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Nationalism and social media in China: a case study of Chinese nationalist movement against Muslim minorities on Sina Weibo
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Nationalism and social media in China: a case study of Chinese
nationalist movement against Muslim minorities on Sina Weibo

By

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Abstract

This thesis provides a case study of the Han nationalism on Sina Weibo which attacks Muslim minorities and current official ethnic policies. This thesis mainly uses Melucci's (1996) framework of collective identity process to analyse this movement, discussing how the national identity and definition of nation evolve within it. By using case study approach and textual analysis method to study the data collected from Sina Weibo, this thesis is belonging to qualitative research. This thesis reveals that under the influence of both platform and government, the Han nationalist movement has forcibly adopted the official nationalist discourses to construct their narratives and ideas to avoid intervention and prosecution from government. This thesis also reveals that the CCP government has silently tolerated this movement that de facto challenges its power on ethnic issue.

Keywords: nationalism, Han chauvinism, Chinese nation-state, Muslim minorities, Sina Weibo, CCP, Uyghurs

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since entering the second decade of 21st century, the world has been experiencing the changes, development, and challenges brought by social media. In contrast to the earlier thoughts that social media would facilitate the communication among people from different areas around the world with high quality and positive consequences, in fact, the social media always become the post-truth sphere filled with rumours, conspiracy theories, and fake news (McIntyre, 2018). Instead of speech and behaviour based on science and reason, the hate speech and radical theories sometimes will ironically attract more attentions and gain more popularity. In recent years, especially after the pandemic of Covid – 19 broke out, Donald Trump and his followers have again provided an example for this point via their misuse of social media like Twitter (Wells, Zhang, Lukito, and Pevehouse, 2020). Moreover, he is not an isolated case since right-wing populism has been increasing on Western social media due to complicated social issues, especially the collapse of economy.

The right-wing ideologies today, especially in Europe and America, has always been involved with religious extremism, ultra-nationalism, Islamophobia, racism, sexism, etc... (Fuchs, 2018; Kimmel and Ferber, 2000; Klammer and Goetz, 2017; Sotiris, 2015). These right-wing trends are not independent but always overlapped or linked with each other. Especially the ultra-nationalism, racism, and Islamophobia are usually intersected in those far right-wing movements today in Western society, particularly represented on social media platforms (Edwards, 2023). There are plenty of scholars focusing on such phenomenon in West, thus,

this research project is not intending to touch that explored field. This project, on the other side, is planning to provide a picture of a nationalist movement bearing the similar (far) right-wing characteristics on one of the most popular Chinese social media platforms: Sina Weibo. Although the field of Chinese nationalism has also been well explored by various scholars, however, it is found that the previous research concerning this field generally discuss about the nationalism opposing foreign countries, especially US and Japan, both of which have serious and deep conflicts with China in last century. Such situation is specifically caused by the broad environment that CCP state regime has been promoting and deeply implementing relevant patriotism and nationalism via education of hate in the whole society, which provides the soils for that kind of anti-foreign nationalist movements grow up and evolve. Or, from another side, although some scholars focus on the Han ethnic nationalism (Carrico, 2017), while they have emphasized the conflicts between Han majority and Machu ethnicity, the later used to rule over China for nearly three centuries before 1911 and seriously oppressed Han people during its dominance. Both of kinds have attracted academic attention and careful studies to certain extent, while scholars seldomly explored the nationalism against Muslims. In recent years, the tragedies among Uyghur Muslims have made Western scholars turn their eyes towards the Muslim minorities living in China, though mainly from the angle of criticizing state regime's oppression. Studies on the nationalism that attacks those Chinese-speaking Muslims like Hui people are seriously lacked. Also, most of the works on Chinese nationalism are discussing the cases taking place in the pre social media era, or the early stages when social media did not get today's popularity in that country. Thus, such phenomenon provides an academic gap for this project to fill in.

However, this condition is still understandable since that before 2016, most of the nationalist sentiments circulated on Chinese internet only orienting to the foreigners, which have also

been manipulated, guided, and even supported by Chinese government to consolidate its rule over the state. Meanwhile, the Han nationalism against Manchu has obtained its popularity via diverse forms as well, especially the Han clothes movement (汉服运动) which has attracted many young people in recent years (Carrico, 2017). The nationalism attacking Muslim minorities, on the contrary, due to the sensitivity of its topics in Chinese society, particularly those concerning the ethnic policies and ethnic or national unity promoted by the government, had not been widely spread and participated into certain extent before. However, the situation changed since March, 2016, alongside with the activism against a Halal food legislation which aims at enacting national standards and regulations for producing Halal food that basically benefits Muslims, Sina Weibo has witnessed various and continuous activities criticizing Halal issues, boycotting Muslim minorities, calling for reforming current ethnic policies, and eventually extending its hostility to all the minorities. These participants have successfully created and maintained a collective nationalist movement on that popular platform, which is rarely intervened or oppressed by government. Thus, the process that how they proceed and sustain it on that platform is valuable for deeper study.

Furthermore, the social, cultural, political, and economical environment in China today have determined the special ecology on social media platforms there, the influence of which on the social movements also deserves study to examine previous research findings. By comparing the findings from the process within the movement and those from the influence from outside factors, it might be possible to discover the authentic intentions behind such movement as well. Such finding will not only contribute to further research on the relations between social media and movements, while also help reflect the deep reasons that make such radical nationalism take place in China under Xi Jinping's dictatorship today.

Therefore, after engaging current literature, this project adopted three types of theories and approaches to build a theoretical framework. Firstly, considering the movement's nationalist essence, the Özkırmılı's (2000) post-modernist approach to nationalist movement is adopted, by attaching insights brought from various schools to nationalism before. Secondly, since the national identity operates as a collective identification in the nationalist movement, the Melucci's (1996) framework of collective identity process is employed as well. Thirdly, in order to make the whole framework applicable for case on Sina Weibo, various concepts, insights, and findings about social media and movements are also brought from current literature to help improve the collective identity framework. Thus, a new framework for studying nationalism on Sina Weibo has been composed for further analysis.

This study proposes two main research questions:

1) How does the use of Sina Weibo affect the process of collective identity for the nationalist movement?

sub-question a: How does the definition or boundary of nation evolve on Sina Weibo?

sub-question b: How does Sina Weibo influence the circulation and reproduction of nationalist discourses?

2) How does the CCP government influence the movement?

sub-question a: How does state power affect the development and activities of the movement through policy and regulation? How has the government responded to the movement?

sub-question b: How does the government influence the participants' activities by intervening, implicitly or explicitly, on the Sina Weibo platform?

In order to answer these research questions, this project used the qualitative research approach, consisting of case study and textual analysis, to explore the data collected from Weibo platform. By searching the influential posts by both influencers and other user accounts during the movement, as well as the top 10 comments and hot reposts they have received, this project finally established a dataset including 2339 texts for analysing two major events of the movement: anti-Halal event, and anti-mark-adding-policy event.

Additionally, the document analysis is also applied to research government's activities during the movement, as well as its official standpoint concerning ethnic issue.

Chapter overview

The main body of this thesis is divided into 9 chapters:

Chapter 2 the contextual chapter: this chapter introduces the basic background information about nationalist discourses in Chinese society, overview on previous research findings on nationalist movements in China, background information about Muslim minorities including both Chinese-speaking Hui people and Turkic Muslims like Uyghurs, as well as background information about recent CCP's ethnic and religious policies in relevance with this study;

Chapter 3 Conceptual framework on nationalism: this chapter builds the applicable approach to analysing nationalist movement within established nation-state by combining post-modernist approach to nationalism and collective identity process to social movement. The insights from previous nationalism schools including primordialism, modernism, ethno-symbolism, banal nationalism, imagined communities, and related concepts about collective identity are also attached to improve the framework;

Chapter 4 Improvements on Melucci's framework: this chapter engage various scholars on social media and social movement, adopting current academic improvements concerning the characteristics about social movements on the social media platforms to revise the framework of collective identity process;

Chapter 5 methodology;

Chapter 6 Case study 1 Anti-Halal event: this chapter analyses how the participants constructed, developed, and sustained the national identity while also reproducing their own narratives and generating common ideas concerning Halal issue and nation;

Chapter 7 Case study 2 Anti-mark-adding-policy event: this chapter provides the analysis on another event of this movement to specifically show how the definition and boundary work of nation evolves depending on the changing environment, while also discovering the Han chauvinist essence of this movement;

Chapter 8 The influence of the Sina Weibo platform on the movement: this chapter explores how participants strategically employed the Weibo platform to proceed and steer their actions, while also examining the platform's influence on the movement, as well as the government action on the platform, especially concerning the intervention issue;

Chapter 9 Discussion: by re-engaging the literature review, this chapter applies the framework to the analysis findings to answer the research questions;

Chapter 10 Conclusion: this chapter mainly proposes several points for future research, as well as further discusses the authentic characteristics and classification of this movement.

Chapter 2

Contextual Chapter

2.1 Definition of 'Nation' in current Chinese nationalist discourse

In the definition of modern Western academia, upsurge of the concept about 'Nation' can be traced to the period after the Enlightenment. According to Anderson (2006), it is a notion of imagined communities about differentiating national identities that accompanied by the development of bourgeois ideologies and capitalism. However, when exploring the issues of nationalism in contemporary China, which means the PRC country after 1949, the definition of 'Nation' concept should be reconsidered due to the distinct historical and social origins. As the literature points out, after obtaining the sovereignty of Mainland China, considering the issues of nation and nationality, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) firstly introduced a set of national policies known as the Marx-Lenin-Stalin model, which have been successfully practiced by Soviet Union government (Carrico, 2017; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Zhao, 1998). According to the standard that the ethnic groups sharing common territories, the same cultural language, similar economic models, and psychological nature can be categorized to one nation or ethnicity, the CCP government has successively identified and recognized 55 ethnic minorities (*少数民族/shaoshu minzu*) with their specific characteristics (Carrico, 2017; Zhao, 1998). With the Han nation (*汉族/hanzu*), which forms the majority of Chinese

population and has long been in absolute dominance in the history of China, both culturally and politically, currently there are 56 different officially-recognized nations in the PRC state.

Meanwhile, in order to prevent any ethnic nation with strong sense of self-identification from developing separatist sentiments to undermine the unity and stability of PRC, CCP has reproduced a conception of 'meta-nation': the 'Chinese Nation' (*zhonghua minzu*), that encompasses all Chinese citizens or national members, though still acknowledging the ethnic differences (Carrico, 2017; Dikotter, 2005; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Feng, 2007; Guo, 2003; Zhao, 1998). Such meta-nation has been defined as the main body of the entire country (Fitzgerald, 1996). This conception not only calls for all Chinese citizens to show political loyalty to the PRC country, but also opposes a 'Big Han chauvinism' to ensure internal harmony and stability, producing a so-called nation-state – 'a sovereign state formed by the people resident in it (Shen, 2007, p. 14)' (Cong, 2009; Dikotter, 2005; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Feng, 2007; Fitzgerald, 1996; Gries, 2004; Guo, 2003; Hizi, 2019; Jiang, 2012; Wang, 2006; Zhao, 1998; Zhao, 2005; Zou, 2019). According to previous research, the nationalism based on such nation-state has laid the foundation for several Chinese nationalist movements after the '1989 Tiananmen Incident' (Hughes, 2006; Shen, 2007). Hence, in order to avoid confusion, in this research, when referring to the meta-nation or nation-state constructed by CCP, the term 'nation' will be used, while for particular ethnic groups like Han majority and other minorities, the term 'ethnicity' will be adopted to clarify the differences between politically constructed nation and already existing ones, although in Chinese discourse both are translated as *minzu* (民族).

2.2 Official Patriotic Nationalism in Post Tiananmen era

On the foundation of the official conception of the nation-state, CCP has stipulated a patriotic nationalism as one of the core concepts of showing loyalty and obedience to the country led by it since 1949 (Hughes, 2006; Unger, 1996). However, in the Mao era, such nationalism was subdued by radical revolutionist ideologies included in Mao Zedong Thought by CCP (Unger, 1996). After implementing the Reform and Opening-up policy, especially after experiencing various political movements during 1980s and the 1989 democracy movement- 'Tiananmen Incident', CCP has practically employed the patriotic nationalism as the core idea of its ruling, and as a significant supplement to its official ideology, the communism (Fitzgerald, 1996; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Guo, 2003; Hughes, 2006; Jiang, 2012; Townsend, 1996; Zhao, 1998). The scholars have listed the following reasons why CCP carried out such changes:

Firstly, alongside with the Tiananmen Massacre and Fall of Communism after 1989, the belief systems of communism de facto have encountered a complete collapse, which shook the theoretical basis of CCP's ruling status and seriously challenged its sovereignty. Chinese society's distrustful attitudes to communist ideologies, especially Mao Zedong thought, which has been illustrated as the very doctrine of CCP and PRC, aggravated such crisis of faith. This situation propelled the CCP to develop an alternative doctrine acceptable to majority of the country to consolidate its regime (Hughes, 2006; Jiang, 2012; Unger, 1996; Zhao, 1998).

Secondly, under the wave of Globalization, the Reform and Opening-up policy and introduction of market-oriented economic systems resulted in a situation where the whole country was faced with the tremendous shock and impact brought by foreign political and economic cultures, especially the Western neo-liberalism. Such circumstances lead to the inconformity and disharmony between an outdated ideological system and an accelerated modernizing society, which will also cause the serious questions against the rationality and legitimacy of CCP's authority if lacking timely theoretical adjustments and modifications (Hughes, 2006; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Nyiri, 2005; Pye, 1996; Unger, 1996).

Finally, since CCP resists structural change and insists on the current undemocratic political model, while abandoning the Stalinist ideas and blocking pluralism, the only most efficient approach for CCP to wining accredit and support from people and maintaining social stability is promoting Statist nationalism and portraying itself as the giant guardian of the state (Cong, 2009; Feng, 2007; Hughes, 2006; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Shen, 2007; Unger, 1996; Zhao, 1998; Zou, 2019).

As Greenfeld (1992) claims, 'Power of nationalism locates the source of individual identity within a people, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity' (p. 3). Since CCP has defined the nation-state including all of Chinese citizens at the very beginning of PRC, the related nationalism logically orients to

the patriotic rhetoric emphasizing the loyalty to the whole state, then leading to the obedience to the super-guardian de jure, the CCP regime, self-consistently rationalizing CCP's ruling power, legitimacy and reigning position (Cong, 2009; Feng, 2007; Fitzgerald, 1996; Guo, 2003; Hughes, 2006; Jiang, 2012; Pye, 1996; Shen, 2007; Townsend, 1996; Unger, 1996; Zhao, 1998; Zou, 2019). As scholars indicate, in fact this kind of nationalism is a combination of patriotism and totalitarian regime (Feng, 2007; Hughes, 2006; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Townsend, 1996; Zou, 2019). Due to that, from 1990s, Chinese government has been propagandizing this official patriotic nationalism and proclaimed it as core value of Chinese society, sparing no effort to popularize it via mass media and school education (Carrico, 2017; Cong, 2009; Guo, Cheong and Chen, 2007; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Modongal, 2016; Schein, 2005; Shen, 2007).

2.2.1 Secularism, national security, and official nationalism

Since CCP regime has adopted the nationalism as its official ideology after 1989, it is worthy of briefly introducing the relations between the concepts of secularism and national security, and such kind of official nationalism, which this research will explore later as well.

2.2.1.1 Secularism and nation-state

In modern China, secularism is a significant theme rooted in the society, which is originally promoted by CCP and its government. In traditional Confucianism, which used to be the official ideology of ancient China, there exists some thoughts similar to modern secularism such as keeping away from gods but concentrating on daily life and the world, acknowledged by scholars as a kind of premodern secularism (King and Bond, 1985; Kuo, 2013; Paramore, 2017; Rogacz, 2018; Taylor and Arbuckle, 1995; Xu and Wang, 2018). However, religions and folk beliefs still occupied a large proportion in traditional Chinese culture, especially among the ordinary people who lived under feudal system and didn't have the chance to enter the literati and officialdom class, the ruling class of ancient China (Adler, 2002; Ching, 2016; Fowler and Fowler, 2008; Teiser et al., 1996). Thus, from the ancient time until CCP taking over the state, various religions including Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam and several folks believes had great influence on ordinary people's thoughts and daily life, throughout cultural, economic and social territories (Adler, 2002; Ching, 2016; Fowler and Fowler, 2008; Teiser et al., 1996). Meanwhile, the religious institutions or organizations also even had considerable power to affect the decisions and activities of central and local governments of ancient China.

However, after 1949, since CCP hold Russian style of Marxism like Leninism and Stalinism as its main ideology, it has been promoting atheism and secularism among the whole society, in order to force ordinary people to accept and acknowledge the official ideology which benefits CCP's governance and consolidates its power (Laliberté, 2015; Potter, 2003; Yang, 2011). Particularly in Mao's era, in addition to measures like preaching and teaching irreligious ideas, atheism and secularism in schools and other educational systems, CCP launched various political movements to vigorously destroy the influence and power of

religion in Chinese society, including closing religious sites, arresting clergies and forcing believers to apostatize, which reached the peak in the Great Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 (Overmyer, 2003; Palmer, 2009; Yang, 2011). After that, although there are some growths of the number of religious believers in recent years after the reform and opening up since 1978, the secularism, which is antagonistic to religion, separates the ordinary daily life from religion and excludes the influence of religion from secular world, still successfully become a public value promoted by CCP in modern Chinese society (Laliberté, 2011; Madsen, 2010; Morrison, 1984; Potter, 2003; Yang, 2011).

In recent years, CCP government has also developed its own type of secularism. Rather than copying the concept of secularism from Marxism and other Western theories after Enlightenment, the CCP has constructed a kind of Chinese secularism by adopting the ideas similar to Western secularism from traditional Chinese culture as mentioned before. Such construction twists the authentic history and ignores the influence and function of religion in ancient China, claiming that China has always been a secular country since antiquity (see Du, 2018; Jiang, 2020; Ma, 2018; Zhang, 2015). Meanwhile, such concept also declares that the current greatness of Chinese nation-state has benefited from this secularism, preventing China from being oppressed by theocracy and religious wars which will hinder the progress and development (see Du, 2018; Jiang, 2020; Ma, 2018; Zhang, 2015). Recently, this concept has been mainly utilized by official propaganda to attack the West, which the government describes as the descendants of monotheism and attempting to use religion like Christianity for peaceful evolution and destroying the great China and Chinese nation founded on secularism, where any religion has never had a significant status and never contributed to such greatness (see Du, 2018; Jiang, 2020; Ma, 2018; Xi, 2016). Thus, according to this kind

of neo-secularism, the religion, especially foreign religion without CCP's control, is described as enemy not only against modern civilization and science, but also inconsistent with Chinese culture and the nation-state, endangering the national security (see Xi, 2016). Therefore, the idea of secularism in current Chinese society accords with the invented nationalistic values in modern nation-state under the ruling of powerful political institutions. Such values express as the tradition invented by ruling elite through reproducing pre-existing cultures or obliterating old cultures and inventing new ones (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

2.2.1.2 Separation of religion and politics

Separation of religion and politics, or separation of religion and state, separation of church and state, is commonly categorized as a sub-concept of secularism which aims at resisting and eliminating the power of religion in politics and public affairs (Asad, 1999; Audi, 2011; Taylor, 2010). This concept is promoted as public value especially in Western countries like France where Christianity has always been dominant religion and have complicated marriage with politics and national cultures throughout the history, which even still has considerable influence on the whole society until today (Baubérot, 2017). However, in China, although religious institutions or organizations used to partially have influence on politics before 1949, there was no particularly dominant religion like Christianity in West which influenced and even governed the power structure of the whole country and society. Also, in China, as discussed in secularism section, CCP government de facto has successfully excluded the traditional influence and power of religion from every field of the mainstream society and embedded the anti-religious secularism in the daily routines of ordinary people. Therefore,

different from that in West, the concept of separation of religion and politics doesn't mainly function as a public value but is normally regarded as guideline for relevant departments of central and local governments to manage the affairs of religions (see Regulations on Religious Affairs, 2017; Xi, 2016). Such guideline illustrates that any religion and religious activity in China should comply with national law and official regulations and be placed under the administration of relevant government departments, emphasizing that any religion or religious activity cannot surpass the state and national law (see Regulations on Religious Affairs, 2017; Xi, 2016). This principle ensures that religion and religious activities will not be employed to oppose CCP and the nation-state but conforming to the official ideologies and national policy in current China (Ashiwa and Wank, 2009; Regulations on Religious Affairs, 2017; Xi, 2016).

2.2.1.3 The importance of national security in official nationalism

Meanwhile, the concept of national security also has its specific status in current Chinese society. As mentioned before, after 1989 Tiananmen Square protest and collapse of communism throughout the world since late 1980s, the CCP government has considered maintaining national security as a cardinal task in its national strategy and ruling policy. CCP's practice to enhance the status of national security in daily routines includes adopting various measures to prevent the society from being influenced by foreign or western cultures, strengthening the control of public opinion, and reinforcing the propaganda about the importance of national security among the public (Hu, 2016; Ji, 2016). Under such condition, in current China, safeguarding national security becomes both a public value and a significant

topic in official ideologies and policies of CCP (Hu, 2016; Ji, 2016). A typical instance is that when talking about the problems of national security, a catchword, ‘Without the motherland, you will be nothing (没有了祖国你将什么都不是)’, is cited in both reports of official media and communication content of netizens to emphasize the importance of a stabilized state under the governance of CCP (see People’s Daily, 2013). Thus, the nation-state under control of CCP is also acknowledged as being capable of bringing happiness to Chinese people and making the whole nation prosperous and strong (see appendix: People’s Daily, 2013).

2.3 The populist nationalism since late 1990s

Accompanying with the success of propaganda for promoting official patriotic nationalism, since late 1990s, a kind of bottom-up populist nationalism has developed among citizens in Chinese society, which even provoked several large-scale offline protests during the Sino-American diplomatic disputes in late 1990s and at the beginning of 21st century, such as Nato Bombing of Belgrade Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999 and Hainan Island incident in 2001 (Cong, 2009; Gries, 2004; Hughes, 2006; Rose, 2000; Shen, 2007; Woods and Dickson, 2017; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018). According to current literature, the issues considered by this nationalism can be divided into two aspects as following.

Firstly, Diplomatic issues: With the development of Chinese Market economy and the gradual enhancement of Chinese national power, the increasing national pride among citizens has

evoked xenophobic sentiment against foreign countries, especially the USA and Japan, while constantly experiencing various competitions and conflicts with those countries in economic, cultural and political territories under the background of Globalization. Due to that, the participants of populist nationalism appeal for serious, powerful and tough diplomatic policies to struggle against foreign countries like the USA to preserve national dignity and win the national pride for people (Cong, 2009; Gries, 2004; Hughes, 2006; Rose, 2000; Shen, 2007; Woods and Dickson, 2017; Zhong and Hwang, 2019).

Secondly, Cultural issues: The intrusion of Western culture and neo-liberalism has shocked the whole society, causing the awaking of locally national consciousness. This phenomenon leads to the revival of traditional culture and values based on Confucianism, which originated from Han national culture. Due to that, such cultural revival has produced a new form of Han chauvinism, which rejects any kind of non-Confucianist culture and ideology, calling on exclusion of other ethnic groups and the exhaustive elimination of influence from 'foreign ideas' even including communism. Such appeal apparently conflicts with CCP's ethnic policies and core ideology, forming threat to its sovereignty. One of the representative examples is the Han-Fu movement (Carrico, 2017; Duara, 1996; Guo, 2003; Hughes, 1996; Townsend, 1996; Unger, 1996).

Meanwhile, since under CCP's dominance nationalistic topics belong to the sole political issue which can be publicly discussed in Chinese society, some scholars indicate that Chinese populist nationalism is a product of a lack of democracy, which provides the public with a special approach to participating in political actions to put pressure on government and

expressing political opinions publicly (Cui, 2012; Friedman, 1996; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Shen, 2007; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019). Previous research also points out that different from official patriotic nationalism, in addition to some primordial features, the populist nationalism also possesses some characteristics of grassroots movement such as provoking street protests, which can be explored from the case of the bombing event in Yugoslavia (Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Hughes, 2006; Pang and Thomas, 2017; Shen, 2007; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019).

The literature also claims that although having some discrepancies against the official patriotic nationalism, the populist nationalism still shares the same historical origins, identical social basis and similar patriotic rhetoric with it (Gries, 2004; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Guo, 2003; Pang and Thomas, 2017; Shen, 2007). Both of official and populist nationalism are the product of Chinese national conditions and globalization wave from 1990s.

So, these two nationalist thoughts can always be placed in a situation of coexisting, negotiating and backscratching. Except suppressing several much radical nationalist expressions occasionally, the government has been constantly adjusting and revising policies and propagandas related to nationalistic issues to satisfy public voice (Cui, 2012; Guo, 2003; Shen, 2007; Zou, 2019). Previous research indicates that CCP is also taking advantage of utilizing nationalistic issues to draw people's attention from current social, economic or political problems, which is able to avoid other kinds of activism directly against its sovereignty (Zou, 2019). Since during the popular nationalist movements, the citizens are continually emphasizing their national identification, through underlining its role of National

Guardian, CCP can reinforce citizens' loyalty to it and re-entrench the legitimacy at the same time (Guo, 2003; Shen, 2007; Zou, 2019). As scholars declare, this produces a social contract between citizens and political authority to largely ensure the domestic stability (Gries, 2004; Guo, 2003; Shen, 2007).

Furthermore, current research reveals that simultaneously participants use the nationalist movement as an extraordinary form of vibrant public sphere to discuss political sensitive topics under the protection of nationalist/patriotic rhetoric by 'kicking the ball from the side', in order to make public political expression while avoiding the confrontation (Gries, 2004; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Shen, 2007; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019; Zou, 2019). Meanwhile, although the literature manifests that CCP has always taken a good control over such populist movements to ensure its ruling status, some scholars still conclude that the government is losing the hegemony upon populist nationalism due to consistent struggle to bring into correspondence with popular nationalist demands in order to reduce conflicts (Cui, 2012; Gries, 2004; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Shen, 2007).

Considering popular nationalism's potential ideological contradiction against the communism mentioned before, this situation makes it some kind of relatively effective civic movement capable of partially countering authoritarian power under the condition in China (Cui, 2012; Gries, 2004; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Shen, 2007; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018). Such essence of political activism inside Chinese popular nationalist movements has been more obviously exposed after the introduction of ICTs and the rise of digital nationalism since 21st century.

2.4 Nationalism in digital era

With the continuous development of the market economy, the introduction and universal popularization of Internet and ICTs, the populist nationalism in China has entered a new era. According to the division made by scholars, since 2001, the popular nationalist movements became active on the internet (Feng, 2007; Jiang, 2012; Shen, 2007). Originating from the populist nationalism developed by late 1990s, the main issues considered in online nationalism basically concentrate on diplomatic policies about external relations and the revival of Han chauvinism (Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Shen, 2007; Wang, 2006; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019). Particularly, in terms of external relations, according to previous research, nationalists principally focus on Sino-US relations, Sino-Japanese relations and the Taiwan issue, expressing an extreme xenophobic and hostile sentiment against those countries (Cairns and Carlson, 2016; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Feng, 2007; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Hyun and Kim, 2015; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Schneider, 2018; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019). In these cases, nationalists advocate that CCP and Chinese government should adopt a tough attitude toward foreign countries when dealing with diplomatic affairs, especially considering the unfriendly attitudes, cutthroat competitions and various conflicts that Western countries and Japan have adopted against China in recent years, thus vying for the country and fighting for the 'face' of the state-nation to vindicate their national pride (Cairns and Carlson, 2016; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Feng, 2007; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Hyun and Kim, 2015; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Schneider, 2018; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019). Internally, most of nationalists advocate a Han chauvinism which also adopts an extremely hostile

attitude towards other ethnic minorities and some foreigners living in China, appealing for purifying the national subject and the restoration of a society under the supremacy of Han nationality (Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Jiang, 2012).

At the same time, the existing literature points out that with the high-speed spread of information and efficient communication benefiting from the rapid development of ICTs and social media, nationalism has developed a prominent feature of digital activism (Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Hyun and Kim, 2015; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Schneider, 2018; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018). Previous studies have shown that nationalists make dynamic online political expressions in their cyber-activities, whether calling for changes in diplomacy or solving domestic problems related to minority policies (Cairns and Carlson, 2016; Duan, 2017; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Guo, 2019; Hyun and Kim, 2015; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Schneider, 2018; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019). In the online discussion that followed, with the free expression, exchange, and dissemination of different opinions, the formation of collective views gradually occurred among the participants, and this phenomenon always ultimately triggered petitions, criticisms and even hostile protests aimed at the policy maker - CCP regime (Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Jiang, 2012; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018). Such results make the bottom-up nationalism obtain more specific characteristics of grassroots movement than previous one, posing a challenge and threat to the authority of CCP's rule (Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014; Hyun and Kim, 2015; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018).

