Ethnic Diversity and Social Conflict in South, East and Southeast Asia: Ethnopolitics in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and China

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1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to evaluate and contrast the issue of institutionalized racism experienced within Malaysia and Sri Lanka, and compare this with the experience of China, another society which also combines subordinate demographic minorities with a dominant demographic majority, in order to bring in a broadened understanding which could serve to lead to a more balanced analytical framework on the trichotomy of polity, society and economy and in particular the political economy of State and ethnicity. Being taken into consideration here are both the two major dimensions of ethnopolitics – ethnic politics which includes both government responses to challenges from ethnic communities and the efforts of ethnic organizations seeking to influence State policy, and the politics of ethnicity which views ethnicity as a consequence of political action (Gheorghe, 1991), the latter “inverted paradigm” being exemplified by the waves of reethnicization in the Eastern European countries after the fall of the Communist Party totalitarianism and the phenomenon of ethnogenesis in Andalucía and among some highly Sinicized ethnic minorities of China such as the Zhuang and the Hui, as well as in the new-found ethnic intensity of the ethnoterritorial groups like the Uyghurs and Tibetans. The paper will begin by clarifying the concept of institutionalized racism and follow up with a description of the similarities and differences between Malaysia and Sri Lanka, as well as comparing them with China. Two important observations that will be derived is that, firstly, though both suffer from institutionalized racism, the Sri Lankan government is more extreme in its enforcement of said racism than the Malaysian government; and secondly, the reaction of the discriminated group in Sri Lanka (the Sri Lankan Tamils) against the institutionalized racism is much more violent than the reaction of the discriminated group in Malaysia (the Malaysian Chinese). Some critics might think to lay the blame for the first observation at the door of the second; this paper argues, however, that it is not just a simple case of more extreme provocation causing more extreme reaction and vice versa, but that there are other factors at play which serve as the root for the differences in both the provocations and the reactions. Two popular theories to explain this phenomenon will put to analysis; namely, the divergence in economic growth and geopolitics of Sri Lanka and Malaysia. On the other hand, China’s ethnopolitics exhibit a rather different landscape. While also being a society which combines subordinate demographic minorities with a dominant demographic majority – as a whole with her demographically (92 per cent) and politically dominant Han Chinese majority – in her frontier regions are found societies in which the numerical majority is dominated by a demographic minority – as the local Uyghurs and other real and exotic minorities in Xinjiang possibly perceive themselves in relation to the minority Han Chinese settlers (around 40 per cent) backed by the Han Chinese-dominated central State, hence as an extension of the Han Chinese-dominated central State power, or seen in another way, a subordinate-superordinate intergroup relationship in a society with no obvious demographic majority – the mainly bi-ethnic relations in Xinjiang between the Uyghurs (about 45 per cent) and Han Chinese (about 40 per cent) or if we take the estimates of the Tibetan government-in-exile, the relations between the Tibetans (about 44 per cent) and Han Chinese settlers (together with the minority Hui settlers totaling about 56 per cent).

In Malaysia and Sri Lanka institutionalized racism is clear-cut, ongoing and extends nationwide. An important note in reading this paper is that it shall set aside the fact that there are various different parties with conflicting interests, ideologies and plans of action involved in this problem in both countries. For example, in Malaysia, both Malaysian Indians and Malaysian Chinese suffer from institutionalized racism, but on the whole do not work together, instead preferring to protest against said racism in racially distinct political parties.
and social organizations. Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the many rebel groups which were formed were strongly divided and showed a disposition towards fighting each other almost as much as they fought the government; the virtually complete annihilation of the “high-caste”-membered Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) by its previous ally, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), is one such example of disunity (Wilson, 2000:126). And in all cases involved, there are various controversies regarding the identities and existence of indigenous races as opposed to “immigrant” races. (Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, only two camps involved in the issue will be pinpointed for analysis – in Malaysia, it will be the indigenous Malays vs. the Malaysian Chinese; in Sri Lanka, it will be the indigenous Sinhalese vs. the Sri Lankan Tamils.) Similarly in China, the generally accepted Han-non-Han dichotomy in ethnic relations can indeed be questioned. For example, the case of Xinjiang is still much more complicated than a simple Muslim struggle for independence against Han colonizers, as Gladney (2003: 24-25) cautioned:

The problems facing Xinjiang, however, are much greater than those of Tibet if it were to become independent. Not only is it more integrated into the rest of China, but the Uyghur part of the population is less than half of the total and primarily located in the south, where there is less industry and natural resources, except for oil […] however, unless significant investment is found, Tarim oil and energy resources will never be a viable source of independent wealth. Poor past relations between the three main Muslim groups, Uyghur, Kazak, and Hui, suggest that conflicts among Muslims would be as great as those between Muslims and Han Chinese. Most local residents believe that independence would lead to significant conflicts between these groups, along ethnic, religious, urban-rural, and territorial lines.

In fact, leaving aside the Han-non-Han dichotomy, even the so-called “Han Chinese” as a homogeneous ethnic group, whether phenotypically or culturally, may not be what it has always been taken for granted. The great diversity of the mutually unintelligible regional dialects is well known. The speakers of many of the Chinese regional languages are in fact simply too numerous for the word “dialects” to be used as an appropriate term to designate their languages. For instance, the number of speakers of either Cantonese/Yue 粵 or Hokkien/Fujianese/Min 闽 is larger than the number of speakers of either Polish or Ukrainian, the two East European/Slavonic languages with most numerous speakers except Russian, or the speakers of Dutch, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish combined. In China, regional differences, including the distinction between the wheat-eating northerners and rice-eating southerners, have always been observed, or as one observer noted, the Hanjen 漢人 and the T’angjen 唐人, plus “national minorities” who have to different extents been Sinicized:

The contradistinction between Han Chinese and national minorities repeatedly made […] suggests that the Han Chinese constitute a homogeneous, discreet community from whom the national minorities are readily distinguishable. In fact, however, the cultural gap between “Han Chinese” and “minority” is often no greater than that between Han Chinese of different regions. There is an almost continuous ethnocultural spectrum extending from the northern, wheat-eating, Mandarin-speaking Chinese at one end to, at the other, the dark-skinned K’awa in the south who are primitive food-gatherers and speakers of a language of the Mon-Khmer family. In between are the more than 100 million “Han” Chinese of south-coastal China who speak dialects other than Mandarin and who, in fact, sometimes refer to themselves as T’ang-jen (men of T’ang, after the T’ang dynasty, seventh to tenth centuries) rather than as Han-jen (after the Han dynasty, third century B.C. to third century A.D.) and the more than ten million persons of the “national minorities” in south China who have been to varying extents
acculturated to Chinese ways – to the point, in some cases, that they had no awareness of being different, of being a “minority,” until they were informed of the fact by workers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences who came to their areas after 1949.

(Moseley, 1966: 8-9)

In answering the question “Who are the Chinese?”, Moseley observed that “Han Chinese” as an ethnic marker began with its use for political mobilization linked to the May Fourth Movement:

Psychologically, the Han Chinese only became a nation in response to Western imperialism; culturally, this movement was greatly reinforced by the literary reform movement led by Hu Shih and others. And nationalism has been a dominant feature of Chinese Communism. Yet much of China’s heterogeneity – in speech, diet, and physical appearance – so often remarked upon by foreign visitors still remains. With reference to its ethnic component, being “Chinese” is a dynamic quality. “Chineseness” may be likened to a geographical zone, a blurred place on the map, through which an unending stream of peoples has filtered in a north-south direction […] On the whole, this southern movement was gradual and piecemeal, being characterized by an influx of Chinese colonizers from the north who mixed with the local people […] The indigenous populations that have remained unabsorbed sometimes live side by side in discreet communities with the Chinese, sometimes retreat back into the hills, and sometimes attempt to emigrate southward. Thus, in any given national minority region of south China today there is a whole range of comparative “Chineseness” among the inhabitants which altogether eludes the dichotomy, “Han Chinese”-“national minority.”

(ibid.: 10-13)

The above description does not apply to Xinjiang – China’s “wild west” – and Tibet, in contradistinction to the southern regions or, with Chinese colonization greatly facilitated by railroads built by the Western powers, Inner Mongolia to the north and the northeastern region formerly being Manchuria. Incidentally, Inner Mongolia had already been overwhelmingly Chinese by the time the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was created in 1947, and in the case of the northeast “the Manchus disappeared and Manchuria became safely Chinese, dooming in advance the Japanese attempt to establish an independent ‘Manchukuo’” (ibid.: 13). In this contradistinction lies the root of the Chinese government’s present problem of Xinjiang and Tibet1:

Outer Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet retained their uniqueness: although held by successive Chinese dynasties, the imperial administration was always unstable because it lacked the ballast of a sizable Han Chinese community. They were tied to China without ever becoming Chinese. Outer Mongolia broke away altogether and succeeded in establishing an independent state […] With the modern transportation and communication facilities developed by the Chinese Communists, the colonization of Sinkiang and Tibet is now proceeding, although it has encountered bitter resistance.

(ibid.: 13)

1 This contradistinction in proportion is apparent in the fact that “while the Han population in Sinkiang and Tibet was nil, in 1949 Han Chinese comprised more than half of the total population of all China’s national minority areas averaged together” (Moseley, 1966: 14). Did the completion in 2006 of the Qinghai-Tibet (Qing-Zang 青藏) railway, said to bring modernity and economic progress to Tibet, also signal a new phase of Sinicization of Tibet? This is a fear that the 14th Dalai Lama’s Tibetan government-in-exile has not been hesitant to voice.
2. Institutionalized Racism

Institutionalized racism is a hotly debated and potentially controversial issue experienced by arguably every country worldwide. Jones (1972: 5) specifies it simply as “the conscious manipulation of institutions to achieve racist objectives”. However, this definition is less than precise, mainly because of the nature of “institutionalized racism” as an ambiguous social construct which is formed from the combination of two equally ambiguous social constructs, i.e. institutionalization and racism. Institutionalization, as defined by Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (2003: 649), is clearly put as “to make into an institution; especially: to incorporate into a structured and often highly formalized system <institutionalized values>”. However, when one considers the elusiveness of the concept of institution, that definition becomes less clear-cut. As the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy notes, “in ordinary language the terms ‘institutions’ and ‘social institutions’ are used to refer to a miscellany of social forms, including conventions, rules, rituals, organisations, and systems of organisations.” Additionally, institutions are in no way static, constant features in society – “from conventions, codes of conduct, and norms of behavior to statute law, and common law, and contracts between individuals, institutions are evolving and, therefore, are continually altering the choices available to us” (North 1990: 6).

