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# **Economic Development and Ethnic Separatism in Western China: A New Model of Peripheral Nationalism**

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## INTRODUCTION

The turn of the twenty-first century brought a slew of scholarly work which analysed 'China collapse' and which slated it as an imminent possibility. Few of these analyses, however, utilised the framework of separatist nationalism or allowed peripheral ethnic tension as a variable. The analyses which did appear, such as those of Sugimoto, Eronen and Fuller, have indicated that the probability of Chinese fragmentation as a direct result of ethnic separatism is exceedingly low (Sautman 2005). Studies have also appeared, such as those of Becquelin, Mackerras, Bovingdon and Gladney, which isolate the separatism of one or another of China's autonomous regions and seek to provide its accurate explanation without addressing its implications.

And yet, consideration of China's 'ethnic minority issue', i.e., the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions, is empirically inspired. Both regions have an enduring history of separatism and opposition to the Chinese state and a 'traditionally strong sense of independence' (Zhu and Blachford 2005). The People's Republic of China's (PRC) central administration has examined and attempted to resolve the common activism of the two regions since their respective 'liberations' during the transition to the communist era to no avail.

The ethnic issue is more pressing than ever before in today's economically burgeoning People's Republic. One analyst provides:

Because of their vast resources, the central and western regions are strategic pillars of China's economy in the twenty-first century. These regions have 89.5 per cent of total Chinese territory, 68 per cent of China's arable land, and 63.1 per cent of the entire population, and are endowed with a high percentage of China's natural resources: coal (50 per cent), non-ferrous minerals (90 per cent), forestry (51 per cent), hydropower resources (72.3 per cent) and abundant reserve of oil and natural gas (Yueyao 2001).

The central administration has indeed recognised the potentially catastrophic effects of ethnic activism in its valuable hinterland regions, and has taken measures to alleviate the problem. These policies have been characterised by China's conviction that the extension of development to its volatile western regions is the definitive key to stability. Thus, the Chinese administration embarked on an aggressive policy path in the mid-1990s designed to develop the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions (Zhu and Blachford 2005). Though the development itself has been a success, it has indubitably lacked the ability to smother ethnic nationalism in the regions. The initiative has at the time of writing remained a categorical failure.

The central research question of this paper, thus, is how and why separatist nationalism should be continuing in the two autonomous regions which comprise China's west, despite economic development designed to quell ethnic unrest. Additionally, this work seeks to explain the

enduring and simultaneous activism in two quite distinct regions and to conceptualise the international implications of these circumstances.

Based on the theoretical framework of Hechter's peripheral nationalism, this paper develops a new model of peripheral nationalism which may account for modern separatism in the Xinjiang and Tibet regions, despite their economic advancement. This model uses local elite affiliation, national identity and economic engagement variables to produce the main argument of this work: China's western autonomous regions will continue to manifest a strong tendency toward separatist nationalism due to weak local elite affiliation with the Chinese central state, strong national identities, and non-engagement by locals in the economic policies and development of their respective regions. In addition, it is asserted that this separatism has had and will continue to have considerable international implications for the Chinese state.

The following sections are designed to illuminate the conceptual framework and historical and contemporary conditional empirical evidence for the applicability and accuracy of the model of peripheral nationalism developed herein. They address, in turn, theories of peripheral nationalism and the logic of the proposed tri-variable model, definitions of and evidence for each of the three variables, and the international implications of the findings of this work.

## **PERIPHERAL NATIONALISM**

'As a multinational state, China's ethnic minority issue (e.g. Tibet and Xinjiang) is always a large political concern' (Zhu and Blachford 2005). Two leading scholars open an analysis of the interactions of China's foreign policy and its minority policy with this assertion, which identifies China's struggle with ethnic unrest with the Tibet and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Regions. This impression is often echoed in scholarly writing on ethnicity in China.

And yet, despite the regions' shared condition as the defining parameters of China's ethnic issue, and irrespective of their unrelenting records of episodic and chronic 'splittism', studies have not appeared which seek to synchronously analyse the activism of the two massive provinces which comprise China's west. No model has arisen which attempts to isolate the commonalities of these regions and thus provide an explanation for their enduring opposition to the Chinese state.

Theories abound which address the phenomenon of separatism in the Xinjiang region. Leading scholars in the field primarily Becquelin, Mackerras, Bovingdon and Gladney have produced a number of standard hypotheses for the impulsions of Uighur activism. The pre-eminent of these theories identify the following causal agents: governmental repression and Han Chinese immigration; international influences, specifically the disintegration of the Soviet Union and increased international awareness of ethnonationalism; inherent flaws in the design and implementation of the

region's political system; and Uighur ethnic identity (Becquelin 2000; Mackerras 2001; Bovingdon 2004; Gladney 1998).

Unfortunately, however, the Tibet region has not been afforded such analyses. The vast majority of scholarly comment here follows this pattern: ‘...The primary basis for Tibetan nationalism rests clearly on the fact that Tibet was recently an independent country’, though the PRC’s central administration does assert that activism in the region is the unequivocal result of ‘imperialist instigation’, for Britain, Russia and the United States have each had their turn in the exhortation of Tibetan separatism (Alling 1997; Information Office 2005).

Clearly the existing literature is insufficient, as none has undertaken to provide a combined analysis of the common separatism of the two regions, nor develop a model which explains it. The failure of the current literature to address the phenomenon of separatism in more than one region of the People’s Republic of China has been previously identified by scholar Yuan-kang Wang. However, the resultant work sought, within the theoretical framework of peripheral nationalism, to determine why separatism has appeared in a certain one of China’s regions and not in another. It stopped short of asking how or why separatism should be manifesting itself concurrently in two of these regions.

Thus, a deficiency remains. The theoretical framework of peripheral nationalism, which has proven to be effective for these purposes, will be employed here to propose a model which accounts for separatism occurring in both the Tibet Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Autonomous Region and not in other regions.