Scholars also conclude several reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, to some extent, the unrestricted feature of nationalistic topics in Chinese political territory contributes to the pro-democracy peculiarity of nationalism under CCP's sovereignty (Jiang, 2012; Shen, 2007; Zhang, Liu and Wen ,2018). Secondly, Internet and social media produce a relatively liberal platform for free flow of opinions and personal ideologies, where the information sources are more diverse and comprehensive than those in mass media controlled by the government. This environment provides participants with more choices and thinking space, causing the messages communicated online more broadly represent the popular political sentiments widely shared by public in everyday life (Hyun and Kim, 2015; Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014). Thirdly, previous research about Sina Weibo claims that on Chinese social media, anti-regime sentiments hold dominant position in online political discourse, which leads to the fact that political issues on social media are often combined with liberal ideas and being pro-democracy. In other words, the online nationalist discourse is influenced and percolated by liberal views, resulting in participants' being critical of authority due to domestic political issues and calling for further political reformation (Zhang, Liu and Wen ,2018).

However, the Chinese government is not laissez-faire about the political and liberal tendency exposed in such nationalism. As current literature indicates, the CCP government has not only been increasing surveillance upon nationalism, but also been secretly attempting to guide, absorb, and subordinate it under its power, same as the strategies mentioned before in populist nationalism part (Duan, 2017; Hyun and Kim, 2015; Jiang, 2012). As Jiang (2012) points out, the CCP adopts the strategy that releases the freedom for open discussion on some sensitive topics online and promotes consumerism as well as related interactions inside the discussion, to make the relevant nationalist narratives 'politicize, nationalize and stimulate an

online consumer culture with the dual purpose of encouraging personal freedoms, but also a common consumer identity' (p. 16). According to Jiang (2012), such identity and culture can satisfy participants' demands from a consumerist angle, drawing their attention from existing domestic complains in reality and avoiding further political claim. Jiang (2012) compares such strategy to 'the technology of the self' analysed by Foucault (1988a and 1991), which produces rituals of truth and self-regulation system to force participants consciously follow the CCP's rules, minimizing the need of direct political intervention. It is believed that 'the CCP has co-opted, subsumed, and suppressed popular nationalism in line with CCP policy goals' (Hyun, Kim and Sun, 2014, p. 591). However, such absorption and negotiation do not mean that current nationalism has completely lost the essence of digital activism. Research proves that in recent years the developing nationalism consistently possesses the characteristics of digital activism and poses increasing challenge to CCP's authority (Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018).

2.5 Critiques and gaps

Although current literature has provided a detailed illustration of nationalist movements in contemporary China, there still exists significant deficiencies and academic gaps, especially considering my research interests.

Firstly, the most important issue of current literature is the obsolete and outmoded materials and cases chosen for research. Most of studies are based on the phenomenon in pre-Internet era, even though there are several works analysing the nationalism on the Internet, so do they rely on the events and movements before the popularization of social media or those taking place in the early days of Sina Weibo before 2013 while the new Internet policies have not been implemented by current leadership of CCP (Cairns and Carlson, 2016; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Jiang, 2012; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018). This will lead to the mismatching between previous findings and current case due to various social environmental changes.

Meanwhile, the previous research mainly focuses on the cases relevant to diplomatic issues such as Sino-US or Sino-Japanese relations, rarely considering the internal ethnic issues. Although there are some studies discussing the internal Han chauvinism in the populist nationalism and online nationalism, the cases explored concern the conflicts between Han people and Manchu nation that are derived from the particular historical problems which are quite distinct from the issues between Han nation and Muslim minority groups (Carrico, 2017; Dikotter, 2005; Duara, 1996; Fang and Repinkova, 2017; Modongal, 2016).

Finally, in addition to the timeliness issues, another problem with current literature is the lack of in-depth functional analysis of relations between social media platforms like Sina Weibo and nationalist movements in China, since the literature has focused on the mass-grassroots feature of these movements while to a great extent considering ICTs and social media as neutral instruments in the light of theories like public sphere (i.e. Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Jiang, 2012; Shen, 2010; Zhang, Liu, Wen, 2018).

Therefore, a new framework concerning both nationalist movement and the influence of social media platform should be established for exploring the current nationalism against Muslim minorities on Sina Weibo.

2.6 Background information about Muslim minorities and related ethnic policies in China

However, before formally building the new theoretical framework for nationalism, the following sections will offer contextual information about Muslim minorities and their history in China, especially their historical and current conflicts with non-Muslim Chinese people like Han. Meanwhile, the information about relevant official ethnic policies in China, the issue of Uyghur, and President Xi's new policies concerning nation-state and religion will also be introduced. Hence, these sections aim at providing basic and background knowledge in detail to help fully comprehend the relevant terms, concepts, historical reasons, and particular situations when analysing the chosen cases later.

2.6.1 Brief history of Muslim minorities in China

The history of Muslim minorities in China is a complicated issue according to current research findings. Although some popular legends among Chinese Muslims claim that their ancestors travelled from Arabian world to China during the Sui and Tang dynasties in 7th century, scholars have found that in fact most ancestors of today's Muslim minorities immigrated into Chinese land during Song and Yuan dynasties after 10th century (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2000b; Ma, 2001; Qiu, 2012). With the success of the Mongol Empire's western conquest in 13th century, large amount of tribal people were brought from central Asia by Mongolian armies to China for being settled as second ruling class to help the Mongols govern Chinese land and people. Such tribal people from Central Asia had been highly influenced by Arab-Persian Islam culture and were known as people of colour eyes (色目人 /semuren) among Chinese people then because of their physical characteristics (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2000b; Ma, 2001; Qiu, 2012). According to current research findings, after experiencing mixed blood with various ethnic groups including Han, Mongols, and ancient Uyghur, these people from Central Asia primarily formed the source of today's Muslim minorities in China (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2000b; Ma, 2001; Qiu, 2012).

Among today's Muslim minorities in China, except Uyghur (issue of which will be discussed later), the Hui people are the most populous and influential one. The Hui people is also one of the main targets of the nationalist movement involved in this research. Therefore, the particular background information about Hui people needs to be highlighted here. After the rapid fall of the Mongolian dynasty in 1368, a new Dynasty called Ming ruled by Han people was successfully established. To sufficiently restore the Han rule over the land and prevent the return of Alien domination, the Ming government accelerated the Hanization or Sinicization of non-Han ethnicities, especially those Muslim tribals from central Asia, forcing

them to intermarry and integrate with Han people, adopt Han culture, and use Chinese language (Lang and Ma, 2008; Ma, 2001; Ma, 2001; Qiu, 2012). In such process, although these people successfully preserved their Islamic belief, eventually most of them had gradually lost other ethnic characteristics like mother tongue and scripts, becoming the so-called Chinese Hui or Hanized Hui people (汉回) who speak Chinese and live with ordinary Han people across the country, particularly in inland areas (Lang and Ma, 2008; Ma, 2001; Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2000b; Ma, 2001; Qiu, 2012). Even though from Ming Dynasty to the period of Republic of China before 1949 all the Muslims could be broadly referred to as Hui, those Chinese-speaking Muslims still earned the narrowly defined title of Hui in practice, while other Muslim minorities which still keep their own ethnic characteristics distinct from Han normally got additional special attributives before being mentioned as Hui, for example: Uyghur - Turban Hui or Chan Hui (缠回), Salır – Sala Hui (撒拉回), Dongxiang ethnicity – Dongxiang Hui (东乡回), etc.. Meanwhile, according to the situation that such Chinese-speaking Hui people coexist and communicate with Han people in inland areas for a long time, they have become the most familiar Muslim minority of Han people while also breaking out several violent conflicts with Han people in the history, bringing a profound impact on both sides (which will be discussed in next section). After 1949, in accordance with new Marx-Leninist ethnic policies, the CCP government officially identified 55 non-Han minorities in China, among which those Chinese-speaking Hui people were officially defined as Hui ethnicity while other Muslim minorities obtained new titles without word like Hui to avoid confusion (Qiu, 2012). Therefore, unless otherwise specified, when referring to Hui people, this research adopts the narrow but also official definition of Hui as the most populous Chinese-speaking Muslim minority.

2.6.2 Historical conflicts between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim Chinese people before 1949

Before Qing dynasty (1644 – 1912), there are rare recordings or proofs showing that any serious conflict between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim Chinese people like Han ever took place. Though the historical materials can prove that the Ming Dynasty adopted a severe policy to oppress Muslims by forcing them to be assimilated to Chinese society, Muslims then didn't take actions like revolt or rebellion to oppose the feudal government then. In contrast, as introduced before, during Ming Dynasty most of Muslims living in inland areas of China successfully completed the process of Hanization by formulating their daily life and habits in accordance with Han culture, except keeping the Islamic faith and religious practice. However, since the middle of Qing Dynasty, ethnic conflicts were intensified due to various complicated reasons involving political, economic, and social issues then. In particular, the conflicts between Chinese-speaking Hui people and Han people continued to breed. The significant reasons about such conflicts in that period, according to scholars, should be attributed to both Han Chinese people and Qing government then (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2009). Firstly, being formed by classical Confucianism for more than two thousand years, Han Chinese people have always held the standpoint that traditional Chinese culture and form of Confucianist Chinese society were the only perfect model or example for human beings to live in this world. Also, such Confucianist ideology implied another viewpoint that China is the centre of world and all the civilizations or cultures coming from outside China were recognized as barbarous or uncivilized. Such ideology inevitably led to the Han chauvinism among Han Chinese people then, lack of respect for other civilizations, cultures, or beliefs (Ma, 2009). Thus, although Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims had already adopted Chinese

language and other cultural custom except those related to Islam, their ‘foreign’ religious belief and practice still made them barbarians or aliens in the eyes of Han people. Reflected in everyday life, the Hui people’s custom of not eating pork and other animal meat which are prohibited by Holy Quran and Sharia Law particularly became the point of attack among Han people since those kinds of meat, especially pork, are the main food daily consumed by Han people (Ma, 2009). According to historical materials, especially from Qing dynasty, Han people always made fun of Hui people by fabricating rumours about Muslims and swine, sometimes even directly insulting Hui people by using pork to attack them in reality (Ma, 2009). In addition to that, Han people also made various attempts to bully Hui people in daily life, such as deliberately defrauding Hui people while doing business. Such daily oppression and humiliation greatly increased Hui people’s hatred and opposition towards Han majority as well as seriously intensifying the ethnic contradictions (Ma, 2009).

On the other hand, although Qing was a regime established by Manchus, after hundreds of years’ communication, integration, and practicing, until the middle of Qing dynasty, the Manchu rulers had basically been Hanized and adopted Confucianism as well as model of traditional Han regimes to rule the country. This means that although there were still policies like apartheid to treat Manchu and Han differently in some fields of the empire like officialdom, in most cases the Manchus and the Han generally stood on the same political and cultural standpoint after middle of Qing dynasty. Such kind of united front between Manchu rulers and Han people was even more apparent in the face of the so-called foreign cultures or things that clearly conflict with traditional Chinese-Han culture like Confucianism (Ma, 2009). This fact led to the phenomenon that when dealing with the ethnic contradictions between Han and Hui, the Qing rulers, from both central government and local authorities,

always favoured the Han side and suppressed the Hui side due to Hui's Islamic background (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2009). Additionally, the Manchu government also adopted various severe policies and methods to put restrictions on Muslims' religious practice like forbidding the activities of those new Islamic denominations originating from Arab to avoid the cultural influence from non-Confucian world (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2000b; Ma, 2009; Ma, 2001; Qiu, 2012). Moreover, the Muslim minorities were even not allowed to take part in management of ordinary social and political affairs as well as sharing social resources, unless they totally abandoned their religion and ethnicity to become Han people culturally and ethnically (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2009; Qiu, 2012). Such unfair practice full of ethnic discrimination and oppression had deepened and increased hatred of the Hui people towards both Han and Manchu Rulers, causing various riots and revolts of Hui people to fight against the oppression. Such continual ethnic conflicts finally led to the largest Hui uprising in the last years of Qing dynasty: Dungan Revolt (1862 AD -1873 AD) (Ma, 2009). This large-scale Hui rebellion spread throughout almost all the north-western areas of China. The Hui people used self-organized armed forces to overthrow the Qing Dynasty's authorities in local areas by violence, while also accompanied with vendettas against the Han people. Until this revolt was finally suppressed by Qing army 11 years later, according to official records then and follow-up investigation, at least 21 million people, including both Hui and Han as well as people from other ethnicities, were lost in the involved areas due to various disasters caused by the revolt like massacres on both sides, famine, plague, war slaughter, etc. (Ma, 2009). A large number of Hui people also immigrated from their north-western hometowns to other parts of China during and after the revolt, voluntarily escaping or being forced by the Qing army (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2009). Some Hui people even fled abroad to central Asia and Russia, living there as Dungan people until today (Ma, 2009).

This revolt has put profound influence on both Hui and Han. On the one hand, the revolt and its final failure have exacerbated Hui people's mistrust, hatred, and hostility against Han and the non-Muslim Chinese state. The collective memory of this tragedy has been making the Hui people more conservative and closed, severely rejecting Han culture and becoming more sensitive to the culture differences and conflicts between Hui and Han like issue of eating pork (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2009). On the other hand, although the Han people and Qing government's discrimination and oppression against Hui people were the root cause of the revolt, after successful suppression, both Manchu rulers and Han majority identified the revolt as rebellion and treason, while considering Hui as the heterogeneous group which betrayed the state and committed heinous crimes against the Chinese people (Ma, 2000a; Ma, 2009). Such perception led the Qing government and Han majority to adopt stricter control and oppressive measures against the Hui in everyday life, strengthening the ethnic discrimination and racial segregation in late Qing dynasty. The negative influence of such historical tragedy is still affecting the relationships between Hui and Han in modern times, which will be partially revealed in case studies of this research. Moreover, after Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911, the governments of Republic of China, especially the Kuomintang government under Chiang Kai-shek, still adopted the Han chauvinism when dealing with the ethnic issues of minorities (Li, 2014; Ma, 2000a; Qiu, 2012). Thus, from 1911 to 1949, various Hui rebellions especially Hui-Han collisions still broke out, the reasons and processes of which were quite similar to those in Qing Dynasty, further intensifying the existing ethnic conflicts and hatred.

2.6.3 Ethnic policies and Muslim minorities under CCP regime after 1949

After 1949, when Chinese Communist Party took over the authority over this country, as already discussed earlier in this chapter, the new government has adopted the Marxist-Leninist ideologies on ethnic issue which promote ethnic equality under the rule of communist government and unite ethnic minorities to build and develop the modern state together with the ethnic majority. According to such ideologies, the Chinese government enacted various new ethnic policies to solve the historical ethnic problems and create new frameworks to govern and lead ethnic minorities in the country. Such ethnic policies emphasize the equality of 56 identified ethnic groups in China while also providing help and support to improve and develop the life and conditions of those 55 non-Han minorities (Jin, 2009; Wang, 1999). The aim is to unite ethnic minorities within the state and offer them proper position in ordinary routines like Han majority. Due to the backwardness, poverty, and underdevelopment of these minorities caused by historical ethnic oppression and Han chauvinism, when implementing the new ethnic policies, the CCP government has always provided ethnic minorities with considerable freedom and abundant subsidies to help them develop as soon as possible and keep up with the mainstream society (Jin, 2009). Moreover, to make up for the rifts caused by ethnic oppression and conflicts in history, and to eliminate the negative impact of Han chauvinism, the CCP government has also highlighted the importance of respecting and protecting the language, culture, and custom of ethnic minorities, encouraging those non-Han minorities to revitalize their own ethnic culture under the premise of national unification (Jin, 2009).

Hence, under such conditions, one point about Muslim minorities and their religious practice relevant to this research needs to be particularly mentioned here. In practice, when the implementation of ethnic policies comes to the Muslim minorities especially Hui, the

freedom and subsidies offered by CCP government for protecting and developing minorities' ethnic culture and custom de facto make a great contribution to protecting and developing Islam religion, which is, however, apparently contradicted against CCP's atheistic religious policies that normally restrict religious activities and limit religious development to finally eradicate religion. One realistic reason behind such paradoxical phenomenon is that for Muslim minorities, especially the Chinese-speaking Hui people, their ethnicity, culture, and custom are basically established on and evolved from their Islam faith. In other words, since the ethnicity and religion of these Muslim minorities are highly bound, when the government implemented the ethnic policies to help protect and develop their ethnicity, their religion has inevitably been protected and developed simultaneously, or the protection of ethnic culture will not make sense to Muslim minorities if the Islam was banned from their daily life. Thus, in fact, both central and local governments always tolerate such contradictions and hold ambiguous attitudes towards it, tacitly acknowledging the Islam and relevant religious practice like public worship and food taboo as the ethnic culture and custom of Muslim minorities rather than particular religious things which should be limited or eliminated. However, such practice was not newly invented after 1949, as scholars found, even in 1930s, before CCP fully established the national regime and was still some kind of local armed separatist force then, it had already implemented such tolerance to unite Hui people and get their support, even allowing those Hui people who joined the Communist Party to preserve their religious belief and practice, which is apparently against CCP's Party Constitution and official ideology (Ding, 2018; Li, 1996; Ma, 2011; Mi, Xiao, and Yang, 2005; Zhang, 1996; Yang and Ma, 2009). On most occasions, the CCP government even openly recognizes that almost the entire people of these minorities believe in Islam, and their ethnicities are established by Islam religion (i.e. central government, 2018). Meanwhile, CCP's current religious policies also leave blank for such contradictions, without any specific stipulation

limiting the public religious activities within Muslim minorities. This phenomenon, however, cause confusions among non-Muslim people like Han, especially when it comes to the relevant official subsidies and preferential measures for Muslim minorities since most of such incentives are closely related to these minorities' religious practice. Such confusions, however, largely constituted the points of contention and debate among the participants of the nationalist movement this research focuses on, which will be discussed later.

Another national ethnic policy which needs to be particularly introduced here is the so-called 'Regional Ethnic Autonomy Policy (民族区域自治政策). The invention or enactment of this policy, as claimed by CCP government, aims to better promote ethnic equality and protect the rights and interests of ethnic minorities from being exploited or undermined by major ethnic groups like the Han people in those areas where ethnic minorities massively gather and live together (Hou, 2003; Chen, 2009; Jin and Dong, 2009; Jin, Ma, and Song, 2002; Wang, 2011; Yi, 2004; Zeng, 2007). Under the regional ethnic autonomous system based on such policy, compared with 'normal' administrative regions, the local authorities including government and legislature of the ethnic autonomous regions can relatively obtain greater freedom to enact local rules, regulations, and policies to more efficiently help realize the purposes of protecting and help developing the 'major' ethnic minorities living in such regions. However, under the political system of CCP regime, such freedom is still limited rather than infinite, which should be taken advantage of under the supervision of the central government and National Congress. Like other official ethnic policies adopted or enacted by CCP regime, this policy and related practice also follow the ethnic theories of Leninism, which emphasize the dangers of conflicts between the ethnic majority and minorities caused by the ruling class's application of the constructed nation-state based on the ethnicity of majority to govern people

while ignoring or intentionally suppressing the interests and rights of minorities (Hou, 2003; Chen, 2009; Jin and Dong, 2009; Jin, Ma, and Song, 2002; Wang, 2011; Yi, 2004; Zeng, 2007). Therefore, considering the long-term ethnic conflicts between the Han people and other ethnic minorities caused by the policy of Han chauvinism adopted by previous dynasties or regimes, since 1930s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began to practice the regional ethnic autonomy policy in various areas under its control even though it was still an illegal political organization then. After 1949 when CCP successfully took over the national authority, its regime has officially and formally adopted regional ethnic autonomy as one of its fundamental national policies to solve regional ethnic conflicts, maintain ethnic equality, and unite those regions where ethnic minorities account for a large proportion of the local population within the newly established Chinese nation-state. Although facing attacks to different extents during the Great Culture Revolution from 1966 to 1976, this national policy and its implementation have obtained the sustainability and stability in general, especially after 1980s when CCP regime started its reform and opening-up practice. In the time of reform and opening-up, the CCP regime has enacted various national laws and regulations to help better explain the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Policy from a legal perspective, as well as helping further implement the regional ethnic autonomous system across the country to help ethnic minorities develop their modernity under the supervision of CCP (Chen, 2009; Hu, 2016; Jin and Tian, 2007; Li, 2009). Today, there are five autonomous regions at the provincial level including Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, as well as 30 autonomous districts and 120 autonomous counties throughout the state (see www.gov.cn, 2008). Among the 5 provincial autonomous regions, there are two based on Muslim minorities gathering and living in those areas: Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. However, due to the realistic problems (which will be discussed in next section), in practice, Chinese government holds distinct attitudes as well as

different working methods towards the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang and other Muslim minorities like Hui in inner lands including Ningxia when applying its ethnic and religious policies, which become one of the core issues that caused controversy and debate within the nationalist movement analysed by this research as well.

2.6.4 Background information about current Uyghur issue in Xinjiang

2.6.4.1 The Origins of the Modern Uyghur Issue: The Impact of the Rise of Pan-Turkism on the Uyghurs since Nineteenth Century

Historically, after accepting Islam and forming a stable ethnic group, the Uyghurs have gradually formed the unique language, customs, and religious practice different from the traditional Han Chinese due to the long-term influence of the Islamic-Turkic culture as well as the Islamic-Persian culture (Bovingdon, 2010; Brophy, 2016; Davis, 2008; Finley, 2013; Kamberi, 2015; Roberts, 2009). Hence, compared with the Chinese-speaking Hui group mentioned above and compared with the various ethnic groups especially Han in the traditional Chinese cultural circle, the ethnicity of the Uyghurs is more prominent and distinct. Therefore, it is even more difficult for Uyghurs to integrate into the traditional Chinese Han culture and form a situation like where the Chinese-speaking Hui people coexists with the Han as well as sharing a common lifestyle with Han except religious part. At the same time, geographically, because the Uyghurs have lived in a fixed and vast land for

a long time (that is, the Xinjiang region in Northwest China today), they are naturally isolated from the traditional Chinese inland, and their exchanges with the inland China were also very limited. Normal communication between Uyghurs and Chinese people living in inland China was mainly limited to trade and commerce as well. Thus, the influence of traditional Chinese culture and the Han nationality on Uyghurs was quite minimal in history. So, for several centuries, Uyghurs and other Turkic Islamic groups have been developing their own culture and ethnicity independently in that land, presenting a unique scene that is different from other parts of China (Bovingdon, 2010; Brophy, 2016; Davis, 2008; Finley, 2013; Kamberi, 2015; Roberts, 2009). Also, before the Qing Dynasty, the Uyghurs had been politically independent from Chinese regime as well, which means that at least before 18th century the Uyghurs were independently ruling their land and did not accept the rule of Chinese feudal dynasties (Brophy, 2016; Bovingdon, 2010; Kamberi, 2015; Tursun, 2008). This situation led to very intense conflicts between the Uyghurs and Chinese central government after the Xinjiang region was occupied and ruled by Qing government under the Emperor Qian Long in 1755. Cultural, religious and ethnic conflicts between Uyghurs and other Chinese people like Han have also become more and more intense since then.

Due to such complex historical background, after Pan-Turkism and the concept of the modern nation-state were born and introduced to Xinjiang in the 19th century, the Uyghurs were highly influenced and have launched various independent movements or riots against Chinese regime (Bovingdon, 2010; Dillon, 2006). These large and small movements or riots are often named as East Turkestan Independence Movement, which indicate that all the Uyghurs belong to a unique nation named East Turkestan and should get independent from China to build their own nation-state (Bovingdon, 2010; Dillon, 2006). At the same time, the unique

Turkic-Islamic culture of the Uyghurs was often used by such movements as an ideological tool to form the cohesion and unified identification among the Uyghurs for constructing the East Turkestan nation (Bovingdon, 2010; Dillon, 2006). The daily religious organizations of the Uyghurs, including mosques and Muslim communities (the ummah) were often used to help build the movement's relationship networks and information sharing networks for actions. Many of those Uyghur religious figures or leaders (such as Imams in mosques and chiefs of religious orders) were even supporters, participants, or actual leaders of such movements themselves. However, both the Qing government and the subsequent government of the Republic of China brutally suppressed these movements or uprisings for the reason of maintaining national unity and territorial integrity (Bovingdon, 2010; Dillon, 2006). In such kind of oppressions and subsequent high-handed rule over Xinjiang region, the local Han warlords and Han politicians always cooperated with the central government to attack and suppress Uyghurs, which further intensified the ethnic conflicts and deepened the ethnic estrangement.

2.6.4.2 Situation of Uyghurs under CCP's regime after 1949

After the CCP successfully established its rule over mainland China in 1949, the Communist government's suppression of such Uyghur independence movements became more severe (Baranovitch, 2003; Bovingdon, 2010; Dillon, 2006; Fathil, 2019; Olivieri, 2018; Petersen, 2006; Thum, 2018). Therefore, although independence movements continued to erupt in Xinjiang in the early 1950s, they were all suppressed by the Communist government through military operations. Horrible genocides and massacres were rumoured to have occurred

during this period, but due to the lack of relevant information and the destruction of evidence by Chinese government, it is currently impossible to confirm their authenticity or true scale. After the reform and opening-up of China in the 1980s, due to the substantial relaxation of ethnic and religious policies as well as the relative progress of CCP government in political field then, the practice about ensuring religious or belief freedom and the protection of minorities' ethnic culture have been re-implemented and even been developed. Under such circumstances, with the increase in communication with the outside world, especially the Islamic world, and the development of various technologies including information technology, the Uyghurs have restarted different attempts to seek independence and build their East Turkestan nation-state (Baranovitch, 2003; Dillon, 2006; Fathil, 2019; Olivieri, 2018; Petersen, 2006; Thum, 2018). During the period from 1980 to 2009, Uyghurs resisted in many different ways but were severely cracked down on. The CCP government has long accused these independence movements of being terrorist activities that split the country and undermine social stability, supported and launched by three foreign forces: violent terrorist forces (terrorism), ethnic separatist forces (separatism), religious extremist forces (extremism) (Ma, 2013). Even so, during this period, the overall ethnic and religious policy practices in Xinjiang did not undergo major changes but remained highly consistent with the those in inland. This means that ethnic minorities like Uyghurs in Xinjiang still enjoyed limited freedom then to dynamically protect and develop their own ethnic culture as well as religious beliefs in everyday life (Debata, 2022).

2.6.4.3 Changes in the Chinese Government's Policy and Rule on Uyghurs after The Urumqi 7-5 Incident

The Urumqi 7-5 Incident in 2009 marked a major change in the CCP's policy and rule on Xinjiang and Uyghurs. After that, especially after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the central government and the Xinjiang local government led by CCP have carried out all-round severe suppression and control of Uyghurs (Ala, 2021; Debata, 2022; Finley, 2019; Hayes, 2019; Kam and Clarke, 2021; Turkel, 2022). Especially in terms of religion, due to the special significance and role of Turkic-Islamic culture for Uyghurs and the Uyghur independence movement as mentioned above, the CCP has severely restricted or even completely banned the normal religious activities and daily religious practices of Uyghurs across the entire Xinjiang region. The purpose of such move is to completely eradicate the unique ethnic cultural identity of the Uyghurs, and force them to identify with and integrate into the Chinese nation-state established and ruled by CCP, so as to root out the Uyghurs independence movement, maintain national unity, and consolidate the CCP's regime and authority (Ala, 2021; Debata, 2022; Finley, 2019; Hayes, 2019; Kam and Clarke, 2021; Turkel, 2022). Therefore, the religious freedom of Uyghurs is now completely deprived in Xinjiang, and Uyghurs are forced to undergo various de-religious and de-ethnicization process. Although at the national level especially in the inland, those normal religious activities and religious customs are still licit and legally protected, they have become illegal in Xinjiang region and are strictly oppressed. Uyghurs who violate such new principle will face severe punishments from the government, including being sent to so-called re-education institutions which are de facto concentration camps (Ala, 2021; Debata, 2022; Finley, 2019; Hayes, 2019; Kam and Clarke, 2021; Turkel, 2022).

On the contrary, the Chinese-speaking Han-Hui group has long had no desire to establish an independent nation-state like Uyghurs. In addition, since their ethnic culture and Han culture have exchanged and co-existed with each other in a long term, as mentioned above, the Hui people have been greatly Hanized (Beech, 2014; Elbenni, 2017; Gonul and Rogenhofer, 2019; Toğuşlu and Gönül, 2016). Hence, there is generally no obvious difference between Hui and Han on the surface except religious part. Moreover, the geographical distribution of the Chinese-speaking Hui people is extremely loose. Although there is a Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in the northwest, in fact, more of Hui people are distributed across the whole country in the form of generally coexisting or even living mixed with Han people. Therefore, throughout the history, the Hui people has never had a core territory where they have lived for generations like the Uyghurs. As a result, the Hui and other smaller Muslim ethnic groups are generally considered by government not to be a threat of secession in a long time (Beech, 2014; Elbenni, 2017; Gonul and Rogenhofer, 2019; Toğuşlu and Gönül, 2016). Therefore, for non-Turkic-speaking Muslim ethnic groups like Hui, the CCP's policy and relevant practice has not changed significantly yet, which still guarantee their limited ethnic and cultural freedom under the supervision of government (Beech, 2014; Elbenni, 2017; Toğuşlu and Gönül, 2016). Especially in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, under the regional ethnic autonomy policy, the Hui have relatively more rights to dynamically develop their own ethnicity and culture. This practice of treating Muslim minorities, especially Uyghurs, in Xinjiang differently from treating Muslims in the inland has caused great controversy and discussion within the nationalist movement this project focuses on, which will be discussed in detail in the case analysis.