However, one characteristic all institutions have in common is that they are meant to govern or enforce certain rules of a society. In other words, “an institution is a system of social factors that conjointly generate a regularity of behavior” (Greif, 2006: 30). It should be noted that Greif had clarified this definition by stating, “[e]ach component of this system is social in being a man-made, nonphysical factor that is exogenous to each individual whose behavior it influences.” (ibid.) This clarification gives rise to two implications: one, that an institution, created as it is from “man-made factors”, has a culture and purpose which reflects the ideologies and intentions of its creators; two, that an institution, being “exogenous to each individual”, imposes constraints upon the lives of people who are bound, whether by culture or by law, to follow it (ibid.). In general, institutions can be separated into two categories – formal institutions (i.e. consciously established with specific individuals as creators) such as “rules that human beings devise”, and informal institutions (naturally arising as a result of the culture and needs of a society) such as “conventions and codes of behavior” (North, 1990: 4). These institutions are very much intertwined, as they are based on similar cultural traditions and beliefs within a society.

This is important in the context of Sri Lanka and Malaysia in that both their formal and informal institutions are imbued with institutionalized racism. One interesting shared similarity between these two countries lies in the order and identity of their conquerors from the colonial period – they were first conquered by the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch, and finally by the British (Levy, 1974: 13-14). Thus, one may theorize that, starting from the colonial period onwards, institutions within these two countries have followed a closely similar development path, as they are “modeled at their initial stage along the forms of [the same] Western institutions” (Levy, 1974: 7). After all, the colonizers, especially the British, had imposed their own political administrations, set up their own Western-styled schools and religious establishments, and instilled “generally cautious economic policies” which has resulted, until today, in the “fear of inflation, the essential reliance on the private sector, and the acceptance of foreign investment” in both countries (Bruton, 1992: 329). Following upon the heels of this, the formal institutions of government within Malaysia and Sri Lanka, influenced as they are by the elements of racism found within the culture and informal institutions of the country, creates and enforces more formal institutions which are characterized by institutionalized racism, and so strengthens even further the racist influences.
within the lives of the people. A vicious cycle is thus created from this “interlocking double-
structure of [... social practices” (Harré, 1980: 52).2

On the other hand, a correct perspective on the issue of ethnoregionalism in China and the
core cause of ethnoregional secessionism and the accompanying peripheral nationalism –
long regarded by the Party-State as irrational, ungrateful and unfathomable – free from the
preconceived bias of “centralist nationalism” is important to understand the complexities of
Xinjiang or Tibet. After all, the whole idea of the Confucian grand unity (datong 大同) in the
Cultural China construct should not be taken for granted without paying due consideration to
the will of all groups, whether dominant or subordinate, in the People’s Republic of China.
This so-called “grand unity” emphasized in the Cultural China construct, far from being a
voluntary federalization by amalgamation, has always been a top-down arrangement in the
millenia of China’s history, shaped mostly by conquest and domination. As Mikhail
Gorbachev pointed out in the case of the former Soviet Union, the disintegration of such an
entity represents the dissolution not of a country, but of the command structure that has long
gone against the genuine will of the constituent nationalities of the empire (Gorbachev,
1991).3 As an illustration, the history of Xinjiang is a history of continuous rebellion and
imperial, often brutal, suppression. Lin (1936) wrote:

2 Note that this is not to say that institutions within other countries are free from racism – on the
 contrary, the United States serves as an example of how institutionalized racism, especially against
the African American community, had been weaved into many of its institutions in its history.
However, the difference between countries like the United States and countries like Malaysia and Sri
Lanka is that, currently, while the former has attempted to counter institutionalized racism via
alteration of old institutions (applying affirmative action policies to oppose discrimination within the
institutions of education)2, destruction of old institutions (eradicating the Old South’s plantation
economy) or creation of new ones (founding formal institutions such as the National Association for
the Advancement of Colored People in 1909), the latter two have mostly taken steps which result in
the perpetuation of said racism, as will be shown later in the paper.

3 China’s leaders, from Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao have been vehemently against
adopting Western liberal democracy for China, both for the fear that the Communist Party will lose its
political dominance or China might disintegrate like the former Soviet Union. The nightmarish
scenario of China’s disintegration, and the most likely prospect of losing Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner
Mongolia, probably also Qinghai and Ningxia, and of course Taiwan, and having China shrunk by
half, alone is enough for the Communist Party leaders to convince many, not least among the overseas
Chinese community leaders to shun the idea of democratization and regional political autonomy. The
death of the Soviet Union hangs like the sword of Damocles to remind people that “[… when] Mikhail
Gorbachev launched his radical political reform and initiated the process of political
democratization in the former Soviet Union, scholars in the West argued that Gorbachev must be
‘right’ and China’s Deng Xiaoping must be ‘wrong.’ […] However, when Gorbachev’s reforms
eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Deng Xiaoping was proven ‘right.’” (Zheng and
Lye, 2004) The prevalence of such views that have fed into the collective fear somehow serves well in
justifying the stance of China’s current regime despite the value-loaded nature of judging right and
wrong in this case. Soviet Union’s disintegration is definitely wrong in the context of the preference
for stability and territorial unity, but this is highly judgmental. Firstly, that a “nation” divided is
destined to herald misery for the people might not be borne out by modern empirical evidence – the
outstanding record of economic prosperity, political stability and human welfare of the many
successor states of the former Austro-Hungarian empire, the Kalmar Union (the Danish empire) and,
closer home, even the success of Taiwan. Of course, to generalize such successes could be as
empirically unsound as to be consumed by the combination of ethno-national pride and the morbid
fear of losing territorial domination, but sometimes, as the proverb goes, the best things might just
come in small parcels. E.F. Schumacher, in his now classic Small Is Beautiful (1973) proposed the
idea of “smallness within bigness” – a form of decentralization whereby for a large organization to
During the Ming dynasty (明朝) located in this [later “Hsinchiang 新疆”] region were Hami 哈密, Huochou 火州, T’ulufan 土魯番 (i.e. Turpan) etc. which were semi-independent, among which the strongest being T’ulufan whose population, other than Muslims, also consisted of Ch’iang 毗邁, T’ufan 吐蕃 and Mongols […] By the time of Emperor Ch’ienlung, Amusana 阿睦撒納 of the Chunkeerh 準葛爾部 (i.e. Dzungaria) rebelled against the Ch’ing government; Muslim leader Hechomu 和卓木 took the opportunity to lead the Muslims to fight for independence from the Ch’ing court but was defeated and killed. Hence the Muslim region again came under Ch’ing rule in the 24th Year of the Reign of Emperor Ch’ienlung 乾隆二十四年 (i.e. 1759) […] The next rebellion came in the 25th Year of the Reign of Emperor Chiach’ing 嘉慶二十五年 stemming from Ch’ing officials’ persecution of the Muslim people. This revolt led by Changkeerh 張格爾, offspring of Hechomu, was finally crushed by the Ch’ing army in the 7th Year of the Reign of Emperor Taokuang 道光七年 […] Muslim uprising occurred again in the 1st Year of the Reign of Emperor T’ungchih 同治初年 and Shaanhsi, Kansu and Hsinchiang almost all achieved independence. Shaanhsi’s and Kansu’s independence movements were crushed by Tso Tsungt’ang 左宗棠 who was sent in the 7th Year of the Reign of Emperor T’ungchih to the western region, who proceeded to crush the independence movement of Hsinchiang in the 2nd Year of the Reign of Emperor Kuanghsü 光緒二年.

(Lin, 1936: 37-41)

In fact, influx of ethnic Han into Xinjiang intensified only after the establishment of the People’s Republic, with the numbers of Han settlers in Xinjiang rising from less than half a million in the early 1950s to 7.5 million by 2000 and 8.1 million by 2006.4 On a historical timeline, Han Chinese colonization of the region has only been quite a recent phenomenon with large-scale Han migration into the region in the mid-19th century:

[…] it was not until 1760, and after their defeat of the Mongolian Zungars, that the Manchu Qing dynasty exerted full and formal control over the region, establishing it as their “new dominions” (Xinjiang), an administration that had lasted barely 100 years, when it fell to the Yakub Beg rebellion (1864-1877) and expanding Russian influence. Until major migrations of Han Chinese was [sic] encouraged in the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing were mainly interested in pacifying the region by setting up military outposts which supported a vassal-state relationship. Colonization had begun with the migrations of the Han in the mid-nineteenth century, but was cut short by the Yakub Beg rebellion, the fall of the Qing empire in 1910 […]

(Gladney, 2003: 4)

Such independence movements have not ended with the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, as the ensuing warlord era dismembered the region and the nascent republican China faced the danger of losing the territory on various occasions – the short-lived East Turkestan Islamic Republic in 1933 and East Turkestan Republic in 1944 which lasted till 1949 when the People’s Liberation Army entered Xinjiang (“peaceful liberation”) and the region was

work it must behave like a related group of small organizations. “Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful”, Schumacher might just have a point. Secondly, the aspiration for a unified nation under the Han Chinese domination from the point of view of the Han Chinese should be indisputable, but whether this is true from the perspective of other non-Han Chinese people – “Chinese” as defined as “China’s citizens” – especially those that are ethnoterritorial would deserve further investigation.

incorporated as part of the new People’s Republic, later established as the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” on 1st October 1955.

As the Uyghur population dwindled to just 45 per cent today (compare this with Lin’s nineteen-thirties figure of about 80 per cent) while large-scale Han Chinese settlement has caused the latter’s proportion to burgeon to 41 per cent, Uyghurs’ resentment against what they perceive as the Han Chinese empire’s internal colonization and the exploitation of the region’s rich resources by the Han Chinese central State is inevitable. Large-scale demographic transfer of members of a country’s dominant ethnic group into a minority ethnic region of the country inevitably, for the ethnic minority, raises the spectre of internal colonization, plundering of local resources, dominant cultural assimilation, and unequal resource contest. Similar phenomenon can be observed in Tibet. The Sinicization of Ürümqi is paralleled by the Sinicization of Lhasa 拉薩. The official population figures for Tibet differ much from certain unofficial ones. The official figures have been disputed by the Tibetan government-in-exile who claimed that “accelerating Han population transfer into Tibet […] has reduced the Tibetan people to a minority in their own land […] and today] there are over 7.5 million non-Tibetan settlers in Tibet including Chinese and Hui Muslims, compared to six million Tibetans” (Cook and Murray, 2001: 141). However, such allegations of population transfer were rebutted by the Beijing government – according to whose official figures Tibetans constitute 93 per cent of the Tibet’s total population – who argued that “the only Han Chinese living in Tibet are specialists who have gone there voluntarily to help in the region’s development […] and they] make up less than five per cent of the population and many of the people are there for only a few years before returning home” (Cook and Murray, 2001: 141). The figure of 93 per cent Tibetans was one given by the 2000 Census. In fact, official data for the year 2005 gave the proportion of Tibetans as high as 95.28 per cent and that of Han as only 3.91 per cent of the total population of Tibet.

