

The Role of Ethnic Dominance in Assertive Assimilation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang

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Paper Presented at the 2021 ASN World Convention, 5-8 May 2021
Do Not Cite Without the Permission of the Author(s)

Introduction:

The concept of ethnicity is subjective. It is a popular term to describe group identity because of its widely used in a lay manner and the way scholars gave emphasis to ethnicity to conceptualize the concept of the formation of modern nation-states. Ethnicity circumscribes to several forms of other group identities that it is a description of mass identity. It is the term that is used as a substituting word for race, culture, region, language/dialect, religion. Several cases of identity politics or group conflict which could be in the shade of religion (protestant/Catholic; Sunni, Shiite), national (British/Irish), power (dominant/subordinate), numeric (majority/minority) ethnic conflict is the word used as a substitute. The whole conceptualization of the modern nation-state and construction of nationalities rests on components such as language, region, religion. Experts such as Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm had similar arguments that the base of a modern nation lies on the gathering of contrasting people as a part of fictional ethnicity that identifies them as one group. Contemporarily ethnicity is seen psychologically beneficial, especially the dominant group identity in a state because ethnicity echoes with people and the elites have orchestrated the meaning.

Similarly, the history of the construction of Chinese modern nation in other words, the construction of national identity encompassing the Han the perceived hegemonic national identity has originated from Chinese statist construction is playing a role in ethnic tensions in China. The non-Han ethnic minority groups perceive China as a state for the Hans and they feel detached from the hegemonic identity. Thus, the debate of the formation of the Chinese nation state is still debatable, scholars like Lucian Pye have described China as a civilization pretending to be a nation-state (Pye, 1993) a questionable perception of China because there is not a single state ruling over a recognizable Mesopotamian civilization. Several instances of dilutions can be traced, such as after the Roman conquest of Egypt it is not Pharaonic Egypt, Greece is not precisely a Greece state, and Indian civilization disintegrated into four modern-states¹.

The article theoretically indulges with the concept of nation, ethnicity, nation-state formation, identity politics to construe the meaning of ethnic dominance in China. The Chinese do not tussle much with terms like ethnicity and nationality but the China watchers give attention trying to decode the several ethnonyms attached to ‘Chineseness’, to its component nationalities- is *China Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo* (the People’s Republic of China)? or is it *Zhongguo* (Middle Kingdom)? What’s the historical concept of China (*Huaxia*)? Who are the *Huaren*? Is *Huaren Hanren*? Tibetans, Uyghur is *Zhongguo ren*? Very confusing terms on which the entire concept of the Chinese modern-state rests upon. These perceptions that Hans has established are monolith the heart of China’s *Minzu* problems. A known fact that the development of the early modern nation-state relied on national identity, the debatable identity is widely entrenched in China’s official policies and the actual situation of the Chinese society. Two conceptualizations explain this paradoxical relationship- first, China claims and has maintained that it is the civilization of the Hans and the state identity is an expanded culture where all citizens should obey

¹ Kaiser Kuo, “Kuora: On the idea that China is a Civilization and not a Nation-State,” SupChina, January 22, 2018, <https://supchina.com/2018/01/22/kuora-on-the-idea-that-china-is-a-civilization-not-a-nation-state/>

it. Second, China officially claims that it is a multi-ethnic state, i.e., no place for Han chauvinism as the state has the shade of multi-cultural identity.

The two conceptualizations are confusing because China contradicts its official claims and the inherent tension exists implicitly from the KMT's rule until the CCP's coming to power. The Chinese officials have only focused on Han identity as the main political identity. All other are regarded as subordinate groups with the expectation to conflate into the main Han-centric identity resulting in minority resistance, the struggle to keep intact their own identity assertions in Hegel's term this is the debate of dialectical struggle. The construction of Han identity is a politicized move by China and the perception established that the Han is not only the majority group but the superior civilized group that should guide the barbarian or the uncivilized group in China has created the inevitable perception of Han's ethnic dominance. Thus, ethnic dominance = political identity in a state who is numerically majority in number and the captured notion is of ethnocentrism i.e., a group regards itself superior to others, if not in all terms but in morality-based ethnocentrism as that appears a universal component of inter-ethnic relations.

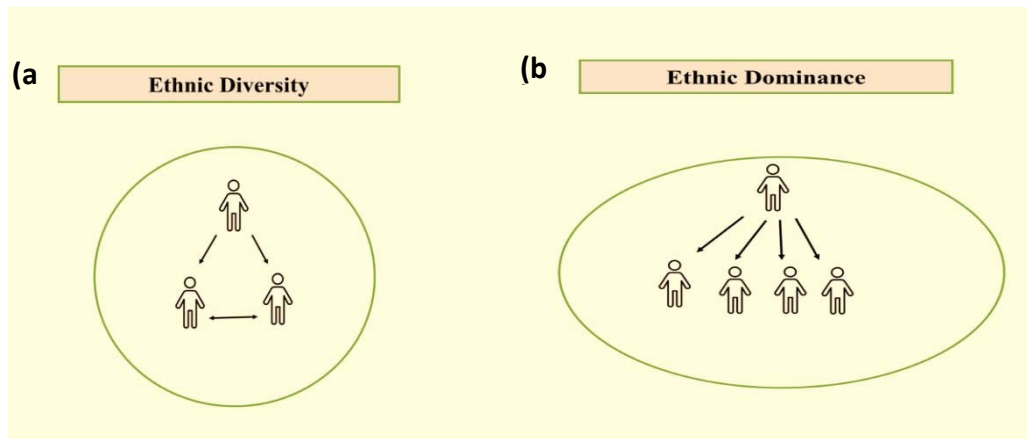


Fig. 1. (a) Pictorial Representation of Ethnically Diversified State

(b) Pictorial Representation of the Idea of Ethnic Dominance (in PRC)

The dominant group considers itself the monolith group and equalizes the nation of its identity. While the subordinate group is a denigrated entity, they might be a member of the nation but they identify/relate more with their ethnic group. Thus, the ethnic identification process is generally remembered as a long tradition of conflictual process and Hegel through his classic work *The phenomenology of Mind* (1841) provides a detailed description where people see identity as a life and death struggle between the dominant and subordinate groups where each group strives to achieve the dominant status intermeshes in a dialectical struggle for identity. The conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis, Lebanon, Northern Ireland illustrates the dialectical struggle of the framework. The identity could be used in a politicized way by both the dominant and subordinate, the difference could be in strategy, but it is through the ethnic identity politics ethnic dominance

is achieved particularly by the dominant group, the dominant group enjoys a secure status while the subordinate struggle, resist and attempts a counter move turning out to be violent.

