

Toward a Synthesis of the Theories of Peripheral Nationalism: A Comparative Study of China's Xinjiang and Guangdong

YUAN-KANG WANG*

(University of Chicago)

The central question of this article is: why is peripheral nationalism virtually non-existent in Guangdong but has long been a problem in Xinjiang? Existing theories are inadequate for answering this question. They are tailored to either wealthy or poor regions, but not both. They also fail to explain the absence of nationalism in Guangdong and its presence in Xinjiang. In this article, I propose a model that can explain peripheral nationalism in both wealthy and poor regions. The model incorporates two key variables, elite status and national identity. Specifically, I argue that if the elites from the peripheral region can hold important positions in the central government and if the peripheral residents identify themselves with the core nation, the probability of nationalist movements will be low. On the other hand, if their elites are excluded from high office in the central government and if their people do not identify themselves with the core nation, the probability of nationalist movements will be high. The model succeeds in explaining the cases of Xinjiang and Guangdong.

Introduction

At first glance, China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Guangdong province look rather different. In terms of economic development, Xinjiang is relatively backward, while Guangdong is relatively advanced. More than half of the population in Xinjiang consists of Muslim minority nationalities, while the majority of the population in Guangdong is considered Han Chinese. However, both also have some similarities. They are located in the peripheral regions of China and far away from central political leadership. The Muslim nationalities in Xinjiang do not speak the official language Mandarin, while the population in Guangdong speaks Cantonese, a language quite different from Mandarin in spoken form. Both have their respective regional identity. In short, these two regions have some ethnic potential, though apparently Guangdong has less.

Secessionism has long been a prominent issue in Xinjiang. Uighur nationalists seek to establish an independent state free from Han Chinese domination by resorting to riots and rebellions. In contrast, such secessionism is unthinkable in Guangdong. Cantonese have long considered themselves Chinese and Guangdong has always been part of China. *Why is peripheral nationalism virtually non-existent in Guangdong but has long been a problem in Xinjiang?*

Existing theories of peripheral nationalism are inadequate for answering this question. One version was developed to explain secessionism in economically dynamic peripheries,

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such as the Basque Country in Spain, while the other was designed to explain nationalist movements in economically backward regions, such as the Celts in Britain. They are tailored either to wealthy or poor regions, but not both. This restriction to a great extent reduces the applicability of both theories.

In order to fill this theoretical gap, this article proposes a new model that can explain nationalist movements in both wealthy and poor peripheries. Specifically, the model incorporates two key variables—national identity and elite status—in explaining secessionism in the peripheral region. I argue that if the national identity of the peripheral residents is congruent with the core nation, and if elites in the peripheral region can serve high offices in the central government, the probability for secessionism will be low. On the other hand, if the peripheral people identify themselves as distinct from the core nation, and if their elites cannot hold significant positions in the centre, the probability for secessionism will be high. I then test my argument in the cases of Xinjiang and Guangdong. I find that national identity and elite status greatly reduce the nationalist potential in Guangdong, while the lack of two such qualities gives rise to secessionist movements in Xinjiang. Cantonese believe that they are really Chinese, even though their spoken language is quite different. Local elites were able to make it to the top of the country, such as Sun Yat-sen, as well as some key national figures in the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, such hegemonic notion and elite status were absent among the Uighurs in Xinjiang.

The next section reviews existing literature on peripheral nationalism and critiques its shortcomings. Then, I present my theory, explicate the two master variables—elite status and national identity—and explain how they contribute to the emergence of peripheral nationalism. Finally, I test my argument in a comparative case study of Xinjiang and Guangdong and discuss its implications.

Current Theories of Peripheral Nationalism

There are currently two versions of the theory of peripheral nationalism, depending on the development level of the region in question relative to the political centre. The first deals with economically advanced regions. This version focuses on the interaction between the economic development of the peripheries and the centre's ability to provide further growth. According to Peter Gourevitch, when there is a lack of congruence between political leadership and economic dynamism, the regions with ethnic potential are likely to develop peripheral nationalism. This non-congruence may result either from the faltering of the core in providing economic growth or political leadership, or from the improvement in economic position of the peripheral region relative to the centre.¹ In other words, if the political centre is experiencing economic or political decline or the ethnically distinct region in the peripheries becomes economically dynamic, the peripheral region is likely to develop 'strong, politically relevant nationalism'.²

Gourevitch's theory focuses on the economic function the centre plays *vis-à-vis* the periphery. However, the logic of the theory is incomplete. The principal problem is that he does not establish any objective, independent criteria for regions with 'ethnic potential'. He admits the difficulty of such a daunting task, but tries to circumvent it by asserting that 'circularity can be avoided by specifying (however arbitrary it may appear) which regions

1 Peter A. Gourevitch, *Paris and the Provinces: The Politics of Local Government Reform in France* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1980), chap. 10.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

have ethnic potential and which do not'.³ Nevertheless, without any objective, clear and independent criteria for ethnic differences, his theory still tends to be tautological.⁴

Even without clear criteria, it would be hard to deny Guangdong's ethnic potential. And as we shall see, it has the other ingredient needed for Gourevitch's theory: economic dynamism. Guangdong's economic position in the PRC before the 1978 reform was below average. During 1953–78, its average annual GDP growth rate was 5.1 per cent, 1 per cent lower than the nation's average. This low level of growth was due in large part to Chinese leadership's emphasis on developing the interior region.⁵ After 1978, Guangdong became the major testing ground for Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. Special Economic Zones were set up to attract investment. During 1979–91, its average annual growth rate was 12.6 per cent, 3 per cent higher than the nation's average.⁶ By 1998, its GDP had already been the nation's largest, accounting for 10 per cent of total national income, and per capita income ranked fifth, after Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjing and Zhejiang province.⁷ These figures suggest that Guangdong has become economically dynamic since China's reforms. Given its regional identity and distinct spoken language, Gourevitch's theory would predict peripheral nationalism in Guangdong. However, there is no nationalist movement there. And as we shall see later, careers of aspiring elites from Guangdong could be aimed at the political centre. Thus, we need to find out other factors that can explain the absence of peripheral nationalism in Guangdong.

The second version of peripheral nationalism deals with backward regions. Michael Hechter, Tom Nairn and Ernest Gellner attribute the rise of nationalism to the painful inequality suffered by the people of backward regions resulting from the uneven pattern of development.⁸ Waves of industrialisation and modernisation hit different areas in uneven speed, engendering sharp and painful inequality in standards of living. Egalitarian expectation and non-egalitarian reality make the misery of those in peripheral regions seem all the more perennial, and intolerable. If they are distinctly differentiated from the people of more advanced regions, such as by skin colour, religion or customs, we are likely to see nationalist movements there.⁹ Independence brings the prospect of being in charge of the nation's own affairs and freeing the region from exploitative relationship with the centre.¹⁰

This version of peripheral nationalism presupposes industrialisation as the driving force of nationalism. For Gellner, agrarian societies were composed of laterally insulated communities, while the ruling class was horizontally segregated. Cultural differentiation

3 Ibid., p. 202.

4 See David Laitin, 'The National Uprising in the Soviet Union', *World Politics*, vol. 44, no. 1 (October 1991), pp. 139–77, fn. 13.

5 Fearing strategic encirclement, China launched the 'Third Front' program from 1964 to 1971 by moving its industrial base to interior regions. See Barry Naughton, 'The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior', *The China Quarterly*, no. 115 (September 1988), pp. 351–86.

