinism as a main danger over that of nationalist sentiments among the minorities (*On Ten Great Relationships*, 1956). Under these guidelines, five provincial level administrations of regional autonomy were established in the 1950s and 1960s – Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Hui, Zhuang and Tibet. They were supplemented by dozens of autonomous municipalities and prefectures and over a hundred of autonomous counties.

This institutionalisation was pursued with great care, detailed designing and an understanding of administrative autonomy as essentially a regional rather than an ethnic concept. Such an understanding was due to mixed nationalities in affected regions and needed regional cooperation for the economically more underdeveloped ones to catch up.⁷ In such multilayered jurisdictions, local governments via local people's congresses 'have the power to enact regulations on the exercise of autonomy and other separate regulations in accordance with the political, economic and cultural characteristics' of their localities (Articles 115 and 116). This innovative configuration of socialist semi-federalism was intended to optimize coordinated authorities based on both autonomy and consensus, so as to achieve unity in diversity for common prosperity.

Also putting in place were policies of preferential treatment to enable the hindrances and victimisation of minorities under the old regimes to be overcome. The first test, for example, was that the minority communities should enjoy 'freedom to develop their spoken and written languages, to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs' (the Common Program 1949, Article 53). Indeed, until the 1980s 'great efforts were made to bring education to all the minority areas, and in some cases this meant first of all creating a written language which could serve as the basis for education' (Ferdinand, 1991: 241–242). Other provisions followed, such as easier access to financial assistance, more generous welfare subsidies, lower entry scores for university admission and exemption from the one-child policy implemented stringently among the Han since 1979 (Dreyer, 1976: 262–263; Goldstein & Beall, 1991; Sautman, 1998). These programs were so effective that they had 'encouraged Han people to marry into or otherwise seek to join these nationalities'.⁸

To reduce regional disparities, the central government consistently and hugely invested in infrastructural upgrading in the poorer minority heartlands while sustaining a large scale of transfers of funds, technologies and experts from coastal provinces. A paternalistic overtone and unintended side effects notwithstanding, on balance neither 'dependent development' (to borrow a concept from the dependency theory) nor 'internal peripheralisation' was the case. As such, 'ethnic minorities are not only recognised as nationalities, but also are respected by public law and – according to this law – enjoy the same rights as the ethnic majority' (Heberer, 2000: 19). Substantial social gains could then be expected and confirmed by human development and overall inter-group peace (Bulag, 2000; He, 2005).

Remarkably, the socialist mandate on ethnic equality and solidarity is not formally repudiated in the post-socialist rhetoric and politics. However, the unprecedented crisis of ethnic relations in China must be traced to losing commitment on the part of the reform regime to the liberation of ‘weak and small nationalities’ in the revolutionary tradition that underlined previous successes. The Chinese story is one of capitalist conversion of modernisation that is morally bankrupt and practically responsible for this crisis as a most deplorable regress from egalitarian politics.

The Origins of Crisis: Region, Religion, Ethnicity and Class

‘Reform and opening’ since the late 1970s have transformed China’s economic structure and social relations, as well as its ideological and regime character. The first reform decade lifted 400 million people out of abject poverty and began to raise the country’s general living standards. After Tiananmen 1989, instead of addressing the emerging problems of corruption and waning social security which gave rise to the student movement, the second reform decade featured an all-out shift to market liberalisation. The ‘free market’ moves were ironically pushed for by an authoritarian ‘communist’ state in awkward alliance with the neoliberal elites who had since been positioned at top levels of the party, government and legislature. Under popular pressure the third phase of reform into the 21st century saw both corrective social policies and continuation of privatisation. The direction of *jiegui* was not faltered but became bolder to eventually include also privatising the land and liberalising the financial sector. The more enriched the private and bureaucratic-comprador actors, the more politically dependent their vested interests would be. It is perfectly logical that market freedom and state tyranny can be compatible. Many well connected capitalists are already communist party representatives and branch secretaries or deputies to the national and local people’s congresses. The police force has long been deployed to handle not only violent resistance and political challengers but also ordinary petitioners, protestors and demonstrators.

