

One Belt One Road: China's Nation-Building Initiative

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Dedication

The author wishes to dedicate this work to her parents, for their endless support and for nurturing a love of exploring the world.

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Note on Terminology

The terms in the "nation-building" literature, including nation-building itself, are complex and nebulous entities that would require a whole separate thesis to truly define. To standardize the language in order to proceed with the conversation, the author has selected to use the most basic and simplest definitions.

In this paper, the term "country" refers to a collective group of people and its government that have institutional ties to a given territory. The "state" represents the series of administrative and political apparatuses that govern said country. A "nation" encompasses the physical and institutional aspects of both a country and a state, but also constitutes a basic element of one's identity. When "nation-states" are mentioned, they refer to states that define their sovereignty explicitly on the basis of a single ethnic group. "Ethnicity" refers to an affiliation based upon language, culture, religion, race, and transcends one's "nationality," which is defined as the country of citizenship.

Since the Chinese Communist Party comprises the entirety of the authoritarian regime in China, the term "state" is used interchangeably with "party" and "government" in the Chinese context. The Mandarin Chinese word *minzu* (民族) is usually translated as nationality, but as it essentially denotes ethnicity, it will be used as such in this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ONE BELT ONE ROAD

Millennia ago, a vital trade route connected the thriving civilizations of ancient Greece, Persia, and China. Cultures as well as goods were exchanged along this vast linkage between the East and the West. Through the ancient Silk Road, China was able to influence societies far beyond its national borders. And now, in the twenty-first century, it seeks to do the same.

In a speech addressing Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University in 2013, President Xi Jinping announced China's plan to build a "Silk Road Economic Belt," with aims to develop infrastructure and investment that would connect China's northwest region to neighboring Central Asian countries and eventually even to Europe.¹ The following month in October, President Xi gave a similar speech to the Indonesian parliament. He proposed constructing a "Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road" to promote naval cooperation and economic integration between China and Southeast Asia.² Taken altogether, the "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) campaign brings increased importance to China's frontier provinces, which will serve as launch pads into the wider global market.³

Similar to its ancient namesake, the One Belt One Road initiative seeks to go beyond the simple exchange of goods and services. As stated by the Chinese government:⁴

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, "President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries," accessed February 9, 2015

(www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml).

² "Chronology of China's 'Belt and Road' Initiatives," accessed February 9, 2015,

(http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-02/05/c_133972101.htm).

³ Min Liang, "'一带一路'最终圈定 18 省 新疆和福建成核心" [The Finalized 18 Provinces of One Belt One Road: Xinjiang and Fujian to Be Central], *Sina*, March 28, 2015, accessed March 31, 2015 (<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2015-03-28/192931656197.shtml>).

⁴ National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and

"The Belt and Road Initiative aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries. The connectivity projects of the Initiative will help align and coordinate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road, tap market potential in this region, promote investment and consumption, create demands and job opportunities, enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and mutual learning among the peoples of the relevant countries, and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity."

Since its initial announcement in 2013, the One Belt One Road campaign has generated a lot of commentary from China-watchers.⁵ In many ways, the government's decision to implement OBOR does not seem rational. Why would the Chinese government pursue large state-funded investments, especially during times of economic uncertainty? Additionally, many of the local governments receiving state funding are wrought with social unrest and ethnic tension, such as those in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Tibet Autonomous Region. Why would the central government choose to target provinces presumably not conducive to economic growth? Especially since the state's previous plan to develop these regions (Open Up the West,

21st-Century Maritime Silk Road," *Xinhua*, March 28, 2015, edited by Shaohui Tian, accessed March 31, 2015 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-03/28/c_134105858.htm).

⁵ The chapters in Chung-in Moon and David Plott, eds., *Global Asia: China's New Silk Roads*, Vol, 10, No. 3 (Fall 2015) provide an illustration of the many different perspectives and lenses through which analysts have tried to explain One Belt One Road.

initiated in the early 2000s) did not yield high returns, why would the government continue to funnel more money into these areas?

The questions above reflect a pervasive sense of puzzlement in the international community regarding the goals and objectives of China's One Belt One Road initiative. The theories seeking to provide answers to these questions fall into three main groups: 1) OBOR is a tool to stabilize China's economy; 2) OBOR is a component of China's resource security strategy; or 3) OBOR is an indication of China's revisionist motives.

This chapter will briefly outline the relevant arguments for each of the three theories above and then assess how comprehensively they describe the One Belt One Road campaign. An overview of the following chapters in this paper concludes this section.

Economic Rationale for One Belt One Road

Those supporting the position that OBOR is purely an economic tool believe that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is attempting to use its vast supplies of foreign reserves and capital to bolster the domestic economy.⁶ China's income inequality between the wealthy coast and the impoverished inland has created a potential threat to the CCP's political legitimacy. Furthermore, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) suffer from over-capacity and are dragging down an already slowing economy. One Belt One Road could serve as a mechanism for the government to improve economic conditions in the western half of the country as well as generate foreign markets for sluggish SOEs.

Market forces have exacerbated income divides between rural and urban communities across China, but this income inequality is particularly salient in the western

⁶ Shannon Tiezzi, "China's \$1 Trillion Investment Plan: Stimulus or Not?" *The Diplomat*, January 8, 2015, accessed January 25, 2015 (<http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/chinas-1-trillion-investment-plan-stimulus-or-not/>).

provinces because economic cleavages map onto ethnic divides. Tensions between ethnic minority groups and the majority Han population in Xinjiang and Tibet have created a sensitive political problem for the CCP. Therefore, the OBOR and state development policies could potentially improve ethnic relations by offsetting the income inequality caused by unfettered market forces.⁷

Because China's southern coast was the first to open up to economic liberalization in the 1980s, cities in these Special Economic Zones (SEZs) experienced dramatic growth from foreign direct investment (FDI), while the western provinces were largely neglected. In an attempt to help the hinterlands catch up in economic growth, the CCP provides targeted investment and infrastructure development, as part of OBOR's goal of greater connectivity with the wider region.⁸ The state recently designated Kashgar, a major city in Xinjiang Province, as an SEZ to encourage FDI and domestic labor migration.⁹ Unlike other urban areas in Xinjiang, Kashgar's population is predominately Uyghur, a Chinese ethnic minority group that often opposes the policies of Chinese Communist Party. As a result of its high concentration of Uyghurs, Kashgar has been considered a hotbed of social unrest, and the CCP's focus on its development could potentially be a means of mitigating ethnic conflict.

One Belt One Road is also a way for the CCP to keep certain SOEs afloat. Not only does the government wish to keep national companies solvent (despite diminishing performance) in order to placate powerful interest groups, but the CCP also wants to

⁷ Yuchao Zhu and Dongyan Blachford, "Economic Expansion, Marketization, and Their Social Impact on China's Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (July/August 2012): 714-733.

⁸ *Xinhua Net*, "Joining the Dots Along Xinjiang's Silk Road," March 22, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-03/22/c_133206639.htm).

⁹ Alessandro Ripa, "Kashgar on the Move," *The Diplomat*, October 14, 2013, accessed February 11, 2015 (<http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/kashgar-on-the-move/>).

maintain state control over important sectors in the interest of national security.¹⁰ As reported by the Wall Street Journal, the plans of OBOR are "designed to put China at the center of Asian trade and transport, and secure more opportunities for major Chinese construction and engineering firms."¹¹ By generating a demand market for these SOEs, the One Belt One Road projects could provide a boost to China's lagging domestic economy without sacrificing state control.

However, OBOR is not a perfect solution for China's over-capacity issues, given that the potential demand generated from external partners will do little to lift macroeconomic performance.¹² To truly achieve sustainable growth, the government would need to fully implement the reforms outlined at the CCP's Third Plenum in 2013, which highlighted the necessity of SOE reform, financial liberalization, and fiscal reform, among others.¹³ Additionally, the state has previously attempted to reconcile ethnic unrest with economic bonuses, but with little effect. Although income disparity contributes to minority dissatisfaction with the Chinese government, larger issues of identity and cultural expression are also at play, which cannot be solved with only economic tools.¹⁴

¹⁰ *The Economist*, "The New Silk Road: China's Latest Wave of Globalisers Will Enrich Their Country - and the World," September 12, 2015.

¹¹ Jeremy Page, "China to Contribute \$40 Billion to Silk Road Fund," *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2014, accessed February 9, 2015 (www.wsj.com/articles/china-to-contribute-40-billion-to-silk-road-fund-1415454995).

¹² David Dollar, "China's Rise as a Regional and Global Power: The AIIB and the 'One Belt, One Road'," *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, No. 4 (Summer 2015): 162-172.

¹³ See "Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," November 12, 2013 (www.china.org.cn/china/third_plenary_session/2014-01/15/content_31203056.htm) and *China Daily*, "Highlights of Proposals for China's 13th Five-Year Plan," November 3, 2015 (www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015ccplenarysession/2015-11/03/content_22361998.htm).

¹⁴ Damian Grammaticas, "Is Development Killing Tibet's Way of Life," *BBC News*, July 16, 2010, accessed March 26, 2015 (www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-10638506).

Implementing broad and deep changes to China's domestic policy would have a greater effect of decreasing income inequality and generating sustainable growth than OBOR would have. Thus, claims that OBOR is a mechanism for achieving purely economic objectives are not entirely sufficient in explaining why the CCP has chosen to pursue such an initiative.

Resource Security Rationale for One Belt One Road

Other China-watchers assert that the main goal of OBOR is to obtain and maintain access to natural resources.¹⁵ Rather than a network of economic or diplomatic ties, these analysts posit that OBOR instead reflects a map of pipelines and shipping routes that the Chinese government hopes to keep secure by engaging with local economies along the way. In order to make economic growth more sustainable in the long run, China must shift its economy to be more service-driven, rather than investment-led. But higher income, consumption-based countries often have an even greater demand for energy, which means that the government must lock down access to necessary resources in order to propel modernization forward.¹⁶

The regions that OBOR will transect are all rich in natural resources. The water supply in Tibet could source various networks of channels and reservoirs to irrigate China's arid inland regions, improving agriculture as well as industrial capacity.¹⁷ Additionally, Tibet's many rivers could also provide hydroelectric power to industries

¹⁵ Jack Farchy, "ERG Taps China for More Than \$2.5bn of New Project Financing," *Financial Times*, September 2, 2015; Lucy Hornby, "PetroChina to Spin off Key Gas Pipelines," *Financial Times*, May 13, 2014; and U.S. Energy Information Administration, "China: International Energy Data and Analysis," May 14, 2015.

¹⁶ Elizabeth C. Economy and Michael Levi, *By All Means Necessary: How's China's Resource Quest Is Changing the World* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 21-67.

¹⁷ Antoaneta Bezlova, "Tibet: China's Little Treasure," *Asia Times*, September 19, 2006, accessed February 10, 2015 (www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/HI19Cb02.html).

and urban centers out east. Considerable deposits of metals and minerals are also found in Tibet, including the world's largest resources of lithium, a key ingredient for expanding China's technology sector.¹⁸

To the north, Xinjiang and neighboring Central Asian countries are rich in oil and natural gas. Since the early 2000s, China has pursued a hedging strategy of acquiring equity production rights in oil and natural gas fields in case a global energy crisis were to occur and China's supply lines were cut off.¹⁹ Along the Maritime Silk Road are additional opportunities to tap into oil and gas, with the potential to build a shipping lane that could avoid the Straits of Malacca, a possible chokepoint for Chinese resource supplies coming from the Middle East.²⁰ Similarly, OBOR also includes plans to build a pipeline from Kashgar in Xinjiang Province to Gwadar in Pakistan, which would allow for direct overland access to the Arabian Sea.

While such investment and development may support China's growing energy needs, local economies (both domestic and international) have historically seen little compensation for resource extraction. China's previous projects in Africa and Burma, for example, had gained a reputation of being a mercantilist approach of paying off unscrupulous authoritarian governments in exchange for access to natural resources, all to the detriment of the local people.²¹ The CCP has since adjusted its strategy and sought to

¹⁸ Roger Howard, "Tibet's Natural Resources: Tension over Treasure," *The World Today*, Vol. 66, No. 10 (October 2010): 12-14.

¹⁹ Oystein Tunsjo, *Security and Profit in China's Energy Policy: Hedging Against Risk* (Columbia University Press, 2013).

²⁰ Llewelyn Hughes and Austin Long, "Is There an Oil Weapon?: Security Implications of Changes in the Structure of the International Oil Market," *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Winter 2014/2015): 152-189.

²¹ For Africa, see: Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2009). For Burma, see: David L. Steinberg and Hongwei Fan, *Modern China-Myanmar Relations: Dilemmas of Mutual Dependence* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2012).

broadcast the "win-win" benefits of economic exchange and connectivity, as evident in rhetoric surrounding OBOR.

