

# **From Xizang to Xinjiang: An Analysis of the Role of Diaspora-Based Transnational Social Movements in Opposing Chinese Ethnic Minority Treatment**

Blanca Marabini San Martín

*Universidad Pontificia Comillas*

## ABSTRACT

During the last few decades, the world has seen a significant rise in China's international clout and, consequently, key international powers and actors have shifted their approach in engaging with the Asian giant, particularly regarding issues that China itself presents as internal or pertaining to national sovereignty. The present article pursues an inquiry into the relationship between one such issue, Chinese ethnic minority policy, and another recent shift in international context: the increased relevance of international forces and pressures originated by transnational social movements founded by ethnic minority members who have chosen to leave China. In order to do so, the diasporas of two ethnic minorities will be studied: the Tibetan minority, residing in the Xizang Autonomous Region, and the Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. This includes a study of the forms of international resistance in which diaspora members are involved, as well as of the ability of diaspora-based transnational social movements to influence public opinion, state policies, and international organization positions in favor of their ethnic group.

The story of China in the last few decades is one of impressive economic and political growth. With its years of post-World War II international isolation long gone, the Asian giant has embraced the advantages afforded to it by specific aspects of the international system, benefitting from international trade and investments in order to establish itself as a regional superpower and an emerging global superpower. Beijing's rise is undoubtedly and inextricably intertwined with the process of globalization and is therefore contemporaneous with the prevalence of views favoring cooperative efforts to solve common, global issues. This has resulted in international rules and regulations, that establish limits within which countries must operate at both the domestic and international levels. China has not always remained within these limits, setting a precedent for a particular path of national development that had not been trodden before.

Although some key international actors and powers have shifted their approach in engaging with the Asian giant due to the significant increase in Chinese international clout, others continue to steadily oppose Chinese methods. This is often the case of civil society actors, such as human rights groups, environmental movements, and NGOs. Civil society actors have been traditionally studied with a focus on either the domestic or the international sphere. However, a new form of civil society actor, whose activity is not restricted to either the domestic or the international sphere, has attracted the interest of scholars and policymakers alike: transnational social movements. This form of civil society action links migrants with their community back home, allowing them to remain politically involved in their country of origin. For China, this means that it can no longer avoid the international dimension of issues that had previously belonged in the strictly domestic realm: members of the diasporas of ethnic minorities in China residing abroad now have the chance to bring the situation of their communities back home to the attention of the international community.

The present analysis will use a qualitative, comparative approach, contrasting the nature, context, and effects of the Tibetan and Uyghur diasporas. This includes a study of the forms of international resistance in which diaspora members are involved, as well as of the ability of diaspora-based transnational social movements to influence public opinion, state policies, and international organization positions in favor of their ethnic group. It will draw on data contained in both primary and secondary sources. The former includes Chinese and international legislation, news reports, interviews, speeches, statistical data provided by national institutions of states where these diasporas are present, and white papers and other documents published by Beijing, the Central Tibetan

Administration, or the World Uyghur Congress, containing their positions on the matter. The latter is composed mostly of academic sources, as well as analyses of the situation in Xinjiang and Xizang carried out by international organizations, such as the United Nations, and civil society groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, or the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS (TSMs)

Literature pertaining to transnational social movements can be divided chronologically into three key groups. Firstly, there are authors such as Charles Tilly (1978), whose work in social movements, and particularly his typology of defensive, offensive, and preparatory movements, although produced at a time in which academic focus was still mostly limited to the national and local levels, remains relevant when it comes to movements that operate across borders. Secondly, Tarrow's (1994) work connects classic approaches to social movements to the current era, marking the rise of scholarly attention to the transnational sphere. Tarrow thus provides a definition of TSM and a general theoretical framework which, along with other similar frameworks coming from different, non-Western perspectives, such as the one developed by Moghadam (2012), provides a valuable foundation for research both in terms of how domestic movements become transnational and how the transnational movements can have effects at the domestic level. A third and final category addresses specific areas or types of TSMs: the role of national and ethnic diasporas as described by Adamson (2008), the domestic effects of transnational mobilization in movements regarding gender equality tackled by Moghadam (2012), or, more related to the study at hand, the role of religion within the transnational sphere, which is categorized by Vásquez and Marquardt (2003) as the main instigator of deterritorialization, or community displacement, and reterritorialization, or the restructuring of local practices and identities. James (2017) further expands on this idea by arguing that transnationalism in the religious context "refers to the fluidity of religion across borders" (p. 3). It seems likely that the increasing importance given to these movements not only by civil society, but also by states in terms of national security, will translate into a further development of the field, which will yield increasingly more specialized works.

#### MINORITY POLICIES IN CHINA

The current cornerstone of Xi Jinping's ethnic policy is the pursuit of homogenization through various forms of social and cultural exposure (Leibold, 2016). Originally, the Communist Party of China (CPC) followed an ideology closer to those originally espoused by Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin regarding self-determination. The UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (UN General Assembly, 1960), provides a widely accepted definition of the principle of self-determination by stating that "all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (para. 2). This definition is greatly influenced by prominent political figures of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as US president Woodrow Wilson, or USSR figureheads Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin, who explicitly embraced the principle. Lenin (1913; 1914) believed that self-determination should be supported in every case, based essentially on the idea that, given the necessary assistance, small nation-states will reach the revolutionary stage much faster than larger capitalist empires. However, he did not fully reject autonomy, perceiving it instead as necessary for purely local issues. The Stalinist conception of self-determination is similar, although less rigid, taking the shape of the "socialism in one country" paradigm that recognized that some nationalities would rather remain within a multinational state (Stalin, 1914).

As a result, Mao Zedong's initial view of the Chinese State was that of a pluralistic but unified state composed of equal minorities with the right to self-government (Wu, 2014). Nonetheless, this pluralistic approach was substituted by intense assimilationism between the mid-1950s and the end of the 1970s, the latter decade being the scenario of the Cultural Revolution. During this period, Mao Zedong attempted to remove religious and cultural elements in order to free the Chinese mind from traditional beliefs, so that the citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC) would place their faith in Marxism instead, thus cleansing them of individual and materialistic desires and molding them into a new communist man (Wang, 2018). This is particularly problematic for minorities, whose cultures and lifestyles were especially targeted.

After Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, the shift slowly reversed itself. Wong (2005) and Lewis and Litai (2003) document how Jiang Zemin embarked on a lengthy operation to maintain the legitimacy of the CPC after the collapse of the USSR, and therefore communism both as a philosophy and as a socio-

economic system, and after the deaths resulting from the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Jiang ended the nation's commitment to formal Marxism and engaged in a re-education campaign, mainly via propaganda and textbook alterations, in order to spread a new nationalist perception of the CPC by presenting it as China's only option to regain honor lost during conflicts that involved external intervention, such as the Opium Wars or the period of imperial Japanese occupation. This new nationalist position took the shape of the Three Represents, which stipulated that the CPC should embody advanced culture, advanced social productive forces, and the interests of the overwhelming majority (Hepeng, 2004).

According to Sautman (2002) and to Teufel Dreyer (2010), the current Chinese minority policy is based on the strategic importance granted to these groups by their size and distribution, given that they amount to almost 10% of the population and live mainly in areas of the PRC with the most natural resources, located near important borders. Both further agree that, under the current conditions, the income and development gaps between Han-majority territories and minority autonomous regions will continue to widen and existing antagonisms are unlikely to disappear. Wang (2015) further critiqued the current system based on the inconsistent application of minority identification standards, which would allow the CPC to control the number of groups and the divisions between them so that they suit their political interests regarding territorial integrity and regional stability. Lastly, authors such as Anand (2018) have gone as far as characterizing the current minority policies as colonization with Chinese characteristics, based on the argument that colonialism is the most appropriate lens through which to understand policies that would appear to pursue the occupation of these territories and the minoritization and securitization of the resident ethnic groups, and could therefore be understood to be part of a Chinese statist project by which the representation of these minorities as a source of insecurity legitimizes increases in state violence.

#### CASE STUDIES: TIBET AND XINJIANG

Literature on the Tibetan issue can be grouped based on the answers given by the authors to the two main questions that constitute the debate: (1) should the region known as Tibet remain as part of China or become a new sovereign state? and, as a preliminary question to this, (2) was Tibet independent from China or part of Chinese territory during certain periods of its history throughout the last few centuries? On one hand, there are those who support the official position of

the Chinese government, such as Li (1956) or Jiawei and Gyaincain (2009). These authors are usually Chinese in origin or connected in some fashion to Chinese authorities, but interestingly enough will often draw on Western literature when it comes to proving the version of history on which they base their territorial claims. Pro-Tibetan authors, on the other hand, are usually Western in origin, as is the case of Chayet (2008), Sperling (2004), Smith (1996; 2010), or Barnett (2009); or work with or within Western institutions, as do Han and Paik (2013). They agree with the India-based Tibetan government that the historical relationship between Tibet and the Chinese Empire on which China bases its claim to the region was of a diplomatic and ceremonial nature, rather than political. Consequently, the works of this second group are usually critical in nature towards the official Chinese account and the current treatment of Tibetans by Chinese authorities, as well as including many more references to the international dimension of the Tibetan issue, both in terms of the role of international institutions and that of transnational networks and movements. The literature on both sides does evolve along with the situation of Tibet itself, especially on the Tibetan side as the Dalai Lama's international appeals yielded favourable results. However, even if the voices raised in support of Tibet have become relatively more moderate in that they no longer call necessarily for full self-determination, this principle remains very present in the literature.

A similar polarization is evident in the literature addressing the situation of the Uyghur minority residing mainly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, in China's Northwest. There are two main positions, one espoused by authors such as Hao and Liu (2012), who support the official position of the Chinese government, and a larger group of mostly Western scholars who adopt a critical stance towards it. In this case, however, the number of authors included in the first group is overall smaller, perhaps due to the more recent appearance of the international dimension of the issue. The literature from the opposing point of view, however, is plentiful and covers many dimensions: some focus on the situation within the Xinjiang region, as do Grieger (2014), Dwyer (2005), or Dorje (2019); while others also include, or even concentrate on, the international dimension of the issue, as is the case with Imtiyaz (2012), Navarro (2008), Mukherjee (2015), Millward (2004), Toops (2016), and Clarke (2015). In this case, it is worth noting that the internationalization process was started by the Chinese authorities, rather than the targeted minority, which also translates into a more equal coverage of the international dimension by both camps, rather than just the authors who are critical of Chinese actions in Xinjiang. Furthermore, the literature from both groups seems to include more authors

with stronger stances than that of the literature on Tibet, particularly as the topics discussed evolve with the recent introduction of new key elements such as the Belt and Road initiative.

After having reviewed the literature referring to the key areas pertaining to this study, there are conclusions to be drawn at multiple levels. Firstly, the different nature of the topics covered calls for different forms of classification: where the authors in the first two sections lend themselves to a chronological classification based on the evolution of the subject of study and, consequently, of the literature addressing it, the literature referring to the selected case studies is much more easily organized into groups depending on whether the author is mainly supportive or critical of the Chinese government's policies towards the minority in question. More specifically, a chronological approach to the study of transnational social movements shows how the literature has become increasingly more specialized over time, from general social movement frameworks, to specific studies showing how easy it is for domestic movements to become internationalized and for international actors to penetrate domestic issues. It has also most recently expanded to include works covering specific types and areas of TSMs, allowing for related studies to use more specialized frameworks, even if the original general theoretical approaches of authors such as Charles Tilly are still very much in use.

Examining literature regarding minority policy in China on a chronological basis yields similar results in terms of reflecting the evolution of the subject of study, showing how it has been affected both by internal political evolution and increasing external critiques and pressure, the latter resulting from growing Western interest in the topic. When it comes to specific case studies, however, the position-based approach allows for easier classification and reveals the connections to key factors that influence the stance of the authors. Using this approach for the case studies also allows for easier comparison of the literature on both topics, so that it is possible to pinpoint key similarities and differences between them. Such a comparison highlights how authors who adopt a critical stance towards the Chinese government are overwhelmingly Western or, at least, linked to Western institutions, although pro-Chinese authors do not shy away from using Western material to support their arguments. It is however worth noting that there is a wealth of documents on the topic written in the Chinese, Tibetan, and Uyghur languages that the author of this text is unable to directly consider due to language and spatial constraints. The comparison also shows differences in the number of authors defending the Chinese position: they are currently more abundant in the case of the Tibetan region, but their

numbers are not growing as quickly as that of the pro-Chinese authors when it comes to literature on Xinjiang. This is probably tied to the more recent nature of the internationalization process of this second case study, which may also explain why pro-Chinese authors cover the international dimension of the issues much more thoroughly when it comes to Xinjiang than when it comes to Tibet. Overall, it is possible to pinpoint elements pertaining to the situations of Tibetans and Uyghurs in China that call for further study, particularly regarding the internationalization of both case studies and the subsequent role of the international community, diasporas, and other international and transnational movements, especially given the power attributed to ethnic and religious TSMs.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEFINING THE CONFLICT

