MINORITY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN CHINA:
EXPLAINING DISCREPANCIES IN STATE RESPONSE

by

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The People’s Republic of China has long demonstrated significant variation in its treatment of the diverse ethnic and religious minority groups that exist within its borders. Specialists in Chinese Regional Studies, especially those whose research focuses on Chinese ethnic minorities, tend to attribute this discrepancy in policy to ingrained racism or Han-chauvinism within the state apparatus. In contrast, Political Scientists tend to hypothesize that the state varies its policies to respond to groups that show the potential to mobilize and pose a threat to state authority. Here, anticipated observations for each explanation are used to create two models that trace how 1) state racism and 2) perceived mobilization potential would result in the state instituting more repressive controls over a minority group. The critical distinction between the two explanations requires that state attacks (literal or figurative) be identified as either primarily symbolic or primarily strategic. Five cases from the Chinese Communist context are examined with reference to these models. Religious minority status is held as a constant among all the cases selected. Within the cases, variability is found in the levels of ethnic distinctiveness from the Han Chinese majority. While there are many minority groups that could have fit these criteria, the cases highlighted here are the Tibetan Buddhists, the Chinese Buddhists, the Uighur Muslims, the Hui (Chinese) Muslims, and the Falungong. It is concluded that in the first four cases, the strong correlation between levels of ethnic distinctiveness and levels of state repression suggests that state racism plays a significant role in informing state policy, the same does not hold true for the Falungong case, and once state attacks are further broken down into symbolic and strategic actions, there is strong evidence that both state racism and state fear of minority mobilization play a role in informing the Chinese state’s actions.
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Dedication

To my mother and father who have always encouraged me to pursue what makes me happy. And to Max, who shares in every aspect of my life, and whose love and support have buoyed me through graduate school.
Introduction

Both regional specialists and political scientists have observed a correlation between the ethnic distinctiveness of a given minority group and the severity with which the state responds to the challenges it may pose. Where such conflicts occur, regional specialists tend to attribute this trend to ingrained racism in the regime and majority population, linking a history of competition to the solidification of ethnic identities and inter-ethnic rivalries. For instance, Gardner Bovingdon makes the observation that competition for economic opportunities and cultural domination have resulted in hostility and confrontation between Chinese authorities and ethnic minorities in China.¹ Dru Gladney uses the term “Chinese colonialism” to communicate the significance of racial identities in shaping state policy in minority regions.²

In contrast, many political scientists look beyond the issue of racial or ethnic identity to explain incidents of state – minority conflict. Instead, they see the state’s decision to use force against minorities as the natural consequence of its sensitivity to the threat posed by the mobilization of any group that falls outside of the regime’s sphere of influence. They attribute the correlation between level of violence and ethnic distinctiveness, to the mobilization framework that is inherent to ethnic identities. An example of such thinking can be found in the work of Donald Horowitz. He states that lines of communication are needed within a group for it to coordinate for conflict, and that ethnicity perfectly supplies these.³

In order to contrast the regionalist and political science explanations, this paper examines five religious minorities in China, three ethnically Han, and two ethnically distinct from the Han. Through observation of the inner workings of each of these groups, and through an examination of their interactions with the Chinese state, I attempt to determine how state racism and group mobilization potential dictate the severity of each of these five state – minority conflicts.

The constitution of the People's Republic of China grants ethnic minorities and religious groups considerable freedom of association, practice and belief; however, the actions of the Chinese state do not always conform to its written guidelines, and there is little consistency of policy application amongst the fifty-six recognized ethnicities or five official religions. Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, ethnic minorities and religious groups have faced varying degrees of discrimination, repression, and attempted eradication. Groups that combine both ethnic and religious identities have endured some of the Chinese state’s most focused attacks. A correlation between ethnicity and state repression is readily observed by contrasting the CCP handling of Tibetan Buddhists to that of Chinese Buddhists, or in comparing the government policies regulating Uighur (Turkic) Muslims to those pertaining to Hui (Han) Muslims. In contrast to these, the Falungong stands out as an exception to the correlation between ethnicity and state use of repression. Falungong membership is almost entirely composed of Han Chinese, and since 1994 its organizations and practitioners have suffered sustained and often violent attacks by the Chinese government; this at a time when the Chinese state’s use of overt force has been in marked decline in its dealings with all other religious groups.
Evidently, state racism fails to explain the extreme force used by the state in the Falungong case; however, the Falungong does offer the opportunity to isolate mobilization from race and ethnicity and to examine how it informs state policy. In all five cases it is critical to be able to make observations that distinguish between the two proposed explanations. One way to do so is to identify the nature of the state’s repressive acts. Where attacks are primarily symbolic or showy in nature, we can assume that the policies informing such actions are influenced by racist perceptions internalized within the state. In contrast, if state attacks against the minority group are primarily strategic with little or no concern for the majority population’s awareness of the measures, than it can be assumed that actions have been in response to perceived mobilization threat.

This paper begins by outlining some of the ideas found in the current literature pertaining to ethnic and racial identities, mobilization, collective violence, and intrastate ethnic dynamics. While these themes are broadly applicable, they are primarily examined as they apply to the Chinese context. Next, hypothesized mechanisms for the two explanations examined here will be traced, and some of the distinguishing observable implications for each mechanism will be identified. This is followed by an examination of the Tibetan Buddhist, Uighur Muslim, Chinese Buddhist, Hui Muslim, and Falungong cases. For each case, the Chinese state’s response will be contrasted with the theoretical explanations of the earlier sections. Next, the Chinese cases are contrasted and

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4 The use of quantitative data relating to ethnic minorities and religious groups in the PRC is avoided, because of the difficulties of obtaining accurate observations. Government figures are often doctored, and academics’ attempts to collect data without eliciting state interference often result in serious inaccuracies. This avoidance of quantitative data common found in the work of regional specialists such as Bovingdon, 40 and Roal Birnbaum, “Buddhist China and the Centuries Turn,” Religion in China Today: The China Quarterly Special Issue. No. 3, edited by Daniel L. Overmeyer (New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 123.
implications of their experiences with the state considered. Finally, the potential for broader application of these explanations are presented.

Ethnic/National Identities and Intra-State Conflict: An Examination of the Literature

Recent decades have seen the rapid expansion of the literature examining questions of ethnicity, race, and nationalism, and their interplay with politics. Despite growing acceptance in the academic community of these identities' role as a significant mobilizing force within society, both remain ill-defined concepts that are more easily observed through group behaviour than predicted through the identification of preconditions. The melding of politics, history, anthropology, and sociology that has been essential to this research, has fuelled interdisciplinary regional studies, and informed the complex theoretical explanations that have been developed by area specialists to explain the phenomena that they observe.

A topic closely related to ethnicity and nationalism is the identification of the conditions that can catalyze violent confrontations between such groups. Understanding the mechanisms of these processes would have significant implications in many fields and, as such, has been the focus of scholarship from an array of disciplines. Key to these inter-group conflicts are the identities that bound and bind groups, and while ethnicity, race, and national identities are but three of many possible catalysts, the high proportion of violence in the last hundred years that has pitted ethnically, racially, or nationally defined interests against one another suggests that the links between these identities and violent conflict are significant. That being said, many of the theories developed to explain inter-group conflicts acknowledge that equally salient identities may be formed around
other characteristics such as religion, territory, language, or common economic interests. In so doing, they stress the mobilization of the identity as key rather than the nature of the identity itself.

This section begins by outlining the concepts of ethnicity and nation as they are used here. The identity formation inherent in these concepts is then examined as it relates to mobilization potential and construction of racialized relations. I then proceed to examine different understandings of collective violence, particularly hypotheses concerning mobilization of actors to unite and act, and conditions that catalyze open conflict.

