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The Interactions of Ethnic Minorities in Beijing

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Abstract

Drawing on six years of fieldwork in Beijing, this article looks at the daily interactions of ethnic minorities in local neighbourhoods and places of economic activities. Moreover, it examines ethnic minorities' negotiations with public institutions, the Han majority and other ethnic minority groups. The article suggests that celebratory ethno-festivals and ethnic-oriented restaurants that showcase minority traditions serve as a mechanism to encourage Han interactions with ethnic minority groups. However, the attendant risk in utilizing this practice is that the socio-economic struggles of many ethnic minority groups are being masked when a celebratory version of their culture and traditions are presented. This can potentially lead to reduce meaningful Han-ethnic minority interactions in the future.

Keywords

Beijing, China, commodification, ethnic minorities, interactions, representation.

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Introduction

There are a growing number of studies focusing on China's ethnic minorities and their interactions with the majority Han ethnic group. The available work suggests that the modern Chinese state has a tendency to depict ethnic minorities as exotic, practitioners of "backward" traditions, and prone to poverty and illiteracy. This is contrasted to the Han, who are seen as united, modern, and "superior" (Blum 2001; Cheung 2012; Leibold 2009; Wangdu 2011). How this interaction manifests from the national to the local is a salient subject of study. For instance, Stevan Harrell's *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (1996), Morris Rossabi's *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers* (2005), and Susan McCarthy's *Communist Multiculturalism: Ethnic Revival in Southwest China* (2009) examine minority-majority interactions in the nation's relatively poor bordering regions such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, the Tibet Autonomous Region, and Yunnan; and, Dru Gladney's monographs *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (1996) and *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (2003) analyze minority-majority interactions by looking at the Islamic minority groups, with notable concentration on the Hui population. One of the limitations in formulating a full ethnographic account of the interactions of the minority population with Hans is that the place of query has a tendency to be located in the less-developed bordering areas or alternatively, entangled in an examination of a single minority in a poorer region of the nation. The little that has been written about the ethnic minority population in the relatively developed urban areas such as Beijing suggests that their experiences require exploration.

This article, building upon prior work, draws on six years of fieldwork (from 2008 to 2013) to examine the micro-level interactions of ethnic minorities in the capital city. In doing so, it offers an extended ethnographic look into the daily interactions of ethnic minorities and their negotiation with public institutions, Hans and other ethnic minorities. The fieldwork was conducted in ethnic neighbourhoods (e.g. Niujie), places of economic activities (e.g. ethnic restaurants and supermarkets), and public institutions (e.g. National Ethnic Palace, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, ethnic minority schools) primarily located in Chaoyang, Haidian, Huairou, Dongcheng, Chongwen and Xuanwu Districts[1], where a relatively high proportion of ethnic minorities reside. Among the 801,000 ethnic minority population in Beijing, the largest ethnic groups include (concentration as a percentage in parentheses): Manchu (41.9 percent), Hui

(30.5 percent), Mongolians (9.6 percent), Koreans (4.6 percent), Zhuang (1.3 percent), Tibetans (1.2 percent) and Uighurs (0.5 percent) (National Bureau of Statistics 2012).

The article will proceed by first discussing the history of ethnic minorities in Beijing; the relevant state policies managing this cohort; and the identification project which effective institutionalized the official ethnic minority groups. This will segue into a discussion about the city's ethnic neighbourhoods that play an inevitable role in understanding Han-ethnic minority interactions. Finally, the article will look at the commodification and exoticization of ethnic minorities, and the potential effects on future Han-ethnic minority interactions.

Historical Background

The history of ethnic minorities' settlement in Beijing is intricately linked with the historical patterns of the nation. The city has had numerous ethnic groups interacting with one another as a result of high migration caused, in large part, by a quest for improved economic prosperity and the aftermath of conflicts. For example, the first major segment of ethnic minorities is the well-entrenched, multi-generational group of Huis, Mongolians and Manchus – who currently comprise the largest ethnic minority segments. The Hui people in Beijing are descendants of Muslim traders and officials who began to arrive in China during the middle of the seventh century.[2] In particular, Persian and Arab Hui descendants came via sea routes, finding trade profitable enough to justify a permanent presence. As a result, large Hui communities were forged in coastal areas, first in the south in Yangzhou, Guangdong and Fujian, and then slowly migrating to the north, culminating in a permanent population established in Beijing by the tenth century. They were later joined by Muslim soldiers from Central and Western Asia who were members of Genghis Khan's army, and moved eastward as the Mongol, Kublai Khan established the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) with Beijing as its capital (Lipman 1997; Wang et al. 2002). Through the passage of time many Huis intermarried with local Chinese, which led to a rapid numerical growth of their population and further increased their relative propensity to assimilate into Beijing society (Israeli 1982). This pattern of intermarriage and assimilation repeated time and again throughout Beijing's history with various ethnic minority groups.[3]

Beijing has also prospered in spite of invasions by numerous empires – Mongolians and Manchus being the major ones. With every invasion the outcome was a consistent pattern: a small ethnic population stayed, adapted, and/or assimilated into the city. The example of the

Manchus who ruled during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) best illustrates this case. For political purposes, the early Manchurian emperors often intermarried with Mongols in order for their descendants to be viewed as legitimate heirs of the previous Mongolian-ruled Yuan Dynasty. It was this interaction between Hans and Manchus throughout the Qing Dynasty that tested the resolve of Manchurian ethnic management in Beijing. On the one hand, the Manchu rulers sought to preserve a distinct Manchurian ethnic identity. However, to keep power they had to respect the existence of various ethnic groups, notably the Han who were the majority population (Rawski 2001). One tactic the Manchus utilized was the system of dual appointments in which all major imperial offices in Beijing would have a Manchu and a Han member. In the late 19th century, Manchurian assimilation into Han culture became apparent to the extent that they began adopting Han customs and language. Spoken Manchu declined in the Imperial Court and in the streets of Beijing. This shift towards a hybridization into Han culture played a major role in overthrowing Manchurian control of Beijing in 1912, and shortly thereafter, to the creation of the Republic of China.[4]

Another example of the national situation ultimately affecting the Beijing reality is illustrated several years later during the "Long March" of 1934-1935 where Chinese Communist leaders experienced first-hand the sheer ethnic diversity and cultures of the nation as they moved from the southwest to the northwest of China. The Communists facing near defeat, "harried on one side by the Japanese and the Kuomintang, and on the other by the 'fierce' barbarian tribesmen" (Gladney 1994: 176), made promises of special treatment, recognition and the establishment of autonomous regions to minorities – markedly the Miao, Yi, Tibetans, Mongols and Hui – in exchange for their support (Cheung 2012: 164).[5] It is from this modern legacy that the National and Beijing Minority Rights policies have been influenced.