2.6.5 Sinicization of Religion (宗教中国化): president Xi's new political measure in fields of ethnic and religious affairs

Since ascending the throne of General secretary of CCP in 2012, Xi Jinping has taken various new political measures to strengthen both his personal authoritarian rule and CCP regime's autocracy over the Chinese state. One of such Xi Jinping's new measures, Sinicization of Religion (宗教中国化), will be particularly introduced here, since it has been significantly involved in the movement this research focuses on and its concept needs to be clarified before formal analysis to avoid potential confusions.

When studying the cases concerning ethnic minorities and foreign religions in China, Sinicization is always an unavoidable issue. It is necessary to make a brief introduction about the Sinicization and simple discussion of the similarities and differences between Sinicization and Hanization. In the traditional sense, the concepts of Sinicization and Hanization have often coexisted vaguely, and the two can even be exchanged with each other when discussing related cases taking place in pre-modern ancient times (Cheng, 2021). This is because in the feudal period or the pre-modern period, China's national and cultural constructions were dominated by the Han nationality and traditional Confucian culture, as discussed in chapter 1. The rulers of the feudal dynasties always focused on promoting such kind of Han chauvinist construction. Thus, in such situations, when discussing the relevant cases or examples, the Sinicization can be considered as equal to Hanization. However, in Western academic research, when it comes to such issues, only the word Sinicization is used, without

specifically identifying the differences or similarities between Sinicization and Hanization, which leaves a blurred area. Meanwhile, in Chinese literature, Sinicization and Hanization are often used interchangeably or coexist, and the two are vaguely equated without making a special distinction as well. Such vague definition creates problems and difficulties for current research concerning the issue of neo-Sinicization led by CCP in modern China since such new type of Sinicization is quite distinct from the traditional one that was often equal to Hanization.

In the feudal or pre-modern period, the Sinicization or Hanization often stopped at the external level, that is, any non-Han group that actively performed Hanization or was forced to Sinicize could still internally retain its unique identity, customs, practices and can even have its autonomous organization within the group (Chen, 1998; Liao, 2015; Liu, 1992; Meng, 2007; Yang and Liu, 1997). Even the feudal rulers who promoted or required such classical type of Sinicization normally did not make further requirements for those non-Han groups' internal ideological identification and folk customs after completing the process of external Sinicization like adopting Chinese language and mode of social life. Sometimes the feudal rulers would even openly recognize the high autonomy of several Sinicized non-Han groups, including the common canonization of tribal leaders as official regional dominator of the lands they gather and live (Chen, 1998; Liao, 2015; Liu, 1992; Meng, 2007; Yang and Liu, 1997). However, after China entered the modernization under the leadership of the CCP, a new form of Sinicization emerged. Such Sinicization promoted by the CCP is a more political and rigorous form than the aforementioned Sinicization equalling to Hanization. This neo-Sinicization emphasizes that all Chinese citizens must fully accept the official ideology, values and governance model of the CCP regime. Any ethnicity or group must eliminate or

transform those elements of its culture, traditional values, lifestyle and daily practice that do not conform to the official standards or are not conducive to the rule of the entire country by CCP, to make them eventually harmonize with the highly intensive rule of CCP over the whole state (Chang, 2018). Therefore, compared with the traditional Sinicization/Hanization, this neo-Sinicization is a more unified and high-pressure formation of totalitarian statism, and it is one of the political tools used by the CCP to establish an all-round vertical dictatorship over modern China. It far exceeds the traditional Sinicization which worked only at the level of cultural and social models. Its main promotion is far beyond the traditional mainstream Han culture or Confucian culture as well, but a new autocratic nationalist identification that mixes official ideology, totalitarianism and modern nationalistic concepts (Chang, 2018). Also, such neo-Sinicization's influences are not limited to ethnic minorities or religious groups distinct from mainstream society but requesting everyone including Han majority and indigenous religion like Taoism to accept such transformation (Chang, 2018). Therefore, in this research, in order to avoid confusion, when mentioning the issues of traditional mode of Sinicization, the term of Hanization will be used, while the word Sinicization will only be referred to the neo-Sinicization led by CCP.

The Sinicization of religion (宗教中国化) which CCP and Xi Jinping have emphasized and promoted in recent years is precisely a modernist type of Sinicization of the religious field under such background. According to official resources (i.e. politics.people.com.cn, 2021), the main content of this Sinicization of religion includes:

First of all, the Sinicization of religion insists on the absolute leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in religious affairs across the whole country, forcing all religions to absolutely support and obey the CCP regime, and emphasizing Xi Jinping's personal authority over religious affairs as well.

Secondly, Sinicization of religion uses the official ideology – socialism with Chinese characteristics as well as official nationalistic values to transform different religions: anything in religious beliefs or practices that goes against the official ideology and the nationalistic values promoted by CCP regime should be eliminated, while the traditional teachings of all the religions in China should be reinterpreted as well and religious etiquette or customs should also be reformed, to match with the modernity and development of current Chinese society under CCP. As it claims, such process aims at making any religion a 'Chinese religion' thoroughly, emphasizing that all religions and believers must strengthen their absolute identification with and commitment to both Chinese nation-state and CCP regime.

Thirdly, it emphasizes opposing extremism and resisting foreign forces which use religion to infiltrate the country and lead illegal religious activities endangering the national security. This point has particularly been used to attack and crack down on Islam and Uyghurs in Xinjiang because of Uyghurs' independent movement discussed before.

2.6.6 Chinese national community (中华民族共同体): Xi Jinping's reproduction of Chinese meta-nation

The concept of the 'common consciousness of the Chinese national community (中华民族共同体意识)' is another significant theory proposed by Xi Jinping to officially deal with ethnic issue under his dictatorship. It was first introduced by him in 2014 when speaking in a conference concerning separatist issues in Xinjiang held by Central Committee of CCP. Afterwards, this concept has been repeatedly highlighted by CCP government in various occasions, especially when discussing the ethnic affairs. Then, at the 19th National Congress of the CCP in October 2017, this concept was formally prescribed into the CCP constitution, later the State Constitution of PRC in March 2018. This concept indicates that all the ethnicities in China should hold the common consciousness that they are members of the meta-Chinese-national-community, promoting the unity of different ethnicities to a unified Chinese nation-state built and led by the CCP regime. Yet, although it underlines the significance of different ethnicities being subordinate to a unified Chinese nation, this concept does not deny or attempt to end the existence of various ethnicities in modern China. In fact, by examining the content of this 'new' concept, one can find that it basically repeats the typical theories concerning the modern Chinese nation-state consistently promoted and implemented by the CCP regime in the past few decades, without any fundamental ideological change but a different title (see State Council Office, 2019). Furthermore, when proposing this concept, the CCP regime still emphasized that the Chinese national community is both pluralist and integrated. This means the CCP regime recognizes that under the umbrella of a unified nation-state, different ethnicities can peacefully and equally coexist,

obtaining the right to develop their own culture, tradition, and custom with its permission. Xi Jinping, himself, also criticized both Han Chauvinism and ethnic independentism in public to promote such concept and balance the positions of Han majority and other minorities (see Wang, Li, and Wang, 2021). Thus, one can find that such concept is still in line with CCP's consistent Marx-Leninist ideas and policies concerning ethnic issue, as well as its sustenance of modern Chinese nation-state.

Chapter 3

Conceptual framework on nationalism

3.1 An overview of historical approaches to nationalism

Scholars acknowledge that throughout the development of academic exploration on nationalism, there have successively existed primordialist, modernist, ethno-symbolist and contemporary approaches attempting to analyse the nature of nationalism (Özkırımlı, 2000). This project, however, will theoretically focus on the contemporary approaches including banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) and a post-modernist approach proposed by Özkırımlı (2000) but combining some insights from other approaches to deal with the current Han nationalism attacking at Muslim minorities in China. So, in the following sections, I will firstly look at the historical evolutions of different conceptual approaches to nationalism.

3.1.1 Primordialism

Before 1960s, primordialism has been accepted as the orthodox theory to deal with issues about nation and nationalism (Özkırımlı, 2000). According to the current literature (i.e. Hearn, 2006), the common features of primordialist approaches of nationalism can be reduced to the following points: Firstly, primordialist scholars emphasize the nontraceable antiquity and perpetual naturalness of nations and nationality in human society. Secondly, the pre-existing substance and ethnicity are placed in a central position, which are thought to cause the formation of nation and nourished it. Thus, nationalism is considered as a 'late development of much older process of ethnicity' (Hearn, 2006, p. 20). Thirdly, primordialism underlines the irrational factors such as emotional bonds and feelings of attachment, and the role of nationalist symbols and language in evoking them. Finally, the significance of 'common descent, territorial belonging and shared language in discourses of national identity' is also highlighted by primordialism (Hearn, 2006, p. 20).

As the literature indicates, the criticisms on primordialism mainly come from modernist scholars. The primary criticisms unfold surrounding the issues related to nature and origins of ethnic and national ties. Scholars like Eller and Coughlan (1993) argue that the fixed and static essence of ethnic and national ties in primordialist view which is claimed as naturally given and transmitted from generations to generations unchangeably has been challenged by empirical studies, manifesting the fluidity and changeability of ethnicity throughout the human history in different areas. It is indicated that ethnicity is socially (re-) constructed and is continuously negotiated, revised and revitalized according to different circumstances including political, social and economic conditions (Brass, 1991; Eller and Coughlan, 1993; Smith, 1995). Some examples of successful creation of new ethnicities lacking appropriate

cultural heritages strengthen the point that ethnic identities and culture are constructed rather than being given (Brass, 1991; Eller and Coughlan, 1993).

Meanwhile, the primordialists' apotheosis and mystification of ethnic and national attachments which describe them as underived, ineffable, inexpressible, unanalysable, and prior to all social interactions are also queried by scholars. Firstly, the meaning of ethnic cultures will be transformed in nationalist actions (Breuilly, 1993). Secondly, it is impossible to predict any successful formation of a nation from any ethnic group depending on knowledge about ethnic cultures, and the systemic way of designating any nation from specific ethnicity doesn't exist (Brass, 1991; Breuilly, 1993; Zubaida, 1978). Gellner (1983) also utilizes the case of navel to refute the logical fallacy of primordialism which implies the inessential of ethnicity because some nations actually lack it. The sociobiological approach is also specifically questioned by the fact that many ethnic groups disappeared in the history and failed to develop as a nation (Smith, 1995). Thus, the primordialist claims about origins and nature of ethnic and national ties are contradicted with the fact.

Scholars such as Smith (1995) also criticize the primordialists for giving priority to ethnic and national identities among other personal attachments. It is argued that human beings have multiple identities when living in society, and the salience of each identity changes according to different circumstances, which cannot be predicted (Smith, 1991).

The third point refuted by scholars is the mystification of emotion and affect. It is argued that such perspective ignores the strong rational dimension, dissocializes the phenomenon, and overlooks human's freedom of choosing and manipulating cultural materials during the formation of cultural and identity (Eller and Coughlan, 1993; Hearn, 2006). It is also pointed out that although the power of emotions makes great contributions to mobilizing nationalism in practice, the interaction and communication between socially related persons fundamentally effectuate action: the abstract ideologies and cultural symbols cannot drive the process independently (Hearn, 2006).

Although these critiques and queries refute the validity of primordialism when solving the nationalist issues, such criticism works from a macroscopic perspective, examining the general applicability of primordialism when analysing the cases from different countries and areas (Özkırımlı, 2000). However, it is clear that even the scholars opposing primordialism do not deny the reality that the pre-existing materials, especially premodern ethnic cultures, are able to influence and promote the formation of nation and nationalism in some specific cases with rich and long cultural heritages, e.g. in Jewish identity (Özkırımlı, 2000).

Meanwhile, as mentioned before, the contributions of emotional attachments on mobilizing nationalism are also conditionally recognized in such practice (Hearn, 2006; Özkırımlı, 2000). Due to that, scholars indicate that the thinking model of primordialism is still of value of reference and needs to be considered when analysing the nationalism evoked in groups with rich and long cultural heritage (Özkırımlı, 2000).

3.1.2 Modernism

According to the literature about nationalism, modernism canonically formulated in 1960s as a critical reaction to primordialism (Day and Thompson, 2004; Özkırmı, 2000). Different from the primordialist approaches, the modernist school focuses on the belief of modernity of nations and nationalism (Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Özkırmı, 2000).

Modernist scholars trace the origins of nationalism back to Enlightenment and French Revolution, which have been considered as the beginning of modern era and declare there is no nation or nationalism in premodern time (Day and Thompson, 2004; Özkırmı, 2000). In this viewpoint, both nationalism and the nation are described as the products of capitalism, industrialization, and the formation of modern state and related institutional mechanisms, which fabricate the economic/political/social force to require a particular national identity in a new world (Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Özkırmı, 2000). It is also indicated that the modern-rational public culture produced by linguistic homogenization, spread of literacy, and central, standardized educational system also provides the significant foundation for a unified national identity for people dwelling in modern society (Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006). Thus, for modernist scholars, the nation is absolutely an outcome of modern historical developments which comes after nationalism and is irrelevant to premodern ethnicities (Özkırmı, 2000).

However, modernism is firstly refuted by its contradictions against historical and empirical facts. For instance, the economic approaches to modernism emphasize the importance of uneven development and argue that nationalism emerged in less developed countries under oppression and exploitation of developed countries by borrowing modernist ideologies from

exploiters to fight against them, while there exist plenty of cases that nationalistic movements broke out in developed regions or at least not exploited or backward areas (Breuilly, 1993; Orridge, 1981; Smith, 1983). Meanwhile, it is also argued that there are also cases of uneven development without significant nationalist sentiments in seriously exploited areas which directly contradict against economic approaches' assumption (Breuilly, 1993; Orridge, 1981). Modernism is also criticized for equating nation-building with modern state-building or industrialization. This reduces nationalism as something that serves only the modernization of the country. It also dramatically contradicts historical realities in various countries. For instance, the early nationalism in premodern and non-industrial areas even before the French and Industrial revolutions, and nationalism re-emerged in advanced industrialized areas like Catalonia in Spain (Breuilly, 1993; Greenfeld, 1992; Hastings, 1997; Hutchinson, 1994; Kedourie, 1994; Kitching, 1985; Smith, 1995).

Secondly, modernism is criticized for taking the model of modern nations such as France and England as a 'given' and giving it a normative status. It also deifies the influence of thought emerging from Enlightenment and the French Revolution on nationalist discourse without considering the complexity and variety of different nationalist movements in different parts of the world (Özkırmı, 2000).

Thirdly, modernist scholars are criticized for exaggerating the role of elites and overlooking the part played by ordinary people in the formation of nation and nationalism (Özkırmı, 2000; Smith, 1991; Smith, 1995). They have ignored the different needs and interests of ordinary people with various backgrounds related to class, gender, religion and ethnicity, and

failed to explain the emotional appeal of nationalism among the masses (Özkırıklı, 2000). Therefore, modernist theories are also unable to explain the persistence of premodern ethnicities in modern nation and nationalism (Özkırıklı, 2000). Such part makes sense because it is ‘the past of that particular community, with its distinctive patterns of events, personages and milieu, which acts as a constraint on the manipulations of elites, hence on invention’ (Özkırıklı, 2000, p. 123).

However, similar to primordialist theories, the contradiction against the realities in general does not entail the inapplicability of modernism in particular cases. Scholars opposing modernism also acknowledge that in a society with powerful political institutions, the nationalist discourse can be invented, reproduced or highly influenced by political elites in the process of modernization, communist countries are a case in point (Brown, 2000; Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006). Thus, when analysing nationalist movements in such areas, the modernist approaches should be taken as the reference.

3.1.3 Ethno-symbolism

As mentioned before, during the studies of nationalism, primordialist scholars and modernist scholars have been falling into the continuous debate on the significance and function of premodern cultural practices as myths, values, symbols and memories in forming the modern nation (Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Özkırıklı, 2000). In order to reconcile and

present a compromise to this academic argument, scholars like John Armstrong and Anthony Smith have proposed the ethno-symbolist approach, a kind of midway between primordialism and modernism, to comprehend the nationalist phenomenon (Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Özkırımlı, 2000). Ethno-symbolists indicate that nations could not be ipso facto invented during modernization, instead, the formation of nations should be examined in la longue durée-time dimension of many centuries, taking the pre-existing ethnic components into consideration (Armstrong, 1982; Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Smith, 1986; Smith, 1991). In this viewpoint, it is indicated that the differences between modern nations and earlier cultural communities or collectivities should be analysed by degree instead of by property. As Smith (1986) argues, once ethnic identities are formed, they can go through historical vicissitudes and persist over numerous generations or centuries, changing more slowly than generally presumed. The ethnic communities, or the *ethnie*, established upon such identities, as Smith (1991) indicates, provide the ethnic bases and models of modern nations and fundamentally ensure the survival of them. Thus, through both bureaucratic incorporation and vernacular mobilization, modern nations have been transformed from lateral *ethnies* by revolutions or vertical *ethnies* via modernization driven by intellectuals (Day and Thompson, 2004; Smith, 1991). Therefore, Smith points out that the nation is ‘a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’ (1991, p. 14).

Therefore, for ethno-symbolists such as Smith (1991), nationalism should be understood as ‘an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential

nation' (p. 73). It is also emphasized that nation should be acknowledged as the primary source of all political and social power, and the supreme authority human beings should obey and identify with in order to free and realize themselves (Day and Thompson, 2004).

3.2 Banal nationalism, imagined communities, and post-modernist approach

Although the ethno-symbolists have promoted a different angle to deal with the shortcomings of modernism and primordialism on relationships between modern nation and historical past, scholars belonging to modernist approaches still showed great disagreement against it. The main argument raised by the modernists is that during the formation of modern nations, pre-existing traditions employed by modern political authorities have eventually been reproduced and drastically distorted to be applied in the modern environment, especially when being communicated via technological media (Day and Thompson, 2004; Özkırımlı, 2000).

Meanwhile, the valid nationality must be produced and protected in the modern institutional system, or it will be easily ruined or destroyed, which distinguishes the modern national identity from the previous ethnic one (Day and Thompson, 2004; Özkırımlı, 2000).

However, it is meaningless to be persistently obsessed with such debate since all these approaches attempted to solve the issues related to the formation of the modern nation but show ignorance of the nationalist movements taking place within a mature nation or nation-state, which this project aims at exploring. Therefore, to deal with the reasons that lead to the

outbreak of nationalism in already formed nations, Billig's (1995) theory of banal nationalism should be primarily considered here.

According to Billig (1995), the socio-historically constructed ideological national beliefs, habits, and practices have been preserved and reproduced in everyday life in established nations rather than being laid aside. Based on Renan's (1882) insight on the forgetfulness in the creation of nations, Billig (1995) points out that in established nations, the national beliefs and habits like national identity are embedded in routines of daily life and social environment, which become the familiar and constant reminders, or flags, of nationhood. However, such familiarity and continuity make these national reminders operate mindlessly and become banal and habitual aspects of normal life (Billig, 1995). Thus, Billig (1995) indicates that banal nationalism is a un-waved flag 'hanging unnoticed on the public building' far from the flag 'being consciously waved with fervent passion' (p. 8), and distinct from the kind of nationalism battling to form new nations.

However, before discussing the outbreak of nationalist movements, Benedict Anderson's (1983) *imagined communities*, which concerns the principle and ideology of nationalism, should be applied. The *imagined communities* theory defines the nation as 'an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). Comparable with Gellner's (1964) declaration that nations were invented where they do not exist, Anderson (1983) illustrates that the nation is imagined since that members of the nation will never know and/or meet most of their fellow-members. Instead, they imagine that all of them naturally live in and belong to a particular community of

comradeship. Meanwhile, the nation is imagined as limited because it always has finite boundaries distinguishing the national 'us' from the 'others' (Anderson, 1983). Finally, the sovereignty of nation is also imagined as taken from heaven to earth and derived from God. Such imagination is caused by the historical origin that the primary concept of nation was invoked in the period of 'destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm', which declared the dream of nations to be free directly under God (Anderson, 1983, p. 7). Such imagination constitutes the common sense of nation and nationalist consciousness among modern citizens. This can be realized and facilitated by standardization of national knowledge or representations like language via print capitalism, as Anderson (1983) suggests.

Therefore, Anderson's (1983) imagined communities helps in discovering the ideology of banal nationalism, as Billig (1995) points out:

'Nationalism involves assumptions about what a nation is: as such, it is a theory of community, as well as a theory about the world being 'naturally' divided into such communities. The theory does not need to be experienced theoretically. Intellectuals have written theoretical tomes about 'nation'. With the triumph of nationalism, and the establishment of nations across the globe, the theories of nationalism have been transformed into familiar common sense.' (p. 63)

Such an ideologically constructed and widely spread common sense of naturalness contributes to the further imagination or, more precisely, the interpretation of the nation as a unique community in terms of space and time by combining its subjective antiquity and objective modernity, which forms the national principle of particularity (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). As Billig (1995) points out, such national principle of particularity and sovereignty has always presented itself as reasonable and hegemonic, while being imagined as the universal principle on behalf of ‘all nations or the universal order of nations’ (p. 89).

Then questions arise around the outbreak of nationalist movements within established nations. According to Eriksen (2010), a nationalist movement is motivated by the national sentiment about ‘the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle’ (p. 119). The same viewpoint is also discussed in Billig’s (1995) work. As mentioned before, Billig (1995) claims that banal nationalism has been embedded into the ordinary life instead of entirely disappearing after the establishment of the modern nation, while leaving the national symbols un-waved and forgotten. Under such conditions, these symbols, which contain political power that enables the creation of loyalty and feelings of belonging to the nation, are filling the ordinary life with the assistance of communication technologies like printing, mass media and Internet (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). Meanwhile, these national symbols provide banal reminders of nationhood which constantly reproduce and strengthen the mindless and unconscious sense of national belonging among citizens, further constituting the solidarity of national members (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). Therefore, as Giddens (1985) indicates, when such ordinary life is disrupted and the ‘sense of ontological security is put in jeopardy by the disruption of routines’ (p. 218), nationalist

sentiments will rise up and nationalist movements will occur to defend the established nation. In other words, the nationalist movement in an established nation is emotionally driven and politically charged to recover the disrupted principle of national particularity and sovereignty to maintain the persistence of this nation (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). Hence, Billig (1995) illustrates the difference between the banal nationalism unnoticed but embedded in everyday life, and the hot nationalism which occurs with forceful social movements in established nations. In Billig's (1995) findings, the hot nationalism occurring with forceful social movements are invoked on the basis of banal nationalism.

Moreover, in order to study the forceful nationalist movements breaking out on the basis of banal nationalism, a post-modernist approach proposed by Özkırımlı (2000) is applied. According to Özkırımlı (2000), under such post-modernist views the active nationalism can be understood as the site where different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other with the nationalist discourses effectively reproduced on a daily basis as the common denominator, which refers to the banal nationalism in normal social life. This post-modernist approach perceives national identity within the nationalist movement not as an accomplished fact, but as always in process and never complete in line with the changing environment (Özkırımlı, 2000). Such view reflects the post-modernist attitude that identities are unstable and fluid rather than fixed or immutable, constantly being redefined and reproduced according to the outside relationship with the 'Other' and continuously negotiated during communication inside the community (Hall, 1990; Hall, 1996). However, considering the basic principle of nationalism that imagines the nation as limited and sovereign, such instability and fluidity of the national identity are not unrestricted but still confined within limits (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). Therefore, the national identity for the

nationalist movement can be understood as negotiated, reproduced and developed based on the banal national identity which embraces all of the ideologically constructed national reminders embedded in routines of social life (Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010; Özkırımlı, 2000).

3.3 Bringing insights from previous approaches

However, this does not mean that previous research is useless in studying current nationalist movements. Since the beliefs and practices existing before and evolved in the formation of modern nation will be transferred into daily nationalist discourses which further constitute the banal national identity, the values and sentiments adhered to these pre-existing materials will influence the orientation of later nationalist ideology that lays the foundation for nationalist movements (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). Thus, the discussion about the content of these pre-existing materials in previous approaches can be referred while exploring the ideology and ends of the nationalism in particular areas. As introduced in last Chapter, since the modern Han nationalism in China receives influence from both Han ethnic culture and nation-state established by CCP, the previous approaches concerning both pre-modern ethnic culture and modernism should be considered here.

3.3.1 Insights from primordialism and ethno-symbolism

As the literature indicates, primordialism and ethno-symbolism can be used to understand the relations between pre-existing ethnic materials and modern nationalist discourses in groups with rich and long cultural heritages (Brown, 2000; Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Özkırımlı, 2000). Thus, the insights from primordialist and ethno-symbolist approaches to nationalism should be important for this project.

In those groups with rich and long cultural heritage, the objects of ethnic attachments such as distinct lifestyle, culture, territorial homeland, political autonomy, self-realization, and exclusion of others are usually considered as naturally given, or at least being assumed to be a given (Eriksen, 2010; Gellner, 1983; Kedourie, 1971; Smith, 1995; Smith, 1998).

Therefore, although the accurate date of birth of the nation or nationalism has not been provided, the nation is defined as a group of individuals who feel ancestrally related and attached to certain aspects of their culture, assuming their givenness, sacredness and underivedness. Thus, such nationalist ideology is related to the intrinsic and perpetual cultural struggle for nationalistic beliefs and perceptions, which may refer to the antiquity of a particular nation, its 'golden age', the superiority of its national culture, periods of somnolence, or its national hero (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010; Özkırımlı, 2000).

Ethno-symbolist scholars also show agreement on this point. Although acknowledging the radical change of *ethnies* in history, they still note that the sense of continuity and common ethnicity is not destroyed in such groups (Smith, 1991). Then, those *ethnies* surviving from premodern era during the modernization, according to Smith (1991), obtain six main features:

‘a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of a common culture, an association with a specific homeland, a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population’ (p. 21). Meanwhile, the goals of such nationalism should be related to ‘attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population’ (Smith, 1991, p. 73). Ethno-symbolists also emphasize that nation should be acknowledged as the primary source of all political and social power, and the supreme authority human beings should obey and identify with to free and realize themselves under such conditions (Day and Thompson, 2004; Özkırmılı, 2000).

Therefore, it is indicated that for groups with rich and long cultural heritages, the pre-existing and survival ethnic attachments can be transferred into daily nationalist discourses which create the emotional bonds that motivate the members to struggle for and defend their cultural distinctiveness and nationhood built on it (Eriksen, 2010).

3.3.1.1 Influence of historical Hanization on today’s Chinese nationalism

Hence, it comes to the issue about influence of Hanization on contemporary Chinese nationalism. Hanization in China refers to the process through which the culture, language, ideologies, and customs of Han majority were forcibly promoted and adopted by non-Han minorities within the country, especially in feudalist and imperial periods (Chen, 1998; Wang, 2011). Since the Han majority has dominated the political, cultural, social, and economic

spheres of the whole country, even under the 'alien' regimes like Mongol and Qing, the Han Chinese language, customs, ideologies, and cultural practices had always been accepted by different rulers as the standard for governance and social organization over the whole population (Chu, 2017; Meng, 2007; Zhang, 2004). Such process occurred through various means, including political control, intermarriage, migration, and cultural assimilation. Non-Han minorities often adopted the language, customs, and administrative systems of Han people to integrate into the larger society and gain political and economic advantages (Chen, 1998; Wang, 2011; Jiang, 2007; Yu, 2002; Zhang, 2013; Zhao, 2007).

Therefore, the influence of Hanization on today's Chinese nationalism, especially the official nationalism built upon modern Chinese nation-state, is multifaceted and complex. On the one hand, the process of Hanization historically played a significant role in shaping the dominant cultural and linguistic identity in the country within nearly 2000 years, which forms a core component of Chinese nationalism. The promotion and sustenance of Han Chinese culture, language, and traditions as the national standard has particularly contributed to a sense of unity and cohesion among the Han majority population, which normally dominated the whole country in the history (Chen, 1998; Wang, 2011).

On the other hand, due to its historical impacts, the narrative and praise of Han civilization's achievements and contributions to Chinese history, culture, and the nation often forms the basis for official nationalist discourses promoted by CCP government. Such narrative emphasizes the accomplishments of past dynasties relying on Hanization, technological advancements, cultural achievements, and territorial expansions, which are frequently

invoked to foster a sense of pride and unity among the Chinese people, as well as constructing the sovereignty and territorial legitimacy of the nation-state today (Liu, 2000; Wang, 2019; Zhao, 2023; Zheng, 2014). In other words, the rich, long, and dominant cultural heritages of Han Chinese civilization not only contribute to the collective identification and cohesion among Han people, but also serve as the foundation of the official nationalist discourses, values, and the emotional bonds created for uniting and motivating common Chinese people today, despite their own ethnicities, to defend the nation-state.