The OBOR campaign is a way for the government to deepen relationships with external partners, but it is also a means for the CCP to solidify control and access to resources within its borders. As a country of over a billion people, the government is very concerned with energy insecurity. Although state investment in tense regions like Xinjiang and Tibet are costly, as is building infrastructure in unstable countries, it is necessary for ensuring continued access to natural resources.

However, the resource rationale for OBOR often misses an important component of China's energy security hedging strategy. The state decision to pursue expensive infrastructure projects and to engage with volatile governments "is best understood by looking at a full range of commercial, strategic, and domestic security concerns, rather than just at oil and gas. Doing so reveals that energy-related commerce is usually intertwined with security goals that go well beyond a desire for reliable oil and gas supplies."²² Although the CCP wants to secure access to needed resources, OBOR serves as more than just a blank check from the government. Not only does OBOR highlight collaboration on resource extraction, but neighboring countries are also, in a way, acknowledging China's leadership in the region.

Revisionist Rationale for One Belt One Road²³

²² Economy and Levi, *By All Means Necessary*, 150.

²³ Revisionism defined here as "a grand strategic orientation that rejects and challenges the international status quo at its most basic levels: the hegemonic leadership of the system and/or the constitutive norms, principles, and rules that undergird the system's hierarchic and normative structure," as used in Steven Ward, "Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s," *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2013): 607-639.

Because of OBOR's nationalist tones and the marked shift in China's diplomatic strategy towards cooperation, some analysts claim that China is seeking to broaden and deepen relations with neighboring countries in order to undermine the role of and eventually replace the United States as Asia's hegemon. They liken the One Belt One Road initiative to the Marshall Plan in Europe during the postwar period, saying that China is striving to use its "economic strength to secure foreign policy goals."²⁴ State funds through OBOR could enhance connectivity with neighboring countries in order to facilitate China's goal of becoming the dominant power in the region.

Many who view China as revisionist also believe that Beijing harbors a zero-sum view of great power relations, meaning that ensuring national security can only be accomplished by establishing China as the hegemon in Asia, to the detriment of the United States.²⁵ If true, then the objectives of OBOR become much more troubling for U.S. interests as well as for those of regional allies and partners. From the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea, for example, China has been suspected of leveraging economic engagement and diplomatic partnerships to reduce the ability of smaller countries to thwart Chinese militarization and naval assertiveness.²⁶ This "String of Pearls" theory presumes that the Maritime Silk Road component of OBOR will use economic incentives to pursue China's military objectives, which ultimately will threaten the sovereignty and security of South and Southeast Asian countries.

²⁴ Shannon Tiezzi, "The New Silk Road: China's Marshall Plan," *The Diplomat*, November 6, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015 (<http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/the-new-silk-road-chinas-marshall-plan/>). See also Chinese government's response to such comparisons: *Xinhua Net*, "China's silk road proposals not Marshall Plan," January 29, 2015, accessed February 12, 2015 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-01/29/c_133956612.htm).

²⁵ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2001) and Gilbert Rozman, *Chinese Strategic Thought Toward Asia* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

²⁶ Christopher Len, "China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Energy Security and SLOC Access," *Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Summer 2015): 1-18.

Although the relationship between China and the United States has become more competitive under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, it would be incorrect to attribute this to a shift towards revisionist intentions. As China has grown, so have its abilities to actualize the national objectives and goals it has long held to be important for national security. Rather than an indication of China's revisionist tendencies, the recent increase in U.S.-China strategic rivalry over the past ten years may instead be a sign of China's desire to achieve international status and recognition commensurate with its growth in economic and military power.²⁷

From this perspective, China's introduction of new institutions and moves to spread its influence do not imply that China seeks to expel the United States from Asia or to craft a security architecture that would replace that of the United States. Instead, initiatives like One Belt One Road and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) illustrate how China's increased power gives it greater ability to amend the existing international order to better serve its own national interests.²⁸ Although OBOR may not be a wholly revisionist tactic, its policies still hold implications for the strategic rivalry between China and the United States.

Thesis Overview

It is important to accurately understand the objectives and implications of One Belt One Road because of all the uncertainty surrounding China's rise. China's increasing global clout has called into question America's dominance not just in Asia but around the world as well. Many believe that the peaceful order that the U.S. has helped maintain

²⁷ Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013): 7-48.

²⁸ Wang Zheng, "China's Alternative Diplomacy," *The Diplomat*, January 30, 2015, accessed February 2, 2015 (<http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/chinas-alternative-diplomacy/>).

may be jeopardized if U.S. power is waning as China's influence is waxing. Additionally, Beijing's partnerships with authoritarian regimes and heightened ethnic unrest along China's periphery could potentially destabilize the region and threaten U.S. national security interests. Understanding the OBOR initiative will not only shed light on China's intentions, but also on how the U.S. should address and react to the actions of a rising power.

Clearly, the One Belt One Road campaign does not fall neatly into just one of the perspectives outlined above; the complexity of the Chinese government's investment plans cannot be explained by any single motive. The above frameworks also neglect the societal and cultural impact OBOR will have, both domestically and internationally. What is lacking in the literature thus far is a framework that integrates elements from all three theories and that also illuminates the relationship between OBOR and China's ethnic policy.

This paper will attempt to develop a new paradigm that more fully explains the rationale and objectives of the One Belt One Road initiative. It argues that nation-building is the most comprehensive way to understand the Chinese government's intentions with OBOR. The following chapters will also demonstrate how OBOR fits into the CCP's larger ethno-nationalist "China Dream" campaign, which crafts a narrative of a unified and rejuvenated China predicated on a single identity. When viewed as nested within nation-building goals, the justification for OBOR becomes more rational, and the puzzling questions noted above become easier to answer.

Chapter Two lays the theoretical foundation of this paper's analysis and provides an overview of the three main categories of nation-building that are most relevant to Asia

and China. These include: the empire model (relevant to both ancient China and the years of Maoist CCP rule), the soft-authoritarian model (encompassing the majority of the years since Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening), and an introduction to the multiethnic integration model.²⁹

Chapter Three demonstrates how the three nation-building models have been applied to state policy in Xinjiang and Tibet over the course of China's history from the Qing Dynasty onward. By establishing a historical context for the various nation-building paradigms that have been used, this chapter seeks to illustrate how China's current national identity narrative may reflect a departure from previous models.

Placing those historical and domestic elements within today's international environment, Chapter Four offers an alternative way of viewing China's nation-building that depicts with more accuracy the goals of the One Belt One Road campaign. This chapter posits that the multiethnic integration model is the best paradigm for explaining possible shifts in China's nation-building strategy and ethnic policy.

And finally, Chapter Five assesses what implications arise for the United States from a better understanding of China's nation-building strategy and the One Belt One Road campaign. This chapter hopes to provide analysts of China with some further insights into what the rise of China means for U.S. interests and how U.S. policy should address growing nationalism in China.

²⁹ This is a term that I have created to describe states that use government policy and rhetoric to emphasize a single, overarching national identity, despite the presence of multiple ethnic groups in the population. Individual ethnicity is de-emphasized to support nationalism based on a single national identity.

CHAPTER TWO: NATION-BUILDING MODELS

Why do states need to engage in nation-building?

Ethnicity, identity, and nationality are not static labels, but rather malleable concepts that are both articulated from the ground up as well as constructed top-down by the state.³⁰ However, loyalty to one's ethnicity and loyalty to an overarching nation-state can be disharmonious at times. Governments seek ways to tie disparate internal groups to a single delineation of land in a process known as nation-building. Problems arise when groups who do not subscribe to the government's definitions of identity then challenge the state's legitimacy and rule.

With the sweeping changes brought by industrialization and globalization, it was thought that ethnic lines would eventually dissolve.³¹ Tribalism and ties to ethnic groups would become either undesirable or, at the very least, unsustainable in the face of modernization and the increasing assimilatory power of the state. However, the global experience in the post-industrial age has been the opposite. Ethnic boundaries have not only persisted despite the increased flow of personnel, ideas, and norms across cultural membranes, but in fact have been reinforced through the accelerated and ubiquitous rise in interactions between and within ethnic groups.³² Modernization has provided even more opportunities to solidify perceptions of identity that are both self-ascribed and imposed by others.

³⁰ Studies of nation-building are well documented and expansive: this paper drew particularly salient insights from: Frederik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994); Walker Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" *World Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (April 1972): 319-355; Karl W. Deutsch and William J. Foltz, eds., *Nation-Building* (New York: Atherton Press, 1963); and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 1983).

³¹ Deutsch and Foltz, *Nation-Building*.

³² Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* and Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?"

Additionally, industrialization has occurred unevenly, layering economic disparities on top of cultural divides, which has exacerbated ethnic cleavages that already existed but are made more salient by modernization.³³ The existential threat to the state emerges when these disadvantaged ethnic groups engage in self-determination movements and seek to create a separate state to represent their distinct national consciousness. In order to ensure the continued survival of the country, governments engage in nation-building policies to promote and enforce a "national identity" that supersedes ethnic affiliation. However, nation-building is not only a method of rallying people around a single identity, but also a politically motivated means of exercising state power to justify certain actions under the banner of "nationalism."³⁴

Because of the party-state structure in China, nationalism and nation-building policies are inherently politically minded.³⁵ National myth and identity are crafted in a manner so as to legitimize and sustain the regime of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). But as China becomes more integrated with the global flow of ideas and people, the CCP has found it more difficult to maintain its monopoly over the national narrative. Separatist movements in western China and unfavorable reports on state policies in the international media present alternative views of the Chinese nation from that espoused by the CCP. How the party perceives and reacts to these domestic and international threats to regime longevity will have implications for the direction of China's nation-building policies.

How do states carry out nation-building?

³³ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

³⁴ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*.

³⁵ Michael, Yahuda, "The Changing Faces of Chinese Nationalism: The Dimensions of Statehood," in *Asian Nationalism*, edited by Michael Leifer (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21-37.

Throughout the course of their development, states may employ a variety of nation-building frameworks to guide policy decision-making and implementation. This chapter will elaborate on the three paradigms of nation-building most relevant to the Chinese case, and give an example of a state that has pursued each set of policies and that China may view as a model to emulate.

Empire Model

Within the empire paradigm, the central government grants autonomy to ethnic regions in exchange for political allegiance. Emphasis is placed on institutionalizing ethnic identity; minority groups have a marked status in society, exhibited by certain preferential policies or political representation granted by the central state.³⁶ From the perspective of ethnic groups, the benefits of the empire model are that the state not only allows but in fact encourages retention of ethnic identity and culture, in addition to permitting varying degrees of territorial control and political autonomy. However, the state may also maintain and exacerbate ethnic cleavages to the point of being detrimental to social cohesion and fostering a unifying national identity.

A country that embraced the empire model of nation-building was the Soviet Union. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was a "multinational state not only in *ethnodemographic* terms – not only in terms of the extraordinary ethnic heterogeneity of its population – but, more fundamentally, in *institutional* terms [emphasis in original]."³⁷ The empire model was critical to the formation of the USSR because the emerging Leninist state not only needed popular support for its socialist

³⁶ "Marked status" referring to the anthropological term that delineates a deviation from the norm; in this case, ethnic minorities receive preferential policies and/or territorial autonomy, which highlight their status as a group distinct from the majority.

³⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23.

revolution but also needed to maintain ideological purity.³⁸ In order to gain the support of the people, the Bolsheviks touted the benefits of an egalitarian, communist future where all ethnic language, culture, and identity would be preserved. They also instituted territorial and political autonomy for minority groups because of communism's ideological foundation as the "liberator of the oppressed."

The emerging Soviet state had to reconcile the anti-imperialist roots of communism with the needs of a growing country that held many different ethnic groups, and the empire model proved a successful nation-building framework in the beginning.³⁹ However, many experts suggest that it was precisely this institutionalized ethnic classification and territorial nationality that ushered in the dissolution of the Soviet Union when Gorbachev loosened central political control.⁴⁰ Because regional and cultural autonomy were already present in ethnic group consciousness, when the central government became less powerful vis à vis the localities, a rising sense of ethnic nationalism led to multiple self-determination movements in certain Republics. One could argue that the breakup of the Soviet Union demonstrated the fragile cohesion of the empire model, which was a lesson not lost upon China's leaders.

Soft Authoritarian Model

The second nation-building paradigm draws from the assumption that strong states with effective control over civil society and economic development can progress a top-down narrative of nationhood that maintains social stability. Ethnic group affiliation persists, but the strength of the state enforces compliance with an overarching national

³⁸ Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994): 414-452.

³⁹ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 24.

identity. This model often applies to states that emerged from the wave of reformist nationalism that occurred after World War II, whereby the public accepted tight political and social control in exchange for good governance and high economic growth.⁴¹ While economic development and higher standards of living benefit all groups, the enforcement of tight political control is often manifested in state-mandated restrictions on cultural or religious practices specific to ethnic minorities, not to mention the repression of certain civil liberties and freedom of speech across the country.