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson explains how collective identities are born out of the ability to communicate *en masse* among those who are being groomed to share that single identity. Such communication allows the group to effectively grow together through shared experiences and perspective. While Anderson particularly emphasizes print media as the break through that expanded the boundaries of group identity from community to nation, other networks such as religion, culture, or economic organization can allow comparable collective identities to emerge. Anderson acknowledges the role that institutions such as the church played in the formation of early collective identities. While he sees the *nation* as replacing older identities such as religion, in countries such as China where many ethnic minorities are in large part defined by their religion, these older forms of identification have retained their salience. As a result, it is possible to superimpose Anderson’s basic concept of mass communication onto many different kinds of group identities and frameworks.
Anderson defines the *nation* as "...an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." The impact of Anderson’s book on the field is evident from the use of the term “imagined” in nearly all subsequent definitions of nation. A classic example is Leong Liew’s definition, which states that the nation is "...a community of people who have the same legal rights and obligations in a demarcated territory that is exclusive to members of that community and is recognized as such both inside and outside the territory, and who share an ‘imagined identity’ on that basis." Anderson’s use of the term “political community” and Liew’s “demarcated territory” both suggest a political structure shaping the communities of which they speak. In contrast, ethnicity requires no such political framework. For the purposes of this paper, the terms *ethnicity* and *race* will be used, while *nation* will be largely omitted; however, it is assumed that many of the characteristics that Anderson has outlined for the nation, are also applicable to ethnic and racial identities.

There is significant variation in the definitions of ethnicity. Most scholars create a definition that highlights the traits that best support their particular theory. However, the key theme that runs through all definitions of ethnicity is a belief in a shared genetic lineage. For example, Donald Horowitz and Anthony Smith both suggest that ethnicity is defined as the largest group that believes it shares a common ancestry. Following from this assumption ethnicity can either incorporate or exclude such traits as language, culture, religion, a common place of origin, and a shared historical narrative. While

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7 Horowitz, 17.
family or clan ties would also be strengthened by these shared traits and experiences, ethnicity’s large unit size imbues it with a more recognizable presence and identity in the community of “others” that exist around it.⁸

The literature on ethnic identity is full of theorized preconditions that herald the outbreak of ethnically based conflicts. Some of these preconditions include material hardship or competition for limited resources⁹, self-awareness of the ethnicity as a bounded group¹⁰, and failure or severing of communication pathways between communities¹¹. Cleavages that divide society into ethnic nationalities can result in a range of majority-minority dynamics. While ethnicity and race are not interchangeable terms, the mindset of participants in specifically ethnic conflict¹² can resemble racism. For that reason, the term “racism” is used in this paper to connote the ethnic and racial manifestations of the phenomenon. Where friction emerges between groups, or between groups and the state, it is generally agreed that an ethnic dimension is likely to increase the severity of the conflict.

The concept of identity formation through some form of mass communication, regardless of whether that identity is ethnic, racial, or religious, is closely linked to the idea of mobilization. Mobilization or group coordination all require some means of mass

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¹² This is meant to suggest that both ethnic groups engaged in the conflict are considered to be of the same race.
communication and the frameworks used in the fostering of collective identities can apply. Where frameworks are rooted in a society and are able to take hold, social movements may emerge that can challenge the actions or even mandate of the state. In his book *Power of Movement*, Sidney Tarrow examines the role of social movements in shaping the political environment, and traces their trajectory in the broader category of “contentious collective action”\(^{13}\). He sees social movements as the product of sturdy mobilization frameworks that solidify the common identity of the membership and allow them to challenge opponents\(^ {14}\).

In his recent book *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Charles Tilly concludes that anticipating where and when a point of contention between two groups will erupt into open physical confrontation is complex and “depends on unpredictable combinations of small causes”\(^ {15}\). Tilly also stresses the need to understand the significance of intrastate conflicts in their specific geopolitical context. To do this he assesses states’ capacities and degrees of democratization\(^ {16}\). China is identified as belong to the *high-capacity undemocratic* category, and as such, is anticipated to demonstrate “…widespread threats of violence by governmental agents, frequent involvement of governmental agents in collective violence – depending on the opening and closing of opportunities for dissent...visible violence tends to broadcast the high political stakes of contention.”\(^ {17}\)

Where state capacity is high, it is more likely that state agents will be one of the parties in

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\(^{13}\) Tarrow, 3

\(^{14}\) Tarrow, 2


\(^{16}\) Tilly (2003), 48

\(^{17}\) Tilly (2003), 73
such conflicts. Additionally, the very limited tolerance of undemocratic states for expression of anti-state feeling means that the few displays of such sentiments are likely to be met by forcible repression from state agents. This is very much in keeping with what is observed in China. Most conflicts occur between the state and its citizens. Where demonstrations erupt, the extreme personal risk that participants face imbues such actions with far more significance than is found in demonstrations in more democratic countries. In contrast, the Chinese state's use of force to quell opposition is not as significant as such actions would be in a more democratic country.

If the internal threat that high-capacity undemocratic states such as China fear is a challenge to the regime's mandate, then it is logical to conclude that there are many issues around which such protests could emerge to question state authority. In effect, any group that were to mobilize and challenge the regime's mandate to rule would elicit a swift and harsh response from state agents. Such a movement could arise from the mobilization of religious groups, economically depressed groups, or any number of groups that felt the state was failing to represent their interests and that were desperate enough to risk confrontation. In a state like China, where ethnic identity of the majority and the promotion of nationalistic pride are the cornerstones of CCP legitimacy, it is only logical that ethnic minorities would have serious concerns over the state's ability to represent their interests.

Regardless of regime-type, the mobilization of a social movement of any kind is complex, and the mobilization frameworks of society are often tools that many regimes

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18 Tilly anticipates that low-capacity states will have higher levels of violence due to increased conflicts between non-state groups within the state, and state agents' inability to exert their authority to quell such actions.
seek to co-opt for their own purposes and protection. In his book *State in Society*, Joel Migdal argues that the traditional segregation of state from society that is the foundation of many theories examining intra-state dynamics, assumes a clean divide between the two that rarely, if ever, plays out in reality. Migdal explores the sites of state and society overlap and concludes that such crossovers can be useful to both sides.\(^{19}\) While hierarchical structures may emerge and seek to direct these state-society interactions, their control is never complete.\(^{20}\) If relationships between state and society are thus negotiated, it must be assumed that the state is aware, and perhaps even adept, in the manipulation of society’s key mobilization frameworks. The state’s success in these interactions would be in part determined by the their ability to recognize and infiltrate salient communities and identities.\(^{21}\)

In the literature examined here, mobilizing tools, whether practical or symbolic, are emphasized as critical to a movement’s success. Inherent in the concept of mobilization is the idea of a mission or struggle, where the interests of the group conflict with those of the state or another group. In examining intra-state conflict, especially where the state is one of the parties engaged in the confrontation, it is important to consider not only the capacity of the state and the political environment in which it operates, but also the way in which that environment shapes the mobilization potential of social movements and their choice of expression. As Tilly notes, violent confrontation has very different political implications depending on the regime-type under which it occurs. In *high-capacity* states, such as China, the increased ability of the government to

\(^{20}\) Tilly also notes that even in the states with exceptionally high capacity, state control of society is never complete and even in such cases there are some interactions must still be negotiated. Tilly, 50
\(^{21}\) James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 26
monitor society, disrupt mobilization structures, and increase the cost of opposition means that any violent opposition takes on greater significance than it would in a low-capacity state. This is relevant to the Chinese cases, and suggests that where violence flares, political stakes are high.

Two Contrasting Approaches, Two Proposed Explanations

From the preceding literature, two explanations for the Chinese state’s variation in response to religious minorities emerge, one based on an assumption of state racism and one based on the ability of the state to recognize and respond to mobilization threats. The following section outlines the hypothesized mechanisms of these two explanations.

Explanation One: Perceived Mobilization Threat

Previous literature has identified a diverse array of identities that can increase mobilization potential. While the ways in which these identities are formed is significant to the literature, the following explanation presupposes their existence and focuses instead on the state’s response to the threat of mobilization. The following diagram outlines one possible mechanism.