Meanwhile, although in modern time the non-Han minorities in China have obtained limited freedom and rights from CCP regime to protect and develop their own ethnicities, as well as sustaining such ethnicities different from Han culture which never completely died in the history, it doesn't simply wipe out the influence of historical Hanization on them immediately. In other words, due to the long-term process of cultural and even ethnic assimilation, the non-Han minorities in China, especially those already Chinese-speaking ones, remain cultural and emotional commitment to Han civilization to different extents, based on each one's own status quo. Alongside with the Hanization's influence on official nationalism discussed above, this scenario contributes to the fact that even those nationalist discourses, values, and/or emotional bonds based on Han civilization would still work among various non-Han minorities today, especially when motivating them to defend the nation-state (He, 2008; He, 2011; Piao, 2008; Wang, 2008; Zheng, 2011).

Thus, it can be confirmed that due to the historical status and influence of Han civilization, in today's Chinese society, the pre-existing and survival ethnic attachments of Han majority

have been transferred into daily nationalist discourses as well, including those official ones promoted by the government. However, different from the Western scholars' viewpoint that such pre-existing materials only work within the same group possessing the rich and long heritage, like Jewish people, due to the impacts of Hanization in the history, they are also effective on other non-Han minorities within the modern Chinese nation-state to varying degrees today.

3.3.2 Modernism, Nation-state, and Invention of tradition

In addition to the traditional Han ethnic cultures, literature also points out that another origin of modern Chinese nationalist discourse is the nation-state concept produced by CCP and Chinese government to replace the classic communism in order to consolidate the political status, as discussed in last Chapter. Since modernism is also helpful in exploring the influence of politically invented or reproduced values of nationalism in areas with powerful political institutions (Brown, 2000; Day and Thompson, 2004; Hearn, 2006; Özkırmılı, 2000), the insights from modernist approaches will also be valuable for this project.

Scholars belonging to political approach to modernism, such as Hobsbawm (1990), focus on the role of political transformation when analysing nationalism in society with powerful political institutions. Hobsbawm points out that modern nations are products of social engineering based on invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). According to

Hobsbawm, the invented traditions are produced in two forms: adapting old traditions and institutions into new situations, and deliberately inventing new traditions for new purposes, which eventually become ‘responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 2). Such ‘traditions’ are utilized to legitimize political actions and reinforce group cohesion by producing a fictitious continuity with the suitable historical past (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

It is indicated that during the process of modernization and democratization, the political elites and rulers found it difficult to maintain obedience, loyalty and cooperation of the mass (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). To solve the issues and threats, the ruling elite has adopted strategies of ‘invention of tradition’ to make nationalistic attachment ‘a substitute for social cohesion through a national church, a royal family or other cohesive traditions, or collective group self-presentations, a new secular religion (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 303). Due to that, Hobsbawm (1990) defines nationalism as ‘primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent’ and ‘also implies that the political duty to the nation overrides all other obligations’ (p. 9). Thus, Hobsbawm (1990) indicates that the modern nation comes after modern territorial state. Hobsbawm’s understanding concurs with Gellner’s (1983) viewpoint that:

‘Nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them and often obliterates pre-existing cultures; that is a reality, and in general an inescapable one.’ (p. 48-49)

Thus, in societies with powerful political institutions, the nationalistic values invented or reproduced by elites to build modern nation-state and furtherly embedded into the routines of social life, can also play a role of emotional motivations among the mass to provoke nationalist actions in an attempt to protect the nation-state by emphasizing the moral duties of obedience and loyalty to it above other obligations (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). Secondly, since in such an environment, the nationalistic attachment has been reproduced as a substitute for social cohesion through a new secular national religion (Anderson, 1983; Eriksen, 2010; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), it is indicated that the mass or citizens living in that society should obey the public nationalist doctrines in order to fulfil their obligations and secure their social status (Özkırmı, 2000). Thus, it is argued that the practice of nationalism in societies with powerful political institutions may be forced to, ostensibly or essentially, obey the nationalistic doctrines designed by political elites in order to maintain the nationalist movements (Özkırmı, 2000).

3.3.2.1 Evolution of Modern Chinese Nation and nationalist doctrines invented by CCP

By comparing the aforementioned modern nation-state and invented traditions theories, it finds that the concept of Chinese nation and its related nation-state-nationalism have actually undergone two major constructions rather than solely during the process of establishing modern nation-state like that in other countries, especially those Western nation-states after Enlightenment. This is a point that existing Western literature and research have not fully addressed or even lacked, as they often conflate Hanization, Sinicization, and the nationalism

present in Chinese society before and after the establishment of PRC, without fully elucidating the development trajectory of current official Chinese nationalism.

The concept of the Chinese nation (中华民族) and the corresponding nationalism originated in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China during the hundred years of humiliation (百年耻辱) when China was invaded and exploited by foreign powers (Huang, 2002; Huang and Wang, 2006; Jin, 2008; Kuang, 2003; Liu, 2000; Liu, 2003; Ma, 1999; Ma, 2012; Zheng, 2013). Initially proposed by some intellectuals and the elite class, its core theories emphasized that all Chinese people, regardless of their individual ethnic identities, share a common and ancient Chinese cultural heritage. This was a call for national unity to resist foreign aggression and protect Chinese civilization and ancestral land. In other words, although absorbing Han civilization's culture, society, politics, and national territorial scope, adapting them to the new circumstances of the time, such theories also indicated the importance of uniting some major non-Han ethnic groups, advocated slogan such as the Five Ethnicities Under One Union (五族共和), and promoted relative ethnic equality to call on all citizens to resist foreign enemies and defend the state (Huang, 2002; Huang and Wang, 2006; Jin, 2008; Kuang, 2003; Liu, 2000; Liu, 2003; Ma, 1999; Ma, 2012; Zheng, 2013). Such new concepts belong to the category of invented new traditions when merging the modern nation-state discussed above. Meanwhile, such definition and ideology about Chinese nation finally gained thorough reinforcement and wide acceptance throughout the whole country during the subsequent period of the War of Resistance against Japan from 1931 to 1945, while also being adopted as the national identification by the Kuomintang Republican government (Huang, 2002; Huang and Wang, 2006; Jin, 2008; Liu, 2000; Liu, 2003; Ma, 1999; Ma, 2012; Zheng, 2013; Zhou, 2000; Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2015). However, despite this, before 1949, in

practice the Republican Kuomintang government still took a stance of Han chauvinism in its ethnic policies and implemented significant Hanization measures towards ethnic minorities, as discussed in Contextual Chapter.

Based on the embryonic form of modern Chinese nation-state theories before 1949, the second construction was completed after the successful establishment of CCP regime. As mentioned in Contextual Chapter, after 1949, a Marxist-Leninist approach to ethnic policies was adopted, emphasizing the equality of all ethnic groups and opposing both Han chauvinism and past Hanization policies. Hence, the nationalist values and concepts of the Chinese nation were reinterpreted, removing the content of Han chauvinism and emphasizing the diversity within the unity of the new established Chinese nation-state (Fei, 1989; Liu, 2000; Sun, 2020; Wang, 2019; Zhao, 2023; Zhou, 2024). Ethnic minorities were granted the right and freedom to develop their own ethnic characteristics within the broader nation-state framework. CCP government reinforced such new concepts about Chinese nation as the official ideologies with the purpose of effectively uniting all ethnic groups as well as ruling the country. However, the broader framework of the nation-state has never been changed, which still emphasizes the sovereignty and unity of the meta-Chinese nation.

Moreover, in the official narrative about Chinese nation-state, since the CCP successfully led the whole state resurrect from the hundred years of humiliation and drove away all the enemies, acceptance and obedience to the absolute rule and leadership of the Communist Party of China over the whole land are prerequisites for the Chinese nation to truly become strong and rejuvenated (He, 2012; Sheng, 1997; Shue, 2018; Zhao, 1998; Zhao, 2023; Zhou, 2011; Zhou, 2015; Zhou, 2024). In other words, while reproducing the existed national

identification and concepts about the Chinese nation, the CCP regime also invented new nationalist doctrine that emphasizes its unshakeable authority over the nation-state, portraying itself as the authentic safe guardian of the whole Chinese nation. Such doctrine never existed before, while even under Kuomintang's rule that old nationalist regime never deified itself as the only authentic protector or defender of the Chinese nation.

Meanwhile, as discussed before, after the comprehensive decline of international communism in late 1980s, the Chinese government officially declared those nationalistic doctrines reproduced and invented by itself as the core ideologies, totally replacing the status of previous communist ideology in Mao era. Therefore, especially from the 1990s to the present, the CCP has successfully propagated this transformed nationalism and its associated ideas and values throughout the whole society through propaganda, education, and other means, making it a permeant part of everyday routines (He, 2012; Sheng, 1997; Shue, 2018; Zhao, 1998; Zhou, 2024). The previously discussed Sinicization measures are also one of the methods by which the CCP enhances and implements such unified national identification under CCP to sustain the daily nationalism within the state and further consolidate its rule. Thus, in contemporary Chinese society, in addition to the already evolved nationalist bonds based on the meta-Chinese nation since 19th century, through strong political means, safeguarding and developing the Chinese nation (-state) under the leadership of the Communist Party has successfully moulded into mainstream values and emotional bonds of the whole society, becoming a significant basis for grassroots nationalism. Otherwise, there is a risk for any nationalist movement of being suppressed by the authorities or failing to gain widespread support and recognition if it denied the nation-state and/or the CCP regime.

In sum, the invented and reproduced concepts about Chinese nation (-state) since 19th century, as well as the newly created ideologies about CCP's rule and leadership over such nation after 1949, serve as the nationalist doctrines in current Chinese society that all the citizens are required to obey, while also forming the nationalist emotional bonds embedded into the daily routines.

3.4 A new framework

Combining the contributions of previous approaches discussed before, it is indicated that both pre-existing or survival ethnic resources and nationalistic values about the nation-state that are invented or reproduced by modern elites are capable of forming the fundamentals of banal nationalism and further create emotional bonds for nationalism occurring with forceful social movements. This point will be particularly obvious within established nations like the Han people that have a rich and long ethnic cultural heritage and are influenced by powerful political institutions in the modern nation-state like CCP, where these two kinds of materials may co-exist and co-contribute to nationalist ideology.

In conclusion, a new framework should firstly understand the active nationalism occurring with social movements as a site of competition and negotiation between different views of the nation based on banal nationalism to defend and protect the persistent existence of an already formed nation, emphasizing its particularity and sovereignty. Therefore, the study of such nationalism includes an analysis of this process of negotiation and reproduction of national

identity. Moreover, such national identity is understood as unstable and fluid rather than fixed or immutable, constantly being redefined and reproduced according to the outside relationship with the 'other' and continuously negotiated during communication inside the community. Meanwhile, the common denominator of such negotiation and reproduction is the banal national identity embedded in everyday life, which is influenced by pre-existing and survival ethnic materials and nationalistic values invented or reproduced by political elites for modern nation-state.

3.5 Framework on analysing social movements

3.5.1 Definition of social movements

3.5.1.1 Development of the definitions of social movements in the West

The concept of social movements has been defined and interpreted in diverse ways by different scholars in the past decades, reflecting various theoretical perspectives and empirical observations. Early conceptualizations of social movements were largely rooted in collective behaviour theories. For example, Blumer (1939) defined social movements as collective enterprises aimed at establishing a new order of life, emphasizing their emergent and spontaneous nature. Turner and Killian (1987) similarly viewed social movements as spontaneous and unstructured forms of collective action, in contrast to organizational and

institutional behaviour, that seek to change societal norms and values. However, Classical Marxist theories provided a different perspective by linking social movements to class struggles and economic inequalities. The Classical Marxist scholars argued that social movements should arise from inherent conflicts between different social classes and be driven by economic exploitation and a desire for revolutionary change (Adam, 1993; Buechler, 1995; Melucci, 1980). Such structural approaches emphasized the role of pre-conditions like economic factors and class relations in the formation and dynamics of social movements.

In west, the 1970s testified a significant change in the study of social movements with the development of resource mobilization theory. This theory, firstly introduced by McCarthy and Zald (1977), marked a shift towards viewing social movements as rational, organized efforts to achieve specific goals including changing the distribution of resources and disrupting power imbalances. The scholars within this theoretical strand perceived social movements as composed of professional organizations and activists who strategically plan and execute their actions to achieve desired outcomes (Edwards, and Gillham, 2013; Flynn, 2011; Jenkins, 1983). Resource mobilization theory argued that the success of social movements depends on activists' ability to mobilize both material resources such as money, organizations, technology, means of communication, mass media, etc., as well as non-material resources like legitimacy, social networks, public attention, moral commitment, solidarity, etc. (Fuchs, 2006). This theory also underlines the necessity and importance to establish more effective, centralized, and formal organizational structures for the success of social movements (Edwards, and Gillham, 2013; Flynn, 2011; Jenkins, 1983). Hence, this theory challenged earlier notions of spontaneity in the field of movement study and highlighted the role of

external support and institutional resources in developing movements in a broader socio-political context.

Based on resource mobilization theory, political process theory further refined the understanding of social movements by incorporating the broader political environment. Scholars like Tilly (1978) and McAdam (1982) indicated that social movements are shaped by political opportunities and constraints, including the openness of political systems, the availability of elite allies, and the state's capacity for repression. This theory posits that social movements emerge when political opportunities align with organizational strength and collective consciousness, which also highlights the dynamic interaction between social movements and the political context, suggesting that movements are not only driven by internal resources, but also by external political conditions.

Later, in the last two decades of the 20th century, new social movement (NSM) theories emerged as a response and criticism of the limitations of previous theories and approaches on social movements, such as resource mobilization theory and political process theory. Among the relevant theorists, Touraine (1981) was one of the first scholars to articulate the concept of NSMs, arguing that such new social movements represent a shift from traditional conflicts over material resources to struggles over cultural and symbolic resources. Melucci (1989, 1996) further developed this idea by emphasizing the importance of collective identity process, symbolic action, and the creation of new meanings, social relations, and social norms. In general, such NSM theories emphasize identity, culture, recognition, and post-materialist values, reflecting the changing nature of social conflicts, and the rise of movements centred on issues beyond economic and political concerns especially in Western

societies, including the civil rights movement, feminist movement, environmentalism, LGBTQ+ movements, and other forms of identity-based activism.

3.5.1.2 Diani's (1992) relational definition

Although through the 20th century, a number of theorists have provided many theories and approaches to social movements, such scholars normally highlight different aspects of social movement but the definition of the movement in general. In other words, those approaches and theories mentioned above usually offer the discussion from various perspectives to help analyse the movement by focusing on different parts of it, lacking a broader concept that can sufficiently define all the social movements in different forms and from different contexts. Thus, in order to solve this conceptual issue, one more reflexive and inclusive definition of social movement should be firstly employed to help build the framework for this research.

After careful review of the current literature, Diani's (1992) work seems to offer a nuanced and reflexive definition of social movements that accommodates and synthesises various theoretical approaches. Diani (1992) suggests that a social movement is a 'network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity' (p. 13).

According to Diani (1992), social movements are conceptualised as fluid and flexible networks consisting of informal interactions among formally independent participants from various contexts, bearing their personal identities and own values, and pursuing specific goals and objectives, rather than rigid organizational structures or an institutionalised network of formal relationships among strictly registered members. This informal nature allows for

flexibility and adaptability, which are crucial for the dynamic nature of social movements. The networks built on such informal interactions further facilitate the flow of information, resources, support, and collaboration among participants via horizontal forms of mobilisation, enabling coordinated collective action. Thus, Diani's (1992) conceptualisation not only acknowledges the diverse and heterogeneous nature of contemporary social movements, but also underlines their characteristics of decentralisation and lacking hierarchical leadership.

However, Diani's (1992) definition does not deny the significant and fundamental role of collective identities for shaping and sustaining the social movements. In contrast, as Diani (1992) points out, collective identity provides a sense of belonging and solidarity among participants, fostering a shared sense of purpose and direction that ensures the sustenance and coherence of social movements. Although still maintaining their individualist characteristics and personal identities, participants of a social movement 'identify each other as part of a collective effort which goes beyond specific initiatives, organizations, and events' (Diani, 2003, p. 301). Such mutual recognition among participants defines the boundaries of a movement that are inherently fluid and unstable as well.

Moreover, Diani's (1992) definition underscores the engagement of social movements in conflictual issues. Such engagement is central to the identity and purpose of social movements, as they seek to challenge and transform existing power structures, norms, and practices. By focusing on conflict, Diani (1992) highlights the confrontational and oppositional aspects of social movements, which often position themselves against specifically identified opponents, i.e. other social actors that the movement intends to subtract them from the social resources they have been controlling over. Therefore, Diani's (1992)

definition suggests that social movements are inherently disruptive, transformative, and seek to challenge the status quo, making them powerful agents of social and political change.

Hence, Diani's (1992) definition has provided a reflexive, inclusive, and relational approach to explore the process of the emergence and development of social movements in different contexts, as well as to discover the dynamics of movement participants from various backgrounds. However, since Diani's (1992) work relies on the theoretical and empirical findings based in West, it is still necessary to further examine the applicability of his definition in the conditions of contemporary Chinese society before formally adopting it to help build the framework for this research. Therefore, in the following sections, the academic findings about social movements in China, especially those taking place on Chinese social media platforms, will be explored to realise such examination, while necessary improvements will be provided as well.

3.5.1.3 Social movements in Post-1989 Chinese society

Compared with movements and activism in the West, the social movements in PRC have evolved in a different way, concerning both the form they have adopted and the situation they have been forcibly located in. Since the economic reforms and opening up in 1978, Chinese society, influenced by Western neoliberalism, market economy principles, and democratic ideas, experienced a brief period in the 1980s where there was an effort to transition towards a civil society and implement comprehensive political reforms (Brodsgaard, 1981; Chen and Jin, 1997; Fewsmith, 2001; Goldman, 1994; Han and Hua, 1990; Kim, 2008; Kwong, 1988; McCormick, Shaozhi, and Xiaoming, 1992; Ogden, Hartford, Sullivan, and Zweig, 2016;

Saich, 2019; Zhao, 2008; Zhu, 1997). During this time, under the tacit approval and even support of progressive leaders like Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, the public organized various social movements calling for thorough political reforms. During that period, such movements often resembled Western social movements in their repertoire of contentious actions, typically manifesting as assemblies, parades, and demonstrations. Meanwhile, the newly enacted constitution of that era (1982 version) also granted citizens the right to engage in such activities, providing legitimacy for their actions at the level of National Law (Chen and Jin, 1997; Fewsmith, 2001; Goldman, 1994; Han and Hua, 1990; Kim, 2008; Kwong, 1988; McCormick, Shaozhi, and Xiaoming, 1992; Ogden, Hartford, Sullivan, and Zweig, 2016; Saich, 2019; Zhao, 2008; Zhu, 1997).

However, this period of liberalization and democratization was short-lived. Following the failure of the 1989 democratic movement, the CCP regime finally abandoned its liberal approach of the 1980s. Reformist leaders were removed from their positions, and the CCP shifted towards conservatism, enacting a series of laws and regulations like the 'Law on Assemblies, Parades, and Demonstrations of the People's Republic of China'. Such laws, regulations, as well as attached implementations restricted the constitutional rights of citizens to gather and protest, requiring prior approval from the government for any such activities (Fewsmith, 2001; Goldman, 2005; Kim, 2008; Schoenhals, 1999; Zhu, 1997). In practice, assemblies, demonstrations, and protests organized by non-governmental agencies have rarely been officially approved. The government also intensified its monitoring and stability-maintenance systems, scrutinizing any potential factors that might trigger collective actions or protests in reality. National violent forces, especially the police and state security apparatus, have also employed measures including intimidation, arrests, and even imprisonment to prevent any non-government-led mass gatherings and actions from taking

place, evolving, or expanding (Fewsmith, 2001; Goldman, 2005; Kim, 2008; Schoenhals, 1999; Zhu, 1997).

However, despite these restrictions, contemporary Chinese society, especially since the early 21st century with the advent of the Internet, still witnesses various social movements continuing to occur and survive in a battle of wits with the government. To avoid government intervention or repression, these movements have developed distinctive characteristics within such specific environment. Firstly, scholars indicate that these movements always lack the formal organizational structures, or at least only maintain weak ones to avoid government vigilance and intervention (Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008; Zeng, Huang, and Liu, 2013). In other words, due to the CCP's stringent regulatory and punitive measures, contemporary Chinese social movements normally do not operate under any public organization name or with a rigid organizational structure (Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008). To evade government censorship, especially police surveillance and interference, participants often maintain covert contact, while the relationships or networks among participants always exhibit atomized and fragmented characteristics in the public sphere, difficult to be detected or to be analysed in their entirety. Hence, there is usually no visible consolidated networks among movement participants, nor visible vertical leadership or hierarchical relationships, which could be explored in detail. Such movements seldom issue calls or directives in the name of specific individuals as leaders, in order to ensure the influencers' or core members' safety (Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008; Qi, 2017). Meanwhile, in the Internet age, unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese social movements rarely create particular public websites, or operate independent digital agencies for movement-focused introduction, claims, membership, mobilization or propaganda since such activities would quickly attract government interference, including bans and offline summons and arrests (Chen, 2012; Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008). Therefore, according to previous

research, the organizations, networks, and membership of Chinese social movements in the post 1989 era can hardly be examined based on publicly available information.

Secondly, scholars also indicate that since the 1990s, Chinese social movements generally avoid publicly attacking the government or calling for political reforms (Almén and Burell, 2018; Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008). In other words, they do not openly challenge the CCP's rule and legitimacy. Instead, such movements generally criticize or oppose particular policies and related practices of government, calling for policy. However, in general these movements still involve conflictual issues like environmental protection, livelihood rights, and social resource distribution.

Furthermore, previous research also finds that offline actions of contemporary movements in China often exist only at the local level (Almén and Burell, 2018; Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008). They usually manifest as collective gatherings and demonstration of local residents concerning issues of livelihood rights, which generally end with the local authorities' intervention, negotiations, and eventual dispersal of such actions in the short term (Almén and Burell, 2018; Lin, 2007; Ma, 2008). Since the 1989 Tiananmen incident, there have been almost no large-scale offline nationwide social movements with broad societal participation in PRC, different from their counterparts in the West.

3.5.1.4 Social movements in the era of social media in China

Although some scholars used to suggest that with the popularity of social media platforms in the 2010s, especially microblogs like Sina Weibo, the conditions for large-scale social movements in Chinese society might be improved, which may lead to new waves of democratization as well as successful transformation to civil society in the digital era, such utopian illusions have been shattered by subsequent government actions dealing with emerging Chinese social media. Especially since 2012, the Chinese government has implemented increasingly stringent regulatory measures on social media platforms (Hiruncharoenvate, Lin, and Gilbert, 2015; Knockel, Crete-Nishihata, Ng, Senft, and Crandall, 2015; Li, 2023a; Li, 2023b; Liu and Zhao, 2021; Qiang, 2019; Stoycheff, Burgess, and Martucci, 2020; Vuori, J.A. and Paltemaa, 2015). This has resulted in strict surveillance over public opinion, trends, topics, and published content across all areas online. Particularly for content related to politics, ideology, and social issues that may challenge state power or social stability, the government collaborates with platforms like Sina Weibo to enforce real-name registration, public opinion monitoring, and real-time censorship (Hiruncharoenvate, Lin, and Gilbert, 2015; Knockel, Crete-Nishihata, Ng, Senft, and Crandall, 2015; Li, 2023a; Li, 2023b; Liu and Zhao, 2021; Qiang, 2019; Stoycheff, Burgess, and Martucci, 2020; Vuori, J.A. and Paltemaa, 2015). Under such conditions, any content that does not align with the official ideology, challenges government authority, expresses political dissent, criticizes government departments or leaders, threatens national security, calls for offline protests, or may potentially trigger offline mass gatherings is subject to intervention and handling by platforms, the Cyberspace Administration of the government, or even national forces like the police.

In particular, on Sina Weibo, such interventions particularly include removing or blocking related hashtags and trending searches, blocking the search of related keywords labelled as

sensitive and illegal, censoring the subsequent content before being published by those targeted accounts, limiting the reach of targeted content, banning the function of repost, comment, and like of targeted posts, and imposing various levels of account restrictions or deletions (Hiruncharoenvate, Lin, and Gilbert, 2015; Li, 2023b; Liu and Zhao, 2021; Qiang, 2019; Stoycheff, Burgess, and Martucci, 2020; Vuori, J.A. and Paltemaa, 2015). Meanwhile, offline measures will also be taken to deal with the owners of those targeted accounts, which include summoning such users in person for warnings or even direct detention by police or national security departments, depending on the severity of the situation. The new Internet Security Regulations under Xi Jinping's rule also stipulate that if any controversial Weibo post is reposted more than 500 times or reaches 5000 times of page views, the original poster may face legal consequences, increasing the risk of direct government action (Xinhuanet, 2013). During special time periods (e.g., gathering of important national meetings like annual National Congress), these measures will be enforced more swiftly and severely, with even minor infractions facing immediate action in order to sustain the social stability to a greatest extent (Qiang, 2019).

Hence, although with the rise of social media in the 2010s, there used to be attempts to replicate the Arab Spring and Jasmine Revolution in China, due to effective government censorship and handling measures simultaneously following up, such attempts were eventually unsuccessful and were quelled at a nascent stage. Subsequent social movements occurring on Chinese platforms, including the feminist #MeToo movement since 2018, have still in general adhered to the characteristics summarized by scholars mentioned above (Gu, Jiang, and Ye, 2022; Liu, 2015; Xue and Rose, 2022). In other words, according to current literature and research, even on social media, social movements in China have not achieved fundamental breakthroughs beyond the general characteristics of the social movements in

Post-1989 era, while still displaying an increasing trend towards weak organization or even de-organization, with participants maintaining loose or even secret connections rather than presenting themselves as members of specific organizations or solid movement networks, criticising the policies instead of attacking CCP regime, as well as offline actions remaining at local level (Gu, Jiang, and Ye, 2022; Liu, 2015; Xue and Rose, 2022).

3.5.1.5 Need for an approach to collective identity of social movements

Thus, from the review of social movements in China above, it is evident that their general patterns do not deviate or break from Diani's (1992) relational definition of social movements. Particularly in the aspect of 'network of informal interactions', due to the specific socio-political environment of PRC, the relationships and connections between participants in current Chinese social movements are even more informal, de-organized, decentralized, and secret than that summarised by Diani (1992). Under such circumstances, while not denying the existence and core function of such networks, it is challenging to analyse the detailed intricacies of these networks and connections through publicly available information, such as qualitative data collected from social platforms.

Meanwhile, although these movements generally do not directly address core political system reforms or other prohibited topics, they are still related to social conflicts and contentious issues, aligning with Diani's (1992) definition. It is also noteworthy that studies on Chinese social movements do not deny the role of collective identity as well, many of which directly analyse different social movements from the perspective of collective identities (i.e. Huang, 2023; Jian and Chan, 2016; Yang, 2023; Zhang, 2015).

Therefore, it can be summarised that Diani's (1992) relational definition of movements as a networks and social processes is applicable to the analysis of contemporary social movements on Chinese social media. However, on the one hand, as previously mentioned, it is difficult to gather comprehensive and detailed data on specific networks and participant connections within those movements. This implies that qualitative analysis of social movements on Chinese social media will struggle to fully discuss this aspect in detail. Consequently, according to Diani's (1992) definition, the only foundational and core aspect remaining for sufficient in-depth analysis of such movements in China should be collective identity.

On the other hand, the nationalist framework established before has already defined nationalist movements in already established nation-states as social movements activated to defend the nation-state. It also defines national identity in such a scenario as an unstable and fluid process for negotiation, competition, and cooperation among participants to develop the movement's own nationalist values and mobilise for nationalist actions, which should be further explored to decode the whole movement. Thus, this preliminary framework has also laid the groundwork for analysing the nationalist movement from the perspective of shared national identity among the participants that is effectively equivalent to the collective identity in the definition of social movements.

Hence, considering the reasons discussed above, it is decided that this research should further introduce an approach capable of detailed analysis of collective identity within social movements to help establish the framework for analysing and discussing the nationalist

movement on Sina Weibo. Thus, Melucci's (1996) framework of collective identity is eventually adopted here.

3.5.2 Melucci's framework

Melucci's (1996) framework conceptualizes collective identity as 'an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientation of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place' (Melucci, 1996, p. 70). According to this standpoint, collective identity is viewed as 'a network of active relationships between the actors, who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions' (Melucci, 1996, p. 71). In other words, it is an open-ended process through which actors constantly 'negotiate, understand and construct their action through shared, repeated interaction' (Fominaya, 2010, p. 394; see also Kavada, 2015). Due to that, collective identity is a reflexive social construct undergoing consistent reproduction and reconstruction, rather than a stable unity of multiple individuals sharing common values or ideological consensus (Bakardjieva, 2015; Coretti and Pica, 2015; Fominaya, 2010a; Fominaya, 2010b; Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015; Kavada, 2015; Milan, 2015; Monterde, Calleja-López, Aguilera, Barandiaran and Postill, 2015; Svensson, Neumayer, Banfield-Mumb and Schossböck, 2014; Treré, 2015). Such understanding of collective identity not only complies with Diani's (1992) concept of social movement, but also accords with the definition of national identity as always in process and never complete in the new framework of nationalism discussed before.