6 David S.G. Goodman and Feng Chongyi, 'Guangdong: Greater Hong Kong and the New Regionalist Future', in David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds), *China Deconstructs* (Routledge, London, 1994), pp. 182–3.

7 State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian (China Statistical Yearbook)* (Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, Beijing, 1999), pp. 62, 65.

8 Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1953–1966* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1975); Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (NLB, London, 1977); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1983).

9 Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1964), p. 167; and *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 73–4.

10 Hechter called this exploitative relationship 'cultural division of labor'. The advanced core 'seeks to stabilize and monopolize its advantages through policies aiming at the institutionalization of the existing stratification system. It attempts to regulate the allocation of social roles such that those roles commonly defined as having high prestige are reserved for its members. Conversely, individuals from the less advanced group are denied access to these roles'. This 'cultural division of labor ... contributes to the development of distinctive ethnic identification in the two groups'. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, p. 9.

prevails over homogeneity between different communities as well as between different strata of the ruling class. The education of skills was very specialised and limited within communities. With the arrival of industrialisation, training became generic, less specialised and more universally standardised in order to provide the mobility and interchangeability of skills needed for perpetual growth. The agrarian communities could no longer assume this task on such a large scale, and the state took over and became the primary form of national identification. The nation-state will impose a national language associated with a high culture to facilitate communication. Seeking a better life, the rural folks, who speak a dialect quite different from the national language, migrate to the industrial centre. They learn the national language to increase their job opportunities in the cities to which they had migrated. If they can blend into the centre, without being noticed, and their leaders can get elite positions there, the rural area will then be incorporated as part of the larger nation-state. However, if the mobility prospects of the migrant rural folks are blocked, even after the second generation, this exclusion will make these migrants begin to see higher economic payoffs for having their own nation-state in which their native dialect will be spoken.¹¹ Thus, the driving force of nationalism in Gellner's model is industrialisation.

Xinjiang has always been a backward region in China. Separatist movements arose whenever the power of the Chinese Empire was on the decline, when there was no industrialisation or modernisation as we know it today. By positing a sharp disjuncture between modern and pre-modern societies, this theory cannot explain secessionist movements that had been happening in Xinjiang prior to industrialisation.¹² The movements for independence were not a modern phenomenon; rather, they have existed long before modernisation took place in China. Therefore, the existing theories not only exclude possible forms of pre-modern nationalism but also fail to explain them.

To sum up, based on current theories, peripheral nationalist movements can occur in both advanced and backward regions. The respective mechanism of how they came into being is very different. In the advanced regions, the inducement can be either the improvement of the economic position of the peripheries or the failure of the centre in providing further economic growth, or its political decline. In the backward regions, however, the inducement can be the seemingly everlasting misery suffered by the ethnically distinct people, who can no longer tolerate their plight and hope that independence will bring an end to their predicament.

The problem with these two versions of peripheral nationalism, in addition to their failures in Guangdong and Xinjiang, is that they are inherently limited to encompassing either advanced or backward regions, but not both.¹³ Gourevitch's theory cannot be applied to Xinjiang, while Hechter's, Nairn's, and Gellner's theory cannot be applied to Guangdong. Moreover, the cases they studied are mostly capitalist societies in the West. One must be cautious in generalising and extrapolating theories derived from Western societies to the rest of the world, such as China.¹⁴

11 Gellner, *Thought and Change*, pp. 166–8; and *Nations and Nationalism*.

12 Prasenjit Duara, 'Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When', in Geoff Eley and Ronald G. Suny (eds), *Becoming National* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1996), pp. 152–3; Anthony D. Smith has an excellent account of this 'modernists' vs. 'perennialist' argument. See Smith, 'The Origins of Nations', in *Becoming National*, pp. 105–30.

13 In a study of the interaction between nationalism and immigration, Gershon Shafir combines these versions of nationalism to distinguish between hegemonic and corporate nationalisms. However, Shafir's study focuses on the internal immigration in larger states' relatively developed peripheries inhabited by a distinct nationality, and is thus different from this study. See *Immigrants and Nationalists: Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Latvia, and Estonia* (State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1995).

14 See, for example, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1993), pp. 1–13.

The Model

I propose a model of peripheral nationalism based on the interplay of two factors: elite status in the central government and national identity. By elite status, I mean the position local elites are able to hold in the political centre. If local elites can serve high office in the central government, without significant discrimination from those in the political centre with similar education and background,¹⁵ the potential for peripheral nationalist movements is low. On the other hand, if local elites are excluded from high office in the central government, regardless of their similar education and background, we would expect to see nationalist movements in the peripheral region. National identity refers to a collective sense of who we are, what we were, and which political community we belong to, and is often associated with an historic territory. National identity should be viewed as a fluid, contingent and relational concept.¹⁶ It is constantly shifting over time, sometimes overlapping with other identities. Language, culture, common history, customs, outer appearances and religion can influence the process of national identification; nonetheless, they are sufficient but not necessary conditions for the formation of national identity. If the national identity of peripheral residents is congruent with that of the political centre residents, we do not expect to see peripheral nationalist movements there. However, if their national identity is incongruent with that of the centre, we are likely to see nationalist movements.

National identity should be distinguished from ethnic identity. A nation is usually composed of several ethnic 'elements'.¹⁷ For instance, China is often said to be a multiethnic state, with the Han as the ethnic core, coexisting with other ethnic groups. Although these different groups have their respective ethnic identities, they have a common national identity—Chinese. Thus, a Manchu can have an ethnic identity of 'Manchu' but a national identity of 'Chinese'; an African American can have an ethnic identity of 'African American' but a national identity of 'American'.

Why does elite status affect the potential of peripheral nationalism? To begin with, high status provides the incentives for local elites to be co-opted into the political establishment at the centre;¹⁸ they can use this status to advance their personal prestige and interests, and presumably promote the welfare of their home people. For the peripheral population, having an effective voice at the centre ensures that their interests will not be ignored, and creates a feeling of belonging to the whole nation.

On the other hand, low status or exclusion of local elites from the power core provides few incentives to stay within the political establishment, and the tendency to break away will be high. Local elites see independence as the best way to enhance the well-being of themselves and their people, and they hope that it will bring about the prestige and interests that they deserve but cannot attain in the old regime. The folks, seeing themselves as the under-privileged population and second-class citizens, are also likely to find independence as a way to restore their rightful place, especially when the economy is doing poorly. They feel that they have been exploited by the centre and the fact that none of its elites is occupying any high position in the central government only exacerbates their grievances. Consequently, we are likely to see nationalist movements, such as the revival of folk culture and tradition, and the call for an independent nation.

National identity also plays a key role in nationalist movements. People identify with

15 David Laitin called this kind of elite status 'most favoured lord', a term borrowed from the notion of most favoured nation in international trade relations. Laitin, 'The National Uprisings', p. 143.

16 Duara, 'Historicizing National Identity', p. 151. Also see Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1989), pp. 270–1.