Peace and Conflict Studies is a relatively young field of social sciences, whose official birth is usually placed in the 1950s, linked to the end of World War II and the creation of the United Nations. Although the field has advanced greatly since then, a universally agreed-upon definition of the word “conflict” does not yet exist. Consequently, analysts will resort to a series of conflict typologies that traditionally categorize conflicts as either inter- or intrastate. The present text will draw upon the classification proposed by Peter Wallensteen (2002, 2014), who added state formation conflicts as a third category. Within this typology, the current situations in Tibet and Xinjiang will be considered as part of this third category. It cannot be considered an interstate conflict, as these re defined as taking place between sovereign states and, although calls for the creation of Tibetan and Uyghur states exist, the territories do not fulfill the conditions established in the widely accepted definition of State provided by Max Weber in *Politics as a Vocation* (1946), which requires a monopoly on violence in order to be considered a state, something that neither Tibetans nor Uyghurs have. Nonetheless, it is important to note that there are elements present reminiscent of Wallensteen’s *idealpolitik* interstate conflicts, that is, interstate conflicts based on conflicting ideologies or issues of legitimacy, in the style of Samuel P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* (1993). However, as pointed out by Millward (2004), the actors and causes within the wide array of episodes encompassed in these conflicts are more diverse that Huntington’s formula allows, as will be established in the final part of this section. Therefore, the conflict in Xinjiang should not just be understood as a clash between Huntington’s Sinic and Islamic civilizations. The conflict in the Tibetan region is even harder to fit into



Huntington's theory, as both of the conflicting parties would be part of the Sinic civilization.

The question then becomes whether the situations in Tibet and Xinjiang constitute intrastate or state formation conflicts. According to Wallensteen's model, intrastate conflicts take place between the government of a country and a rebel group, and tend to be linked to domestic power relations, economic inequality, and social structures, especially those related to ethnic, religious, or racial factors. State formation conflicts, on the other hand, are defined as a confrontation between a government and an identity-based opposition, often with links to a specific territory. In order to choose between these two categories, the key variable is perspective. From the Chinese point of view, it would make sense to approach the issue as if it were strictly intrastate, since their policies regarding these conflicts are constructed around a zero-sum game perception. This is based on the idea that maintaining the order they currently defend is essential for conserving the current Chinese political system, both in terms of power in the domestic sphere and of newly gained influence in the international sphere. Relinquishing control of these minorities would allow greater freedom for secessionist movements, one of the Three Evil Forces — namely terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism— which the Chinese government determined to be its key security concerns in the 1990s. Beijing has since made them a key part of its foreign policy and regional international relations in general, as evidenced by their prominence in international forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization<sup>1</sup> (Aris, 2009).

Nonetheless, there are characteristics of the conflict to which the state formation model is better suited. This includes the territory-based nature of both the Tibetan and the Uyghur positions, as well as the groups in both Xinjiang and Xizang who are calling for independence or perceive their territories as occupied nations. The post-Cold War state formation conflicts described by Wallensteen can be argued to best encompass the Xinjiang and Tibet issues, especially in terms of the differences in how each party involved perceives the conflict. Wallensteen describes how the rebel groups will approach such conflicts as the historical pursuit of self-determination, whereas the existing government will

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<sup>1</sup> International forum composed by China, Russia, and six central Asian states. It aims to promote cooperation and coordination in politics, economy, culture, and security and military affairs. It was preceded by the Shanghai Five. There is debate on whether it is really a Chinese tool to increase its international presence (Albert, 2015; Desai, 2017).

present it as a struggle for territorial integrity, which they argue is for the benefit of all. Given the Chinese government's position on secessionism, whereas Uyghurs and Tibetans often refer to historical claims regarding the times when their territories were independent, mainly before the Chinese Qing Dynasty, the logical step is therefore to approach the situations in Xinjiang and Xizang as state formation conflicts, as it is the approach that best encompasses the claims and perspectives of the key actors involved.

#### KEY ACTORS

Keeping in mind restraints such as unclear limits of conflicting parties, this section aims to paint a brief picture of the key actors involved in the conflicts analyzed. To this end, it will use the models proposed by Graham T. Allison in *Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1969). Allison explains how the behavior of national governments is often explained in terms of the rational policy model, according to which government decision-making is based on national interest and on maximizing benefits and reducing costs for the state. He further posits that, although this traditional framework is still useful, it needs to be supplemented to incorporate new perspectives, such as a non-monolithic perception of actors. Consequently, Allison proposed two complementary models, which are further explained below: the bureaucratic model and the organizational model. While applying these models, this section will also draw on the levels of analysis set out by Kenneth Waltz in *Man, the State, and War* (1959), namely actors at the individual, state, and systemic levels.

Regarding the state level, the most influential actor is the Chinese government, whose decisions determine key factors in this conflict, such as the nature of the political system and the distribution and levels of power. Furthermore, this actor interacts with other crucial elements in this case, particularly the geographical context, based on the need to keep the territories involved in the Belt and Road Initiative stable. The Chinese government also attempts to influence the social and cultural context in many ways, such as by providing incentives for ethnic Han to move to Xinjiang and Xizang, or through the re-education camps and associated programs, further explored in the following sections. Within this state context, the key actor at the individual level is President of the PRC and General Secretary of the Communist Party Xi Jinping, whose political thought has been included into the constitutions of both the party and the state and, since his tenure began, the trappings for a cult of personality system have been put into place (Torigian, 2019).

Some members of the CPC are also relevant individuals, such as the Communist Party Secretaries in Xinjiang (Chen Quanguo) and Xizang (Wu Yingjie). Interestingly, Chen Quanguo held this position in Tibet from 2011 to 2016 and was then transferred to Xinjiang, where he has since attracted the attention of the press due to his security policies in the region, most notably the re-education system. The system used by the Chinese to address secessionism is best explained in terms of Allison's (1969) organizational actor model, according to which state decision-making functions via standardized operational procedures. China's current approach to perceived secessionism is the result of standards set while dealing with these movements in the past, and as such remains largely the same when applied in different areas. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that, once Chen Quanguo achieved a certain level of success in Tibet, he was transferred to Xinjiang so that he could apply there the model developed in Tibet (Zenz and Leibold, 2017). Some have also drawn parallels between tactics applied in Xinjiang and in Hong Kong (See for example: Lii, 2019). Furthermore, the rigidity of bureaucracy and the chain of command, which are crucial in such a system, are defining factors of the political structure in place in China.