Robert Kaplan proposes a theory of ancient hatred stemming from ethnic identity as the outcome of ethnic conflict, and the Balkans were the prominent center for the historical and cultural conflict (Kaplan, 1993; 7). While the empirical analysis of Wigmore Shepherd and Daniel Sebastian through their simulation provided an alternative to Kaplan's theory that ethnic conflict could also arise in the absence of ancient ethnic hatreds. However, their simulation does not clearly refute Kaplan's theory because they found a mid to high level of pre-existing ethnic antagonism between the ethnic groups that can escalate into ethnic violence (Shepherd and Sebastian, 2012). In the case of China pre-existing antagonism exist but to form a nation-state, during its initial years under the Soviet Union's (SU) influence China pursued the policy of 'friendship of nationalities' termed as *Shaoshu Minzu*. The Han dominance may not be externally visible but it was externally verifiable, because of changing of minority script (Uyghur script) hinting at the ingrained presence of dominant Han chauvinism.

Post Mao's demise in the 1980s, the meaning of ethnic identity started changing. Marxism which use to be a prominent ideology post-Mao lost its relevance and nationalism became a driven ideology (Zhao, 2000). The shift that nationalism brought stressed cultural and nationalist striving towards a common cultural identity for different ethnic minorities. The effort to categorize the minorities as Chinese raise question about their identities. The national wars between the Han and ethnic groups were termed after the revision of history as inter-ethnic conflicts between ethnic groups under *Zhonghua Minzu*. China shifted from *Zhongguo Renmin* (the nationalities of China) to *Zhonghua Minzu* (multi-ethnic statehood). The shift has implications on ethnic identification because China by shifting raises the question on whether ethnic minority equates to Han Chinese identity while the Uyghurs (Tibetans & Mongolians) resent against the Han Chinese identity to retain its own identity (Mackerras, 2011). The shift to *Zhonghua minzu*, i.e., the Soviet Union's concept of nationality to the concept of ethnicity serves China's purpose that all ethnic groups in China belong to one nation, one Han race, in other words reconceptualized ethnicities of non-Han as Chinese having shared roots of identity.

The clumsy revision of the history of the Xinjiang being an inseparable part of China since the Han dynasty, repudiating historian works that the silk road had the mixture of various identity groups and Uyghurs were one such part of the Turkic group was later annexed by the Qing dynasty in 18th C. Thus, Uyghur's identity is different not born from the Han race becomes nullified under the *Zhonghua Minzu* concept. The problem persists because the bequest of a current ethnic group residing in China is claimed as Chinese heritage equating to Han or the yellow race and *Shaoshu minzu* becomes devalued. The situation in China is that the dominant Han identity is Chinese and the subordinate ethnic groups are called upon to become identical by conflating to Han identity. The Uyghurs (Tibetans) are fighting the pressure of accepting *Zhonghua minzu* because the subordinate group considers itself a separate identity not from the Han race. Even the Chinese theorists have mentioned that *Zhonghua minzu* is about embracing Confucian, Taoist principles and cultures connected with the Han noting that no equivalence has been given to *Shaoshu minzu* culture (Tobin, 2020). The conceptualization of *Zhonghua minzu* is an ethnic dominance concept, a political concept highly motivated to assimilate the ethnic minority groups into the Han Chinese identity.

Through identity politics Han has achieved the dominant status. The ethnic Han identity card acts as a catalyst for not only maintaining social differentiation but has also become the major source of conflict between the Han and the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Given the advantageous situation the dominant group enjoys it seeks to consolidate its power (and maintaining its political power). Group theorists have observed that once the group is powerful and well established it does not need ethnic identity politics rather it follows ideologies of individualism to maintain the status quo and hegemony (Greene, 2012). Through their dominant position they promote their self-interest agenda which could not be evident in real terms and it could have the shade of nationalism. These hidden politics have been given a name by Michael Billig as 'Banal Nationalism'. He attempted to stretch the word nationalism to interpret the ideological means by which nation-states are created. He uses the term banal nationalism in the context of the established nations such as the western states-France, the US, the UK or New Zealand, that nationhood is part of their political discourses, for cultural products and also restructuring of the newspapers. The citizens are reminded of their national place but the reminding is done in such a manner that it does not explicitly appear as a reminder. Thus, nationalism is routinely flagged and spawned in existing states (Billing, 1995).

Billing opines that once the existing states achieve independence, or unity the state strives to maintain its nationalism which is generally ignored by researchers mostly focusing on hot nationalism. Banal nationalism is the facet of maintaining nationalism so that national identities become a form of life, daily lived in a world of nation-states (Billing, 1995). States celebrate national day, unfurling the flag, sports events add fuel to banal nationalism underscoring the nationhood. States' first concern during its formation is the factor of political independence and focus on building state apparatus which is firmly implanted, followed by loyal citizens is an essential component for a stable regime and states do not like oppositional movements (Foltz, 1996). Post-state formation the dominant ethnic group strives to not only consolidate power but also use identity politics to limit the political power of other groups which as a result could unintentionally motivate the identity politics of subordinate groups. John Anner postulated the subordinate identity politics that the group members believe they certainly have things in common than the outside group, their suppression is identical and their road to justice is the same (Anner, 1996).

Several instances of the subordinate groups' political movements low in power and hungry for resources were (are) Chechens in Russia, the Catholic Irish, the Quebecois in Canada, indigenous people in Latin America, the Uyghurs and Tibetans in China perceive as a tool to improve their situation. Subordinate ethnic identity politics thus becomes an obstacle in the formation of a homogenous national identity instigating violence between the two, dominant and subordinate groups. The subordinate group's road to justice is guided under the semblance of the theory of relative deprivation, i.e., the discontentment exists because the attainments do not match the expectations.

The subordinate groups who perceive their situation as uncalled for/unfair challenge the hierarchy. An organized political activity is based on inequality perception and they believe that organized political movement can challenge or reverse their lower position. In China, unlike organized political movement violence is witnessed but that's not agenda-based violence. Mostly

in Xinjiang, the violence has been uncoordinated and unorganized, i.e., event-based violence which results in riots and lynching. The appellation of Chinese identity=Han has fostered for the Uyghur subordinate group an alarming situation of discontentment that their identity has no recognition render them perceive that violence is the only possible way to secure their identities while, China claiming itself the victim of the terrorism (civil war) in Xinjiang is an exaggeration.