Singapore's policies of nation-building under the People's Action Party (PAP) has exemplified the soft-authoritarian model. Singapore has based much of its nation-building rhetoric on the narrative of being a multicultural, meritocratic, and secular nation.⁴² Especially in the early years of being an independent state, it was very important for the former British colony to stress a national identity that still allowed individual ethnicities to flourish. Only by accommodating all races could the state effectively generate loyalty to the new state. The PAP was also seeking to consolidate political power and wanted to ensure that the ethnic majority (the Chinese population) did not exercise too much clout, which would have jeopardized the PAP's control over establishing the new state.⁴³ As a result, the PAP actively limited any displays of overt Chinese chauvinism and did not encourage a dominant Chinese culture.

⁴¹ Francis Fukuyama, "Asia's Soft-Authoritarian Alternative," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring 1992): 60-61. In Fukuyama's 2004 book, *State-Building: Governance and Order in the 21st Century* (Cornell University Press), he also posits that strong states contribute to global stability because of their greater administration capacity for domestic institution-building and ability to enforce order.

⁴² Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and the Nation-Building Project*, (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2008).

⁴³ Eugene K. B. Tan, "Re-Engaging Chineseness: Political, Economic and Cultural Imperatives of Nation-Building in Singapore," *The China Quarterly*, No. 175 (Sept 2003): 751-774.

However, as the state grew stronger and the PAP's political goals changed, policies towards minority groups changed from accommodation to more forceful assimilation.⁴⁴ Political and economic motives have prompted the Singaporean government to move closer to China, resulting in a policy for mandatory Mandarin education, in addition to other homogenizing programs.⁴⁵ PAP leaders also want to establish themselves as a successful Asian state that does not follow the typical Western model of development and governance. Instead, the Singaporean government heavily stresses Confucian influences on societal values and organization, and uses that hierarchical morality to justify both the strength of the state as well as the mono-cultural national narrative.⁴⁶

In addition to being the moral stewards of society, government leaders are also seen as the economic guardians of the country. Much of Singapore's cultural assimilation is justified as the state's mandate to enforce social stability in order to progress economic growth. Similarly, China's government has sought to trade economic gains in exchange for political loyalty, particularly in its underdeveloped hinterlands, but has encountered domestic and international opposition to its policies.

Multiethnic Integration Model

States undertake a multiethnic integration framework of nation-building to eliminate institutionalized differences between ethnicities in order to emphasize an

⁴⁴ Barr and Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, 252.

⁴⁵ Tan, "Re-Engaging Chineseness," 754.

⁴⁶ Hussin Mutalib, "Singapore's Ethnic Relations' Scorecard," *Journal of Developing Societies* Vol. 28, No. 31 (2012): 31-55. Within this Confucian system, society is stratified into different ethnic groups, but one may achieve a higher status if one adopts the culture and norms of the most civilized group. According to the national narrative in Singapore, the group at the top of the hierarchy is the ethnic Chinese; thus, the perceived merits of Chinese culture rationalize state policies that favor Chinese-Singaporeans over other ethnic groups.

overarching national identity and reduce ethnic tensions. The state's narrative highlights social harmony within a pluralized, multiethnic society, wherein ethnic differences exist on an individual rather than group level. However, because the state's legitimacy and national identity are predicated on the illusion of cohesion and equality, society may become blind to the institutions and policies that favor the majority and are biased against the minority. In the best case scenario, the government works to slowly erode institutionalized discrimination, but in the worst case scenario, the state uses the excuse of a meritocratic and egalitarian society to explain the inherent superiority (or inferiority) of one ethnic group versus another.

Brazil has often been praised as a "race blind" society, where different ethnicities exist but are rarely acknowledged on an institutional level. Instead, the state touts its strong national identity as a unifying mechanism that blurs ethnic cleavages that would otherwise foster discrimination and racism.⁴⁷ Part of the reason for Brazil's narrative of a strong national identity relates back to its formation as an independent state.

In order to successfully break away from Portuguese colonialism, Brazil's independence movement needed a homogenous society and a centralized form of government.⁴⁸ In its early years as a new state, Brazil initially had a federalist system but centrifugal forces brought about a return to a monarchy and then eventually to a military-controlled, authoritarian government.⁴⁹ A cohesive, homogenous society and a state with consolidated power were necessary to avoid political dissolution. Additionally, the

⁴⁷ Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁸ Alcida Rita Ramos, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

⁴⁹ E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 99-148.

narrative of a strong national identity also became a legitimizing force in the independence movement.

However, given Brazil's colonial roots, the majority of those driving the independence movement and leading Brazil's new political future were white, former Europeans. The large portion of the population that was African slaves or indigenous tribes did not have a hand in shaping the new Brazilian national narrative. The government needed to propagate a single identity in order to maintain its survival as a newly independent state, but in doing so, it crafted a myth that obscured the diverse ethnic composition of Brazilian society.

Modern Brazil has continued to tout its "racial democracy," and while it is not necessarily a top-down form of cultural and ethnic assimilation, the state's emphasis on color blindness has certainly affected how non-white Brazilians and immigrants conceive of their national identity.⁵⁰ Despite state efforts in the past, a single homogenous culture has never emerged in Brazil, largely because individuals themselves have some agency in incorporating their own ethnic and cultural differences into Brazilian society. But while hyphenated identity exists, it is not overtly acknowledged by the state.⁵¹

Indigenous Brazilian Indians represent a particularly salient contradiction to the much-touted Brazilian homogeneity. Their allegations of mistreatment and discrimination by the state disrupt and expose the fallacy of the national narrative of a post-racial Brazilian society and identity.⁵² The Brazilian example illustrates how multiethnic integration has yet to be perfectly executed and implemented. While indigenous voices

⁵⁰ Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity*.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵² Ramos, *Indigenism*.

are muted in Brazil, the fact that the government is a democracy does allow them to be heard. How would multiethnic integration policies then play out in an authoritarian country like China?

Nation-Building Policies

Within each of these broad strategic paradigms, states employ certain nation-building policies. This paper utilizes the theoretical framework of Harris Mylonas, which emphasizes that in a globalized world, nation-building is not simply a domestic matter, but rather is a response to and an influence on international geostrategic trends.⁵³ In his hypothesis, Mylonas lays out certain conditions that may produce tension between a host state and its constituent ethnic groups.⁵⁴

- 1) The host state seeks to reproduce power and ensure sovereignty;
- 2) the non-core group (ethnic minority) seeks to maximize well-being and avoid repression;
- 3) external powers seek to destabilize the host state in order to gain bargaining power or as the result of ethnic ties to the non-core group of the host state.

Depending on the intensity and manifestation of the above conditions, the host state can then choose from a series of policy configurations:⁵⁵

- 1) Assimilation: state policies aimed at adoption of the core group culture and way of life by the non-core group.
 - a. May be overt government policies or hidden under the guise of "impartial laws" (i.e. mandatory education in a single language, etc.);
 - b. May take the form of more violent policies like internal colonization or exclusion of non-core group elites and assimilation of the rest.
- 2) Accommodation: differences are respected and institutionalized in exchange for political loyalty (similar to the empire model outlined above).

⁵³ Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, 5-6.

⁵⁵ Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, 21-23.

- 3) Exclusion: physical removal of a non-core group from the host state (i.e. genocide, deportation, segregation, internal displacement, etc.).

Using Mylonas' theoretical framework, which policies has China's nation-building strategy exhibited over the years? Given the more recent buildup of ethnic turmoil and unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet in particular, is China's nation-building paradigm likely to shift? To answer these questions, the next chapter looks at how the three different models outlined above explain China's nation-building from the Qing Dynasty to the 21st century, and whether recent developments in China's periphery have prompted a change in strategy.

CHAPTER THREE: NATION-BUILDING IN XINJIANG AND TIBET

China has one of the longest histories of statehood, but has not been without threats to national integrity. This chapter will focus on the nation-building policies concerning Xinjiang and Tibet – two provinces on China's frontier that are particularly salient not only because of their geographic relevance to One Belt One Road, but also because of their long history of cultural and territorial separation from the central Chinese government.⁵⁶ As the greatest sources of China's ethnic unrest and separatist movements, Tibet and Xinjiang represent an obstacle to the state's objective of social stability and national cohesion. Therefore, a study of how the central government has approached tackling these domestic disturbances throughout the years can illustrate how China's nation-building model and goals have evolved.

This chapter will assess how changes to the Chinese state have influenced how national identity is conceived as well as carried out by state policies. It also seeks to illustrate how society at the ground level can choose to accept, refute, or transform the state's narrative through individual articulations of identity. These shifting internal dynamics are compounded by changes to China's external environment and its foreign policy objectives. The goal of this chapter is to show how both domestic and international forces have influenced the type of nation-building policies the Chinese government chooses to pursue.

Qing Dynasty: Empire Model

⁵⁶ Solomon M. Karmel, "Ethnic Nationalism in Mainland China," in *Asian Nationalism*, edited by Michael Leifer (Routledge 2000), 38-62. The Tibetan plateau was first under Chinese rule during the Yuan Dynasty (1207 BCE) when the Mongols conquered the region, but then drifted in and out of the Chinese empire until the Communists took power. Present-day Xinjiang was conquered by the Qing in the 1850s, although had been under some Chinese control since the Han Dynasty (206 BCE- 220 CE), also experiencing interludes of independence until Communist control.

Analysis of China's nation-building begins with the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912). Although it may seem irrelevant to bring up the history of China prior to modern statehood when discussing current state policies, a comprehensive understanding of China as a nation would be incomplete without examining its historical conceptualization of nationality. The Chinese public as well as government view history as a cyclical phenomenon, rather than a series of discrete stages.⁵⁷ Thus, events and ideology from the past have a much more influential role in crafting modern-day policy.

One of the more important aspects of nation-building under the Qing was the tributary system, an institutional legacy from ancient times. While the tributary system dictated the nature of economic and political transactions within the empire, it was also based upon a cultural hierarchy. The most "civilized" group received tribute from the others, who fell in line based upon their degree of similarity to the dominant group. At the time the tributary system was first established, Han (Sinic) culture was at the top of the hierarchy.⁵⁸ Those who were viewed as less Sinicized were obligated to pay tribute to their Han rulers, as a ritualized expression of deference to Han culture. Although the tributary system became the dominant institution of international relations under a Han-led government, it endured through subsequent political changes and even under non-Han rule during the Qing Dynasty.⁵⁹

The tributary system had an effect on how ethnicity was conceptualized by both the ruling elites and their subordinates. Each ethnic identity had a stereotypical set of

⁵⁷ Mark Strange, "An Eleventh-Century View of Chinese Ethnic Policy: Sima Guang on the Fall of Western Jin," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (September 2007): 235-258.

⁵⁸ David C. Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁵⁹ Michael Yahuda, "The Changing Faces of Chinese Nationalism: the Dimensions of Statehood," in *Asian Nationalism*, edited by Michael Leifer (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21-37. The Qing Dynasty was governed by the Manchus – an ethnic minority group originating from China's northeastern regions.

cultural behavior and markers, and those furthest from the ideal culture were labeled "barbarians." A gradient of "barbarism" and a primordial definition of ethnic identity have long been a part of how ethnicity was interpreted in China.⁶⁰ The tributary system reinforced the view that the emperor was the pinnacle of civilization and had the moral imperative to extend this civilizing process to peripheral barbarians.

This idea that outsiders, through cultural assimilation, could attain a status in society that was on par with the dominant ethnic group was very much tied to ensuring unity in the empire.⁶¹ In order to achieve and maintain a cohesive kingdom, the emperor and his elites needed to preserve fluidity in ethnic identity. They promoted the notion that all those "under heaven" were of one universal base but had different cultural manifestations. Ethnic affiliation could be dampened when cohesion was needed and could be highlighted when ethnic divides were necessary for political gain.⁶²

The use of ethnicity as a tool of the state was evident in the Qing Dynasty's empire model of nation-building, wherein the central leadership maintained ethnic cleavages to ensure control. While the underlying hierarchy of the tributary system remained, a true "civilizing" campaign was lacking. The end of the Qing Dynasty was the height of China's territorial expansion, creating much of the basis for its national borders today. Trying to culturally assimilate the disparate groups covering so much land would have been an exhaustive endeavor. Moreover, maintaining ethnic cleavages provided a

⁶⁰ Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁶¹ James Leibold, "Ethnic Policy in China: Is Reform Inevitable?" *East-West Center Policy Studies*, No. 68.

⁶² Leibold, "Ethnic Policy in China."

political advantage for the Qing rulers, who were of a minority group themselves.⁶³ Ethnic delineations were encouraged in order to prevent alliances between groups that may have opposed or sought to overthrow the Qing Dynasty.⁶⁴ For Xinjiang in particular, there did not seem to be evidence of any real attempts to assimilate the Turkic Muslims (Uyghurs) living there, as long as proper tribute was paid.⁶⁵ The combination of all these reasons resulted in an ethnic policy that was more accommodating than assimilatory.