It is harder to determine state-level actors when it comes to Tibet and Uyghurs. It can be argued that the Tibetan government in exile, known as the Central Tibetan Administration, or CTA, should be included in this category. According to Römer (2008), the CTA is being increasingly recognized, not just by Tibetans but internationally, as the legitimate representative of the Tibetan people. They may be limited in terms of applying policies in the territory disputed with China, but they have defined a state ideology of sorts, based on Buddhism and democracy, as well as determining a power distribution within their political structure. Multiple attempts have been made to create a government in exile for East Turkestan, the name given to the Xinjiang region by those in favor of establishing an independent state, but there is not yet an equivalent institution to the Tibetan government in exile, particularly in terms of international recognition. Individual-level actors for these groups also exist, namely the Dalai Lama and internationally active Uyghurs such as Dolkun Isa, current president of the World Uyghur Congress and vice-president of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (World Uyghur Congress, 2020). However, their level of influence on the case studies analyzed is much less than that of Xi Jinping.

The main particularity of the actors involved on the Tibetan and Uyghur sides of the conflict, however, is the number of both organizations and individuals concerned. They constitute a spectrum of actors with different positions and objectives, which makes Allison's (1969) bureaucratic actor model the most

effective when it comes to accurately representing all the players on the field. This model perceives actors as non-unitary, but instead as composed by a series of sub-actors with different preferences who all contribute to decision-making and must negotiate with each other in order to undertake collective action. For the present analysis, the value of this model resides in the fact that it is the best of Allison's models when it comes to incorporating transnational actors and, therefore, taking into account Waltz's (1959) systemic level. Aside from placing certain limits on Chinese policy towards minorities, the systemic level here also includes members of the Tibetan and Uyghur diasporas who remain politically engaged with their homelands despite living abroad, as well as NGOs and human rights organizations, who function based on values such as democracy which are widely accepted in the international system.

#### INTERNATIONAL FORMS OF VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

Since China began to increase contact once again with the outside world during the 1980s, emigration restrictions have been increasingly eased, greatly due to the economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping and the end of the Cold War. As a result, the outflow of migrants has increased, including many Tibetans and Uyghurs who chose to move abroad. Although it is not easy to obtain exact quantitative data regarding the number of members of these ethnic minorities in China that have chosen to remain or to leave, some tentative statistics can be found. In the case of ethnic Tibetans; MacPherson, Bentz, and Ghos (2008) provided quantitative data according to which the Tibetan diaspora resides mainly in India and neighboring states, following the Dalai Lama's exile from China to the other Asian giant. However, the data also shows a substantial group of Tibetans residing in Western countries such as the United States. According to these authors, those belonging to this group are often able to reach higher levels of education and a higher economic status than the members of the diaspora who remained in South Asia which, in turn, enabled them to adopt positions of increased influence in their host societies. Having a presence in the national politics of various states has enabled the members of the Tibetan diaspora to create a transnational social movement known as the Global Tibet Movement, which Noakes (2012) describes as a truly global network composed of over 170 organizations, mainly belonging to civil society.

When it comes to the Uyghurs, it is even harder to determine how many live abroad, since relevant census data is released only selectively by Chinese authorities. However, data available from other states points to a pattern similar

to that of the Tibetan diaspora: states near the border with Xinjiang house the largest numbers of ethnic Uyghurs outside of China. This is especially evident the case of Kazakhstan, who shares a border with the Xinjiang region, and is estimated to hold about 285.000 ethnic Uyghurs, or 1.5% of the country's population (Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011; CIA, 2020). However, the more internationally active groups of ethnic Uyghurs reside in states where they have access to more tools that allow them to have a presence on the international stage. Like in the case of the Tibetan diaspora, there are politically active communities in Western countries, such as the United States, leading to the birth of groups such as the Uyghur American Association, which describes itself as pursuing the preservation of Uyghur culture and supporting the right of Uyghurs to self-determination (Uyghur American Association, 2019). Nonetheless, the Uyghur case differs from its Tibetan counterpart in that there is also a politically relevant group residing in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA). Within these, the 30,000-strong Uyghur community living in Turkey (Yackley and Shepherd, 2019) is particularly relevant. Turkey's inhabitants share ethnic and religious ties with the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, given the Turkic ethnic origins of the latter and the predominant position of Sunni Islam both in Turkey and among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. These ties have proven substantial enough for Turkey to offer sanctuary to Uyghur leaders and refugees, allowing them to set up organizations that aim to preserve Uyghur culture, and provide some forms of support to Uyghur movements. This has repeatedly hindered Sino-Turkish relations (Shichor, 2009a).

Beyond the political mobilization of the resulting diasporas, there are resistance groups whose actions are of a more violent and extremist nature. As mentioned above, China has often linked violence in Tibet and Xinjiang with separatism. In fact, it is now almost two decades since Beijing began tying Uyghur separatism to international jihadist groups. However, as Millward (2004) points out, the main violent disturbances in these regions took place at the time of the political and economic disruptions of the Great Leap Forward (1959-61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In fact, Millward further argues that instances of separatist violence have declined in number and intensity since the end of the 1990s.

In the case of Tibet, reports of violence after 1980 are few and far between. Current reports all seem to focus on the March 2008 uprisings in Lhasa. Both Chinese and Western sources indicate that the riots included the burning and looting of both government and privately-owned buildings and vehicles, as well

as people-on-people violence. Where the Chinese focused on the violence toward ethnic Han and claimed that it was motivated by separatism and led by the Dalai Lama (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Namibia, 2008), Western media and Tibetan groups abroad spoke of inflation, Han immigration, and unequal access to jobs and education (The Economist, 2008). These protests were echoed around the world, mostly in the shape of disturbances targeting Chinese embassies (Hong and Zhouxiang, 2013). Most recently, some reports have also covered the self-immolation of Tibetans in protest against Chinese policy towards Tibet during the 2008 riots, citing self-immolation as one of the few ways left for Tibetans to have their voices heard (Carrico, 2017).

Although there is a certain concern over whether younger generations in Tibet may be rejecting the non-violent methods traditionally espoused when protesting Chinese policy, reports regarding secessionist violence are much more abundant when it comes to Xinjiang. Here, too, large-scale incidents were less common after 1990, but they have been much more publicized, especially since 9/11. Millward (2004) describes how what had generally been branded “a handful of separatists” was categorized as a full-blown terrorist organization. He highlights how, since 1998, reports of Uyghur violence have not focused on violence within China itself, but on linking Uyghurs to a series of violent incidents in other states, such as Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Finally, Millward also provides a brief description of the main groups that the People’s Republic of China linked to terrorism and separatist violence. Among these, the PRC has attributed the most incidents to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), officially presented as a terrorist group pursuing the creation of an independent state in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region and surrounding territories, who has ties to Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State. This group has the most international pull, as the aforementioned ties have led the US, as well as a few other states, to officially consider them a terrorist organization, despite ETIM leaders denying having such contacts, or even intending to commit terrorist acts (US Library of Congress, 2019). Other groups mentioned include the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan (URFET), and the Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO), now merged with URFET.