Therefore, the article attempts to decode the role of ethnic dominance in Xinjiang's conflictual situation. It applies an analytical framework of majoritarian nationalism, faulty ethnic policies and threat perception of the state to build up the scholarship. This would be supported by hypotheses to support arguments assessing the impact of ethnic dominance in China.

Majoritarian Nationalism- to construct a Han dominant identity:

The widely famous term even after globalization is nationalism which can be interpreted in different ways. When a group or a community believes that it shares a common culture, language and territory are convinced to maintain its identity to acquire the authority of its own affairs through the creation of its own state.

Hypothesis 1: China equates dominant Han identity as a Chinese state (political) identity marginalizing the space of Uyghur identity.

China's political, ideological tool is *Zhonghua minzu* concept. It's very uncertain that China has deliberately used confusing words such as *minzu* connoting either nation or ethnic group to keep the mystification for China watchers while it very well knows what it means through the usage of such terms. China intends to enact the *Zhonghua minzu* concept full-fledged in the rest of China, including the peripheral areas, and this reality of Chinese identity being 'Han centric' has been echoed by many scholars where minorities are framed as 'others' at the societal level. The Han attitude towards minorities has implications that the minority policy only appears ethnic inclusive while at different phases minorities representing exoticism have occurred. The classic work of Dru C. Gladney's is the leading one; he contended Han ethnicity equivalent to Chinese. He was the one who coined the term 'essentializing of the Hans', and he observed that Han and its culture equalizes to modernity while the depiction of minorities was backward. Gladney gave a detailed account of the eroticization of minorities, expressing the superiority of the Han and minorities were categorized as 'othered, feminized and backward' (Gladney, 1994).

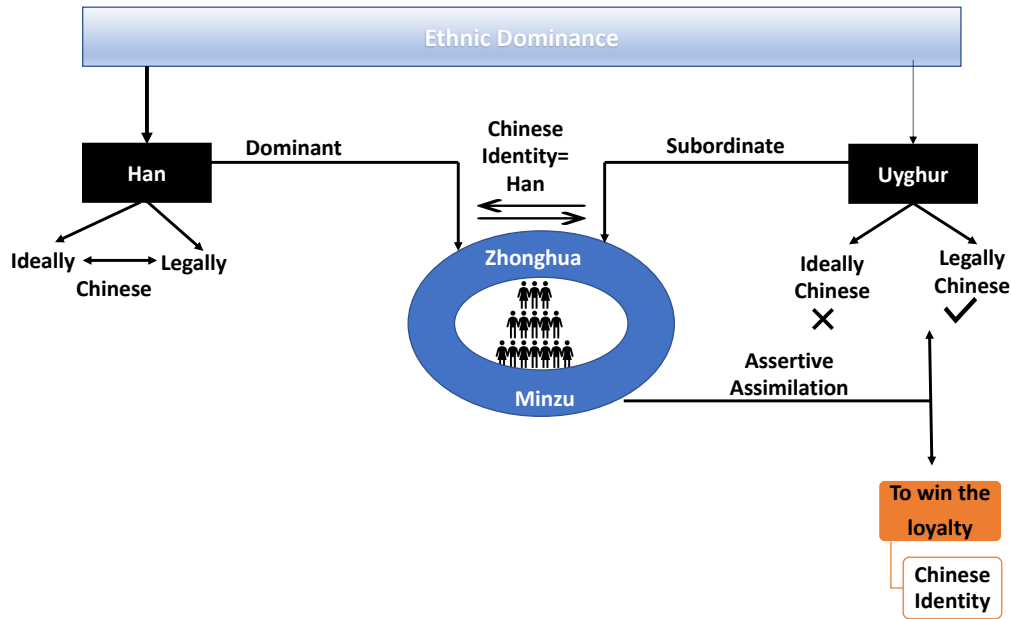


Fig.2. explains the role ethnic dominance plays in creating a Chinese identity=Han; Han is regarded legally and ideally Chinese while the Uyghurs are legally considered Chinese citizens but ideally not Chinese model citizens and they need the assistance of the Han to become modernize and be loyal citizens.

Chinese state nationalism and Han nationalism are often used as interchangeable terms, and the discourse rests on the history of the Han people. In fact, the cultural components are directly connected to the Han identity, i.e., the Mandarin language, customs, Confucius practices. In other words, Han nationalism is a political ideology, a tool used by the CCP through which the majority group identity themselves as Chinese. Extremely sensitive towards any act of dissent or resistance, since its inception in 1949 under Mao Communism was the guiding philosophy and his nationalism was limited to victorious revolution against the KMT and Taiping Rebellion. This shifted to Confucian principles guided by Han/Chinese state nationalism under Deng Xiaoping because the Tiananmen Incident bolted the party and the neighboring areas, i.e., the disintegration of the SU and Yugoslavia made China alert of its uncertain fate. With Xi Jinping in power to avoid anything like Tunisian Revolution also known as Jasmine Revolution, China is soaking in Han nationalism. He rejuvenated patriotic campaigns. Xi Jinping addressing students and workers at the Great Hall of the People to commemorate the 100th anniversary of China’s May Fourth Movement urged the people to love the party, and obey the dictates of the CCP². To fuel nationalism Xi Jinping fuses Chinese identity with the identity of Communism with social characteristics. He targets to keep the youth in confidence which shall follow three L’s-Love, listen and be loyal to the party.

² Duncan DeAeth, “Xi Jinping Says Chinese Youth Must Love the Party and Socialism,” *Taiwan News*, May 01, 2019, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3691983>

Thus, Chinese identity perception in China is equated to Han practicing Han Chinese culture represented by Confucianism. Even Rong Ma mentions that the difference between Chinese and foreign is that Chinese adopts Confucian cultural norms (Ma, 2007). Confucianism gaining ground since the reform era the new ideology of nationalism and Chinese as a distinct culture was tapped. Confucianism is embedded in the governance and filling the ideological gap, it stresses Chinese exceptionalism, which works as a support and justification that China's culture is unique and requires a unique political rule to support the CCP and works as a fuel to boost the pride of the Han (Meissner, 2006). This is banal nationalism that the CCP uses to fuel the dominant Han nationalism because the Chinese state identifies *Chinese = Han*. The kind of discourse created by the CCP within China that minorities need the assistance of the Hans to grow as they are the modern ones, while minority-themed museums, their dances on tv are portrayed as exotic being amplifies the existence of Han nationalism. A stereotyping image of minorities was presented not only on television and museums but also in books was Han centric. The Han equalizing to Chinese identity or de facto Chinese person, i.e., the Han are normalized citizens without being objectified to any singer and dancer identity implying Hans as the original identity/representative of China (Chu, 2015).