In addition to the tributary system, policies towards the peripheral regions and different ethnic groups were also shaped by considerations of external conflict. While cultural assimilation was largely ignored, political control over ethnic groups was actively enforced in order to preserve the territorial integrity of the Qing Empire. Insecurity regarding the Russian Empire's growing power made the Chinese nervous about its western borders. Even though territorial maintenance and strategic defense were costly, Qing leaders "had come to see retention of Xinjiang as a point of dynastic – one might even say nationalistic – pride."⁶⁶ In the case of Tibet, the region was not formally thought to be under Chinese sovereignty until the British attempted to invade it in the early 1900s.⁶⁷ After the Qing realized their vulnerability to territorial loss, control over Tibet became a national imperative. The dedication of forces and resources sent to Tibet

⁶³ Because their government was led by an ethnic minority group, Qing rulers may have sought to perpetuate the economic and foreign policy aspects of the tributary system without necessarily maintaining its aspects of cultural assimilation

⁶⁴ Jonathan N. Lipman, "A Fierce and Brutal People': on Islam and Muslims in Qing Law," in *Empire at the Margins*, edited by Pamela Kyle Crossley, et al. (University of California Press, 2006), 83-110.

⁶⁵ James A. Millward and Laura J. Newby, "The Qing and Islam on the Western Frontier" in *Empire at the Margins*, edited by Pamela Kyle Crossley, et al. (University of California Press, 2006), 113-134.

⁶⁶ James A. Millward, "Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Xinjiang," *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2000): 125.

⁶⁷ Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (University of California Press, 1989).

to quell ethnic revolts contributed to the overall weakening of the Qing Dynasty and its eventual collapse.

This lesson from history persists in the mindset of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) today. Because the Qing Dynasty represents the height of China's territorial expansion as well as its humiliating defeat at the hands of Western powers, it is a very powerful symbol of China's fall from glory and provides a foundation for China's potential rejuvenation. Just like Qing leaders felt that any cost was worth paying to retain the borders of the Qing Empire, the CCP may hold a similar calculation when it comes to maintaining control over Xinjiang and Tibet. China's return to greatness and its identity as a nation-state seem to entail complete territorial integrity.⁶⁸

Maoist China: Empire Model⁶⁹

When the Chinese Communist Party came into power in 1949, it set about instituting a Leninist system of government modeled after the Soviet Union. Tight party-state control pervaded every aspect of the newly formed People's Republic of China (PRC). In the realm of ethnic policy, the CCP adapted the Soviet model of regional autonomy. It set about surveying all minority groups, which produced over four hundred different self-identified ethnicities.⁷⁰ The state eventually distilled those hundreds into the

⁶⁸ Yahuda, "The Changing Faces of Chinese Nationalism," 22.

⁶⁹ When the Kuomintang (KMT) established the short-lived Republic of China (ROC), the model of nation-building most represented multiethnic integration. Although five different ethnic categories were officially recognized, the KMT emphasized a single Chinese identity to illustrate the ROC's status a modern nation-state. More detailed analysis of this time period is beyond the scope of this paper because of the nearly complete erasure of KMT policies after the CCP took power and also because of the KMT's relatively weak control over Tibet and Xinjiang at the time. During KMT reign, Tibet was *de facto* independent from the central Chinese government and Xinjiang was in and out of Soviet control, including two brief periods of independence as East Turkestan. See S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 2004) for more on Xinjiang's history at this time.

⁷⁰ Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (University of California Press, 2011).

fifty-six nationalities (民族, *minzu*) China reports to have today. Not only does this demonstrate the influence of the Soviet Union on the CCP's recognition of ethnic identity, but it also illustrates how ethnicity can be constructed from the state down.⁷¹

Similar to the USSR, much of the CCP's rationale for following an empire model of nation-building was to gain support for its political objectives. When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched into China's western hinterland, which had been only loosely controlled by the central state for some time, the new CCP leaders promised ethnic groups territorial autonomy in exchange for political acquiescence.

The creation of these autonomous regions gave political legitimacy to an ethnic identity separate from the national concept of "Chinese." The Soviet Union first laid the seed for ethno-nationalism when it institutionalized the term "Uyghur" as the pan-ethnic identity for Turkic Muslims living in the region.⁷² Previously, group identity in Xinjiang largely depended on the nature of one's lifestyle. Sedentary groups tended to view each other as more similar than in comparison to nomadic tribes; the same in-group mentality applied for nomads.⁷³ The CCP adopted the ethnic label "Uyghur" and designated Xinjiang as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, which gave disparate minority groups living in the area a common identity around which to coalesce.

Similarly, the signing of the "Seventeen Point Agreement" of 1951 and the creation of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 1965 gave Tibetan ethnic groups the

⁷¹ In a way, designating fifty-six ethnic groups is just as arbitrary as designating five, which indicates that such delineations must be based upon something other than an ethnic essence.

⁷² Ablet Kamalov, "The Uyghurs as Part of Central Asian Commonality: Soviet Historiography on the Uyghurs," in *Situating the Uyghurs Between China and Central Asia*, edited by Ildikó Bellèr-Hann, et al (Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 31-45.

⁷³ Laura J. Newby, "'Us and Them' in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Xinjiang," in *Situating the Uyghurs Between China and Central Asia*, edited by Ildikó Bellèr-Hann, et al (Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 15-30.

expectation that they would receive a certain degree of political and cultural freedom from the central Chinese state.⁷⁴ However, when that autonomy never truly materialized and central control tightened, ethnic groups in both Xinjiang and Tibet felt a greater separation in identity from the nation-state of China.⁷⁵ Minorities turned to ethnicity as the basis of their identity, rather than subscribing to the narrative of being Chinese. The combination of strong ethnic affiliation and territorial autonomy led to self-determination movements across both Xinjiang and Tibet after the CCP took power. Thus, while beneficial to the initial formation and establishment of the PRC, the designation of Xinjiang and Tibet as autonomous areas also produced an institutional basis for challenging the legitimacy and power of the Chinese Communist Party.

Preferential policies towards ethnic minorities also represented an element of the empire model of nation-building. In addition to designating autonomous zones, the central government exempted ethnic groups from the One Child Policy, reserved a set quota for minority representation in political office as well as in higher education, and enforced preferential hiring policies in state-owned enterprises.⁷⁶ For a Han-dominant regime, this strategy of minority accommodation was crucial to maintaining political legitimacy and dampening the threat of ethnic tensions. However, the CCP attempted to use these preferential policies to solicit minority compliance in lieu of granting true territorial or political autonomy, which was the ultimate root of ethnic unrest.

Additionally, because the Maoist years of the CCP's reign saw a great deal of turmoil and

⁷⁴ Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2006): 54-101.

⁷⁵ Gardner Bovingdon, *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent* (East-West Center: Washington, D.C., 2004).

⁷⁶ Barry Sautman, "Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minorities in China: The Case of Xinjiang," *Division of Social Science at the Hong Kong University for Science and Technology Working Papers*, No. 32 (September 1997).

upheaval in all aspects of society, the state was never able to consistently implement and replicate the policies of the Soviet model. Nation-building in China moved further away from the empire model after the opening of the Chinese economy and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Reform and Opening: Soft Authoritarian Model

Both the collapse of the USSR and China's economic opening had a profound effect on how the CCP implemented nation-building policies. When Deng Xiaoping took power in the late 1970s, he saw economic development as a necessity for China's future. His policies unleashed not only a flurry of economic reform, but also a different method of governance based upon empirical study rather than ideological whims. The way that China opened up in the 1980s ensured that privatization would benefit the state and bring elites closer to the CCP.⁷⁷ Therefore, the party could use the boons of economic growth to boost regime legitimacy while cementing its hold on political control.

The dissolution of the USSR also heavily influenced the Chinese Communist Party. Seeing the failure of the empire model, the CCP's ethnic policies shifted away from any promise of true autonomy in minority regions. In addition to the political weakness of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government also marked economic decline as an important factor in regime change. The CCP saw that many of the political revolutions

⁷⁷ Mary E. Gallagher, "Reform and Openness' Why China's Economic Reforms Have Delayed Democracy," *World Politics*, Vol. 54 (April 2002): 338-372. China's initial opening relied heavily on foreign direct investment, which gave the CCP control in determining which sectors and which geographic regions were allowed to liberalize first. This piecemeal reform prevented the loss of political control while still cultivating a booming economy.

that occurred across the former Soviet republics were often the result of economic opening that was either too rapid or in states that were too weak to maintain control.⁷⁸

As a result of both internal and external phenomena, the central government adopted a soft-authoritarian model of nation-building that emphasized social stability as a precondition for economic growth. In order to continue delivering economic benefits to the people, the state needed to enforce strict control over society.⁷⁹ Because it had proved so effective at boosting political legitimacy in the eastern half of China, the CCP sought to use economic policy to temper unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet.

When China first opened its economy, Xinjiang and Tibet initially did not see much improvement in their economic situation due to geography. The first Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were concentrated along the eastern coastline, to capitalize on close proximity to financial hubs like Hong Kong and Taiwan. Inland regions like Xinjiang and Tibet did not receive much development because relations with neighboring countries were not as amicable. China was still in the middle of territorial disputes with the Soviet Union and India, and therefore did not see a benefit to promoting economic development in those contested areas.⁸⁰

Additionally, because SOEs factored prominently in these more isolated provinces, the downsizing and shrinking of state sectors after markets opened had a negative effect on the local economy in Xinjiang and Tibet. This decline in productivity disproportionately harmed ethnic workers, who not only formed the majority of the SOE

⁷⁸ Scott Radnitz, "The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet 'Revolutions'," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (January 2010): 127-146.

⁷⁹ Denny Roy, "Singapore, China, and the 'Soft Authoritarianism' Challenge," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Mar 1994): 231-242.

⁸⁰ Sylvie Démurger, Jeffrey D. Sachs, Wing Thyee Woo, Shuming Bao, Gene Chang, and Andrew Mellinger, "Geography, Economic Policy, and Regional Development," *Asian Economic Papers*, MIT Press, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2002): 146-197.

workforce but who also had greater difficulty transitioning to private sector jobs.⁸¹ The state's preferential policies set in place to help ethnic minorities gain employment in SOEs did not extend to private firms, which had greater flexibility in discriminating against non-Han laborers.

However, as the saliency of the territorial disputes diminished and the success of the SEZs had made the east coast rich, the central government sought to rectify this regional income disparity. Acknowledging that such economic cleavages could threaten the CCP's legitimacy, the party saw it as its duty to offset the negative impact market forces had had on minority groups.⁸²

In 2000, the Chinese government announced its "Great Open Up the West" campaign (西部大开发, *xibu da kaifa*). Like today's One Belt One Road (OBOR), the Open Up the West initiative was focused on increasing connectivity and infrastructure in the poorer inland regions. Also similar to OBOR, this policy of economic development was part of a larger nation-building strategy with domestic and international components.

The domestic focus of the Open Up the West campaign was to solidify central control in peripheral regions. Chinese authorities assumed that minority grievances and tensions with the regime would eventually fade away as economic growth brought greater prosperity to all ethnic groups.⁸³ In order to facilitate economic modernization, the state had to clamp down on societal control. One aspect of such political tightening was the increase in Han migration. Part of the rationale for diluting the concentration of ethnic

⁸¹ Barry Sautman, "Scaling Back Minority Rights," *Stanford Journal of International Law*, L. 51 (2010): 68.

⁸² Yuchao Zhu and Dongyan Blachford, "Economic Expansion, Marketization, and Their Social Impact on China's Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (July/August 2012): 714-733

⁸³ Nicolas Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," *The China Quarterly*, No. 178 (June 2004): 358-378.

minorities was that the "Chinese state [continued] the belief of its predecessors in recognizing a civilizing imperative in Han Chinese culture."⁸⁴ The state thought that injecting more Han Chinese into these minority-dominated societies would have a taming effect on rebellious ethnic groups, thus diminishing internal threats of separatism and regime change.

Another reason to promote the migration of Han Chinese was so that the central government could more easily control the effect economic liberalization would have on society. Han Chinese essentially held all the power in both Xinjiang and Tibet, and the CCP wanted to ensure that economic growth did not cause a shift in political control. Thus, much of the investment from Open Up the West encouraged a path of development that biased Han Chinese over local minorities.⁸⁵ This served dual purposes: the CCP could still claim to be helping to boost local economies while also maintaining Han satisfaction with the regime.

Discrimination had to be subtle, so as to avoid ethnic uprisings and preserve party legitimacy. Since economic development largely came through the influx of private firms, these companies could impose hiring preferences that essentially excluded ethnic workers. For example, firms in Xinjiang's urban areas paid much higher wages than agricultural jobs in the countryside. But Han-based companies could cite the necessity of fluency in Mandarin as a means of barring local Uyghurs from obtaining these high-wage jobs.⁸⁶

While minority groups retained their own ethnic labels, the expression of non-Han

⁸⁴ David S. G. Goodman, "The Campaign to 'Open Up the West': National, Provincial-Level and Local Perspectives," *The China Quarterly* (2004): 317-334.

⁸⁵ Stanley Toops, "Demographics and Development in Xinjiang after 1949," *East-West Center Working Papers*, Vol. 1 (May 2004).