The next concept related to the theory of institutionalized racism is racism itself. To define racism, however, one must first deal with the issue of race. As van den Berghe noted in his work of Race and Racism (1967: 9), “The term ‘race’ has been quite confusing because of its four principal connotations.” Of the four that he stated, the only truly relevant definition to this analysis would be the definition of “a human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics. These physical characteristics are in turn believed to be intrinsically related to moral, intellectual, and other non-physical attributes or abilities.” In other words, the term “race” refers to “a group that is socially defined but on the basis of physical criteria” (van den Berghe, 1967: 9). It is often intertwined with, but should not be confused as, the concept of ethnicity, which refers to being “socially defined but on the basis of cultural criteria” (van den Berghe, 1967: 10). One should remember, also, that using physical characteristics as criterion for defining a race is very problematic; as noted in Vol. 9 of the Encyclopedia Britannica (2003: 876), “Human races are in a continuous state of flux, with genes constantly flowing from one gene pool to another. This process is known as admixture (also called miscegenation, or gene flow).” From this, one could thus conclude that “all existing human

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5 These data were from the 2000 Population Census of China. Official data for the year 2006 gave the proportion of Uyghurs as 45.92 per cent and that of Han as only 39.62 per cent of the total population of Xinjiang. See Xinjiang Tongji Nianjian 2007, pp. 82-87, Figure 4-7, which gave the year 2006 figures of 9,413,796 Uyghurs and 8,121,588 Han out of a total population of 20,500,000 people of Xinjiang.

6 See Xizang Tongji Nianjian 2007, pp. 33-34, Figure 3-4, which gave the year 2005 figures of 2,549,293 Tibetans and 104,647 Han out of a total population of 2,675,520 people of Tibet.
This is especially true in this age of globalization; with the disintegration of the geographic boundaries that used to hinder migration and interracial mingling, the only barrier which still preserves “racial purity” would be presumed cultural boundaries. However, this bastion has proven to be particularly difficult to surmount – cultural boundaries have oftentimes been instrumental in maintaining the aforementioned “racial purity” and racial isolation. Such culturally-created racial isolation oftentimes gives rise to the social construct of racism, which can otherwise be known as “the transformation of race prejudice […] through the exercise of power against a racial group defined as inferior, by individuals and institutions with the intentional or unintentional support of the entire culture” (Jones 1972:117). Note that the implication here is that only aggressive hostility is classified as racism; passive hostility, such as merely possessing, but not actually acting upon, the belief in one’s own racial superiority over another, can just be classified as race prejudice.

All this is significant when applied to the situation in Malaysia and Sri Lanka as the parties involved shows such racial divides based on cultural boundaries. Though they live within the same countries and so, would be unhindered in admixture, racism holds them back from doing so. As shown by a telephone survey of 1,200 Malaysians conducted by the Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research, “About 42% of the population do not consider themselves Malaysian first, and 46% said ethnicity was important in voting, 55% blamed politicians for racial problems and 70% would help their own ethnic group first. According to the survey, 58% of Malays, 63% of Chinese and 43% of Indians polled agreed with the survey item that ‘in general, most Malays are lazy’. Meanwhile, 71% of Malays, 60% of Chinese and 47% of Indians agreed with the generalization that ‘in general, most Chinese are greedy’” (Kuppusamy, 2006). Meanwhile, a questionnaire aimed at determining ethnic stereotypes in Sri Lanka concluded the following: “Sinhalese (e.g., Selfish, Foolish), Sri Lankan Tamils (e.g., Loves own ethnic group, Terrorist or supporters of terrorism) [and] Indian Tamils (e.g., Poor, Naïve)” (Schaller, 2006: 6). Such negative stereotypes serve to discourage interaction between the races, which leads to further ignorance and fear; and so, yet another vicious cycle is created – racism results in the hindering of intermingling and interbreeding, which leads to further “racial purity” and segregation, which leads to yet more racism.

Similarly, China is a nation abounds with Han Chinese chauvinist racism wherein it is a perception of the non-Han ethnic people that they are often looked upon as backward, dirty, lazy and superstitious by the dominant Han who pride themselves on assiduity and having a “5000-year culture”. Marginalized by centuries of Han Chinese imperial expansion, China’s ethnic minorities have historically been viewed as manyi 蠻夷, i.e. “barbarians”, and it was only after the revolution that the “dog” radical 犭 – implying sub-humanity – in most of the Han Chinese names given to the ethnic minority groups was eventually replaced with a “human” radical 亻. Paradoxically parts of the CCP’s affirmative action policies for minorities such as exemption from the one-child policy, employment quotas and in particular legal leniency on minority offenders (in non-political cases) have added to the negative stereotyping of ethnic minorities in the eyes of the dominant Han population.

Racism within Malaysia and Sri Lanka can be traced back to the colonial period of the British Empire, which was undoubtedly the most influential colonizer of these two countries. It was in that period that the foreign-born community swelled drastically, not via the natural means of migration and trade, but instead through the large-scale British importation of indentured labour to work in the local plantations and mines. Institutionalized racism was affixed within the lives of the local colonized populations, as the British “white race” became
the de facto superior race. Furthermore, the British had favoured a divide-and-conquer style of rule which separated the colonized according to class and race. As Levine (2007: 125) noted, “British policy generally sought a degree of collaboration with those who they saw as the elites among the locals.” It did not help that in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, the said elites were not the indigenous population, but were instead members of the “immigrant” races, for this set the stage for the racial problems which were to come. For example, British colonizers in Malaysia had created a dual economy in which it favoured the Chinese businessmen, thus alienating the local Malays and causing resentment to arise (Gambe, 1999: 77). Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka it was the Sri Lankan Tamils who were regarded by the British imperialists as their “source of second-tier civil servants” (Pereira, 1983). And so, economic segregation by race was intensified in both these countries, leading to social disparities and increased hostilities, especially on the part of the indigenous Sinhalese in Sri Lanka and Malays in Malaysia, who naturally felt that their economic and political power had been supplanted by the colonizers and newcomers.

Similarly in China, conquest and colonization during imperial times and internal colonization today play a big role in sowing the seeds of ethnic hatred and conflict and perpetuating them. For instance, during the 1700s, it took a brutal campaign of ethnic genocide to deliberately exterminate the Dzungars and it has been estimated that more than a million people were slaughtered. Here, the term “genocidal” or “ethnic cleansing” is not an exaggeration. Take the example of the imperial court’s suppression of China’s Muslim rebellion:

Close to a million Hui Chinese Muslims were slaughtered in Shaanxi alone and 800 mosques burnt when in November 1869 Ayub Bai Yanhu led his Shaanxi Muslim rebels retreating to Jingjibao (in today’s Ningxia) under the attack of the Ch’ing troop led by Zuo Zongtang who just defeated the (Christian) Taiping rebellion. When Jingjibao fell in November 1870, more than 170 members of the various generations of the family of Ma Hualong, the Muslim leader who surrendered, were executed. Ma Hualong was tortured and killed in 1872, his heart dug out, his head paraded and burnt. A total of 1800 people were mass slaughtered, and it was alleged that during the gruesome torture of Ma Hualong and his people, seven layers of carpets were used to avoid the “rebel blood” from getting into the ground and “breeding rebel seed”. When Zuo Zongtang’s troops took Suzhou (in today’s Gansu), up to about 10000 Hui Muslims were slaughtered, including the old, the women and the children. Zuo’s military crime against humanity was so gruesome that it was even chided by the Ch’ing court’s civilian officials. The imperial (Manchu) Ch’ing government was not known to be sympathetic to rebels. Between 1648 and 1878, around twelve million Hui and Han Chinese were killed in ten unsuccessful uprisings, and the Ch’ing court’s harsh suppression of these revolts was nothing less than genocidal, including the mass slaughtering of several million Hui Muslims in the “Hui-cleansing” (xi hui) policy that had been long advocated by officials in the Ch’ing government. Before the war against the rebels, there was a total population of about 13 million people in Shaanxi province, at least 1,750,000 of whom were Hui Muslims, and the province’s population dropped to 7 million after the war. There was a mass exodus from Xi’an, the capital of Shaanxi province, which was the holy city of the Hui Muslims before the revolt, and Shaanxi province’s once-flourishing Hui Muslim population suffered a decline of 93 per cent. The Ch’ing court’s Hui-cleansing campaigns, hence, were quite a success.

(Yeoh, Liu and Fan, 2011: 8-9)
However, seen in a different light, such gruesome genocides could be more political and tactical rather than downright racist:

[...] to be fair to the Ch’ing government, while not denying the gruesome war atrocities committed against the Muslim civilians, the Ch’ing armies only massacred the Muslims in areas that had rebelled, and spared Muslims in areas which took no part in the uprisings. Many Hui Muslim generals who helped the Ch’ing court to defeat the Muslim rebels were rewarded and their followers were spared from the genocide. General Zuo Zongtang, who was a Han Chinese, even relocated the Han people from the Hezhou suburbs to reward the Muslims there who surrendered and were granted amnesty and allowed to live as long as they stayed outside the city. Muslims in eastern and southern China did not revolt and hence were not affected by the rebellion and experienced no genocide. In fact, in Henan province which was adjacent to Shaanxi, Muslim villages were said to be totally unaffected by the Shaanxi rebellion.

(*ibid.*: 9-10)

For Malaysia and Sri Lanka, the tense situation was only truly brought into the spotlight after these two countries attained independence from the British, for without the oppressing thumb of the colonizers to force the people into compliance, it soon became very clear that the only shared heritage of these clashing races in their respective countries was their colonial past, which was the root of the segregation in the first place. And so, it is hardly surprising that over the years, the Sinhalese-dominated government in Sri Lanka and the Malay-dominated government in Malaysia have clearly expressed their racial hostility and decided that “[t]he concept of *Bhumiputra* (‘son of the soil’ in Malaysia – ethnic Malays – in relation to the Chinese or the Indians) or Sinhala *Buddhaputra* (member of the majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka in relation to the Sri Lanka Tamils) illustrates the concept of the true national, and when it comes to the test it is the true national (*Bhumiputra* or Sinhala *Buddhaputra*) which enjoys precedence” (Wilson, 2000: 7). This belief is shown via the enactment of various institutionally racist laws which have targeted the main institutions of politics, language, education, religion, etc. As shown in Table 1, these laws favour the Malay and Sinhalese race in Malaysia and Sri Lanka respectively.