## CONTEXT FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTION

In order to analyze the role of members of civil society in conflicts that have become internationalized, it is first necessary to determine the international context in which these actors move, and which therefore determines the level of international presence and international support received in each case. To this end, we turn back to Waltz's (1959) three levels of analysis, and focus on the systemic level. For Waltz, this level is important based on the perception of states as actors who respond in a unitary and rational fashion to external incentives. Given the nature of the conflicts being analyzed, we can no longer assume our main actors to be unitary states. However, this does not mean that their interaction with systemic elements does not influence the conflict, especially since the peaks of both conflicts are decades apart, and therefore take place in different international contexts.

If we first look at the Tibetan conflict, its peak is usually associated with the 1959 uprisings (Han and Paik, 2013; Smith, 1996) which, in turn, were a key element in bringing the conflict to the international stage. By the late 1950s, the world had mostly recovered from World War II and was settling into the new bipolar world order that characterized the Cold War era. For the Tibetan conflict, the key characteristic of this era was how the international perception of the principle of self-determination evolved. Although initially perceived as dangerous due to its association with the causes of the World War, the rise of the UN and the subsequent institutionalization of the principle of self-determination in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights greatly increased international support for it (Pereira, 2001; Rodríguez-Santiago, 2016). It was within this context that some rumors that Chinese authorities planned to apprehend the Dalai Lama resulted in the 1959 popular Lhasa uprisings. During the chaos, the Dalai Lama crossed into India where, after being granted asylum, he set up the Central Tibetan Administration (Smith, 1996). These events marked the full internationalization of the conflict into an international sphere where support for self-determination had once again become widespread. This was key in the success of various Tibetan efforts to obtain international support, which we will examine in the next section.

When it comes to the Xinjiang conflict, its peak is usually associated with the years following 9/11 and the rise of modern international terrorism, but this does not mean that the conflict was not present before. The Uyghur and Xinjiang issues were never embedded into the predominant global geopolitical discourse of the Cold War like other intrastate conflicts which were turned into

proxy wars, due to China's international isolation up to the 1970s and, according to Clarke (2015), the regional influence of the Soviet Union. For Clarke, Xinjiang's geographical location meant that Uyghur separatism was largely contained within Sino-Soviet relations, even if said relationship was not always positive. Nonetheless, it appears to be the presence of the USSR that kept China from taking stronger measures regarding security in Xinjiang (Kamalov, 2009), or rather, that its sudden absence precipitated a change of strategy in terms of security in the region that opened it up to more external influences. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the loss of Soviet control over central Asia meant the creation of new states, which resulted in greater instability on the other side of the borders of Xinjiang, especially given the Islamic revival that was part of this process. The new Chinese strategy regarding Xinjiang was based on ensuring stability and security via economic growth, which would be achieved by opening Xinjiang to Central Asia (Clarke, 2015). However, this also gave Xinjiang Uyghurs the opportunity to re-establish links with Uyghurs living in the new Central Asian republics, which marked the start of the internationalization of the Xinjiang issue in its modern form.

Between 1990 and the turn of the century, China still managed to keep the international dimension of Uyghur resistance in check via organizations such as the Shanghai Five<sup>2</sup>. However, the consolidation of Islamic movements in Central Asia—particularly the Taliban in Afghanistan—and the 9/11 attacks in the US, precipitated a new change in strategy: this time, China voluntarily internationalized the Xinjiang issue. Echoing the shift in US Foreign policy, China declared its own War on Terror and, although foreign leaders are reluctant to equate the American War on Terror with domestic crackdowns on separatists, the following rise of terrorist attacks linked to religion, and particularly to Islam, has not done Uyghurs any favors. According to Rapoport (2013), this current wave of religious terrorism is the most destructive by far, as perpetrators engage in tactics that are deadlier than ever before and the international dimension of the wave is stronger than that of the preceding ones. This has no doubt affected the general international perception of Islam. Studies carried out by the Pew Research Center (2006; 2017) show that many in the West perceive Muslims to be arrogant, intolerant and fanatical and, therefore, likely to harbor violent tendencies, which only fosters international concerns over Islamic extremism. In comparison, the feelings towards Buddhism are neutral to positive, which is attributed to a widespread belief that Buddhist

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1.



values hinge around peace and harmony. This gave Tibetans an advantage over Uyghurs in terms of obtaining international support from Western states.

A final element that must be considered is the stage of development of international human rights at the time of the conflict peak. Based on the commonly used three-generation classification of rights, at the time of the Tibetan uprisings, only the first two generations were anywhere near being enshrined in international law through binding agreements. Furthermore, at this time, the Cold War bipolar context resulted in a relatively clean split between Western states, who prioritized first generation (i.e. civil and political) rights, and Eastern states, who focused on second generation (i.e. economic, social, and cultural) rights (Domaradzki, Khvostova, and Pupovac, 2019). The former category includes rights with clear links to the Tibetan position, such as freedom of religion or political participation, or the prohibition of torture and inhumane treatment. The latter category is more closely linked to rights emphasized by Beijing, related to fulfilment of basic and economic needs. These positions regarding human rights would have influenced the attitude of various states regarding Tibet and willingness to provide international support.

The third generation of rights did not achieve widespread recognition until the 1990s and was therefore absent during the most intense decades of the Tibetan issue evolving instead at the same time as the conflict in Xinjiang. This is the generation that directly addresses the right to self-determination, as well as the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, among other categories (Viljoen, 2009). Its key distinguishing characteristic is that rights included address overlapping global concerns and therefore demand a responsibility that lies beyond the nation state, relying greatly on international law instead. This led to the adoption of international declarations that were of great relevance to the situations in both Xinjiang and Tibet, particularly the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities which, although non-binding, is part of an increasingly elaborate international system that monitors the situation of minority groups all over the world (Viljoen, 2009). As such, there was a visible increase in attention towards Chinese treatment of their own minorities in terms of human rights, which has undoubtedly also played a role in the international presence and support of the minorities involved.

