Ethnicity or nationality?

Minority policy and ethnic conflict in contemporary China

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INTRODUCTION

When translating the Chinese word *minzu* into English, translators are always faced with a choice between two alternative terms: 'ethnicity' or 'nation'. Most Chinese government departments and public sectors have used 'nationalities' in English translations of the term *minzu* when it appears as part of their official names. Recently, influenced by the nation-state discourse of the Western world, the English translations of the names of some institutions which formerly included variants of the terms 'nation', 'national', or 'nationality' have begun adopting the terms 'ethnic' or 'ethnicity' instead. For example, the former State Commission of Nationalities has changed its official name in English to the 'State Ethnic Affairs Commission'. However, the former Nationalities University of China has changed its English name to 'Minzu University of China', retaining the transliterated Chinese term, while other provincial colleges have continued to use the terms 'national' or 'nationalities' as part of their names. In 2012 Chinese economist Ho Angang (2012) published an article discussing "the second generation of minority policy". He raised the argument that equality of individual rights, rather than minority policy – that is, understanding groups as ethnicities rather than nations – is the right way to reduce the differences and conflict between majority and minority. His view aroused a big debate in the Chinese academic and mass media. The most powerful opposition came from minority elites, who claimed that minority policy has provided necessary protection for minorities since 1950 (Chang 2013). The argument reflects the fact that ethnicity in China is actually a political question more than a cultural one. In this paper I use the example of Uyghur migrants in

Guangzhou to discuss different articulations of ethnicity in the rural home areas and urban destination areas of migration, and relate it to the complexities of the political construction of ethnicity in China.

ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC POLITICS

Ethnicity is often understood as a form of cultural identity. That is, culture provides the content and meaning of ethnicity, such as a shared history, ideology, shared symbols, and system of meaning. At the same time, ethnicity is also understood as a political identity that, in some cases, may be coupled with ethnic nationalism or conflict.

After World War II, many countries constituted by multiple ethnic groups had implemented minority policy in order to prevent their societies from falling into ethnic conflict. These minority policies were basically developed on the basis of two assumptions. Firstly, following the notion of the 'melting pot' in America, was that ethnic distinctions could be eliminated because of the inevitability of assimilation (McDonald 2007: 50). Secondly, following the framework of the countries that formed the alliance of Eastern Europe after World War II, was that ethnic conflict could be controlled by a powerful overarching political union of its various nations or ethnicities, even though those ethnic distinctions might continue to exist.

Two theoretical approaches have developed in social science in parallel with state politics. Some scholars, like Giddens (1985), have argued that the legitimacy of modern states must be based on the political and civil rights of autonomous individual subjects. According to this view, the state should not focus on ethnicity, but rather enforce political and legal equality of all individuals. Others, like Will Kymlicka (1995), argue that the notion of an autonomous individual is itself a cultural construct. According to this view, the state must recognize ethnic identity, and let all ethnic groups express their own identities.

However, the resurgence of ethnic nationalism around the world demonstrates that the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is complicated and changeable (Calhoun 1993: 235). Social scientists have found that ethnicity had been socially constructed in the sense that ethnic boundaries, character, and identities are continuously negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction both inside and outside ethnic communities (Negal 1994: 152; Eriksen 2001). State policies have great power to shape patterns of ethnic identification when controlled resources are distributed along ethnic lines.

Some researchers in America indicate that ethnicity is a rational choice in resource competition among social groups. For example, Hechter's research (1983) showed that the construction of ethnic boundaries could be seen as a strategy to gain economic advantage. Banton (1987) observed that ethnic boundaries are defined and redefined according to strategic calculations of interest.

In this paper I wish to discuss the constructed character of ethnicity in China by focusing on the complex interplay of Chinese minority politics and population movement. As I will argue, in contemporary China, minority politics has an enormous power to shape ethnic boundaries and identifications, as well as the relationship between majority and minority populations. While the central government's minority policy, which binds a minority to its territory, was originally designed with the intention of unifying the country, it no longer matches the current ethnic diversity of China's urban centers that has resulted from the past twenty years of economic opening-up coupled with internal and international migration.