The unfortunate consequence of these laws, however, is that it encourages racism to occur far beyond the details specified by the said acts. One example would be the resultant increase in the Malaysian *bumiputera* share in all economic sectors at the expense of the Chinese as a consequence of the 1970 New Economic Policy (Phang, 2000: 99); another would be the resultant decrease in employment of non-Sinhala-speaking Sri Lankan Tamils within the Sri Lankan civil service as a consequence of the 1956 Sinhala Only Bill.

It is equally clear, that the acts passed by the Sri Lankan government, especially the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act, show them to be far more extreme than that the Malaysian government in enforcing institutionalized racism. The effect of this zealousness can be seen in the difference in reaction of the discriminated groups against the institutionalized racism oppressing them. In the case of Malaysia, protests against said racism has mostly been limited to political actions including demonstrations; in Sri Lanka, however, it has resulted in the emergence of various militant groups, the brutality of a civil war, and the death of millions. However, the situation in Sri Lanka is, as mentioned previously, not just a simple case of extreme provocation causing extreme reactions – most cases of institutionalized racism, many of which are equally or even more extreme than that found in Sri Lanka (discrimination of Jews within the Third Reich, enforcement of the Apartheid Policy within South Africa), do not result in the emergence of so many rebel groups quite as violent and
militant as those found in Sri Lanka. Indeed, the non-violent reaction of Malaysia’s
discriminated groups is more like the norm.

Table 1  Institutionally Racist Laws in Malaysia and Sri Lanka

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Sri Lanka</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>1957 constitution, Article 153 –Malay Special Privileges allow for</td>
<td>1949 disenfranchisement act – deprived Indian labourers of the right to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maintenance of quotas for employment within the government service</td>
<td>vote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act – denied citizenship rights to a large number of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sri Lankan Tamils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>1967 National Language Bill – establishment of Malay as the national</td>
<td>1956 Sinhala Only Bill – establishment of Sinhala as the national language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>language, with English used occasionally for official purposes</td>
<td>instead of English and/or Tamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1957 constitution, Article 153 –Malay Special Privileges allow for the</td>
<td>1972 constitution – “district quota system and standardization of marks for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maintenance of quotas for bumiputeras in educational assistance</td>
<td>university admission”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1957 constitution – Islam as the main religion, and restriction of</td>
<td>1972 constitution, Chapter II – changed Sri Lanka from a secular state to a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>propagation of religious doctrine among Muslims</td>
<td>Buddhist state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations have been made that members of China’s ethnic minorities are
appointed to leadership positions in the ethnic regions, for instance, in the following
comments by Tan (2004):

Contrary to the bash-China writers’ portrayal, the minority policy of China is better than
most countries, and in fact better than that of the U.S. (in relation to the American Indians)
and Malaysia (in relation to the Orang Asli). China’s constitution requires minorities to be
represented in the local government. Thus, in a Yi majority area the county head has to be a
Yi, and a Tibetan in the Tibetan autonomous region. In the one-person one-vote system of
democracy practiced in Malaysia that is still largely ethnically based, it is almost
impossible for an Orang Asli to be elected in a state or national election. Even where
positions are bureaucratically appointed, it is rare, if any, for an Orang Asli to be appointed
to such a position. In fact, the main officials of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs are
not Orang Asli. Whereas in China there are many nationalities affairs commissions, these
are mostly run by cadres who are minorities themselves, although in sensitive regions,
government-trusted Han officials may hold the real power. Of course, China has more
security concerns over certain minorities in certain regions, especially Xinjiang and Tibet.

To fully comprehend Tan’s assertion in the context of the political economy of ethnic
relations, it should be noted that the dominant group may perceive a subordinate group as
“exotic” rather than “real” (Hoetink, 1973: 177-91). Another example of such an “exotic”
minority in Malaysia, besides the Orang Asli (i.e “aborigines”) is the small Gente Kristang
community (autoglossonym, from Portuguese “Gente Cristã”) in the state of Melaka, descended from the 16th century Portuguese settlers and occupiers. Defined as “deviating in somatic and/or cultural respects, without being conceived subjectively as a menace to the existing social order” (Hoetink, 1967), “exotic” groups (or Cox’s (1948) socioracial “strangers”) are not perceived as “real”, because they are not subjectively comprised within the “societal image” of the dominant. Thus they do not attract the latter’s hostility, as do “real” subordinate groups viewed as a menace. The case of the Ainu アイヌ and the Burakumin 部落民 in Japan and that of the Amerindian natives and Afro-Americans in the United States today are good examples of these two polar subordinate situations – the Ainu and Amerindians being in some way viewed as “exotic” vis-à-vis the other two “real” minorities; instead of bitterness and hostility, they are met with “a mild benevolence, a condescending philanthropy” on the part of the dominant society (Hoetink, 1973: 179). Such distinction between the two types of subordinate groups was vividly described by DeVos in his study of the Burakumin: “The basic attitudes held [by the dominant Japanese society] toward the Ainu are not as pejorative as towards the outcasts [i.e. the Burakumin] [...] the Ainu have been treated ambivalently very much as the American Indians have been, in contrast to the caste distinctions which underlie the treatment of American blacks.” (DeVos, 1972: 326) Paradoxically, China’s largest minority, the Zhuang, could actually be more “exotic” than “real”. Being the most assimilated of minorities, the Zhuang’s ethnic consciousness was virtually created by the Han-dominated central Communist Party-State in the early 1950s (see, for instance, Kaup, 2000).

By the same token, appointment to leadership positions begs the question: exotic or real? Whether members of an ethnic minority are appointed to leadership positions could ultimately be perceived by the ethnic community concerned as irrelevant, as it does not reflect the extent of autonomy and self-determination which the community may regard as crucial for the preservation of communal interests – be they political, socioeconomic or cultural – or in short, who holds the real power? For instance, at the time of the riots, while the chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Zizhiqu (“Autonomous Region”) is Nur Bekri, a Uyghur, in the eyes of the Uyghurs real power is allegedly in the hands of the Party secretary Wang Lequan 王乐泉, a Han.7

One argument which may be employed to answer the question of why more extreme governmental actions of and civilian reactions against institutionalized racism occurred in Sri Lanka as opposed to that in Malaysia is that better economic conditions in Malaysia as opposed to Sri Lanka has lead to a higher tolerance amongst the Malaysian Chinese against the institutionalized racism than amongst the Sri Lankan Tamils. Referring to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)’s World Factbook, Malaysia is approximately five times larger than Sri Lanka in terms of total land area, and yet, referring to the United Nations World Prospects report, population density within Sri Lanka is approximate three and a half times larger than that of Malaysia. Additionally, according to the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, Sri Lanka’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has, since 1960 onwards, consistently been lower than that of Malaysia. Both Malaysia’s GDP per capita and Human Development Index (HDI), as of the year 2010, are also significantly higher than that of Sri Lanka. This in itself does not translate to inevitable institutionalized racism; however, when paired with a poorer economic growth, i.e. lower GDP per capita, it stands to reason that the people of Sri Lanka would be less inclined to look favourably upon “outsiders” who threaten their possession of their scarce resources. In the case of Malaysia,

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7 东方日报 (Oriental Daily News/ODN, Malaysian daily), 8th July 2009.
Mauzy (1993) noted that rapid economic growth could be the most important variable in explaining the absence of ethnic violence (as occurred in Lebanon and Sri Lanka) in response to preferential policies that led to growing ethnic polarization. Every non-Malay she interviewed between October and December 1990 “cited the continued possibilities of making money as the chief reason why there has been no ethnic violence in Malaysia, despite more polarisation, less accommodation and more repression” (Mauzy, 1993: 127).

War has often been closely linked with economic problems. Many analysts share Urdang’s (2002:191) belief that “political turmoil can trigger economic chaos, and economic crisis can produce political turmoil.” That economic situations play an important role in interethnic conflict seems obvious. Collins (1975: 389-390) believed that the more severe a (political/economic) crisis, the greater the tendency for groups to coalesce along the lines of collective interests and the society to polarize into two-sided conflicts. Van Evera (1994: 9) claimed that the publics become receptive to scapegoat myths (which are more widely believed) when economic conditions deteriorate. If one links this to the situation in Sri Lanka, the following picture may be derived – Sri Lanka, a relatively smaller country than Malaysia, with a relatively higher population density, is driven by the need to reduce the competition for resource allocation. Recognizing this problem, the Sri Lankan government attempts to win political favour from the Sinhalese majority by moving the resource allocation away from the Sri Lankan Tamil minority. In this light, the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act could be seen as a shrewd move to “reserve” Sri Lanka for the Sinhalese. In less ideological terms, the government may have been attempting to curry political favour from the Sinhalese majority by “removing” their competition for possession of said scarce resources. However, the scheme backfired in that these economically irrational actions stunts economic growth within Sri Lanka. For the Sri Lankan Tamils, dissatisfaction with poor economic growth combined with anger against institutionalized racism, which led to violence and civil war. In other words, by pushing them into statelessness, the government created a situation in which the Indian Tamils had nothing to lose and everything to gain from inciting rebellion.

Meanwhile, a different pattern occurred within Malaysia. The Malaysian government also recognized that the way to winning political favour involved manipulation of resource allocation to favour the Malay majority, and so, the Malay Special Privileges were enacted, albeit at the expense of the Malaysian Chinese minority. However, Malaysia, as a developing country with one of the best economic records within Asia, does not feel the same level of threat as does Sri Lanka regarding the competition for allocation of scarce resources, and so, the Malaysian government chooses to mostly interfere with the resources of employment and education, rather than of citizenship as does Sri Lanka. The competition for the relatively richer resources in Malaysia was thus less strife-filled than that of Sri Lanka. The Malaysian government thus enacted milder policies which constrained and hampered, rather than removed completely, the competition for resources, using the 1970 New Economic policy.

Furthermore, a higher economic growth also translates into a higher living standard for all members of the Malaysian population, including the marginalized Malaysian Chinese. In effect, this raises the costs of launching an all-out war against institutionalized racism, for unlike the Sri Lankan Tamils, who have been pushed to the brink of statelessness, the Malaysian Chinese would have more to lose in the advent of violence. And so, the Malaysian Chinese exhibit a higher tolerance for the institutionalized racism than do the Sri Lankan Tamils. Although the Malaysian Chinese are discriminated against and they feel dissatisfaction at the inequality of political power and resource allocation, they are, on the whole, still a relatively wealthy group within Malaysia. Thus, their methods
of protesting against the institutionalized racism – via political actions including demonstrations – will not lead to significant losses of economic wealth on their part.