The process of collective identity includes three main aspects according to Melucci's (1996) framework. Firstly, boundary work, or the cognitive definition of the movement, which distinguishes the 'collective self' from 'others' in order to emphasize the commonalities inside the collective (Coretti and Pica, 2015; Fominaya, 2010a; Hunt and Benford, 2004; Melucci, 1996; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Treré, 2015). Secondly, active relationships among participants which ensure the continuous argument, discussion and negotiation inside the group in order to recognize, develop, rectify and reinforce collective action through 'a reflexive understanding of its relation to the context or environment in which it develops, including an awareness of the opportunities and constraints it faces in a given field of action' (Fominaya, 2010b, p. 395; Melucci, 1996). Thirdly, the creation of bonds which enables fostering and sustaining collective identification and devotion to the movement (Chan, 2017; Coretti and Pica, 2015; Fominaya, 2010a; Fominaya, 2010b; Melucci, 1996).

Thus, collective identity is a 'dynamic ongoing process that involves cognitive definitions about ends, means, and the field of action, which are expressed through a common language and enacted through a set of rituals, practices, and cultural artifacts where the dimension of negotiation is central' (Melucci, 1995, cited by Fominaya, 2010b, p. 378). Additionally, Melucci (1996) also stresses the utilization of 'identization' instead of the term 'identity' to emphasize the collective actor as a whole rather than a sum of individuals, which benefits understanding 'how the collective becomes a collective through 'multiple and heterogeneous social processes'' (p. 20).

3.5.3 Revising Melucci's framework and applying it to the new framework of nationalism

Current literature provides various modifications and supplements to Melucci's (1996) framework for exploring movements under contemporary social conditions. I do not intend to introduce all of them here since there will be further improvements concerning social media in next chapter, but I attempt to primarily build a practical version for discussing nationalism in this section.

According to Fominaya (2010a; 2010b), previous research shows that in the movements where identity politics play a central role, the 'distinction between collective identity as a process and as a product has sometimes been blurred' (2010a, p. 379). It is indicated that in such 'identitarian movements' which strategically utilize collective identity as a political tool, those shared interests, meanings, ties or goals are not only experienced and produced through the actors' interactions inside the movement, but also partially constituted from pre-existing materials outside the movement (Fominaya, 2010a, 2010b). In addition to a need of explicit construction of collective identity, scholars also point out that in such practice, between personal identities, social identities and collective identities, there exists strong overlap and interaction (Fominaya, 2010a, 2010b). Due to that, considering the framework of nationalism proposed before, the concepts of common origin frames, existing emotional value commitment, and construction of enemy should be attached to Melucci's (1996) framework of collective identity to discuss the function of pre-existing materials and ideologies.

Firstly, common origin frames, according to Adler (2012) and della Porta and Diani (2010), indicate that activists absorb symbolic meanings from pre-existing cultural and political resources to reproduce common meanings of the collective through interactions and experiences in order to precede, justify and reinforce the current actions (Treré, 2015). This matches with the functions of pre-existing ethnic resources and politically invented or reproduced modern values in forming banal national discourses which contribute to the ideological foundation of further invoked nationalism.

Secondly, according to Kern and Nam (2013), in modern societies, since public discourse is always shaped by positive versus negative value categories, values are usually efficiently used to draw frontiers between good and evil. Some values, which are developed throughout individuals' growth and adolescence or some significant situations, can be extremely desirable and provocative with strong emotional quality (Kern and Nam, 2013). These values can also help promote the establishment of the boundary between positive 'us'-the collective self-and negative 'them'- the evil 'other' - and illustrate the goals aimed at maintaining justice and defeating wickedness in order to legitimize the collective actions under the protection of public discourse without direct conflicts with the political authority (Kern and Nam, 2013). Since previous research indicates, emotional motivations are necessary to activate the participants and sustain the movement, it is acknowledged that the emotional value commitment is of importance to motivate and maintain actions bound with such influential values permeated into public recognition (Chan, 2017; Fominaya, 2010a; Fominaya, 2010b; Hunt and Benford, 2004; Ji, Zhou and Kim, 2017; Kern and Nam, 2013; Pan, Lu, Wang and Chau, 2017; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Treré, 2015). Thus, it is argued that in addition to the emotional bonds produced or reproduced during the collective action, the

existing emotional value commitment recognized by public is also a necessary factor for evocating and maintaining the collective movement. Similar to common origin frames, this concept also corresponds to the function of existing materials in invoking active nationalism while laying emphasis on emotional work.

Meanwhile, another concept of construction of enemy can also be attached, which illustrates the ability to reproduce the pre-existing group identities into symbolic negative images of current oppositional 'others' (Benford and Snow, 2000; Svensson, Neumayer, Banfield-Mumb and Schossböck, 2014). This practice can help stimulate the anger of participants and vivify the conflicts between active groups and targets, which Melucci (1996) described as the enhancer of the solidarity among intragroup relations (Chan, 2017). Thus, bound with the concept of emotional value commitment, this can be applied to deconstruct the negative image-building of targeted groups within the nationalist movement which helps explore the solidarity and ideology of it.

Thus, combing these three concepts, the Melucci's (1996) framework of collective identity is applied to the new proposed framework of nationalism to analyse the nationalist movement with national identity developed from banal nationalism in China.

Chapter 4

Improvements on Melucci's framework

4.1 Social movement and technologies complex

4.1.1 Technological determinism and social constructionism

As scholars point out, although a social movement like Han nationalism can maintain its collective process in digital era, the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) still bring challenges and innovations on analysing such movement which practices differently from traditional modes, indicating that the previous approach needs to be improved (Bakardjieva, 2015; Coretti and Pica, 2015; Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Fominaya, 2010a; Fominaya, 2010b; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015; Kavada, 2015; Kavada, 2018; Kidd and McIntosh, 2016; Milan, 2015; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019).

Meanwhile, the literature also points out that the most important demand for such improvement is to accurately understand the position of technology in current movements, requiring the avoidance of both technological determinism and extreme social constructionism (Deseriis, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Poell, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020; Willems, 2020). Technological determinism in this sphere refers to views that privilege

information and communication technologies and solely acknowledge the technological power of social media platforms as primary driving forces of activism, revolution and movements, disregarding the autonomous and dynamic ability of social movement actors (Etter and Albu, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Kavada, 2018; Tang, Hung, Au-Yeung and Yuen, 2020; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020; Willems, 2020). Such standpoint, as scholars conclude, can be attributed to the overgeneralization of technological features and excessive attention on research data gathered from external and observable communication processes and behaviours, neglecting the internal and backstage communicative dynamics among activists (Coretti and Pica, 2015; Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020).

On the other hand, social constructionism extremely emphasizes the role of social actors in effectively deploying the technologies to construct and promote the movements, privileging activists' practices over affordances provided by communicative environment on social media platforms, ignoring the influence of technological power and other external dynamics (Etter and Albu, 2020; Treré, 2019; Willems, 2020).

Both sides are naïve simplifications, misunderstanding the technology-media-movements complex. Empirical research shows that the interplay of technical affordances, technological competencies, pre-existing social, cultural and political commitments and collective processes has enabled the creative and strategic agency of activists to autonomously steer the collective movements in the communicative environment constituted by ICTs (Bakardjieva, 2015; Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Dumitrica and Felt, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Gerbaudo,

2015; Kavada, 2015; Kavada, 2018; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Stewart and Schultze, 2019; Stewart, Arif, Nied, Spiro, and Starbird. 2017; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020). Academic findings also prove that in practice the development of the movements on social media platforms will betray and contradict against the initial purpose and intention embedded into the sociotechnical architectures of these platforms (Dumitrica and Felt, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Hoyng, 2020; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020). Hence, although specific technologies are able to shape the form of the movements, the dynamics reflected in participants' actions can still correspond to longstanding conflicts where social movements are rooted, rather than absolutely depending on such technologies (Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Kavada, 2015; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020).

4.1.2 An information ecology approach

4.1.2.1 Ecological perspective and information ecology

Therefore, in order to accurately deal with the technology-media-movements complex issue and achieve equilibrium between technological determinism and social constructionism, an information ecology approach is applied. The information ecology approach, developed by Nardi and O'Day (1999), links actors' practices, imaginaries, and cultures with the material

features of technologies. This approach is based on Altheide's (1995) theory of ecology of communication which aims at exploring the interrelations among information technologies, communication formats and social activities. According to Foth and Hearn (2007), distinct from traditional Medium Theory which focuses on media effects and considers media as independent and disconnected from social, cultural and political contexts, the communicative ecology perspective illustrates the constitutive part of specific context in which communication takes place and sociocultural activities in producing and reproducing meanings during media practice. On this basis, Nardi and O'Day (1999) define the information ecology as incorporating five aspects, including recognizing it as system, exhibition of diversity, acknowledgement of co-evolving among different parts, some necessary keystone species, and a sense of locality. Hence the information ecology approach is helpful to reintroduce the human agency and avoid technological determinist tendency in empirical research (Barassi, 2015; Treré, 2012; Treré, 2019). In other words, 'the information ecology approach includes the network of relationships, values, and motivations involved in the use of technologies, and is thus especially useful in analysing all the nuances inherent in multiple local interactions, changes, and practices' (Treré, 2019, p. 42).

Thus, as Treré (2019) indicates, the information ecology approach extends the preceding definition of media ecologies in order to 'include the structure and the context of media uses, relocating concepts like co-evolution and coexistence from the macro level to the micro/ local dimension of analysis, placing attention on people's practices, needs, and the values they attribute to technology' (p. 43). Therefore, scholars who apply the information ecology approach in their work successfully illustrate the critical ways that actors use proper social media platforms by understanding and estimating the commodification entailed by platforms

and risks for surveillance, in order to protect their security and rights while maintaining the protest actions (i.e. Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela, 2019; Milan and Barbosa, 2020; Poole, Giraud, and de Quincey, 2019). This peculiarity of information ecology approach corresponds with the demand in last section that dynamic of actors in social movements should be emphasized in order to go beyond the simplification of technological affordance by simply focusing on external material features.

4.1.2.2 Main points and insights brought from affordances lens

4.1.2.2.1 A diachronic perspective

Concurrently, three points are emphasized when applying the ecological approach for this research. Firstly, the analysis should be examined in a diachronic perspective which views the complexity of social media practices of the movements as a fluid, unpredictable, and dynamic process. As Treré (2019) puts it:

'Social movements and media technologies are both processes that emerge, evolve, and transform, passing through phases of latency and visibility (Mattoni 2017; Mattoni and Treré 2014). Looking at their interactions over time means recognizing the contentious path of activists' media technologies adoptions, rejections, and

abandonments, and inquiring into the motivations, meanings, and causes of these practices. Social movements' media ecologies are in constant evolution and rearrangement. Since this lesson highlights continuities and discontinuities with past media practices and processes, it contributes to eschewing the fallacy of technological presentism, focusing instead on the roots (Lim, 2018), trajectories, and historical communicative conditions of movements' (p. 48-49).

4.1.2.2 Sociotechnical complexity and imagined affordances

Secondly, the sociotechnical complexity of social media technologies should be recognized, which defines the movement by material complexity consisting of 'multiple affordances, layers, and concomitant environments that are traversed and merged by activist practices' (Treré, 2019, p. 49). Thus, the materiality is scrutinized as a dynamic, multidimensional and complex phenomenon where the material and social are co-constitutive (Treré, 2019).

However, although scholars employed ecological approach attempt to illustrate the co-constitutive relations between activism and digital media, they still leave ambiguity for such sociotechnical complexity, which means related research didn't give a microscopical framework to explore the specific affordances evolved from interplay between platform architecture and actors' practices. Instead, these scholars seem more likely to discuss the phenomenon in a more general way, lacking detailed analysis on various social media affordances playing roles in different fields of the movements (see Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela, 2019; Milan and Barbosa, 2020; Poole, Giraud, and de Quincey, 2019; Treré, 2012; Treré, 2019). Thus, an affordance lens should be supplemented to dispose such issues and

provide a meticulous approach, as other scholars suggest (Deseriis, 2020; Etter and Albu, 2020; Khazraee and Novak, 2018; Treem and Leonardi, 2013).

4.1.2.2.1 Applying imagined affordance lens

The concept of affordance was primarily proposed by Gibson (1979) in ecological psychology to discuss the specific relationships between environment and animals. In his work, Gibson (1979) defined affordance as a relational property, which is offered by physical environment and to be perceived by observer to behave with the possibilities for action provided by it. In Gibson's conception, affordance is invariant, always there to be perceived, and it doesn't cause the observer's behaviour but constrains and controls that (Gibson, 1979; Gibson, 1982; Greeno, 1994; Heft, 1989; Jenkins, 2008; Natsoulas, 2004). Literature points out that Gibson's concept of affordance has enormously influenced the studies on human-technology relations, especially user-Internet interactions, developed by scholars into various conceptualizations such as perceived affordances, technology affordances, and social affordances (Gaver, 1991; Greeno, 1994; Heft, 1989; Jenkins, 2008; Natsoulas, 2004; Norman, 1988; Wellman et al., 2003). However, similar to studies on technologies and movements, among these scholars there has been longstanding debate on defining affordance between technological realism and social constructivism, surrounding whether technological objects have inherent properties to enable and constrain certain actions and impact on constituting sociality, or the very reality of technology and associated sociality are constituted and shaped by human practices (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Hutchby, 2001; Jordan, 2008; Leonardi and Barley, 2008; Nagy and Neff, 2015).

In order to reconcile the controversies and theoretically balance the effects between technology and human users, Hutchby (2001) updates the concept of affordance, which indicates that ‘affordances are functional and relational aspects [of an object’s material presence in the world] which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object’ (p. 444). Thus, the technologies are defined as artefacts which are ‘both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them’ (Hutchby, 2001, p. 444). In other words, the affordances of an artefact set limits on and shape the conditions of possibility for an action, meanwhile, there are various ways of ‘responding to the range of affordances for action and interaction that a technology presents’ (Hutchby, 2001, p. 453). As Bucher and Helmond (2018) note:

‘For the sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001a, 2001b) the term affordance provides a way to move beyond naïve technological determinism and strict social constructivism. Hutchby suggests that affordance provides a middle term that both takes into account the ways in which technologies are socially constructed and situated on the one hand, and materially constraining and enabling on the other hand. [...] This definition emphasizes how affordances are both functional and relational; ‘functional in the sense that they are enabling, as well as constraining’ and relational in terms of drawing ‘attention to the way that the affordances of an object may be different for one species than for another’ (p. 10).

The imagined affordance concept proposed by Nagy and Neff (2015) extends the communicative affordance of Hutchby (2001). Similarly opposed to a fixed and even more rigid notion of affordance underlining the material features provided by technology designs, the imagined affordance concept acknowledges that users can ‘have certain expectations about their communication technologies [...] in effect and practice, shape how they approach them and what actions they think are suggested’ (Nagy and Neff, 2015, p. 5). Such expectations, as Nagy and Neff (2015) indicate, may not be absorbed and encoded into technology by design quickly and hardly, but they become a de facto portion of users’ perceptions of available actions for them. As Nagy and Neff (2015) note: ‘Imagined affordances emerge between users’ perceptions, attitudes, and expectations; between the materiality and functionality of technologies; and between the intentions and perceptions of designers’ (p. 5). Thus, on the basis of the perspective of Hutchby (2001), Nagy and Neff (2015) indicate that the actualization of social media affordances relies on the co-constitution and co-evolution between users’ specific intentions and sociotechnical configurations of platforms in a broad social context.

Therefore, in this research, when exploring the materiality of social movements on platforms from an ecological perspective, the actualization of those influential social media affordances should also be analysed and decoded in a sociotechnical mediated environment by considering the interaction between human activities of movement actors and non-human configurations from social media platforms.

4.1.2.2.3 Power struggle between movement actors and platforms

The third point is related to the issue of power struggle between actors and platforms. The ecological approach views the political nature of media ecology as the basic and fundamental dimension (Treré, 2019). It is necessary to reveal the corporate and mainstream uses of the technologies in a critical perspective. Scholars emphasize that it helps illustrate the ‘actual power relations and political conflicts’ behind the protest, rooted in media ecologies (Barassi 2015; Fuchs 2014; Treré, 2019, p. 49). As (Treré, 2019) claims:

‘Contemporary activism is characterized by ‘a complicated marriage’ with social media platforms (Galis and Neumayer 2016, p. 2), whose materiality needs to be critically unveiled in order to appreciate them ‘as active agents shaping the symbolic and organizational processes of social actors’ (Milan 2015, p. 897). An ecological exploration of social movements’ media practices reveals the ambivalences and contradictions of contemporary ‘communicative capitalism’ (Dean 2005) from a bottom-up perspective. This approach investigates the consequences of materiality in the context of the increasing corporatization of digital environments and the resulting negotiations and tactics of activists in their everyday struggle against digital capitalism (Barassi 2015)’ (p. 50).

4.1.2.3 Two essential factors in current platform-movement ecology

Hence, as the third point underlined before, the information ecology approach demands that from a critical perspective to discussing the use of technologies in social movements, in addition to the co-constitutive relations between specific technological materials and actors' sociocultural practices, the struggle between dynamic actors and current power structure behind platforms also needs to be discovered. In other words, both of the external institutional influence placed on and inserted into the architecture of social media platforms which determines the technological or non-human activities, and particular contexts generally affecting actors' perceptions, intentions and practices in utilizing technologies, should be simultaneously emphasized in the analysis. Thus, according to findings in current literature, in the second part of this approach section, I will introduce two essential or even determinative factors in current media-activism ecology: the political economy tied to social media platforms, and the techno-utopian values attributed to information and communication technologies among users in modern society.

4.1.2.3.1 Political economy of social media platforms

Current studies point out that the political cultures and political economy tied to technologies de facto construct the architecture of digital communication that produces the tension between emancipatory and repressive tendencies of applying ICTs into social movement (Coretti and Pica, 2015; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2019; Trillò, 2018). Thus, when analysing relations between social movement and social media platforms, the applied political cultures and economies need to be considered (Coretti and Pica, 2015;

Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2019; Trillò, 2018). This means technologies are never value-neutral, and both the state and digital capitalist powers are able to influence the movement, either fostering or impeding it, through the use or direct operation of technologies which create positive or negative implications for social movement actors (Coretti and Pica, 2015; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2019; Trillò, 2018). Thus, it is argued that information and communication technologies must be acknowledged as already and always enmeshed with social processes and institutional power while researching on how social movements adopt ICTs must rely on empirical evaluation considering these external effects, preventing the theoretical fiat and rhetorical pronouncement of a presupposed tendency (Coretti and Pica, 2015; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2019; Trillò, 2018). Again, such perspective from previous research coincides with the third point underlined in information ecology approach part which claims the importance to deconstruct the corporate/mainstream use of and power structure behind the platform while exploring the social movement adopting it.

Hence, it is necessary to briefly elucidate the political economy of current social media platforms. As scholars note, the 'economy' in this issue refers to the ownership structures of the platform as well as the power relations which shape and structure the platform architectures and the communications taking place on social media (Dahlberg, 2015; Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2015; Fuchs, 2016). Meanwhile, the 'political' indicates the power structures and empowerment divides modelled by the 'economy' and

associated influences on identities, values and related rules on the platform (Dahlberg, 2015; Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2015; Fuchs, 2016).

Previous research points out that popular social media, such as Twitter and Facebook are ‘predominantly based on a US and Californian model of capitalism’ (Fuchs, 2016, p. 18). Therefore, scholars indicate that the commercial and profit logic dominates the Internet and social media platforms (Dahlberg, 2015; Fuchs, 2013; Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2015; Fuchs, 2016; Meier, 2019; Poell, 2015; Poell, 2015; Van Dijck 2013). Thus, the profit-making private companies which own the platforms generate revenues by commodifying user data to sell targeted advertising in order to accumulate capital (Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs and Sandoval, 2015; Fuchs, 2016; Meier, 2019; Poell, 2015; Van Dijck 2013). Under such conditions, social media like Twitter and Facebook are primarily large advertising agencies promoting consumerism and capitalism rather than neutral communicative platforms (Fuchs, 2013; Fuchs, 2014a; Fuchs, 2014b; Fuchs, 2014c; Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs, 2016; Poell, 2015). Therefore, the online sociality on these platforms such as sharing, communication, collaborative work and community-building inherently serve the interests of commerce, capitalism and advertising instead of true sociality such as that expressed in public sphere theory or Enlightenment thought (Fuchs, 2013a; Fuchs, 2013b; Fuchs, 2014; Fuchs, 2015; Fuchs, 2016; Meier, 2019).

Meanwhile, although previous research primarily focused on Western social media, Fuchs (2016) indicates that economic structures of social media platforms owned by private capitalist corporations in China such as Sina are also quite similar to those in Western

countries. This circumstance is caused by the reality that China's economy is de facto predominantly capitalist after Reform and Opening-up in the 1980s and has been gradually embedded into and shaped by global capitalism (Fuchs, 2016). Therefore, after examining the economy of several Chinese social media platforms, such as Baidu, Renren and Sina Weibo, Fuchs (2016) points out that 'commercial and profit logic dominate the Chinese Internet and Chinese social media just like it dominates the Internet in the USA' (p. 20). Thus, the findings related to influence of political economy and platform architectures based on Western social media research can be preliminarily applied and examined for exploring the social movement on Sina Weibo.

In contrast to optimistic views describing social media platforms as emancipator and supporter of collective movements in earlier research, recently many scholars recognize that technological designs and architectures of these platforms are not always consistent with the needs and interests of activists, even conflicting against the movements (i.e. Aho and Duffield, 2020; Cobbe, 2020; Coretti and Pica, 2019; Dawson, 2020; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Evolvi, 2019; Hoyng, 2020; Meier, 2019; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Poell and van Dijck, 2018; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018). As literature points out, this attributes to the fact that social media platform architectures, especially the algorithms, through which such possible inconsistencies and potential conflicts are constituted and shaped, are determined by the commercial and profit logic discussed before, aiming at maximizing revenues and profits by accumulating users' data and facilitating targeted advertising rather than spontaneously enabling political activism (Aho and Duffield, 2020; Cobbe, 2020; Dawson, 2020; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Evolvi, 2019; Hintz, 2014; Hoyng, 2020; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Poell and van

Dijck, 2015; Poell and van Dijck, 2018; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018). Thus, as scholars indicate, although the platform algorithms occasionally support the actualization of interlinking, assembling, and augmenting among like-minded users or activists, which can assist movement actors in establishing, maintaining and enlarging linkages and interaction to cooperate and engage collectively, the same platform can also frequently constrain and undermine these activities when such actions are no more capable of meeting the corporate requirements of profit maximization (Dawson, 2020; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Hoyng, 2020; Poell, 2015; Poell and van Dijck, 2015; Youmans and York, 2012). In other words, social media platforms are not geared toward generating sustained interest in controversial issues which gather publics collectively, instead, such commercially oriented platforms are more inclined to identifying and promoting trending topics among as more users as possible, hindering the long-term organizing process by favouring ephemeral immediacy rather than continuity (Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; van Dijck and Poell, 2013).

4.1.2.3.2 Techno-fantasies and digital sublime surrounding social media

Another point that needs to be recognized is the ‘ideational frameworks and political priorities in influencing technology and media use’, emphasizing the actors’ ideological commitments embedded to technologies in a wider social-cultural context which will navigate the adoption and use of ICTs in the movements (Fominaya and Gillan, 2017, p. 397). Scholars indicate that through the affordance lens discussed before, those values and commitments attributed to information and communication technologies among common

users will determine the intentions and measures taken by actors to proceed the movements on social media platforms, which should be analysed (Etter and Albu, 2020; Feshami, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Treré, 2019). As previous research points out, since algorithmic operations of social media underlying technological features which afford certain actions are largely hidden and secretive to actors, the affordances for collective action enabled by mediated environment between actors and platforms can only be imagined and employed based on actors' particular perceptions and expectations (Albu and Etter, 2016; Dawson, 2020; Etter and Albu, 2020; Ettliger, 2018; Naggy and Neff, 2015; Poell, 2015). Meanwhile, such perceptions and expectations among activists in recent decades, are strongly associated with techno-fantasies and technopolitical sublime which presume the emancipatory functionalities of social media in movements (Barassi, 2015; Couldry, 2015; Treré, 2019). The literature points out that throughout history, techno-utopian fantasies around technology which promise the inevitability of technological development and make commitments about the successful construction of a more democratic and just society by applying new technologies are embedded in daily life, being entrenched in public values of modern society, and in recent years they have largely moulded the story of digital technologies (Barassi, 2015; Dickel and Schrape, 2017; Jeffcote, 2003; Kozinets, 2019; Mosco, 2004; Segal, 2005; Turner, 2006; Turner, 2010). In other words, such techno-fantasies and technopolitical sublime around digital communicative technologies are the reinvocation of old myths of technology, which imply that new technologies such as ICTs will help people escape from banal reality constituted by existing power structure and various oppressions, to invent or enter into another world of sublime, utopia, and true freedom (Dickel and Schrape, 2017; Kozinets, 2019; Mosco, 2004; Segal, 2005; Treré, 2019; Turner, 2006; Turner, 2010). Thus, previous research finds that such widely spread and acknowledged techno-fantasies about digital technologies make present actors insistently employ communicative technologies as

the most effective agency to realize their aspirations, which aim at changing the status quo (Barassi, 2015; Couldry, 2015; Treré, 2019).

Therefore, considering the political economy issue discussed before, there are unavoidable contradictions between actors' intentions on making use of social media to proceed social movements and commercial orientation of the platforms which fundamentally non-support the continuity of collective actions. Thus, such contradictions and consequent struggle of actors to sustain the collective movement on commercially driven platforms should be explored in a diachronic view when improving the framework. Additionally, since current literature about techno-utopianism and digital activism mainly focuses on Western society and at the moment there is no appropriate academic work particularly dealing with this issue in China, especially on Sina Weibo, this research should also explore the utopian imaginaries about social media among the activists in China while examining the applicability of previous findings in West.

4.2. An improved framework of collective identity on social media platforms

4.2.1 Developed boundary work of the collective identity

Traditionally, as mentioned in last chapter, Melucci's (1996) framework of collective identity defines the boundary work, or the cognitive definition of the movement, as the aspect that distinguishes the 'collective self' from 'others' in order to emphasize the commonalities inside the collective. In researching collective actions occurring on social media platforms, some scholars as Milan (2015) find that such cognitive work becomes more inclusive and pluralist, which means the previous fixed and solid boundary line between collective 'us' and others has been blurred into a vaguely defined 'us' in the new condition, accepting personalized differences and even contradictions among participants on the basis of a minimum common denominator open to interpretations (see also Fominaya, 2010; Svensson, Neumayer, Banfield-Mumb and Schossböck, 2014). Hence, these scholars focusing on activism on social media intend to transform the definition of collective identity into a set of shared meanings which successfully pass through the filter depending on private individual experiences based on a loosely defined coherence (Fominaya, 2010; Milan, 2015; Svensson, Neumayer, Banfield-Mumb and Schossböck, 2014).

According to current literature, this kind of perspective may confuse the concept of crowds and movements when analysing specific events which should be explored in a movement approach. The concept of the crowd usually defines it as the 'temporary gatherings of individuals who share the same feelings and grievances', which also 'have now become 'smart' and 'wise', characterized by collective intelligence and more complex processes of self-organization and knowledge generation' in the era of digital media (Rheingold, 2002 and Surowiecki, 2004, cited in Kavada, 2018, p. 109). The communication in such crowds is concentrated on inclusive personal action frames, while the individualistic expression will still be existent and discernible in the connective action furtherly developed (Bennett and

Segerberg, 2013). However, in contrast to a simple aggregation of atomized behaviours like that in crowds, social movements involve the solidarity developing with the construction of collective identity as actors' own agency to concern the means and ends of actions, the boundaries of movements, and movements' relationships with the environment (Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1996). As Kavada (2018) concludes:

'The collective identity of a social movement should therefore be perceived as an open-ended process of negotiation among the different actors constituting the movement. This process of 'identization' is both cognitive and emotional, as social movement participants develop feelings of solidarity and invest emotionally in the shared cognitive schemas constructed through this process. To create a sense of themselves as actors with their own agency, social movements also require 'a network of active relationships' that includes forms of organization and leadership, as well as channels of communication (ibid.: 71). [...] They devise 'their own, primarily informal, rules, norms and organizational patterns' (ibid.) that stabilize collective action and ensure its durability' (p. 110).

Meanwhile, the non-organized crowds are considered as the simple reaction to the current crisis but without politics, only generating the rupture and producing the opportunity for further political struggles by determining the subject and meaning (Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Kavada, 2018). On the contrary, social movements are centring on deeper systemic conflicts 'between actors struggling to appropriate resources that they consider valuable' (Melucci, 1996, p. 22), as collective action entails 'a breach of the limits of compatibility of the system

within which action takes place' (Melucci, 1996, p. 28). Therefore, when analysing a social movement with evident collective identity formation, though it may become more inclusive and flexible on social media platforms than previous ones, it is inappropriate to simply reduce it to aggregation of individualistic activists reacting to particular issues.