CHINA'S MINORITY POLICY SINCE 1950

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (the National Congress had passed in 1954) declared that China is a unified country with multiple *minzu.* In the definition of the country, *minzu* are those ethnic groups that live in China, classified by the country and confirmed in the Constitution. Between 1950 and 1980, fifty-six *minzu*, including Han, were defined. The state classified *minzu* according to four kinds of criteria: common territory, common language, common economy, and common psychological nature, as manifested in common culture (mainly in terms of religion and living habits), which were partly outlined by Stalin and revised in the context of Chinese conditions. (Fei 1980: 148) In this political framework of the country, national identity prevails over any ethnic identity, and every ethnicity must accept its political position and economic condition as determined by the country. The general economic advantage enjoyed by Han Chinese – who are also the majority *minzu* – has been carefully hidden behind the political discourse of 'ethnic equality' and 'solidarity'. As each *minzu* and its territory has been legally and politically established, their classification has actually made different economic resources available for each ethnic group, since different regions and lands have differing economic values. For example, Han occupy most of the regions with high economic value. In Xinjiang, Kazak and Han occupy the rich land of Zhungeer Basin and South of Tianshan Mountain, while most Uyghur live on relatively

barren land north of Tianshan Mountain. As an attempt to redress the balance between the Han advantage, as majority *minzu,* and other minority *minzu* , the minority policy was implemented in the 1950s, which, writes Stevan Harrell, "in practice means developmental aid from higher level government agencies to minority districts, representation of minorities in political bodies, more lenient application of the stringent population control program, affirmative action in education at several levels, and other important benefits" (1990: 517).

According to the Constitution, this minority policy can only implemented within the confirmed *minzu* autonomous districts. It means that an ethnic people can only enjoy the benefits of the minority policy in the places where they have registered formally as members of a *minzu* and as definite residents of the *minzu* autonomous district. Once such an individual has left his home town he or she can no longer take advantage of the policy. Therefore, the minority policy is territory-bounded. The character of this policy is similar to that of other population and social welfare policies put in place by the local government for domestic inhabitants, in that the rights granted are all linked to the idea of *huji* （户籍） – migrating people (whether members of the majority or minority *minzu*) are not supposed to enjoy the same rights as the domestic people in any locality. In China *Huji* has been used by every executive region government as an exclusive policy for some purposes. Thus, while members of a *minzu* cannot be discriminated against directly on the basis of their ethnicity (as stipulated by the constitution), they nevertheless may be discriminated against on the basis of their status as migrants (*huji* exclusion). Even members of the Han majority could find themselves disadvantaged by this exclusive rule. For example, in the city Urumqi, in Xinjiang region, the population of Han was greater than that of Uyghur, but Han people in the region refer to themselves as 'border supporters' (*zhibianzhe*, 支边者) and 'constructors' (*jianshezhe*, 建设者), who contribute to nation-building in an "ethnic region" (*minzu diqu*, 民族地区) (Cliff 2012: 82). These names mean that Han in the region are guest inhabitants, living in Xinjiang for some work-related reason. Even though some Han individuals have lived there all their lives, they still retain this 'guest' identity.

XIAOBEI: A MULTICULTURAL/MULTIETHNIC IMMIGRANT QUARTER

Let me begin by introducing one of China's ethnically most heterogeneous locations, the Xiaobei community of Guangzhou. Guangzhou is a megacity in the Southeast of China that looks back on a long history of international

connections, including the historical emigration of Chinese workers and entrepreneurs to the Americas (Zhou 1992) as well as the contemporary immigration of African traders and Arab businesspeople (Li/Du 2012). While today, Xiaobei is well known for its African immigrant community, it is actually a multiethnic quarter where members of different nationalities and ethnicities live together, including Africans, Arabs, and Sala Huizu (a branch of Muslims in China), as well as Uyghur, Han, and other *minzu*. Africans and Uyghurs are the two biggest immigrant communities in this quarter. Both are treated in roughly the same way by the locals, who see them first and foremost as immigrants, not differentiating between national/domestic and international migrants. For the purpose of this article, all immigrant groups (irrespective of whether they are national or ethnic units) are here considered as ethnic immigrant communities.

Similarly to migrant communities elsewhere, the different ethnic immigrant groups in Xiaobei tend to occupy separate economic niches. Africans are primarily international traders who buy from China and sell in their home countries in Africa; many members of Turkish and Arab communities run restaurants or commercial firms; many Uyghur work as Muslim intra-community food suppliers, cooks, butchers, or mobile snack-sellers; and a large number of Han work as wholesalers and service providers. Ethnic immigrants from different regions or countries have developed a self-sufficient environment.