The year 1991 played a significant role in boosting the role of patriotism. The historic 'Patriotic Education Campaign' which began in 1991, was the beginning of ideological indoctrination. In a systematic way the entire propaganda machinery of the CCP worked to materialize this campaign, the history textbooks were revised and emphasis was given to impart China's humiliating history 'century of humiliation' and how Communism and Communist revolution saved and changed China (Wang, 2008). In 1994 the outline of this top-down nationalism was articulated and the CCP's Central Committee set the goal that the 'press, radio, film, tv departments to use advanced media technology to conduct patriotic education to the masses, the state-controlled popular cultures producer produced movies and songs on the themes of patriotism' (Wang, 2012; 262-263). This patriotism got a fillip under Xi Jinping's governance. He not only has the vision to educate the youth particularly the majority group but also consolidated a tightened political control. He equates any form of dissent as a security threat thus, nation security measures have been exemplified and he himself heads the National Security Commission (Zhongyang guojia anquan weiyuanhui) established in 2014 (Lampton, 2015; 767) and heads the internet security group for national security³. Thus, in China, it is the excess of patriotism symbolizing chauvinism and it is also synonymous with nationalism because the youth is indoctrinated to support whatever the country does. The other ethnic group's identity is not considered an identity because China considers nationality a historical cultural concept. Ethnic groups imply a separate cultural identity. Unlike most other ethnic groups which have assimilated, few subordinate group(s) such as the Uyghurs (Tibetans, Mongolians) have resisted assimilation, the Han have no appeal to them. Local nationalism has no place in China, and the contours of Chinese nationhood are shaped by majoritarian nationalism and presently Chinese nationhood is linked up with strategic concerns and to build a strong nation and rise in status.

³ "Xi Heads Internet Security Group," *Global Times*, February 27, 2014, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/845238.shtml>

During the initial years of the formation of the CCP Premier Zhou Enlai in 1951 made a statement that for nationalities appropriate reforms are necessary to reach the advanced nationality. Similarly in 1953, chairman of the Commission for Nationality Affairs, Li Weihan emphasized checking Han chauvinism and local nationalism, at the same span expresses the vital abatement the Han can render in the military, political and cultural areas⁴. Han Chauvinism was deeply implanted in Han cadres who were sent to the peripheral areas, the cadres were disrespectful for the religious beliefs of the minorities giving rise to resistance in the Northwestern region reported by Renmin Ribao in 1953 (Bush, 1970, 25-28). From 1956 the CCP swayed away from its previous moderate policies as a result the local nationalism gained ground and supported strengthening the Uyghur identity and Uyghur nationalism. In the 1990s, Joanne Smith Finley's fieldwork and interview unveil that Han chauvinist attitude proliferated directly proportional to the growing of Han population in Xinjiang. The second-generation Han settlers in the 1980s and 1990s created more problems compared to the first-generation settlers as they were not briefed on nationality policy in Xinjiang (Finley, 2013, 86-88). It became clearer that the CCP sought to reform (policy, law) that was in sync with the CCP's requirement to be in power. For instance, the CCP was intolerant towards any kind of political reform as that would disturb the social hierarchy of Han and any activity linked even with non-political goals such as the Falun gong or cultural practices of the Uyghurs was also dealt strictly (Bovingdon, 2002, 45-46).

Simultaneously China also build-up a multicultural image that fosters and protects traditional cultures of diverse ethnic groups and endorses it by releasing White Papers (WP). The multicultural promotion was done through the WP titled 'Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China' released in 2005⁵. On paper China has a systematic framework to show the preferences, policies, laws it has framed for the promotion of minorities but under the semblance of *Zhonghua Minzu* the ethnic differences are enlarged because it is shaped according to the majority group requirements and imagination. To scrutinize minority group representation Zhenzhou Zhao and Gerard A. Postiglione analyzed campus newspapers as they are the main source of information related to universities. Their analysis concluded that the newspapers had a dual representation of minority images of 'US' and 'Other' (Zhou and Postiglione, 2010). Han nationalism further exacerbated this dichotomy in the form of cultural hegemony, internal colonialism, xenophobia and suppressing practices. (Gladney, 1998, 6). Thus, the other two elements, faulty ethnic policies and threat perception of the state are an extension guided and shaped under the semblance of majoritarian nationalism.

Faulty Ethnic Policies- Departure from Accommodation Policy: The CCP's policies have sparked widespread resentment against the Chinese state reinforcing the stronger Uyghur identity. The Chinese-state multicultural-unified projection didn't manage to celebrate the differences just like other multicultural country such as Canada, Switzerland. China's ethnic policies have the shade of homogeneity because the drive of economic policy, cultural policy, language policy was planned with the purpose of gradual homogenization as an outcome, that worked in a contrasting manner.

⁴ *Policy Towards nationalities of the People's Republic of China*, (Foreign Language Press, 1953), p.25-28

⁵ "Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China," 2005, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/4/4.3.htm>

Hypothesis 2: China's ethnic policies of language, bilingual education, autonomy are symbolic and idealistic.

China expounds about its minority policy but overlooked the asymmetries that exist between Han and the minority groups. China under Mao despite being aware of the danger of Han chauvinism settled surrendered Guomindang (KMT) 80,000 forces or in other words an army with no uniforms in 1954 known as Xinjiang Production Construction Corps (XPCC) or (Bingtuan). Bingtuan was the unit that was efficient in economic and military, its central objective was sinification of the peripheral regions. Thus, between 1962-1972 under the so-called development phase the Bingtuan established 58 farms in the peripheral regions to sinify it. Bingtuan during the Cultural Revolution period contributed to the destruction and attacking of historic landmarks, burning of religious books and confiscating private property in Xinjiang (Seymour, 2000, 170-77). Presently the Bingtuan has been sanctioned by the US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for their role in human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Bingtuan is more like a treasury unit as it has global assets of around 800,000 majority and minority companies⁶. Bingtuan's presence has strengthened the prevalence of Han chauvinism the Tibetans were considered as "stupid people, Tibet as a primitive place that needs development"⁷ and "Uyghurs in Xinjiang were regarded dirty, uncivilized and not very smart" (Sautman, 1999, 291).