Unable to shed its costly yet entrenched growth pattern, China has allowed ‘cheap labour’ to remain a symbol of its long departure from a workers’ and peasants’ state, causing also a profound ideological disorientation and social decay. Predictably, the normative values concerning ethnicity also deteriorate, making ethnic–regional relations ever harder to manage. Accompanying a decentralised economic geography of augmented local power and leverages, pluralism, transparency and responsiveness in governance tend to generally increase, aided by the rise of associational activism, internet and social media. But any trend of devolution, flexibility and bottom-up participation seems to have bypassed large areas of minority and frontier territories, where central control is tightened – the autonomous regions end up enjoying less autonomy. The gulf signified in this breakdown of autonomy is wide and deep between what policy makers consider necessary for interconnected regional and national interests and what is perceived locally. The latter is rather about illegitimate violation or ignorance of constitutionally and legally protected local rights and preferences.

How has China come to where it is? The intensity of its spatial politics today is attributable to a range of intervening variables. The historical and international backgrounds loom large, in which concerns for economic unevenness and national unity intertwine, buttressed by a duality of globalization and nationalism. In particular, growth-

centred marketisation in the minority regions has encouraged private businesses often run by the Han people and promoted exhaustive resources exploitation. The priority given to growth also entails toleration of inequalities as well as corruption; while economic benefits are, thought to be compensable for religious restrictions. The joint effects have been inflamed confrontations and deadly riots in recent years.

The blending of old socialist paternalism, new capitalist developmentalism and 'striking hard' (at times preemptively) campaigns against extremists may have reflected accumulated frustration and paranoia but is not working. The simple truth of 'the more oppression, the more resistance' (which the revolutionary communist generation should know better) is yet to be registered for China's political class. The grim lesson of Xinjiang becoming a hotbed of violence has yet to be learned. Incidents of Tibetan self-immolation or bloody unrests in Xinjiang must end, which however would not be achievable without a thorough going self-critical policy scrutiny. The moral imperative and far-sighted political wisdoms needed for such a scrutiny are nowhere else attainable other than trusting and allowing honest criticisms while tapping into the egalitarian socialist legacies.

Take the external factors first. The colonial making and cold war continuation of the 'Tibet question' have involved direct British invasions and manoeuvre in the Himalayan region before the communist revolution, the CIA training and arming of Tibetan rebels after, and a growing Free Tibet lobby with considerable government backing of several major countries since the 1990s (Grunfeld, 1996: Chapters 5 and 8; Wang, 2011: 165–175; Conboy & Morrison, 2002). The 1951 Agreement for the peaceful liberation of Tibet signed between Beijing and Lhasa was followed by regional transformations before and after cultural revolutionary disruptions. The 'democratic reform' of 1959 targeted manorial land and 'feudal' relations of a theological serfdom; the economic reform of the 1980s, like the rest of China, featured market opening and commercialisation (Goldstein, 1997). The gains and losses for the Tibetan people and their proud place in the PRC remain controversial, but none of the changes is explainable without considering outside catalyses.

In particular, forces beyond the Chinese borders infuriated in the events of 1959 and propelled the Dalai Lama to flee, of which the lasting impact has turned out to be mainly negative.⁹ Not only had his future potential collaboration been missed out, but his unavoidable denouncement was also a head-on contradiction to local mass opinion, which together meant a weighty element of coercion in the subsequent, otherwise valid social reforms in terms of equality and justice. The communist revolution, initially skipped Tibet, now must proceed to abolish large landholdings and replace an anachronistic theocracy. From a socialist point of view, even if class mobilization was limited among the former serfs, the changes were liberating.¹⁰ Yet the shadows of 1959 as an episode of a wounded history stayed. The economic reform, in contrast, was in many ways socially retreating. The newly generated problems kindled an unrelenting global orchestra played also by the Tibetan exiles and conducted in the west. However disconcerted it may be, the international cry over the Tibetan plight has become a formidable obstacle to the nonnegotiable Chinese position on an 'internally' forged solution as a matter of sovereignty. As the past two precious decades passed by, a generation of radicalised militants grew up to denounce non-violent means of promoting the Tibetan cause.

In Xinjiang, too, the separatist organisations cannot be shielded from external ties. They could also draw an array of reinforcements from spreading political Islam and a Central Asian realigning in the Soviet Union's disintegration and vast geopolitical aftermath. Meanwhile, as part of its global and Middle East strategy, the US 'war against terror' with an anti-Muslim overtone managed to get straight into the Chinese framing of security, which has nevertheless proven counterproductive for both countries. It looks as though the globalization of local conflicts and internalisation of global ones feed each other to amplify effects at both ends.