According to the record of the local immigrant registration office,[1] the Uyghur population is the most numerous, followed by Sala-huizu. Most Uyghur migrants are male; no female has been registered officially as a contemporary resident. In fact, Uyghur women are seldom seen on the streets. Many Uyghur men say that a married Uyghur woman should stay at home to take care of the family, and that married Uyghur men here leave their wives at home. In contrast, most Sala-huizu migrants are female. They come to Xiaobei following their families, or following the neighbors or friends of hometown, as housewives or maids, some married to Uyghur. Both of these migrant groups are predominantly Muslim. They worship at home or have religious gathering in friends' homes, seldom going to the mosque like Guangzhou's domestic Muslims.

1 In the population administrative regulations, when a migrant wants to rent a room for accommodation in a city, he or she must go to the office of the community to register as a contemporary resident and obtain an official resident's permit. Without such a permit he or she would be kicked out of the district immediately once he was found by the police.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN AN IMMIGRANT SETTING

Most of the ethnic immigrants in Xiaobei quarter arrived after 2009. An informant who works in immigrant registration said that before 2009, Uyghur and African laborers had gathered in the area at daytime for employment but dispersed again at night. The Xiaobei community was recognized by the outside world because of this multi-ethnic labor flow, until two significant ethnic conflicts occurred in 2009, which changed the human ecology of Xiaobei community.

Conflict between Uyghur and Han

On June 26, 2009, a collective conflict between Uyghur and Han workers occurred in one factory (Xu Ri Toys Manufacture), located in Shaoguan, a north city of Guangzhou[2]. The factory had employed about 700 Uyghur workers and a similar amount of Han workers. According to the official reports, hundreds of workers fought with each other because some fake messages about violence between two ethnic groups had been passed among workers and aroused anger. Though the conflict was soon interrupted by police and the managers of the factory, it still resulted in 120 workers being injured (31 Han and 89 Uyghur) and two Uyghur workers being killed. Within two weeks of the conflict, the factory stopped producing. Managers from both local governments of Shaoguan city and the home towns of the Uyghur workers (all were from a same county of Xinjiang) helped to deal with the conflict. Some persons, both Han and Uyghur, had been arrested, charged with having written the fake messages and of being the instigators of the fight. Some Uyghur workers were taken back to their home areas.

Many different news stories about why and how the conflict happened, with differing and confusing details, appeared on the internet and in newspapers. According to the two most detailed official reports,[3] the situation in Shaoguan

2 "'Workers' fight caused two deaths in a toy factory (Wnaju gongchang gongren douou 2ren siwang)". Guangzhou Daily June 27, 2009 (http://gzdaily.dayoo.com/html/2009-06/27/content_615478.htm); Series reports in the Xinxi Shibao: June 28, 2009. A8; GuangZhou Daily (Guangzhou Ribao) July 9, 2009. A2 and July 10, 2009. A4.

3 Two reports are: a) the television talk about incidents of '6.26' and '7.5' given by the chairman of Xinjiang Ughur Autonomy in June 6, 2009 (egov.xinjiang.gov.cn/xxgk/zwdt/2009/56200.htm; b) the news report in Hainan Daily about the judgment of Court to the suspects and the case of '6.25', October 11, 2009 (http://ngdsb.hinews.cn/html/2009-10/11/content_163889.htm).

can be roughly reconstructed. Between June 16 and June 25, 2009, allegations about Han females being raped by Uyghur men were uploaded to a Shaoguan public website. These messages were forwarded by workers in the factory, and aroused panic among the female workers. At the night of June 25 one female worker, who was a newcomer and did not know the plan of the factory, walked into the male Uyghur workers' dormitory by mistake. The Uyghur workers made fun of her. The woman's scream alerted the guard nearby, and the woman escaped while the guard came to check what was happening. The woman ran back to her dormitory and complained to other Han workers. Some Han workers, both male and female, then went to the Uyghur men and asked them to apologize. The two groups of workers then argued and fought with each other in the early morning of June 26. In the statement of the court of October 10, 2009, according to the police record there were no rape cases reported between June 16 and 25, so the messages had been fake. The person who had uploaded the messages had recently been fired by the factory and wanted to arouse chaos as an act of revenge.