In brief, internationalization of the Tibet issue was achieved at the end of the 1950s, at a time when the UN had once again began to champion the right to self-determination, along with the first and second generations of human rights,

which aligned many states in the Western world with the Tibetan point of view. The generally peaceful and harmonious perception of Buddhism has also positively influenced the international perception of Tibet, as opposed to the general Western perception of Islam, especially in the wake of 9/11, which has led to the majority of the Uyghurs allies being in the Muslim world. Internationalization of the Uyghur issue was also limited by its border with the Soviet Union until the collapse of the latter, which resulted in regional instability that Beijing attempted to resolve via internationalization. Nonetheless, full internationalization took place at a time when the third generation of human rights was on the rise and, consequently, so was international support for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. With these key contextual elements in mind, we now move on to the analysis of the impact of resistance via transnational social movements.

#### IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL FORMS OF RESISTANCE

The factors hitherto presented gave way to specific forms of transnational resistance. In this section, we will compare key aspects of transnational resistance by both minorities, focusing specifically on the nature and role of leaders, the role of politically active diasporas in influencing public opinion in their host country, and their role in obtaining support at the international level.

#### RESISTANCE CENTRALIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

Looking first at the nature of leadership in both cases, it quickly becomes apparent that leadership roles are closely linked to religion. In Tibet, the predominant religion is Tibetan Buddhism, of which the Dalai Lama is the foremost spiritual leader. As such, although he is no longer the official political leader, he still remains the *de facto* leader of Tibet (Tuttle and Schaeffer, 2013; Yardley and Wong, 2011). Therefore, Tibetans have a clear leadership figure in Tenzin Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. This sort of centralized structure has ensured the coordination of international action by Tibetans, resulting in the projection of a unified international image opposing the narrative presented by Beijing (Teufel Dreyer, 2010). This unified narrative has been made public through the publication of White Papers and other accompanying documents by the CTA. The Dalai Lama's role as a unifying figurehead became particularly apparent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when he travelled widely, explaining the conflict in other states, and working to gain international support. These

early successes marked the birth of the international Tibet lobby, and were directly responsible for the expansion and professionalization of the network. The Dalai Lama was particularly successful in Washington, greatly contributing to the formation of the politically active Tibetan diaspora in the US, which would later serve as a stepping-stone to obtain support from other states, international organizations, and even celebrities (Noakes, 2012).

The centralized structure of Tibetan Buddhism and, consequently, transnational Tibetan action, contrasts with the more decentralized nature of Islam, which is in turn reflected in instances of Uyghur transnational action. The absence of a clear, unifying figurehead means that positions further towards the end of the spectrums are more visible, whereas a centralized structure means that the average position, which is of a more moderate nature, would play a pivotal role (Auriol and Platteau, 2017). This means that, rather than one unified narrative, Uyghurs are engaging in multiple approaches to resistance to Beijing authorities: from propaganda, to cultural and symbolic resistance, to violence and attacks. The latter strategy is often the most visible, if only because of the increased impact and more intense media coverage. Thus, there is no clear leader, but rather multiple relatively well-known figures, ranging from academics to extremist leaders. On one end of the spectrum, we find figures such as Ilham Tohti, an Uyghur economist currently imprisoned in China on separatism charges who has nonetheless been internationally recognized as a voice of moderation and reconciliation. He has been awarded multiple human rights-related international awards, including the Václav Havel Prize, the Martin Ennals Award, and, most recently, the Sakharov Prize (Sánchez, 2019). On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have individuals such as Mehmet Emin Hazret, leader of the ETLO, who stands accused of violent incidents both in and beyond the borders of Xinjiang, or ETIM leader Abdullah Mansour, recognized as having links to Al-Qaeda by the US and the UN, among others.

From this we can infer that the differences in leadership and level of centralization of the transnational resistance have an influence on the effectiveness of resistance efforts, particularly in terms of presenting a unified narrative strong enough to oppose the way in which Beijing presented the conflict internationally, an essential step in obtaining international support. Nonetheless, this does not mean that transnational Tibetan efforts are fully unified. Since the formation of the transnational Tibetan network, the Dalai Lama himself has stated that he is no longer pursuing full independence for Tibet, but rather campaigns for increased autonomy of Tibet within China, while groups remain abroad that still pursue total independence (Crowe, 2013).

#### DIASPORA INFLUENCE ON HOST STATE PUBLIC OPINION

Within the previously described transnational resistance systems, diasporas are often among the main actors, especially when it comes to influencing the politics of their host states. As previously established, diaspora members are often grouped in the states bordering with their homeland: India in the case of Tibetans, Kazakhstan in the case of Uyghurs. There is no denying that these diaspora groups are politically active, in fact it is precisely the Tibetan diaspora in India who keeps the CTA running, for example. However, in terms of international impact, the diasporas in other states further away from the original location of the conflict have gained paramount importance. As was previously mentioned, the United States holds the third highest number of individuals belonging to the Tibetan diaspora (9,000). In the case of the Uyghurs, a similar situation takes place in Turkey, where over 30,000 ethnic Uyghurs reside. It is comparable in the sense that, although located further away from the conflict itself, the diaspora members residing in these states have both managed to achieve certain relevance, to the point where they have been able to influence public opinion and, therefore, the national position regarding the corresponding conflict, in favor of the minority to which they belong.

In the case of Tibet, diaspora members residing in the US have been able to build on the initial success the Dalai Lama achieved there during his travels in the 1980s and 1990s. They have since managed to influence public opinion via the work of both individuals and organizations. Thubte Jigme Norbu, elder brother of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, is a relevant example of the former. Since moving to the US in the 1950s and becoming a prominent civil rights activist, and until his death in 2008, Norbu singlehandedly increased awareness of the Tibetan conflict in his new country of residence through lectures, publications, and the creation of organizations such as the Tibetan Cultural Centre and the NGO known as the International Tibet Independence movement (ITIM, 2018). By making his knowledge of Tibet and the Tibetan cause widely available, he had an impact on public opinion, which was instrumental in having US citizens take up the cause for themselves, including celebrities such as American actor Richard Gere.

Norbu's ITIM is a prime example of an organization that has influenced public opinion by hosting awareness-creating events, such as walks for Tibetan freedom and, more recently, by actively participating in protests against the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Similar organizations exist throughout the world, mostly in Western states and states with a higher number of Tibetans residing within its

borders. Examples include the International Tibetan Aid Organization in the Netherlands, the Tibetan Youth Congress in India, and the Free Tibet Campaign in London (MacPherson et al., 2008). The network created by the Tibetan diaspora has continued to expand, to the point where the global Tibet Movement resulted in coordinated marches and protests around the world again regarding the fact that the 2008 Olympics were to take place in Beijing, as well as calls for international leaders not to attend competitions (Barnett, 2009). All these efforts, along with the generally positive perception of key elements of the Tibetan identity, such as Buddhism, have resulted in the predominance within public opinion in Western states of positions favorable to Tibet.