Ethnic Minority Policies

When the Communist Party of China (CPC) came into power in 1949 they infamously commissioned studies to officially categorize ethnic groups. Although 400-plus separate groups applied to be formally recognized, after detailed study by the CPC they found that there was a lot of overlap, and a significant number of groups that claimed to be separate actually belonged to existing groups albeit with different names. As a result, 39 ethnic groups were officially recognized in 1954. By 1964, another 15 had been identified, with the Lhoba ethnic group

added in 1965.[6] The Jino were included in 1979, bringing the present-day count to 56 official 'nationalities'[7], including Han. All Beijing residents were subsequently registered by nationality status in household registration and personal identification – a practice that still remains in effect.

Prior to the founding of the People's Republic, it was out of political necessity by the Communists to secure the support of ethnic minorities to ensure their survival against the Republican Kuomintang and Japanese forces. However, with China no longer facing these threats, as the "benevolent patron of minorities" the CPC slowly turned its attention to "modernizing" and improving the livelihoods of "brother nationalities" akin to the standard of more developed Hans (Zhao 2004: 197). Though the Cultural Revolution slowed development efforts, significant changes began to appear for minorities in Beijing after 1978 with the adoption of China's modernization scheme.

With the onset of China's market reforms, the CPC instituted systematic and procedural preferential policies (*youhui zhengce*) for ethnic minorities, reaffirmed in various national (e.g. 1999 National Minorities Policy) and local (e.g. Beijing Minority Rights Protection Policy) policies. Special exemptions in the population policy have been afforded to ethnic minorities, whereby couples from any minority group whose national population is below 10 million members are permitted to have more than one child. For the most part, this means the majority of minority couples are allowed to have more than one child.[8] While special exemptions vary by province, autonomous region or municipality, in general, they include: paying lower taxes; lower required scores for entry into university; easier access to public office; greater freedoms (relative to Han) for religious practices; and funding to express their cultural difference through the arts and sports.[9]

Evaluations of China's National Minorities Policy and Beijing's Minority Rights Protection Policy provide mixed reviews. As Zhou and Lin separately argue, an ethnic minority group must learn how to become more like the dominant Han group to overcome their "deficits" with respect to values, beliefs and language (Lin 1997; Zhou 2000). Lin's study concludes that among the Han majority a "great Han chauvinism" (*da hanzu zhuyi*) has long existed and forms the basis of a profound bias against ethnic minority groups. The promotion of a "culturally advanced" Han Chinese community is preferred and is reflected in the outcomes of numerous social policies outlined below.

With respect to language usage, ethno-cultural assimilation is also observed in Beijing. Although minority languages are granted status equal to Mandarin Chinese since the inception of Article 53 of the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1949 – reaffirmed with every version of the Chinese Constitution – historical circumstances and inequities in social and economic development have impacted the use and accessibility of various minority languages in Beijing. As a result, Mandarin Chinese remains the dominant language spoken in local government agencies and media. It is the language used in most forms of business, to the point when observing the Beijing Municipal Commission of Ethnic Affairs, the majority of employees can only speak Mandarin Chinese. This has created a "reward mechanism" in Beijing that has been set up by and for Hans (Stites 1999). Seemingly, the Mandarin language is "the avenue to opportunities and social acceptance, whilst minority languages are limited in use and [are] of low social status" (Lin 1997: 196). This may explain why members of the Islamic-Uighur community in Beijing, during conversations, expressed disappointment that their children could not speak their minority language(s), and had assimilated fully into the Han culture in order to have more opportunities in the labour market. Ironically the expected opportunities do not come to past. As Hasmath (2008, 2011b) suggests, the ethnic minority population in Beijing experience an 'ethnic penalty' in the labour market, whereby their wages are significantly lower than Hans when factoring returns to education (e.g. 20 percent of the ethnic-minority population earn above the average gross income). Furthermore, the ethnic minority population in the city are predominantly concentrated in low status, lower skilled positions.

Officially, China's National Minorities Policy and Beijing's Minority Rights Protection Policies articulate a very different picture. In the preamble of the first policy, it states, "[China is] a united multi-ethnic state founded jointly by the people of all its ethnic groups". In fact, the CPC have noted that they have adopted special policies and measures to effectively realize and guarantee equality of opportunity among all ethnic groups. This is prescribed by the current Chinese Constitution and reaffirmed in the 1999 National Minorities Policy (Section II, Paragraph 3):

> All ethnic groups in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the ethnic minorities and upholds and develops a relationship of

> equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's ethnic groups. Discrimination against and oppression of any ethnic group are prohibited.

Beijing's Minority Right Protection Policies also present five basic principles that should theoretically be adhered to in the social policies of Beijing. The first is an adherence to equity and unity among ethnic groups (Section II, Paragraph 1). Here, "equality among ethnic groups means every ethnic group is a part of the Chinese nation, having equal status and enjoying the same rights and duties in every aspect of political and social life according to law". The second is that "all ethnic groups can participate as equals in the management of state and local affairs" (Section II, Paragraphs 8-10). Third, all ethnic groups have the freedom and right to use and develop their own spoken and written languages (Section II, Paragraphs 18-20). Fourth, education for minorities must be developed to "improve the quality of the minority population" (Section IV, Paragraphs 23-26). And finally, Section V guarantees the preservation of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities such as "famous historical monuments, scenic spots and rare cultural relics". The end goal is to create "a favourable social environment for ethnic groups … to treat each other on an equal footing and to develop a relationship of unity, harmony, friendship and mutual assistance among them" (Section II, Paragraph 1).