Unfortunately, the '6.26 Incident' was just the beginning of a series of ethnic conflicts between Uyghur and Han. On July 5, 2009, hundreds Uyghur gathered in Urumqi city, demanding an investigation into the death of two workers in the Shaoguan conflict. More political demands, including sovereignty claims, as well as violent attacks, soon followed. Two days of chaos resulted in over 1,700 persons being injured, most of them Han.

Conflict between African immigrants and Guangzhou police

While the influence of the '6.26 Incident' was still being felt, another conflict emerged in Guangzhou city. On July 15, 2009, hundreds of African immigrants gathered outside the police station in Xiaobei area to protest about police officers causing the death of a Nigerian. According to the news report, at midday, a Nigerian man had jumped out of a high window and died while he was attempting to escape from a passport check by the policemen. Since an entry visa to China cost a lot of money at that time, many immigrants from central Africa were overstaying. As they said, the one thing they hated the most was a passport check by the Chinese police. The death of the young Nigerian aroused the sympathy of other Africa immigrants, and the protest made the city government and police very nervous. Soon armed police surrounded the crowd and declared the protest was illegal, stating that those protesters who did not disperse would be expelled from the country. Most participants left from the place within two

hours, with some representatives remaining in order to negotiate with the police and the immigration department of the province.[4]

Ramifications after the conflicts

As I will show in the following, the Uyghur-Han conflict has impacted significantly on the living and working conditions of Uyghur migrants in Guangzhou, and has caused a shift in their self-identification, from stressing their identity as an ethnic minority to emphasizing their identity as part of the wider Muslim community of Xiaobei.

In the minds of Han people, Uyghur were previously associated with an ethnic image of vigor, humor and kindness, since all movies stories and novels had portrayed Uyghur in this way. Unfortunately, this has changed toward a stereotype of fierceness, anger, and violence since 2009.[5] After the conflict, Uyghur people were no longer welcomed in Guangzhou, or in other cities of Han majority. Moreover, ethnic labor employment (as a previously favorable ethnic policy before) has been stopped by the city's manufactures. It is difficult for Uyghur to get hired, to rent houses, or to earn their food on streets – "once they saw my ID they refused to hire me"; "they saw my face, then immediately refused to let me stay"; many informants of Uyghur complained that they were in the same terrible situation. Many migrating laborers have had to leave the city. The Uyghur people who remained in Guangzhou gradually moved to the Xiaobei area, where most African immigrants also live.

Since most immigrants in Xiaobei are Muslim, it is easier for Uyghur to earn money by selling food to other Muslims, and to rent houses from African leaseholders, and they feel less hostility from their Muslim neighbors than from local Han people. In this multi-ethnic community, Uyghur tend to emphasize their religious identity as Muslims to a much greater extent than they express

4 "Embassy to aid investigation into Nigerian trader's death", June 21, 2012 (www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqgj/jryw/2012-06-21): The Nigerian embassy in Beijing has sent officials to Guangzhou to cope with the investigation of a Nigerian's death in police custody. "We have sent officials to Guangzhou to observe the investigation and calm the Nigerians in the Nigerian residential areas," Ademola Oladele, official for public communications at the Nigerian embassy in Beijing, said on Wednesday. Elebechi Celestine, 28, the man who died, comes from a town in southeast Nigeria, he said. Celestine is said to have argued with a motorbike taxi driver on Monday.

5 Here I refer to the notion of 'others' as described in terms of difference from 'us' – where 'us' – the 'we-group', are Han in this case. Cp. the critical dissertation by Gladney, 1994.

their ethnic identity as Chinese. For example, ethnic restaurants in the community hang many Islamic signs and scriptures on their walls, and place Arab items on tables, compared with ethnic restaurants in other place of city, which are decorated with many pictures of Xinjiang landscapes and ethnic symbols. Uyghur wear more Arabian-style dress in the community, in contrast to Uyghur in Xinjiang. Some Uyghur have even learned to write Arabic, and to speak English and French to communicate with their neighbors and customers. The meat suppliers develop a Xinjiang-Guangdong cross-provincial market network to ensure that the meat is sourced from the genuine Muslim butchers. Restaurants and meat stores in the community put up pictures of Mosques as posters.