### *A Tri-Variable Model*

A comprehensive conceptualisation of peripheral nationalism necessarily arises as a prerequisite to its use as a theoretical framework. Therefore, the following brief review of Hechter's nationalism typologies is provided as logical context for the theoretical framework, and it should be noted that the intent is not to explain the development or formation of nationalism, but rather to demonstrate its existence.

Hechter (2000) stipulates that, although variation among nationalist movements has been widely recognised, and further, that considerable attention has been paid to the identification and categorisation of these variations, the approach to this process must be analytical, and not normative:

If nationalism is collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit, then a simple analytic typology of

nationalism flows directly out of this definition. Further, this typology helps account for the normative differences between types of nationalism.

Hechter thus arrives at four types of nationalism: state-building, irredentist, unification and peripheral.

State-building nationalism is a culturally inclusive, security-driven form for which homogenisation is paramount. Often, this is the central government's 'attempt to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories in a given state', though it may also appear as the eviction or extirpation of the populations of these territories. Integration of neighbouring regions populated by 'co-nationals' is the mark of the expansive irredentist strain. Unification nationalism is culturally exclusive, and occurs with the consolidation of culturally unvaried but politically partitioned regions into a coincidence of cultural and political domination.

Finally, peripheral nationalism 'occurs when a culturally distinctive territory resists incorporation into an expanding state, or attempts to secede and set up its own government...Often this type of nationalism is spurred by the very efforts of state-building nationalism described above' (Hechter 2000).

Peripheral nationalism itself has grown into two distinct schools of theory: [One] theory focuses on economically advanced regions and attributes peripheral nationalism to the noncongruence between political leadership and economic dynamism in ethnically distinct areas... [The other] theory deals with backward regions and presupposes industrialism as the driving force of nationalism (Wang 2001).

Upon discovery of the literature deficiency mentioned above (namely, a theory which addresses separatism, or lack thereof, in more than one region of the People's Republic), Yuan-kang Wang sought to establish why Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region has experienced such a high incidence of peripheral nationalism, whereas Guangdong province has had none. In applying existing theories of peripheral nationalism to the two regions in question, Wang found that the two schools of peripheral nationalism theory were inadequate for answering the research question: 'They are tailored either to wealthy or poor regions, but not both. This restriction to a great extent reduces the applicability of both theories' (Wang 2001).

Wang subsequently proposed a new model of peripheral nationalism with two key variables: national identity and elite status. The scholar contends that a strong local national identity combined with a lack of local elite representation in central government will produce a high probability for 'secessionism'. In testing the model on the regions in question, Wang found confirmation: Xinjiang, with a strong ethnic identity and with limited elite representation, demonstrates a strong tendency toward peripheral nationalism. Guangdong, to the contrary, which

possesses a strong local identity but is well represented in high-level central government, exhibits a very low tendency toward separatism (Wang 2001).

While Wang's model does well to explain variations in the probability of nationalism among regions which differ only in terms of level of economic development, it substitutes one error for another in omitting the economic factor completely. An integral component of modern *minzu* (national minority) policy in the PRC is the attempt to stifle 'splittism' with development: 'The central assumption of this approach is that, if the government can deliver economic growth and well-being to... ethnic minorities, ethnic separatist tendencies will diminish'; '[e]conomic development there is presumed to eventually be capable of achieving the political loyalty of [Tibetans and Uighurs] to China' (Clarke 2003; Smith 2004). Indeed, the PRC's central government has made great gains in the development of its 'backwards' provincial-level units, a fact which shall be fully illustrated later.

Over the last fifteen years, in fact, the Tibet and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Regions have become economically dynamic. And yet, to the chagrin of the Chinese government, ethnic tensions have indubitably not been smothered. The central argument of this work seeks to rationalise these facts within a given theoretical framework and subsequently to quantify their international implications. These contentions rely on the assertion that the political and economic measures which have conspired to create development in these regions and the development itself may be characterised as 'non-engaging'. A 'non-engaging' economic initiative is defined as one which has been imposed rather than negotiated, and which is designed to benefit the centre rather than the region. It is important to note that a non-engaging economic policy may afflict both developed and non-developed peripheries, e.g., a centrally-imposed economic policy may in fact produce development, though it does not engage the periphery group in question.

The existing dichotomous schools of peripheral nationalism theory are incapable of explaining the persistence of separatism in Tibet and Xinjiang despite their increasing economic dynamism, whereas Wang's model circumscribes economic development entirely. A new model is thus proposed which seeks to explain coincidental separatism appearing in China's western autonomous regions and not in other Chinese provincial-level units, without ignoring the phenomenon of western economic development. Wang's model is qualified with an additional factor, that of economic engagement, to create a tri-variable account of peripheral nationalism in the People's Republic of China.

Wang's work affirms that '[b]oth elite status and national identity must work together to generate enough support for nationalist movements' (Wang 2001). The model proposed here confirms this assertion, while reincorporating the economy of the peripheral region. The new model

predicts that regions with a strong ethnic identity (ethnonationalism), weak local elite affiliation with the centre, and a non-engaging economic policy will manifest a strong tendency toward separatist nationalism. The three variables are henceforth considered and accordingly expounded.

### Elite/Government Representation

Wang provides that peripheral nationalism is affected by elite status because, '[f]or the peripheral population, having an effective voice at the centre ensures that their interests will not be ignored, and creates a feeling of belonging to the whole nation' (Wang 2001). Our investigation of the *minzu quyue zizhi* system of regional ethnic autonomy revealed that Chinese autonomy law specifies *minzu* representation in local and national government, though it does not extend this guarantee to membership in the Chinese Communist Party, wherein the vast majority of state power is vested.