On-the-Ground Ethnic Relations

As one of China's largest developed urban communities, over 4 percent of Beijing's total 20.18 million population are ethnic minorities (National Bureau of Statistics 2012). This reported percentage can be even higher, whereby many Hans are descendants of ethnic minority groups, but identify themselves as Hans. For example, although 41.9 percent of the ethnic minority population are officially Manchu, this number could be significantly higher as many individuals with Manchurian ancestry choose to identify themselves as Han in order to protect themselves from the stigma of being seen as "outside colonizers" (as Manchus were initially portrayed in the Republican era), or "imperialists" as depicted by the CPC particularly in the early PRC years) (Li 1951). Ethnic identification other than Han was so common in the 1982 census there were still lingering doubts about the government's true intention for registering nationalities. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976 – a ten-year period when any type of ethnic, religious, cultural or political differences were suppressed by the CPC – mosques, temples,

churches and other religious-cultural institutions had been torn down in the name of erasing the "four olds" of custom, culture, habits and ideas. By the early 1990s, it had become clear that those identified as an official ethnic minority were receiving real benefits, as outlined earlier, leading to a greater propensity for non-Hans to identify themselves as such. Indeed, on the outskirt districts of Beijing – where a sizeable ethnic Manchurian population reside – there was a growing trend of those who are of mixed Han/Manchu descent or have strong Manchurian ancestry, attempting to re-identify themselves as Manchu in the present-day. Individuals in this situation were very frank, claiming they sought to re-identify themselves as Manchu not only because of ethnic pride and a more favourable environment where the negative stigma of being Manchu is weak, but also due to the preferential treatments ethnic minorities tend to receive. Yet, the re-identification process is quite difficult especially in adulthood. Most are often not successful due to strict government policy and, for some, a lack of formal records to prove ethnicity.

It should come as little surprise that state-imposed ethnic categories often contrast with on-the-ground ethnicity. Certain official ethnic groups are near extinction or borderline assimilated into the Han group, which begs the question whether a re-categorization or abolition of official ethnic minority groups are needed in the near future. For example, when discussing with Cui, a second-generation ethnic Xibo living in Beijing about what it means to be an ethnic minority, she jokingly replies, "We don't eat dogs or horses. Otherwise we are the same as Han". Elaborating further, her explanation was that her grandparents will wear traditional clothes during festivals otherwise their cultural and social lives are virtually identical to Han. Few Xibos she knows can speak the traditional dialect fluently – a trend that will continue as the number of elders diminish. Cui, like many young ethnic minorities in Beijing, can barely speak her "own" ethnic language or dialect, and certainly does not practice it every day. Although officially she is considered a member of an ethnic minority, her personal customs and way of life are indistinguishable from Han.

This situation has vivid resemblance to Moerman's (1965) study on ethnic relations in Thailand, where he pondered, "Who are the Lue?" In his research, while attempting to describe who the Lue were in ways distinct from other ethnic groups, he encountered numerous problems. Whilst querying individual Lues on their typical characteristics they would mention cultural traits that were shared with other (often dominant) neighbouring groups. They lived in

close interaction with other groups in the area; they had no exclusive livelihood, language or customs. Why was it appropriate to describe them as an ethnic group?

It can be suggested that the minority identification policy has allowed the new People's Republic to forge a nation-building project under the leadership of the dominant Han nationality. The Communists reinforced the image of Han superiority by intertwining it into a Marxist ideology of progress, which was likewise inspired by Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877). Recognized minority nationalities were categorized according to five major modes of production: primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist. The Hans were ranked the highest on this scale, reinforcing the Han idea that minorities are "backward" and perpetuating the Communists' portrayal of Hans as the "vanguard" of the people's revolution. Ethnic minorities were thus encouraged to follow the Han example.

Moreover, while the Cultural Revolution sought to remove markers of ethno-cultural traditions, many ethnic minority groups such as Tibetans and Uighurs continue to strongly resist. As a result, members of both groups in Beijing harbour resentment against the dominant majority Han, due in large part to the CPC's treatment of their large populations in the Western provinces (Moneyhon 2004). In contrast, certain other groups such as ethnic Koreans have adapted well to Beijing's urban milieu. In fact one can suggest that ethnic Koreans' historical experiences in China can account for their highly successful accumulation of economic capital and social integration in Beijing (Yoon 2006). Their migration to the city was due to famine and war in the Korean peninsula from the 1860s onwards. Most notoriously, the Japanese who occupied Manchuria in the 1930s organized a series of collective labour migration from southern Korea to parts of northeastern China, which eventually lead to thousands of ethnic Koreans settling in Beijing (Kim 2003). After the Sino-Japanese war and civil war between the Communists and Nationalists, Koreans in China who allied with the Communists were granted formal citizenship and were encouraged to maintain their ethnic language, education and culture. However, during the Cultural Revolution, Koreans encountered setbacks as an ethnic minority group when the Communists sought to abolish bureaucracy and feudalistic "old" elements of society. Having realized the vulnerability of being a minority group and the danger of nationalism, many ethnic Koreans in Beijing adopted a strategy of full accommodation to the authority of the central and local Beijing government. They have obeyed the population control policy very enthusiastically, with most of the Korean families encountered during

fieldwork opting to have one child. As a result, their birth rates and population growth statistics are much lower than Han and all other ethnic minorities.