⁸⁶ Emily Hannum and Yu Xie, "Ethnic Stratification in Northwest China: Occupational Differences between Han Chinese and National Minorities in Xinjiang, 1982-1990," *Demography*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (August 1998): 323-333.

cultural practices, like maintaining a beard or attending certain religious services, was strictly regulated and often times prohibited. The CCP justified these limitations on minority self-expression as necessary to ensure a stable environment conducive to economic growth.

In addition to these domestic imperatives, the Open Up the West campaign was also "shaped by specific notions of modernization and socio-economic development that only partly [came] from the heritage of communism. The PRC's senses of international position and purpose helped determine the articulation of the campaign as a major state project."⁸⁷ As China's economic and global clout increased, so did its desire to project itself as a modern nation-state. The Open Up the West initiative represented a bold move for China's leadership in terms of governance and nation-building. It sought to be a demonstration that China was no longer a poor, developing country, but rather a strong state that had the ability to cultivate and enforce ethnic harmony. Its policies also illustrated the strength of the state in forwarding a nation-building strategy that aligned with the party's political objectives.

However, the Open Up the West campaign and China's soft-authoritarian model of nation-building have not successfully quelled domestic threats to state cohesion. What accounts for the government's persistent attempts at assimilation, as opposed to exclusion or accommodation?

Nation Building Policies: Why Assimilation?

⁸⁷ Goodman, "The Campaign to 'Open Up the West'," *The China Quarterly* (2004): 329.

Applying the assumptions of Mylonas' framework of nation-building policies, states pursue assimilation if the non-core group has little or no external support.⁸⁸ States also institute assimilation if there is an external state providing support and that country is an enemy of the host state. In this latter scenario, assimilation usually takes a more violent form and often resembles internal colonization. Adoption of assimilation policies assumes the host state is status-quo seeking; if the host country is instead revisionist, then exclusionary policies are preferred. Accommodation is pursued when the external support comes from an ally state.

In its history of nation-building, China has implemented assimilatory policies for the most part, with varying degrees of violence. In the early years of CCP rule, for example, the central government attempted to enforce political compliance in Xinjiang with state-mandated Han migration. The *bingtuan* (兵团) were ethnically Han, PLA soldiers who were initially dispatched to Xinjiang to claim land for agriculture, in order to support a military presence. Eventually their purpose morphed into one of imposing strict social control and implementing the state's policies of economic development.⁸⁹

However, the relationship between the central government and ethnic groups in both Xinjiang and Tibet also contains elements of exclusionary policies. Historically, ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet have had an affiliation with outside forces, whether they were groups of the same ethnicity in neighboring countries or political advocates in the United States. In Tibet for example, the harsh state crackdown on revolts in 1959, which ultimately led to the exile of the Dalai Lama and the flight of many

⁸⁸ Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 36-49.

⁸⁹ Millward, "Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Xinjiang," 121-135.

Tibetan refugees, was largely due to China's antagonistic relations with both India and the United States.⁹⁰ Similarly, the downturn in Sino-Soviet relations prompted a large exodus of Kazakhs and Uyghurs out of China and into the USSR to escape Chinese persecution of suspected Soviet-supporters.⁹¹

The current dynamic between the Chinese state and ethnic minorities would seem to lead the central government to undertake exclusionary policies once again. Both Uyghur and Tibetan protests against the CCP have some form of external backing.⁹² While overt government support from the Western community is limited, powerful lobbying groups and non-governmental organizations have been vocal about legitimizing ethnic minority dissent against the CCP. Given that the Chinese government is very sensitive about any subversive attempts on the part of the West, especially from the U.S., to incite regime change or collapse, exclusionary policies would theoretically expel this potential threat to political control.

Despite the internal and external conditions that would point towards exclusion, the Chinese state has instead opted for greater efforts at assimilation. The next chapter examines why this is the case and whether the soft-authoritarian model still best describes China's current nation-building strategy.

⁹⁰ Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building*, 175-178.

⁹¹ Kamalov, "The Uyghurs as Part of Central Asian Commonality," 31-45.

⁹² John Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (NY: Public Affairs, 1999) details when the CIA backed the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan independence movement in the 1960s. In the post-Cold War global arena, overt U.S. and Western backing for minority groups in China has declined. But non-governmental organizations and lobbying groups within those countries still have a powerful influence on the voting public. The international organization Campaign for Tibet works to promote self-determination and human rights for Tibetans. There is also a Uyghur American Association, which is an advocacy group based out of the United State and which received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, and the World Uyghur Congress, which is based out of Munich, and speaks for Uyghur diasporas around the world.

CHAPTER FOUR: ONE BELT ONE ROAD AND CHINA'S NATION-BUILDING GOALS

Despite state efforts to quell unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet, ethnic discontent and dissatisfaction with the Chinese Communist Party have become more vocal. With its soft-authoritarian approach to nation-building, the central government has promised to improve regional economic growth and to lift the standard of living for minority groups. However, there is ample criticism that these policies do not actually benefit impoverished ethnic populations, but instead disrupt their way of life. The government's aim of extracting natural resources from these western provinces has also spurred backlash, as minorities believe the CCP is simply taking the spoils of the land without adequate compensation or investment in the local economy. Economic exploitation combined with tight political and social control is creating a highly pressurized environment in China's northwest, prompting the state's assimilation of minority groups to take on a more aggressive approach. Many elites in both the Uyghur and Tibetan groups are facing persecution, and expression of non-Han ethnic identity has been highly constrained by state policies geared towards cultural homogenization.

The soft-authoritarian model justifies such repression with economic growth, but this strategy has thus far not produced ethnic harmony in China. Has the Chinese government determined that a change in policy is necessary, and if so, does the One Belt One Road (OBOR) campaign represent such a shift? Additionally, since Uyghurs and Tibetans make up such a small portion of the total population in China, why doesn't the CCP pursue policies of exclusion, instead of assimilation, to silence ethnic minority dissidents and remove the threat to political control? This chapter seeks to address these

questions and provide a rationale for why One Belt One Road is not merely a policy of regional economic development or resource acquisition, but rather a comprehensive nation-building strategy.

One Belt One Road as a Nation-Building Strategy

Although seemingly a modern-day solution to China's current economic and social troubles, One Belt One Road has also been shaped by historical factors. The legacy of the tributary system and its hierarchical structure of ethnicity and culture has justified and encouraged the bias of state policies in favor of Han Chinese.⁹³ Increased Han migration and the repression of non-Han cultural practices are the central government's modern-day efforts at "civilizing the barbarians." The dissolution of the Soviet Union has also had a lasting influence on the CCP. Self-determination and nationalist movements furthered the collapse of the USSR because of three liberalization policies already in place: marketization, decentralization, and democratization.⁹⁴ China has already gone down the road of marketization, but has never fully implemented regional political autonomy and remains far from any democratic opening.

The CCP leadership also recognizes that such liberal policies were implemented in the USSR because the government needed a boost to its political legitimacy. It was the desperation of a weakening state that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Taking this lesson from history, OBOR represents an attempt by the Chinese state to reinforce governmental control and bolster public favor, in order to avoid the need to turn to democracy or decentralization. Thus, the impetus for One Belt One Road extends

⁹³ Barry Sautman, "Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minorities in China: The Case of Xinjiang," *Division of Social Science at the Hong Kong University for Science and Technology Working Papers*, No. 32 (September 1997).

⁹⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford University Press, 1993).

beyond the surface-level need for regional investment; it reflects how historical elements have influenced the way the CCP seeks to maintain its regime.

In addition to historical and domestic factors, the One Belt One Road initiative is also a response to changing international conditions. As China has modernized, so has its conception of statehood. Particularly influential has been the Westphalian model of state sovereignty.⁹⁵ China claims that it has the prerogative to conduct its domestic affairs as it sees fit, as evidenced by the aggressive assimilation policies within OBOR. However, there has been a growing trend of international political intervention (largely led by the West) on the grounds of human rights abuses or reports of bad governance. From the perspective of the CCP, this violation of Westphalian sovereignty is an attempt by the West to weaken certain regimes on ideological grounds or as a means of maintaining Western dominance in the international order.⁹⁶

As a result, the CCP perceives the external support of China's ethnic minorities as a threat to its own political regime as well as to domestic stability. Because of interactions with international organizations, Chinese ethnic minorities now have greater potential to recognize their marginalized state, to do something about their status if they are dissatisfied, and to mobilize others to act on their behalf.⁹⁷ However, today's globalized, digital age means that the actions of the central government in China have

⁹⁵ The Treaties of Westphalia established the concept of state sovereignty, whereby states had a right to govern their domestic affairs as they saw fit, and interference from other states was against the norm. States, regardless of size or power, should enjoy equal rights to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

⁹⁶ Denny Roy, "Singapore, China, and the 'Soft Authoritarianism' Challenge." *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Mar 1994): 236-237; China perceives Western intervention in Tibetan and Uyghur independence movements and its admonishment of China's human rights records as hypocritical, arguing that such criticism demonstrates the lack of understanding from the West about China's history and culture.

⁹⁷ Barry Sautman, "Scaling Back Minority Rights," *Stanford Journal of International Law*, L. 51 (2010): 108. "Minority/state relations are especially not a function only of interaction between minorities per se and the state, at least not in the cases of the two most 'sensitive' areas, Tibet and Xinjiang, where external actors, including the Tibetan and Uighur diasporas and other states also play roles."

reverberations throughout the world.⁹⁸ Too aggressive or too violent a crackdown from the state could diminish China's reputation on the global stage, not to mention further exacerbating internal unrest. Awareness of its global reputation is part of the reason why the CCP has elected to forgo exclusionary policies, like mass deportation or genocide.

Changes in China's relative global standing also provide a reason for why the state has pursued assimilation instead of exclusion. The CCP is aware that "in the case of ethnic groups who construe their primary self-identification outside of the Chinese state, assimilation (and thus political loyalty to Beijing) will never be either complete or irreversible."⁹⁹ Since assimilation is not guaranteed, the CCP has put in place an insurance policy for controlling ethnic groups by building close diplomatic ties with states that share an ethnic link with Uyghurs and Tibetans. Acknowledging the potential support that might reside in the countries neighboring Xinjiang and Tibet, the Chinese government has sought to use OBOR as an attempt to win the political cooperation of those states. With economic and political ties to the CCP, these peripheral countries will be less likely to harbor Uyghur or Tibetan separatists and dissidents, who may incite turmoil within China's borders.¹⁰⁰

Because the power dynamic between China and neighboring states in Central and Southeast Asia is tilted heavily in China's favor, the CCP has a lot of leverage in coercing them to cooperate with its ethnic policy objectives. Furthermore, because the Chinese state has poured a lot of investment into the natural resource sectors of OBOR countries, the CCP has a stake in maintaining stability on its borders and friendly relations with

⁹⁸ Enze Han, *Contestation and Adaptation* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹⁹ Nicolas Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," *The China Quarterly*, No. 178 (June 2004): 377.

¹⁰⁰ Rafis Abazov, "Chinese in Central Asia: Loyal Citizens or Fifth Column?" *CACI Analyst*, accessed February 9, 2015 (<http://caci-analyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/10620-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2006-2-8-art-10620.html>).

surrounding governments. Therefore, the Chinese state does not gain by deporting its dissident ethnic groups, nor do the adjacent countries benefit by encouraging destabilizing forces in their powerful neighbor. Through OBOR, the Chinese government is able to further integrate peripheral regions (like Xinjiang and Tibet) into the unitary nation-state of China, as well as increase Chinese influence in Central and Southeast Asia, both of which contribute to China's overall global status and clout.¹⁰¹

The bigger challenge to China's unfettered dominance in Asia is the influence of the West, and more specifically, the United States. The separatist threat in both Xinjiang and Tibet is not inherently threatening in and of itself, given the overwhelming military power of the Chinese state. However, support from international players, whether actually effectively or simply perceived as such by the CCP, is much more ominous for the regime because of the implication that party control and sovereignty over these contentious regions could be in jeopardy.¹⁰² The One Belt One Road campaign seeks to reassert the power and influence of the Chinese state through this manifestation of international clout, and to weave a narrative of nationalism based upon opposition to the West. Thus, OBOR is a tool of foreign as well as domestic policy.

Multiethnic Integration as China's Nation-Building Strategy

¹⁰¹ Michael Clarke, "China's Integration of Xinjiang with Central Asia: Securing a "Silk Road" to Great Power Status?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2008): 89-111 and Thierry Mathou, "Tibet and Its Neighbors: Moving toward a New Chinese Strategy in the Himalayan Region," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 45. No. (July/August 2005): 503-521.

¹⁰² Barry Sautman, "China's Strategic Vulnerability to Minority Separatism in Tibet." *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 87-118 and Cheng Song, ed., "用周边外交让世界感受中国温度" [Using Peripheral Diplomacy to Allow the World to Feel China's Influence], *QiuShi* [Seeking Truth], February 2, 2015, accessed March 26, 2015 (www.qstheory.cn/zhuanqu/rdht/2015-02/02/c_1114220964.htm).