While the Uyghur-Han conflict impacted the social and economic situation of Uyghur migrants in Guangzhou, the conflict between African immigrants and the local administration caused a shift in the city's treatment of African migrants. Subsequent to the conflict, in 2009 the Exit and Entry and Administration Department of Guangdong province modified the entry rules for the immigration of Africans in order to decrease the numbers of overstaying immigrants (Li/Du 2012). Governments of the city and district tried to renovate the commercial buildings and the public environment in Xiaobei, which led to a rise in real estate prices in the area. Two kinds of ethnic immigrants have gradually become established there, and most of them have settled down, as businesspeople rather than as mobile laborers. According to an informant from the immigrant registration office of Xiaobei area Africans and Uyghur have developed a co-existence relationship

The two conflicts in Xiaobei raise some very interesting questions about ethnicity: Why did the '6.26 Incident' cause greater ethnic conflict in the distant city of Urumqi than in the nearby city of Guangzhou? Why did Uyghur have to claim their right and privilege as a minzu in Xinjiang? In Guangzhou, under what circumstance do Uyghur join in with the multi-ethnic community, rather than with the domestic society? In order to answer these questions, we need to take a closer look at the minority and ethnic politics of the Chinese central government.

MINORITY POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNICITY IN CHINA

As I have outlined at the first part of this paper, the origin of China's contemporary minority and ethnic politics dates back to the 1950s to the Mao

era, when the country defined itself as a state composed of 'unified multiple *minzu*'. In the 1980s, the country underwent economic reforms and instituted new policies that promoted regional development by encouraging rural workers to migrate to urban production centers. These policies are ongoing, but as they are managed on the local level, different regions pursue different strategies. These three factors are relevant in understanding the outcomes of the described ethnic conflicts.

Post-Mao era: Regional development and ethnic gap

Between 1950 and 1980 the minority policy fixed ethnic population in their own territories. Income inequality between regions and nationalities was unclear. The patron-client relationship between the majority and the minority constructed by minority policy seemed roughly stable, though several small conflicts had erupted in Xinjiang and Tibet.

After 1980 economic growth made Han cities much richer than the minority autonomous districts, and many ethnic people moved to the eastern cities from minority regions seeking jobs and opportunities. They saw the difference in development between central Han cities and marginal nationality districts and the income gap among nationalities, and discovered how hard it was for a person with poor education, like most Han laborers, to find a good job (Gustafsson/Li, 2003). According to reports in newspapers, many teenagers from south Xinjiang went to eastern cities to pursue their dreams of city life, but ended up becoming homeless or resorting to crime.[6] Now they have realized that the minority policy will not bring them the kind of modern life that the city people have. The Patron-client relationship between majority and minority has changed.

The central government started the 'Western Development Plan' in 2000. The plan has brought billions of dollars of investment funding to Xinjiang and developed new industries, mainly in resource exploitation, agro-industry, and tourism. The design of the plan was intended to reduce the income gap between regions and nationalities by increasing ethnic labor employment and developing industry; it is a kind of 'affirmative action' to promote minority peoples. The Western Development Plan includes other forms of economic aid, like financial aid, trade, employment, etc., and the eastern developed cities must carry the

6 "Homeless Children in a mainland city is not only a problem for the image of Xinjiang, but a problem for people living in Xinjiang" (Liulang ertong bujin shi xingxiang wenti, gengshi minsheng wenti. 流浪儿童不仅形象问题，更是民生问题) Reported by Ye Weimin. In South Weekend (Nanfang zhoumo《南方周末》), June 27, 2011.

burden of implementing these 'political tasks'. This is why manufacturers in Shaoguan city hire hundreds of workers from the county of Xinjiang at one time. The factory would have been impossible to run without support by the governments of Xinjiang and Guangdong provinces. The plan has pushed the rapid economic growth in Xinjiang. Similar to the situation in other nationality districts, the gap between provincial GDP of minority regions and non-minority regions has narrowed, according to an econometric analysis by academics (Ho/Ho 2012).

However, the employment of Uyghur did not increase rapidly even though as a domestic nationality they enjoy privileges with regard to employment. The employers from Han cities found that many Uyghur laborers could not fulfil the requirements of most positions in terms of skill and qualifications. Similar issues also arose in the tourism industry. The big agencies were run by investors from mainland cities, which make most of their profit from the industry. The domestic nationalities can only take advantage of their *minzu* status by selling their ethnic products – fruits, foods, and arts. In this development pattern, it is no surprise that the domestic nationalities, especially Ugyhur, as the majority population in the district, would conceive of the development plan as a kind of invasion by Han – who take advantagers of the local resources but do not share the profits.