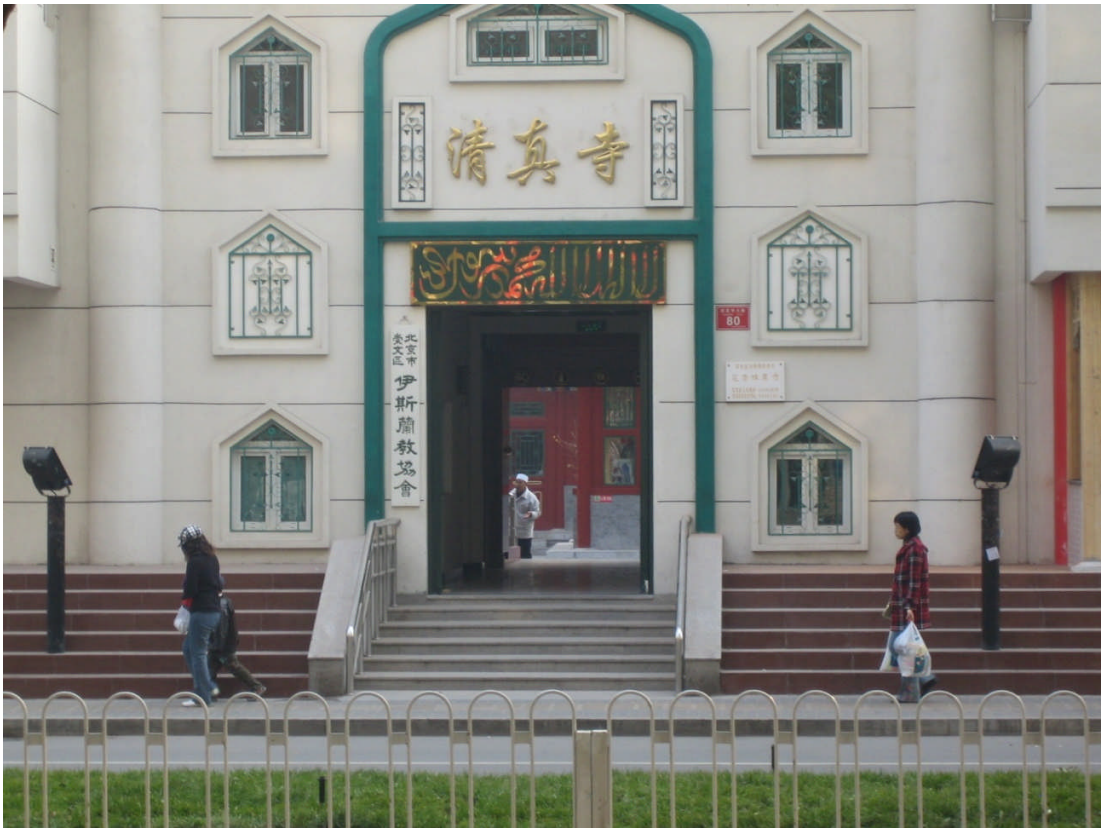
With widespread economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, South Korean firms began entering Beijing markets. Ethnic Koreans, who were relatively successful in retaining their native language through the generations, were better positioned to benefit from the introduction of such firms. These companies' preference was to hire cheaper, China-based employees who were able to communicate in the Korean language, and relate more closely to the firms' cultural values and practices. Widespread economic reforms in the 1980s not only encouraged greater economic activities for ethnic Koreans, coupled with reduced restrictions on mobility, it also provided an incentive for both Hans and other ethnic minorities to internally migrate to Beijing for employment, and to seek a higher standard of living. This movement of large numbers of ethnic minorities since the beginning of economic reforms initially resulted in the formation of distinct ethnic neighbourhoods in the capital city.

Ethnic Minority Neighbourhoods

One dominating characteristic of Beijing is that the city lacks numerous defined and distinct ethnic minority neighbourhoods in present day. This has not always been the case. Beijing has periodically received a large number of ethnic minority migrants from different parts of the nation. These migrants and their descendants developed geographically distinguishable ethnic minority neighbourhoods in the city. For instance, Hui communities settled in areas separate from local Hans which allowed them to maintain their Islamic traditions. The seclusion was also made possible by domestic laws that protected Islamic traders, a point of custom which was also enjoyed by foreign entities including the British and French in later centuries.

Continuing to exist are several Islamic-oriented ethnic neighbourhoods, a small Tibetan neighbourhood in Haidian District, and pockets of Manchurian communities in the city's outer districts. However, due to Beijing's rapid development and shortage of physical space, most ethnic minority neighbourhoods have disappeared, making room for high-rise residential and corporate buildings. At present, there are still several original Tibetan temples (which have become "museums")[10] and Islamic mosques intact (see Image One and Table One), but in most cases they do not reflect the ethnic demographics of the local area. This makes the Niujie area more remarkable as one of the last surviving historical ethnic neighbourhoods in Beijing.

Image One: Local Mosque in Chongwen District



Source: Author's Photograph

Niujie in the former Xuanwu District is one of the largest ethnic neighbourhoods in the city, with a current population of 24,088 in the core area, of whom 54.1 percent are Huis. Historical documentation indicates a Hui settlement has been in this location since the Tang Dynasty (618-907) (Weng 1992). By the Yuan Dynasty, Niujie – then called Willow River Village – was located outside but close to the main city walls. The location during this period amply reflected a separation between the Huis and the ruling Mongols living inside city walls. Although Huis continued to strive in Willow River Village as a distinct ethnic enclave[11] and ethnic enclave economy, when Hans regained control and established the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Hui communities slowly began to scatter throughout Beijing (Liu 1990). By the Qing dynasty, Willow River Village changed its name to Niujie, which literally means "Oxen Street", and most likely took this name given the main economic activity was trading beef and mutton prepared in

accordance to Islamic customs. Today, food services, including Islamic restaurants and supermarkets, continue to play a central role in the economic activities of the enclave.[12]