The CCP is comprised of four bodies with an inverse size to power correlation, i.e., the smaller (and more exclusive) the body, the greater the power. In order of decreasing magnitude, they are: The National Party Congress, with more than 1,500 members; the Central Committee, with approximately 300 members; the Political Bureau, 14 to 24 members; and the potent Standing Committee, with a mere four to six members (Wang 2001).

Tibetans and Uighurs have not only struggled with the shortcomings of regional autonomy law at the local level of governance, but have also been chronically under-represented in the Communist Party, which exerts an influence over Chinese administration unobvious in PRC legislation. This phenomenon has been observed in the Tibet Autonomous Region by the International Commission of Jurists (1997):

The actual extent to which Tibetans control their own affairs is ... circumscribed, however, due to the centralized dominance of the CCP, and the exclusion of Tibetans from meaningful participation in regional and local administration. When Tibetans are in positions of nominal authority, they are often shadowed by more powerful Chinese officials. Every local organ is shadowed by a CCP committee or 'leading group', which does not function in keeping with concepts of autonomy.

The CCP's opposition to religion has proven an effective deterrent to membership among Uighurs and Tibetans. The Party's 1996 communique made this policy clear: 'Communist party members and party cadres are Marxist materialists and atheists. They shall not believe in any religion or take part in religious activities' (in Mackerras 2001). Party membership in the Tibet and Xinjiang regions is not, however, nonexistent.

During the mid and late 1990s, there were approximately 60,000 Tibetan Communist Party members in the TAR (Xu 1998). The same period saw 95,800 members in Xinjiang, 37.37 percent (35,800) of which were minorities (Mackerras 2001). This percentage has hovered at its current position for nearly two decades. In 1987, 38.4 percent of party members in Xinjiang were non-Han, and in 1994, the ratio had fallen slightly to 36.7 percent. However, it should be noted that non-Hans accounted for a significantly greater proportion of the population of Xinjiang (well over today's 60 percent) during these periods. One scholar notes: 'Over time the increasing numbers of Hans have made it easier to justify Han predominance in government' (Bovingdon 2004).

Party members must, however, be distinguished from cadres, or persons in positions of actual (or alleged) local authority. The CCP selects exclusively sympathetic minority cadres who have demonstrated a willingness to propagate CCP objectives. Even so, virtually all positions of factual authority are appropriated for in-migrated Hans (Bovingdon 2004). Ethnic minorities in the Tibet and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions occupy many cadre positions at the village and township levels, yet an extremely small number advance to positions in the central administration. 'Moreover, the few [ethnic minorities] in higher governmental posts ... are seen not as advocates for their fellow [ethnic minorities] but as collaborators in Han rule' (Hastings 2005). Between 1957 and 1992, a mere five Uighurs advanced to become members of the CCP Central Committee (Wang 2001). Six members of the current Central Committee are Tibetans, though there has never been a Tibetan party secretary (Sautman 2005). The single historical Uighur member of the Political Bureau, Saifudin Azizov, was nevertheless an alternate member (Wang 2001).

The proportion of ethnic minority cadres in Xinjiang reached its height in 1965. Of 190,000 total cadres in Xinjiang at this time, 106,000 (55.8 percent) were minorities, though ethnic minorities comprised over 80 percent of the population of the region. During the Cultural Revolution, the percentage plummeted and has never again approached its historical zenith. From 1966 to 1976, 99,000 of the 106,000 minority cadres were dismissed from their positions (McMillen 1979). During the Reform Era, 100,000 minority cadres were instated, some of whom were returnees, some of whom novices. The total number of minority cadres increased to 181,860 nearly twice that in 1965 yet the proportion of minorities to the whole fell to 43.1 percent (Bovingdon 2004). The real numbers of total cadres and minority cadres have continued to rise, though the ratios have remained relatively stable: In 1997, 312,000 of the 639,000 total cadres in Xinjiang were minorities. Thus, 48.83 percent of the cadre positions are filled by the ethnic minorities which represent 61.58 percent of the population (Mackerras 2001).

Tibetans appear to be somewhat better represented: There are 37,000 Tibetan cadres in the TAR. These 37,000 constitute 66.6 percent of the total cadres in Tibet, 71.7 percent at the regional

level and 74.8 percent at the county level. Representatives to district and county level People's Congresses are 95 percent minority in the TAR, and representatives to the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region are 82 percent minority (Information Office 2005).

On the whole, as one author writes: 'The [ethnic minorities] in [Xinjiang and Tibet] have little voice in day to day affairs of the region, and even less in determining the region's long-term political destiny' (Moneyhon 2004). In the cases of the Tibet and Xinjiang regions, peripheral elite affiliation with the core state is quite weak, as can be seen in their very limited experience with the four essential bodies of the Chinese Communist Party and their lack of representation in governance above the local level.

## National Identity

### **The Uighur Nation**

The Uighur identity originated in the eighth century with the nomadic inhabitants of the steppes of the Xinjiang region (Yom 2003). The importance of this identity was negligible until the early twentieth century, when it was embraced by an array of Xinjiang peoples, including the Taranchi, Kazak, Kirghiz, Tatar and Uzbek. The common identity was thence utilised in initial struggles for independence of the region, such as those of the First and Second Turkestan Republics (Wang 2001). During the years of political transition into the communist era, the People's Republic institutionalised the identity in its autonomy legislation and *minzu* policies (Zhu and Blachford 2005). The Uighurs became one of ten officially recognised Islamic national minorities (Hastings 2005). Today there are 8.7 million Uighur inhabitants of the Xinjiang region; they comprise 47 percent of the region's population and with that the largest part (Yom 2003). Conservative estimates place the Xinjiang Uighur population at 8.4 million (2000 PRC census), with an additional population of 300,000 in Kazakhstan (as of 1993); ca. 90,000 in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (officially 37,000 in 1998); 3,000 in Afghanistan; and 1,000 in Mongolia (according to a 1982 estimate). Uighurs have also immigrated to other countries, particularly Turkey, Australia, and Germany.