Events that catalyze mobilization can either be anticipated, such as the response to new restrictive regulations, or they can be unpredictable, such as a traffic accident. These events can lead to instantaneous responses (riots, spontaneous strikes, violent resistance) or they can initiate processes that take months, or even years, to develop into

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22 Charles Tilly gives an example of the way in which a traffic accident in an Indian village resulted in the spontaneous mobilization of the local untouchable caste (of which the victim had been a member) against the local authorities. Tilly, 194
action (petitions, political movements, non-violent resistance, underground resistance). As a result, catalyzing events can be difficult to identify, let alone predict. For a government concerned about the potential for a group to mobilize against them, time and resources are often more efficiently spent in disrupting potential or current mobilization frameworks, than in trying to anticipate and prevent all the events that might set off the mobilization process.

Figure 1: Theory One – Perceived Mobilization Potential as the Key to Predicting State Repression

State perceives increased potential of minority group to mobilize

Improved ability of minority group to mobilize

Trigger event to catalyze mobilization

State is likely to use comparatively repressive measures to contain and disrupt the minority group’s mobilization networks.

For the state to target the minority group at random or in symbolic but non-effectual ways would be a waste of resources and potentially of little strategic effect. Moreover, such actions by the state could provoke a more organized opposition. Among

23 Tilly, 52
the many identities around which mobilization could foment, ethnicity and religion are some of the simplest to identify, and their presence or absence can be compared to the degree to which state–minority conflicts escalate in the Chinese cases. Both religion and ethnicity provide strong mobilization frameworks for a group. They can offer communication structures, established hierarchies, common values, shared cultural norms, possibility of linguistic distinctiveness, likelihood of geographic concentration, and community structures and patterns of interaction. Where a state feels threatened by either ethnic or religious mobilization, it is likely that it would attack target these specific frameworks.

If this explanation is correct, and the state's repression of a minority ethnic group is the result of its perception that the group is able and likely to mobilize, there are two key observations we would expect to make. First, we would expect to observe evidence of communication frameworks developing and operating outside of the official networks sanctioned by the state. In China these could include un-licensed religious communities and organizations, language schools, cultural clubs, publications, and even such innocuous communication forms as graffiti. All of these could be used to promote a common identity, as well as to facilitate communication between disparate members of the group. Second, we would anticipate evidence that the state recognizes and targets these frameworks. This evidence could come from a variety of sources including a careful examination of the groups and individuals that are affected by changing state regulations, discredited in state sponsored campaigns, are threatened by state sponsored competitors. In addition to considering the timing of state and minority actions to place them in a "cause and effect" sequence, it would also be important to maintain an
emphasis on state actions rather than policies. In China, the policies on paper often bear little resemblance to the practices of the state. Where the state is in a position of strength, its actions will more accurately reflect its goals than will its written statements.

Explanation Two: The Racist State and Conflicting Intra-State Identities

The literature that examines ethnic conflict offers a range of preconditions and factors that are thought to trigger and/or exacerbate racial or ethnic divisions. Examples of these conditions are found in the previous section. Despite the range of explanations that are offered, most sources agree that in the sequence of such conflicts, distinctive ethnic or racial identities must exist before hostility can develop. When racial or ethnic identities are already strong and hostility between these identities has emerged, it is likely that racially or ethnically biased ideas have an impact on individuals in the government and state bureaucracy, allowing an entry point for racist views to inform state policy.

This second explanation assumes that racialized identities have formed and hostility or competition between the racial groups is widely recognized by individuals in the society. Given these assumptions, racism can infiltrate the state apparatus through both the personal views and professional ambitions of individuals within the state apparatus. On a personal level, government officials and bureaucrats are likely to hold racist views, which would bias their professional decisions and actions. This follows from the assumption that racist views are the norm in the larger community, and though agents of the state, these individuals are also imbedded in their society. Second, if the government, or individuals within the government, are trying to gain the support of the majority population, they will likely create and enforce policy that compliments the racial
perceptions held by the majority of the people. It is possible that such agents could even go so far as to foster racial divides in a strategic bid to garner majority support.

Figure 2: Theory Two – Ingrained racism as the cause of harsh state response to minority.

Long-standing racial divisions exist in the society

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Ethnic identity comes to define majority and minority groups

State actors are more likely to personally hold racist views

State likely to try to gain majority support by catering to racialized public views

State initiates and enforces policies that target the minority ethnic group

State is more likely to come into either open, or clandestine conflict with the minority ethnic group

Together, these two conditions can result in the state privileging the ethnic majority at the expense of the ethnic minority, and attacking the ethnic minority (physically or symbolically) where and when it hopes doing so will grant personal
satisfaction and/or garner support among the majority the population. Because the normative values of the society are translated into the state's policies and actions, it is likely that the state that officially privileges ethnic hierarchies is more likely to use repressive measures to curb ethnic minority activities and freedoms. Consequently, this explanation could be understood to infer that as salience of ethnic identity is raised by competition and unequal treatment, ethnic conflict is more likely to flare.

Varshney suggests that incremental increases in racist or oppressive measures can lead to a change in the normative values of a population.\textsuperscript{24} If acclimatized gradually, the majority population will often accept discriminatory actions or decrees that would previously have been untenable. Presumably, the mechanism outlined above could be repeated many times within the same society, allowing for a gradual escalation, such as that which Varshney predicts, in a racial divided society. Where the majority population is conditioned in this way, the state feels less inhibited in meeting minority opposition with force, or the threat thereof.

If the state's repression of minority ethnic groups is the result of ingrained racism within the state apparatus, we would expect to observe two key phenomena. First, we would anticipate a state-condoned discourse that promotes ethnic hierarchies. This could be as blatant as the apartheid of South Africa, or as subtle as a consistent underlying assumption that the racial or ethnic minority in question requires the political or social guidance of the majority to flourish. Whether blatant or subtle there is the clear communication of hierarchy and an environment is created in which the state can justify its actions towards the minority. Second, we would expect to observe the state engaging in symbolically biased action against the minority regardless of their strategic relevance.

\textsuperscript{24} Varshney, 93
Targets and timing of such attacks would be selected based on political climate rather than minority threat, and could include attacks on religious symbols, sources of minority cultural pride, or objects of historical significance to the minority identity. While they might also have the effect of diminishing the minorities ability to mobilize, such actions on the part of the state would be intended to demoralize the minority population while providing symbolic victories for the racial majority.

**Five Case Studies Drawn from the People’s Republic of China**

**The Tibetan Buddhist Experience**

The Tibetan case clearly demonstrates the state’s fear of the potential for mass mobilization through religious networks. This can be seen in government restrictions and monitoring of religious leadership, as well as in their attempts to discourage bonds of loyalty between the monastic communities and the broader population. However, there is also strong evidence that the Chinese state is in part motivated by racism and an ingrained presumption of Han cultural superiority. Evidence of this can be found in such government-sponsored policies as the restrictions on the Dalai Lama’s portrait, the random destruction of the Cultural Revolution, or even in the gradual assimilation of Tibetan children through education in Chinese language schools. This section outlines the Tibetan experience with the Chinese state.

When the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) first arrived on the Tibetan Plateau in 1950, it initiated only minimal changes within Tibetan society, focusing instead on the construction of transportation infrastructure into the previously isolated region.\(^\text{25}\)

However, increasingly restrictive policies towards religious institutions and activities, and the gradual undermining of Tibetan political authorities promoted the bloody (though poorly armed) popular uprising of 1959. In the spring of that year Khampa tribesmen and the monasteries lead offensive actions against the PLA stationed in the region. Witnesses have described the 1959 uprising as an “act of desperation” that relied as much on prayer and meditation as on the use of military tactics. The uprising was quickly put down by the flood of PLA soldiers streaming onto the plateau along the newly constructed roads. In the wake of the failed rebellion and the retaliatory destruction of religious sites and centres throughout the region, the Dalai Lama, other Lamas, living Buddhas, religious clergy, and a significant population of Khampa and other Tibetan tribes people fled over the Himalayas to India.