It is also possible to pinpoint instances in which the Uyghur Diaspora in Turkey has managed to influence the public opinion there, as well as in other states in the region. The initial stages of Uyghur settlement in Turkey were favoured not by the convincing rhetoric of a centralized leader, as was the case of Tibet, but rather by shared historical, ethnic, and religious ties, as Uyghurs have Turkic ethnic origins and, like those living in Turkey, are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Based on these ties, individuals such as internationally famous Uyghur musician Abdurehim Heyit have played an important part in improving Turkish public opinion on the matter. Heyit engaged in overseas trips to promote elements of Uyghur culture. He visited Turkey often, and his efforts cast him in the role of bridge between the Uyghur and Turkish cultures (Tiezzi, 2019). It was also due to these ties that Turkey allowed Uyghur refugees and leaders to settle in its territory, even permitting the creation of organizations such as the Eastern Turkestan National Congress, which sought to preserve Uyghur culture and provide pro-Uyghur movements with support (Shichor, 2009a). These organizations have, however, experienced only limited success, especially since the Turkish Government, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has increased the value it places on its relationship with China, motivated by the rising Chinese investment in the nation as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative (Tiezzi, 2019). Consequently, newer organizations are being established in Western states, such as the World Uyghur Congress, headquartered in Munich. This organization is now widely considered to represent most Uyghur diaspora associations, a feat accomplished by choosing a more moderate approach than previous organizations, underlining human rights, self-determination, and democracy, rather than independence itself (Shichor, 2009b). This non-profit NGO has also been instrumental in improving public support for Uyghurs and encouraging people around the world to mobilize in their favour. This has even been felt in Turkey where, despite the economic ties to China, public opinion

tends to favour Uyghurs, as shown by their participation in mass-anti-China protests that broke out in response to reports that China was applying increasing restrictions to Uyghur expressions of their Muslim faith (Tiezzi, 2019).

Both the Tibetan and the Uyghur diasporas have managed to tilt the scales of public opinion in these states in their favour. Examples of political activities carried out by both diasporas show that the path to success can include both individual actions and the efforts of formal groupings, mostly of the NGO category. By comparing both diasporas it is also possible to conclude that a more moderate stance will be more effective when it comes to garnering the support of the public, as shown by the issues met by the first Uyghur diaspora groupings. Nonetheless, the ability to influence public opinion demonstrated by both diasporas has proven to be of great importance since, as we will discuss in the following section, public opinion can be a determining factor of national positions adopted by states and, consequently, of the positions of international organizations who are constituted by said state actors.

#### DIASPORA ROLE IN OBTAINING STATE AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION SUPPORT

There is a general consensus in academia that public opinion plays a role in decisions made by the executive. Although it may not determine the details of government policies, it sets certain limits within which public officials must work: if there is a widespread demand being voiced, policymakers will usually attempt to satisfy it, or at least to avoid decisions they believe will be unwelcome (Burstein, 2003). This also affects a State's foreign policy for governments engaging in diplomacy, negotiations, and other facets of foreign policy must deal not only with the other parties with which they are negotiating, but also with internal pressures, and must therefore attempt to, through their foreign policy, fulfill these domestic demands to the furthest extent possible while limiting adverse consequences (Putnam, 1988).

This process is very visible in the case of Turkey and the position of its national public opinion in favor of the Uyghurs. On February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, as a result of the protests against Beijing's restrictions of Uyghur freedom of religion, the Turkish government issued a statement in which it denounced China for violating the fundamental human rights of Muslim communities in Xinjiang, and particularly those of the Uyghurs. Through this statement, Turkey would become one of the small number of majority-Muslim states that has openly criticized Beijing for its treatment of Uyghurs, particularly the mass detentions (Tiezzi, 2019). Before

this statement, Erdogan's administration had remained silent in the face of Chinese treatment of Uyghurs. However, maintaining this silence was becoming increasingly more costly for the Turkish government: opposition parties had been organizing protests to urge the ruling party, to take action on the matter, particularly after they rejected the opposition's push for a parliamentary motion to investigate the state of Uyghur rights in Xinjiang. The months prior to the statement, protests throughout the peninsula had been more and more frequent, increasing the pressure on the government (Middle East Monitor, 2020; Tiezzi, 2019).

Similarly, increasing support of Tibet in US public opinion has been a key factor in bringing about several instances of US legislation that constitute explicit support for Tibet, the most notable of which is the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002. This document, which was updated in 2019, is the core guiding document of US policy toward Tibet which, according to the text, focuses around promoting substantial dialogue between the PRC and the Dalai Lama, but also includes the protection of Tibet's cultural, religious, linguistic, and overall national identity through initiatives such as assistance to Tibetan NGOs operating in China, assistance to refugees, or educational and cultural exchanges with Tibet (Lawrence, 2014). This document amounts to the culmination of the strong interest in Tibet the US has displayed since the Dalai Lama first visited them in the 1980s, as manifested via dozens of Tibet-related laws and resolutions and by the numerous visits of the Dalai Lama and, more recently, the political leader of the CTA.

Public opinion calls strong enough to be felt at national foreign policy levels will consequently also have an impact in international organizations. The CTA has identified over a hundred international resolutions in favour of Tibet, not the least of which are the three resolutions passed by the UN General assembly calling for respect of human rights in Tibet (i.e. 1353, 1723, and 2079) (MacPherson et al, 2008). There have also been calls for a UN resolution regarding the situation in Xinjiang, as well as a series of joint declarations by states, such as the one delivered in October of 2019 at the UN General Assembly on behalf of 23 countries, and by human rights and civil society organizations, delivered in February of the same year (Charbonneau, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Similar initiatives have also been brought up in other international bodies, such as the European Parliament (2019), or even the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, of which the Central Tibetan Administration and World Uyghur Congress are both members (UNPO, 2020). It is no secret that China holds considerable influence in some of these bodies.

This is particularly true in the case of the United Nations, as the second largest contributor to the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets, as well as being a permanent member with veto power on the UN Security Council (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; Security Council Report, 2020). Nonetheless, the issue of Chinese treatment of Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other minorities was brought up repeatedly in China's most recent Universal Periodic Review. The issue was tackled by Western states (USA, EU states, Australia, New Zealand), Muslim states (Afghanistan, Pakistan), neighbouring Asian states (South Korea, Nepal, Bangladesh, Laos), and other developing nations in areas such as Latin America and Africa, regions where China has a strong economic hold (UNCHR, 2018).