17 See Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (University of Nevada Press, Reno, 1991), pp. 19–42.

18 Laitin, 'The National Uprisings in the Soviet Union', p. 144.

		National identity	
		Same as the 'core nation'	Different from the 'core nation'
Elite status	High	Low probability of nationalist movement (I)	Moderate probability of nationalist movement (II)
	Low	Low to moderate probability of nationalist movement (III)	High probability of nationalist movement (IV)

Figure 1. Elite Status, National Identity, and Peripheral Nationalism.

a named community to distinguish themselves from the 'Others'. Whether this process of identification is imagined¹⁹ or real should not obscure the fact that this is how each community of people distinguishes itself from the others. As Peter Sahlins observes, '[n]ational identity is a socially constructed and continuous process of defining "friend" and "enemy", a logical extension of the process of maintaining boundaries between "us" and "them" within more local communities'.²⁰ This 'identity as opposition' distinguishes us from the 'Others' in our daily lives. A distinct national identity is often associated with the demand for a separate political entity. When the people of a peripheral region identify themselves as the same nation as that of the centre, we are not likely to see nationalism there because these people see themselves as culturally homogeneous with the core nation. However, if they identify themselves as a distinct nation, the potential for nationalist movements will be high, because the fact that the rulers of the region belong to a nation other than the majority of those being ruled constitutes an intolerable situation for the peripheral nationalists.²¹

Both elite status and national identity must work together in order to generate enough support for nationalist movements. Low elite status by itself is not sufficient to cause peripheral people to want an independent state of their own. They must also have a different national identity. In other words, national identity is an antecedent condition that enables elite status to have an effect on the probability of peripheral nationalist movements.²² Figure 1 summarises the relationship between elite status and national identity. The model makes two major predictions. First, if an ethnic group in the periphery identifies itself as having the same national identity as the core nation, and if its elites enjoy high status in the central government, the probability of peripheral nationalist movement would be low (Cell I). Secondly, if an ethnic group in the periphery has a different national identity from the core nation, and if its elites are excluded from important positions in the central government, the probability of nationalist movement would be high (Cell IV).

Cells II and III depict a situation in which both elite status and national identity point in opposite directions. Cell II refers to a peripheral region with high elite status but populated by minority nationalities that do not identify with the dominant nation. In this

19 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, New York, 1991).

20 Sahlins, *Boundaries*, p. 270.

21 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 1.

22 An antecedent condition is '[a] phenomenon whose presence activates or magnifies the action of a causal law or hypothesis. Without it causation operates more weakly ... or not at all'. See Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1997), pp. 9–10.

situation, the potential for nationalist movements would be moderate because high elite status could offset some of the nationalist demands aroused by different identities. Cell III represents a situation in which the peripheral elites have low status in the political centre but the majority of the population identify themselves as belonging to the same core nation. In this case, the nationalist potential is from low to moderate because there would be very few incentives to seek separation from their fellow countrymen (Cell III). Inherent in these two situations is that national identity seems to play a more important role than elite status. After all, as Ernest Gellner states succinctly, 'nationalism is a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'.²³ By definition, nationalism requires a distinct national identity. However, relying solely on national identity to explain peripheral nationalism seems a bit obvious, and tautological. This is where the inclusion of elite status can illuminate our grasp of the problem.

Ethnic Conflicts in Xinjiang

Xinjiang's relationship with China dates back in history. As early as 60 BCE, the Han dynasty recognised the strategic importance of Xinjiang as the 'western frontier' and established garrisons in key oases there. As the Chinese empire waxed and waned, Xinjiang experienced periods of revolts and independence. Most of the time, its relationship with China proper was loose. It did not become a province of China until the late nineteenth century. During the Republican period, Xinjiang was dominated by a handful of Chinese warlords. Its provincial status was abolished after the Communist Revolution of 1949. To reflect the diversity of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, the PRC government established an autonomous region on 1 October 1955.

There are 56 nationalities in China, and according to the 1995 sample census over 91 per cent of the total population are Han. Nearly two-thirds of China's are populated by minorities and abundant in natural resources, such as petroleum, minerals and timber. Mao Zedong, when addressing the relationship between the Han nationality and the minority nationalities, reminded his cadres that:

We say China is a country vast in territory, rich in resources, and large in population; as a matter of fact, it is the Han nationality whose population is large and the minority nationalities whose territory is vast and whose resources are rich, or at least in all probability their resources under the soil are rich.²⁴

Minority policy has always been an important aspect of China's domestic policies. The official policy stresses the equality, solidarity, autonomy and co-prosperity of nationalities.²⁵ The Chinese government established several autonomous regions and counties across the country. In Xinjiang, it divided the region into several autonomous prefectures and counties according to the dwelling places of nationalities, and recruited minority cadres into the local government. Minority languages are used in newspapers, broadcasts, and government documents. For instance, the Xinjiang Television Station broadcasts in Mandarin, Uighur and Kazak, and the *Xinjiang Daily* is published in the above three languages plus Mongolian, to reflect their relatively larger population. At present, there are 47 nationalities among Xinjiang's 17.5 million population (1998).

The Uighurs are the largest nationality in Xinjiang, constituting nearly 50 per cent

23 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 1.

24 'Speech at an Enlarged Meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (April 25, 1956)', in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 5 (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1977), p. 295.

25 Huang Guangxue, *Xin shiqi minzu wenti tansuo (Inquiries on the Problems of Nationalities in the New Era)* (Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe, Beijing, 1989), pp. 19–22.

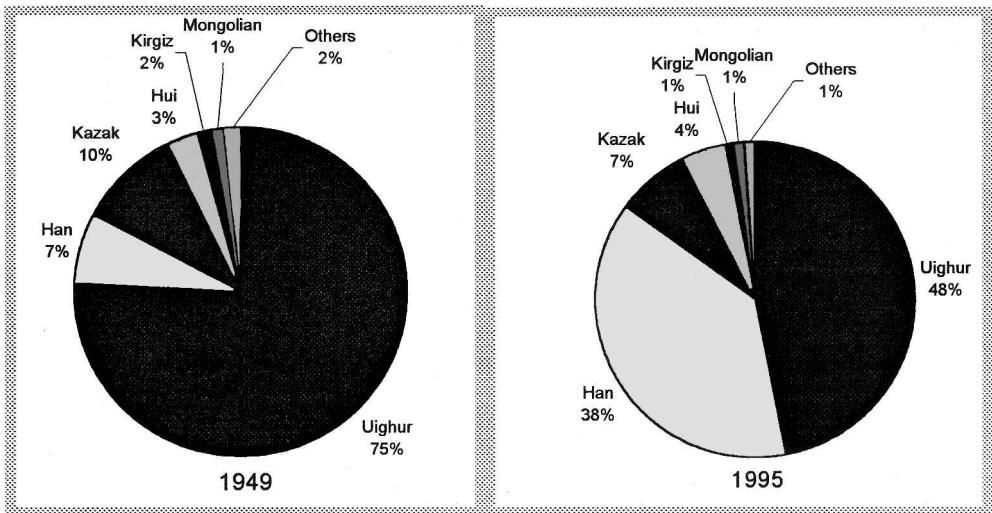


Figure 2. Ethnic Composition in Xinjiang 1949 and 1995.