During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, violence against religious personnel and religious sites was widespread on the Tibetan Plateau. In addition to the systematic devastation by the PLA and the Red guards, Tibetan civilians were routinely forced to take part in the destruction of their own places of worship and to lead struggle sessions against their religious leaders and local Lamas. While religious practices in China generally enjoyed increasingly relaxed controls under Deng Xiaoping (1979-1989), Jiang Zemin (1989-2003), and Hu Jintao (2003-present), the legal codification of religious laws that began in the early 1990s saw a new wave of bureaucratic restrictions imposed on Tibetan Buddhist religious communities and

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26 Many of these policies are linked to the Great Leap Forward’s collectivization plans.
27 Norbu, 153
28 This is based on accounts of villagers and monks that were collected last summer in the Amdo Tibetan region. The most vivid evidence of this destruction is seen in sites off the tourist route such as Gongbasi Monastery in Choni. Gongbasi was once the second largest monastery in the region but was completely razed during the 1960s. Monasteries such as Labrong and Kumbum, which are seen by thousands of tourists a year, have been tidied up and evidence of the devastation they endured largely repaired.
practitioners. Pictures of the Dalai Lama were banned in 1993 leading to riots in many monasteries and at least one incident that lead to the deaths of monks in a confrontation with state authorities.\textsuperscript{29} According to the Chinese state, some 150 Tibetans were arrested in crackdowns on illegal religious activity between 1993 and 1994.\textsuperscript{30} Re-education campaigns for monks and nuns were undertaken in 1996. Political vetting of religious populations was carried out through a number of measures, including mandatory certification through oral examinations. Topics covered included Tibetan history\textsuperscript{31}, a denunciation of the Dalai Lama, and an acknowledgement of the Panchen Lama just selected (1995) by the Chinese state. Failure in the exams could result from incorrect or insufficient answers, or a “bad attitude”.\textsuperscript{32} Non-cooperation with the new certification programs was widespread, and there are documented incidents of monks and nuns being locked in their rooms, beaten, and even killed for failure to take part.\textsuperscript{33} By 1998 the government was forced to reassess its tactics, as their harsh approach was not having the desired effect.\textsuperscript{34} To date, most of the leadership in the major Tibetan monasteries has been replaced with secular outsiders appointed by the CCP,\textsuperscript{35} but for the time being the oral examinations have been dropped from the certification process.

In Tibet there is a long history of overlap between religion and politics. The legitimacy of Tibetan society’s hierarchical structure, which places the Dalai Lama at its

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Monks were killed in confrontations with the PLA at Ganden Monastery on May 7, 1996. The incident was sparked when monks refused to allow the removal of images of the Dalai Lama. HRW 44 It should be noted that in my travels through Amdo Tibet (which has more relaxed religious policies than Tibet proper) I was shown or observed pictures of the Dalai Lama in a seven of the twelve monasteries that I visited. In addition to monasteries, it was not uncommon to see Tibetan children in the countryside with pictures of the Dalai Lama worn as pendants around their necks.
  \item Human Rights Watch, (1997) 43
  \item Monks were expected to state that Tibet had traditionally been a part of the Chinese motherland.
  \item Human Rights Watch, (1997) 47
  \item Human Rights Watch, (1997) 48
  \item Human Rights Watch, (1997) 46
  \item Human Rights Watch, (1997) 43
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
apex, is reinforced by both religious faith and cultural/political norms. As a result, a reinforced mobilization framework exists. In addition, ethno-specific traditions, distinctive language, and local knowledge of terrain all give the Tibetans the advantage of illegibility in the eyes of the Chinese state. The Chinese have done their best to break or infiltrate Tibetan mobilization frameworks at strategic junctures. This trend can be seen in the state’s interference in the religious leadership and Lama selection, as well as in the restrictions and regulations that it imposes on religious individuals and institutions. Furthermore, use of political vetting has ensured that those deeply opposed to the system remain excluded for the authorized religious sphere, and if successful could gradually weed subversive elements away from the monastic networks, which make up some of the strongest mobilization frameworks in Tibetan society. On the other hand, the state has clearly undertaken symbolic attacks on Tibetan culture, such as prohibiting pictures of the Dalai Lama and the random brutality of the Cultural Revolution. State racism finds expression in a number of ways. Prohibition of portraits of the Dalai Lama; the random brutality of the Cultural Revolution; representation in Chinese popular culture of the Tibetans (and other ethnic minorities) as the younger brothers of the Han; and the assumption that nomadic and religious traditions render them backwards, feed Han Chauvinist sentiments and allow state agents to justify their interference in Tibetan society. Discrediting of Tibetan culture is particularly harmful for Tibet’s youngest generation who are made to feel that their identity is inferior. Thus, while symbolic attacks that inconvenience and demoralize the population continue, the state’s invests much of its energy in disrupting the ties that exist within Tibetan religious communities, and in isolating Tibetan communities from their religious leadership. All this suggests

[36 Scott, 33]

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that both awareness of mobilization threats and state racism have been significant in informing state policies in Tibet.

The Chinese Buddhist Experience

The Chinese Buddhist experience has naturally not been effected by state racism. Today, the comparatively minimal state regulation of the Chinese Buddhist communities, is likely the result of the very limited mobilization threat that this group poses.

Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in the PRC. This is not surprising given the millennia during which this faith played a central role in Chinese culture. However, despite its rapid expansion, Buddhism receives comparatively little coverage in the government documents and statements concerning religion, suggesting that the CCP is not greatly alarmed by the spectre of its resurgence in Chinese society. Chinese Buddhism, as it is most commonly practiced by lay people, is infused with a significant amount of folk culture, and is generally dismissed by the state as superstition and comparatively harmless. While religious clergy are easily recognized by their robes and shaved heads, lay people who comprise the larger community of Buddhist practitioners, are generally impossible to identify in passing.

Though the Chinese Buddhist monasteries did suffer damage and closure during the Great Leap Forward and especially the Cultural Revolution, today they are being allowed a renaissance of sorts. Several factors contribute to this. First, there is a degree of leadership continuity that is not seen in the Tibetan monasteries. Many of the monks who have risen to prominence and authority under the CCP were students or disciples of

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37 Human Rights Watch, (1997)
38 Birnbaum, 123
notable Republican era Buddhist leaders, ensuring that today’s practices and teachings have direct links to pre-Communist traditions. Second, a network of Buddhist academies with structured curricula has been established to promote a coordinated and quality education for monks and nuns. Non-state sources suggest that the Chinese Buddhist communities are generally quite happy with these schools and the material taught therein. Because of the state’s tolerance, the work of religious clergy is increasingly seen to be “socially productive”, and so graduates of these schools are generally guaranteed a place in Chinese society. Third, after the neglect and material destruction of the Cultural Revolution, today there is a commitment on the part of the government to rebuild, develop and support Chinese Buddhist communities. While state officials speculate that 40,000 temples and some 150 Buddha statues remain unregistered, and are thus technically illegal, the lack of state action suggests that these do not constitute a serious threat.

The above is not meant to suggest that there have not been changes imposed on Chinese Buddhism under the CCP. The most significant adjustment that the Buddhist monastic communities have had to make is in their financial affairs. Lands formerly controlled by monasteries were taken away during the reforms of the 1950s. In addition, there have been periods when the monasteries were not allowed to solicit donations from the faithful. Today, the majority of a monastery’s budget comes from the paid performance of rituals. The second most significant source of financing is the state.

39 Birnbaum, 133
40 Birnbaum, 134
41 Ibid
42 Ibid
43 Human Rights Watch, (1997) 38
44 Birnbaum, 132
45 Birnbaum, 137
Finally, donations are once again permitted, and these make up a third source of income. There have been concerns expressed by some members of the monastic community that the increasing significance of ritual performances has come at the expense of less dramatic (but equally important) aspects of monastic life, such as scholarly work and meditation.\textsuperscript{46} Today, those monks and nuns wishing to avoid an increasingly performance oriented life tend to move to smaller monasteries, either in the rural west of the country or in less prominent urban temples.\textsuperscript{47} Nevertheless, financial constraints aside, today there is a reasonable degree of freedom and government support for Chinese Buddhist communities.