The modern Uighur is ethnically Turkic and Muslim, though the group is a heterogeneous one, riddled with internal divisions of ethnicity, religion and history (Rudelson 1997). Despite this diversity, Uighurs are identified, and identify themselves, as distinct from the Han Chinese majority and other *minzu* nationalities. Outward manifestations of this discrete identity are evident in the physical appearance of the Uighurs, which differs quite obviously from that of the Han Chinese (Hastings 2005).

Ethnonationalism among Uighurs draws more heavily from history and ethnic identity than from religion, for the former predates the latter (Mackerras 2001). Uighurs demonstrate a particularly strong emotional attachment to their common territory, Xinjiang, which they overwhelmingly perceive as their native land. In a survey, 91.3 percent of Uighurs indicated that they are proud to be residing in the Xinjiang region (Yee 2005). The modern Uighur regards himself not merely as a relative to the nomadic steppe folk of the eighth century, but also as a descendant of the region's Tarim Basin indigenous peoples (Moneyhon 2004).

In addition to a distinct visual aspect, the Uighur nation may be distinguished by its use of the Uighur language, a derivative of the Taranchi Russian dialect. For eight to eleven million speakers in Xinjiang, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan, Uighur is a native language and lingua franca. As such, it is used 'in a greater number of social domains than any other language in the area: the home, the marketplace, street and business signs, the media, and in many schools, besides being an official language of governments and courts' (Dwyer 2005).

A member of the Altaic linguistic family, Uighur (also referred to as New-Uighur) is closely related to the Uzbek language. The two are classified together in the south-eastern or Uighur-Chagatai branch of the Turkic languages Altaic subfamily. While the Arabic script was initially employed in the transcription of the Uighur spoken language and continues to be used informally in Xinjiang, a new orthography was adopted in 1930 which modified the Latin alphabet. Likewise, Uighur speakers in the Soviet Republics adopted a modified Cyrillic alphabet in 1947 (Crystal 1987). 'Uyghur [sic] thus has representative status for the minority languages of Xinjiang, just as Tibetan is the flagship language for greater Tibet' (Dwyer 2005).

The Uighur nation has maintained common religion since its origin: A primitive shamanism was shared by the indigenous oasis peoples of ancient Xinjiang. Though the religion varied throughout the centuries, its commonality did not. Zoroastrianism in 400 BC, Buddhism in 100 BC, Taoism in AD 500, and finally Iranian Manicheism in AD 700 enjoyed prevalence in Xinjiang (Information Office 2003). Three centuries later, the Uighur nation adopted and adapted Islam, and incorporated attributes of the pre-existing common belief sets into a unique interpretation of its current national religion. Islam has thus come to represent an integral part of the Uighur identity, 'though not necessarily the dominant characteristic' (Shichor 2005).

Only in recent years has the Uighur national identity come to be equated exclusively with that nation's Islamism. Post-Mao reform provided an alleviation of the religious repression which typified the Cultural Revolution, and consequently allowed an Islamic revival in Xinjiang. The resurgence of Islam brought with it a reassertion of the Uighur identity, which could be seen not only in the rapid construction of hundreds of mosques, but also in increasing resistance to

assimilation. Uighurs shed their 'Han' dress, shunned the Chinese language, and even refused the implementation of a common Chinese time zone (Wang 2001).

The most significant of these reform-era identity trends, however, may have been the irreversible amalgamation of Uighur identity and Islam. Mackerras (2001) writes: 'Uygurs [sic] have said to me, "I am Muslim because I am Uygur", whether they follow Islamic rules or not'. It must be noted that, despite a modern emphasis on the Islamic aspect of Uighur identity, one must not mistake the ethnonationalist struggle in Xinjiang for a religious one. Indeed, Islam has provided inspiration for moderation in Uighur opposition to the Chinese state, and Uighur religious leaders have emerged as proponents of temperance (Vicziány 2003).

Yee's survey of ethnic consciousness concludes Uighur identity is not only strong, but stronger than Han identity, and reveals that 88.7 percent of Uighurs surveyed are proud of this identity. The Uighur national identity has indeed proven to be considerable enough to qualify it for use in the tri-variable model.

### **The Tibetan Nation**

While Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan language have been identified as the two most elemental properties of Tibetan identity, the Tibetan nation does exhibit additional objective criteria for ethnonationalism (Dorjee and Giles 2005). The modern Tibetans are considered, and consider themselves to be, descendants of proto-Tibetan 'mountain rearing' peoples (including Tubo, Tyarung, I, Nasi and Moso tribes) who inhabited the pre-historical Himalayan plateaux (Gernet 1982).

Dorjee and Giles (2005) provide: 'Tibetans construct their identity primarily through Buddhist narratives of their land, origins of their race, leaderships, literature, language and ritual practices.' This particular attachment to the Tibetan common territory differs somewhat from that documented above in the Uighur nation, in that the latter derives its connection to the territory from an oral (intuited) and factual history. The Tibetan national territory and myth of origin is considerably more subjective and non-rational; it is a derivation, in fact, of Tibetan religion.

Tibetan ethnonationalism lends religious sanctity to its homeland, the 'divine environment (*Dag zhing*) of Chenrezig (*Aryd Avalokiteshvara*), a Buddha of Great Compassion'. Likewise, where the Uighur nation asserts itself as the descendant of the indigenous peoples of its common territory, the Tibetan narrative maintains that its nation 'originated from the mating of a Bodhisattva monkey and an ogress at Zothang in the Yarlung valley of Tibet, the cradle of Tibetan civilization' (Dorjee and Giles 2005). Tibet is thus the simultaneous spiritual and temporal common territory of the Tibetan nation.