Source: Jin Yunhui (ed.), *Xinjiang jingji yu shehui fazhan gaishu (A General Survey of Economic and Social Development in Xinjiang)* (Minzu chubanshe, Beijing, 1998), pp. 205–6.

of the population; separatist movements are mostly associated with them. More than 80 per cent of the Uighurs live in southern Xinjiang. The Uighur language belongs to the Altay Turkic language, and is written using the Arabic alphabet.²⁶ The Han population in Xinjiang was small before the Communist Revolution, making up 7 per cent of the population. The new Communist government recognised the importance of this peripheral region and systematically encouraged and forced Han migration into this region. As a result of this policy, Han population grew rapidly, reaching nearly 40 per cent at present (see Figure 2). There are also a large number of Kazaks, Hui (Chinese Muslims), Kirgiz and Mongols, along with a much smaller number of Xibes, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Manchus, Daurs, Tatars and Russians. After 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established cadre schools and systematically trained minority cadres in Xinjiang. Most of the CCP-trained cadres were recruited in the local government in accordance with the principle of national autonomy; few were able to be recruited to the centre. In 1997, 48.9 per cent of the cadres in Xinjiang are minorities, an increase of 2.6 times from 1978 and 23 times from 1954.²⁷ Heads of autonomous prefectures, autonomous counties, and nationality townships are all minority cadres. A policy similar to ‘affirmative action’ was in place where minorities dwell to ensure a certain proportion of minority cadres in local governments, parties, and the military.²⁸

Despite the high percentage of minority cadres in the local government, there exists a sharp discrepancy in their living standards and educational level compared with the Han. According to the 1990 census, the infant mortality rate for minorities was 73.6 per cent, 3.6 times higher than Han infants born in Xinjiang (20.4 per cent). Life expectancy among the minorities was 62.9 years, while among the Han it was 71.4 years. The Han were also more

26 Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Government of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (comp.), *Xinjiang: A General Survey* (New World Press, Beijing, 1989), p. 28.

27 Liu Min and Wusman Niyazi, ‘Bianjiang shaoshu minzu diqu ganbu renshi zhidu gaige chutan’, (‘A Study of Frontier Minority Regions’ Cadre and Personnel System Reform’), *Xinjiang daxue xuebao (Journal of Xinjiang University)*, vol. 27, no. 4 (December 1999), p. 6.

28 A. Doak Barnett, *China’s Far West: Four Decades of Change* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1993), p. 366.

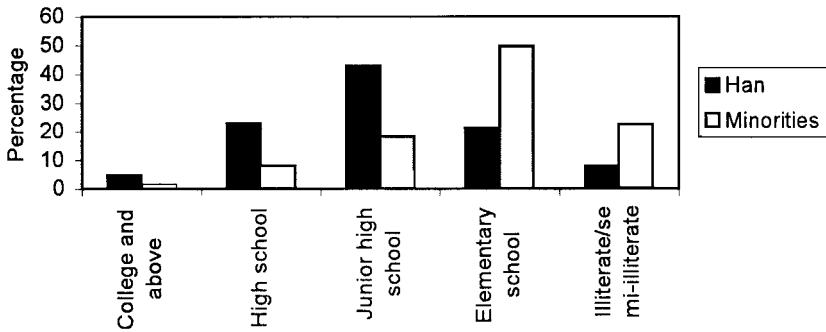


Figure 3. Educational Level of Employed Minority Nationalities in Xinjiang 1990. Source: Tong Yufen, Reyila Maimaiti, *et al.*, 'Xinjiang shaoshu minzu renkou de suzhi yu jiuye', ('The Qualifications and Employment of Xinjiang's Minority Population'), *Xinjiang daxue xuebao*, vol. 27, no. 3 (September 1999), p. 17.

educated than the indigenous nationalities (see Figure 3). Although the educational level of the nationalities has improved in absolute terms since 1949, they are still significantly behind the Han. More than 30 per cent of the Han work in industries that require higher skills, such as the industrial and construction sectors, while over 80 per cent of minorities are in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishing.²⁹

In order to minimise friction, there are some institutional designs to separate Han areas from minority areas, such as separate restaurants, cinemas, and marketplaces. However, Han and other minorities still harbour negative stereotypes of each other. The Han's habit of eating pork, the way they use well water, and methods of food preparation are considered unclean by the Muslims, who in turn are viewed by Han as 'backward' and 'superstitious'. Neither is completely convinced that their separate facilities are equal. Ethnic relations were relatively quiet in the early years of the PRC until the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Leap Forward in 1957–58, when members of Xinjiang's minority elites were declared guilty of 'local nationalism' and sentenced to reform through labour. The famine after the Great Leap fuelled the flames of ethnic hostility, escalating into a major riot in 1962. The Cultural Revolution was even more devastating; some Muslims were force-fed pork, mosques were burned, and there were some public burnings of the Koran by the Red Guards.³⁰ In 1975, Muslims rebelled when ordered to work on Fridays, their holy day. Riots broke out in 1979 after two Han beat a Uighur to death.

Xinjiang's ethnic problems were exacerbated after 1989 when fundamentalist Muslims began to protest. A political group, the Islamic Party of East Turkistan, had called for a *jihad* (holy war) to wipe out Chinese rule in Xinjiang. Ethnic issues were even more complicated after the dissolution of the Soviet Union; the independence of former Soviet central Asian republics seemed to have encouraged the separatists. Some kind of terrorist act was carried out. In 1990, about 50 people died when the government put down an uprising by religious extremists in a town near Kashgar. In February 1992, six people were killed and 20 injured in an Urumqi car bomb explosion that was linked to Muslim separatists.³¹ Separatists assassinated several people in 1996, including two policemen and a pro-Beijing Muslim cleric. In early May, nine Muslim rebels were reportedly killed in a

29 Tong Yufen, Reyila Maimaiti, *et al.*, 'Xinjiang shaoshu minzu renkou de suzhi yu jiuye', ('The Qualifications and Employment of Xinjiang's Minority Population'), *Xinjiang daxue xuebao*, vol. 27, no. 3 (September 1999), pp. 16–19.

30 June Teufel Dreyer, 'The PLA and Regionalism in Xinjiang', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1994), pp. 42–3.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 49–52.

gun battle with police while trying to plot bomb attacks.³² In February 1997, about 1,000 Uighur separatists rioted in the region's north-western town of Yining and at least 10 people were killed.³³

In contrast, Guangdong is much more integrated into China dating back to 224 BCE when the first emperor of China, Qin Shihuang, unified the whole country. It has remained part of the country's administrative system ever since.³⁴ In a word, Guangdong has been successfully incorporated in China's nation-building process, while Xinjiang has remained on the fringe of the Chinese nation and separatist movements have been a constant theme there since its incorporation.

Guangdong was the gateway of the Western powers to China in the nineteenth century. Its capital, Guangzhou (Canton), was one of the first ports opened to the West. Commercial activities and trade brought economic dynamism to this region. Guangdong was the financial base of the Nationalist Government in Guangzhou when the Northern Expedition was launched in 1926 to unify the country. While the decade 1926–36 witnessed intermittent Guangdong separatism, the movement was a form of provincialism and did not seek independence from China.³⁵ The province became economically dynamic again after China's economic reforms in 1978. Based on Guangdong's distinct dialect and cultural traits, its long distance from Beijing, and economic dynamism, current theories of peripheral nationalism would predict strong nationalist movements in that province. However, there is none in Guangdong.

Why are there nationalist movements in Xinjiang, but not in Guangdong? The next sections will address this question in light of elite status and national identity.

Elite Status

Since our interest lies in the elite status in the central government, we need to examine the percentage of elites in high positions in the centre. In the PRC, the CCP is the only dominant power in the state. Virtually all key positions in the central government are held by CCP members. Even at the local level, party membership is a necessary requirement for anyone interested in pursuing a serious career in politics. The presence of the party at every level of the state is a widely recognised phenomenon in China. Hence, in assessing the elite status of any particular province or region, we can analyse the percentage of its elites in high positions of the party and come to a fairly good estimate.

The organisation of the CCP consists of four major party organs: The National Party Congress, the Central Committee (CC), the Politburo (also called the Political Bureau), and the Standing Committee of the Politburo. The frequency of meetings and sizes of membership determine the order of importance of these four organs:³⁶

The National Party Congress has the largest membership, over 1,500 in recent Congresses. It meets infrequently (generally once every five years), and because of its size, in practice, it becomes an organ for endorsing major decisions made by the leadership.