Departing from accommodation posture, no longer attenuating the different characteristics of the minorities was fascinating. The CCP realized that language was one of the vital characteristics that would maintain the differences. The CCP manifested that Han was in the majority so the minorities should learn the majority language (Dreyer, 1968). Zhou Enlai who was so aware during the accommodation phase that the language of minorities should be backed changed his official stance in 1958, stating that minorities desire to share the pinyin style of their language with the Han for cultural exchange. Zhou Enlai knew the importance of language in assimilation, thus he proposed two proposals related to language. First, a unified system for Chinese and minority languages to make Chinese attuned to the pinyin system. Second, the Chinese language usage should be increased, which would complement eliminating the minority languages from school (Zhou, 2003, 63). For instance, in the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture, Korean people and Korean schools were forced to learn Mandarin. After the transition in 1958 teachers enhanced Mandarin learning and 90 per cent of the students were involved in discussions in Mandarin (Olivier, 1993, 118-119). Similar was the situation in XUAR, the CCP planned to revise and propagated the script of Uyghur and Kazakhs based on the Roman alphabet of the Han language in 1959. Even in the 1990s during the reparation phase education policy turns out to be idealistic because the CCP didn't utilize this medium to bridge differences by making awareness not only regarding the Han but also about the minority groups in China. Rather the CCP used education as a state-controlled drive as a tool to socialize into the nation-state content of Chineseness. Rebecca Clothey heuristically put forth more than two decades before in her study where she exposed the inaccuracy in providing education opportunity. Her study on Minzu University of China discloses that minority education is supported but the outer structure of the

⁶ Alex Bate, "US Sanctioned Xinjiang Paramilitary has Over 800,000 Holdings Worldwide," *Sayari*, August 4, 2020, <https://sayari.com/blog/u-s-sanctioned-xinjiang-paramilitary-has-over-800000-holdings-worldwide/>

⁷<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-06-14-wr-3888-story.html>

competitive Chinese society depends on your capabilities of Mandarin and not on ethnic languages. *Minkaomin* students on the one hand had the opportunity to learn their language but on the other hand the CCP didn't establish a system that provided opportunities to *minkaomin* students and rendering them feel isolated (Clothey, 2005). Such policies are hypocritical in nature.

Why was (is) the CCP so ignorant and one-sided in the framing of ethnic policy where technically the CCP asserts ethnic groups their rights but fosters a situation of antipathy for minorities that usage of their language and culture comes under extreme exertion. This is a polemic course of action because legally the state grants protections but rationally it maintains the political dominance of Han and the usage of Mandarin as the only means and end to survive the socio-economic hierarchy and avail the resources. During the 20th C the institutionalization of Mandarin as the official learning language in schools and workplaces speeded up putting the subordinate group identity at stake. Although the CCP continued with the bilingual program it was a part of the curriculum and by 2015 more than 75 per cent of students were seeking bilingual education. This didn't improve the situation as the CCP predicted (Pokna et al., 2019, 37). Neither it won the loyalties of the Uyghur minorities nor was it successful in creating Chineseness identity or Chinese model citizens as required by the CCP. Thus, what we see later since 2015 is a complete shift in the policy of bilingual education and the Uyghur language in peril. Only Mandarin became the official language in schools, Uyghur signs on streets and university campus have been removed, using of Mandarin at the workspace and also privately is promoted, even at the re-education camps Uyghurs are forced to pick up the Mandarin language. Such a move is an assault on the Uyghur language, the CCP's purpose is to fulfill the loyalty aspect even if it has to change the landscape in language terms (Zhang and Yang, 2018).

Questions were also raised on the CCP's so-called structure of autonomy, followed by the reparation phase of preferential ethnic policies in the 1980s showcasing that it gave enough room for the minorities to climb up the socio-economic hierarchic ladder and assimilate in the mainstream Han culture. However, the inaccuracies the CCP left without addressing or intentionally didn't address because it cannot compromise on the moods and loyalty of the majority Han group was the marginalization of the ethnic policies. It can be sensed that the CCP had an understanding that even though they crafted ethnic policies, legally they are part of the Chinese society, ideally, they are not Chinese so the vision was to create an ideal Chinese citizen until then the minorities cannot be trusted. Ideally the CCP's ethnic policy grants opportunities to the minorities, in practice it is disenfranchisement in nature. The CCP granted the permission to create autonomous regions and the political participation of minorities exists but different level of freedom exists for different minority groups particularly for the Uyghurs and the Tibetans. The CCP recruited 5 million ethnic cadres but most of them don't enjoy higher positions they were only recruited for the lower levels. The autonomous region assessment discloses that inspite of neither the CCP's self-declared Marxist yearnings and titles the autonomous region is not at all autonomous. The dominant Han group is dominating the major top positions, the minority cadres by only holding symbolic positions can't do much but they are alienated from their group because of the framing of unpopular policies (Sautman, 2010).

In the 1990s the verbal negative stereotyping against the Han categorized as immoral other was at its peak still the ethnic policies CCP crafted was institutionalized in the framework of preferential policies, the economic policy of Great Western Development (GWD) (*Xibu Dakaiifa*)

was implemented, state-controlled religious and cultural practices were relaxed in Xinjiang but the riots and inter-ethnic tensions kept occurring which kept the CCP on its feet reminding them that a change in policy is the need of the hour. The ethnic policy was a cycle of *fang* (soft/loose) and *shou* (hard/tighten) (Grose, 2012). Post 9/11 the CCP played the card of its legitimate rule declaring itself the victim of terrorism a challenge to its territorial integrity. On the one hand the CCP intensified the crackdown on the subordinate Uyghur group in Xinjiang, on the other hand the CCP was basking in nationalism and national identity and talking about nationhood. The creation of national identity became vital because it involved being situated legally, physically and emotionally in a homeland and the CCP represented this view soaking in Han nationalism that the 3 evil forces of ‘separatism, terrorism and extremism’ forces should be controlled and eradicated to save the Chinese nation. The *shou* of ethnic policy since the Ghulja incident shifted towards assimilation because Zhu Weiqun, the United Front Work Department vice director, stated that minorities should substitute their native language by learning Mandarin, thus Mandarin was imposed (Elliot, 2015). Economic policy also has similar symbolic fate. Even the belief that economic development would succeed ethnic policy turned out to be a failure as highlighted by Wu Ge’s (2005) empirical analysis of socio-economic inequalities between Han and the Uyghurs in Xinjiang (Wu and He, 2018) and the recent work echoing the same inequalities by Joanne Smith Finley. China targeted language and used state institutions providing ethnic preferential policies but the Han chauvinism that was fed by the Chinese state equating *Chinese=Han* identity resulted in intense discrimination at the workplace, schools, private sectors and the CCP officials paid no heed to this significant problem (Sautman, 2010).