The multiethnic model of nation-building seeks to remove ethnic minority labels as salient identity markers, and instead, attempts to dissolve the barrier that separates each ethnic minority from the overarching Chinese identity.

The most vocal proponent of de-politicizing ethnic identity in China has been Ma Rong, a professor of sociology at Peking University. Professor Ma believes that ethnic groups exist on a spectrum that extends from cultural minority group at one end, to individual nation-state at the other.¹⁰³ Through changing the internal and external conditions, an ethnic group can gradually morph into a nation-state. Conversely, divisions within a state can also lead to identification with individual ethnicities. Ma critiques the CCP's categorization of society into ethnic nationalities (民族, *minzu*), stating that demarcating ethnic groups as political entities pushes minorities towards self-determination and separatist movements.¹⁰⁴

To avoid state fracturing, the government should move towards an assimilatory structure whereby ethnic groups are perceived as 'sub-cultures' (subordinate to the majority group), rather than classifications of equal standing. Ma posits that multiethnic integration can be achieved if the state successfully determines a federal law to unify all minorities into the mainstream culture, allows only certain cultural traditions to be performed, and de-emphasizes ethnic distinctions and boundaries (i.e. ethnic delineation

¹⁰³ Rong Ma, "A New Perspective in Guiding Ethnic Relations in the 21st Century: 'De-Politicization' of Ethnicity in China," *China Policy Institute at the University of Nottingham* (July 2007), 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ma, "A New Perspective in Guiding Ethnic Relations in the 21st Century," 5 and Rong Ma, "21 Shijie de Zhongguo Shifou Cunzai Guojia Fenlie de Fengxian? [Is There a Risk that China Could Fracture in the 21st Century?]," *Lingdao*, Vol. 38 and 39 (2011).

on ID cards, job applications, etc.).¹⁰⁵ Such legislation and policies would clearly propagate a single homogenous culture, thereby increasing national cohesion and unity.

Tsinghua University scholars Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe also subscribe to the multiethnic model, but take Ma's notion of de-politicizing ethnicity a bit further. Similar to Ma's proposal, the two Hus want to remove ethnic group labels to eliminate the connotation of political entities.¹⁰⁶ They suggest changing *minzu* to *zuqun* (族群) – new Chinese characters that downplay the nationality (and therefore political) aspect of ethnic affiliation. But they go further than Ma on the political dimension by proposing an eventual change to the Chinese constitution that would eliminate mandatory minority representation in political offices and state subsidies to autonomous regions. They recommend instead that the state focus on further integrating poor local economies with the national economy and open up channels for capital, labor, and technology into peripheral regions.¹⁰⁷

Additionally, the two Hus propose that the state should do more to emphasize a national culture and to incorporate disparate ethnic traditions into a grand, overarching narrative of the Chinese people. On a societal level, the Chinese state should promote greater interaction between minority peoples and the majority Han, in order to further

¹⁰⁵ Actual removal of autonomous region designation and preferential policies towards minorities would require an amendment to the 1982 Constitution, such a large and controversial step is not likely to happen any time soon. See James Leibold, "Can China Have a Melting Pot," *The Diplomat*, May 23, 2012, accessed March 31, 2015 (<http://thediplomat.com/2012/05/can-china-have-a-melting-pot/>).

¹⁰⁶ Angang Hu and Lianhe Hu, "Dierdai Minzu Zhengce: Cuijin Minzu Jiaorong Yiti he Fanrong [Second Generation Minzu Policies: Promoting Organic Ethnic Blending and Prosperity]," *Xinjiang Shifan Daxue Xuebao* (Zhexue Shehui Kexue Bao) Vol. 32, No. 5 (2011): 1–13.

¹⁰⁷ Within the group advocating for a push towards de-politicizing ethnicity, there has emerged a division between those who favor Ma Rong's more moderate and gradual policy changes, and those who support the two Hus and their more radical proposals. See Rong Ma. "Guanyu Dangqian Woguo Minzu Wenti de Jinyibu Taolun: Yetan 'Dierdai Minzu Zhengce'" [Further Discussion of Our Country's Ethnic Issues: Talk of a 'Second Generation of Ethnic Policies']. *Minzu Shehuixue Yanjiu Tongxun*, No. 127 (January 15): 1-17.

facilitate modernization in ethnic regions. These adjustments to China's nation-building strategy are forwarded by the two Hus as a response to the failures of China's current ethnic policy.

Some recent developments in the CCP's national narrative suggest a shift towards a multiethnic integration model as advocated by Ma Rong and the two Hus. For example, President Xi Jinping's "China Dream" campaign calls for a rejuvenated and reunified China, but in order to return to its former glory, China must first be a wholly unified nation-state. The China Dream rhetoric extolls a single nationality and identity that supersedes all ethnic affiliation.¹⁰⁸ The China Dream, announced early on in Xi's presidency, has continued to influence many aspects of his policymaking, especially with regards to ethnic relations.

In his speech at the Second Xinjiang Work Forum in 2014, Xi emphasized the need for ethnic unity and for all people to "stick together like the seeds in a pomegranate."¹⁰⁹ He raised the need to improve education (especially bilingual education) to provide more opportunities for local Uyghurs to find better job opportunities within Xinjiang, as well as to move to the more developed east coast for employment. Such rhetoric clearly promotes increased minority-majority interaction and prioritizes assimilation into the majority Han culture as a means of achieving national unity.

However, many aspects of China's nation-building policy do not align with the tenets of the multiethnic integration model. In government white papers regarding Xinjiang and Tibet policy, the state reiterates the autonomy and preferential policies

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin Carlson, "The World According to Xi Jinping," *The Atlantic*, September 21, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Guomin Chen, "Xinjiang Right on Track: Ethnic Unity and Prosperity," *National People's Congress of China Journal*, No 2 (2014): 34.

given to minority regions.¹¹⁰ Yet, maintaining the status quo as official policy does not necessarily mean that change is not in the future. It would be counterproductive for the CCP to remove autonomous regions and preferential policies before the assimilating effects of gradual multiethnic integration had taken place. Slowly downplaying the saliency of ethnicity and diluting ethnic populations now will make it easier for the government to legitimize removing preferential policies in the future. Subtle but steady cultural homogenization seems to be the current tactic of the Chinese government.

Multiethnic Integration and One Belt One Road

China's previous attempt to use economic development in the west to enhance state and nation-building did not alleviate threats from domestic ethnic unrest, so why pursue more development-based strategies of assimilation?

The goals of Open Up the West mirror the objectives of One Belt One Road. Indeed, the investment- and infrastructure-led campaign of the early 2000s "must not be considered as a simple regional program but as a national strategy with global political implications."¹¹¹ Its similar focus on turbulent regions like Xinjiang "demonstrated its purpose to serve the 'internal' goal of tying the province [Xinjiang] closer to China and the 'external' goal of utilizing the region's position to accelerate economic relations with Central Asia."¹¹² Furthermore, the same challenges that faced Open Up the West still face

¹¹⁰ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "National Minorities Policy and Its Practice in China," June 2000 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/employment/2002-11/18/content_633175.htm); "Tibet's Path of Development Is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide," April 15, 2015 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-04/15/c_134152612.htm); "Successful Practice of Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet," September 6, 2015 (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-09/06/content_21796860.htm); and "Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang," September 24, 2015 (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c_134655252.htm).

¹¹¹ Mathou, "Tibet and Its Neighbors," 505.

¹¹² Clarke, "China's Integration of Xinjiang with Central Asia," 97.

One Belt One Road.¹¹³ The economic environment is not conducive to private investment; thus, much of the funding for transportation, resource extraction, and tourism infrastructure is from the government. Such a big economic gamble from the state did not necessarily pay off in Open Up the West, and it remains to be seen whether or not One Belt One Road will produce returns on state investment. Ethnic unrest is also still a concern, as increased Han migration could breed further minority discontent and increase the frequency of violent incidents from both parties. When implementing Open Up the West, the CCP believed these obstacles would fall away through course of nation-building.

The Open Up the West campaign was initiated as a facet of the state's soft-authoritarian approach to nation-building. It was predicated on economic benefits pacifying ethnic tensions, which would then demonstrate the strength of the CCP in achieving the status of a modern, cohesive nation-state. But the shifting tones of China's overall nation-building strategy have affected the nature of One Belt One Road, causing a slight but significant divergence from its predecessor.

The external and internal conditions surrounding OBOR differ from those that produced the Open Up the West campaign. As a more explicitly international campaign, OBOR places an emphasis on cooperation with neighboring countries that goes beyond economic connectivity. The rise of terrorist activity stemming from Xinjiang has added a security component to China's foreign policy efforts in Central Asia. China leads the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a security-minded intergovernmental organization established in 2001 that includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and

¹¹³ Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 358-378 and Hongyi Harry Lai, "China's Western Development Program: Its Rationale, Implementation, and Prospects," *Modern China*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (October 2004): 432-466.

Uzbekistan, with recent additions India and Pakistan joining in June of 2016.¹¹⁴ The increased saliency of territorial disputes in the South China Sea has also prompted China's burst of diplomatic outreach to India and Pakistan, as Beijing seeks alternative oil and gas shipping routes to bypass the Strait of Malacca. China wields much more power on the global stage today than it did during the timeframe of Open Up the West. Thus, the CCP is able to utilize its leverage over neighboring countries to help achieve the goals of OBOR, an advantage that the party did not hold to such an extent in the early 2000s.

One Belt One Road may also reflect the state's transition away from the soft-authoritarian model towards one emphasizing multiethnic integration. If OBOR were enacted to address income disparity between ethnic minorities, as a soft-authoritarian model of nation-building would suggest, then it would specify preferential policies for minority groups. Although the rhetoric surrounding OBOR has touted the benefits investment will bring to local ethnic populations, policies particularly aimed at bridging the income gap between minorities and Han are not present.¹¹⁵

Instead, OBOR indicates a possible shift away from the soft-authoritarian model and toward one emphasizing multiethnic integration. Ethnic nationalism is influenced not only by international factors but also by societal shifts in the domestic environment. Thus, the Chinese government has an incentive to alter domestic conditions in addition to foreign policy to diminish ethnic unrest. One Belt One Road addresses both the internal

¹¹⁴ Ashok Sajjanhar, "India and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Diplomat*, June 19, 2016, accessed June 24, 2016 (<http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/india-and-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization/>).

¹¹⁵ *The Economist*, "Tibet: Taming the West," June 21, 2014, accessed February 9, 2015 (www.economist.com/node/21604594) and, Shannon Tiezzi, "China's Prescription for Troubled Xinjiang: The New Silk Road," *The Diplomat*, November 19, 2014, accessed January 25, 2015 (<http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/chinas-prescription-for-troubled-xinjiang-the-new-silk-road>).

and external threats to the CCP's political rule by promoting a nation-building strategy of cohesion and unity under a singular Chinese identity.

Domestically, OBOR controls the relative size of the ethnic population and prevents minority groups from reaching a critical mass of resistance.¹¹⁶ Due to their greater concentration and isolation away from the Han majority, "Chinese minorities are more likely to want to protect their ethnic autonomy and to have a sense that they are entitled to ethnic autonomy."¹¹⁷ OBOR brings an influx of Han Chinese, diluting the ethnic homogeneity of these regions and reducing the likelihood and efficacy of future ethnic efforts to mobilize against the Chinese state.

The economic component of OBOR also stresses adoption of Han culture as a means of improving one's economic situation. For ethnic minorities, learning Mandarin or forsaking certain religious practices can possibly increase the likelihood of attaining a better job. Even if minorities exercise agency in utilizing certain aspects of the dominant culture in order to achieve their own ends, the net effect remains that the dominant culture has become more integrated into everyday life.¹¹⁸ This has a cumulative effect on non-Han cultures as more and more ethnic minorities see their traditional lifestyles erode.

One Belt One Road also illustrates the interest the central government has in preserving Han contentment and economic growth in volatile regions, like Xinjiang and Tibet. The state encourages development in these provinces because of the international focus of OBOR, rather than as a result of their special status as minority regions. This downplays the ethnic component of state funding, and instead highlights the *national*

¹¹⁶ See David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Cornell University Press, 1998) for further discussion of this idea of tips and cascades: critical mass needed to either fully accept or resist assimilation policies.

¹¹⁷ Sautman, "Scaling Back Minority Rights," 62.

¹¹⁸ Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

goals China hopes to achieve. Additionally, OBOR can attract Han investors and workers looking to capitalize on easy money from the state, thereby increasing the Han population in ethnic regions.¹¹⁹ Both de-emphasizing the ethnic saliency of OBOR investment and promoting Han migration help the CCP change the nature of the state's relationship with Xinjiang and Tibet. Instead of a majority-minority divide, which provides a political basis for self-determination and separatist movements, the state can cultivate a center-locality relationship that removes ethnic saliency.¹²⁰ OBOR is a way for the state to keep the Han inhabitants of Xinjiang and Tibet content with the CCP, thereby allowing the party to retain political control.