As the Western Development Plan has been carried out in Xinjiang, new problems have arisen from the fast economic growth.

a) The economic growth has been pushed by urbanization and industrialization rather than by the development of agriculture. Meanwhile, most Uyghur living in south Xinjiang, are considered as being of relatively low value for the economy, and are weak in terms of competition in the labor market. The new growth has widened the development gap between city and countryside, as well as the income gap between Uyghur, Han, Kazak and other minorities within a given region or district (Hannum/Xie 1998: 327).

b) The elites of minorities now live in cities far from their hometowns. Though in official documents the numbers of ethnic representatives continue to increase in the state congress, they are mostly administrators of government and members of the Party. These elites may call themselves ethnic representatives, but they have actually been distanced from the grassroots society for a long time. Most Uyghur administrators, as the important agents of the state-nationality connection, remained silent about the '7.5 Incident' and the series of subsequent violent events, because they might not know what and why exactly happened in south Xinjiang, and also because as members of a *minzu* they cannnot betray their own ethnic community.

New problems diversify the society of Xinjiang. The inner social stratification prompts members of each *minzu* to focus primarily on the interests and welfare of their own ethnic community. In other words, the Western Development Plan leads interested competition to localize in Xinjiang, while at the same time the connection between *minzu* and country has become less reliable. The '6.26 Incident' was one reason for this, but was not the only one that led to the '7.5 Incident' and series of violent events following it.

Different Regions, Different Strategies

However, for the mainland majority, especially for city governments, keeping the nationwide inter-ethnic relationship stable is not a major concern. They mainly focus on domestic economic growth and peaceful politics. From the point of view of city governments and domestic society, Uyghur are just one kind of migrant, like the migrants from other Han regions. The domestic newspapers and public media of Guangzhou and Shaoguan reported the '6.26 Incident' as just a workers' fight; ethnicity and nationality were not mentioned in the media coverage.

In the '6.26 Incident', Uyghur workers and Han workers alike were viewed as migrant laborers and chaos-makers by the domestic government and society of Shaoguan. Those found responsible were dismissed by the factory after the '6.26 Incident', even though some of them were hired again few days later. The administrator, who came from the Uyghur workers' hometown, had to send some of those people who were fired back to their home towns. Under such circumstances workers, whether Uyghur or Han, had no chance to declare their opinions or to protest if they felt unfairly treated. But Uyghur can claim their rights in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous district. As the '7.5 Incident' showed, in their own territories minorities can use their nationality as a political resource. Less than two months later, on September 3, following reports of Uyghur assailants using infected hypodermic needles to attack Han women, children, and the elderly, crowds of Han people gathered outside the offices of the Xinjiang government to request effective protection for Han people, but the government made no public promises (Cliff 2012).

Since the '7.5 Incident' and the ensuing violence, the government of Guangzhou, as well as the governments of other majority cities, began to consider that Ugyhur migrants might bring about serious conflicts, and they have since increased controls over the Ugyhur staying in their jurisdictions. Following advice or suggestions from the local government, most hotels and rental houses now refuse to accept Ugyhur; the same is true of many factories and firms.

Xiaobei is an exception in the Guangzhou. As members of the first community that opened up to other *minzu*, the local residents tend to neglect the administrator's advice and to accept the Uyghur as renting residents, especially because fewer and fewer Han migrants want to rent the houses in this area since it has become a multi-ethnic community.

The Uyghur migrants have their own strategies for solving the problem of accommodation, but avoid attracting the government's attention. For example, one person might register as a contemporary resident and rent a big room in order to offer place for other acquaintances. Thus, the number of people living in one house is often higher than the number shown in official records. This approach definitely goes against the local regulations. Now the Uyghur migrants dislike ID checks by the police with the same intensity that some African immigrants do.