The failure of statist economic policies and language in minimizing the cultural and societal barrier and bridging the relationship of Han and the Uyghurs. China thought that by providing the carrot of economic development that stability could be achieved. Such an approach cannot be refuted as a wrong strategy because in some societies, states who are successful in providing some benefits do not encounter much opposition. However, in Xinjiang’s case even if economic equity is achieved in Xinjiang that does not guarantee zero dissents because economic growth does not assure the vulnerable people to achieve social (or political) rights. With the 2009 Urumqi riots the watershed movement of inter-ethnic enmity the level of distrust between the Han and the Uyghur community was so deepened that a slight misunderstanding fuel the riot costing the lives of 200 people and gathering the world’s media attention. Authorities put Xinjiang under martial law suspending all legal trials and sentencing 21 Uyghurs to death as an example of *pour encourager les autres* (Dillon, 2017, 20-21). The deadly violence was ceaseless, the Tiananmen explosion and Kunming attack in 2013 and 2014 rendered a serious chaotic situation in Xinjiang⁸. Thus, the intriguing question regarding the shift in the CCP’s policies since 2017, why did the CCP choose to tighten its ethnic policies? The justified description of such questions could be traced to the securitization build-up done by the CCP.

⁸ R.A. 2011, *Reflections on Chinese Policy in Xinjiang-Uighur autonomous Region, An Eye Witness Account of 5 July 2009 and the Aftermath*, Islamic Human Rights Commission, p. 20-21, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Chinese%20Policy%20in%20Xinjiang-FV11-LOW%20RES.pdf>

Threat Perception of the Chinese state:

The CCP prepared to construct the social construction of the security issues (of who, what is being secured and from what) depends on securitizing speech acts through which threats became represented and recognized as explained by securitization theory (Baele and Thomson, 2017)⁹. Copenhagen School is closely associated with securitization conceptualizing security not as an objective condition but as a process marked by the intersubjective establishment of existential threat (Buzan et al., 1998). Barry Buzan identified five different sectors of security, William Scott taking it further noted that sectoral approach gives the idea that how political elites have securitized a wide range of objects and sectoral approach is adopted to elucidate the distinct logics of state security, societal security, cybersecurity, social security (Watson, 2011; 5-6). Additionally, Scott D. Watson highlights an interesting fact on the securitization and framing discourse, that they overlap but constitute different bodies of work. Security operates as a distinct master frame similar to rights and injustice, thus, securitization may be understood as a subfield of framing (Watson, 2012; 279-282). Both discourses need three elements to construct the meaning- the audience, communicator and culture. Buzan et al., contended that an issue could be securitized only if the audience accepts it and securitization is not decided by a securitizer but by the audience (Buzan et al., 1998; 25,33).

***Hypothesis 3:** Han (majority) nationalism are designated to state sovereignty and Uyghur (local) nationalism are designated as terrorism rendering China to adopt an anti-terrorism stance.*

China has securitized the Xinjiang region framing the threat perception that the Chinese state sovereignty (referent object) is under threat. Since the 1990s the series of violence in 1992, 1997, 2009, 2014 hints at Islamist threat because in few cases East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and then its successor group the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) claimed responsibility. The presence of the Uyghurs from Afghanistan to Syrian war zones does raise speculation of threat or the Chinese contribution to the global jihad threat. However, it should also be highlighted that their limited size presence and targeting its own country gives an indication that the issue is onward looking of separatism. The CCP's framing of threat perception became easier because it is complemented by the rise of Han nationalism (audience) that the majority group identity is under threat fueling an inexhaustible sense of distrust in the society. Violence in Xinjiang a hybrid assessment of the Uyghurs terrorism is inappropriate, as it too nationalist to be categorized as the fourth wave of terrorism, not web savvy to be the fifth wave and not organized enough to be

⁹ First developed by Waever and Buzan securitization theory has developed into a rich research agenda on the dynamics through which issues are transformed into security threats by political actors and the consequences of that type on transformations.

instrumental. The violence surging in the 1990s were separatist activities as observed by Michael Winchester. He noted that the Baren uprising was inspired by the holy crusade in Afghanistan against Soviet disbelievers. Separatism also got intensified because of the disintegration of the SU and many newly independent states formation gave hope for Xinjiang (Winchester, 1997)¹⁰. The tonality and the perception post 9/11 changed was the building of a threat perception against the Uyghurs calling them from separatist to terrorist.

Therefore, the article contends that the domestic separatist activities or inter-ethnic violence in Xinjiang were transnationalized by the CCP by joining the ‘war on terrorism’ declaring its fight against three evils- separatism (*fen li zhu yi*), terrorism (*kong bu zhu yi*), and extremism (*ji duan zhu yi*). Interesting to note, Document No. 7 issued a strict directive to tighten the control in Xinjiang and eradicate separatist activities¹¹. Post 9/11, China launched its ‘war on terror campaign’ considering these violent attacks as part of a terror campaign of a network of international Islamic terror with funding from the Middle East, training in Pakistan and combat experience in Chechnya and Afghanistan (Chung, 2002; 8). China also attempted to portray that the violence in Xinjiang is supported by abroad-based ‘East Turkestan Forces’ (ETF). The elaboration extended, suggesting that Turkey’s backing of ETF is similar to the Taliban’s permission of Osama bin Laden. To such claims the then Turkey’s Prime Minister Yilmaz clarified that Xinjiang is part of China (Clarke, 2017; 9). With the worldwide trend of the states handling radical Islam forms a formidable discourse on terrorism China followed the trend. While the other fact of ethnonationalism which had historical roots and political identity contexts, stereotyping it with religion does not provide a rational justification. It is a must to have a rigorous theoretical understanding to analyze terrorism a group willingly adopting such a strategy must have collective rationality but such a strategic approach also requires defacto presence of an organization to foster discussion (Crenshaw, 1998, 8-9). Constructing a threat perception is an extreme version of politicization the issue is framed as a special kind of politics or as above politics. The detainment of over more than one million of the Uyghurs and other Turkic minority groups which China justify as the alleged terrorist threat and the need to purge the community from extremism. Expert Sean R. Robert presents a contrasting narrative digging deeper into the history of colonialism in Xinjiang, the formation of the terrorism narrative of the Uyghurs and the extreme form of repression under the shield of counterterrorism which is nothing short of genocide. Thus, it should be other way around that it is a war on the Uyghurs or the Uyghurs are facing the threat of losing their identity, colonization, marginalization and displacement (Robert, 2020).