The CC also meets infrequently (once or twice a year), but has a smaller membership (approximately three hundred in recent years, including alternate members), selected

32 Anthony Davis and Sangwon Suh, 'China: The West Gets Wilder', *Asiaweek*, vol. 22, no. 24 (14 June 1996).

33 *The New York Times*, 11 February 1997.

34 For a detailed history of Guangdong up to 1949, see Jiang Zhuyuan and Fang Zhiqin (eds), *Jianming Guangdong shi* (A Concise History of Guangdong) (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, Guangzhou, 1993).

35 See John Fitzgerald, 'Increased Disunity: The Politics and Finance of Guangdong Separatism, 1926–1936', *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 24, no. 4 (1990), pp. 745–75.

36 Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1995), pp. 159–61.

Table 1. Elite Status in the CC by Ethnic Origins

	Guangdong	Xinjiang ^a
7th CC (1945–56)	5/77	0
8th CC (1956–69)	7/170	1/170
9th CC (1969–73)	9/279	2/279
10th CC (1973–77)	12/319	3/319
11th CC (1977–82)	8/333	3/333
12th CC (1982–87)	11/348	2/348
13th CC (1987–92)	10/285	3/289
14th CC (1992–97)	9/319	4/319

* Denominators represent total membership; numerators represent numbers of members in each CC. Both figures include alternate members.

^a All Xinjiang elites are from the Uighur nationality, except for one Kazak in the 14th CC.

Source: *Lijie Zhonggong zhongyang weiyuanhui renming cidian* (Biographical Dictionary of Various CC Members of the CCP) (Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, Beijing, 1992); *Zhonggong di shisi jie zhongyang weiyuan minglu* (Biographical Dictionary of the 14th CC Members of the CCP) (Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, Beijing, 1993).

by the Party Congress according to a list made by the Politburo. Article 15 of the CCP Constitution stipulates that '[o]nly the Central Committee of the Party has the power to make decisions on major policies of a nation-wide character'. In reality, with few exceptions, it discusses and announces policies handed down by the Politburo in plenary sessions rather than decides them. Nevertheless, all of its members hold other important positions and have access to some social privileges and inside information of the Party.

The Politburo typically has 14–24 members, selected by the CC. It functions as a small but powerful committee. Politburo members are among the top power elites of China.

The Standing Committee of the Politburo is the most powerful organ of the party, and thus of the state. It has four to six members, selected by the CC, and meets frequently (normally once a week).

Table 1 shows the degree of representation of elites from Guangdong and Xinjiang in the CC. As is clearly seen, Guangdong elites enjoyed a significantly higher status than their Xinjiang counterparts. Although Guangdong's population is much larger than Xinjiang's, its favourable position is still reflected in the fact that Uighur membership in the CC was occupied by only a handful of the same people in different terms, while Guangdong membership was changing constantly, with new faces coming in. Only a total of five Uighurs were able to serve in the CC from 1957 to 1992, compared with 37 Cantonese during the same period.³⁷ The data here suggest that the role of Uighurs in the centre was more symbolic than real.

An analysis of elite status will not be complete without looking at the micro level. Three Cantonese CC members, Ye Jianying, Liao Chengzhi and Xie Fei, were able to serve in the

³⁷ See *Lijie Zhonggong zhongyang weiyuanhui renming cidian* (Biographical Dictionary of Various Central Committee Members of the CCP) (Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, Beijing, 1992).

Politburo. Ye even served on the Standing Committee of the Politburo (10th–12th), the most powerful organ of the party. Ye joined the CCP in 1927, and had served high positions in the Red Army. He was a commander in the Long March and became mayor of Beijing (then Peiping) in 1949. He was made Marshall in 1955 and was Minister of Defense in 1975. He had been member of the Politburo since 1966 and had remained a key national figure until his death in 1986. Liao Chengzhi joined the CCP in 1928, served in the propaganda and united fronts departments, and was elected to the CC (alternate member in 7th, member in 8th, 10th–12th). He became a member of the Politburo in 1982, but died a year later. Xie Fei joined the CCP in 1949. In his youth, he was in charge of the propaganda division of his home county in Guangdong. He was promoted CCP secretary of the Guangdong provincial committee in 1983. Later on, Xie was elected a CC member in 1987 and 1992, respectively. He became a Politburo member in 1994, was re-elected in 1997, and has remained in that position to date.

Historically, Guangdong elites have long been able to serve high offices in the central government. During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), for example, several Cantonese held important positions in the central government. Although the percentage of Cantonese elites in the central government was lower than that of the northern provinces, this reflected a general bias in favour of northern elites rather than exclusion. Elites from distant provinces such as Fujian, Yunnan, Guangxi and Sichuan, ranked lower as well.³⁸ The situation was similar during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Guangdong elites were able to make it to the top of the nation. Nearly 4 per cent of the Qing Dynasty's *jinshi* degree holders came from Guangdong (obtaining a *jinshi* degree was a *sine qua non* for people interested in government positions). In terms of the number of *jinshi* produced per prefecture, Guangdong's Guangzhou ranked fifth in the nation.³⁹ Cantonese elites were also able to lead national movements. The leaders of the late Qing's three most important events—the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64), the Hundred Days Reform (1898), and the Republican Revolution (1911)—were all Cantonese.

The relatively high status of Guangdong elites substantially curtailed the incentives for secession. Career aspiring individuals knew that, by working hard, they could advance toward significant positions in the central government. Having an effective voice at the centre, Cantonese could rest assured that their interests would not be neglected by Beijing and that their grievances would be heard and remedied. They thus saw little incentive to have a nation of their own.

The only Uighur to be elected to the Politburo was Saifudin Azizov (Seypidin Aziz); nevertheless he was merely an alternate member. Saifudin joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in his youth, but was allowed to transfer his membership to the CCP after Mao Zedong negotiated with Stalin on his behalf in 1950. He became deputy governor of Xinjiang and later chairman of the Autonomous Region. He helped implement Chinese policies in Xinjiang, and in return was awarded with positions in the CC (alternate member in the 8th, member in the 9th–13th) and in the Politburo (alternate member in the 10th and 11th).⁴⁰ However, Saifudin was never fully entrusted with top CCP, government or military posts.⁴¹ The positions he maintained were more symbolic than real.

38 James B. Parsons, 'The Ming Dynasty Bureaucracy: Aspects of Background Forces', in Charles O. Hucker (ed.), *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1969), pp. 182–3.

39 Ping-ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368–1911* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1962), pp. 228, 247.

40 *Lijie Zhonggong zhongyang weiyuanhui renming cidian*; also see Wolfgang Bartke, *Biographical Dictionary and Analysis of Chinese Party Leadership 1922–1988* (K.G. Saur, New York, 1990), pp. 395–6.

41 Donald H. McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949–1977* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1979), pp. 36–7.