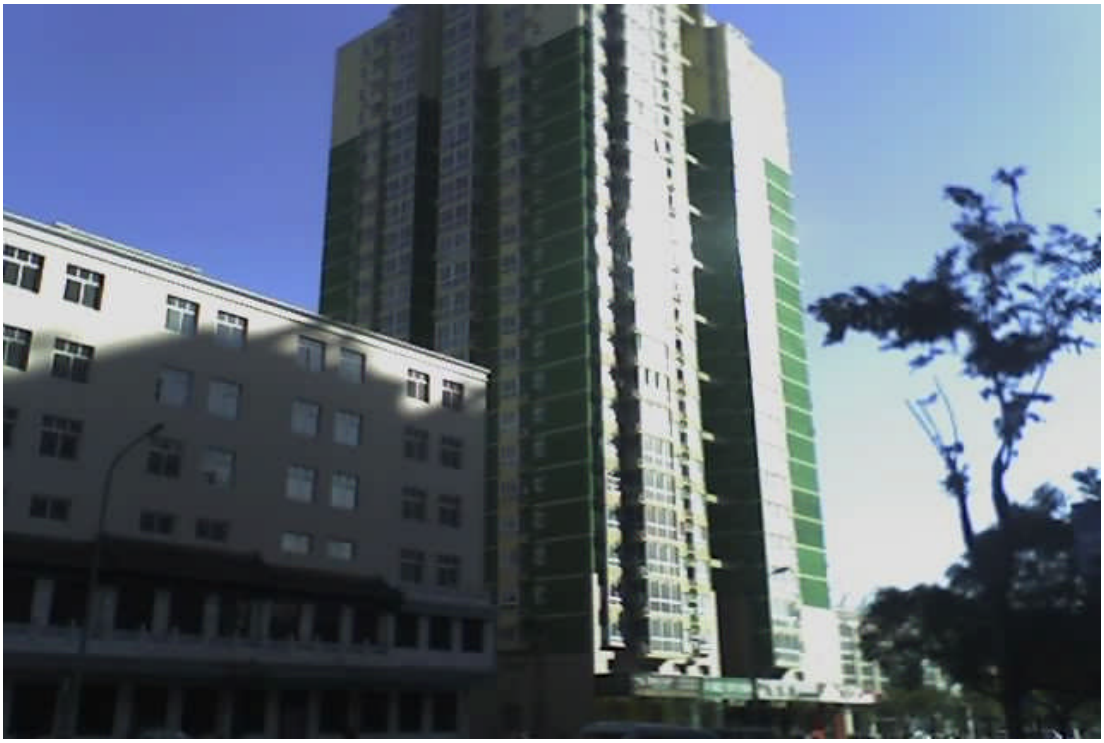
Table One: List of Major Mosques in Beijing

Name	District	Established
Changying Mosque	Chaoyang	Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
Nanxiapo Mosque	Chaoyang	Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)
Jinshifang Street Mosque	Xicheng	Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
Huashi Mosque	Chongwen	Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
Haidian Mosque	Haidian	Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
Dongzhimen Mosque	Dongcheng	Originally in Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Rebuilt in Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)
Dewai Mosque	Xicheng	Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)
Nandouya Mosque	Dongcheng	Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)
Dongsi Mosque	Dongcheng	Yuan (1271-1368) or Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
Madian Mosque	Haidian	Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)
Niujie Mosque	Xuanwu	Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)

Niujie still remains peripheral to the city's core area of economic growth. In neighbouring Xicheng and Dongcheng districts, there is a higher GDP per capita and higher rates of economic growth than Xuanwu district, where Niujie is located. Perhaps in reaction to this, since 1997, the Beijing Municipal Government has redeveloped both commercial and residential areas of Niujie, affecting over 7,500 households. By 2000, approximately 3,000 households moved into new apartment buildings painted in green and white paint (to emphasize "Islamic colours") and decorated with Islamic symbols (see Image Two). In 2002, the second phase provided apartments for the remaining households. With a return rate of more than 90 percent according to the Niujie street administrative office, the majority of household members who did not return to Niujie were Hans, suggesting that this neighbourhood continues to retain its ethnic characteristics. The municipal government has also spent over 10 million yuan (~ US $1.63 million) renovating the 1,000-year-old Niujie mosque. Additionally, it has revitalized Oxen Street into a Islamic-style commercial street, home to numerous Muslim restaurants, a major supermarket with halal goods, a Hui primary school, and Islamic-Chinese styled buildings (from apartment blocks to the post office). In CPC fashion, there are signs and murals present

reminding the locals about the recent historical achievements of the community and the role the municipal government has played in improving water, electricity and gas supplies to the area (see Image Three). As a 92-year-old male Hui, who has lived in the Niujie area since birth puts it, "We are all happy about the renovation projects and we are grateful for the government's religious policy".

Image Two: New Apartment Building with "Islamic Characteristics" in Niujie



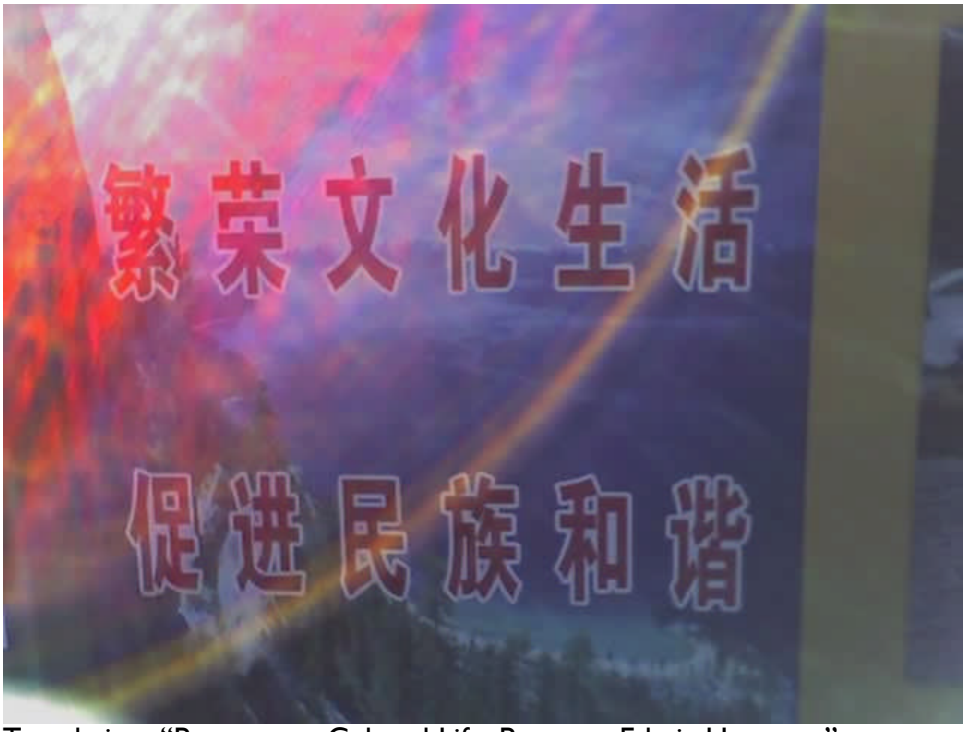
Source: Author's Photograph

Compared to the well-entrenched Hui communities in Beijing, the influx of labour migrants during the past few decades has led to the emergence of relatively new 'home' province-based and ethnic-based neighbourhoods emerging, such as Zhejiang Village and Henan Village. For Uighurs from Xinjiang, the early migrants concentrated in Ganjiakou and Weigongcun – collectively known as Xinjiang Village in Haidian District, and located near an ancient Uighur enclave.[13] Similar to the Huis, the primary ethnic enclave economy in Xinjiang Village revolved around the food industry. Baranovitch vividly recalls young Uighurs sold Xinjiang-style,

barbecue mutton from food stalls (Baranovitch 2003: 731). Uighurs who were better financially positioned opened restaurants that offered Xinjiang style food.[14] During the mid-1990s, the popularity of ethnic cuisine soared to such an extent that Xinjiang Village had more than 40 restaurants (Ma and Biao 1998: 566).