¹⁰ Michael Winchester, “Beijing Vs Islam,” *Asiaweek*, 23(42), October 24, 1997, p. 30-42

¹¹ CCP Central Committee, ‘Guanyu Weihu Xinjiang Wending de huiyi jiyao, zhongyang zhengzhiju weiyuanhui 7 hao wenjian, (Records of the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CCP: Regarding the Protection of Xinjiang’s Stability-Document No 7) (19, March 1996)

Correspondingly, the Xinjiang issue can be analyzed from the societal sector. The organizing concept in the societal sector is identity. Contradicting its official claim China invariably defines national identity in terms of dominant group values and culture leading to marginalization of the Uyghur group who refuse to assimilate and they consider China's nation-building process as a threat to their identity (Gunaratna et al, 2010, 38). This gives rise to societal insecurity as it about self-sustaining, a deprived community feels insecure about the survival of its community. Common issues to view as threats to societal security are:

- Migration: when a Y community of people is diluted by the migration of Z community of people, this also brings imbalance in the population composition of Y community (Han Chinese migration to Xinjiang and Tibet; Russian migration to Estonia)
- Horizontal Competition: Y community still living in the region but their live style ways are challenged because of overriding cultural and linguistic influence from Z community (Uyghur's fear of Sinicization, Quebecois fear of Anglophone Canada)
- Vertical Competition: the region would be subjected to either an integrationist project or a secessionist project pulling them towards wider or narrower identities (Buzan et al, 119-121).

Thus, the Placement of issues on a particular spectrum varies from state to state. Some states politicize religion (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar), some states securitize culture (former USSR and Iran), China has securitized the region of Xinjiang as an extreme politicization of Uyghur's identity, land, religion and culture. With Xi Jinping coming to power nationalism was immensely subjected to top-down narrative and it is the core ideological ruling form just like the Mao era. Under the reform phase the policies articulated for the minorities especially for the peripheral regions to win the loyalties of the subordinate group did not materialize and violence was a notable phenomenon that rendered Xi Jinping to review the policies marking a shift since 2017. Under Xi Jinping nationalism is fueled because that would act as a catalyst to fulfill his China Dream by being resilient. It is not only Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan is also facing the brunt of Han nationalism but particularly Xinjiang is facing harsher brunt of repression because it is the gateway for Xi Jinping's signature policy of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with more than 80 states showing interest. Xinjiang is the main link to serve as the transportation hub, logistics and commercial in the future and it is also a facilitator to the Central Asian region as import and export pass through it¹². A significant proposal sketching the development was drafted in the 13th five-year plan running through 2016-2020 thus it is becoming of utmost importance to restore a stable environment in Xinjiang for the success of the ambitious connectivity project¹³. The implications of this top-down nationalism are severe for domestic politics particularly for the Uyghurs who do

¹² Faisal Kidwai, "Xinjiang Rides High on Belt and Road Initiative," *China Daily*, August 08, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201808/08/WS5b6a649ba310add14f384a0c.html>

¹³ Shabir Hashmi, "Xinjiang at the Heart of Belt, Road," *China Daily*, September 02, 2019, <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201909/02/WS5d6c84d0a310cf3e355692ce.html>

not correspond to the Han centric ideals of the state. And Xi Jinping desires to prevent radical transnational networks from Southeast Asia, Syria, Middle East borders from getting dissolved in China.

The CCP Overlooks an admixture of separatism, jihadism and Uyghur nationalism in Xinjiang, contemporarily only a single lens of terrorism is projected globally. Viva Ona Bartkus in her book *The Dynamic of Secession*, using the framework of cost and benefits analyzed the reasons for secessionism identified two-variable mortal and cultural threats. Mortal threat represents the threat to the community's existence and cultural threat represents threat to unique cultural inheritance. The Uyghurs encountered (encountering) both the threat intensified their ethnic consciousness and their call for independence and violence surged (Bartkus, 1999). However, Xi Jinping's cult xenophobic-cum-essentializing nationalism chose the trajectory to the killing of subordinate Uyghur group as a state policy in which millions are held in incommunicado detention which China calls 'vocation education center' solely because of their ethnicity. The counter-terrorism intelligence mechanism set up post 9/11 and evolved under the comprehensive security plan for the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 has intensified China's domestic security strategy under Xi Jinping. The after-effect of the Urumqi riots, Xi Jinping discussed a new strategic plan (Zhanlue bushu)¹⁴, in 2013-2014 the CCP paid attention to recruiting security personnel in Uyghur communities¹⁵ followed by the announcement by the regional authorities in 2014 to strike hard campaign it was a short version of detention as it was for a short period targeting the Uyghur population in Uyghur cities (Sheena et al., 2019, 16).

Surveillance and legitimization of laws became significant in the domestic security structure in Xinjiang, after Xi Jinping's visit to Xinjiang in 2014 a BBC report claimed that the security spending of the region increased to 213 per cent between 2016-2017¹⁶. China revised its National Security Law (NSL) stipulating what it accounts for as internal national security concerns and Uyghur activities were included. The shift was from external to internal threat to target the Muslim minority with a broad generalization of threat, increasing the chances of arrest and punishment¹⁷. Chen Quanguo's appointment as the Xinjiang Party Secretary in 2016 was a major step toward counter-terrorism, he called for social stability and domestic spending took a leap

¹⁴ Yang Jingjie, "Xinjiang to See Major Strategy shift," *The Global Times*, January 9, 2014, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/836495.shtml>

¹⁵ James Leibold, James, 2014, "Xinjiang Work Form Marks New Policy of Ethnic Mingling," *China Brief*, Vol.14, No. 12

¹⁶ "Xinjiang: China's Muslim Camp Spending Revealed," *BBC News*, November 06, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-46111865>

¹⁷ Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, "National Security Law of the People's Republic of China," 2015

from 5.45 billion RMB in 2007 to 57.95 billion RMB in 2017.¹⁸ In 2016 Xinjiang regional government passed Anti-Extremism Regulation to prevent the spread of an extremist idea. A further extended step was taken by amending the Anti Extremism Law in 2018 and the local Xinjiang authority was permitted to establish vocational education centers to impart education, skill training and psychological institutions that have extremist thoughts. In 2017 the internal security strategy shifted from individual repression to mass repression XUAR Justice department ordered to construct centers for ‘transformation through education’¹⁹.