For Chinese Buddhists there were really no significant aids to mobilization open to them except perhaps within the religious networks among monasteries. However, it would be insufficient to only mobilize monks. While they could be leaders of the wider population (as is the case in Tibet), monks alone could not take on the state. Any attempt to mobilize the broader Chinese population would have been difficult without the state becoming aware of these activities. All networks that religious leaders could potentially draw on were already infiltrated by the CCP or destroyed by it. Thus they posed no serious threat to the Chinese state, and though they suffered the same ideological attacks that all religious groups endured during the Cultural Revolution, they have not been subject to violence from the state in the post-Mao era. Chinese Buddhists enjoy a role in mainstream Chinese identity and are simply not seen to have any real mobilization potential.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid
\textsuperscript{47} Birnbaum, 139
Obviously, racism cannot be a factor in shaping the state’s interactions with Chinese Buddhists. But the absence of racial or ethnic identities may not necessarily be responsible for the state’s comparatively relaxed handling of Chinese Buddhists, nor does it explain the state patronage that Chinese Buddhist communities have enjoyed in recent years. Clearly, the Chinese state does not see these Buddhist communities as posing a threat, and this could be because of their limited mobilization potential. While many Han Chinese are returning to Buddhist practices, the religious community holds little influence over the population, and has not become deeply ingrained in the modern Chinese identity. As a result, beyond their monastery walls, the Chinese Buddhist religious networks have little power to lead the community. The state understands this, and so feels no threat from the proliferation of these religious communities.

The Uighur Muslim Experience

Like the Tibetan case, the experience of the Uighur community is an excellent example of the Chinese state’s combined fear of mobilization, and institutionalized racism informing government policy and practice.

The Uighurs of China’s Xinjiang Province, Sunni Muslims who are ethnically Turkic, speak a language closely related to Uzbek, have a distinctively Central Asian culture, and harbour hopes for the separation of their traditional territories from the PRC. The Chinese controlled Xinjiang during most of the Han (206BC – 220AD), a short period of the Tang (618AD – 907AD), and the late Qing (1644AD – 1911AD). However,

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48 Officially titled the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, this territory comprises almost a fifth of Chinese territory and is located in the extreme northwest of the country.
even for the long periods when it was not administered by the Chinese, Xinjiang and its population have had close trade and political relations with China.

The PLA arrived in Xinjiang shortly after their victory over the Nationalist forces in 1949, and quickly set about consolidating control of the region. After a period of comparative tolerance during the early 1950s, the Great Leap Forward and then the Cultural Revolution saw large-scale repression of religious activities and clergy. In particular, during the Cultural Revolution many Mosques were converted into barns for housing pigs, and newspapers in the east of the country spoke triumphantly of Uighur workers eagerly joining new Han settlers in non-halal dining halls. As was the case with Tibetan religious leaders, many Uighur Muslim leaders underwent physical abuse, struggle sessions in their own communities, and terms in re-education labour camps. During this period public statements issued by the government officials equated illegal Islam in Xinjiang with separatism or splitism.

While Deng’s reforms of the 1980s did see the lifting of some of the most repressive policies in Xinjiang, and the tentative encouragement of Uighur cultural activities, the growth of Uighur nationalism lead to another round of restrictions on religious practices and institutions beginning in the early 1990s. With escalating tensions and rumours of violence between religious extremists and state authorities, 1996 saw

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49 In 1949 there were very real concerns over Soviet designs on the region. China wished to keep Xinjiang as a buffer, and a source of natural resources.
50 I am still trying to locate this reference. It was in some of my research notes from a few years ago, but the source is not cited. I suspect it came from FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Services).
52 When state information sources are not trusted, rumours gain greater credibility in the population. For example, Uighur friends and acquaintances talked of an incident involving protests in the Hotan district in the south of the province. Depending on who told the story, casualties numbered several, several tens, or several hundreds. Word of mouth is obviously not always reliable, and as there is no official record of such an incident taking place, it is impossible to confirm or disprove details.
the state coming down in force on illegal mosques, religious schools and uncertified clergy. In that year, the state claimed to have detained 2773 terrorist suspects; however, international Uighur sources believe that the figure was closer to 10,000 with about 1000 executions.\textsuperscript{53} Unfortunately, neither figure is confirmable. 1997, the year of the Hong Kong handover, marked a peak in state-Uighur violence. Both Uighur and state sources agree that very significant civilian casualties were sustained when government troops opened fire on crowds of demonstrating Uighurs in Gulhja city.\textsuperscript{54} This incident resulted in hundreds of arrests and a nationwide crackdown on Uighur communities, including the government demolition of two Uighur districts in Beijing, Ganjiakou and Weigongcun.\textsuperscript{55} In the spring of that year bus bombings in Urumqi were timed to coincide with Deng Xiaoping’s funeral. Two Uighur university students were later arrested and executed on charges related to the incident. In a public statement, a Han official explained, “We always like to decide on the nature of some event. The nature of [the bus bombings] has now been decided. It belongs to [the category of] illegal religious activities. These people are just a bunch of drug takers (\textit{xiduzhi}), uncultivated folk (\textit{meiyou wenhua.de ren}), and layabouts (\textit{xianza})…”\textsuperscript{56} It is difficult to know whether religious fanaticism resulted in government restrictions, or whether the government restrictions brought about a revived interest in religious activity. However, if the conservative dress of women can be used as an indicator of Islamic fervour, the significance of religion in the daily life of Uighurs has undergone a change. The Uighurs, who for centuries have been castigated by the broader Muslim community for being extremely lax in their faith, have recently gained a

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\textsuperscript{53} Gladney, (1997-1998) 13 \\
\textsuperscript{54} Bovingdon, 39 & Nimrod Baranovitch, “From the Margins to the Centre: the Uighur Challenge to Beijing” \textit{China Quarterly} 29 (2003): 731 \\
\textsuperscript{55} Baranotivich, 731 \\
\textsuperscript{56} Bovingdon, 64
\end{flushright}
reputation for having the most conservatively dressed women in Central Asia after Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{57}

In recent years violence in the region has subsided, but tensions still remain high. Today, much of the resistance to the state comes in the form of low-level, or symbolic rebellion.\textsuperscript{58} It is likely that the dramatic rise in religious activity in the Uighur community has much more to do with political resistance than it does with a spiritual revival.\textsuperscript{59} The events of 9/11 and the ensuing “War on Terror” have given the Chinese authorities greater confidence in their mission to root out religious extremists and separatists in the region. According to Chinese government sources, the gun battle in the spring of 2007 between the East Turkestan Liberation Front and CCP authorities in the mountains along the Karaokorum pass resulted in the deaths of some twenty Uighurs, the arrest of sixty others, and the death of one police officer. It stands as evidence that relations in the region remain far from ideal.

The Uighur Muslims possess some mobilization potential through religious channels, as well as the same Tibetan advantages of cultural and linguistic illegibility. Though it seems unimaginably careless of the Chinese state, until the mid-1990s Uighur musicians, comedians, and other artists were using state venues (including the state television stations) to make anti-Han jokes and barely veiled pro-Uighur nationalist

\textsuperscript{58} Bovingdon, 42
\textsuperscript{59} This conclusion is based on the observation that while most Uighurs I have met decry the semi-restrictions placed on the right to exercise superficial religious practices such as fasting for Ramadan and wearing a veil, there is little discussion of religious ideology. Most of those who complain about religious restrictions have never actually read the Koran and do not take part in the daily (or even Friday) \textit{namaz}, this despite the fact that both the Koran and the mosques are in theory available to them.
It took several years for word of this to finally reach the thousands of Han government officials in the province who were meant to be monitoring Uighur attitudes and watching for signs of political dissention. Language alone proved enough of a barrier to leave the Han population oblivious to what was happening in the parallel Uighur community. Since the incident that finally roused Chinese suspicions, the state has implemented significantly more stringent regulations concerning the documentation and translation of Uighur broadcasts, song lyrics, literature, and all forms of the arts. Yet to date, it remains extremely rare to encounter a Han who can speak even a few words of Uighur.