While ethnic unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet threaten China's domestic cohesion, the ability of the CCP to preserve territorial integrity also has international implications. The party's legitimacy has become predicated not only upon economic growth, but increasingly upon nationalism as well. With the China Dream rhetoric and the CCP's desire to broadcast China's role as a major global player, territorial integrity and sovereignty have become pillars of the party's regime. Ethnic unrest and threats of separatism in Xinjiang and Tibet are posited as potentially jeopardizing economic growth and foiling the state's diplomatic efforts, but ultimately they are presented as threats to China's nationhood and to the CCP's claims of sovereignty elsewhere.¹²¹ The implication is that the state has no option but to enforce assimilation because exclusionary policies

¹¹⁹ Thomas Cliff, "The Partnership of Stability in Xinjiang: State-Society Interactions Following the July 2009 Unrest," *The China Journal*, No. 68 (July 2012): 79-105.

¹²⁰ This assumption that greater interaction between Han and non-Han cultures further illustrates the legacy of Sinicization and how civilizing the barbarians by "teaching" them the merits of Han culture can lead to social stability.

¹²¹ Gardner Bovington, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (Columbia University Press 2010).

would reinforce separatist movements, which would then legitimize anti-CCP voices in areas like Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Therefore, the One Belt One Road campaign and multiethnic integration together may represent the Chinese government's efforts to strengthen the state's narrative of national unity. By promoting a single Chinese identity, the CCP discredits dissenting voices in Xinjiang and Tibet. More importantly, however, the party also emphasizes the commonality Mainlanders share with Taiwanese and Hong Kong people, many of whom increasingly distance themselves from the Chinese identity propagated by the CCP.

When viewed as a facet of nation-building strategy, the One Belt One Road campaign reveals important implications for how the Chinese Communist Party intends to handle China's rise. A transition to a multiethnic integration model will certainly have an impact on the government's domestic policies, but as the preceding chapters have shown, nation-building extends beyond a country's borders and holds international repercussions as well.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

The focus of this paper has been on China's nation-building and how the One Belt One Road initiative reflects the ethnic policy objectives of the Chinese Communist Party. But why is a study of China's nation-building campaign important for the U.S.-China relationship? On the one hand, the United States has an interest in monitoring Beijing's treatment of ethnic minorities to protect human rights. Advocacy groups, in the U.S. and across the Western world, pressure their own governments to speak for and protect minority groups that are experiencing state-sanction oppression or a threat to traditional livelihood and culture. Given China's increasingly violent and restrictive assimilation policies, the U.S. should be aware of how OBOR affects Chinese minority groups in order to uphold an international standard of respecting and guaranteeing human rights.

Another reason to understand China's nation-building and ethnic policies is that the type of approach the CCP undertakes can reveal China's intentions as a rising power. Ethnic policy is a reflection of how the state seeks to construct and enforce its definition of national identity. The narrative of a singular Chinese identity is wholly tied to political objectives of the Chinese Communist Party, which in turn are shaped by external forces and changes in the global arena.¹²² How China's nation-building and ethnic policy are manifested then sheds some light on the objectives and priorities of the CCP, which could hold implications for how the party approaches other issues of international relations (i.e. disputes in the South China Sea, possible reunification with Taiwan, etc.).¹²³

Much of the debate surrounding China's rise has been whether or not it has revisionist intentions. As noted in Chapter 1, many China-watchers believe that OBOR

¹²² Colin Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

¹²³ Jeffrey A. Bader, "How Xi Jinping Sees the World...and Why," *Asia Working Group Paper 2* (February 2016).

represents a move on the part of the CCP to expand China's influence in Asia, with the goal of rewriting the rules established by the United States. Additionally, given the authoritarian system in China, the CCP faces significant domestic pressure from hyper-nationalists to assert China's dominance in the region.¹²⁴ Scholars have noted that when an ascendant country reaches power parity with the established hegemon and that rising country also feels dissatisfied with the status quo, then the transition in power will likely result in war.¹²⁵

However, China's actions, while increasingly labeled as provocative and aggressive, do not demonstrate a marked desire to oust the United States from Asia and to replace the international order with rules of its own.¹²⁶ For one thing, China and the United States are not at power parity, despite the rhetoric of fierce strategic competition adopted by both sides. China's military prowess is not on par with that of the United States, and it is debatable whether or not its economic leverage has comparable global reach either.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the One Belt One Road initiative and the ethnic policy components therein illustrate China's predilection for the status quo.¹²⁸ OBOR, instead of being entirely revisionist, may in fact follow the established norm whereby powerful

¹²⁴ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics," *The National Interest* (Jul/Aug. 2011): 18-27.

¹²⁵ Douglas Lemke, "The Continuation of History: Power Transition Theory and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Feb. 1997): 23-36 and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell University, 1991).

¹²⁶ Jeffrey A. Bader, "A Framework for U.S. Policy toward China," *Asia Working Group Paper 3* (March 2016).

¹²⁷ Given that China's Gross National Product (GNP) per capita seems more like a developing country, rather than one of a developed nation, China has a great reluctance in adopting the responsibilities of a highly industrialized country. Even though its gross GNP may rival the United States, because of the absolute volumes of poverty still in China, Beijing does not have the economic capability to replace the United States as a global superpower. See World Bank World Development Indicators.

¹²⁸ In Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 41-44, Mylonas' model assumes that if an enemy state is supporting the non-core group, but the host state pursues assimilation rather than exclusion, then the host state is status-quo seeking rather than revisionist.

countries have the ability to game the international system to better their own interests, especially when it comes to protecting and ensuring sovereignty over domestic affairs.¹²⁹

Throughout the course of its development and rise in power, the United States has crafted an international system based upon its own national interests and used its clout to circumvent or alter the rules it did not like, much like China is doing today.¹³⁰ As China's global standing grows, it too will seek to forge an international order that best suits its own prerogatives. Rather than attempt to close the international order to a rising China, U.S. policy should emphasize and demonstrate the ways in which the current international norms have facilitated China's rise in power. By acknowledging the constructed nature of the global system, the United States can both offer China greater respect on the international stage as well as encourage China towards national objectives that preserve rather than challenge the established world order.

This chapter starts with the implications that One Belt One Road may hold for the United States and its interests in Asia as well as the rest of the world. Assessing the areas that may present opportunities for cooperation and also challenges to the U.S.-China relationship, this section concludes with a brief overview of policy recommendations.

U.S. Implications from One Belt One Road

China's OBOR reflects a nation-building strategy with a goal of multiethnic integration in order to enhance China's influence and economic clout internationally. Internally, the One Belt One Road campaign pursues policies that seek to aggressively assimilate its ethnic minorities into the CCP-led ideal of a nation-state; externally, the party uses this narrative of a cohesive Chinese society to broadcast an image of national

¹²⁹ Bader, "How Xi Jinping Sees the World...and Why," 5.

¹³⁰ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

rejuvenation and power. Although not directly aimed at the United States, OBOR holds important implications for how Washington should pursue both its China and Asia policy in the future.

A major objective of OBOR is to enhance trade with neighboring countries in both Central and Southeast Asia. This is particularly salient for the United States because OBOR seeks to create markets in countries that do not have a significant trade relationship with the United States. In Central Asia, for example, the rise of China's economic integration corresponds with a decline in that of the U.S.¹³¹ American influence is weakening in Central Asia, and China seems willing to step into the void. In the end, it may be that the Central Asian countries gain the most, as investment coming in from China provides an alternative source of revenue other than Russia. From the U.S. perspective, a stronger Chinese presence in Central Asia may be preferable to increased Russian influence. With its conduct in both Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated that it will violate the sovereignty of neighboring countries through military force; China has yet to do something similar.

Similarly in ASEAN, Chinese trade with Southeast Asian countries continues to exceed that of the United States, although the United States still provides a great deal more investment.¹³² Many analysts fear that OBOR gives China greater economic leverage in addition to military intimidation over smaller countries in Asia.¹³³

¹³¹ Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia: The End of the 'Great Game'?" in *International Relations of Asia*, edited by David Shambaugh and Michael Yahuda (University of California Press, 2014), 267-292, and *The Economist*, "The United States in Central Asia: Going, Going..." December 7, 2013, accessed February 9, 2015. (www.economist.com/node/21591242).

¹³² "Southeast Asia: Trends in U.S. and Chinese Economic Engagement." United States Government Accountability Office, August 2015.

¹³³ Pepe Escobar, "The 21st Century Belongs to China: Why the New Silk Road Threatens to End America's Economic Dominance," *Salon*, February 24, 2015, accessed March 5, 2015

Additionally, they believe OBOR demonstrates China's own "pivot to Asia" and the desire to diversify investment and trade opportunities away from the United States.¹³⁴

Both instances ostensibly harm the interests of the U.S. because ally or partner countries are less able to thwart China's aggressions due to economic dependence and because these markets become less available to the U.S. as China moves in. From this perspective, OBOR highlights China's economic power while seeming to signal the dwindling role of the United States in the global economy.

Much of this rhetoric about the decline of U.S. economic dynamism arose after the 2008-2009 Financial Crisis. Because China emerged relatively unscathed from the economic turmoil, many analysts both inside and outside China had begun to predict the demise of U.S. influence across the globe.¹³⁵ Efforts to boost the domestic economy would draw the attention of the U.S. leadership inward, and the U.S. presence would fade from international affairs. But now, nearly a decade after the financial collapse, the U.S. is no less involved in global governance and China's economy has begun to display fundamental weaknesses of its own.¹³⁶

While the OBOR is no quick-solve for China's structural economic issues, it does lay the groundwork for generating important markets in Central and Southeast Asia. An economically strong and stable China is in the interest of the U.S., but a China free to financially coerce and bully smaller countries is not. In order to secure its interests in

(www.salon.com/2015/02/24/the_21st_century_belongs_to_china_why_the_new_silk_road_threatens_to_end_americas_economic_dominance_partner/).

¹³⁴ Stephen Harner, "Has China Given Up on the U.S.? Short Answer: Yes," *Forbes*, February 18, 2015, accessed February 19, 2015 (www.forbes.com/sites/stephenharner/2015/02/18/has-china-given-up-on-the-u-s-short-answer-yes/).

¹³⁵ Xinbo Wu, "Understanding the Geopolitical Implications of the Global Financial Crisis," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct. 2010): 155-163.

¹³⁶ Nicholas R Lardy, *Sustaining China's Economic Growth After the Global Financial Crisis* (Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2012) and Joseph S. Nye, "American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct. 2010): 143-153.

Asia as well as in other parts of the world, the United States must remain economically competitive. But rather than seek to limit China's economic expansion abroad, the U.S. should concentrate its efforts at home and continue to foster human capital and innovation, and pursue trade relationships with emerging markets in Central and Southeast Asia that play to the U.S.' competitive advantage.¹³⁷

One Belt One Road has also generated fears that China will incite a natural resource scramble, as it moves to control production and transport lanes across Asia. Although China has made resource acquisition an important element of its foreign investment strategy, it also sells much of its equity production back onto international markets.¹³⁸ China's investment in natural resource sectors provides a hedge against a supply shock during peacetime, rather than as a long-term strategy for times of conflict.¹³⁹ If oil from the Middle East indeed became cut off due to a massive war, China's equity production would do little to balance the significant drop in supply. Therefore, OBOR and China's bids to access natural resources in its neighborhood will not likely invoke a resource scramble across the globe. In fact, much of China's willingness to work with shady governments and unstable countries is because those are the markets that are still open. Countries like the United States and Britain, which

¹³⁷ Daniel W. Drezner, "Bad Debts: Assessing China's Financial Influence in Great Power Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 2009): 7-45 and David P. Rapkin and William R. Thompson, "Will Economic Interdependence Encourage China and India's Peaceful Ascent?" in *Strategic Asia 2006-07: Trade Interdependence, and Security*, edited by Ashley Tellis and Michael Wills, 333-363.

¹³⁸ Oystein Tunsjo, *Security and Profit in China's Energy Policy: Hedging Against Risk* (Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹³⁹ Charles L. Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Fall 2013): 112-146.

industrialized earlier, control the vast majority of oil and gas production, leaving more recently developing countries to secure their own energy futures any way they can.¹⁴⁰

Another fear is that OBOR gives China greater control over sea-lane and pipeline transport of oil and gas, which China could threaten to disrupt if conflict ever broke out with the United States. However, the U.S.' vulnerability to such shocks is largely limited due to U.S. military dominance.¹⁴¹ Even if successfully completed (which remains to be seen), the pipelines proposed within OBOR will be difficult enough for the Chinese central government to simply manage, much less to use as a tool of resource warfare. Cutting across unstable Chinese provinces and also through countries like Myanmar and Pakistan, which have their own domestic struggles, these pipelines will require a great deal of government oversight and money to remain economically viable.