Among domestic triggers, the first is inflow of Han, Hui and other settlers to Tibet and Xinjiang is first to consider. To be sure, spatial ramification of market transition in China is nowhere more visible than in the massive migration, short and long distances, often back and forth, as an everyday experience. But ethnic-specific population movements can be more disruptive when the redrawing of regional economic-demographic landscape induces resentment from the locals. If there was never a deliberate state policy of undermining Tibetan or Muslim domination and heritages in these regions, then an invasive market is doing the job most ruthlessly and effectively.¹¹ An immediate result is the ever tighter labour market for local job seekers. As committed government provision with minority quotas has diminished, discrimination against minorities becomes rife not only in the private but also public sector wherever the formal rules are ignored. As told in a news report, in the Kashgar prefecture in Xinjiang, where ethnic Uyghurs make up nearly 90 per cent of the population, for half of the positions recently advertised on the government's civil servant examination information website only native Mandarin speakers would be eligible. In 2011, 80 per cent of the 60,000 jobless graduates in Xinjiang were Uyghurs (Pai, 2012: 286). Important spots in state agencies are regularly filled by people from other regions, and many local workers are frozen out of the gas and oil industry built on the treasured local resources.¹² What initiated in market spontaneity has mutated into institutionalised social exclusion.

Apart from employment hurdles, there is also the fear of losing one's cultural traditions or identities. An inadvertent upshot of the language barrier to job opportunities is that the constitutionally required minority language education is compromised when majority assimilation appears to be practically inescapable. The bilingual education initiated in 2000 intended to help minority groups to cope with the market was quickly deformed into mandatory Mandarin in nearly all the subjects being taught in many regional schools, putting local languages at an utter disadvantage. This is viewed by some as a sign of 'desertification' of once flourishing, officially promoted and legally protected minority cultures, if not the beginning of their extinction.¹³

As the state cannot decisively modernized religious societies, market modernisation only signals a horrifying prospect of commercial homogenisation. It is the market that could be the ultimate path towards a 'cultural genocide' if the state fails to step in (Sautman, 2006). Equally alarming is not only a growing antipathy between Uyghur and Han communities but also their physical segregation of residential quarters in the ethnically mixed areas in Xinjiang. Cross-boundary communications are ever more bitter and difficult, making communal tensions prone to outbreaks of violence (Palme, 2013). The collapse of the old socialist rules and codes in extreme cases sees Muslim scarf, clothing and symbols being arbitrarily banned by local governments through such impositions as self-criticism sessions, fining and depriving social benefit entitlement. The

return to unchecked Han chauvinism also led to a demonised Uyghur image, permitting discriminative practices at the points from hiring and business licensing to hotel and airport check-ins.¹⁴

Thirdly, within the broader conditions of widening socioeconomic inequalities, both causal and consequential of decreased participation from ethnic minorities in the urban workforce is their political marginalisation. By law and in the nature of autonomy, 70 per cent of regional and lower level administrators should be from the local ethnic groups. Yet in reality the Han now regularly outnumber non-Han cadres especially in more responsible positions (e.g., the party secretary). Moreover, minority nationalities are seriously under-represented in the national legislative and governmental bodies, and their members take far fewer leading posts than before the economic reform. The army and police are also grossly disproportional in their ethnic compositions. The lack of badly needed, democratically spirited consultation and conversation between the centre (along with its regional appointees) and locally rooted leaders and intellectuals fortifies a dwindling mutual trust. The latter's allegedly diminishing civic loyalty to the Chinese nation then rationalises an overestimation of, and excesses in handling, the 'separatist' tendencies (Toxti, 2013).

The fourth expression of the present crisis is the spectacular upsurge of religion in a traditionally secular civilisation (aside from Confucianism or Taoism and other churchless philosophical schools) reinforced also by communist atheism. The movements that have drawn tens of millions followers for Christianity, Catholicism and the more orthodox sects of Buddhism is phenomenal. As commonly noted it is in part a response to the ideological and moral erosion brought about by market transition. The phenomenon has a manifested class dimension: religious fervour grows faster and stronger when conjoined by poverty and despair, as happened in the poorer counties in southern Xinjiang and Tibetan inhabited central-west provincial peripheries.¹⁵ But there is also a direct state contribution, contrary to the common impression of China's formal religious policies (Leung, 2005).

In Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, with huge public funds overwhelming private donations, monasteries and temples have been massively and in many cases lavishly built or rebuilt since the 1980s. Monks and priests were recruited in record numbers.¹⁶ Rather than reducing any religious sentiment or resistance on the ground, quite a few of these monasteries serve as safe heavens for political networking and sabotage. If the dynamics of globalization 'allowed temples to become nodes along horizontal networks linking local communities and identities to transnational flows of capital, people, and memory' (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011: 242), the post-socialist Chinese state is doubtlessly its largest agent. In the same vein, the simultaneity of religious resurgence and market secularisation is no paradox, fashioning forms of 'religion for profit' not least in temple and church management and tourism. As market values permeated religious ideas, artifacts and rituals, orientalist – western, Chinese or nativist – productions of religiously identified 'ethnicity', 'locality', and 'culture' abound.¹⁷

Finally, in the broad socioeconomic arena, single-minded developmentalism is blamable for damaged ethnic relations. On the national stage, allocating budgetary, technological and other resources in the minority regions continues to be firmly the case; and in principle the Chinese economic and administrative structure can accommodate a system of central management embracing decentralised market mechanisms to more or

less redeem developmental unevenness. Accordingly, from poverty alleviation and tax breaks to preferential quotas and multi-provincially coordinated training schemes (for cadres, technicians, skilled workers, doctors and teachers), prioritised programs for minority development are still in full swing. At the same time of national largesse being poured into the poorer, multiethnic western regions, however, a superstitious developmentalist impel overpowers spatial-cultural sensibilities. Disregarded are not only the likely social and eco-environmental costs of an unsustainable growth pattern, but also its social injuries and political risks. That the participants in the 2008 Lhasa riot included rural migrants without stable jobs is an example in point (Hu & Salazar, 2008: 18–21). So is anger over the massive exploration of Xinjiang's natural resources without substantial local sharing in productive, distributive, and investment decisions. Urumqi has meanwhile become one of China's most polluted municipals.

As noted, inequalities in whatever guises are not ethnic specific in China's reforms. But market pathologies do seem to upset more lethally in the minority regions. Researches find that forms of seemingly ethnically related economic imparity are often not actually due to ethnic identities but rather differences in levels of education, residential locations and so on. Ethnicity is by and large not directly correlated with income and life chances in China.¹⁸ The commodification of land, labour, and people themselves; the hardship involved in migration, low-graded and low-paid jobs, or joblessness; regional and sectoral disparities; class polarization; corruption and other abuses of power; land shortage, urbanisation squeezing and pollution are common factors across the whole country. They could nevertheless all have an ethnic face. Worse still, the repudiation of class politics without a rigorous defence of the communist revolution's most popular achievements has inevitably resulted in demoralisation of non-Han party members and socialism's traditional local supporters. This redrawing of political landscape required by a capitalist modernisation has paved the way for a contentious identity politics that ethnicises or essentialises ethnicity and religion in interpreting social relations.

The Politics of Contestation: Which Modernisation? Whose Choice?

The argument that ethnic and religious problems are rooted in social ills, that they are only part of China's general post-socialist crisis, and that state-sponsored neoliberal globalisation is behind the present impasse of ethnic relations amounts to a depiction of an identity crisis of the People's Republic itself. Having retreated so radically from its founding ideas the regime faces an acute internal challenge to its ruling legitimacy. Restoring trust between the party and people seems a daunting task. The situation, however, should not be beyond repair, given the socialist path dependency in both policy debates and popular contestation traversing nationalities and regions. The point is thus indivisibility of socialism and nationalism in any credible political articulation of China's ethnic question.

Presupposing spatial and temporal pluralities, the PRC state must carry with it a sacred duty of securing sovereignty and unity while enhancing social cohesion and ethnic harmony. Its trajectory of revolutionary modernity makes national integrity not only a nationalist but also a socialist mission, as mighty as defending and completing the revolution being ultimately measured by defeating capitalism and imperialism. This

conviction obliged the people's liberation army to cross the *Yangzi* and march into all corners of the country then; and still inspires popular obsession with China's sovereign integrity and global equal status now. However, the vanishing ambitions of socialist egalitarianism and proletarian internationalism, and degradation of the Chinese people and labour as the 'master of society', entail neglected or damaged ethnic solidarity. These degenerations make official Chinese nationalist claims unappealing without their historically constituted social substance.

Any remedy can only begin with bringing the people – in its multinational and multicultural makeup – back in, drawing critical lessons from both socialist and post-socialist transformations. Without such a democratic agenda categorically different from a 'political reform' to match and facilitate further capitalist subordination, neither ethnic nor wider social crises would resolve. Indeed, the socialist towering order is not just about managing multiethnicity but its celebration within a greater union of shared social goals and common citizenship. As splendidly demonstrated in new China, minority communities can succeed socioeconomically as much as culturally and politically in beneficial and confident linkages with overall national development. The fact that the notions of equal nationalities and regional autonomy in China have survived an otherwise diluted ideology in contrast with the disintegrated Soviet bloc speaks volumes of the legitimation depth of the Chinese revolution. Only by honouring its modern revolutionary origin and subsequent social contracts would China and its central and local governments be able to correct those policies and approaches which contradict their own objectives.