Like the Uighur nation, Tibetans use a namesake language. Evidence indicates that categorisation of the Tibetan language is in some respects a rather difficult enterprise. Scholarly publication points unanimously to its association with the massive Sino-Tibetan (ST) linguistic family, which claims more constituent languages than any other class, including the Indo-European. However, scholarly writing diverges at this juncture. Whereas Chinese scholars interpret the ST family as comprising Chinese, Tibeto-Burman, Tai and Hmong-Mien (Miao Yao) linguistic sub-classifications, the reading in Western circles is much more exclusive, and allows only for the Chinese and Tibeto-Burman groups (Matisoff 1991). Scholars do concur that the Tibetan language is one of more than 300 documented languages within the Tibeto-Burman sub-classification.

The two principal forms of the Tibetan script are derived from a seventh-century modification of the Eastern Turkestanic Gupta, which in turn originated in the Indian Khotanese alphabet. The modern manifestation of the Tibetan script is most readily compared to an abridged rendering of the Indian Deva-Nagari orthography (Diringer 1948).

Finally, the Tibetan nation's common religion has over the last decades risen to international prominence. Like its common territory, Tibet's historical leadership has been at once spiritual and temporal, and demonstrates the pervasive nature of Tibetan Buddhism in every aspect of that nation and its members. Indeed, the present leader of the Tibetan nation, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, is believed to be a manifestation of the Buddha of Great Compassion, for whom Tibetan common territory is a holy environs. Since its introduction to Tibet in the fourth century AD, Buddhism has been adapted to the native shamanism of the proto-Tibetan tribal peoples and to the political hierarchy of the Tibetan state (Dorjee and Giles 2005).

Objective criteria for national identity have been applied to the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions to determine their eligibility for the tri-variable model. It has been shown that both regions exhibit the characteristics of ethnonationalism and therefore produce strong national identity. The two variables, elite representation and national identity, have been examined for the cases of Xinjiang and Tibet, and findings are thus far positive for the model's predictions in respect to the emergence of separatist nationalism. In closing this section, we look to Connor (1993) for a final note to confirm the significance of ethnonationalism:

... [F]or most people the sense of loyalty to one's nation and to one's state do not coincide: they often compete for the allegiance of the individual. For example... a Tibetan nationalism [in conflict] with a Chinese patriotism... We know from the comparative study of nationalism that when the two loyalties are perceived as being in irreconcilable conflict that is to say, when people feel they must choose between them nationalism customarily proves the more potent.

We now turn to the final variable, that of economic engagement.

## Economic Engagement

A 'non-engaging' economic initiative has been herein defined as one which has been imposed rather than negotiated, and which is designed to benefit the centre rather than the region. To this definition, a must has been added: Such policies may result in development or 'positive' economic effects for the region in question, though they fail nonetheless to engage the periphery group. The following sub-sections seek to provide evidence that the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous have been afflicted by non-engaging economic policies, and thus exhibit the final component of the tri-variable model for peripheral nationalism.

Since the genesis of the Reform Era in the late 1970s, China has dramatically reinvented itself as an integrated member of the global economy and potential economic superpower. The reform policies of Deng Xiaoping and his successors have engineered a radical liberalisation of the Chinese economy through market competition, power decentralisation and private property authorisation (Yueyao 2001). Beijing has adapted the market-driven model to its command-and-control economy by promoting international trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) with considerable success. The state's high-technology and private sectors are booming, and it has attracted an average of US\$500 billion per year in foreign direct investment, making it one of the world's largest recipients. Real gross domestic product (GDP) has leaped from US\$106 billion in 1970 to US\$1.3 trillion in 2003. Population control and economic liberalisation have worked in conjunction to make great gains in GDP per capita: In 2000, this figure reached US\$980, and thus exceeded Deng Xiaoping's goal of US\$800 by the close of the twentieth century (Hale and Hale 2003).

The neoliberal and private-sector friendly strategy for international economic engagement which China has embraced since the Reform Era has thus proven quite effective. Yet, application of the same schema to internal development in lieu of the socialist and re-distributive approach of the Maoist administration has been proven to aggravate disparities and inspire ethnic unrest (Chua 2003). Analysts have noted that, specific to its western autonomous regions, China's economic liberalisation policies '[are] not simply based on opening the economy or reducing the state's involvement. Rather, it appears much more like a carefully crafted plan to restrain [ethnic] nationalism... and secure its position there' (Alling 1997). Indeed, predictions have surfaced that greater minority control of regional autonomies would create a subsequent desire for greater political control.

Regional development strategies in the People's Republic since the mid-1990s have focused on rebuilding the integrity of the national market economy, which suffered greatly with the uneven development strategy of the 1980s. During this decade, Deng Xiaoping's comparative advantage-based strategy perpetuated a coast-oriented development pattern and neglected the interior and western regions.

The particular implementation of Deng's regional development scheme serves to illuminate the lack of peripheral nationalism in the provincial-level units which were developed during the 1980s. The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) applied a plan of development to the coastal regions which decentralised economic authority by improving the technical levels and management of enterprises, and affording them more autonomy. This allowed enterprises to disengage the state from various aspects of their operation. For instance, the customary assignment of employees by the state labour bureaux was superseded by an independent hiring-by-examination process. In addition, the regional populations were given the opportunity to self-motivate: 'In sharp contrast to the Cultural Revolution period, official policy under the new strategy [stressed] material incentives over moral exhortation or social and political pressure as a means of inducing productive effort...' (Lippit 1983). Thus, the populations of regions developed during this period (today's economically advanced coastal provinces) were engaged in the local process of development. Their economic engagement has endured to the present, for they were effectively consigned the economies of their respective regions following development.

Nonetheless, in response to the asymmetry of the 1980s, the central government has begun to re-emphasise the pattern of balanced development of the Maoist era. To this end, Beijing has adopted a number of 'west-leaning' economic policies, including favourable rates for land lease, diminution of taxation and the 'Go West' campaign for in-migration of Han Chinese, facilitated by extensive development of infrastructure in the western provinces (Bovingdon 2004). China's reform-era economic policies specific to the Xinjiang and Tibet regions and their respective effects are documented below to demonstrate their non-engaging nature.