On the other hand, the phenomenon that on social media the boundary work of collective identity has been blurred and open to broader individuals can be explained by considering the intersection and confluence between crowds and movements. Scholars indicate that empirically the social movements and crowds related to the same issues can coexist and intersect in the same protest on social media (Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Kavada, 2018). The crowds can serve as the foundation for new movements to emerge, opening up the opportunity, since struggles activated by crowds around contentious issues can function as the site where social movements strive to obtain the legitimacy (Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Kavada, 2018). Meanwhile, studies have found that in many cases the online crowds were rising through strategically designed and oriented social media accounts prepared by existing networks and organizations (Kavada, 2018). This phenomenon, as Kavada (2018) analysed, can be explained in the sense that activists of the collective movements apply the power wielded by social media administrators to play the role of 'connective leaders' (Poell et al., 2016) or 'digital vanguards' (Gerbaudo, 2017) in order to 'influence and stir the online crowd', alongside using the 'platforms to crowdsource organizing tasks by appealing to people who did not form part of the movement's core' (Kavada, 2018, p. 112). Thus, the spontaneity of the emergency of social movements can be successfully manufactured to strategically 'present movements as an authentic expression of grassroots feeling' (Fominaya, 2014, cited by Kavada, 2018, p. 111).

In other words, the dynamic actors of the collective movements are able to initiatively form the temporary online crowds aggregating to react to special contentious issues with the assistance of the platforms which enable the connection and gathering of individuals sharing concerns on same issues, making these crowds serve as the public foundation for their further actions. Thus, such online crowds open up the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the movement, offering dynamic actors the opportunity to convert outsiders and bystanders, who are de facto gathering due to the vagueness of crowds but not yet identifying with the movement, into collective participants (Kavada, 2018). This can be realized by utilization of social media accounts belonging to the core actors to emphasize the inclusiveness by blurring the boundary of the movement to encourage individuals in the crowds to take a more active role in the movement (Kavada, 2015; Kavada, 2018). Therefore, social media facilitates a flexible process of affiliation, turning crowds into movement participants and leading the peripheral membership, which exists without powerful organizations, under the guidance of core hierarchies of the collective action (Kavada, 2018; Tréré, 2015). In sum, for a social movement with collective identity taking place on social media, the blurred and vague boundary work should be a strategic process employed by dynamic and core actors to enlarge the scale of participants among coexisted crowds, rather than solely passive transformation forced by the platforms.

4.2.2 Maintain the network ties among participants

The active relationships among participants enabling the continuous argument, discussion and negotiation to recognize, develop, rectify and reinforce collective action depending on various conditions are acknowledged as the most significant aspect which ensure the continuity and evolution of collective movements (Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1996). Thus, on social media the sustainability of this kind of dynamic relationships should also be realized to defend the dimension of negotiation, the central pivot of collective actions (Melucci, 1996), in order to proceed the movement. However, as discussed in political economy section, the commercially driven platforms will not be in support of the continuity of collective movement, instead, sometimes such platforms even try to disrupt or dissolve the same actions they enabled before when these actions are considered as contradicted against the profit maximization logic (Albu and Etter, 2016; Dawson, 2020; Etter and Albu, 2020; Ettlinger, 2018; Poell, 2015; Trillò, 2018). Therefore, in such environment, the ways or methods taken by the activists to struggle for maintaining the network ties among participants, which is the foundation of the active relationships, should be primarily explored. Meanwhile, current literature indicates that one of the reasons that some scholars failed in discovering actors' initiative in this issue but entrapped into technological determinist standpoint is that they ignored the existence of internal backstage, only focusing on the observable activities on the frontstage of platforms (Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020). Thus, in order to explore actors' dynamic striving in this issue, their activities on both backstage and frontstage should be analysed simultaneously. Therefore, in next paragraphs, the influence of platforms on actors' frontstage activities will be primarily discussed, then following their internal dynamics on backstage.

4.2.2.1 Frontstage

4.2.2.1.1 Survival in an environment with strict surveillance and censorship

Social media platforms, as scholars summarized, have been currently infiltrated and are intertwined with institutional logics and values outside platforms (offline). This means that the power of traditional institutions has permeated social media and transformed platforms into a society under the influence of normal political and economic power (Kalsnes, Larsson and Enli, 2017; Kennedy, Poell, and van Dijck, 2015; Poell, 2015; van Dijck and Poell, 2013).

This tangle, as previous research points out, is much more obvious in authoritarian states such as China (Hearn, 2009; Hou, 2019; Poell, 2014; Poell, 2015; Poell and van Dijck, 2018).

Current literature points out that in authoritarian countries like China, surveillance and censorship on social media have been developed in various ways in order to fit the new environment produced by digital media (Dimitrov, 2017; Hou, 2019; Jia and Han, 2020; Jiang, 2014; Jiang, 2016; Liu, 2015; Poell, 2015; Repnikova and Fang, 2018). Scholars are used to indicating that in China the Internet and social media are specifically monitored and censored by government to enhance autocracy, while presuming the idealized freedom on Western social media (Dahlberg, 2015; Fuchs, 2016; Qin, Stromberg, and Wu, 2016).

However, as Fuchs (2016) illustrates, surveillance-industrial complexes which combine capitalist and state control exist in both China and West. As Fuchs (2016) says:

'User data are both in China and the West's surveillance-industrial complexes first externalized and made public or semi-public on the Internet in order to enable users' communication processes, then privatized as private property by Internet platforms in order to accumulate capital and finally particularized by secret services and the police who bring massive amounts of data under their control that are made accessible and analysed with the help of profit-making companies. Internet surveillance is a political-economic reality that combines state control and capitalist control in both China and the West and other parts of the world' (p. 30-31).

What is distinct for Chinese social media is that the surveillance and intervention from state powers are more apparent and direct (Fuchs, 2016; Hou, 2019; Poell, 2015; Qin, Stromberg, and Wu, 2016). In other words, state control of social media in China is operated under a predominantly capitalist economic system without capitalist democracy as that in West, still maintaining the characteristics of the traditional authoritarian state (Fuchs, 2016; Hong, 2011; Hou, 2019; Huang, 2008; Li, 2008; Lin, 2013; Poell, 2015; Qin, Stromberg, and Wu, 2016). Thus, in China the capitalist powers and authoritarian regime are connected with each other and co-operating to economically and politically control social media (Cobbe, 2020; Fuchs, 2016; Hong and Kang, 2016; Hou, 2019; Liu, 2019; Poell, 2015; Sargsyan, 2016).

Therefore, as previous research illustrates, under President Xi's new Internet policy, surveillance, censorship and control practiced on platforms like Sina Weibo have two forms

(Cobbe, 2020; Poell, 2015; Repnikova and Fang, 2018; Yang, 2017). The first one still corresponds with the traditional kind of censorship practiced by many other countries: the application of a mature system of sensitive-word examination, filtration, and prohibition in order to steer the content disseminated via the networks (Dimitrov, 2017; Hearn, 2009; Hou, 2019; Jiang, 2016; Poell, 2015; Repnikova and Fang, 2018; Stockmann, Luo and Shen, 2020; Yang, 2017). This form is assisted by the transformation and development of specific features in cooperation with the platform corporations, while sometimes the direct intervention from the government departments such as commands to cancel or ban particular tweets or accounts is also placed to enhance the current censorship on social media (Dimitrov, 2017; Hearn, 2009; Hou, 2019; Jiang, 2016; Poell, 2015; Repnikova and Fang, 2018; Stockmann, Luo and Shen, 2020; Yang, 2017). Meanwhile, special regulations or laws concerning the guidance and manipulation of content communicated on social media platforms have also been enacted in recent years to reinforce, normalize and legitimate such censorship, i.e. real-name registry regulation (Hou, 2019; Jiang, 2016; Poell, 2015; Yang, 2017).

The second kind is a more latent and constitutes a softer practice than ostensible state actions. According to current research, scholars point out that in order to maximize the revenues and profits generated by information flow and related advertisings, commercially-driven platforms develop the algorithmic censorship through automated tools to ensure the content published online can appeal to and be spread among as wide mainstream users as possible (Cobbe, 2020; Hong and Kang, 2016; Schwarz, 2019). Meanwhile, as mentioned before, in authoritarian states like China, such algorithmic censorship should also be configured in line with political priorities set by government (Cobbe, 2020; Hong and Kang, 2016). Thus, with the assistance of algorithmic censorship, the platforms like Sina Weibo can

independently permit and suppress the published content according to their own norms and criteria determined by both commercial motivations and political incentives (Cobbe, 2020; Gibson, 2019; Hong and Kang, 2016). This more active and interventionist control, as scholars indicate, leads to the limitation on and exclusion of unacceptable and non-mainstream discourses which contradict with mainstream audience and state power (Cobbe, 2020; Gibson, 2019; Hong and Kang, 2016). In other words, under the algorithmic censorship, the permitted and widely available discourses on social media platforms like Sina Weibo stand with a broader social, cultural and political environment (offline) where public opinions and values are formed and accepted by mainstream society and authoritarian government (Cobbe, 2020; Hong and Kang, 2016).

Thus, as scholars indicate, alongside these tactics of censorship, an environment with high sense of self-censorship and self-regulation under the pressure of full-scale surveillance and severe punishments has been formed (Cobbe, 2020; Dimitrov, 2017; Hong and Kang, 2016; Jiang, 2016; Repnikova and Fang, 2018). Scholars focusing on surveillance usually adopt the concept of panopticon to explain the phenomenon of self-censorship. Panopticon is acknowledged as a kind of prison making prisoners more visible to guards which enables much easier control (Foucault, 1977). In panopticon, prisoners are placed in a situation that they can be potentially monitored at any given point-in-time (Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1991; Foucault, 1993). Thus, in order to avoid punishments or troubles caused by unexpected and uncertain monitoring at any given point-in-time, prisoners are induced to self-censor and self-regulate their behaviours to follow the discipline, submitting themselves to the rule of power (Foucault, 1977; Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1991; Foucault, 1993). However, as Cobbe (2020) indicates, through the governmentality of algorithmic censorship,

the surveillance on social media platforms is not uncertain as that in panopticon but much more encompassing and full-scale since users' activities are permanently watched, judged, permitted or suppressed rather than simply visible. Such environment corresponds with what Deleuze (1992) named societies of control, where the control is continuous and limitless, replacing the previous infinite but discontinuous discipline. Therefore, as previous research proves, the more interventionist form of control on platforms results in users' self-censorship moving to a greater degree than that in panopticon theory (Cobbe, 2020; Gibson, 2019; Hong and Kang, 2016). Thus, all of the communications and activities taken by users on social media are profoundly influenced by such self-censorship and infiltrated regulatory power of platforms (Cobbe, 2020; Hong and Kang, 2016). In other words, in order to survive on social media, the users' discourses and communications are moulded and shaped in accordance with the permitted standards set by platforms, through users' self-censorship and self-disciplining (Cobbe, 2020; Hong and Kang, 2016). However, since in authoritarian countries like China, the hard censorship and direct intervention from government are concurrently applied to algorithmic censorship of platform, the users' discourses and communications are also brought into correspondence with official norms enacted by government to ensure the security and survival, through the same self-censorship principle (Cobbe, 2020; Dimitrov, 2017; Hearn, 2009; Jiang, 2014; Jiang, 2016; Kelsey and Bennett, 2014; Liu, 2015; Repnikova and Fang, 2018; Stockmann, Luo and Shen, 2020).

Hence, it can be briefly concluded that in order to maintain the existence and availability of their communications, users of social media like Sina Weibo, should adopt the permitted and standard discourses set by both platform and government to express their opinions and

thoughts, publishing the available content, while such discourses actually accord with broader social, cultural and political values accepted by mainstream society.

4.2.2.1.2 Repurposing and reappropriating the algorithms

Certainly, mere survival and availability of published content and communications on platforms are deemed insufficient for the networks. Furtherly, the communications and connections among participants must also be consistently activated and reproduced to maintain the ongoing networks among activists (Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1996). This step on social media platforms, as literature indicates, should be realized by continual information flows related to particular issues the movement dealing with, and connections among participants identified to the movement who share similar standpoints on these issues, enabled by connective functionality which promotes the connections between like-minded people (Dawson, 2020; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Evolvi, 2019; Geboers and Wiele, 2020; Lee and Lim, 2019; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, 2015; Stewart, Arif, Nied, Spiro, and Starbird, 2017; Treré, 2019; Williams, Mukherjee and Utsey, 2019). However, as mentioned before, the commercially driven algorithms of social media will not always be supportive, instead, the same algorithms will even dissolve the information flows and connections they helped form before if such intervention contributed to profit maximization principle. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that in specific socio-political contexts where users are increasingly aware of surveillance and control from platform architectures, collective actors are able to repurpose the algorithmic power to pursue collective actions by making use of the same algorithms which try to suppress or mislead them (Bucher, 2017; Cobbe, 2020;

Dumitrica and Felt, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Milan, 2017; Papacharissi, 2014; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2019; Trillò, 2018). Typically, according to current literature, this kind of repurposing and reappropriation of algorithms refers to actors' independently producing or reproducing plentiful data streams surrounding particular topics, such as quantitatively retweeting, sharing, commenting, liking, and also, the hijacking of the Hashtags or cyber-détournemen (Dawson, 2020; Etter and Albu, 2020; Evolvi, 2019; Lünenborg, 2020; Papacharissi, 2014; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, 2015; Poole, Giraud and Quincey, 2020; Stewart, Arif, Nied, Spiro, and Starbird. 2017; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020; Williams, Mukherjee and Utsey, 2019). The same scholars also find out that such practice will force the algorithms to consider these data streams as valuable and continually promote them among those users who are involved with and interested in, helping establish and maintain the connections between like-minded ones and forming the network ties. Thus, the actors are capable of combating the algorithmic intervene aimed at misleading or disrupting the information flows and connective networks which sustain the communication but are not in favour of the platform political economy (Galis and Neumayer, 2016; Jackson and Foucault Welles, 2015; Poole, Giraud and Quincey, 2020; Treré, 2019; Trillò, 2018; Williams, Mukherjee and Utsey, 2019).

In sum, in order to maintain the network ties among participants on commercially oriented platforms, the movement actors are able to repurpose and reappropriate the algorithmic power by initiatives and consistently producing large amounts of data streams surrounding specific topics to constantly drive the related information flows and promote the connections among participants identified to the movement who are involved with and interested in these movement-based issues with the assistance of connective functionality.

4.2.2.2 Backstage: internal dynamics of core actors

As discussed before, actors' dynamics on sustaining the movement network ties could not be accurately explored by solely focusing on observable activities on the frontage, but the internal dynamics on backstage should also be considered. For example, according to Treré's research on #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico, core activists of the movement appropriated the communicative ecologies constituted by digital media, including not only the digital frontstage mechanisms of social media platforms like Twitter but also the backstage such as WhatsApp groups, to 'negotiate and reinforce their collective identity on an everyday basis' (Treré, 2015, p. 912). As Treré found, those core activists of #YoSoy132 movement employed internal communications tools like WhatsApp to collectively make decisions on the selection or creation of specific hashtags and tweets in order to establish the narrative and streams of the movement, while the frontstage of platforms was utilized to quantitatively disseminate the information among users (Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020). Therefore, as Treré (2020) points out, the backstage sphere offers core activists spaces to reinforce their collective identity, lowering the pressure and stress of the surveillance, censorship and control on frontstage of platforms. Thus, on the basis of such internal dynamics, core actors are more smoothly and strategically appropriating the frontstage mechanisms like Hashtags to proceed the movement (Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020). In other words, the strategies taken by actors to maintain the networks on the frontstage, such as adoption of standard discourses to ensure the survival and availability, and reappropriation of algorithms to ensure the persistence, should be primarily negotiated and decided by core actors on the backstage to

guarantee the quality of these activities without the intervention from frontstage architectures, assuring their adequacy and feasibility.

4.2.3 Emotion, movement, and social media platforms

However, the mere existence of defined boundaries and established network ties is not enough to effectively proceed the social movement, which synchronously requires motivation, commitment and solidarity to ensure the activity and permanence of the movement (Fominaya, 2019; Jasper and Owens, 2014; Kemper, 2001; van Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019). As discussed in the previous chapter, Melucci (1996) primarily indicates the role of emotional involvement in this field, which underlines the creation of emotional commitment and solidarity to sustain the movement on a long-term basis instead of perishing quickly. However, although his study claims that the collective identity process is both cognitive and emotional, as well as emphasizing the significance of *active relationships* and *solidarity* in sustaining the movement, Melucci (1996) certainly doesn't give a detailed explanation about how emotion specifically works in this part, nor about influence of media or social media on it. Thus, other academic writings on this issue must be examined and applied.

4.2.3.1 Emotion as cultural and social practice rather than irrationality

In the history of studying social movements, emotions used to be thoroughly excluded from the related field. At the very beginning, until the 1960s, the gathered protestors were considered as immature and irrational crowds engaging from outside world to the actions, in a conception of *collective behaviour* developed by scholars like Le Bon (1895), Blumer (1939), Turner and Killian (1957) and Smelser (1962). Veering to another extreme, after the 1960s, in order to analyse the internal organization and formation of social movements, scholars repudiated all of emotions in their research to describe participants as rational like-minded actors who were capable of reasonably making decisions and acting (Calhoun, 2001; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 2011). This turn was caused by the reality that protestors in that period were seeking for individual interests or existing groups which were defined by structural positions like social class, in a more normal and everyday form of politics than before (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001). Thus, scholars in 1970s concentrated on studying issues like tactics, mobilization, and organization-building of the social movements rather than discussing the motivation or emotions, while reinvigorating the ideological origin in Western society aroused from Enlightenment which drew the binary opposition between emotion and reason (Ahmed, 2014; Calhoun, 2001; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

However, around the 1980s, due to the research progress of sociology, the discussion of the emotions entered a new phase. Emotions were no longer acknowledged as irrational or merely psychological states, instead, sociologists began to regard emotions as being both produced and shaped by cultural and social practices. For instance, Kemper's (1978) analysis of relations between an individual's emotions and her or his position in the system of power, and Hochschild's (1983) study about influence of culturally constructed feeling rules on

managing emotional expressions, both of them prove the socially or culturally constructed characteristic of emotions.

In the same period, scholars of social movements also turned their focus to the cultural side of the movements, while rediscovering the ‘emotions of protest’ (Goodwin and Jasper, 2015, p. 6). The role of emotions like anger, outrage, hate, love, fear and passion in forming and sustaining political engagements have been carefully examined by various scholars (Ahmed, 2004; Dahlgren, 2009; Jasper, 2011; van Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). For example, Gould’s (2009) work on *Act Up* illustrates how anger was utilized as positive recourse to arouse and consolidate the activist group. Empirical studies by Goodwin et al. (2001) on passionate politics explore the role of particular emotions in motivating or proceeding collective political movements, etc... Meanwhile, specific attention to the part played by affective ties and emotions in collective movements has also been included in current literature (Fominaya, 2019). Thus, in the following discussion, I will introduce these particular findings and attempt to complement Melucci’s (1996) framework of collective identity.

4.2.3.2 Jasper’s approach to emotion and social movements

Jasper (1998) provides a valuable approach to the issue of emotion and social movements.

For Jasper (1998), emotions permeate every part, including social movements, of social life.

Emotions are ‘learned and controlled through social interaction’ (p. 399), while also shaping the goals of human actions. In other words, rather than simplistically defined as rational or irrational states, emotions should be considered as a component of culture and social life. Thus, Jasper (1998) adopts a constructionist view to conceptualize emotions as being culturally constituted by shared social meanings. Hence, ‘emotions involve beliefs and assumptions open to cognitive persuasion’ (Jasper, 1998, p. 401). On this basis, Jasper (1998) argues that emotions can be aroused by cognitive understanding and appraising the objects and tied beliefs, values and contexts.

In Jasper’s (1998) definition, he makes a distinction between general affects and reactive emotions. General affects, as Jasper (1998) indicates, include more permanent feelings such as loyalty and identification to specific group, which have been formed and shaped in long-term process and in broader social, cultural and political contexts. On the other hand, reactive emotions are responses to particular events or circumstances depending on ‘deeper affective states’ (Jasper, 1998, p. 402). Hence, Jasper (1998) indicates that affects and emotions are interconnected and mutually influenced, which means that affective bonds can help shape reactive responses. At the same time, reactive emotions caused by specific contexts can also help furtherly enrich and develop the affective values.

Other scholars express similar viewpoints though sometimes being more explicit on the distinction between affect and emotion. For example, Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) develops the concept from Massumi (2002) to argue that emotions are both relational interpretation and narrativization of affects and discursively constructed in a given context, while affects refer

to pre-existent long-standing feelings experienced in individual bodies. Papacharissi (2014) also points out that affect is a kind of non-conscious experience of intensity which ensures that feelings can be felt and transcribed into emotion, meanwhile, it subsequently amplifies such intensity by increasing people's certain awareness of a particular mind which is labelled as particular feeling and expressed as a given emotion. On the other hand, although Jasper (1998) discussed the different characteristics and functions of affect and reactive emotion, he still categorized both of them under a general title of *Emotion*. Thus, in order to be more explicit and avoid any potential confusion in future analysis, the unambiguous distinction between affect and emotion should be applied to rectify Jasper's (1998) approach, which means adopting a narrow definition of emotion solely conceptualizing it as those reactive emotions to specific affects, cancelling the general title of *Emotion* mentioned before.

Therefore, in a given context, the circulation of emotions can be more precisely explained as the circulation of reactive emotions developed from corresponding affective bonds, which are concurrently triggered by circulation of particular objects, such as special cultural symbols, tied with these affective values over a long period of time. This standpoint can be primarily proven by Parkinson's (1995) indication that emotions are intentional and involve a direction and orientation towards the object. Meanwhile, Ahmed (2014) deepens such acknowledgement and claims that 'emotions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects' (p. 7). Further, Ahmed (2014) attests that it is the circulation of objects with affective value which enables the circulation of emotions among human beings instead of the independent movement of emotions.

Then, it comes to the question of how affects and emotions work in social movements. Jasper (1998) has divided both affects and emotions into two main types: those outside movement and those inside movement (as shown in Figure 1).

Types	Settings Where Developed and Sustained	
	Outside Movement	Inside Movement
Ongoing Affects, Loyalties	Love for family members. Fondness for neighborhood. Reassuring security of home. Fears of radiation, war. Trust in certain public figures, mistrust of others. Racial or other prejudices.	Love, attraction to other members. Loyalty to shared symbols, identity. Respect, trust for leaders. Jealousy of leaders, others. Trust or mistrust of allies. Trust or mistrust of government officials, politicians.
Responses to Events, Information	Shock at loved one's death. Anger at government decision. Outrage at plans for nuclear plant. Indignation over siting of waste dump. Resignation over government inaction.	Anger, outrage, indignation over government actions, reactions to movement demands, responses of media.

Figure 1. Examples of affects and reactive emotions developed with the movement (Jasper, 1998, p. 407)

According to Jasper (1998), the interaction of affects and relative emotional responses outside the movement contributes to motivating people to participate in the movement. To illustrate this point, Jasper and Poulsen (1995) offer a typical example: moral shocks, which is usually the first step for outsiders to be recruited into the movement. Moral shocks refer to the situation that particular unexpected event contradicting one's basic beliefs and values leads to shock, implying the visceral and bodily feeling about the event, which is in another word, the affect (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995; Jasper, 1997). On the basis of such affect, reactive

emotions like outrage and anger can be aroused by further reflection on how the things went wrong in the case, which form the basis for movement mobilization, driving people with these affects and subsequent reactive emotions to join the movements fighting against the perceived errors (Jasper, 1997; Jasper and Poulsen, 1995, Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

Meanwhile, ‘the movements are themselves a distinct setting in which emotions can be created or reinforced’ (Jasper, 1998, p. 417). Therefore, for the affects and emotions generated within the movements, Jasper (1998) also distinguishes them into two types: reciprocal ones and shared ones. The reciprocal ones, as Jasper (1998) indicates, are those ‘close, affective ties of friendship, love, solidarity, and loyalty’ and emotions based on such affects, which influence ‘participants’ ongoing feelings towards each other’ (p. 417). The shared ones refer to those affects and emotions consciously held by the whole group simultaneously and ‘toward objects outside the group’ (Jasper, 2014, p. 209), such as those which nurture anger and outrage to other groups or government policies. These two types of affects and emotions are acknowledged as reinforcing each other to establish a movement’s culture, emphasizing the ‘we-ness’ and consolidating the identification to the group, which proceeds and sustains the movement (Ahmed, 2014; Jasper, 1998; van Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019). As Jasper (2014) points out:

‘Every demonstration of shared anger or hatred toward a policy or a group reinforces reciprocal emotions: they feel the same way I do, they must be good people. Even negative shared emotions, such as fear, can reinforce positive reciprocal emotions: we have survived this together (Eyerman, 2005, p. 43; Whittier, 2009). A

successful collective identity fuses reciprocal and shared emotions by imagining an object of attachment (the group) consisting of its individual members taken as a whole. They love both the group and its members (Rupp & Taylor, 1987), often fused into a feeling of home and community (Duyvendak, 2011)' (p. 209).

However, scholars also indicate that in order to reinforce the group solidarity, the created or reproduced affective bonds within the movement should be further stabilized by collective products like internal rituals, or new affective ties and related emotions will be fleeting (Fominaya, 2019; van Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019; Jasper, 1998). The rituals are able to generate collective effervescence, producing symbols and standards of morality for the movement (Collins, 2004; van Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019). Thus, just as other objects with pre-existing affective values, internal rituals 'remind participants of their basic moral commitments, stir up strong emotions, and reinforce a sense of solidarity with the group, a 'we-ness'' (Jasper, 1998, p. 418).

4.2.3.3 Influence of social media on affect and emotion work

Nevertheless, although Jasper's (1998) approach provides a relatively clear way to illustrate the work of emotional factors in social movements, it does not consider the influence of social media. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) points out, in the current online mediated environment, emotions are more than that simply constructed through collective and

individual discourses, but also shaped by the affordances and technological architectures of social media platforms. Therefore, in recent years, scholars have contributed to the studies of emotion and social media platforms, some of which particularly underline the influence of social media platforms on emotion and political actions. For example, according to Papacharissi (2014), the networked structures of feeling supported by platforms such as Twitter produce affective statements which ‘mix fact with opinion, and with emotion, in a manner that simulates the way that we politically react in our everyday lives’ (p. 5). Meanwhile, such public display of emotional processes is considered as able to shape the solidarity that sustains a political movement in a long period (Papacharissi, 2014). Thus, in the remaining part of this section, I will discuss how social media platforms shape the work of affect and emotion in collective social movements.

4.2.3.3.1 Digital media, affect, and actions: emotionally motivating participants

To more explicitly conceptualize the structure of feelings and its influence, firstly, relations between affect and social media platforms need to be explored. The concept of structure of feelings, as Williams (1977) indicates, understands culture as alive, active and flexible present far from fixed habits formed in past. Meanwhile, Williams (1977) adopts the concept of residual culture to refer to that ‘has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only, and often not at all, as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present’ (p. 122). Hence, Williams (1977) points out that the emergent culture should be understood as new practices in the process of emerging partially based on residual culture, ‘active and pressing but not yet fully articulated’ (p. 126).

Furthermore, Williams (1977) indicates that emergent culture becomes a coherent genre only when it is capable of observing the situation rather than experiencing it. In other words, the transformation from experience to observation actualizes the formation of emergent culture. Thus, according to Williams' (1977) conception, the experience should be considered as pre-emergent.

On the basis of this conception, scholars indicate the pre-emergent characteristic of social media. As Coleman (2018) points out, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook operate as feeds that 'are always updating, presenting a constant flow of images and text' (p. 84), while these flows, activities, practices and events are available hovering rather than fully articulated, being experienced more than being observed.

Therefore, on social media platforms, such pre-emergent condition that things are experienced in real time constitutes an environment of intensity or affect (Coleman, 2018; Döveling, Harju, and Sommer, 2018; Karatzogianni, 2012). The meaning of affect, however, compared with that discussed in last section, is expanded here. More than being conceived as long-standing and permeant socio-culturally constructed feelings, affect should also be understood as unconscious activity occurring prior to subsequent consciousness and relational experience driven by the intensity seeking further actualization (Clough, 2012; Duncombe, 2019; Massumi, 1995; Massumi, 2015; Solomon 2014; Solomon and Steele 2017).

Thus, according to previous research, the architecture of social media platforms invites and suggests the affective engagement to make users intensely and urgently consume the content constantly distributed and circulated via networks to exploit digital labour for financial gain, in the service of digital capitalism (Coleman, 2018; Garde-Hansen and Gorton, 2013; Kuntsman, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Therefore, since affect produces the urgency for people to act upon this intensity, studies find that the media are capable of sustaining and transmitting such affect ‘in ways that may lead to the cultivation of subsequent feelings, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours’ (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 22).

More than that, digital media are able to ‘sustain affective feedback loops that generate and reproduce affective patterns of relating to others that are further reproduced as affect’ (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 23). In other words, as recent research confirms, digital media possess the ability to constantly sustain and expand the affect, driving the circuits of communication text, which will ultimately lead to actions (see Boler and Davis, 2018; Döveling, Harju and Sommer, 2018; Geboers and Wiele, 2020; KhosraviNik, 2018; Johns and Cheong, 2019; Kwon and Cho, 2017; Williams, Mukherjee and Utsey, 2019).