Lacking this awareness of a missing socialist foundation, the well intended and high-profile proposal for a 'second generation' of ethnicity policies seems misconceived (Leibold, 2012). It holds that affirmative actions in the market conditions do not actually benefit the needy, and that the established policies, regulations and languages are liable to antagonism by solidifying ethnic differences and consciousness. Partly blamable is the terminology of 'nationality' itself, which is viewed as conceptually inaccurate and politically detrimental while functioning to instigate or strengthen cultural nationalism. De-ethnicisation is therefore called for, believed to be doable through economic regional balancing and a phasing out of existing arrangements since the 1950s. But even if theoretically ethnic divisions can wither away, the requisite of general equality is unfortunately not there. Reversing the socialist convention could then be confusing, offensive, and politically disastrous.

A correct diagnosis and prescription should instead respect the historical evidence of the overall efficacy of normative socialist principles, institutions and policies concerning minority rights and protection. Also to be recognised is that the old scars from past wrongs or more recent 'autonomous deficits' are yet to heal. Responsible for today's crisis is not the persistence of socialist management but its corrosion. This is not to deny that there could be a few undue identity-based entitlements, and certain policy vocabularies might be in need of fine tuning. 'Diversity in unity' conditioned on equality, autonomy and solidarity is an unfinished project to be fulfilled. Abandoning it in favour of 'unity over diversity' would end up attaining neither.

Paradoxically, as market transition tears apart organic social tissues while fostering a culture of greed, fear, dissonance and public apathy, contentious politics in the nature of Polanyian social self-defence is bound to ascend. Such a resistant movement in a post-socialist environment could catalyse the formation of a non-sectarian social power

in defiance of atomized diversities and inequality induced fragmentation. The dilemma of modernity for ethnic-religious distinctions could be acute but superficial,¹⁹ if modernisation and capitalism can be duly decoupled to undercut a teleological ‘world time’ ignorant of not only multiple but also alternative temporalities. Two additional observations follow. First, capitalist modernity, even if materially feasible, will still never win over the hearts and souls (as Marx puts it) in its geo-economic and cultural peripheries. Reorienting development is needed functionally to deter local conflicts as much as influence from foreign agitation, but it is also a moral imperative. Second, modernization does not have to be tied to ruthless and endless expansion of capital, and can thus become an intrinsic want of the peoples and communities themselves in their collective subjectivity. The violence of modernity can be transcended.

Challenging capitalism’s false universality and true monopoly over global accumulation and standardised industrialism, urbanism, private property and market supremacy, the remaking of the modern is a feasible by relinking modernity with socialism. A corresponding epistemological paradigm shift is overdue in a country where capitalist standardisation is incomplete in the first place. In the end, a popularly participatory socialist reconstruction would be the only contour for China’s ethnic minorities to modernize; and they certainly have the moral right and institutional means to do so in their own interest, terms, pace and rhythms as a matter of self-determination.

¹ The notion of ‘nationality’ is considered by some scholars as conceptually confusing and politically unwise: its linguistic affinity with ‘nation’ encourages nationalist feelings among the minorities (Ma, 2012a). In disagreement, I see the usage as legitimate in its modern and revolutionary historical context. ‘Nationality’ and ‘ethnicity’ in this chapter are mostly interchangeable unless otherwise specified. On the Chinese adaptation of the language from the Soviet Union, see Connor (1984) and Ma (2007). For the Euro-genetic notion of ‘nation’ being itself questionable in the Chinese context see Wang (2011: Chapter 2).

² Revolutionary and socialist modernity as a political rather than cultural and thus universalist alternative to late capitalism is discussed in Lin (2006: Chapter1; 2013: Chapters 2 and 8). My conception of ‘alternative modernity’ differs from that of ‘multiple modernities’ premised on a paradigmatic modernity modifiable only locally as cultural variations.

³ See UNDP’s annual Human Development Reports. For long-run index tables 1950–2000; see Crafts (2002). Comparisons between China and India are most telling; see Sen (2011); Dreze & Sen (2002).