The policy of co-opting ethnic leaders into the power structure dated back to the later days of the Republican era (1912–49), when separatists proclaimed the establishment of the East Turkistan Republic (ETR) in 1933 under Soviet influence. It was later crushed, and re-established in 1944. The then Nationalist government was preoccupied with fighting the Japanese and the Communists, and, in an attempt to deal with the ETR, sought to co-opt its leaders into the local power structure. After the People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched into Xinjiang in 1949, it became clear to its leaders that in the long run military resistance would be useless, and it was also clear to the Communists that resistance, if any, would be bloody and enduring. The CCP then sought to incorporate Xinjiang leaders into the power structure.⁴² It appointed Burhan Shahidi (a Tatar born in Aksu, Xinjiang, and former Nationalist Party functionary who had participated in the ETR) governor of the province, and Saifudin deputy governor. Burhan was essentially a minority nationality figurehead in Xinjiang. However, he did condemn the separatist intentions of his fellows and stressed the unity of Xinjiang with China.⁴³ He was replaced by Saifudin in late 1950s. ETR military leaders were also incorporated into the PLA, though some were later replaced by Han.⁴⁴ However, the chairman of the autonomous government has always been of the Uighur nationality. These Uighur cadres had learned to speak Mandarin and provided Beijing with their networks of influence and patronage in their home region. In return, they were rewarded with official positions and privileges.

The low status of Uighur elites in the centre was seen as a reflection of Han domination. Some felt that the Han was exploiting the rich natural resources (particularly cotton and petroleum) of this region for the development of China's coastal region without giving the Uighurs adequate compensation. A recent proposal for the construction of a \$14 billion natural gas pipeline from Xinjiang to Shanghai exacerbates suspicion of exploitation.⁴⁵ In addition, the Chinese nuclear test site at Lop Nor raised concerns among the indigenous people. Within the region, there was a sense that Xinjiang was allowed to fall behind the coastal provinces in the race towards industrialisation and economic development.⁴⁶ In the meantime, there were no Uighur elites in the centre powerful enough to defend the interests of their homeland. Uighur separatists are thus tempted to see independence as a way to free their homeland from Han domination and finally put themselves in charge of their own affairs.

With Whom Do They Identify?

Identity is an elusive concept, fluid and constantly changing over time. Since conducting a reliable survey of identity is extremely difficult at this point, the data presented below will draw largely from the writings and discourses of intellectuals and ethnic entrepreneurs as well as from the media. By carefully examining the discourses, we can still obtain a fairly good estimate of the national identities in Xinjiang and Guangdong. Note that this article

42 Dreyer, 'The PLA and Regionalism in Xinjiang', pp. 41–2.

43 McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang*, p. 33–4.

44 Most of the other ETR leaders were killed in a mysterious plane crash en route to Beijing. See Dreyer, 'The PLA and Regionalism in Xinjiang', p. 42; Barnett, *China's Far West*, p. 373.

45 John Pomfret, 'China: Go West, Young Han; Beijing Urging Dominant Ethnic Group To Resettle, Develop Restive Regions', *The Washington Post*, 15 September 2000.

46 Beijing embarked upon a massive campaign in March 2000 to develop the western regions partly due to this concern, planning to spend as much as \$12 billion on 70 projects during the next five years in Xinjiang. These projects include airports, telecommunications, agriculture and other infrastructures. The goal is to develop Xinjiang's economy and strengthen its ties with China. See Susan V. Lawrence, 'Where Beijing Fears Kosovo', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 163, no. 36 (7 September 2000).

does not attempt to offer an explanation of how identity is formed. Instead, I am mainly interested in showing what the identity is rather than explaining how it came into being.

Xinjiang

The Qing dynasty's control of Xinjiang since the late eighteenth century did not stem separatist movements. Many Uighurs viewed Qing rule as illegitimate and an onslaught on their way of life.⁴⁷ Several rebellions took place in the region, but were quickly suppressed. The longest and most important of these rebellions was led by Yakub Beg from the mid-1860s to early 1878, who remained a legendary figure in the area. These rebellions and Russian penetration into the region led to the Qing court's decision to proclaim Xinjiang (literally 'the New Frontier') a province on 17 November 1884. It introduced several military and political reforms in an attempt to make Xinjiang become a regular province.

Throughout the Republican era from 1912 to 1949, the Chinese government made clear its policy on minority nationalities: to preserve China's national unity. Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, delineated this policy in his Theory of Nationalism, the first of his Three Principles of the People. According to Sun, the Chinese people are composed of five major nationalities—Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui (including Uighur), and Tibetan. Together they made up the Republic of Five Nationalities (*Wuzu gonghe*). The initial Republican national flag had five colours, representing each of the five nationalities. Sun advocated assimilation of different nationalities into 'a single powerful nation'. China, in his opinion, should follow the examples of Switzerland and the United States and 'satisfy the demands and requirements of all races and unite them in a single cultural and political whole'.⁴⁸

Reflecting Sun's view, the official policy of the Kuomintang (Nationalist) government regarding minority nationalities was, theoretically, equality for all nationalities and the right of self-determination.⁴⁹ In practice, Xinjiang was dominated by Han warlords or local elites during this Republican era. The harsh policies of the warlords had a very negative impact on how the minorities perceived the Han Chinese. Viewing Chinese rule as oppression of a foreign people, Muslim Turks in Yili, located in far north-western Xinjiang, rebelled against the Chinese government and re-established the ETR in November 1944. The rebels successfully drove out Chinese troops from all towns and border posts in the three districts of the province and advanced toward the provincial capital Dihua (Ürümqi). One early rebel pamphlet described why they were fighting:

Who are we? Who and where are our near and far relations? . . . [A]ny man who seeks the truth and whose heart is right cannot fail to say that the root of our nation and soul is not in China, but in Central Asia Our native place is East Turkestan Of the fourteen nations living in East Turkestan, the 10 nations accounted the most numerous have had no national, racial, or cultural relationship nor any community of blood with the Chinese, nor did any ever exist Our fathers and grandfathers were for hundreds of years oppressed by the savage Chinese East Turkestan belongs to the real masters of the territory, the Uighurs, the Taranchis, the Kazaks, the Kirghiz, the Tatars, the Uzbeks, together with all those who live among them in peace and friendship and who alike suffer Chinese oppression.⁵⁰

Apparently, the rebel pamphlet exhibited a distinct national identity from the Chinese. They

47 Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1994), pp. 35–6.

48 Sun Yat-sen, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary, A Programme of National Reconstruction for China* (AMS Press, New York, 1970), pp. 228–9.

49 Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang 1944–1949* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1990), p. 12.

50 Cited in *Ibid.*, 'Why Are We Fighting?', pp. 200–5.

denied any ties with China and viewed the Han Chinese as oppressive foreign colonists and urged their people to resist Chinese rule. They sought to demonstrate that Muslim Turks were an ethnically distinct nation from the Han Chinese. The rebellion would not have succeeded had there not been enough popular support. The abuses perpetuated by successive Chinese regimes, culminating in the rule of the warlord Sheng Shicai, had made the people ready to accept yet another attempt at self-rule. This period witnessed the growth of resistance organisations aimed at ousting Han Chinese from Xinjiang.⁵¹ They looked forward to an independent country composed of Muslim Turks, putting an end to the long rule of the ethnically distinct Han Chinese.

The Chinese central government was still at war with the Japanese at this time and was unable to defeat the rebels militarily. It sought a negotiated outcome with the Muslim leaders and in January 1946 reached a peace agreement promising self-government. The ensuing coalition government did not fulfil that promise because the Chinese military interfered frequently in the region's civil affairs and the Han bureaucrats were reluctant to share their power.⁵² The coalition lasted only one year and collapsed in 1947. The rebels maintained independent control of the three districts in Yili, while the Nationalist Party controlled the rest of the province, both until Communist take-over in 1949. Chinese failure in Xinjiang during this period can be attributed to two factors: the insistence on Xinjiang behaving like other provinces of China and continued interference by Chinese military in civil affairs.⁵³

Nationalities in the PRC were state-sanctioned. From 1953, the PRC government sent out identification groups, including linguists, archaeologists, historians and ethnologists, to check the validity of claims being made by numerous groups for status as minority nationalities. Applying Stalin's four criteria for a nationality—common language, common territory, common economic life and common culture—and flexibly adjusting for the 'national will', the state approved the status of some 50 nationalities out of over 400 groups who had made such a claim.⁵⁴ The basic policy of the PRC toward minorities is that all the nationalities should be treated equally and have the right to autonomy. According to the constitution, the PRC is a 'unitary multinational state', and '[a]ll the national autonomous areas are inseparable parts of the People's Republic of China'.⁵⁵ Secession is not to be tolerated. As a result of this new policy, the status of Xinjiang was changed from province to autonomous region in 1955.