This argument is interesting, but has its weaknesses. Firstly, if poor economic growth had lead to violence in Sri Lanka, then races other than the Sri Lankan Tamils should be fighting against the government, for though institutionalized racism is directed primarily at the Sri Lankan Tamils, the country as a whole suffers. Also, as noted by Blainey (1973:88), “the theories which point to economic needs as the mainspring of wars assume that inadequate finance did not usually deter nations from initiating a war.” It would be economically irrational and terribly ironic if poor economic growth had encouraged the Sri Lankan government and the rebels to fight a costly war which would stunt their economic growth even further. In fact, it would be more feasible for Malaysia to incite a war – according to Goldstein (1988: 260-262), major wars generally occur when a country has sufficient resources to fund them, and that generally is only possible after “a sustained period of stable economic growth” (Cashman, 1993: 135).

In China, as poverty and inequality constitute one of the most, if not the most, critical challenges the country presently faces in her next phase of politico-socioeconomic development, and as has been noted earlier, poverty in China has the properties of being concentrated in the western region and in the ethnic minority areas, ethnoregionalization of poverty inevitably ensues, presenting China not only with economic challenges but also long-term sociopolitical security risks. Public protests in the ethnic “autonomous regions” lately have been growing alarmingly. For instance, over a thousand ethnic Mongolian herdsmen demonstrated in mid-July 2011 against alleged government-business collusion in an ethnic Han Chinese businessman’s low-price purchase of over ten thousand mu8 of grazing land, according to the New York-based Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center.9 The subsequent development of the purchased land had allegedly brought in hundreds of ethnic Han workers with trucks and bulldozers whose brutal intrusion into the ethnic Mongolian village concerned had resulted in the death and injury of over a hundred livestock and the injury of over 20 herdsmen who were trying to defend their rights. Another 20 more herdsmen were injured in the thousand-strong demonstrators’ clash with the police in mid-July.10 This, in fact, is not the first such incident in 2011. Earlier, on 25th May, over two thousand ethnic Mongolian students and herdsmen demonstrated in front of the government building in Xilinhot (Siliyinqota) following the death of a herdsman after being hit by coal truck on 10th May while protecting his grazing land against destruction by ethnic Han’s economic development drive that has caused increasingly acute resentment among ethnic Mongolians who see themselves as the oppressed people of Inner Mongolia, devoid of political power and falling prey to the insatiable rapacity of the Han Chinese migrants – an extension of the dominant central Han political power of the country – who are destroying their traditional economy, culture and environment. Also, in May, demonstrations erupted in the regional capital Hohhot (Kökeqota) ending with the arrest of 50 students and other citizens, and according the Southern Mongolian Information Center, by early June at least 90 students, herdsmen and other citizens had been arrested in Inner Mongolia’s demonstrations, with many students seriously injured in their clash with the police. The herdsman’s death was not an isolated case in Inner Mongolia. There was another case occurring also around that time.

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8 1 mu 畝 = 0.0667 hectares.
9 ODN, 26th July 2011.
10 Ibid.
that involved the death of an ethnic minority young man being hit by an excavator in a fight with the miners over issues related to environmental pollution due to mining activities.\textsuperscript{11}

The Inner Mongolia troubles came at a time when tensions were high due to the approaching anniversary of the June Fourth 1989 Beijing massacre, and when this multiethnic nation\textsuperscript{12} is still reeling from the shock of the 14th March 2008 Lhasa riots and the 5th July 2009 Xinjiang ethnic conflict. There are indeed many similarities between the new incident in Inner Mongolia and the 2009 ethnic violence in Xinjiang, as shown in Table 2.\textsuperscript{13}

<table>
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<th>Table 2</th>
<th>“Mass Incidents” in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang: Comparison and Contrast</th>
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<td>Trigger</td>
<td>Inner Mongolia, 11th May 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rights-defending herdsman killed by coal truck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Herdsmen’s livelihood in great difficulty and poverty blamed on mining activity on their grassland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way of protest</td>
<td>Peaceful demonstrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slogan of protest</td>
<td>“Remembrance of the killed! Stop mining!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Mongolian students and herdsmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State response</td>
<td>Suppression with army and riot police; making arrests before situation worsened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Xinjiang, 5th July 2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uighur workers killed by Han Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor development in Uighur areas leading to acute poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violent Uighur backlash killing Han Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Blood for blood! Han Chinese get the hell out of Xinjiang!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uighur youths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppression with army and riot police; making arrests after conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the Inner Mongolia trouble is more recent in origin and less volatile as compared to the long-running troubles in Tibet and Xinjiang, Beijing’s central government has not been any softer in its suppression of the slightest sign of organized dissent that it perceives as equivalent or a prelude to separatism. The most high-profile case of such suppression is the 15-year jail sentence meted out to ethnic Mongolian dissident scholar Hada who founded the Southern Mongolian Democratic League in 1992 pursuing high autonomy for “Southern Mongolia” (i.e. China’s Inner Mongolia) and possible referendum for the unification of Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia (i.e. the Republic of Mongolia). He was sentenced in 1996 for subversion, separatism and espionage, and had since disappeared after his release in December 2010.

What the Beijing central government might find perplexing is the fact that since 2002 Inner Mongolia has been China’s number one province/zizhiqu (“autonomous

\textsuperscript{11} ODN, 31st May 2011.
\textsuperscript{12} Due to the abnormal size of China’s population and in particular the size of China’s citizens of the Han ethnicity, a distortion or misrepresentation emerges in the application of the term “multiethnic” to China as the country’s large populations of minorities – about 110 million in total, including the 16 million Zhuang, 10 million Manchu, 9 million Hui, 8 million Uyrgurs, 5 million Mongols and 5 million Tibetans – are practically dwarfed almost to invisibility by the sheer size of the Han population (about 92 per cent of the total population of China). In fact, based on the "critical mass" theory (advanced, among others, by Semyonov and Tyree [1981]), societies are considered multiethnic only if minorities constitute more than ten per cent of their population.
\textsuperscript{13} ODN, 29th May 2011.
region”) in terms of GDP growth rate, with a GDP of 972.5 billion yuan in 2009, mainly from mining, which also gave the prefecture-level city of Ordos a high GDP per capita of US$15,000. While the rich deposits of Inner Mongolia’s minerals such as coal, rare earth, Glauber’s salt, trona, etc. have indeed brought wealth to the region, excessive mining has been accused by the locals as the main reason for the deterioration of grassland (receding grassland) for which the official media has also blamed on the herdsman’s over-grazing their livestock. Of Inner Mongolia’s over 63.59 million hectares of useable grassland, as large as 38.67 hectares, i.e. 60 per cent, has deteriorated. Horrific pollution and scarred landscape of the Inner Mongolian grassland environment have been caused by excessive mining due to recent years’ rapidly rising coal price which have attracted a huge influx of Han Chinese into this largest coal mining region of China, which is viewed by civil rights groups as tantamount to genocide of the Mongolian herdsman whose life is so closely intertwined with the grassland for hundreds of years till today. The peaceful and harmonious society and interethnic relationship, vis-à-vis Tibet and Xinjiang, in this top-growth “autonomous region”, have been proven to be a façade hiding the simmering, suppressed anger of the ethnic Mongolians against the State-capital collusion in exploiting and destroying their landscape and life for the benefit of Han Chinese migrants and the Han Chinese-dominated central Party-State. Furthermore, the atrocities committed by the Maoist State during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, when hundreds of thousands of people were accused, through torture, to be members of the spurious seditious “People’s Revolutionary Party of Inner Mongolia”16, resulting in the death of tens of thousands of persecuted ethnic Mongolians, have also been a ghost haunting Beijing’s rule over Inner Mongolia to date, similar to the other volatile ethnic regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, that the cosmetic rehabilitations after the passing of the Maoist era and overall GDP growth have not been able to exorcize.

It is also crucial to take into consideration that for China as a whole, poverty is still very much related to ecological factors. For instance, the concentration of the poor in the western region which includes, among others, Inner Mongolia and the other ethnic “autonomous regions” like Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia and Guangxi, is related to the fact that, besides desertification, the poverty-stricken mountainous areas are concentrated in this particular region. The country’s 64.8 per cent of poverty-stricken mountainous areas (shangqu 山区) and 56.2 per cent of the hilly (qiuling 丘陵) areas are found in 10 provinces/zizhiqiu/zhixiashi (municipalities under the central government) of the western region, occupying 72.9 per cent of the total area of the region, with mountainous areas alone taking up 53.1 per cent. The most mountainous provinces are the three southwest provinces of Sichuan (including Chongqing), Yunnan and Guizhou, with mountainous areas taking up 72 per cent, 80.3 per cent and 80.8 per cent of the respective total areas of the said provinces. If inclusive of the hilly areas, the figure rises to 95 per cent for Yunnan and Guizhou, and 97.5 per cent for Sichuan.17 (Chen, 2006: 176; original source: Zhongguo

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14 ODN, 29th May 2011.
15 Ibid.
16 Or the “Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party” (“Dotoγadu Mongyol-un Arad-un Qubisγal-un Nam” in Mongolian) which was founded in 1925, allied to the CCP. The party was dissolved in 1946.
17 Such harsh landscape has been the object of lamentation since ancient days, as the Tang 唐 dynasty poet Li Bai 李白 grieved in his immortal poem Shu Dao Nan 蜀道难 [Hard Roads in Sichuan]: “Yiyu! Xi! / Wei hu gao zai! / Shu dao zhi nan nan yu shang qingtian … Huanghe zhi fei shang bude guo / Yuanrou yu du chou panyuan … Qi xian ye ruo chi / Jie er yuandao zhi ren hu wei…
Shanqu Fazhan Baogao 2003, pp. 246-247) Out of the 592 poverty counties, 366 are in the western region, and out of these 366 counties, 258 are in remote mountain counties, occupying about 70 per cent of the western mountain counties. Most of these poverty counties are distributed over 6 major areas of fragile ecology, viz. Inner Mongolian plateau’s southeastern border area that suffers from desertification, Huangtu 黄土 plateau’s gully area that suffers from severe soil erosion, the environmentally deteriorating mountainous areas of the Qin Ba 秦巴 region, the ecologically endangered hilly areas of the karst plateau, the sealed-off mountain and valley areas of the Hengduan 横断 range and the severely cold mountain areas of the western deserts. Being ecologically fragile and sensitive, all these are areas extremely short of resources, with extremely bad environment for human habitation. (ibid.: 177) Thus, coupled with structural economic disadvantages, the western region populated by many of China’s ethnic minorities is trapped in the vicious cycles of developmental nightmare as depicted by Wu (2006) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1  Vicious Cycles of China’s Ethnic Minority Areas

Natural environment

- harsh natural conditions
- diminishing green
- soil erosion
- desertification
- declining land quality
- rapid increase in clearing and deforestation
- poverty and backwardness
- drought
- frequent natural calamities
- declining production