Meanwhile, this possibility can be furtherly explained by Ahmed’s (2014) findings about the circulation of objects and emotion. As Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) indicates, the mediated emotions driving social and political action today have been discursively constructed through media texts. This indicates that means in media, especially digital social media, the objects with affective bonds that can invoke further emotions present themselves in the form of text,

rather than in a traditional material form. Thus, the circulation of affective objects eventually becomes the circulation of communication texts on platforms, which further facilitates the circulation of related emotions among subjects – the users of social media here – as discussed before (Ahmed, 2014). In other words, the circulation of communication texts with affective values facilitated by platform architectures contributes to invoking related emotions among users. For social movements, such circulation of affective texts and related emotions among users can help both motivate outsiders to participate in the movements and consolidate members within the movement, as discussed in Jasper's (1998) approach before.

In particular, such capability is produced by a social awareness environment which offers an ambient, always-on and interconnected web of information and storytelling infrastructure, constituted by architectures of social media platforms, such as Twitter hashtags (Clough, Gregory, Haber, and Scannell, 2015; Coleman, 2018; Papacharissi, 2014). As Papacharissi (2014) points out, in social movements taking place via Twitter, the developing discourses evoked by particular actors may be turned into 'streams generated through the collaboratively discursive logic of the hashtag' (p. 118). Such discourses are interpreted as the soft version of Williams' (1977) structures of feeling functioning as affective mechanisms that 'amplify the awareness of a particular feeling, the intensity with which it is felt' (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 118). In other words, with the assistance of connective and expressive functionalities on social media platforms like Twitter, these discourses are expressed in the form of communication text and circulated by related streams constantly being exposed to involved users on the platform. Such practice enables both actual and potential participants to obtain a sense of urgency with which specific issues must be immediately discussed and solved, while accelerating and enhancing the process of translating affects into mediated or collective

emotions, which will result in quicker participating in as well as commitment to the movement.

Concurrently, platforms that afford broadcasting capabilities, such as Twitter, also invite pluralized narratives, which form the soft storytelling infrastructures enabling actors to turn events and issues into stories in more emotional ways (Papacharissi, 2014; Papacharissi, 2016). This practice enables users to ‘feel their way into their own place in politics’ (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 131). Therefore, diverse users can be emotionally driven to engage, participate and act in a specific event and find their own location in it by obscuring the various beliefs, ideologies and opinions among them, thus benefiting the collectivity (Papacharissi, 2014; Papacharissi, 2016). Therefore, the feelings of belonging produced by such affective process will help motivate diverse participants to take part in the movement without considering their potential discrepancies or divergencies in some respects.

4.2.3.3.2 Appropriation of the affective attunements and contributions to the movement

However, same as the issues discussed before, these affective infrastructures are primarily designed to serve the commercial and profit logic of the platforms, the temporary affective engagement will be easily misdirected or dissolved by intervention of the same platforms when such affective engagements are not able to help reproduce or accelerate the speed of constant data flows (Johns and Cheong, 2019; Papacharissi, 2014; Poell, Rajagopalan and

Kavada, 2018; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Thus, in practice, the strategies of creating organized constant flows of streams can also be proposed to produce or reproduce and enhance the affective publics, which helps stimulate, define, sustain, and expand the affective engagement, benefiting the formation and expansion of collective movements by helping to develop emotional commitments and solidarity (Papacharissi, 2014). As Papacharissi (2014) found in the Egyptian revolution:

'On a first level, networked actors collectively elevated atomized reports and other nodes to prominence in ways that organically, yet strategically, organized the flow of the stream. On a second level, the practices of networked gatekeeping and networked framing introduced new values that shaped how an event was turned into a story: instantaneity, the crowdsourcing of elites, solidarity, and ambience. The affordances of the platform, together with the news values of the publics employing the platform, produced, on a third level, a form of news affective in nature. Affective news reconciled oral and print traditions of storytelling to produce a dominant narrative for a movement framed from its early days as a revolution' (p. 60).

Hence, considering the boundary work and establishment of network ties discussed before, three points can be proposed. Firstly, on platforms like Twitter, dynamic actors' repurposing and reappropriation of algorithms to create plentiful and constant data streams related to movement-based issues are simultaneously producing affective influences. While such influences will enhance and accelerate the emotional work including intensely motivating the participation into the collective movement and reinforcing the movement solidarity.

Secondly, since such constant information flows will emotionally drive diverse users interested in or involved with the movement-based issues to participate into the movement with the sense of urgency, this affective influence not only benefits the vitality of established network ties among existent participants or actors, but also contributes to bringing more outsiders and bystanders into the movement networks, such as those from temporary gathered crowds. Thirdly, with the aid of created or reproduced affective bonds and internal rituals within the movement, the concurrent emotionally-driven identification facilitated by platforms will help consolidate existent participants' commitments. They will also assist those diverse newly participating activists in integrating into the collectivity by encouraging them to stay in the movement and find their own places to join the communication and further negotiation.

Finally, before leaving the discussion of emotional field of collective movements, a critical point mentioned earlier in this chapter should be emphasized again, which relates to the academic gap in current literature. The approach and findings discussed here are mostly based on the cases taking place in Western world or on Westernized platforms like Twitter, while research on platforms like Sina Weibo in China is lacking. Thus, in this research project, this approach and findings must be examined or improved by exploring their applicability when analysing the targeted movement on Sina Weibo.

4.3 Revisiting the framework of nationalism

By applying these improvements, Melucci's (1996) framework becomes applicable for analysing the collective social movement on social media platforms. Furthermore, considering the objectives of this project, the framework of nationalism should be revisited here. As proposed in the previous chapter, the new framework of nationalism for this research conceives the current Han nationalist movement against Muslim minorities as a forceful social movement where national identity functions as movement identification. Meanwhile, such national identity is considered as collective identity in the process of constant reproduction and negotiation on the basis of banal nationalism embedded in routines of social life. Therefore, since the improvements have not abolished the concept of collective identity and dynamic role of actors, the Melucci's (1996) framework developed by these improvements can still be applied to the new framework of nationalism to further analyse the nationalist movement under the influence of social media platform.

Chapter 5

Methodology

5.1 Research objectives

This research aims at exploring how the Chinese nationalist movement against ethnic minorities has evolved on Sina Weibo. This research will also explore and decode the reasons, impetus, and the purposes of its participants for provoking and sustaining such a movement considering the broader cultural, political, and social conditions in China in the last decade. The influence of both Sina Weibo and the Chinese government on the movement will be particularly analysed to reveal the role(s) that platform political economy and state power play during the movement to provide a more complete picture about the environment and ecology where this movement has been located.

5.2 Research questions

Thus, this project will address the following research questions:

Research question 1

How does the use of Sina Weibo affect the process of collective identity for the nationalist movement?

- a) How does the definition or boundary of nation evolve on Sina Weibo?*
- b) How does Sina Weibo influence the circulation and reproduction of nationalist discourses?*

Research question 2

How does the CCP government influence the movement?

- a) How does state power affect the development and activities of the movement through policy and regulation? How has the government responded to the movement?*
- b) How does the government influence the participants' activities by intervening, implicitly or explicitly, on the Sina Weibo platform?*

5.3 Research design

5.3.1 Case study approach

The primary strength of the case study approach, as scholars indicate, lies in its ability to help researchers offer an in-depth exploration of a social phenomenon within its real-life context (Anthony, Joe, and Gideon, 2016; Baxter and Jack, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2006; Priya, 2021; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). In other words, the most significant characteristic of the case study approach is its emphasis on contextual analysis, which is essential for a comprehensive study. As a qualitative method, the case study approach also allows for a detailed examination of the complexities of the research object, enabling the identification of underlying mechanisms and processes that quantitative methods might overlook (Anthony, Joe, and Gideon, 2016; Baxter and Jack, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2006; Priya, 2021; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2017). Hence, the case study approach is well-suited for studying the qualitative data of the objects like group, organization, or event, by providing a longitudinal and holistic analysis under a comprehensive view (Anthony, Joe, and Gideon, 2016; Gerring, 2004; Priya, 2021; Yin, 2017). Such advantages of the case study approach can contribute to tracking the research object not only in the temporal dimension but also considering all relevant aspects including both internal and external factors that influence and shape it, to well examine the process of its development and transformation in a particular ecology or environment.

Therefore, since this research intends to explore how the nationalist movement evolve on the Sina Weibo over time, especially the development of its collective identity process, while also examining the influence of both the platform and government on it within the socio-political environment in contemporary Chinese society, it is suitable and even necessary to adopt the

case study approach to help build a comprehensive analysis to answer the research questions. In particular, according to the basic principles and themes of case study approach, this research identifies the whole nationalist movement on Sina Weibo as the *unit of analysis*, which is the primary entity that is generally being analysed in this project. Meanwhile, various events or protests within the movement will be selected as the specific *cases* for being explored in detail, which refer to the actual instance and concrete manifestation of the *unit of analysis*, serving as the subject of the case study *per se*. This practice, as scholars point out, can help deepen the exploration and understanding of the *unit of analysis* by providing detailed, contextualized insights that can reveal its nuances and complexities, while also illustrating broader themes through the specific instance (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Gerring, 2006; Hancock, Algozzine, and Lim, 2021; Priya, 2021; Thomas, 2021; Yin, 2012; Yin, 2017). In other words, in such model, the specific *cases* serve as a microcosm that helps to further illuminate the broader *unit of analysis*, which can help provide more accurate and sophisticated answers to the research questions concerning the later in general.

5.3.2 Case identification and selection

Thus, the chosen cases should be representative or significant enough to provide valuable insights into the whole movement. Such cases should also reflect key aspects or pivotal moments of the movement to ensure that the findings are relevant and informative enough for generally comprehending the broader movement they are located within.

For the purpose of case selection, initially, this project employed a process involved the thorough review of available news reports, focusing on coverage from both International and

Chinese media outlets. Notable among these was the reporting from Global Times (环球网) in 2017 (see GlobalTimes, 2017), which highlighted the anti-Halal event and the opposition to mark-adding policy in College Entrance Examination as major grievances among nationalist participants online in the moment. Such official news report demonstrated a governmental perspective that recognized two representative cases in relation to the targeted nationalist movement via state-controlled media.

Meanwhile, various International or non-Chinese media also published some reports related to this movement. Such reports, however, generally focused on discussing the popularity of anti-Halal sentiments and hate speech against Muslims on Chinese social media, as well as attempting to explore the so-called 'Chinese Islamophobia' by relating the phenomenon to several political and social issues in the country (i.e. BBC, 2016; NYTimes, 2016).

In parallel, academic sources were reviewed as well. Some studies are crucial as they offer a primary in-depth and professional look at the discourse generally surrounding the main events within the movement. For example, in Miao's (2019) work, the author provided a detailed discussion on the anti-Muslim narratives on Chinese social media, which specifically categorized those narratives into various sub-groups including Halal issue, mark-adding-policy issue, and issue related to Sinicization of Islam. Meanwhile, in their work, Lan and Navera (2021) also indicated that two significant branches of Islamophobic discourse on Chinese social media are those opposing Islam religion and those promoting antagonism against Halal products. Hence, such scholarly examples discussing the dynamic and evolving nature of these controversies on Chinese social media also provided a contemporaneous snapshot of the public sentiment and the specific aspects of the nationalist discourse that were

most prevalent in relevance to the movement from an academic view, while also basically corresponding with the observations in news reports by various media outlets mentioned above.

Therefore, by reviewing all the resources engaged, it became apparent that there was a common acknowledgment, between the media outlets and scholars, of the prominence of at least three main phenomena, or events, within the targeted movement: *opposition to Halal food/products*, *opposition to the Islam religion*, and *opposition to the official mark-adding policy*.

Given this background, as well as the principles of case study approach discussed before, such three events, were considered for being selected as the cases for this research. However, through preliminary exploration, it was discovered that the anti-Islam religion branch of the movement exhibits consistent content without significant symbols of evolution, primarily focusing on the critique of Islamic doctrines and issues related to mosque architecture and buildings. In other words, the core topics and participants' demand of this event are relatively singular, showing no noticeable fluctuations or turning points throughout the process. Consequently, it is challenging to observe the specific impact of internal or external factors on its development. Thus, this branch cannot provide a sufficiently detailed and concrete sample for researchers to investigate the whole movement in order to help answer the research questions.

In contrast, the anti-Halal event, which also involves issues related to Islam and Muslim beliefs, is not only the primary origin of this movement but also demonstrates a clear process

of development and evolution. It includes several significant incidents as turning points, with complex interaction among participants, Weibo platform, and the government. This event provides a more comprehensive set of materials for researchers to deeply analyse the process of collective identity among participants to answer the two research questions. Thus, this study decides to select the anti-Halal event as one of the cases for research, while omitting the anti-Islam-and-mosque-building event that contains overlapped topics but fails to effectively reflect the movement's dynamics and development.

Simultaneously, preliminary exploration of the anti-mark-adding-policy protest reveals that this branch not only exhibits a clear process of development and change but also shows more apparent conflicts of interests among participants, ethnic minorities, and the government. In other words, the participants' demand for particular interests and their motivations are more discoverable in this branch. Therefore, analysing and studying this protest can help improve and enrich findings on the nature and purpose of the whole movement, as well as deeply explore the power struggle behind it. Hence, alongside with the analysis of the anti-Halal event, findings based on this protest will make the final answers to the research questions more comprehensive and more objective, better reflecting the whole movement.

Hence, this research ultimately decided to select the *anti-Halal event* and the *anti-mark-adding-policy protest* as the cases for study, despite that the data of all the three branches have already been collected.

5.3.3 Justification on choosing Sina Weibo as the preferential platform

For establishing the database of this research, it is decided that the data of the chosen cases should be collected from Sina Weibo platform, while the specific reasons are listed below:

Firstly, both previous news reports and academic studies have confirmed that the primary operational platform for the movement is Sina Weibo. On the one hand, various media outlets have indicated that the relevant anti-Halal, Islamophobic, and anti-mark-adding-policies controversies generally existed and obtained the popularity on Sina Weibo when reporting the movement-related phenomenon since 2016 (i.e. ChinaDigitalTimes, 2019; NYTimes, 2016; YahooNews, 2016). On the other hand, previously when discussing the movement-related events or phenomenon on social media, the scholars also focused on analysing the data collected from Sina Weibo while implying that such platform should be the main battlefield of this movement (i.e. Miao, 2019; Lan and Navera, 2021). Therefore, collecting data from Weibo can be conducive to a comprehensive analysis of this movement, showcasing its full scope.

Meanwhile, the features, configurations, and layout of the published content on Weibo platform provide reasonable support for choosing it to collect data for the study. As shown in the figure below, the platform offers functionalities including comments, reposts, and likes for the public accessible posts to facilitate interaction and communication between other users and the original posters, as well as to share and disseminate the posts.

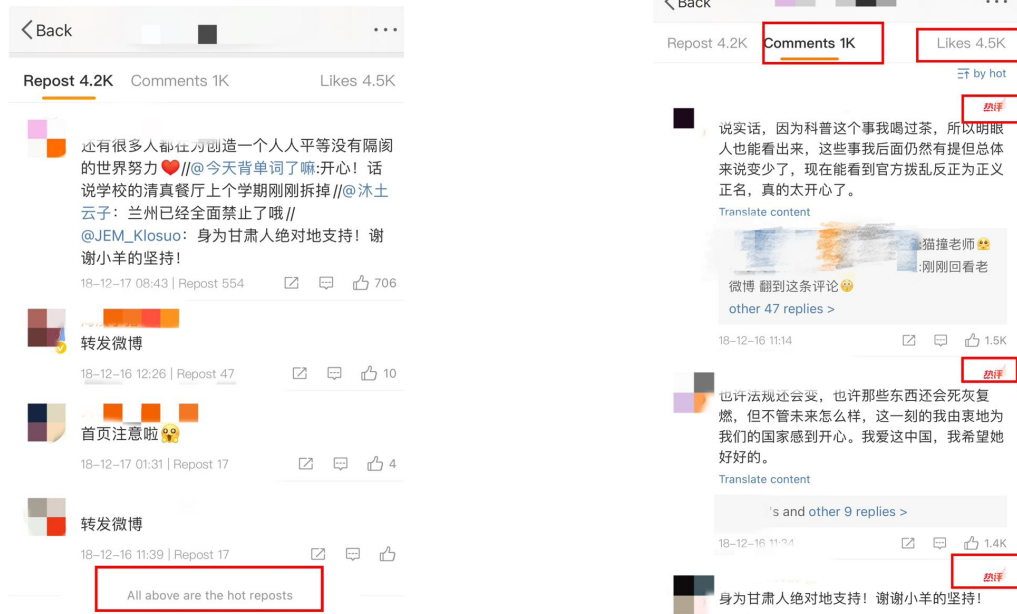


Figure 2. The layout of a post published on Sina Weibo

As a public platform, under normal circumstances without special intervention from the platform or other forces, the reposts and comments of a public post, along with the number of likes it receives, are publicly visible on Sina Weibo. The platform's algorithm automatically highlights the most popular comments at the top of the comment section and sorts reposts by determining the popularity based on the number of secondary reposts they received. In other words, under normal conditions, the most popular comments and hot reposts for each post can be accessed at any time.

Such platform mechanism well facilitates the collection of data needed for qualitative research. In other words, under such mechanism, the qualitative data collected from Weibo, like influential posts, and top comments and hot reposts they received, not only reflect the most popular, trending, and widely circulated content or opinions among participants during

corresponding periods, but also provide materials for further exploring the changes, development, and evolution of discourses and themes related to nation and national identity among participants across different phases. The analysis on this can then help address research question 1, which examines the collective identity process of the movement and how the definition of the nation evolves on the platform.

Moreover, this decision also considers the significance of Sina Weibo in politics as well as its relationship with government in China today. Since its rise in popularity in the 2010s, Weibo's characteristics, dissemination capabilities, and popularity have made it a primary platform for online political discourse. Citizens often utilize it to voice various opinions and participate in social movements, shaping public opinion to address the government through expressions of protest, pressure, and demands. Previous research indicates that such pervasive influence of Weibo has not gone unnoticed by the Chinese government, which has adopted a multifaceted approach to manage and regulate online discourse on it (i.e. Benney and Xu, 2017; Gu, 2014; Nip and Fu, 2016; Yang, Yang, and Wilson, 2015). Through a combination of censorship and surveillance, technological controls, administrative measures, and propaganda tactics on Sina Weibo, the government seeks to monitor, influence, and if necessary, suppress dissenting voices and disruptive movements. Such movements normally obtain the characteristics that may challenge the legitimacy of the ruling regime and/or the social stability, even those in the form of pro-nationalism or pro-patriotism. However, in such scenario, the activists will also make attempts to seek survival on the platform and sustain their actions. This point has been extensively discussed in the Literature Review part as well. Hence, since scholars have provided valuable resources to help explore the intricate interplay between state power and digital activism in such conditions, by analysing the samples

collected from Sina Weibo, this research can reveal the actions as well as influence of Chinese government on the chosen movement, thus addressing research question 2.

Thus, based on the reasons discussed above, Sina Weibo has been chosen as the primary data source of this project in order to effectively answer the research questions proposed.

5.4 Methods

5.4.1 Original Plan and Final Decision

Originally, I was planning to use multiple methods, including textual analysis of collected data, interviews with movement influencers on Sina Weibo, and online surveys for other common participants from the same platform. However, after starting the data collection in early 2021, I discovered that the latter two were not viable for different reasons. Firstly, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic placed limitations on international travel, especially on the Chinese side, where government set up strict rules after March 2020 to prevent foreign travellers from entering the country to stop the virus being imported, lasting until 2023. This situation made it impossible for me to go back to China to proceed interviews in person since I was in the UK when I began the process of data collection in 2021 while my research schedule didn't allow me to wait for the unforeseen end of restrictions as well. Secondly, since this research concerns very sensitive ethnic issues and the nationalist movement in China – political topics that are highly taboo – it was impossible to conduct any online survey or online interview with movement participants because of risks to their personal safety under

conditions of contemporary Chinese society. My preliminary attempt to contact influencers and conduct the survey from May 2021 to September 2021 proved this point as well since both received zero response. Therefore, I have eventually withdrawn the two methods involving human participants but focused on textual analysis of data collected from Sina Weibo concerning the movement itself, and content analysis of the materials collected from official resources including documents, laws, and regulations, which address the government's standpoints, measures, and actions on the relevant issues.

5.4.2 Data collection and sampling from Sina Weibo

Initial codebook of keywords

Data were collected from Sina Weibo in two ways. To effectively capture the dynamics and discourse surrounding the movement on Sina Weibo, firstly, I employed a targeted keyword search strategy as a primary means of data collection. The keywords, carefully curated and grouped into three distinct categories, serve as the initial codebook. This initial codebook is designed to filter and retrieve relevant Weibo posts for further sampling.

Selection of Keywords

The selection of keywords was meticulously conducted based on an extensive review of literature and media reports in relevance to the targeted movement for this research. Some

academic journals and articles discussing the main issues of this movement have made contribution to determining the scope of these keywords (Miao, 2019; Lan and Navera, 2021). Meanwhile, the sources including both Chinese media outlets and reports from international channels such as the BBC (BBC, 2016; BBC, 2019; GlobalTimes, 2017; NYTimes, 2016), also provided a comprehensive perspective of the terminology about this movement used in public discourse. Hence, the chosen keywords are pivotal in capturing the nuanced and often coded language used in discussions pertaining to the movement.

Keyword Categories

The keywords are organized into three main categories, each corresponding to a case within the nationalist movement as discussed before:

Anti-Halal Event:

Keywords such as "清真" (Halal), "清真认证" (Halal certification), and "伊斯兰教" (Islam) are selected to identify discussions focusing on the resistance against Halal practices and products, reflecting broader religious and ethnic tensions:

清真/清真食品 Halal/Halal Food

清真认证 Halal Certification

清真食品补贴 Halal Food Subsidies

宗教认证 Religious Certification

宗教食品 Religious Food

回/回族/回民 Hui/Hui ethnicity/Hui people

伊斯兰教 Islam

Anti-Islam-and-Mosque-Building Event:

This category includes keywords like "清真寺" (mosque) and "中国化改造" (Rehabilitation for Sinicization), aimed at isolating discourse around opposition to mosque constructions and efforts to align Islamic architectural styles with traditional Chinese aesthetics, indicative of hostility to Islam and Muslim culture, as well as ethnic assimilation pressures:

回族 Hui ethnicity

穆斯林 Muslim

伊斯兰教 Islam

清真寺 Mosque

宗教场所 Religious places

宗教建筑 Religious buildings

中国化改造 Rehabilitation for Sinicization

抵制/反对沙化阿化 Opposition to Saudi - Arabianization and Arabianization

Anti-Mark-Adding Policy Protest:

Keywords such as "加分政策" (mark-adding policy) and "教育公平" (educational fairness) focus on controversies over mark-adding policies in education and civil service examinations, highlighting debates over ethnic equality and preferential treatment:

加分政策 mark-adding policy

考试加分 mark-adding in examinations

高考加分 mark-adding practice in College Entrance Examinations

公务员考试加分 mark-adding practice in civil service examinations

少数民族加分 mark-adding practice for ethnic minorities

回族加分 mark-adding practice for Hui people

反对加分 opposition to mark-adding practice/policy

教育资源 educational resources

教育公平 educational fairness

民族平等 ethnic equality

Hence, based on this initial codebook of keywords, I was then planning to create a sample database to find out the influencers or core participants of the movement. A Python software named *Weibo-Search* was applied. With the help of this software a user can continuously get one or more Weibo post keyword search results, i.e.: search for posts that contain the specified keywords, and user can also specify the time range of the search. The software will write the results to a file to set up a database. Hence, after searching for case-related posts through keyword search, I established a sample database containing a total of 150 posts, which consists of the top 50 reposted posts for each case. Based on a simple content analysis of this database, I found 12 Weibo accounts who were active in all of three cases and in each case the posts published by these 12 accounts made up the majority of the 50 most popular posts:

Top 50 posts from Anti-Halal event: 100%

Top 50 posts from Anti-mosque-building event: 82%

Top 50 posts from Anti-mark-adding-policy protest: 72%

Meanwhile, in reviewing these 12 accounts, I found that most of them had been active within the movement on a long-term basis since 2016, continually publishing viewpoints, mobilizing for actions, as well as receiving dynamic reactions from other users and/or participants.

Therefore, I primarily identified that these 12 accounts should represent the influencers of the movement. Hence another Python software *WeiboSpider* was applied. This software can

continuously crawl the data of one or more Sina Weibo users and write the results into a database file. The written information can include almost all the data of the user's Weibo accounts. Thus, I have used *WeiboSpider* to collect all the posts published and displayed on these 12 users' accounts. Afterwards, by using the initial codebook of keywords again, I selected all the posts related to the three events from these 12 accounts, selecting those with more than 1000 reposts or 1000 comments as the influential ones. Therefore, 83 influential posts for anti-Halal event, 47 influential posts for anti-Islam-and-Mosque-building event, and 29 influential posts for the anti-mark-adding-policy protest have been collected from these core participants' accounts.

However, since not all influential posts were published by core participants only, I applied the *Weibo-search* again to try to collect all the posts related to the movement available on the platform by using the initial codebook. Finally, by selecting those with more than 1000 reposts or comments, as well as excluding duplicate posts from the previous collection, 17 posts by other users were added to the anti-Halal event database, while 22 were added to the anti-Islam-and-Mosque-building event, and 11 to the anti-mark-adding-policy protest. These additional influential posts consist of news published by official accounts on Sina Weibo which trigger a significant number of reactions among the users, posts by ordinary participants (but where only one such influential post can be found in their accounts), and posts by users who join only temporarily and who otherwise have very little movement-related content in their accounts.

Thus, the data collection of top posts for the three cases included:

- 100 influential posts for the anti-Halal event (83 from core accounts and 17 from other users),
- 69 influential posts for the anti-Mosque-building event (47 from core accounts and 22 from other users),
- 40 influential posts for the anti-mark-adding-policy protest (29 from core accounts and 11 from other users).

As discussed before, I decided to only analyse the first and third events mentioned above.

Therefore, the sample of top posts included 140, 100 for the anti-Halal event and 40 for the anti-mark-adding-policy protest.

Then, by reviewing the influential posts sampled for the two selected cases, as well as re-examining those 12 accounts identified as influencers before, some detailed information can be found in the table below:

Influencer	Basic information	Influential posts they contributed to two selected cases	The period they were active within the movement until August 2021 (proved by all the relevant posts they published in their accounts, not limited to the identified influential posts)
1	No specific personal details provided on their account page	Case 1: 4 Case 2: 1	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021
2	No specific personal details provided on their account page	Case 1: 7 Case 2: 2	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021 (account disappeared/blocked in 2022)
3	Verified as education micro-blogger	Case 1: 6 Case 2: 1	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: June 2016 – August 2021
4	Verified as Internet technology micro-blogger	Case 1: 3 Case 2: 1	Case 1: March 2016- August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021
5	Verified as education micro-blogger	Case 1: 4 Case 2: 2	Case 1: July 2016 – November 2018 Case 2: January 2017 – November 2018

6	Verified as scholar and columnist in economics	Case 1: 5 Case 2: 3	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021
7	Verified as marathon runner	Case 1: 4 Case 2: 2	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021
8	Verified as translator	Case 1: 2 Case 2: 3	Case 1: December 2017 – August 2021 Case 2: July 2018 – August 2021
9	Verified as scholar in education	Case 1: 4 Case 2: 4	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021
10	Verified as professor in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Case 1: 29 Case 2: 8	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021
11	Verified as humorous micro-blogger	Case 1: 10 Case 2: 1	Case 1: May 2016 – March 2019 Case 2: April 2017 – July 2018
12	Verified as original video producer on Weibo	Case 1: 5 Case 2: 1	Case 1: March 2016 – August 2021 Case 2: April 2016 – August 2021

Table 1. Basic information of 12 identified influencers

From this table, it can be confirmed that 9 of these 12 accounts had been constantly participating and acting in both selected cases throughout the whole movement until data collection was completed. Even for those 3 exceptional accounts, they still demonstrate long-term dynamic participation to some extent, i.e. being active in both cases more than one year while also taking part in daily communication, production, and reproduction of the movement during their periods. Thus, considering the fact that these accounts' contribution has covered the absolute majority of the whole sampled influential posts (83% for case 1, and 72.5% for case 2), their role as influencers as well as their fundamental relevance to build the two case studies can be affirmed.

Furthermore, the top 10 comments and hot reposts of each post are also collected for deep exploration of the process of communication and negotiation among the participants. As mentioned in the discussion on the reasons why choosing Sina Weibo before, the hot reposts are the most popular reposts of the original post identified and listed on the top section of repost area by the platform. Similar to the top comments algorithmically sorted by the platform, hot reposts normally include those re-posters' comments concerning the original one. Thus, the top 10 comments and those hot reposts can reveal the process of communication and negotiation among various participants and involved users, while the shared opinions, attitudes, themes, and discourses contained in these texts can also expose the common ideas concerning nation and national identity among participants. These collected texts included:

Anti-Halal event: 930 top comments, and 563 hot reposts

Anti-mark-adding-policy protest: 320 top comments, and 386 hot reposts

Thus, finally the dataset from Sina Weibo for this research consists of 2339 texts.