### **Non-engagement in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region**

Beijing adopted a development strategy in the mid-1990s for its western provincial-level units which could be examined according to its four major elements: Centralisation of economic policy-making, enormous investment in development of infrastructure, increased political and economic internationalisation, and Han in-migration (Clarke 2003). The decentralisation theme of the 1980s and the Sixth Five Year Plan, which engaged the regional populations in development, have unfortunately been deserted. The consequences of this are detailed below.

It should be noted that Xinjiang has been on a path of economic development since its liberation in 1949. The Maoist-socialist era in Xinjiang witnessed regional GDP growth; extensive development of rail, road and air infrastructure; industrialisation; and increased agricultural productivity. Employment opportunities were provided on an unprecedented scale by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and massive central government subsidies improved the average standard of living. Xinjiang's regional GDP per capita in 1952, at the dawn of the People's Republic, was a mere 170 yuan. By 1960 this figure had doubled, and reached 314 yuan. Despite a drop in the mid-1970s to 229 yuan, the overall increase has been maintained. There were, however, disadvantages attached to the economic policies of Mao's central administration: The regional development it provided was uneven, and brought with it environmental deterioration and political and economic isolation (Bovingdon 2004).

The trend toward regional development has been perpetuated in the Reform Era, as liberalisation policies have encouraged the growth of a private sector, sanctioned transnational trade, and allowed specialisation via agricultural reform. In the year 2000, GDP per capita reached a record 1,699 yuan. Certain economic disadvantages have appeared in the Reform Era as well: 600,000 jobs were lost in Xinjiang between 1995 and 2000 as a result of SOE reforms, and non-Hans have struggled to find employment in the burgeoning private enterprises (Bovingdon 2004).

Indeed, despite 'a growing Uygur [sic] middle class and business community', minority employment in the new private sector has aroused perceptions of non-engagement in Xinjiang. Hiring practices have left Uighurs with the impression that their Han Chinese competitors are often awarded the better jobs, and that the predominantly Han employers dismiss Uighur applicants as less qualified and possibly less civilised (Mackerras 2001). A visible disparity of living standards serves to exacerbate these tensions: Statistically, the *minzu* population in Xinjiang is less educated, and suffers a lower life expectancy and higher unemployment and poverty rates than its Han counterpart (Yom 2003). Uighurs have lost to Hans in the Reform Era, and evidence indicates that the gap will only widen (Bovingdon 2004).

Even in the face of figures such as these, some scholars have concluded: '[O]ne of the biggest problems is that a tendency is developing among some Uygurs to want the...economic gaps to grow, so that they can feel greater resentments and find grounds for rebellion against the Han and against China' (Mackerras 2001). The assessment of the *minzu* population of Xinjiang is not simply that the local Han Chinese enjoy more fortunate conditions, but additionally that this has been achieved by their own exploitation (Mackerras 2001). In a survey, 27.3 percent of Uighurs cited 'slow economic development' as the major factor which inhibits national solidarity in

Xinjiang. An additional 13 percent cited ‘inequality of economic interests between nationalities’ (Yee 2005).

This perception of discrimination is pervasive, despite the effects of preferential policies for minorities – *youhui zhengce* – which provide affirmative action regulations for employment. One study found that an educated *minzu* in Xinjiang is more likely to attain an elite position than a Han of equal qualification (Sautman 1998). While hard evidence exists that discrepancies and discrimination plague the newly privatised and liberalised economy of the XUAR, such evidence likewise indicates that these circumstances have been exaggerated by the minority population. The Reform Era opening of China’s (and Xinjiang’s) borders to international trade has served to promote this phenomenon, as it has allowed the region’s minority identity to turn away from the Chinese and toward the Muslim Central Asian community (Moneyhon 2004).

Central government infrastructure development projects have also failed to engage the Uighur nation. Between 1991 and 1995, Beijing invested more than 33 billion yuan in 78 projects in Xinjiang, including a railroad, optic-fibre cables, coal and gold mines, electric power and ethylene plants. Pipelines race furiously year after year to link the region with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (Pham 2006). During 1995 alone, the central administration invested 9.5 billion yuan in thirty projects in the XUAR, and it has plans to invest more than 900 billion yuan in fixed assets in Xinjiang between 2000 and 2010 (Yueyao 2001). Such development has exceedingly little positive effect on the region’s national minority inhabitants, however; governmental projects employ Han Chinese in-migrants rather than Uighur or other Xinjiang minority workers (Moneyhon 2004). And ‘despite the subsidies and tax rebates, most of the profits from energy and mineral exploitation in Xinjiang enrich Beijing rather than the region’ (Bovingdon 2004).

The seemingly endless supply of Han in-migrant workers to the region may in fact be the most contested of the central administration’s development policies in Xinjiang. Hastings has identified four types of official Han in-migrants: ‘[T]ransferred work units, demobilized People’s Liberation Army troops, people rejoining families already in Xinjiang, and employees of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps’ (Hastings 2005). Today’s XUAR is populated by 8.7 million Uighurs, who represent roughly 47 percent; 7.5 million Han Chinese, approximately 41 percent; and myriad additional *minzu* groups, including Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Mongolians, and others who comprise the remainder (Yom 2003). In 1949, the demographic was radically different: Han Chinese represented a mere five percent of the region’s population. By 1978, the figures had reached a level comparable to the modern population ratios after the Chinese Communist Party had moved three million Han Chinese into the XUAR (Bovingdon 2004). The number has continued to rise, and has thus implicitly justified the increasing marginalisation and

lack of engagement of *minzu* groups in Xinjiang, despite general economic advancement and development in the region. This pattern of non-engagement is strikingly similar to that which has occurred in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