Economic environment

- little investment for development
- transport backwardness
- ineffective communication and information
- backward-ness in merchandise economy
- economically weak
- little cumulative capital for initiation
- low productivity
- low average income
- lack of self capability
- inadequate attraction for investment


hu lai zai? …” [Oh / but it is high and very dangerous! / Such traveling on the roads of Sichuan is harder than scaling the blue sky … Such height would be hard going even for a yellow crane / So pity the poor monkeys who have only paws to use … With all this danger upon danger / Why are you people from far away still coming here? …]
3. Truncated Nation and “Double Minority”

A second argument which may be applied is that it was influenced by the proximity of India, the Sri Lankan Tamils’ homeland, to Sri Lanka, as compared to the larger distance between China, the Malaysian Chinese’s ancestral homeland, and Malaysia. In the case of China’s own volatile regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, the recent increasingly violent backlash from the Uyghurs against Han immigrants in Xinjiang and against the Han-dominated central Chinese State as compared to the Tibetans who in an ironic contrast have resorted instead to continuous self-immolation since 2009 as protest against the Han-dominated central-State colonizers is undoubtedly in a large part linked to the Muslim Turkic Uyghurs’ ethnonationalist and ethnoreligious brethrens and other coreligionists immediately across Xinjiang’s borders which armed assistance could be readily available from the region-wide Islamic militancy in Central Asia and Middle East to support the boiling independence movement of this region China’s imperial rulers named as their “New Dominion” (Hsinchiang 新疆) but to today’s Uyghur secessionists their rightful, sovereign “East Turkestan” homeland. However, this is not to say that the Uyghurs’ claim is uncontestable. Today, studies on intergroup relations usually see ethnicity not as a “‘given’ of social existence”, but a political construct linked directly to power relations and resource competition. The boundary marker of ethnicity is frequently mobilized to meet the rising need of identity investment for economic and political purposes (the “situation theories” of ethnicity, see Barth, 1969). Heiberg (1979) observed that for political purposes, descent has never been regarded by the Basques in Spain as a sufficient criterion for ethnic inclusion. “Basqueness” is measured instead in terms of the adherence to certain morally-loaded political and social prescriptions, or more specifically, whether one is a Basque nationalist.18 Thus it is as an instrument for political mobilization that ethnicity often plays a key role in the interplay between group activities and public policy19 which again is

18 Or in a different setting, take the case of Malaysia. According to Cheah (1984), the Malay ethnic identity (bangsa Melayu) was a creation after 1939 in response to the perceived threat from the increasingly politicized immigrants from China and India. The notion of a Malay race had therefore hitherto been absent, as Cheah elaborated: “[...] the Malays rose to confront what they considered threats posed by the immigrant races to their rights, but the Malays themselves had not been united as a race or a ‘bangsa’, and moreover they had not found a way to solve differences among themselves [...] Such differences] were nurtured by the strong provincial feeling among the ‘provincial Malays’ (such as the Kelantan Malays, Perak Malays and so on), DKA Malays (those of Arab descent) and DKK Malays (those of Indian descent) [... There were also] tribal divisions, such as the Bugis, Minangkabau, Javanese, etc.” (translated from Cheah, 1984: 83) The first open suggestion of a “Malay people” (orang Melayu) came only in 1939 when Ibrahim Yaacob (or I.K. Agastja by his Indonesian name) championed the notion of a unified Malay race across Malaya and Indonesia which he christened Melayu Raya (Great Malay) or Indonesia Raya. The boundary marker of ethnicity was thus mobilized to meet the rising need of identity investment for politico-economic purposes. An even more blatantly political ethnicization came after the 1969 riots in the creation of the “Bumiputera” race (kaum Bumiputera). Bumiputera (a term of Sanskrit origin meaning literally “prince of the land; son of the soil”) became an official collective term grouping together the Malays, the aboriginals and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak (both on the Borneo island) after these two regions joined the Peninsula in 1963 to form Malaysia. It excludes “immigrant races” like Chinese, Indians and Europeans, but not Arabs and Malays from Indonesia.

19 See Yeoh (2008: 81). While emphasizing the importance of the ethnic factor in understanding the role of the State does not diminish the significance of contention between social classes, it serves to avoid the pitfall of reductionist Marxism, in which, as Wolpe (1988: 15) remarked, ethnicity
apparent in the case of the Uyghurs’ ethnic identity in Xinjiang, as lucidly described by Dru Gladney:

Chinese histories notwithstanding, every Uyghur firmly believes that their ancestors were the indigenous people of the Tarim basin, which did not become known in Chinese as “Xinjiang” (“new dominion”) until the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the identity of the present people known as Uyghur is a rather recent phenomenon related to Great Game rivalries, Sino-Soviet geopolitical manoeuvrings, and Chinese nation-building. While a collection of nomadic steppe peoples known as the “Uyghur” have existed since before the eighth century, this identity was lost from the fifteenth to the twentieth century […] The Islamicization of the Uyghur from the tenth to as late as the seventeenth century, while displacing their Buddhist religion, did little to bridge their oases-based loyalties. From that time on, the people of “Uyghuristan” centred in Turpan, who resisted Islamic conversion until the seventeenth century, were the last to be known as Uyghur. The others were known only by their oasis or by the generic term of “Turki”. With the arrival of Islam, the ethnonym “Uyghur” fades from the historical record.

(Gladney, 2003: 3-4)

The emergence of a modern “Uyghur” ethnic identity is thus basically a political construct:

Competition for the loyalties of the peoples of the oases in the Great Game played between China, Russia and Britain further contributed to divisions among the Uyghur according to political, religious, and military lines. The peoples of the oases, until the challenge of nation-state incorporation, lacked any coherent sense of identity. Thus, the incorporation of Xinjiang for the first time into a nation-state required unprecedented delineation of the so-called nations involved. The re-emergence of the label “Uyghur”, though arguably inappropriate as it was last used 500 years previously to describe the largely Buddhist population of the Turfan Basin, stuck as the appellation for the settled Turkish-speaking Muslim oasis dwellers. It has never been disputed by the people themselves or the states involved. There is too much at stake for the people labelled as such to wish to challenge that identification. For Uyghur nationalists today, the direct lineal descent from the Uyghur Kingdom in seventh century Mongolia is accepted as fact, despite overwhelming historical and archeological evidence to the contrary.

(ibid.: 4-5)

A factor that stands out here in the discussion above is the existence of borders that bisect nationalities, which are usually more troublesome than those that follow national demographic divides because the borders that bisect nationalities entrap parts of nationalities within the boundaries of states dominated by other ethnic groups (van Evera, 1994: 22). Revanchist tendencies of the adjacent truncated nations – implicit or expressed – or sympathy and support (including logistic or even arms support) from co-ethnics who are the group in power across the border often serve to fuel ethnic intensity of the minorities this side of the border or potential separatist regional sentiment of the entrapped nationalities, as in the case of Sri Lanka, Cyprus and Northern Ireland, in marked contrast to the absence of such borders for Malaysia and Fiji. As noted by Schaller (2006: 615), Sinhalese people are indigenous to Sri Lanka, but the Tamils race has spread all over the globe. And so, “reference must [...] be made to the ‘double minority’ factor – both Sinhalese and Tamil perceive themselves to be minority populations under threat, the

“becomes merely an external instrument for the reproduction of class interests which are assumed to be entirely defined by the economic relation of production”.
former in relation to the Tamil population in South India, and the latter in relation to the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka” (Lewer, 2002). Within Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese feel the pressure to assert their dominance, as they acutely feel their vulnerability in the face of the geographical power behind the Sri Lankan Tamils, who are presumed to have the weapons and mental support of their ethnic brethren just across the Park Strait within India’s Tamil Nadu. So, in an attempt to correct this imbalance of power, the Sinhalese-dominated government is far more extreme in their efforts in subjugating the Tamil masses via law and institutionalized racism. The proximity aided in the passing of the 1948 Ceylon Citizenship Act, as many of the stateless Sri Lankan Tamils were deported back to India. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Tamils are caught between two conflicting powers, for they are paradoxically both emboldened by their proximity to their Tamil Nadu allies and threatened by their status as a marginalized population minority within Sri Lanka. These two factors serve to incite the extreme violence of reaction from the Sri Lankan Tamils. As Schaller (2006: 617) concludes, “each group may perceive the other to be especially malevolent and untrustworthy, may feel especially justified in the use of violence against the other, and may be especially wary of negotiated attempts at conflict resolution.”

From this perspective of the numerical structure of ethnicity, for a fundamentally bi-ethnic region like Xinjiang, just like the case of a bi-ethnic state of Sri Lanka or Malaysia, it is apparent that the relationship between State policy and ethnic conflict and antagonism is influenced by the subordinate group’s aspirations, the dominant group’s orientations and their dynamic interaction. Figure 2 constructs a power-size configuration of ethnic groups similar to Moscovici’s diagram of group power-influence configuration (Moscovici, 1985: 26). Based on this paradigm, a typology of multiethnic societies can be constructed, as illustrated in Figure 3. Excluding case 4 which is by definition not applicable, Figure 3 shows a threefold typology of multiethnic societies. Case 2 represents a Jd-Ns type of society which combines a subordinate demographic minority with a dominant demographic majority – a typical example is China as a whole with her demographically (92 per cent) and politically dominant Han Chinese majority. Case 3 is an Nd-Js society in which the numerical majority is dominated by a demographic minority – as the local Uyghurs and other real and exotic minorities in Xinjiang possibly perceive themselves in relation to the minority Han Chinese settlers (around 40 per cent) backed by the Han Chinese-dominated central State, hence as an extension of the Han Chinese-dominated central State power. The subordinate-superordinate intergroup relationship in a society with no obvious demographic majority (an Nd-Ns society) is represented by case 1 – the mainly bi-ethnic relations in Xinjiang between the Uyghurs (about 45 per cent) and Han Chinese (about 40 per cent) or if we take the estimates of the Tibetan government-in-exile, the relations between the Tibetans (about 44 per cent) and Han Chinese settlers (together with the minority Hui settlers totaling about 56 per cent). If the non-Han nationalities see the Han influx into Xinjiang as in a way an extension of the Han dominance of the central State, to them the Xinjiang society then belongs to the Nd-Ns category, while the continued influx of the Han following increasing economic prosperity of the region is seen as moving the society towards a Jd-Ns configuration, or probably it could have already to a certain extent reached that stage, if some unofficial data on population composition are accurate. Indeed, if we look at cities – the centres of prosperity – while the populations of Kashgar/Qeshqer (Kashi 喀什) and Hotan/Xoten (Hetian 和田) are still in the main Uyghur, that of the capital city Ürümqi/Ürümchi (Wulumuqi 乌鲁木齐) is already almost

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20 “Bi-ethnic” in terms of major power structure and socioeconomic relations, though the region’s population consists of more than two ethnic groups.
80 per cent Han.\textsuperscript{21} Official data, in fact, show that Ürümqi’s population is currently 12.62 per cent Uyghur and 74.70 per cent Han.\textsuperscript{22} Similar situation is also apparent in Tibet and Lhasa.