Xinjiang Village did not last long. In 1999, the Village was demolished due to an official position taken by the municipal government that the action will effectively curb 'illegal' street vending and remodel Beijing into a modern metropolis.[15] A more sinister explanation suggests the municipal government demolished the Village due to severe criminal activities such as drug dealing and violence (Baranovitch 2003). Moreover, the demolition was part of a municipal strategy to "deport" Uighurs back to Xinjiang, which not by chance, coincided with the general crackdown of Uighur separatists.

Image Three: Government Sign in Niujie



Translation: "Prosperous Cultural Life. Promote Ethnic Harmony"

Source: Author's Photograph

This begs the question, what makes one ethnic minority neighbourhood thrive and another disappear in Beijing? In large part, the central and municipal government policies and attitudes are an important factor in the development and survival of ethnic minority neighbourhoods in the capital city. For example, the CPC's relatively favourable policies towards ethnic minorities have provided an impetus for improving the Hui-dominated, Niujie neighbourhood and tentatively provided the space for Xinjiang Village to develop. Yet the CPC's distrust of Uighur activities in Beijing, during a period of heightened separatist activities in the late 1990s, resulted in the demolition of Xinjiang Village. One can also suggest that the development of an ethnic minority neighbourhood is improved if it is located wholly within one administrative district,[16] such as Niujie, and unlike Xinjiang Village which combined two neighbourhoods.[17] Since the street administrative office is responsible for overseeing the residential and economic development of urban neighbourhoods, an administrative unit that solely oversees a particular ethnic neighbourhood will be more inclined to represent the neighbourhood's interests especially in a climate of accelerated investment in urban development. For instance, the outcomes of the redevelopment of the Niujie area suggests that the street administrative office played a crucial role in preserving the Hui character and ethnic-specific economic activities of the neighbourhood; which in turn, provided a greater incentive for Hui residents to return.

Also, it is strongly plausible that the municipal government endorsed the redevelopment of the Niujie area with strong "Muslim characteristics" as a means to attract tourism to the area, as well as providing a showcase to illustrate the CPC's continued efforts to preserve and respect ethnic minorities in the capital. On this point, the Imam of Oxen Street mosque – one the largest mosques in Beijing and China – confirms that the mosque has been visited by not only Huis and Hans from across the nation, but also Muslims from other nations. He estimates more than 200 worshippers attend the Mosque each day. Furthermore, the Beijing Municipal government has designated this mosque as an important place for international leaders from Islamic nations to attend. In sum, the role of the municipal government in showcasing the Niujie area and the mosque has enhanced the possibilities of preserving the unique ethnic characteristics of the neighbourhood.

The Commodification and Exoticization of Ethnic Minorities

From another standpoint, one of the major vehicles in forging and reinforcing Han stereotypes of the ethnic minority in Beijing is their portrayal in the official state media, amply demonstrated in the China Central Television's (CCTV) widely watched broadcast of the annual Chinese New Year's programme. Over one half of the evening's broadcast is normally devoted to Tibetans, Mongols, Zhuang, Hui and other ethnic minorities singing in their native languages (with simultaneous Chinese translation) and performing traditional dances. Another example of these performances was during the 2008 Beijing Olympics' Opening Ceremony. Notwithstanding the fact that the 56 ethnic groups on display were actually only Han Chinese members, the "minorities" paraded cheerfully into the Bird's Nest stadium in brightly colour cultural costumes (hats, dresses and robes), while carrying the Chinese flag in an effort to signify national harmony. "Non-minority" performers exclusively wore Western-style suits and dresses, a marker in China for sophistication and respectability. At the same time, this juxtaposes the colourful and less modern costumes of the "minority" entertainers, further reinforcing the "exotic" and "backward" image of ethnic minority groups (see Leibold 2010 for further discussion). In many ways, minorities are also represented in official media sources in Beijing by emphasizing the feminine. It is not uncommon in variety shows for the majority of ethnic minority performers to be female. This has lead to suggestions that feminizing minorities reinforces a perception that they are subordinate to Hans (Schein 2000) or "an unthreatening curiosity" (Hoddie and Lou 2009: 60).[18]

The media is not the only source for commodifying ethnic minorities. Institutions such as the National Ethnic Palace, near *Minzu* Hotel, and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC) on Chang An Avenue, frequently host enormous displays of minority artefacts, costumes, books and temporary exhibitions on ethnic minorities. Indicative of the majority of content on display is the iconographic image of ethnic minorities (mostly females) which greets visitors upon entering (see Image Four). Cues denoting the "primitive" and traditional livelihoods of ethnic minorities are contrasted with Han modernity. For instance, Tibetans are depicted within a serfdom system (see Hung 2012 for further discussion). This is a similar situation reported elsewhere in the nation, such as Varutti's (2010: 76) research in Yunnan, where there were displays reinforcing stereotypes of ethnic minorities constantly dancing, participating in religious

rituals or other leisure. Suffice to say, this portrayal effectively reduces ethnic minority cultures into commodified, "backward" properties, that contrasts with Hans' 'advanced' culture.

Image Four: National Ethnic Palace

Source: Author's Photograph

It is further intriguing that certain ethnic minority groups such as Koreans are seldom exoticized and commodified in the media, in exhibitions such as the National Ethnic Palace, or in the wider Beijing context to the same extent as other ethnic minority groups. For the most part, it is ethnic minority groups with large populations in the relatively less-developed provinces – such as Tibetans, Uighurs, Zhuang – who are usually portrayed in an exoticized and commodified fashion, whereas ethnic minority groups with relatively higher aggregate education outcomes enjoy contrasting experiences (Hasmath 2011a).