In spite of this, the state may in fact have overestimated the mobilization capacity of the Uighurs. (Thus the importance of "perceived mobilization potential" to the first theory.) Unlike the Tibetans, the Uighurs lack a history of stable political institutions. Until just four years before the CCP takeover, Xinjiang had been organized as a series of city-states that fought amongst themselves as often as they cooperated. The Uighurs also lack political leadership. There are few prominent Uighurs, and none of them is in a position to act against the government. The Chinese state observes the Uighur unrest in the last fifteen years and concludes that mobilization structures are nurtured within the Uighur population, yet all first hand accounts of recent large scale mobilizations suggest that they were not coordinated, but instead were spontaneous actions usually in response to some immediate grievance of the population. In contrast, the bus bombings

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60 Jennifer Taynen, “Interpreter, Arbiter, or Outsider? The Role of the Min kao Han in Xinjiang Society” The Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs 26, 1 (2006): 53
61 This incident occurred in 1995, and involved a Uighur folksinger/poet who made Uighur nationalist statements during a performance that was being televised on Xinjiang Uighur language television. The performer was later arrested.
62 Examples of such mobilizations include the riots in Hotan, Gulhja, and to a lesser extent, Yinning.
63 Tilly, 157
in Urumqi clearly required premeditation. Yet if there had been any large-scale mobilization behind them, there would, at the very least have been a follow up attack. Instead, most Xinjiang experts have come to believe that the bombers were acting on their own. In any event, the real mobilization potential of the Uighurs is irrelevant to this theory. The state has come to believe that a mobilization threat exists, and so it seeks to attack religion, and to a certain extent culture, as the most obvious frameworks within Uighur society.

The Uighur Muslims did not mount an organized campaign to confront the state when it began to impose restrictions on their religious practices. Instead, most individuals complied grudgingly with new regulations. The incidents of violence that did occur (such as the riots in Gulhja and the bus bombings in Urumqi) were largely spontaneous actions or the actions of isolated individuals. Even so, the state did respond with some measure of violence to these incidents, with deaths and injuries resulting. The group re-evaluated the cost of conflict and by 2000, even spontaneous Uighur violence was all but quelled.

Was the state motivated by fear of Uighur mobilization, or was it racism? Likely both played a factor. Outside experts feel that the Chinese government has over-estimated the capacity of the Uighur population to mobilize, which could be the result of the former’s inability to penetrate and understand Uighur society. While their have been violent incidents involving the state and Uighur populations, none of these seem to have grown from an organized resistance movement. However, from the prospective of the Han population, it is better to error on the side of caution and assume that mobilization within the Uighur ethnic and religious communities is a real possibility. While state officials claim the violent incidents to date have been the work of a few isolated
extremists, their actions taken against religious institutions and leaders suggest that they perceive a substantial threat from that quarter. Thus in the Uighur case, it could be argued that both potential mobilization and racism play a part: mobilization networks (both cultural and religious) have been the targets of state attacks, and racism has created an environment of miscommunication and escalating fears that have influenced the direction of state policy and practice.

The Hui Muslim Experience

The Hui Muslim experience with the Chinese state has in large part been shaped by an incongruous combination of the state’s fear of the Hui community’s mobilization potential, and by that community’s unwavering identification as Chinese nationals. While genetically, culturally and linguistically Chinese, the Hui still are identified as an ethnic minority, and so their status in the Chinese state is a confusing mix of “other” and Han.

Originally, “Hui” in the Chinese language was simply the word for Muslim. In that late 19th and early 20th centuries a Hui collective identity began to emerge, but it centred chiefly on being Muslim and Chinese, and could not really be characterized as an ethnic conceptualization. It was not until 1949 that the Communists began to realize the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Hui. As this group is found in every province and nearly every county in China, the Hui have adopted the same plethora of spoken dialects and cultural practices that are found within the Han population. Communist definitions of ethnicity are usually explained in terms of language, religion, region of origin, or

65 Lipman, 23
66 Lipman, 21
67 Lipman, 22
economy.\textsuperscript{68} For the Hui people, defining them as an ethnic group has been particularly problematic as the Islamic faith is the only feature common to the whole group, and religion is not an identifier that the government wishes to encourage.\textsuperscript{69} The Hui were eventually defined as an ethnic group in 1953,\textsuperscript{70} and became the prototypical “ethnic minority” on which the government tested many of its minority policies. Unfortunately, the close cultural and linguistic resemblance between the Hui and the Han meant that the success of a policy with this group was a not an accurate indicator of its success with other, more distinct, minority groups.\textsuperscript{71}

During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Hui suffered in much the same way as Muslims elsewhere in the country. There were cases of Han cadres dumping pig bones into Hui wells to “get them used to the taste of pork”\textsuperscript{72} In another incident, a village Imam was made to crawl in the mud imitating a pig, in front of an audience of the villagers to whom he had ministered.\textsuperscript{73} Mosque closures and re-education of religious leaders through labour were commonplace. These policies and incidents like those just described triggered conflicts that occasionally turned violent. Particularly in parts of Yunnan, the PLA was repeatedly called on to deal with Hui uprisings during the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{74}

However, in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, the Hui were the first to experience the state’s relaxation of religious policy, and minority economic planning. In 1987, Fei Xiaotong, a government economic advisor, suggested that ethnic minorities

\begin{footnotes}
\item[69] Ibid
\item[70] Ibid
\item[71] Gladney, (2004) 286
\item[72] Gladney, (2004) 310
\item[73] Lipman, 44
\item[74] Ibid
\item[74] Lipman, 19-20
\end{footnotes}
might best benefit from economic reforms if they were allowed to actively take part in them.\textsuperscript{75} The Hui were used to test not only the new market reform plans, but also to help determine the best means of including minority groups in economic development. As a result, in many districts the Hui became the first to be allowed to sell their surplus products and enter into the open market. What resulted was the rapid accumulation of wealth in many Hui communities (especially in the east), and the co-opting of religious networks into trade networks. What the state had not anticipated was that wealth in Hui communities would be translated into a revival of their religious institutions.\textsuperscript{76} The Hui were also the first of the PRC’s Muslims to be allowed to take part in the \textit{Haj}, and even today Hui are more likely to be successful in their travel applications than are other Muslim minorities. Cadres began to complain that they were unable to put a stop to religious donations without angering the Hui communities and upsetting regional development.\textsuperscript{77} Today, religious enterprises have become so financially rewarding that it is not uncommon to find Hui government cadres who have left their positions with the state to become Imams.\textsuperscript{78} In some ways, entrepreneurial skill has come to be the defining characteristic of the Hui, a shift in identification away from Islam that the state is eager to encourage. Still, the debate continues as to whether or not the Hui are really an ethnic group or simply Han Chinese who follow the teachings of the Islamic faith.

\textsuperscript{75} Gladney, (2004) 286
\textsuperscript{76} Only a few of the major Uighur mosques in Xinjiang’s largest urban centres are in decent repair. Especially in the countryside, mosques are often made of mud brick and many appear to be collapsing into the ground. In contrast, Hui mosques in Xinjiang, Gansu, and Qinghai are numerous, new, large, and well maintained. There is also evidence of Hui seminaries and Koran schools, something that is rarely seen in Uighur communities. I was not able to ascertain whether this was the result of more stringent restrictions on Uighur religious activities, or whether it was in fact simply a question of economics.
\textsuperscript{77} Gladney, (2004) 294
\textsuperscript{78} Gladney, (2004) 290
For the Hui Muslims, the only real mobilization potential at their disposal is through their religious networks. Culturally and linguistically, they are identical to the Han populations around them. Geographically, they are dispersed throughout the whole of the PRC, and in any case, they are vehemently pro-China and have never exhibited any wish for separation or autonomy from the PRC.

The effectiveness of the Hui religious networks has been demonstrated through their adaptation to business. Interestingly, in spite of their many similarities with the Han, there is a deep distrust of the Hui in much of the Chinese population. Many Han see the Hui as being crafty and too financially successful. Though both groups are genetically of the same group, Han and Hui are officially designated separate nationalities, and the dynamic between them is increasingly that of separate ethnicities. More than one researcher has drawn parallels between the Hui in China and the pre-WWII Jewish communities in Europe. In addition, there is a history of Hui violence, both between their religious sects and in conflicts with the Han populations around them. This history naturally leads to a climate of distrust both within the community and beyond its boundaries.