**Figure 2  Power-Size Configuration of Ethnic Groups**

![Power-Size Configuration of Ethnic Groups](image)

Notes: $Jd$ = dominant demographic majority (Schermerhorn’s “majority group”)
$Js$ = subordinate demographic majority (“mass subjects”)
$Nd$ = dominant demographic minority (“élite”)
$Ns$ = subordinate demographic minority (“minority group”)

**Figure 3  Typology of Multiethnic Societies**

![Typology of Multiethnic Societies](image)

Note: Typology based on the paradigm presented in Figure 12.


\textsuperscript{22} See \textit{Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2007}, pp. 82-87, Figure 4-7, which gave the year 2006 figures of 254,722 Uyghurs and 1,507,720 Han out of a total population of 2,018,443 people of the city of Ürümqi.
Schermerhorn’s concept of a minority mentioned above, which he redefined as a variety of ethnic group, is part of the fourfold typology he developed to take account of the numerical and the power dimensions (Schermerhorn, 1970: 13):

**Figure 4  Schermerhorn’s Fourfold Typology of Dominant-Subordinate Relations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Groups</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majority Group</th>
<th>Élite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subordinate Groups</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group D</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass subjects</th>
<th>Minority Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The fourfold typology illustrated in Figure 4 includes not only “majority group” and “minority group”, which are dominant and subordinate respectively in terms of both size and power, but also “élite” and “mass subjects” where numerical superiority and power do not coincide. Societies that combine the subordinate numerical minorities (“minority groups”) with dominant demographic majorities (“majority groups”) (D+A, such as China as a whole), are contraposed as the structural opposites of those in which the numerical majority of "mass subjects" are dominated by a demographic minority, the "élite" (C+B, such as Xinjiang and Tibet, if one sees the minority Han settlers as an extension of the Han Chinese-dominated central State power). While it is undeniable that the typology provides a comprehensive picture of the dominant-subordinate relationship, the C+B case, other than cases of internal colonialization of a country’s ethnic regions, is rare in today’s world after the demise of Western colonialism in the Third World and the end of White rule in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South Africa. Nevertheless, the fact that such configuration is rare other than internal colonization does not imply its total disappearance – two obvious examples are Rwanda and Burundi where the Hutu majorities are still politically dominated by the Tutsi minorities. Cases 2 and 3 in Figure 3 thus correspond to Schermerhorn’s AD and BC configurations respectively. However, since societies containing disadvantaged demographic minorities do not necessarily have the complementary majorities that Schermerhorn postulated (e.g. Niger, Nigeria, Liberia, Benin, see Smith, 1986), the inclusion of case 1 is necessary, examples of which as we have seen above are China’s Xinjiang and possibly Tibet.

Meanwhile, Malays are the undisputed population majority in Malaysia, both within the country itself as well as within the broader geographical region. Malaysia is close to Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country in the world and whose people have a shared history as having been the same country, “Tanah Melayu”, with Malaysia before the advent of colonialism. Malaysian Chinese relations with China has not been as close as that of the Sri Lankan Tamils with India, as many factors aside from distance – for example, “[...] the early 1950s [...] reported excesses of the Communist government against landlords and other members of the property holding class in Southern China [had] hardened local
anti-Communist sentiment in Malaya and resulted in [...] any of the Malayan Chinese [beginning] to regard Malaya as their sole country of residence” (Heng, 1988: 100-101) – is one such example. China has similarly been passive and silent in the face of the 1998 Indonesian anti-Chinese riots (Zheng, 2010: 186). And so, in Malaysia, it is clear to the Malays and the Malay-dominated government who has the upper hand in political and geographical power. The only threat the Malaysian Chinese could pose to the Malays is in terms of economic superiority and wealth, and the government has already taken steps to partially nullify said threat with the New Economic Policy, which is by far the most extreme step of institutionalized racism inflicted within Malaysia. Meanwhile, from the perspective of the Malaysian Chinese, all this translates to a need for more concessions and compromise, for without the backing of a powerful neighbouring country, using violent means to fight for their rights would have a higher chance of being a losing battle.

This argument is a tempting one, but can also found to have its imperfections with a closer look at the histories of India-Sri Lanka and Malaysia-China relations. It is true that cultural ties between the Tamils of Tamil Nadu and the Sri Lankan Tamils of Sri Lanka has resulted in the emergence of Tamil Nadu allies calling for Sri Lanka’s Sri Lankan Tamils’ secession, declaration of an independent Tamil Eelam, and military support to the Sri Lankan rebel groups. It is also true that during the late 1980s and early 1990s, India’s foreign intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, had played an important role in training and equipping Tamil militants (Wilson, 2000: 126) and so, it fits previous analysis that India has a part in creating a feeling of vulnerability within the Sri Lankan government, while providing encouragement for further incitement of violence among the Sri Lankan Tamils. However, one should note that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which eventually became the main militant rebel group within Sri Lanka, had significantly a hostile relationship with India, especially after the LTTE’s assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the sixth Prime Minister of India. During the peace talks, India, more often than not, showed support for the Sri Lankan government rather than for the rebels. After the breakdown of the peace talks in 2006, “the Sri Lankan government [...] successfully pursued an ambitious military campaign to eliminate the LTTE, aided by the military and financial support of India.” This was largely unpublicized because of Indian sensitivities about the politics of Tamil Nadu [...]” (Keethaponcalan, 2011: 52, italics added). One can see from this that India had not played as supportive a role of the Tamil Indians as commonly believed.

Meanwhile, though Malaysia does not enjoy an easy across-border access to China as does Sri Lanka, China has managed to exert its influence in Malaysia previously. One strong example is its backing of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) during the Malayan Emergency. In fact, it is very clear that the only instances in which Malaysian Chinese have managed to exert clear political dominance over Malaysia is when they possess the backing of China; when China finally decided to “cut off financial and moral support for communist parties in Southeast Asia[...] that decision put the Malayan Communist Party and other Communist parties in Southeast Asia on the defensive, and they finally gave up their struggle” (Khoon, 2005: 255). This truly indicates how crucial the support of a powerful “big neighbour” is. Unfortunately, as noted before, China has preferred to follow a policy of non-interference regarding such racial issues that plague countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. As Soon (1973: 18) said, “it is clear [...] that China can be selective in its support of [...] allies.” So, one may conclude that it is less the problem of distance, and more the problem of lack of interest which fueled China’s passiveness in the face of anti-Chinese marginalization in Southeast Asia.
4. Historical Geography of Ethnicity

The discussion so far has repeatedly brought up the issue of homeland-immigrant dichotomy. The critical difference between two distinct types of ethnicity – *homeland* and *immigrant* ethnic groups – indeed requires recognition. Their definition is subjective, being related to the real or mythical attachment of an ethnic group to the land on which it resides (Smith, 1981; Murphy, 1989). Ethnic identity is generally more intense and more ascriptive in homeland communities than in immigrant societies. It is also more explicitly expressed in patterns of political organization and spatial segregation in states composed of the former (Esman, 1985). Homeland communities are sometimes described as “plural” (or “deeply divided”) to differentiate them from immigrant societies which are often described as "pluralistic" (Garcia, 1980). The homeland-immigrant distinction is in fact crucial as a determinant in the analysis of ethnic coexistence and conflict, public policy and ethnic response, in a multiethnic (including "bi-ethnic") society. Consider here a trichotomous taxonomy of multiethnic states based on their ethnic historical geography: “homeland-multiethnic states”, “immigrant-multiethnic states” and “mixed-multiethnic states”. The first category refers to those composed of two or more homeland ethnic groups of significant proportions. Sri Lanka, with her Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority who claim descent from residents of the former Jaffna Kingdom in the north of the island (where the Tamils now constitute a majority in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province) and the Vanni chiefdoms from the east, can be considered as belonging to this category, which also includes, among others, Spain, Belgium, Britain, Italy, Nigeria, India, Russia and the former Yugoslavia. The second category refers to immigrant states that consist of more than one major immigrant ethnic group but are devoid of significant homeland ones, e.g. the United States, Canada, Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago. The essential features of an immigrant-multiethnic society are that its settlers (and therefore their descendants) are diverse in ethnicity, and that all settlers feel an equally legitimate claim upon it, regardless of their ethno-national background. In the homeland/immigrant categorization, Malaysia belongs to the third category, which includes countries whose population comprises homeland and immigrant ethnic groups (in the eyes of the so-called “indigenous” population, the latter includes descendants of the “latecomers” to the land), both of significant proportions.

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23 This classification follows Yiftachel (1992).
24 The issue of "numerical significance", nevertheless, is not the sole criterion involved here.
25 The long history of Sri Lanka Tamils is also linguistically reflected in the archaism noted in their dialects and retention of vocabulary no longer in everyday use in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
26 To categorize these countries as homeland-multiethnic states is not to deny the possible existence of substantial immigrant communities in these countries (including the later Tamil immigrants to Sri Lanka). Or in another context, the so-called “new minorities” are, however, not seen as such important players in the political arena as the homeland communities, e.g. the Castilians, Catalans and Basques of Spain, who are directly responsible for the identity and survival of these countries as national entities.
27 Although pure immigrant states like Mauritius and Trinidad and Tobago best fit this category, small segments of its population being homeland ethnic groups does not disqualify a state from this immigrant country status. The United States of America, for instance, is considered an immigrant state despite the existence of the homeland communities of the Native Americans (Amerindians). As in the definition of homeland multiethnic states, it is the politically important ethnic groups that matter, for instance the blacks and whites in the US, the Anglophones and Francophones in Canada.
Hence by contrast, whereas societies such as Sri Lanka can be described as homeland-multiethnic (with her Sinhalese majority who consider themselves “indigenous” vs. the minority Tamils most of whom also considered themselves “indigenous” on the peninsula), Malaysia represents a homeland-immigrant case of ethnic relations. In a multiethnic democracy, where all component groups are homeland communities, as in Sri Lanka, their ethnic identity is equally intense and ascriptive.\(^{28}\) It is, however, not so in a country like Malaysia where one community perceives itself as homeland and the other community is unambiguously descendants of the late-coming immigrants. When large-scale Chinese immigration began in the late nineteenth century into British Malaya, the Malay people had already long established themselves as an indigenous population with an organized socio-political system, after displacing the earlier inhabitants (orang asli) since time immemorial. The basic problem with this third type of society (homeland-immigrant) stems from the primal title to a homeland claimed by the indigenous ethno-national group. As Conner (1986: 20) explained:

Though it may never be exercised, the power of eviction that is inherent in such a title to the territory may be translated into action at any time. Members of a diaspora can therefore never be at home in a homeland. They are at best sojourners, remaining at the sufferance of the indigenous people.