Daily interactions between ethnic minorities and Hans revolve around food. Many Hans visit ethnic restaurants to try different cuisines and to experience an exotic and "foreign"

environment. This fascination is further heightened by popular ethnic minority restaurants decorating both their exterior and interior with stereotypical ethnic designs (i.e. ethnic language scripts) and offering ethnic musical performances. For instance, despite the dismantlement of Xinjiang Village, Uighur culture has thrived in other parts of the city where Xinjiang restaurants appear. One of the most famous and popular in Beijing is the 400-person capacity, Afanti restaurant situated in an old alley in Dongcheng district. Co-owned by an ethnically mixed married couple, a Uighur woman (the daughter of the former provost of Beijing's minority-oriented, Minzu University) and Han husband, one of its main stated objectives is to break down barriers of ethnicity.[19] How this manifests itself is fascinating: after dinner, typically around 8pm, a band performs both traditional and contemporary Uighur music with an accompanying dancing troupe on stage in traditional ethnic costume. As the performance matures, patrons are encouraged to participate by dancing on their own tables. Afanti has gained such popularity that high-ranking Chinese and foreign government and business officials frequent the restaurant.

In many respects, Afanti can be seen as case of appropriating ethnic minority culture into a commodity and financially profiting from it. While Afanti restaurant was used as an example, the lessons from this case can be transferred to many other ethnic minority restaurants in the capital city. For instance, King Gesar, a Tibetan restaurant in Chaoyang District has a similar setup to that of Afanti. Decorated with traditional ethnic Tibetan style frescos and waiters in full Tibetan costumes, customers are offered traditional Tibetan food such as yak meat, cheese and butter tea. Traditional Tibetan performances, akin to Afanti, are also performed from 8 to 10 pm. Arguably, its successes are partially due to the tacit approval by the CPC – indicative by high-ranking officials' visits, and the invitation of both restaurants' minority performers to CCTV's or Beijing TV's (BTV) variety shows. Seen in a different perspective, the restaurants serve the interest of the CPC by embodying the intended image of ethnic harmony and tolerance in the capital. As the former vice-director of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Dainzhub Ongboin (a Tibetan) reiterates, like Hans "people from different ethnic groups help each other and their relations are harmonious" (Beijing Review 2007).

The increasing popularity of ethnic minority food notwithstanding, religious and ethnic traditions can be a barrier for minorities to fully interact with Hans, especially among Tibetans and Islamic minorities who have strong ethno-cultural traits. A matter as differing diets due to varying ethnic traditions and customs with Hans can be a barrier for meaningful interactions

with ethnic minorities, especially given food is so central to social life in China. For instance, since Islamic diet requires meat to be prepared in accordance to religious practice, and it strictly prohibits the consumption of pork – a staple among Hans – there is the potential for reduced social interactions between Islamic ethnic minority groups and Hans. In fact, deep-rooted ethnic Hui identity and religious traditions centred with the Mosque and Islamic food have for many generations separated Huis from Hans in Beijing.

Perhaps the most culpable barrier for minority-majority group interactions in Beijing is the institutionalization of an ethnic minority group by the CPC itself. The official system of categorization constantly remind ethnic minorities that they are members of a fixed and specific ethnic group differing from the dominant majority Hans. Clarifying the boundaries between ethnic minority groups and Hans creates a host of issues, especially when history or 'home' province issues mix within the politics of ethnic minority representation. This can potentially lead to continued negative stigmas of Mongolians who are historically portrayed in Chinese textbooks as barbarians, or Manchus as imperialists. This may mean Han-ethnic minority relations in Beijing can be affected by far away frictions between Uighurs from Xinjiang or Tibetans from the Greater Tibetan Area.[20] For example, just prior to the demolition of Xinjiang Village, many Hans decided not to frequent the Village on the grounds that it is unsafe and dangerous due to growing disturbances in Xinjiang. In March 2008, protests and demonstrations by ethnic Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Greater Tibet Area marking the 49th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising, or the July 2009 and June 2013 outburst of ethnic violence in Xinjiang, can potentially lead to a growing distrust of Tibetans ad Uighurs living in Beijing. What makes both Tibetan and Uighur communities particularly vulnerable is that they are more easily identified as "outsiders" due to their physical appearance.[21]

While the popularity of all things ethnic, from music, dance and food, remains at its highest levels in the capital city, the contradictory nature of inter-ethnic representation and interactions remains rooted in stereotypes perpetuated by the CPC controlled media and ironically, in part, by ethnic minority oriented restaurants such as Afanti and King Gesar.

Implications and Conclusion

This article suggests that local ethnic minorities in Beijing continue to be affected by minority-majority interactions and events outside of the capital city. In effect, the localization of minority-

majority interactions cannot be fully separated at this juncture from a national one. This suggests that the CPC's attention to "modernizing" and improving the livelihood of ethnic minorities in the less developed areas of China inevitably have a consequence of clouding Han perceptions of ethnic minorities as being "backward" and "exotic" in the relatively developed capital city.

Indeed, practices to improve ethnic relations may be a double-edged sword. Celebratory ethno-festivals and variety shows on CCTV and BTV, and ethnic restaurants such as Afanti and King Gesar that showcase ethnic traditions and culture serve as a mechanism to promote minority groups to the mainstream. However, criticism can be levied when a packaged and commodified version involving song, dance and foods, is presented of a particular ethnic minority group. Paradoxically, the central concern is that the socio-economic struggles of many ethnic minority groups are being masked when a celebratory version of their culture and traditions are presented. This leaves little room for attention on socio-economic issues such as segmented labour shares and unequal sectoral distribution in occupational categories between Hans and ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities' disproportionate access to the labour market does not bode well for economic, social and political integration in the short- and long-term, and will only intensify perceived (or real) differences between ethnic minorities and Hans. Thus, reinforcing ethnic minority consciousness and potentially lead to reduced Han-ethnic minority interactions.