In terms of maritime transportation, the United States has sustained its strategic primacy in Asia, acting as the enforcer of open Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC). An attempt from China to disrupt SLOCs would be either short-lived because of immediate naval retaliation or result in a costly conflict with the United States, neither of which would be in China's best interests.¹⁴² At the end of the day, China is a net oil and gas importer, and it would see huge negative consequences to its own economy if it attempted to tighten the world's market.

Instead, the potential drawbacks of China's resource acquisition strategy may be less direct. Tapping into oil and gas reserves and building expansive pipelines across

¹⁴⁰ Rapkin and Thompson, "Will Economic Interdependence Encourage China and India's Peaceful Ascent?," 346.

¹⁴¹ Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," and Llewelyn Hughes and Austin Long, "Is There an Oil Weapon?: Security Implications of Changes in the Structure of the International Oil Market," *International Security*, Vol. 39. No. 3 (Winter 2014/15): 152-189.

¹⁴² Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," 131.

Central and Southeast Asia may have detrimental effects on the surrounding ecosystems. The impact of development and industrialization has already taken its toll in rural Tibet, inciting local anger and raising again questions of China's possible human rights violations.¹⁴³ Tibetan voices are largely silenced because of their limited political power within China; many in the international community worry that because OBOR deals with countries that have poor records of governance, local dissent and protest against Chinese resource investment will also be ignored. Given the commitment the U.S. and China have made regarding climate change and environmental protection, the U.S. should monitor the nature of OBOR investment in these energy sectors to ensure that China is holding up its end of the bargain.

This paper has already argued that claims attributing OBOR and its related institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to revisionist intentions are unfounded. A more plausible and insidious threat to U.S. interests lies in the nationalist tone of One Belt One Road and the overarching "China Dream" campaign of President Xi Jinping. China's rise in power and prestige has often been framed as a return to former glory.¹⁴⁴ This rhetoric surrounding China's rejuvenation has ambiguous but important implications for the Asia-Pacific region. Will a rejuvenated China emerge as the responsible stakeholder that the United States believes a country of China's size and stature should be? Or does rejuvenation imply that China's increased capability and clout will allow the state to actualize nationalist goals long-held by the Chinese Communist Party?

¹⁴³ Melvyn C. Goldstein, Ben Jiao, Cynthia M. Beall, and Phuntsog Tsering, "Development and Change in Rural Tibet," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (September/October 2003): 758-779 and June Teufel Dreyer, "Economic Development in Tibet under the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, No. 36 (August 2003): 411-430.

¹⁴⁴ Angang Hu, *China in 2020: A New Type of Superpower* (Brookings Institution Press, 2011).

One Belt One Road's emphasis on a single Chinese identity illustrates the priority the CCP has placed on national cohesion and unity. Given the economic and potential societal costs to complete OBOR, the fact that the state is choosing to pursue such a gamble demonstrates both the greater tolerance for risk in the CCP leadership as well as the extent to which the party is willing to commit to its nationalism campaign. The state's commitment to pursuing nationalist goals has implications for many of the contentious issues plaguing the U.S.-China relationship.

The OBOR initiative illustrates the lengths the CCP is willing to go in order to preserve territorial integrity. Tibet and Xinjiang have long been labeled "core interests" by the Chinese government, as matters of domestic sovereignty, but so has Taiwan. The CCP's resolute dedication to preserving China's borders combined with the state's imagery of national renewal could foretell turbulence ahead in cross-Strait relations. Historically, the territorial salience of Taiwan has been a fluid rather than fixed concept in the minds of the CCP. Only in the early 1940s did it become a useful political tool for the CCP to construct a narrative of reunifying Taiwan and the Mainland.¹⁴⁵ The geostrategic importance of Taiwan's position in the First Island Chain and the association it has with Chinese humiliation at the hands of both the Japanese and the West make it nearly impossible for the CCP to compromise on cross-Strait reunification. Furthermore, the linkage between western China and Taiwan is a two-way street; if the CCP appears weak on addressing separatist movements in Xinjiang and Tibet, then that opens the door for Taiwanese independence, and vice versa.

¹⁴⁵ Alan M. Wachman, *Why Taiwan? Geostrategic Rationales for China's Territorial Integrity* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 69-117.

One Belt One Road rhetoric and policy objectives indicate that the CCP's goals of national cohesion could potentially extend to areas over which it does not exercise complete sovereignty. This includes territorial disputes in the South China Sea.¹⁴⁶ Analysts who have studied China's previous behavior in territorial disputes have noticed that escalation into using force occurred when the Chinese government attached great symbolic, economic, or strategic significance to an area, *and* perceived a decline in bargaining power regarding control of said region.¹⁴⁷ Taiwan and areas in the South China Sea are vitally important to the CCP's legitimacy, but China is losing its control over both regions, especially since the recent inauguration of Tsai Ing-wen as President of Taiwan and the arbitration case pending in the UN Tribunal has voted against China.¹⁴⁸ Whether this meets the conditions for China to resort to force in order to bolster its claims to both Taiwan and islands in the South China Sea remains to be seen. However, as it has demonstrated in western China, the CCP is not afraid to flex its military force in order to maintain territorial integrity.

¹⁴⁶ Edward Wong, "Security Law Suggests a Broadening of China's 'Core Interests'," *New York Times*, July 2, 2015, accessed June 22, 2016 (www.nytimes.com/2015/07/03/world/asia/security-law-suggests-a-broadening-of-chinas-core-interests.html).

¹⁴⁷ M. Taylor Fravel, "Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 44-83. Fravel's argument is particularly interesting because he proposes that rising powers may actually be more status-quo seeking, and instead, declining powers who fear a loss in nationally significant territory (or at least marketed as such) will be more revisionist and more likely to resort to force.

¹⁴⁸ President Tsai Ing-wen is a member of Taiwan's Democratic People's Party (DPP), which has historically been less favorable towards greater interaction and economic integration with the Chinese Mainland. President Tsai has been ambiguous about her commitment to uphold the 1992 Consensus, which states that there is One China and the Mainland and Taiwan differ about which political entity controls it. The 1992 Consensus has also formed the basis of cross-Strait relations for the past 30, but Beijing is extremely concerned that President Tsai's reservation in explicitly restating her adherence to the Consensus is an indication of her desire to pursue Taiwan independence. The UN Tribunal has arbitrated a case put forward by the Philippines stating that China's control of certain land formations in the South China Sea is unfounded. China has repeatedly said it would not adhere to any decision made by the Tribunal as it does not believe the Philippines have a legitimate case to be made.

Rising nationalism in China's policies creates much of the tension in the U.S.-China relationship. Because of the Taiwan Relations Act, the U.S. is obligated to ensure Taiwan's defensive capabilities against a possible invasion from the People's Republic of China.¹⁴⁹ If China were to militarily pressure reunification with Taiwan, the U.S. would have to intervene. The threat of escalation into military conflict in the South China Sea also plagues U.S.-China relations. More than just a debate over territory and retribution for historical grievances, the disputes in the South China Sea represent a test of U.S. commitment and credibility to its regional allies and partners. If the U.S. allows China's militarization and nationalism to grow unchecked, then it undermines not only its position in Asia, but also the security guarantees it provides elsewhere in the world.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, U.S. policy has to walk the fine line between protecting its national interests while ensuring that it does not back China into a corner.

U.S. Policy Recommendations

What the U.S. perceives to be China's intentions will have a significant effect on how the U.S. formulates and implements policy in the region, which is why it is crucial to carefully and systematically assess the claims that China is revisionist. If the United States were to pursue containment strategies and respond to China's actions as those of a critical threat to the international order, then China would likely get pushed into acting like a revisionist power.¹⁵¹ The malleability of China's objectives and goals is hardly certain, but policies that highlight competition rather than cooperation leave very little

¹⁴⁹ *Taiwan Relations Act*, enacted by the United States Congress on April 10, 1979 (www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479).

¹⁵⁰ Leszek Buszynski, "The South China Sea: Oil, Maritime Claims, and U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry," *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 2012): 139-156.

¹⁵¹ David M. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Fall 2002): 1-40.

room for China to negotiate and amend its position. By adopting a hardline, hawkish position, the United States essentially catalyzes a security dilemma wherein the relationship continues to spiral into even greater distrust and possibly even conflict.¹⁵² Therefore, U.S. policy should be structured around the understanding that the domestic situation in China has become one of heightened nationalism, and as a result, the U.S. should be cognizant of backing the CCP into a corner from which it cannot emerge without losing face.¹⁵³

Outlined below are key components for U.S. policy that will hopefully forward a sustainable and peaceful relationship with China:¹⁵⁴

- Abandon rhetoric around regime change or postures suggesting the immediate removal and collapse of the Chinese Communist Party. Adopting such a position backs China into a corner and feeds into the party's distrust of the West.
- Maintain military superiority and strategic primacy in Asia as a means of providing partners and allies in the region with a credible security guarantee against Chinese provocations and aggressions. At the same time, U.S. security assistance should be contingent upon forwarding policy that promotes diplomatic overtures and mutual restraint between China and other Asian countries. This way, the U.S. establishes a much more fair and principled set of policies, rather than a strategy that seeks to exclude only China. For example, as a condition for arms sales or further military cooperation with

¹⁵² Thomas Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2015).

¹⁵³ Steven Ward, "Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s," *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Fall 2013): 607-639 brings up an interesting notion of how the concept of "saving face" and status immobility can impact the intentions of a rising power. If the rising power perceives that its global status is either not truly recognized by established powers or in some way thwarted, then it can lead to a domestic drive to save face and towards revisionism.

¹⁵⁴ The following list is by no means exhaustive, but simply highlights a few crucial elements of U.S.-China policy, without which the relationship is likely to continue to spiral downward.

Vietnam, the United States could first request that the Vietnamese leadership sign onto agreements with China to jointly develop and extract natural resources in the South China Sea. Greater U.S. military support would reassure allies in the region while also dissuading China from engaging in provocative activity that has thus far stymied much of the joint-development negotiations.

- Provide assurance where possible of benign intentions and encourage region-wide confidence building measures. Given the superiority of the U.S. Navy and missile capability, a security dilemma between the U.S. and China has the possibility to escalate from a misunderstanding to nuclear attack. Security and military cooperation in the South China Sea, for example, could help to reassure the Chinese that U.S. Navy patrols are not a means of containing or threatening China's sovereignty. Similar open dialogue is also necessary to ensure that a U.S. attack on China's conventional weapons (should it be necessary) does not get misinterpreted as an attack on its nuclear arsenal. Getting China to clarify its limited first-use policy would be beneficial in this regard.
- Invite active Chinese cooperation and participation in matters of global security and governance. Combating transnational threats to security like climate change and nuclear proliferation in North Korea can be areas not only for greater Sino-U.S. cooperation, but regional collaboration with Japan and South Korea as well.
- Welcome reforms in the global institutions led by the West to recognize and appropriately adjust for China's increased weight on global affairs (i.e. World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Trans-Pacific Partnership), and encourage the growth of institutions established by China. In excluding China or limiting its role in international organizations, the U.S. sets the norm that great powers cannot (or will not) share leadership when forming institutions. This becomes problematic for security in the region if the most powerful

countries are working at odds with each other. Given that China and the U.S. are both vital to the future of Asia's security and economic prosperity, regional frameworks should include representation from both countries.

- Continue to pressure China on improving its domestic human rights and emphasize the important role that a robust civil society can play in ensuring a peaceful, multiethnic community. As discussed in this paper, China's assimilation policies towards Uyghurs and Tibetans may eventually become cultural genocide. The United States should highlight examples from its own history of minority oppression to demonstrate that a country can emerge stronger and more cohesive when the civil and cultural rights of all ethnic groups are respected and protected. If China continues down its current path of aggressive assimilation, future ethnic relations in Tibet and Xinjiang are likely to involve substantial violent resistance, which is not only a threat to regime stability but to the region and U.S. interests as well.

Conclusion

Rising nationalism is not only a trend in China but is a global phenomenon as well. Populist leaders from the Philippines to the United Kingdom are echoing the CCP's sentiments, calling for greater national pride, solidarity, and the prerogative to forward their country's interests as they see fit. While useful as a political tool for whipping up public fervor and redirecting attention away from the real troubles ailing any given country, nationalism has the potential to bring out the worst in strategic rivalry and competition between states.

China's rise in nationalist rhetoric and its corresponding bold actions both domestically and regionally have put a great strain on the U.S.-China relationship. The policy response from the United States must be firm in establishing the boundaries of China's behavior, while at the same time must also resist excluding China from the

international system. In order to curb the centripetal forces of nationalism around the globe, the United States should lead by example. It should demonstrate that deepening integration with the world's economy and its different cultures serves the interests of every nation.

By committing to the enforcement of international principles, rather than engaging in competition and exclusion, the United States can indicate to China that the two great powers can collaborate on global governance, to the betterment of both countries. However, the United States can only extend so many olive branches of engagement and reassurance. Ultimately, the Chinese leadership must decide if China will continue down its current path of entrenched opposition to the West or accept a future of shared power and peace with the United States.

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