Since the Cultural Revolution, the Hui have only been subjected to mild government interference and there have been almost no incidents of Hui-state violence in that time. And yet, it would seem that the government is not altogether comfortable with the Hui faith and the latent threat it poses to socialist loyalty. Despite the recent good relations between state authorities and Hui communities, popular Han suspicion of this group makes it entirely conceivable that racist-like influences could inform future state

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79 Lipman, 38
80 Lipman, 29

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policy. Thus, the Hui case suggests that perceived mobilization potential is not sufficient to elicit government interference. Rather, mobilization potential is only a threat when it is likely to arise to challenge the state. Additionally, the state’s tolerant response could be influenced by the Hui’s privileged position as the model minority group in China, the economic strength of this group, and the strong cultural and linguistic similarities between this group and the Han Chinese majority.

The Falungong Experience

The Falungong experience with the Chinese state has been largely shaped by the former’s immense capacity to mobilize its membership, and the latter’s legitimate concern that the such a movement could emerge as an opposition movement.

Since the early 1990s, increasingly codified regulations governing religious activity in China have been credited with the nationwide decline in state initiated violence, despite the introduction of increasingly repressive religious policies over this same period.\(^1\) However, one stark exception to this decline in violence is the case of Falungong, which first attracted the CCP’s attention in 1992 as one of the many resurgent Qigong movements of the 1980s.\(^2\) Despite the fact that it includes meditation practices, salvationist and apocalyptic elements, and that the practitioners believe the group’s founder Li Hongzhi to be the saviour of mankind, both the state and the practitioners themselves deny that Falungong is a religion.\(^3\) Such a denial is in the state’s interest, as it


\(^3\) Human Rights Watch (2002)
exempts Falungong practitioners and institutions from protection under the constitution. The Falungong’s motives for claiming non-religious status are not entirely clear. If the rejection of the religious label is strategic, it could be that the group wishes to avoid being classified as a cult or illegal sect under Chinese Law. The group has been immensely popular, and in 1991, it was estimated that the Falungong had a following of 100 million of whom 70 million were inside China.\(^8\)

The Falungong has gone through two distinct phases in its challenge to the state. The first phase was largely domestic. Followers deliberately set out to confront the Chinese government, and staged well-coordinated protests in Beijing and in other parts of the country to draw attention to increasing government restrictions on their activities.\(^9\) Falungong demonstrations are nearly all identical, with practitioners congregating in an orderly fashion, arranging themselves in straight lines, and then silently performing the five set Falungong motions. In 1998, a demonstration of close to 2000 Falungong followers was held outside a Beijing television station that had aired an interview criticizing the movement.\(^\) On April 25, 1999, a demonstration of over 10,000 Falungong followers from all over China was organized in Beijing in front of the Communist Party leadership’s compound. For the first time, police reacted with open violence to clear the protest, and in the process detained an unknown number of people. Within months of this incident, the state began a campaign to eradicate the Falungong. Then, on July 21, 1999, well-coordinated and simultaneous demonstrations involving several thousand people broke out in Hubei, Anhui, Hunan and Guizhou provinces. Leaders were quickly arrested, setting off three days of protests in more than thirty cities.

\(^8\) Ibid
\(^9\) Ibid
\(^8\) Human Rights Watch (2002)
across the country. In the capital, from July 23, 1999 until the end of October 2000, state authorities report that there were 35,792 incidents where Falungong protesters were interrupted by police, and either detained or told to leave Beijing.\(^87\) By December of 2000, demonstrations in the capital area were an almost daily occurrence and involved hundreds of people. Because many of the protesters were coming into the capital from surrounding provinces the government imposed travel restrictions and put measures in place to hold local and provincial officials accountable for any demonstrators from their areas arrested in Beijing. Particularly alarming for the CCP was the growing realization that those being arrested or detained included not only less educated workers and farmers, but also many party members and educated professionals from a whole range of public and private sectors.\(^88\)

In January 23, 2001 one protest altered the tactics of both Falungong and the Chinese state. Seven Falungong practitioners doused themselves with gasoline in Tiananmen square and lit themselves on fire. This act of self-immolation justified the government's claim that Falungong members posed a risk to themselves and should have the state's protection. It also resulted in significant bad press for the organization both in China and beyond, especially as one of the victims was a twelve-year-old child. From the January 23 incident on, the Falungong allowed its domestic protests to die off, and instead focused on raising international awareness of their cause through information campaigns, peaceful demonstrations and hunger strikes carried out abroad.

\(^{87}\) Ibid  
\(^{88}\) Potter, 25
Since the January 23 incident, the state has been increasingly confident in its use of legal arguments in its claim that the Falungong represents an "evil cult",90 and that strong measures must be taken to protect the group’s members and the stability of society.90 An example of a regulation (but not a law under the criminal code) often used in justifying the state’s response to Falungong is Article 24, Section 4 of the “PRC Regulations on Public Order Control and Punishment”, which state:

[It is an offence to be found] disturbing social order, endangering public interests and harming other people's physical health or swindling their money or belongings through secret sects or societies, or by means of feudalistic or superstitious customs; but the conduct does not warrant a punishment for criminal offence.91

Laws have also been specifically created or ratified with the Falungong in mind. For example, on July 21, 2001, new guidelines were introduced to aid in interpreting the criminal code to apply to illegal sects. Contained in it were sections relating to the following: collaboration with foreign organizations and individuals; causing deaths and injuries; disseminating superstitious beliefs and heresies; encouraging suicide or self-mutilation; engaging in the sexual exploitation of women and girls; defrauding people of money or property; attempting to divide the state or overthrow the socialist system; and "other activities that undermine the enforcement of state laws or administrative regulations."92

In the years since 1999, serious allegations have been raised concerning the treatment of Falungong detainees in Chinese prisons, labour camps, and psychiatric

89 This term was first coined in the Chinese media in July of 1999.
90 Human Rights Watch (200)
91 "PRC Regulations on Public Order Control and Punishment." Appendix II: Laws and Regulations used to crack down on Falungong. http://hrw.org/reports/2002/china/China0102-09.htm#P1008_283830
92 "PRC Regulations on Public Order Control and Punishment." Appendix II: Laws and Regulations used to crack down on Falungong. http://hrw.org/reports/2002/china/China0102-09.htm#P1008_283830
institutes. While the Chinese government has been slow to respond to enquiries from international organizations such as the UN, Falungong networks outside of China have been mobilized quickly to broadcast their findings. It is important to note the difference between detention and arrest in the PRC. Arrest suggests that a trial will be held at some point in the future, and a specific sentence will be handed down. Detention could result in incarceration, or removal to a re-education camp or psychiatric institute. No formal charges or fixed time for release are required, and no trials take place. Only a few high profile members of the organization have actually had criminal trials of any kind. The vast majority of Falungong members in state custody are being held in detention. Allegations of beatings, tortures, force-feeding, shock therapy, sexual abuse, psychotropic drug administration, and other forms of maltreatment have been made. Easier to confirm than cases of abuse are the untimely deaths of some of those in detention. As of 2002 the Chinese government and the Falungong interest groups were in agreement that there had been 234 non-execution deaths of persons in detention. Of those 234, the Falungong claim all were suspicious, and as families were generally not allowed to see bodies before cremation, it is difficult to prove or disprove these charges. The Chinese state claims that one of the deaths was suspicious, while the remaining 233 were either due to natural causes or suicides. It is worth noting that all of these deaths occurred within two months of detention and most in the first few days before the detainees had left local police custody.

The Falungong have none of the mobilization potential that comes from ethnic distinctiveness, and yet they have highly maintained networks whose mobilization potential was displayed for the benefit of the CCP leadership on April 25, 1999. In
addition, to the concern over the public demonstrations, the discovery that so many party members were involved with the Falungong may have caused the Chinese state to fear that its own mobilization networks had been compromised. Given government corruption levels, and its poor record in handling environmental and health emergencies\(^\text{93}\), it is difficult to believe that so many resources are being devoted to the eradication of the Falungong out of state concern for the protection of the financial and physical well-being of its citizens. Rather, it is much more likely that the state is threatened by the Falungong’s ability to attract and mobilize its membership. The Falungong’s demonstrated capacity is no doubt alarming to a state that attempts to hold the monopoly on mass mobilization. It is not surprising that the Chinese state sees the Falungong as posing a serious existential threat.