Overall, despite China's increasing international influence and power, there are still states and international organizations willing to publicly declare, at least to an extent, their support for Tibetans and Uyghurs. Domestic pressures linked to public opinion have led states in which politically active diaspora members reside to issue declarations and legislation in support of these minorities. In some cases, this has taken place after years of open support, as is the case of the US regarding Tibet, whereas in others, such as Turkey, domestic pressures have had to work against government misgivings in order to influence state foreign policy. The support shown by these states is then echoed in international organizations exercising certain levels of normative power in the international system, such as the United Nations. Therefore, it can be said that the actions initiated at a domestic level by members of the Uyghur and Tibetan diasporas living abroad have been magnified, reaching the international sphere. We therefore find ourselves before two thriving transnational social movements, who play an important role in providing international support for those who remain in their homeland. This is not to say that these movements are without issues—for example, authors such as Roche (2019) have argued that some aspects of the Tibetan global movement are furthering the erosion of Tibetan languages instead of protecting them—, but nonetheless, evidence suggests that these minorities would be in a much worse position than they are today had the force of their respective diasporas not been on their side.

## CONCLUSION

The current structure of the international sphere makes Waltz's (1959) systemic level an essential part not just of every state's foreign policy but also of its domestic political sphere. Diasporas are an important aspect of this, as increased



interconnectivity and transnational networks are favoring the growth and spread of these groups. Such is the case of the Tibetan and Uyghur diasporas, whose voice has grown louder and has caught the attention of Chinese authorities and key international players alike.

There is no doubt that the global context in which internationalization and transnational mobilization takes place influences the nature and effectiveness of transnational activity. We have seen how the UN's push in terms of self-determination has had some influence, for example, as it provided a favorable context for the Dalai Lama's quest for international support. However, this value became part of international binding human rights instruments closer to the peak of the Uyghur conflict, so timing was not as defining in the sense that this value is still internationally important now: both minorities have benefited from support based on this principle. There are, however, other elements of the international context that did mark a difference between the two case studies, specifically by limiting Uyghur access to international support: perception of Islam remains mediocre at best in Western nations, which definitely limits government activity in their favor. Therefore, support for Uyghurs in states such as the US is limited, whereas in Turkey, the average citizen finds it easier to identify with the Uyghurs due to shared ethnic and religious identities. It is therefore more accurate to say that increased international intervention by Western actors, rather than by the international community in general, will remain unlikely as long as the association of Islam with international terrorism persists. Similarly, a nuance must also be added to the hypothesis regarding the role of the USSR in keeping the Uyghur issue out of the international public eye: it was not necessarily that the Soviet Union worried about hushing up the situation in Xinjiang, but rather that the geographic location of said region meant that, upon the collapse of the USSR, it was exposed to a great deal of instability that precipitated changes in the Chinese security strategy in the area, through which it was opened up to more external influences.

These are a few of the key factors that diasporas must take into account when operating as part of a transnational social movement. Some TSM structures have proven to be more effective than others, as can be seen when comparing the centralized Tibetan global movement with the efforts of the Uyghur diaspora. Nonetheless, their ability to garner the sympathy of public opinion for their cause in Muslim states still grants them substantial influence as, by causing alterations in Turkey's foreign policy, they can subsequently influence that of neighboring states. The Tibetan diaspora has pursued US support via a similar process, which has garnered them a lot of international support thanks to US

influence as an international superpower. Given the nature of these processes, diaspora groups working from more developed nations have obtained a greater international presence, as the states where they operate currently hold more weight in the international sphere. This is not an independent variable, however, as the type of approach will also affect TSM effectiveness regardless of the location of its members. This is exemplified by the Uyghur groups we have examined, which achieved greater effectiveness in both Western and non-Western states after adopting a more moderate, human rights-based approach.

Building on the variables we have analysed, it can be concluded that diaspora-based transnational social movements do indeed hold certain influence in strengthening international opposition to Chinese treatment of ethnic minorities. The Tibetan and Uyghur diasporas have achieved significant influence by generating links between their ethnic minorities and inhabitants of other nations, to the point where public opinion has influenced the foreign policy of multiple states in their favor. They have been a key element in ensuring that, despite China's increasing international influence and power, there are still states and, subsequently, international organizations, willing to position themselves opposite China on this matter. We can see examples of this even within the United Nations, where China holds great influence due to its status as a global economic power. However, instead of this resulting in other states giving China *carte blanche* to go against generally accepted international norms such as human rights, as we might have expected, states are voicing their concern through official channels, such as the universal periodic reviews.

Based on these results, it is undeniable that TSMs, the new actors on the international scene, hold a great deal of potential, not only regarding issues regarding minority treatment, but also on other global concerns, such as environmental or gender equality issues, thanks to the weight afforded to them by globalization and technological advances, particularly those regarding communications and social media. Given the evolution of China in the last decades, it is especially important not to underestimate the effect that these movements can have in terms of undermining the state's rise. We have seen that they have already gained the strength necessary to oppose Chinese narratives at the international level, and now it remains to be seen whether transnational social movements are able to adapt to the changing polarity of the international system. For Tibetans and Uyghurs around the globe, the limitations being increasingly experienced by the US, especially in Asia-Pacific, and the rise of China as its main challenger, may limit the effectiveness of their current strategies, which will have to be adapted to new international structures, should

they arise. Both diasporas are already undergoing shifts, towards greater centralization in the case of Uyghurs and towards a possible existential crisis due to the Dalai Lama's new position that is no longer based on pursuing statehood, in the case of Tibet. Therefore, it is in the interests of academics and policymakers to continue to pay attention to these groups, and to the evolution of their activities, both in their own right and as part of the study of the ability of norm-resistant states to re-shape global governance.

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**Blanca Marabini San Martín** holds an MSc in Political Science: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Development at Leiden University, as well as a Double BA in International Relations and Translation and Interpreting (EN/DE>ES) from Comillas Pontifical University, during which she studied abroad at SOAS and the Freie Universität Berlin. She has pursued her passion for Chinese foreign policy and identity politics via internships in think tanks such as the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE-CESEDEN) and the Spanish Chinese Policy Observatory, as well as her work in European youth organizations such as the European Student Think Tank. She is currently an assistant in the New Silk Roads project at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and holds the position of Editor in Chief at European Guanxi. [blancamarsanm@gmail.com](mailto:blancamarsanm@gmail.com)