⁴ Ernest Gellner observes that ‘only when a nation became a class... did it become politically conscious and activist... [as] a nation-for-itself’ (1983: 12).

⁵ Addressing the Irish question Marx warns that ‘the English working class will never accomplish anything until it had got rid of Ireland’. Lenin in ‘The right of nations to self-determination’ (1914) reconfirms this position. See, Chauhan (1976: 101–112).

⁶ Relevant original documents are collected in Brandt, Schwartz and Fairbank (1967).

⁷ Zhou Enlai explains these considerations with superb clarity, as quoted in Wang Hui (2011: 179–187). The Xinjiang Autonomous Region, for example, is home to 47 mostly Muslim communities with a Uyghur majority alongside the Han.

⁸ Between 1982 and 1990, for instance, the Hui population grew by 19 per cent in eight years (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011: 375). Thomas Heberer notes that the proportion of China's minority population grew from 6.1 per cent in 1953 to 9 per cent in 1995: a few groups doubled, tripled or times more in size (2000: 3). By 2005, the population of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) had grown 15.6 per cent, of which the Tibetans accounted for 11.3 per cent, as compared with the national average of 5.9 per cent (Ma 2012b: 68).

⁹ The events also helped Dalai Lama's ascendance from being the spiritual leader of Gelugpa lineage to a supreme status in the hierarchy of whole Tibetan Buddhism. Standing for non-violence and genuine autonomy within the PRC, he confirmed his position in an interview with BBC as recent as on 24 June 2012. Remembering fondly his 'very good relationship' with Mao, like father and son, he recounted his attraction to the Marxist idea of equal distribution. <http://www.ibtimes.com/dalai-lama-says-mao-considered-him-sonrecalls-his-attraction-communism-704140>.

¹⁰ The party's inconsistent tactics between an 'untied front' with the Tibetan elites and class struggle from below in the post-1951 decades caused confusions among the former serfs and lower social strata in the new regime's power base. This in turn also limited the separation of religion and politics as a modern marker in the region.

¹¹ According to the 1990 and 2000 Chinese censuses, the Han population in TAR rose from 3.68 per cent to 5.9 per cent in those ten years, which 'do not point to any mass influx of Han' (Mackerras, 2010: 233). The figure rapidly increased afterwards, with the settlers concentrated in Lhasa as temporary or long term residents, making the city's Han/Hui component a much higher proportion.

¹² Among many examples, see Andrew Jacobs, 'Uighurs in China say bias is growing', *New York Times*, 9 Oct. 2013, and stories reported by Gabriele Battaglia, 'Creaks in western China's door to Asia', *Asia Times*, 24 Oct. 2013.

¹³ Concerning Tibetan culture, Colin Mackerras observes that despite some decline the Tibetan language was 'in absolutely no danger of dying out' (2010: 234). The fear, however, is real. In urban Xinjiang, the ignorance of Uyghur traditions and literature among the younger generation is an increasing concern.

¹⁴ See Hastings (2011). David Tobin points out that the security quandary in Xinjiang might be solvable only if local grievance can be addressed 'beyond relying on lazy essentialisations of Islam' ('The Tiananmen attack and China's insecurity problem,' *Beijing Cream: a dollop of China*, 1 Nov. 2013, <http://beijingcream.com/2013/11/the-tiananmen-attack-and-chinas-insecurity-problem/>).

¹⁵ Marx's critical sympathy is accurately resonant: '*Religious* suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions'. In this sense, it is 'the opium of the people' ('A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right,' 1843, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>).

¹⁶ An economically pressing issue, especially in Tibet, is how a disproportionately large group of unproductive monks might be sustained without government subsidies. Cf. Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 362).

¹⁷ For a critique of Orientalism under the rubric of 'depoliticisation', see Wang (2011: 153, 194–209).

¹⁸ See Ma (2012b: 286–287). An observer puts it bluntly concerning the case of Tibet: 'There is no systematic discrimination of Tibetans by employers. The labour market operates according to market principles and the most skilled people are getting the jobs regardless of ethnicity' (Ben Hillman 2008).

¹⁹ The secular segments within religious societies are faced with a perplexity between modernisation and Han-assimilation, superficially mirroring the ambiguities of the Chinese reformers at the turn of the 20th century confronted with a modern yet imperialist west. If history is of any guide, the earlier though limited

success of revolutionary and socialist modernity in a few multiethnic and (semi-)federal socialist countries indicates the viability of modernisation not sacrificing but boosting autonomy.

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