The initial PRC policies in Xinjiang were generally moderate. Taking into account local conditions and peculiarities, Beijing carefully implemented its policies to achieve the goals of stabilisation and consolidation of its power in the region. The granting of regional autonomy in 1955 put minority cadres such as Burhan and Saifudin in nominal leadership. The real power however still resided in the hands of Han cadres such as Wang Zhen and Wang Enmao, along with their colleagues in the PLA.⁵⁶ Ethnic relations were gradually stabilised but began to deteriorate after the Great Leap Forward and the later Cultural Revolution. The excesses of these two campaigns, such as starvation, burnings of mosques, and public burnings of the Koran, resulted in several ethnic riots.

Political and cultural differentiation from the Chinese provided Uighur nationalists the

51 Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, pp. 34–5.

52 Mackerras, *China's Minorities*, p. 67.

53 Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, pp. 179–82.

54 Mackerras, *China's Minorities*, pp. 140–3; Thomas Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation?* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1989), pp. 30–4.

55 *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1961), p. 9. This policy is stipulated in Article 3 of the first constitution adopted in 1954.

56 Donald H. McMillen, 'Xinjiang and Wang Enmao: New Direction in Power, Policy, and Integration?', *The China Quarterly*, no. 99 (September 1984), p. 570.

raw materials to construct their argument. The historical intermittent Chinese control of the area, they contend, is not sufficient to establish a territorial claim. The formal incorporation of Xinjiang in Qing dynasty ‘cannot be viewed as an assertion of Chinese dominion because the Manchus were not Chinese’.⁵⁷ Preferring to call the region ‘East Turkestan’ instead of the Chinese name of ‘Xinjiang’, Uighur nationalists see their homeland as a country occupied by a colonial foreign government. They stress a deep cultural, religious, and linguistic gap with China and resist what they called ‘forced assimilation’ by the Chinese government. Isa Yusuf Alptekin, a Uighur leader living in Turkey, was quoted as saying: ‘At present, the peoples of Eastern Turkestan are forced to choose between national extinction and a mortal struggle of heroic resistance to defend their cultural identity against a Chinese Communist policy of assimilation’.⁵⁸ Some local people also resent Chinese migration. One Uighur university student was reportedly quoted as saying: ‘We have too many Chinese here—too many, and more keep coming ... The Chinese have no religion; they are infidels. We look to Turkey and Iran and Arabia. We do not look to Beijing. Islam is our law’.⁵⁹

The revival of Islam, which was harshly repressed during the Cultural Revolution, accompanied China’s open-door policy in the post-Mao reform. Hundreds of new mosques were built, new Islamic colleges and Koran schools were opened, and interest in the *hajj* (pilgrimage) was renewed, accompanied by a revival of Islamic architecture and renewed use of Arabic in place of Roman script. As Anthony Davis points out, ‘the Islamic revival has been more a reassertion of a cultural and ethnic identity defined in religious terms than any conscious embrace of an ideology of Islamism. Yet, the rediscovery of religion has unquestionably provided fertile recruiting ground for those who have adopted a specifically Islamist agenda and are committed to armed struggle (*jihad*) against an “occupying” communist power.’⁶⁰ Increasingly, more people are wearing Islamic dress, refusing to speak Mandarin, and defying Beijing’s efforts to impose a uniform time zone across China. Some even found links with Kosovo and celebrated its liberation from the non-Muslim Serbs and fantasised about a similar ‘rescue’ in Xinjiang.⁶¹

The emergence of the newly independent Islamic states in Central Asia after the Cold War encouraged Uighur separatists to seek a nation of their own. One remarked that ‘[w]e Uighurs will fight for our liberty and independence and we want to be as free as the other Asian republics of the old Soviet Union’.⁶² The proximity of these republics to Xinjiang also made them an ideal place for sources of weapons, money, training, as well as places of refuge. Some Uighurs have reportedly joined the Taliban in Afghanistan, and some even have links with alleged Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden. In order to deal with Uighurs’ increasing contacts with Islamic groups, Beijing has requested assistance from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to help put down separatist movements, terrorism, and religious extremism.⁶³ To date, religion has increasingly become a powerful source of national identity among Uighur nationalists.

By emphasising their distinct identity of Turkic origin, constructed mainly through

57 (No author) ‘Is Eastern Turkestan a Chinese Territory?’, *Eastern Turkestan Information Bulletin* vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1993). [ETIB is available on the Internet at <http://www.taklamakan.org/etib/>]

58 ‘Appeal to the Free World’, *East Turkestan Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 6 (December 1993).

59 Jeffrey Taylor, ‘China’s Wild West’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 284, no. 3 (September 1999), pp. 22–9.

60 Anthony Davis, ‘Xinjiang Learns to Live With Resurgent Islam’, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol. 8, no. 9 (1 September 1996), pp. 417ff.

61 Elisabeth Rosenthal, ‘Defiant Chinese Muslims Keep Their Own Time’, *The New York Times*, 19 November 2000.

62 Patrick E. Tyler, ‘In West China, Tensions With Ethnic Muslims Erupt in Riots, Bombings’, *The New York Times*, 28 February 1997.

63 Susan V. Lawrence, ‘Where Beijing Fears Kosovo’; Ahmed Rashid and Susan V. Lawrence, ‘Joining Foreign Jihad’, *Far Eastern Economy Review*, vol. 163, no. 36 (7 September 2000).

history, religion and language, Uighur nationalists have appealed to their people and the world for self-determination and independence.

Guangdong

Separated by the high mountains of the Nanling range from the rest of China, Cantonese have long considered themselves somewhat distinct from other Chinese ethnic groups. They speak a language unintelligible to Mandarin speakers unless written in characters, maintain their unique cultural style, and have their own regional identity. For centuries, the area Lingnan, the ancient name for Guangdong and neighbouring Guangxi, was considered a backward barbarian region by northern China. Although Chinese influences reached this area as early as the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE), the natural barriers of high mountains had prohibited contacts with the north until the Tang Dynasty (616–907CE) when improvements in river and land transportation brought the region into closer economic and cultural contacts with northern China. The Sinification of Lingnan was a long process, fuelled by repeated Han migration from the north. The influx of Han brought the language of the north and mixed with the local language in what now becomes known as Cantonese.⁶⁴ Cantonese culture is now accepted as part of the Chinese subculture. Some Cantonese are still proud of the fact that their language was more like ancient Chinese than was Mandarin and that they were purer representatives of Chinese culture.⁶⁵ Today, as the result of continuous Han migration from the north, most of the Cantonese population is related to Han Chinese.