The evidence presented in this article also suggests that understanding the behaviour of ethnic minority neighbourhoods deserves attention when it comes to understanding wider minority-majority interactions. While Beijing has an entrenched ethnic minority population for centuries, the increasing movement of ethnic minority, internal migrants to the capital city in the last few years, coupled with the rising number of ethnic minority students who attend Beijing's universities and thereafter settle upon graduation, compels further analysis of what makes one ethnic neighbourhood strive and another disappear in Beijing? While the article suggests that the central and municipal government policies and attitudes are an important factor in the development and survival of ethnic neighbourhoods, perhaps the calculus should include an understanding that ethnic neighbourhoods can serve as a as a potential source of social networks for ethnic minority members – which in turn can provide greater occupational possibilities and in the long-term, a source of improving minority-majority interactions in the

mainstream. Especially in an environment of rapid urban expansion, Beijing's ethnic neighbourhoods can serve a more critical role as a location where ethnic minorities' practices can be preserved and protected.

[1] Note, effective July, 2010, Chongwen and Xuanwu districts were merged into Dongcheng and Xicheng Districts, respectively, but the old delineation will be utilized for consistency in analysis.
[2] The term Hui itself derived from the Mandarin word "Huihui", which was used in the Yuan Dynasty (1276-1368) to refer to a diverse group of Central and Western Asian, Persian and Arab Muslim merchants.
[3] Intermarriage occurred in spite of many local sayings discouraging the practice. For example, one local saying warned, "cattle don't herd with water buffalo; 'immigrants' shouldn't join with locals".
[4] The legacy of Manchurian rule in Beijing can be seen today in the wider Han cultural context. The *qi pao*, a Manchurian dress, has been popularly adopted by Hans.
[5] There are currently six autonomous regions which have political autonomy in theory – among them Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang. Moreover, autonomous cities, prefectures and municipalities where minority nationalities are territorially concentrated are still present. The Constitution stipulates that the leaders of an autonomous area must be members of the area's main ethnic nationality. In practice, however, the Party Secretaries – who exercise real authority – of each autonomous administrative unit are Han.
[6] By early 1965, there were 183 nationalities registered (based on the 1964 census), among which the government recognized only 54 (Minority Rights International 2007).
[7] The term *minzu* is directly translated into English as 'nation', with a potential intentionality equating to an 'ethno-national group'. In recent years, another word *zuqun* has slowly appeared in scholarly literature often referring to 'ethnic groups' or 'ethnicity' in the Western sense. While officially there are 55 *shaoshu minzu* in the P.R. China, it may be prudent to officially change reference to these groups from 'nationalities' to 'ethnic groups' or 'ethnic minorities' for two reasons. First, the social and cultural connotations of minority groups such as Mongolians,

Manchus, Tibetans, Uighurs and Hui are approximate to 'ethnic minorities' in other jurisdictions. Thus, the term 'ethnic groups' reflects the structure of ethnicity in China more accurately. Second, conceptual confusion of both terms *minzu* and *zuqun* will be avoided. There is a potential for wrongfully confusing the 55 minority 'nationalities' as independent political entities who have unique interests based on Western ideals of 'nationalism' (Ma 2004).

[8] This is potentially one of the main reasons why many farmers tried to change their nationality status from Han to a minority group. In fact, from 1982 to 1990, several minority groups have doubled their population size mainly by re-registration, e.g. the Manchu population increased from 4.3 million to 9.8 million, and Tujia increased from 2.8 million to 5.7 million during this 8 year period.

[9] Due to these advantages and preferential treatments afforded to ethnic minorities in China, the status of an ethnic citizen cannot be altered at his/her discretion, save in the situation where a child is born by mixed parents due to inter-ethnic marriage. Here the ethnic status will be determined by the parents before the child reaches 18 years of age. However, when the child reaches 18, s/he can choose which parent's ethnic status to adopt. After the age of 20 no alteration can be made. In practice, the large majority adopts the ethnicity of their father. Also, in cases where the CPC was mistaken in nationality status recognition, an individual can apply for "correction" of their status. In practice, most individual apply to correct their status due to nationality recognition "errors" during the Cultural Revolution.

[10] Note, Yonghegong in Dongcheng District still nominally functions as a temple. There are resident monks and it is often the sight for Geshe examinations.

[11] The term 'ethnic enclave' in this context is used to denote a distinct, concentrated 'ethnic neighbourhood' in terms of residential patterns and/or economic activities. The intentions are not to utilize the term in a political sense, that is, to potentially suggest a quasi-political periphery.

[12] Niujie was also known for its jade industry. Prior to the CPC's rule, Niujie accounted for nearly three-quarters of the jade enterprises in Beijing.

[13] During the Yuan Dynasty Uighur intellectuals and merchants of Islamic faith settled in the Weigongcun area. However, when Hans began to rule during the Ming Dynasty, there was a

gradual decline of Uighur population in the area, with many electing to move back to Xinjiang (Zhuang 2000).

[14] The usual Uighur dishes at Xinjiang style restaurants include fried, spicy mutton, flat breads, square noodles (which is often served with tomato sauce) and pilaf rice.

[15] The area has now been replaced with numerous small ethnic restaurants, including Tibetan, Korean, Dai, Yi and Mongolian.

[16] In Chinese cities, there is hierarchical administrative system which extends down as far as the neighborhood and household levels.

[17] We should not discount the fact that the majority of Niujie's residents are most likely permanent residents of Beijing and thus, possess Beijing *hukou*. In Xinjiang Village, this may be a different situation whereby the migrants who resided in the area may not have Beijing *hukou*. In short, the *hukou* status of the neighbourhood population can potentially play an interactive role in determining the survival of an ethnic minority neighbourhood.

[18] This analysis does not completely factor gender role differences and the patri-/matri-archal structure of various Chinese ethnic groups, including Hans. These differences can potentially affect one interpretation of the performance and groups portrayed.

[19] In many ways their marriage is a living testament to the restaurant's stated objective of breaking down barriers of ethnicity. While there were initial objections to their marriage given that the husband was not Muslim, the couple eventually married only after he agreed to convert to Islam and accepted a Uighur name.

[20] The Greater Tibet Area incorporates historic Amdo in the northeast (in present day Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces) and Kham in the east (in northern Yunnan, Qinghai and Sichuan)

[21] The worry that ethnic minority issues may result in growing dissension has led to the creation of a monitoring body (proposed in the ethnic minorities affairs 11th Five-Year Plan, 2006-2010, and approved by the State Council) that aims to "clamp down on ethnic separatism so as to safeguard ethnic unity, social stability and national security" (Quoted in Beijing Review 2007).

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