### **Non-engagement in Tibet Autonomous Region**

Just as in the Xinjiang region, the Tibet region has been on a course of continued development since its liberation in 1950, a fact which has been particularly evident in the years since reform. Between 1980 and 1994, the TAR witnessed a 120 percent increase in output. Growth rates were consistently extraordinary throughout the early 1990s, and reached 10 percent in the late 1990s. In 1994, output for the region was 4.23 billion yuan, an 8.6 percent increase from 1993, when output stood at 3.65 billion yuan (Alling 1997). Between 2002 and 2005, the GDP of the Tibet region grew by 12 percent annually (Hoh 2005c). Despite enormous growth and development, discrepancies among the national minority and Han populations have invariably arisen, starkly uneven development has plagued the minority population, and Tibetans have been perhaps even less engaged in the economic policies of the central government than national minorities in the Xinjiang region.

In 1987, average rural income in the region was 361 yuan. The state sector employed 95 percent of Han in-migrants in the TAR, while 90 percent of Tibetans lived without income in abject poverty. In an effort to alleviate the enduring problem of rural poverty in Tibet, the central administration provides the region with an average of 1.5 billion yuan per year in welfare subsidies. By the 1990s, some Tibetans had benefited from development, though most had not. Between 1980 and 1993 private enterprises in the TAR increased from 489 to 41,830; the absolute majority of these were Han (Xu 1998). Today, 70 percent of urban employment of minorities is in the state sector, and vocational training has been provided to urbanising Tibetans (Sautman 2005). Since 1992, urban annual income per capita in the TAR has risen by 75 percent, though rural income per capita remains less than 20 percent that of urban income (Hoh 2004).

Beijing has invested heavily in the development of the Tibet Autonomous Region, though apparently not to the extent that it has done so in the Xinjiang region. The central government's total investment in the Tibet region since 1950 is roughly 20 billion yuan, 16 billion of this in subsidies and four billion in construction projects (Information Office 2005).

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway, a 1,118 kilometres line which links the Qinghai Province city of Golmud to the Tibetan capital, is perhaps the most illustrative and timely example of Beijing's investment in, and its future plans for, the Tibet Autonomous Region. The total cost of the project is estimated at US\$3.2 billion (a figure, incidentally, three times that spent on healthcare and

education in the TAR in the fifty years since liberation). The railway is designed to expedite Tibet's economic development. The Chinese central administration indicates that it will produce US\$500 million in income as it carries annually five million tons of goods in and nearly three million tons out of the Tibet region (Hoh 2005b).

The central administration's development projects have done little to engage the Tibetan people, however, as they have been imposed upon them and have been designed to benefit the core state. One author notes:

But much of the development has been geared to Chinese, rather than Tibetan, interests. Roads have been upgraded and new ones built to enable the army... And telecommunications have been brought in to improve military efficiency. If Tibetans have benefited, it has mostly been by association or coincidence (Bond 1999).

Indeed, workers on the new Qinghai-Tibet Railway are nearly exclusively Han in-migrants from Qinghai Province. One Tibetan villager told a reporter of initial hopes for engagement on the railway:

The radio said that we would be able to make 50 yuan per day working on the railroad. We were very happy and thought that we could make some money. But only five or six people got work, and they were only paid 15-20 yuan. It is unfair, but we don't know where to complain (Hoh 2005c).

This type of alienation reverberates in the central administration's policy of Han in-migration to the Tibetan region. In May of 1984, 60,000 Han workers were recruited for transmigration into Tibet. Massive influxes such as these have created the extraordinary metamorphosis of Tibet's population. The population ratio in the former Tibetan Amdo Region, today a part of the Chinese Qinghai Province, is approximately 2.5 million Han Chinese to 750,000 Tibetans. In the proper territory of the Tibet Autonomous Region, there are seven and a half million Han Chinese and six million Tibetans (Dalai Lama 1990). This number stands in stark contrast to the 1.2 million Han inhabitants of Tibet recorded in the 1957 census (Gernet 1982). The policy of in-migration, 'the primary concern among educated Tibetans', continues unabated: The central administration has plans to expand the population of the Tibetan capital from 230,000 to 2.5 million, and the new railroad seems the perfect method by which to achieve such a goal (Hoh 2005c).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The previous sections of this paper have presented a new model for assessing separatist nationalism in the economically developing western autonomous regions of the People's Republic of China. The tri-variable theoretical account builds on existing theories of nationalism to predict that

peripheral regions with weak local elite affiliation with the core state, strong national identity (high incidence of ethnonationalism), and low engagement in local economic policy and/or development will manifest a strong tendency toward separatist nationalism. The immediate following sections provided empirical evidence for each of the three variables in the Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet Autonomous Regions.

This model satisfactorily explains why the specified peripheral regions of western China demonstrate separatist nationalism, in contrast to other Chinese provincial-level units and in the face of economic development. One research question which has remained unanswered, however, is the following: What are the international implications of this separatism? Too often, scholarly work here addresses exclusively the negative implications of regional separatism, employing terms such as ‘threats’, ‘vulnerabilities’, or ‘challenges’.

Prominent authors have argued that ethnic separatist nationalism is categorically incapable of causing the collapse of China. Examples include Vicziany (2003), who argues that, ‘it is evident that Uygur [sic] terrorism and other Uygur demands constitute no significant threat to the modern Chinese state’; Sugimoto (1993): ‘Tibetan and Uygur [sic] independence is unthinkable unless China undergoes a tectonic political upheaval similar to the one experienced by the former Soviet Union’; and Shichor (2005): ‘The existing internal and external challenge of Uyghur [sic] separatism and Islamic radicalism to Chinese rule in Xinjiang is, at best, marginal and, at worst, manageable’.