The groups are unequal and bargaining is often one-sided in a democracy that Mauzy (1993: 124) called “coercive consociationalism” (or Smooha’s “ethnic democracy”) – consociationalism on the terms of one side. In such a democracy that is composed of both homeland and immigrant communities, the situation is more complex than the pure homeland-and immigrant-multiethnic/biethnic categories. To understand this one needs to distinguish between two types of homeland movements.\(^{29}\) The first category refers to peoples who already possess their own territorial state, but feel threatened by the “invasion” of aliens, who may reduce them to the status of a demographic minority in their own homeland and eventually assume control both of the State and of the economy. The second refers to ethnoregionalism – movements “directed not at immigrants but at the central state, to protect or redeem the homeland, its culture, and its economy from neglect, encroachments, or domination by an alien central government and the ethnic groups it represents” (Esman, 1985: 439). The first type is particularly of interest here in the context of Malaysia. In this case, the political mobilization of the homeland peoples has been triggered and sustained by the fear of being overwhelmed and dispossessed by the (economically) aggressive immigrants. The reactive homeland movements by the native peoples thus aim to retain control of the State, economy and of their ancestral homeland. Their strategy is to “terminate and if possible to reverse the flow of immigration, to entrench the political, economic, and cultural position of native sons by preferential rules and by limiting the rights and opportunities of immigrants” (ibid.: 438). This deviation from the ethnic-neutral position of the State led Smooha (1990) to proclaim the limitation of the explanatory powers of the two conventional models of multiethnic democracies, majoritarian and

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\(^{28}\) Equivalent circumstances occur when all communities are immigrant and similar in time of arrival, which is crucial since a community that arrived (e.g. the Malays in Malaysia) earlier may consider itself more "homeland" than late-comers (the Chinese and Indians).

\(^{29}\) See Esman (1985).
consociational, and propose a third regime type: the “ethnic democracy”. In an ethnic democracy, while individual civil rights are enjoyed universally and certain collective rights are extended to ethnic minorities, the State is institutionally dominated by the majority. The imbalance in ethnic intensity between homeland and immigrant communities enables the former to exercise, or attempt to exercise, politico-economic hegemony within the framework of democracy by seizing the control of the State and implementing government-mandated preferential policies, yet without causing a violent rebellion from the immigrant population or descendants of the “latecomers” (e.g. Malaysia, Fiji, the Indian state of Assam, at different critical structural periods). If the two communities are homeland-based with equal ethnic intensity, such an attempt by one may result in a breakdown of the democratic machinery, violent ethnic strife and ethnoregionalism - the second type of homeland movement in the above typology, e.g. Sri Lanka, Cyprus and Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the homeland-immigrant categorization has increasingly been attracting criticism. Not least is the stigma that the so-called “indigenous” groups insist on forcing upon the descendants of the immigrants by continuing to tag them “immigrants” even when they are generations removed from their forefathers who first migrated to the land. Also being questioned by the descendants of immigrants is the imbalance in rights often claimed by the “homeland” groups who in the eyes of the former are simply distinguished from them by having forefathers who arrived in the land much earlier in historical, or prehistoric, times.

In his study of the revolutions in several African countries, Kuper (1974) found that, despite the existence of class differences, once revolutions started they developed along ethnic rather than class lines. Although class conflict is the source of revolutionary change in many societies, Kuper observed that in plural societies “it is the political relations which appreciably determine the relationship to the means of production, rather than the reverse, and the catalyst of revolutionary change is to be found in the structure of power, rather than in economic changes which exhaust the possibilities of a particular mode of production” (Kuper, 1974: 226). While Cox (1948) attributed the main forms of alignment and conflict, including ethnic ones, to the relation of groups (classes) to the means of production, political relations in plural societies, according to Kuper, influence relations to the means of production more than any influence in the reverse direction. Thus, conflicts developed in plural societies tend to follow the lines of ethnic cleavage more closely than class division. Besides post-colonial developing countries like Sri Lanka and Malaysia, such trend of development is also apparent in the Eastern European countries after the collapse of Communist Party totalitarianism including the strife-torn Balkans as well as the increasingly the volatile ethnic regions of China exemplified by the troubled

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30 Prominent examples of such countries include Malaysia where such policy impact has been an integral part of the politico-economic structure of the country since the 1970s, Fiji where such policy imperative has been in progress since the mid-1980s coup and the post-apartheid South Africa where such policy direction is increasingly inevitable to allay the growing social discontent of newly empowered but economically backward ethnic majority. Among other countries where the politically dominant ethnic majority has in one way or another voted themselves preferences at one stage or another over the economically more successful minorities are Sri Lanka (in which, as we have seen, partly due to her particular historical geography of ethnic, such policy had resulted in a violent rebellion), Nigeria, various states of India, Indonesia, Uganda, Guyana, Trinidad and Sierra Leone (see, e.g., Sowell, 1990).
Xinjiang and Tibet, and the potential impact on the long-simmering peripheral ethnonationalism in Inner Mongolia from the recent rise of increasingly anti-Han-Chinese ethnocentrism of the neo-Nazis in the Republic of Mongolia\(^\text{31}\), that first country in Asia to come under Communist Party dictatorship and also first country in Asia to release herself from that yoke. A relatively high-profile case related to peripheral ethnonationalism in Inner Mongolia, as highlighted by the Amnesty International, is that of Hada who was tried behind closed doors in the Inner Mongolia Zizhiqu in 1996 and sentenced to 15 years in jail for separatism and spying and his support for the Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance that sought greater rights for China’s ethnic Mongolians.

### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, geopolitics (with its link to the historical geography of ethnicity) and economic growth have been argued to be the root causes for the contrast in degree of institutionalized racism and reaction against said racism occurring within Sri Lanka and Malaysia, as well as the intensity of rising peripheral ethnonationalism in China. Both have their weaknesses, however. One observation that should be made is that this problem is not confined solely to the realms of Sri Lanka, Malaysia and China, but is instead a problem which occurs worldwide.

Rex (1986: xiii), in his remark that “what we call ‘race and ethnic relations situations’ is very often not the racial and ethnic factor as such but the injustice of elements in the class and status system”, emphasized the economic, political and social balance of power rather than biological or cultural characteristics of groups. Differences in power and the dynamic change of power resources over time are seen as the key to explaining racial and ethnic conflicts. Such a perspective enables parallels to be drawn, for instance, between the “religious” conflict in Northern Ireland and racial violence in the British urban areas, which at first sight may not seem to share much similarity. As Stone (1985: 38) argued:

> It is true that the sectarian gunman who enters a public house in Belfast and demands to know the religion of the drinkers before deciding who to murder has an identification problem not faced by the white racist intent on attacking blacks in the streets of Brixton or Bradford. However [...] both incidents of violence take place against a background of differential group power, perpetuated over the years in customary patterns of social relations and institutions, and both are to some degree a legacy of colonialism.

Such a focus upon power differentials and the conceptual problem associated with “race” and “ethnicity”\(^\text{32}\) have led to the argument that the notion of “minority” is central to the analysis of


\(^{32}\) There is a tendency in academic circles to distinguish between socially defined and biologically defined races – “ethnie” and “race”. An ethnie or ethnic group is said to exist when three conditions are present – “a segment of a larger society is seen by others to be different in some combination of the following characteristics – language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture; the members also perceive themselves in that way; and they participate in shared activities built around their (real or
race and ethnic relations. Nevertheless, it is useful to compare Rex’s remark with Cox’s thesis (1948) that perceives race relations as mainly proletarian-bourgeois, and hence political-class, relations. For Cox, racial prejudice is a weapon to exploit others rather than a defensive reflection of group solidarity. Racial categories exist in the social life of capitalist societies because they serve the interests of the ruling class; the contradictions in these economies have not yet reached the point at which the actual character of the underlying system is apparent to workers (Banton, 1983: 88). Such reductionist Marxist legacy of perceiving ethnic problem as class problem, coupled with the fact of the absolute demographic dominance of the Han Chinese dwarfing the minorities out of a critical mass, could be clouding the CCP regime from effective understanding of China’s ethnic problem, including that in the volatile ethnic regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. On the contrary, Harold Wolpe, in his critique of reductionist Marxism which conceives classes as unitary entities, posited a different view:

[…] classes exist in forms which are fragmented and fractured in numerous ways, not only by the division of labour and, indeed, the concrete organisation of the entire system of production and distribution through which classes are necessarily formed, but by politics, culture, and ideology within that division of labour, for example, gender, religion, the mental-manual divide and racial differentiation. Classes, that is, are constituted, not as unified social forces, but as patchworks or segments which are differentiated and divided on a variety of bases and by varied processes […] Race may, under determinate conditions, become interiorised in class struggles in both the sphere of the economy as well as the sphere of politics.

(Wolpe, 1988: 51-52)

And so, the paper ends with a quote from Dewey (1957: 21-22), “We may desire abolition of war, industrial justice, greater equality of opportunity for all. But no amount of preaching good will or the golden rule or cultivation of sentiments of love and equity will accomplish the results. There must be change in objective arrangements and institutions. We must work on the environment, not merely on the hearts of men.”

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mythical) common origin and culture [and] a nation [is] an ethnic group that claims the right to, or at least a history of, statehood” (Yinger, 1986: 22). In contrast with “racial groups” which are biological categories based on immutable, physical attributes fixed at birth, “ethnic groups” are defined by a much wider range of cultural, linguistic, religious and national characteristics, with a more flexible form of group differentiation. Therefore, the term “racial” should more appropriately be used to describe group distinction on the basis of phenotypical (i.e. physical) characteristics, while “ethnic” refers to those based solely or partly on cultural characteristics (Yeoh, 2003: 26). The term “ethnic” can also be generalized to be a blanket concept (Harmannus Hoetink’s attribute “socioracial”) to cover both the above distinctions. The term “cultural” here mainly covers the ascriptive attributes “ethnolinguistic” and “ethnoreligious”. The emphasis on language and religion in empirical research is due mainly to the fact that they are the relatively less vague factors in the fourfold categorization of ascriptive loyalty (Hoetink, 1975: 23-4). While “racial” – meaning phenotypical – differences is only skin deep, ethnic boundary as a process (à la Barth, 1969) tends to be tenacious and uncompromising, the manifestation of the age-old fourfold ascriptive loyalty of race, territory, language and religion (Yeoh, 2006: 224). However, racial and ethnic characteristics thus defined often overlap in any one group while extremely deep divisions are often found between groups whose racial as well as ethnic differences are actually imperceptible, e.g. the Burakumin, the so-called “invisible race” of Japan.
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