Subsequently reports from Adrian Zenz in 2017 started surging that around 1.5 million people are facing mass detention between 5-10 per cent of the Uyghur population. By the end of that year reports emerged that ethnic townships had detained and Uyghur dominated Kashgar prefecture number of detainees reached 120,000. Without due process, it is a drive looking for a definitive solution to the Uyghur question where Uyghurs are sent to re-education school based on different levels and are facing forced labor (Zenz, 2019). Through, the surveillance-based system of Integrated Joint Operation Platform (IJOI) the Chinese-state has access to high information capacity. Anar Sabit a survivor from the detention center narrates her detention story that how she was confined at the airport by Xinjiang authorities because she visited certain sensitive countries listed by China recorded by the IJOP system²⁰. An extended step of surveillance also includes sending state spies to live with the Uyghur families with the objective to stop people dress according to their religious belief, teach how and what to worship, which version of history to read, and which language to speak. Thus, Chen Quanguo summarized since 2017 CCP’s counter-terrorism to fight terrorism i.e., to first priority is to prevent, then to stop the nexus of international and domestic terrorists and finally to digitize public security to use for mass surveillance on Uyghur and Muslim minorities²¹. Under Xi Jinping to break the transnationalization of terrorism repressive strategy is adopted misperceiving the threat. The approach used of policing and surveillance conforms that Xi Jinping aimed at identifying and eliminating dissent before they adopt an antithetical behavior.

Conclusion:

The article sought to draw theoretically the prevalence of ethnic dominance in China and initiated hypotheses to tests the relevance of ethnic dominance in the suffering/repression of a subordinate group in China. The article particularly focusses on ethnic dominance to explain the cyclical role of majoritarian nationalism, faulty ethnic policies and threat perception of the Chinese state to

¹⁸ Adrian Zenz, 2018, “China’s Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data,” *China Brief*, Vol 18, Issue 4, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-domestic-security-spending-analysis-available-data/>

¹⁹ (unofficial translation) “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification,” (China Law Translate, March 30, 2017), <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-regulation-on-de-extremification/>

²⁰ Raffi Khatchadourian, “Surviving the Crackdown in Xinjiang,” *The New Yorker Times*, April 2, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/04/12/surviving-the-crackdown-in-xinjiang?mbid=social_twitter&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_social-type=owned&utm_brand=tny

²¹ Shai Oster, “China Tries its Hand at Pre-Crimes,” *Bloomberg*, March 3, 2016,

analyze the situation of Uyghur who refuses to assimilate into the main Han culture. Xi Jinping focuses a lot on governance setting an example internationally, however, his governance model in Xinjiang based upon surveillance and securitization complements his assertive assimilation policy. In other words, his governance model is not in sync with international norms i.e., China is conducting grave human rights abuse against the Uyghurs. Majoritarian nationalism was embedded in China since ancient times (the idea to rely on the dominant race), it was only later robustly reinforced under the leadership of different Presidents of China.

It would be worth highlighting a parallel narrative on nationalism that China under the semblance of forming a homogenized unified Chinese nation is suppressing the Uyghurs but at the same time it is also using the Han to fulfill its capitalist interest. China's state-led-authoritarian capitalism is a clash between capitalist nationalism and Uyghur fight for the survival of its Uyghur identity i.e., China's path of internal colonialism of Xinjiang to use its resources. Despite China's claim that it is different from the Western nation's aggressive nationalism driven by capitalism now the situation of Xinjiang has the same lens of aggressive nationalism. China under the mechanical concept of Chinese nation and instrumental approaches supports Han culture to retain the top echelon in Chinese society. Therefore, China does not understand the concept of culture is like an organic fluid way of understanding human societies and at the same time under the semblance of this mechanical concept China is refuting the existence of Uyghur culture and identity shaped by the oasis dwellers of the silk-road (Tagore, 1917). Thus, China's contemporary trajectory of Han nationalism is no different from the western nation i.e. exploiting human life under the label of the nation.

With Xi Jinping's rise to power, the path of capitalism with Chinese characteristics is the central focus. He focuses on hard policies in Xinjiang understanding the importance of keeping in confidence the majority group. Assertive assimilation under Xi Jinping shifted to a mere legalistic attitude towards the Uyghurs i.e., a systematic framework is charted out to bring out the desired results of creating Chinese model citizens. Xi Jinping has a huge list of don'ts- an attack on Uyghur language, religion, culture. He has denounced the policy of preferentialism, using the narrative of counterterrorism in Xinjiang the vision is to promote the Chinese political identity. Thus, the CCP's assertive assimilation by using its force, law and resources is giving no scope to dissent against the CCP policies and Chen Quanguo's harsh detainment policies, indoctrination of the mindsets and zero tolerance towards the subordinate groups' practices turn out to be radical and 'crimes against humanity'. Putting it in a different orientation Xi Jinping assumed to be an absolute leader of China didn't tolerate any form of local nationalism in dissenting voices. In order to stop the contestation of local vs state (Han) nationalism the trajectory of killing the Uyghur group as a state policy has been chosen by Xi Jinping. Under the semblance of ethnic dominance, the Chinese state compelled by a *Zhonghua minzu* concept equalizing *Chinese identity=Han* is seeking irrational ends by battling against its own *Shaoshu minzu*.

The bigger question remains: how long will China carry out such repressive assertive assimilation policies against the Uyghurs? And will China get away with the repression? The Western states have started to pay attention against China's repression questioning China on its human rights abuse and calling for a visit to Xinjiang to assess the situation of China's dealing with the counter-terrorism and know the reality of detention centers. Contradicting itself China

has refused every time not allowing any UN official visit shielding under the claim that Xinjiang matter is an internal situation however, forgetting its stance that it was the Chinese state that transnationalized the terrorism by joining the 'war on terrorism.' Above all, the situation in Xinjiang should be seen from the lens of humanity and including the basic human rights requirements.

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