Sautman (2005) alone provides a caveat to this position: ‘While separatism in Tibet is unlikely to make China vulnerable to disintegration, regime collapse, ethnic violence or international isolation, Tibet entails costs and low-order vulnerabilities. Material costs include security forces beyond those needed to face off India's border armies and subsidies above those provided to less-problematic poor provinces... low-order vulnerabilities exist, including embarrassment, sporadic separatist protests, and “everyday resistance”’. In addition to these low-order vulnerabilities, Sautman points out perhaps the most serious implication of ongoing regional separatism in China’s west: The threat to its international standing.

Over the last two decades the world has witnessed not simply China’s course towards global economic integration, but also its march towards regional and global ascendance. It is the desire for a position as a global power which produces the greatest negative implication of separatism in China’s west: A state cannot vie for global power if its legitimacy is in question domestically. Put another way, ‘every major power needs at minimum to gain the perception that it has secured its own territory’ (Sautman 2005). It is in this manner that the ‘ethnic issue’ produces considerable

negative implications for the Chinese state. The peripheral nationalism of western China represents a significant stumbling block to the aspirations of that state.

Despite scholarly neglect, positive international implications of western nationalism for the Chinese state are both evident and substantial. These have appeared in the international engagement inspired by the challenge of containing separatism, for what began as a defensive measure has grown into a crucial regional alliance. The Shanghai Five was little more than a forum for Chinese elicitation of Central Asian cooperation in combating peripheral separatism at its genesis in the mid 1990s (Bovingdon 2004). Ten years later, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has solidified into an organisation of Central Asian political and economic cooperation. Also during that period, the People's Republic became Kazakhstan's fourth largest export market and its second largest import market, the third largest export market and largest import market for Kyrgyzstan, and the second largest export market and sixth largest import market for Uzbekistan. The SCO is likely to only expand in the immediate future. The July 2005 meeting of member states in the Kazakhstan capital Astana gave India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Iran observer status. Together, this group represents more than half the world population (Pham 2006).

Yet, it must be noted that this international engagement may bring with it an additional weakening of the legitimacy of the Chinese state. The drastic change in PRC policy embodied in its acceptance of international assistance in controlling separatism in Xinjiang and Tibet may in itself be compromising the validity of the state:

The meanings and implications for China's ethnic minority policy are multiple. The policy often conveys a signal to the domestic audience that it will take a hard-line approach to maintaining national unity and political stability. On the other hand, the policy also intends to demonstrate a strong 'sovereignty' principle to the international community so it understands that China will not accept any criticism which is deemed to be aimed at disintegration of the nation. It should be understood that this policy position is indispensable for China's claim of state legitimacy (Zhu and Blachford 2001).

China has recognised the capacity of its western regions to secure the perpetuation of its progression toward development, and has recently modified its economic policy to balance the economic activity of the established coastal provinces with those of the interior. The untapped resources of the central autonomous regions are a requisite component to sustained Chinese growth.

The PRC's minority population, which represents a mere 8.41 percent of the total, inhabits 64.3 percent of China's land area. This population resides atop the vast majority of China's natural resources, including 40 percent of the state's forests, oil, gas, minerals and precious metals, and 75 percent of its grasslands. 115 of 147 minerals in PRC are located in its northwest region, i.e. Xinjiang (Pham 2006). 13 copper belts (with a million tonnes reserve) and two cobalt deposits (a

reserve of 20,000 tonnes) were discovered during the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet railway (Hoh 2005a). China's economic advancement depends on its ability to access these resources and to attract the foreign direct investment which makes this possible (Zhu and Blachford 2001). Ethnic violence and separatist nationalism, will, at the very least, complicate the realisation of these goals. 'All [these regions'] potential to contribute to China's continued economic development will come to naught, however, without the resolution of outstanding regional conflicts and regional security issues' (Clarke 2003).

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has been primarily concerned with asking why the Tibet and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Regions have demonstrated such enduring separatist movements; why they continue to do so, even in the face of rapid local economic development aimed at the suppression of this activism; and whether predictions can be made for the future of separatist activism in a liberalised, internationalised and developed setting. These questions have been inspired by inadequacies in the existing literature, which has not attempted to examine the 'ethnic issue' as a western phenomenon, develop a model for its explication, nor evaluate the international and internal implications of western nationalism.

In providing an answer to these questions, a new model of peripheral nationalism has been proposed. This model integrates three variables, local elite affiliation with the core state, national identity and economic engagement, to determine the probability of separatist nationalism in a given peripheral region. Additionally, it has provided empirical evidence for the incidence of these categories in the Xinjiang and Tibet regions. Application of the new model to the empirical data found that both exhibit weak elite affiliation, strong national identity and weak economic engagement, and thus succeeded simultaneously in explaining the separatism common to the two regions and in making a prediction for its future.

The model predicts that the opposition to the Chinese state which has characterised the two regions will persist, despite economic liberalisation and development. The strategy of the Chinese central administration to smother ethnic unrest with regional development has proven ineffective, for the policies of development have failed to engage the minority nations. These policies have been imposed upon the autonomous regions in question, and have been designed with the centre as the main beneficiary. Furthermore, such non-engaging economic policies will inflame pre-existing separatism, as they serve to further alienate an already estranged nation.

Finally, and in light of the research data and the predictions of the model, this work has identified the implications of continuing peripheral nationalism in the autonomous regions of western China. Here again, the literature was found lacking as it analyses exclusively the negative implications for the Chinese state, and neglects what may be categorised as positive effects of separatist nationalism. It was found that, in addition to those conventionally cited negative implications – compromised state legitimacy and economic losses of various types – nationalism in the Xinjiang and Tibet regions has created a positive outcome for the People’s Republic in motivating international engagement and particularly the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It should be noted, however, that the unique geographical distribution of national minority groups in the PRC necessarily affords them a considerable ability to complicate China’s march toward economic development and world power.

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