**Racism and Group Mobilization: Interpreting the Cases**

In considering the cases presented in this paper, it is clear that since the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese state’s perception of a group’s mobilization potential has influenced both policy and action in dealing with religious groups. In addition, where ethnic or racial identities have coincided with religious identities, conflicts between these groups and the state are exacerbated. The two mechanisms outlined in this paper often occur as part of hybridized processes, with increasingly racialized identities leading to competition and finally catalyzing mobilization, and response to that mobilization being informed by the ethnocentric views of individual government officials. That being said, as the Falungong case demonstrates, there are many other kinds of group identity that can

\(^{93}\) This is with reference to the state handling of the SARS outbreak in 2003 and of the chemical spill in Harbin 2005, though there are many other similar examples that could be cited.
produce mobilization. The cases examined in this paper offer an opportunity to isolate and observe each of these phenomena. The implications of both state perceptions of mobilization potential and state racism will be examined in turn.

The Chinese state’s concern over group mobilization potential is most readily observed in its calculated attempts to disrupt or sever the targeted communities’ most salient mobilization frameworks or lines of communication. Anderson suggests that collective identities are born through the ability for individuals to feel that they share a common experience and history with a larger community. The frameworks that facilitate the communication of experience and history are also able to transmit communication that catalyzes mobilization within the group.

In the case of the Tibetans, religion is a critical component of identity, and the religious networks of Tibet link one community of Tibetans to another. This is done both through the reproduction and repetition of ceremonies and traditions, as well as through the concrete lines of communication that exist between monastic communities throughout the region. The Chinese state has specifically targeted the monastic networks, vetting the individuals who join religious communities, co-opting the selection process that identifies each new generation of the religious leadership, and attempting to replace the religion with either communist or capitalist ideology in the broader Tibetan population. The Chinese state has used similar tactics in its handling of the Uighur population. Beijing maintains careful control of religious networks, educational institutions, and cultural organizations. These are all frameworks critical to both the maintenance of Uighur identity, and to communication among the Uighur population. The Falungong have mobilization networks at their disposal that the Chinese state has as yet failed to infiltrate.
This is because the Falungong circumvent such formalized institutions as schools and houses of worship, making the monitoring of participation and activity more difficult for the state. Additionally, the Falungong conducts much of its activity outside of China, and so is largely beyond the reach of the Chinese state. What the Chinese state is able to do, is to respond to the manifestations of mobilization. State authorities violence towards demonstrators is one example of this. Such violent repression by the state is less effective in containing the Falungong, than is the infiltration co-option of mobilization networks that has been seen in Tibet and Xinjiang since the Cultural Revolution. However, until the state is able to gain some means of regulating the Falungong, encounters between the two groups are likely to continue to be violent.

An important point to remember when examining the role of minority mobilization in informing state policy is that not all potential mobilization will be seen as a threat to the state. The Hui use of religious and cultural networks to facilitate trade clearly demonstrates the salience and efficiency of these networks. Moreover, Hui communities have created tight organizations that are active in promoting their faith and in organizing religious activities, education, and such projects as mosque construction. While the Hui did suffer at the hands of Red Guards and other state authorities during the Cultural Revolution and earlier anti-imperialist campaigns, the comparative freedom that they now enjoy to practice their faith and foster their identity as Muslims, is in large part due to the fact that the mobilization capabilities that they have at their disposal are not likely to be used against the state. The Hui are vehemently nationalistic Chinese, and while earlier Communist regulations of religion may have caused them to challenge the CCP, since the 1980s, the state’s attempt to replace Communism with Han nationalism as
the unifying ideology of the people has been very successful in pacifying the Hui. Thus where the state does not sense the threat of challenge, it is not necessarily going to quell mobilization.

Where racism or ethnocentrism informs the Chinese state’s minority policy, conflict does appear to be exacerbated. This is particularly true of the CCP’s various anti-rightist movements, as well as the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. Until recently, the state was less able to infiltrate and neutralize the communication frameworks that existed in Uighur and Tibetan communities. Instead, a systematic approach that aimed to control the manifestations of mobilization, such as that which they currently employ in handling the Falungong, was employed. This resulted in more frequent occurrence of violent conflict, and a more systematic use of symbolic attacks. Both are informed by racial or ethnic bias. Horowitz\textsuperscript{94} and Tilly\textsuperscript{95} note that the systematic use of violence by a group requires the dehumanizing of the victim in the eyes of the perpetrator. Symbolic attacks, such as the killing of religious persons and the destruction of sacred sites, are meant to humiliate individuals and communities and devalue minority religious or ethnic identities. The physical violence the victims suffer is less significant because they the aggressor sees them as less developed. Moreover, the aggressor is able to condone violent tactics as the necessary imposition of a superior system. Today, the Chinese state still uses similar justifications for coercive or repressive CCP minority policies. They are explained as necessary for the better guidance or protection of child-like minority peoples.

\textsuperscript{94} Horowitz, 360
\textsuperscript{95} Tilly, 4
Religious groups in China seem to be entering into a new phase of interaction with the state. The state's capacity to monitor groups and individuals, and to enforce its policies has been rapidly expanding. At the same time, the increasing use of legal frameworks, and China's wish to appear just in the eyes of the international community, offer these religious groups the potential for a stable and defined space in Chinese society. It is important to understand how the Chinese state is changing, and the logic it utilizes to dominate in domestic confrontations. It is also important to examine which conflicts have spawned violence and which have not, and where mobilization processes have emerged and where they have failed to develop. It is hoped that together, these offer some insight into the present dynamic between state and religious minorities in the People’s Republic of China.

**Conclusion**

This essay has sought to shed light on some of the conditions that affect the Chinese state’s decision to engage in conflicts with five religious groups. The severity of these conflicts varied between groups and over time, and was influenced by a wide range of conditions. Despite this variation, there are patterns that emerge in conflict severity when contrasting it with the mobilization potential of the groups, and the degree of ethnic or racial difference between them and the Han population.

While this paper has focused on religious groups within the Chinese state, it is possible that the mechanisms outlined here could be applied more broadly. For instance, state response to political opposition groups, lobbyists, or even environmental protest groups could also be assessed using the state’s perception of the groups’ ability to mobilize. Additionally in a wide range of situations, the presence of racialist or
ethnocentric perceptions in a conflict are likely to influence both the aggressors' willingness to use force, and the consolidation of identity for both aggressor and victim.

Broader application of these explanations would require consideration of regime type. Tilly discusses how under different regime types varying degrees of significance is attached to manifestations of conflict. Demonstration, police brutality, or even verbal complaints must all be understood in the context of the state in which they occur. To assume that the Uighur demonstrations in Ghulja carry the same political significance as an anti-war demonstration in the West, is to forget that the potential cost to participants (and their likelihood of having to pay that cost) is much higher under a high capacity non-democratic regime.

In addition to regime-type, it is important to understand the historical context of the conflict. Have the state and the group in question engaged in the past? A history of confrontation introduces the possibility of learning on both sides, and can effect the actions that each side will choose to take. Is there a history of broken negotiation between the parties? Previous attempts at dialogue and the circumstances surrounding their failure will significantly impact how each party views the other, and will affect the level of trust between them. How established are the identities of both the state and the minority? Newly established identities can have all the inertia associated with a nascent movement, but may have untested communication frameworks and membership loyalty. What is the strength and degree of illegibility of the minority’s mobilization frameworks? In China, the state’s careful control of media and education, and its attempts to replace minority languages with Mandarin, have all contributed to the weakening of Tibetan and Uighur communication frameworks. In contrast, the Falungong have managed to establish
networks that are difficult for the state to penetrate and are very efficient in organizing large numbers of people in a short period of time.

Understanding the conditions that can inform a state's decision to use force against religious, ethnic, or other minority groups within its sphere of control is far from simple, and the explanations presented here are but two of many mechanisms that could be examined. However, in the five cases drawn from the Chinese context, these two explanations do provide meaningful insight into the actions taken by both state and minority. The utility of these explanations for the Hui, Uighur, Chinese Buddhist, Tibetan, and Falungong conflicts with the Chinese state suggests that they could prove to be more broadly applicable.
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