Ethnicity as a political resource in China

In China, ethnicity may be used as a powerful political resource, but only when it is represented in its own territory. Immediately prior to the '6.26 Incident' in Shaoguan, seven hundred Uyghur and eight hundred Han workers lived together. The dialogue between two groups increased their mutual levels of ethnic awareness. Some benefit competition among individuals inside the working system could therefore be more easily transformed into a discourse about ethnic inequality. Sexual tension between young male and female workers could become conflated with ethnic stereotypes. The factory management evidently had not paid attention to the emerging tension between these two ethnic groups. As Donald Donham (2011) had claimed in his book, some conflicts between workers would turn into or be read as ethnic conflict. Since ethnic conflict is always a sensitive political subject in China, it is easy for some people to use it as a way to gain power or as an excuse to escape their responsibilities. After the '6.26 Incident' the governments of provinces and cities did not expect the Uyghur migrants to gather together, so they advised domestic society to push the Uyghur migrants away. The Uyghur migrants gathering in Xiaobei went contrary to the government's expectations and purpose. However, the Uyghur people didn't present their collective nature as a *minzu,* but rather present themselves in religious terms, as Muslims. By employing the strategy of using their religious community as a shield, the Uyghur have found a way to survive in a multi-ethnic community in an unfriendly majority city. Apart from their territory in south Xinjiang and the ethnic group to which they belong, Ughur immigrants in Xiaobei are a minority *minzu* distinct from Han Chinese; they are immigrants

distinguished from other local residents, and are also one a Chinese nationality distinct from African immigrants. Separated from the majority by different policies of the country – minority policy, *huji* policy, and religious policy – the identities of Uyghur migrants have to be redefined flexibly and situationally. In other words, ethnicity is manipulated for political and economic purposes (Brubaker 2002).

If one investigates the behaviour and presentation of Uyghur people in Shaoguan factory, Xiaobei community and Xinjiang city, one can see the character of their ethnicity shift. This demonstrates clearly how an ethnicity may be politically constructed by the state. The political alliance built on the minority policy, which has specific nationality-territories at its core, could once maintain a balance between the majority and the minority in the relatively homogeneous society that existed before, but it cannot continue to play that role in today's increasingly diversified circumstances. China has never had as many foreign immigrants as it has today. Some academics have begun to argue for the depoliticization of nationality – for ethnicity to be recognized without being associated with territorially bounded privileges, and for equality and individual right instead (Ho/Ho 2012). Furthermore, prior to international immigration, Chinese people saw ethnicity mostly in terms of their own ethnic minorities, as a question of different political treatment within the Chinese nation state because these groups were classified and named as *minzu* in the country's minority policy. Although Chinese people were aware of cultural differences, they were hidden to some extent behind political discourse, and religion was formerly thought to be unrelated to ethnicity because even individual Han had different religious beliefs and practices. With the arrival of African immigrants, the Chinese have begun to understand ethnicity purely in terms of cultural difference, without additional political treatment.

CONCLUSION

China's original notion of 'unified multiple nationalities', created in 1950, did not definitely follow the idea of multicultural citizenship, because the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'individual civil rights' do not constitute the basis of China's national political framework. In China, rather, rights are formulated on on the basis of a common sense of the political and economic differences between majority and minority, and have allowed minority peoples to continue to live according to ethnic cultural mores on their own land through the introduction of the minority policy (for example, in ethnic regions the regional mother tongue

can be used in school lessons instead of Mandarin) (Attané/Youssef 2000). In this way ethnicity has more or less become a part of multicultural 'citizenship'. However, in China political discussion and conflict over ethnicity have never ceased (Dreyer 1977; Karmel 1996). The Xiaobei case demonstrates that the people continue to use ethnicity as a political resource, but that the frontier has now moved from marginal ethnic regions to central city areas (Zhang 2003).

Ethnicity is not only a cultural but also a political construct. According to this view, it should be possible to reshape ethnic distinctions by political demand, even though assimilation among ethnicity is inevitable. The relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is dynamic, and both can be evoked by the same factors. Thus, ethnic conflict certainly will not disappear, no matter what efforts are made to address issues of individual equality or ethnic demands.

Since ethnic identifications and the relationships between 'ethnicity', 'nationality', and 'personal identity' are being continually renegotiated, a dynamic concept of 'ethnic community' can help to explain why and how ethnic conflict occurs. China's case shows that the kinds of strategy (whether conflict or negotiation) an ethnicity might choose is at least partly determined by individuals' knowledge about control of territory, about their own group's historical and contemporary relationship with other groups, and about the possibilities that exist for reforming their communities. Ethnicity can therefore be understood as a political resource which leads and supports the idea that the relationships between ethnic groups must continually form and reform, in term of 'ethnicifying'. By keeping these points in mind we may be able to better understand why and how ethnic conflicts begin or are resolved by comparing different cases in the world.

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