When the Westerners came to China in the nineteenth century, there had been a high level of resistance and xenophobia among those who were accustomed to a Sinocentric world order. Compared with northern China, the idea of *yi xia zhi fang* ('protection against barbarians') was much weaker in Guangdong. Though still met with some resistance, Western ideas and technology got their first foothold in this southern part of China in the late nineteenth century. Patriotism characterised the so-called 'Lingnan Culture', manifesting itself in poetry and action.⁶⁶ Liang Qichao, a Cantonese intellectual who was one of the masterminds in the Hundred Days Reform in late Qing period, wrote:

Beautiful, my young China, eternal as the heaven;
Magnificent, my Chinese youth, boundless as the country!⁶⁷

Others, lamenting the weakness and corruption of China at that time, resorted to rebellions, reforms, or revolutions. Three important modern Chinese movements originated in Guangdong: the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64) led by Hong Xiuquan, the Hundred Days Reform (1898) led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, and the Republican Revolution (1911) led by Sun Yat-sen which overthrew the last dynasty of China. All of the above leaders were Cantonese, who had no doubt that they were Chinese as well. Though having their own different spoken language and regional identity, the Cantonese still identify themselves as Chinese and they are no less patriotic than northern Chinese.

Guangdong's tradition of regionalism grew not out of any local movements for political separation but out of its distance from various Chinese capitals in the north. There had been 15 or so independent or *de facto* governments in Guangdong since its incorporation into

64 Jiang and Fang eds, *Jianming Guangdong shi*, p. 12.

65 Leo J. Moser, *The Chinese Mosaic: The Peoples and Provinces of China* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1985), pp. 206, 209.

66 Hua Min, 'Lingnan wenhua yu minzu jingshen' ('Lingnan Culture and the National Spirit'), *Guangdong shehui kexue* (*Social Sciences in Guangdong*), vol. 2 (1995), pp. 117–18.

67 Quoted from Zeng Xianjiu, 'Liang Qichao shiwen de hexin sixiang ji yishu tese' ('The Core Thinking and Artistic Characteristic of Liang Qichao's Poetry and Articles'), *Social Sciences in Guangdong*, vol. 5 (1995), p. 133.

China in 224 BCE. However, almost all of these were alternative national governments opposed to the north rather than movements for an independent country. Guangdong's reputation for regionalism remained after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, but this regionalism is concerned with diversity and individualism rather than a drive for political separation.⁶⁸

The first goal of the CCP leaders was to build a strong state. Guangdong's unique sub-culture, dialects, distance from Beijing, and history of treaty ports helped prompt tighter central control.⁶⁹ Security concerns led Beijing to move China's industrial base from the coastal region to the inland, leaving Guangdong's economy sluggish. This situation began to change after China entered the reform era in 1978, as special privileges were granted to this province for the goal of economic development. As a result of this preferential policy, Guangdong's economy grew dramatically and became one of the richest provinces of China. The province's GDP, national income, total retail sales, and exports were the nation's largest in 1991. Half of China's foreign direct investment poured into Guangdong, and one-third of the nation's total exports originated in that province.⁷⁰

Guangdong's rapid economic development has given the province a new cultural status in China. Recognising the commercial power of the south, some people in the north began to learn the Cantonese language and culture, and some migrated into that province in search for jobs. The anti-imperialist capital of Beijing, on the other hand, was ridiculed by the Cantonese as a backward city of mere talkers who live off the wealth and profit of its people. Southern virtues spread to the north and gave new meaning to what is meant by being Chinese.⁷¹

For the Cantonese, it is very hard to imagine themselves not being Chinese. Although they speak a different dialect, common written characters provide the essential tools of communication, as they do elsewhere in the dialect-rich China. Guangdong's literacy rates ranked among the highest in China: according to official sources, illiteracy was 'basically eliminated' in the province by the early 1980s.⁷² For the cadres, the ability to speak Mandarin is a badge of elite status and a necessary requirement for anyone interested in further career advancement. When one wishes to speak with the authority of the state or the Party, Mandarin is the basic qualification to do so. On the other hand, when one wishes to defend local interests against the state, local dialects are the preferred means.⁷³ This reminds us of Eugen Weber's celebrated study of modernising rural France, in which peasants spoke *patois* to discuss local politics but switched to French when discussing national issues.⁷⁴

Conclusion

The cases of Xinjiang and Guangdong illustrate the inadequacy of current theories of peripheral nationalism. Gourevitch's theory focuses on economically advanced regions and attributes peripheral nationalism to the noncongruence between political leadership and

68 Goodman and Feng, 'Guangdong: Greater Hong Kong and the New Regionalist Future', pp. 179–80.

69 Peter Tsan-yin Cheung, 'The Case of Guangdong in Central-Provincial Relations', in Jia Hao and Lin Zhimin (eds), *Changing Central-Local Relations in China: Reform and State Capacity* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1994), p. 211.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

71 See Edward Friedman, 'A Failed Chinese Modernity: China in Transformation', *Daedalus*, vol. 122, no. 2 (22 March, 1993).

72 Glen Peterson, 'The Struggle for Literacy in Post-Revolutionary Rural Guangdong', *The China Quarterly*, no. 140 (December 1994), p. 926.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 935.

74 Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1976), pp. 67–94, 266–9.

economic dynamism in ethnically distinct areas. His theory, however, fails to predict nationalist movements in Guangdong, an economically dynamic region with some ethnic potential located in China's periphery far away from the political centre. Gellner's theory deals with backward regions and presupposes industrialisation as the driving force of nationalism. Nevertheless, his theory ignores possible forms of pre-industrialisation nationalism. Separatist movements had been a salient issue in Xinjiang prior to China's industrialisation. In addition to the aforementioned drawbacks, the applicability of these two versions of theory is inherently limited to either advanced or backward regions, but not both. Gourevitch's theory can not be applied to backward regions, while Gellner's cannot be applied to advanced regions.

The model proposed in this article broadens the scope of applicability. It can be applied to both advanced and backward regions. By examining elite status and national identity, the model succeeds in explaining what current theories fail in Guangdong and Xinjiang. It directs our attention to the importance of the positions local elites are able to occupy in the central government and whether local people identify with the core nation in affecting the emergence of peripheral nationalism. In Xinjiang we found few local elites in the central government, and the separatists identify themselves as a distinct nation from the Chinese. The opposite is true for Guangdong, where local elites enjoy 'most-favoured-lord' status in Beijing, and its population has no problem identifying with the Chinese. The low values of these variables—elite status and national identity—explain the presence of separatist movements in Xinjiang, while their high values explain the absence of such movements in Guangdong.

Both variables in our cases point in the same direction; i.e. either both have a high value at the same time or a low value. This raises an interesting question in cases where elite status and national identity move in opposite directions. In Figure 1 (p. 182), Guangdong is situated at Cell I, to which we may also add Fujian province, where the majority of the population speak the Minnan dialect and its elites have access to high positions in the centre. Xinjiang is located at Cell IV, to which we may also add Tibet. Although further research is required for the other two cells not covered in this study, we can speculate on what would possibly happen when one of the variables has a high value but the other does not. Cell II describes a region with high elite status but different national identity. In this case, the potential for nationalist movement is likely to be moderate because high elite status could reduce the nationalist demands resulted from different identities. Real world cases are few in this regard. One possible example is Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, whose elites had been powerful figures in the centre and has so far no significant incidences of irredentism or separatism. For provinces or regions with low elite status but similar national identity (Cell III), the nationalist potential is likely to be from low to moderate because there would be very few incentives to seek separation from their fellow Chinese countrymen. However, a reidentification process could tip the situation toward Cell IV. Possible examples are Yunnan, Guizhou, Gansu, Qinghai and Ningxia.