5.4.3 Textual analysis of Weibo dataset

5.4.3.1 Combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis

Although there are various existing types of approaches to textual analysis, in this research, I have generally combined the *thematic analysis* and *discourse analysis* for exploring the data collected from Sina Weibo to better answer the research questions.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is a widely utilized qualitative research method that focuses on identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (or themes) within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Clarke and Braun, 2017; Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun, 2017). Although originating in the field of psychologist studies, thematic analysis has gained considerable traction across various fields of social sciences, including but not limited to psychology, sociology, and education. The focus of thematic analysis, according to scholars, is coding the texts by reading and re-reading them while extracting the common themes by grouping those codes, providing a holistic view of the whole dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2019; Clarke and Braun, 2017; Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun, 2017). Thus, the thematic analysis can systematically enhance a more conscious and rigorous understanding of the textual data by demonstrating the common topics and opinions,

both implicit and explicit, within the body of texts. Therefore, especially considering the research question 1, it is necessary to employ thematic analysis approach to examine the common themes and shared opinions about nation and national identity circulated among the collected texts according to different periods, for further exploring their development and evolution.

Meanwhile, as discussed before, this project also intends to explore the interplay of power among the movement, the platform, and the government, to discover the influence of both Sina Weibo and Chinese government on the movement. Hence, only focusing on the evolution of common themes and ideas about nation at the level of participants within the movement but ignoring the effect of external factors cannot provide enough materials to thoroughly answer both research questions 1 and 2. Considering such situation, the discourse analysis should also be applied as well.

The Discourse Analysis (DA), as scholars indicate, generally facilitates the in-depth analysis on textual data, approaching discourses - the language those texts use and organize - as social practices constitutive of identities, norms, and perceptions (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough, 2013; Gill, 2000; McCarthy, Matthiessen, and Slade, 2019; Taylor, 2013; van Dijk, 1993). In other words, the discourse analysis helps investigate the sampled texts beyond their superficial representations or abstract forms but further examine the linguistic mechanisms and processes prescribed within them that receive, produce, and/or reproduce discourses (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough, 2013; Taylor, 2013; van Dijk, 1993). When exploring such processes of producing and reproducing discourses, this approach will also consider both the situational context and broader social, cultural, and

political context where the processes and discourses exist and operate. In this way, the discourse analysis not only helps discover the authentic meaning or implication the texts create via producing and reproducing such discourses, but also contributes to revealing the relations between such texts and broader social norms, hierarchies, and power structures (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough, 2013; Gill, 2000; Taylor, 2013; van Dijk, 1993). This is due to the fact that those social norms, hierarchies, and power structures often determine the existing forms and standards of relevant discourses in the broader socio-political environment. In other words, with the assistance of discourse analysis, how the text producers (movement participants in this project) perpetuate, or challenge/contest existing societal norms and power can be reflected in their use and (re)production of discourses. Thus, the exploration of the interplay of power among the movement, Sina Weibo, and Chinese government, as required by both research questions, can be realized by applying discourse analysis to examine the sampled movement texts since the platform and government have set up the permitted and official discourses around politics and nationalism that the movement participants may have adopted or reproduced, as discussed earlier in literature review part.

Therefore, it comes to the issue of effectively combining the thematic and discourse analysis approaches for proceeding the study of Weibo dataset. This research will adopt a strategy that combines TA with DA, which has been affirmed its feasibility by various empirical research in past few years (see Alejandro and Zhao, 2024). This strategy uses discourse analysis as a general analytical framework that guides the thematic analysis to code and analyse data, as well as interpret findings. In other words, this research will basically adopt the coding procedures of TA to extract the common themes, ideas, and opinions around nation and national identity from the Weibo dataset, while further exploring and interpreting such results through the lens of discourse by considering both situational and broader contexts related to

Sina Weibo, contemporary Chinese society, and CCP regime. Hence, not only how the movement evolved on the platform, but also how the platform and government shaped the movement can be well explored by analysing the dataset from Sina Weibo, addressing both research questions.

5.4.3.2 Coding and analysis process

To analyse the data collected from Sina Weibo, this study follows the six-step thematic analysis method recommended by scholars, namely: Familiarization, Initial Coding, Generating Themes, Reviewing Themes, Defining and Naming Themes, and Producing the Report. Through this iterative process, the dataset collected from Weibo was coded and analysed in stages, ensuring that every text entry was classified, providing a comprehensive understanding of the sample data.

5.4.3.2.1 Familiarization

In the first step, as the researcher, I thoroughly browsed and read all the collected Weibo text data. Following the chronological order of their publication, I read all the sample data from the two cases, gaining an initial comprehensive understanding of the main viewpoints, core demands, definitions of nation, targets of criticism, and the development and changes in collective identity process among the participants. I also initially observed the parts of the data that clearly reflected the influence of the platform and the government, especially those reflect the interventions. Notes and initial reflections were made on these observations. While

reading and understanding all the data from the two cases chronologically, I also conducted a preliminary timeline division. By capturing and initially analysing significant incidents and key turning points in the two cases, I divided Case 1 into four main phases and Case 2 into two main phases. In the following steps, I mainly followed this timeline to conduct detailed coding and analysis of each phase.

5.4.3.2.2 Initial Coding

After gaining a preliminary comprehensive understanding of the Weibo dataset and the two cases in the first step, I proceeded to the initial coding of each phase in each case based on the previously mentioned initial observations, reflections, and timeline divisions. In this step, I focused on capturing and extracting recurring nouns, phrases, terms, and expressions from the texts in each phase, arranging them as raw materials for coding. Then, I reread and grasped the corresponding texts of these raw materials, making various modifications to the initial codes, including additions, deletions, merging, rewriting, and even splitting into new codes. This ensured that no text was left uncoded or repeated and that each text was represented by appropriate, objective codes. This process was repeated several times until all texts were coded, resulting in updated code lists for each phase. The table below presents the initial coding results of the first phase of Case 1, the opposing Halal legislation incident, as an example.

Initial codes	Examples
宗教/religion, religious	[...] 宗教 的存在仅仅对于现有已信仰者的尊重, 和合法利益的保护, 而不是赋予 宗教 权利去涉足介入世俗社会的权利 ([...] <i>the existence of religion is the respect for existent religious believers and protection of legal rights, which doesn't intend to give the religion power to intervene and affect the rights of secular life</i>) (post 6 top comment 3)
极端/extremism, radical	可以说, 任何要求把宗教教义定为公共规则, 而非个人遵守的教义, 就具有一定的宗教 极端 特征 (<i>we can say that any request to make religious doctrines as public regulation rather than doctrines obeyed by individuals has the characteristics of religious extremism</i>) (post 1 hot repost 1)
世俗/secular	再次 mark 这四篇文章, 讲得很到位, 更让我们看到宗教对 世俗 的干预足以导致颠覆现行社会规则的危险 (<i>Mark these four articles again, which analyse in place and make us see the dangers of religious intervention on secular world that will lead to subversion of current social routines</i>) (post 1 top comment 2)
国法/national law	[...] 在中国, 国法 大于教法 [...] 清真食品立法的就是想要给他们一个法律标签, 说的严重点, 就是把宗教教义渗透到世俗化的国法中 [...] ([...] <i>In China, the National law is greater than religious teaching [...] Halal food legislation is trying to give them a legal label, and to put it more seriously, it is infiltrating religious teachings into secularized National law [...]</i>) (post 4)
国家安全 /national security	[...] 如果国家统一清真食品认证体系, 将对 国家安全 战略构成潜在的威胁 (<i>If the state unifies the Halal food certification system, it will pose a potential threat to the national security strategy</i>) (post 2)
政教分离 /separation of politics and religion	[...] 我质疑国家立法管理清真食品, 是反对宗教教义渗透国家法律 [...] 是贯彻“ 政教分离 ”的国家法律 [...] 信仰是公民的权利, 应当得到尊重, 但是在国家的决策上, 没有上帝和神灵的位置 ([...] <i>I doubt the national legislation governing Halal food to boycott against the infiltration of religious teachings into national laws. [...] My action is the implementation of the national law of "separation of politics and religion", [...] Belief is a citizen's right and should be respected. However, there is no place for God and gods in national decision-making</i>) (post 6)
所有人/everyone	天下兴亡 匹夫 有责, 坚决反对清真立法, 这不仅仅是捍卫中华五千年的文明成果, 也是为了你我的子孙后代不活在恐惧之中! 任何提议支持清真立法的行为都是敌我矛盾, 可以冷酷无情的进行打击! (<i>Everyone is responsible for his country's rise or fall. I resolutely oppose halal legislation. This is not only to defend the achievements of China's five thousand years of civilization, but also</i>

	<i>for you and my children and grandchildren not to live in fear! Any proposal to support halal legislation is a contradiction between ourselves and the enemy, and can be attacked ruthlessly!)</i> (post 2 hot repost 4)
世俗化穆斯林 /secularized Muslims	[...] 阻止清真食品立法，就是保护绝大部分爱好和平的 世俗化穆斯林 ，让他们不被敌视，不被排挤，让他们能够与我们一同生活在这片土地上 [...] (<i>[...] to prevent Halal food legislation is to protect the vast majority of peace-loving secularized Muslims from being hostile or squeezed out, so that they can live with us in this land [...]</i>) (post 4)
胜利/victory	【重大胜利！国家清真食品立法被叫停】 [...] (<i>[Great victory! National Halal Food Legislation Suspended][...]</i>) (post 8)
长期斗争/long-term fighting	[...] 政策若不改变，未来的中国会走得很难！只能算阶段性胜利， 反邪教是一项长期、艰巨/需要反复斗争的任务 。此次战役只是一个开始，大家要做好心理准备 (<i>[...] If the policy does not change, the future of China will be very difficult! It can only be regarded as a temporary victory. Anti-cult is a long-term and arduous task that requires repeated struggles. This battle is just the beginning, and everyone must be mentally prepared</i>) (post 8 hot repost 7)

Table 2. Example of initial codes for Case 1 phase 1

5.4.3.2.3 Generating Themes

After completing the coding of the texts, the next step is generating themes. According to thematic analysis approach, themes are patterns of meaning that capture something important about the data in relation to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes represent significant concepts or issues that recur across the dataset and provide a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, after initial coding, the researcher should collate all the codes and search for patterns among them. Codes that seem to be related are grouped together to form potential themes. In other words, by categorizing and summarizing the codes, broader common themes can be extracted. Therefore, in this step, I categorized and summarized the initial codes generally based on their common characteristics or implications. This resulted in the initial formation of potential themes. For example, the potential themes extracted from the initial codes of first phase of the anti-Halal event are listed in the table below.

Potential themes	Related codes
The Halal legislation will help religion damage the secular world	宗教/religion, religious 世俗/secular 极端/extremism, radical
The Halal legislation will threaten national security and national political system	国家安全/national security 国法/national law 政教分离/separation of politics and religion
All the people including secularized Muslims must unite to oppose the Halal legislation	所有人/everyone 世俗化穆斯林/secularized Muslims
The temporary victory of stopping Halal legislation signifies the beginning of the long-term struggles	胜利/victory 长期斗争/long-term fighting

Table 3. Potential themes generated from the dataset of Case 1 phase 1

5.4.3.2.4 Reviewing Themes and Integration of Discourse Analysis

In this step, according to scholars' requirements, the researcher needs to review and refine the themes by compared with the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure that all the patterns of meaning related to research questions are objectively reflected. Hence, similar to the previous steps of modifying codes, I repeatedly read and compared the themes with the data of each phase, making necessary deletions, additions, splitting, or modifications to ensure that all data were comprehensively represented by these themes in relation to research framework and research questions. For example, the revised themes for phase 1 of case 1 are presented in the table below.

Revised themes	Related codes
Halal legislation violates the principle of secularism, damaging the secular society	宗教/religion, religious 世俗/secular 政教分离/separation of politics and religion 极端/extremism, radical 国法/national law
Halal legislation will threaten national security	国家安全/national security

Vague boundary of ‘us’, uniting secularized Muslims	所有人/everyone 世俗化穆斯林/secularized Muslims
Evolution of emotional bonds and long-term commitment to anti-Halal actions	胜利/victory 长期斗争/long-term fighting

Table 4. Revised themes for Case 1 phase 1

As the table shows, during this step of reviewing themes for case 1 phase 1, I have found that those codes related to religion, religious extremism, and religious influence on secular world including that on national laws should be grouped under the theme that indicates the charge against Halal legislation’s anti-secular nature that violates the basic principle of modern Chinese nation-state: secularism, since separation of politics and religion also belongs to a sub-category of secularism as well. Meanwhile, after applying the framework of collective identity, I have also revised the themes about vaguely defined boundary line and emotional bonds based on preliminary results from last step. Such procedure has been sufficiently taken for other phases of case 1 as well as case 2 to objectively reflect the proper themes extracted from the whole Weibo dataset.

Meanwhile, since this study adopts TA with DA, discourse analysis rules also need to be followed. While verifying the fit between the generated themes and the data, the themes were also reviewed under the situational context of each phase and the broader social, cultural, and political context that fundamentally shapes the ecology on the platform, especially regarding the related official discourses, standards, and norms set by both Weibo platform and Chinese

government (these parts can be obtained from the document analysis results and supplemented by related materials from the literature review chapters). Thus, through the lens of discourse, I explored the deeper meanings of these patterns, their role and functions within the whole movement, as well as their relationships with the platform and broader socio-political structure. Therefore, the results of this step prepared for the next one, which is the formal definition and naming of themes.

5.4.3.2.5 Defining and Naming Themes

Based on the findings from previous step of reviewing themes, I formally defined and named the final themes of each phase. Especially in the definition part, the functions and roles of these themes within the movement are highlighted, while the related findings of discourses analysis are also reflected. Again, taking the first phase of the anti-Halal event as an example:

Revised themes	Definition	Related codes
<p>Halal legislation violates the principle of secularism, damaging the secular society</p>	<p>Since secularism is a public nationalist value developed and promoted by CCP regime in modern China, this theme indicates the participants' construction of a negative and anti-secular image of Halal legislation, describing it as potential destroyer of a great and sovereign Chinese nation-state built on secularism to provoke the opposition against it among national members. Furthermore, since secularism belongs to the basic political principles prescribed in CCP's official ideology and PRC state constitution, this theme also reflects the constructed antagonism between Halal legislation and secularism by participants which simultaneously endows the</p>	<p>宗教/religion, religious</p> <p>世俗/secular</p> <p>政教分离/separation of politics and religion</p> <p>极端/extremism, radical</p> <p>国法/national law</p>

	<p>legislation as substantially anti-CCP, making the opposition pro nation-state and be in support of CCP regime.</p>	
<p>Halal legislation will threaten national security</p>	<p>This theme reveals the participants' efforts to enhance the legislation's negative image as destroyer of Chinese nation-state and the life of Chinese people by introducing the concept of national security, to provoke the opposition against it among national members. Meanwhile, considering the specific status of guarding national security in officially promoted public nationalist values and CCP's basic national policies, this theme also implies an antagonism between Halal legislation and the CCP regime constructed by participants, presenting the legislation as contradicting CCP's official ideology, making the opposition pro</p>	<p>国家安全/national security</p>

	nation-state and be in support of CCP regime.	
Vague boundary of ‘us’, uniting secularized Muslims	This theme helps reveal that during the phase 1 of case 1, the participants were attempting to unite all the national members to help them oppose the Halal legislation thus they have defined a vague boundary line between ‘us’ and hostile ‘others’, even considering the secularized Muslims as the potential participants.	所有人/everyone 世俗化穆斯林/secularized Muslims
Evolution of emotional bonds and long-term commitment to anti-Halal actions	This theme shows that at the ending point of phase 1 when the Halal legislation was eventually abrogated by the state council, the participants celebrated this victory and evolved long-term emotional bonds based on it, which contributed to the sustenance of their collectivity, motivating their further actions.	胜利/victory 长期斗争/long-term fighting

Table 5. The example of thematic codebook for Case 1 phase 1

5.4.3.2.6 Combining, further analysis, and writing up

After completing the primary coding and analysis process, I initially obtained the periodically divided results for the two cases, which can be found in the full inductive codebook of all the phases presented in Appendix I. This includes the participants' common/shared viewpoints, their main demands, their construction or reproduction of the nation-state and ethnic minorities, etc., in different phases. In other words, reflecting on the preliminary results of these phases and exploring them further under the theoretical framework of this research provide a comprehensive understanding of each case at the level of temporary stage, particularly in terms of collective identity construction within different periods. However, at this point, such discontinuous milestone results still cannot fully reflect the whole process of the development and evolution of collective identity among the participants on the platform.

Therefore, after obtaining the preliminary periodic results, I combined them chronologically according to the timeline drawn before. By comparing the developments and changes across all phases from beginning to end for each case within a diachronic view, I identified the specific development trajectories related to the research question 1 concerning nation and national identity. I then conducted a deeper analysis of the turning points that connect different phases. By thoroughly exploring the incidents representing these turning points reflected in the data and other related external factors, especially those related to government and platform like intervention on the movement and/or specific activities related to movement topics, I discovered the further results that indicate the reasons for these changes and their relationships with government and/or platform actions as well as the broader socio-political context at the time.

Furthermore, I reviewed the overall development and change trajectories from a holistic perspective. Combining the previous findings from literature review and document analysis on the official positions and views on the issues related to the movement, as well as the relevant permitted discourses, norms, and standards set up by the government and platform, I re-explored the discourse aspects of each case's data analysis results. Through this discourse lens, I identified the interplay between the official standard discourse systems established by the government and platform, and the participants' expressions, communications, and collective identity process. Such findings further expose the interactions, compromises, conflicts, and even struggles among the movement, the government, and the platform. Therefore, by further exploring the environment provided by Sina Weibo as well as broader socio-political contexts in contemporary China to discover the in-depth power dynamics behind such interplay, as a researcher, I provided more insights into the specific impacts and shaping effects of the government and platform on the movement, thereby eventually addressing research question 1b and research question 2.

After completing the combined analysis and exploration mentioned above, I reported the final results in the following chapters.

5.4.4 Collection and Analysis of Official Documents

To more comprehensively understand the socio-political environment in which the movement operates, as well as the relevant background of the particular issues involved, especially the

official stance and policies of the CCP regime regarding these issues, this study also includes the analysis of relevant official documents. This analysis of official documents, particularly those related to ethnic policies and Internet/social media regulations, is not intended to evaluate the movement-related issues from an official standpoint or perspective. Instead, it aims to better analyse how the movement participants constructed movement ideas and collective identity via their own narratives or descriptions on official policies and government standpoints, further exploring the interplay of power between movement participants and state regime revealed by such construction. In other words, solely analysing data from movement participants on Sina Weibo would not provide the specific context and background of certain claims and demands, nor the real official stance and attitude, potentially leading to biased understanding of the movement and hindering the objective presentation of research results. Additionally, combining with the relevant findings on CCP's regulating and control of the social media platforms like Sina Weibo that were obtained from Literature Review part before, analysing documents related to the government's Internet and social media regulation policies can help further understand the actual relationship among the movement, platform, and government, facilitating a more objective discussion of the impact of the platform and government on the movement.

Thus, since the main goal of analysing such documents is to provide contextual information for the primary textual and discourse analysis of the Weibo data, which denies the necessity of another independent content analysis of these documents, the desk research, or secondary research method, is applied (Moore, 2006).

5.4.4.1 Collection and categorization of documents on ethnic issue

Therefore, I firstly intended to collect official documents on ethnic issues and ethnic policies by the CCP regime since 1978 when it has revived the normal implementation of its Marxist-Leninist ethnic policies after ‘Great Culture Revolution’ from 1966 – 1976, until today. Given that the study mainly deals with conflicts and tensions between the Han majority and ethnic minorities, the criteria for collecting these documents are based on whether they pertain to issues and policies regarding ethnic minorities. In particular, documents related to ethnic minorities’ education, culture, languages, customs, religious beliefs, ethnic autonomy, ethnic rights, and ethnic equality are prioritized for collection. Two methods were primarily used to collect these documents. The first method involved using search engines such as Google/Google Scholar to perform keyword searches. Example keywords include Chinese ethnic policy (中国民族政策), Chinese ethnic minority policy (中国少数民族政策), Chinese ethnic issues documents (中国少数民族问题文件), etc. This search initially yielded results including relevant government official web pages and books archived on Google Scholar. Through further searches of the policy or ethnic policy document sections on official websites of the central Chinese government, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, and several local governments, as well as further searches of those books archived on Google Scholar, an initial database of official documents related to ethnic issues and policies at both national and local levels was established.

Additionally, as the researcher, I also employed a second method of document collection, which involved directly consulting compilations and collections of official literature published by the CCP government since 1978, especially those that compile ethnic policy documents. In this regard, the website ‘Theory China’ (<https://www.theorychina.org.cn>)

operated by the Party History and Literature Research Institute of the CCP Central Committee provided primary data resources. This site includes electronic versions of nearly all official literature by CCP regime and is freely accessible to the public. By conducting keyword searches and categorized searches in the e-library of this website, I further enriched the data collection of official documents related to ethnic issues relevant to this study.

After completing the document collection, I conducted a preliminary reading of the collected documents and further select only those closely related to the two cases chosen for this research, discarding documents unrelated to the two cases, such as those solely involving Tibetan and Mongolian ethnic issues which are not relevant to the movement studied here. Through such further screening and multiple comprehensive readings, eventually, I categorized the finally selected ethnic documents into three major categories based on the following criteria:

Category 1: Documents Guiding Ideologies on Ethnic Policy

These documents typically focus on macro-level ethnic theories and are intended to guide the national and governmental handling of ethnic issues, providing overarching direction.

Analysing these documents helps to grasp the ideological dynamics and ideological stance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on ethnic issues, which is crucial for a deep discussion and analysis of the official ethnic policy theories/ideas involved in the movement. These documents can be further divided into two sub-categories based on their periods:

1978-2012: Post-Reforming-and-Opening-up Ethnic Policies

Following the reform and opening-up policies initiated in 1978, the CCP entered a new era of ethnic policy after Mao, which lasted until Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012. By searching and reviewing various official resources, this section ended up with a collection of 15 official documents on ethnic issues from 1978 to 2012.

2012-Present: Xi Jinping's Ethnic Policy Guidance Documents

Under Xi Jinping, while the broad direction of ethnic policies since 1978 has not fundamentally changed, there has been a shift towards re-emphasizing a unified Chinese national identity, which Xi and his administration have heavily promoted. This part finally includes 6 documents.

Category 2: National-Level Laws and Regulations on Ethnic and Religious issues in post-1978 era

This category includes laws and regulations that detail the national-level implementation of ethnic policies. 9 national laws have been collected for this category.

Category 3: Local Ethnic Policy Documents and Regulations in Minority-Concentrated Areas in post-1978 era

This category comprises documents from local authorities of minority-concentrated areas like those inhabited by the Hui/Muslims and in regions inhabited by other non-Han minorities like Guizhou and Yanbian. These documents represent various local policies aimed at the specific ethnic minorities that are related to the research focused cases. Analysis of such documents can provide insights into how ethnic and religious policies are tailored at the local level, such as those regarding Halal food certification, subsidies, Muslim religious and custom practices, and mark-adding policies for ethnic minorities. 5 documents are sampled for further analysis under this category.

The full list of the 35 official documents eventually selected and analysed for this research can be found in Appendix II.

5.4.4.1.1 Analysis of ethnic documents

The analysis of these documents primarily seeks to understand the official stance on relevant ethnic issues and specific policies towards ethnic minorities, particularly those related to Muslim groups, and the particular provisions regarding mark-adding practice for ethnic minorities in various examinations. A thorough initial reading of the collected documents revealed that CCP's official standpoints and discourses on such topics have been consistently clearly and straightforwardly expressed in the document texts, while often providing explicit definitions and clear explanations at official stance as well. Despite some degree of flexibility or tightening of actual practice over different periods, the cardinal content regarding the

official definition of ethnic minorities, their status, the relationship between the nation-state and ethnic groups, and the guiding principles for specific preferential policies has not fundamentally changed since 1978. Hence, I primarily used keywords like ‘nation/ethnicity (民族)’, ‘ethnic minority (少数民族)’, ‘rights of ethnic minority (少数民族权利)’, ‘customs of ethnic minority (少数民族风俗习惯)’, ‘religious beliefs of ethnic minority (少数民族宗教信仰)’, ‘Islam (伊斯兰教)’, ‘preferential (优惠)’, ‘subsidy (补贴)’, ‘adding marks (加分)’, as well as other terms particularly mentioned or criticized by participants found from sampled Weibo dataset, to locate and extract all the content related to issues covered within two selected cases, which eventually formed the contextual materials or coherent synthesis needed for further analysis of Weibo data. The findings from this analysis are mainly reflected in the Contextual Chapter as well as following Case Study Chapters.

5.4.4.2 Collection of official documents concerning the Internet regulation

For further exploring the CCP government’s regulation and control of Internet as well as social media platforms like Sina Weibo, I have also collected and analysed the related official documents. For the collection of such documents, I have engaged the official website of Cyberspace Administration of China (www.cac.gov.cn). This website has listed all the official documents concerning the issue of Internet in PRC, while also categorising them into following categories: Law, Administrative regulation, Departmental regulation, Judicial interpretation, Normative documents, Policy documents, and Policy interpretation. Since this categorization clearly represents the different characteristics and functions of these documents, I primarily adopted such divide and performed an initial browse and read of the documents according to it. Considering the conditions of the targeted movement, I have

eventually decided that only those documents concerning the issues related to the movement, in relevance with social media platforms like Sina Weibo, as well as published before 2021 and particularly in practice between 2016 – 2021 which cover the period of movement dataset, should be collected as part of the document data for this research. Therefore, finally I have collected 24 documents for further analysis, including 3 law documents, 3 administrative regulation documents, 3 departmental regulation documents, 2 judicial interpretation documents, 6 normative documents, and 7 policy interpretation documents. The full list of these documents can be found in Appendix II as well.

5.4.4.2.1 Analysis of Internet Regulation Documents

The analysis of internet-related laws and regulations focused on the government's rules and standards for content and discourse published on platforms like Weibo, particularly regarding topics related to ideology, national security, ethnic sentiments, and issues concerning ethnic minorities, all of which are relevant to the two chosen cases. This analysis also examined the measures for handling violations and offenders to determine the government's specific regulations and possible interventions on these platforms.

Similar to the ethnic policy documents, the regulations in these legal documents are also clearly articulated. By reading the texts, it is possible to discern the government's stance and regulations, as well as their control measures and intervention methods on the Sina Weibo platform. Through comprehensive reading of these documents, I mainly extracted provisions related to user content regulations, standards, and restrictions on Sina Weibo, as well as punitive measures enacted for handling possible violations. By comparing these regulations

and measures stated in the official documents with the analysis results of the actual dataset collected from Sina Weibo, I aimed to reflect the extent of government intervention on the movement, as well as the participants' reaction or countermeasures to such intervention, to further explore the shaping impact of both government and platform on the movement, as well as the power dynamics behind it. The findings of such analysis can be generally found in the Chapter 8.

5.5 Ethics, privacy, and data protection

Due to the high sensitivity of the data collected for this research, during the collection and sampling, various measures have been taken to protect posters' privacy and security, while also preserving the data for project. Firstly, all the data that were not sampled into the final dataset have been safely destroyed to avoid potential data leaking. Secondly, the original dataset containing the personal information and files about the involved Weibo users was securely transformed to one encrypted physical memory stick rather than being preserved in any digital devices. Thirdly, to avoid data loss caused by accidents like laptop stolen or broken, as well as platform newly intervention that would lead to cancellation of the posts after sampling process, every post collected, with the hot reposts and top 10 comments they received, have been carefully screenshotted from Sina Weibo as a backup. Furthermore, due to the same privacy issue for the dataset file, these original screenshots are also stored in the same encrypted memory stick rather than online space.

Meanwhile, in order to prevent any possible identification of the involved Weibo users' real information by reading this thesis, when mentioning or citing the specific posts as well as the

comments and reposts, any sensitive content related to their files like account id, personal information, or human images has been anonymized or mosaiced. No others will be provided access to the original identifiable information of these involved Weibo users as well.

5.6 Limitations

5.6.1 Lack of backstage data

As the theoretical framework points out, the backstage data should be collected for analysis on the internal dynamics of the movement participants, which can help avoid technological determinism. However, due to the impracticality of methods like interviews and survey mentioned before, this research eventually cannot provide such data collection and relevant analysis. Although the existence of such backstage communication and networks can be observed from final dataset, there is no enough and strong evidence to help discover the details and influence of that. Thus, the lack of discussion on backstage and internal dynamics of participants may cause bias or even misinterpretation about participants' activities on Sina Weibo platform, especially their employment of algorithmic power and counter-surveillance strategies.

5.6.2 Original data loss

The original data loss on Sina Weibo platform is unavoidable. For example, when establishing the primary database for influencer determination, I have experienced one serious data loss. There is a Weibo user F, her/his account was extremely active in all the three events of the movement while publishing various influential posts with more than 1000 reposts. However, as I was sampling the top 50 posts for each case to identify the influencer, she/he suddenly changed the setting of her/his account and made only recent six months of her/his published content publicly available, without providing a reason. This severely damaged my data collection since most of her/his posts during the movement reflected the participants' common activities, as I observed before. This would not be an isolated case since on Sina Weibo users have the right to change their privacy settings. Furthermore, the cancelling of published posts as well as accounts, performed either by users themselves or by platform intervention, also contributed to the original data loss. Therefore, the final dataset established for this research may not be able to provide a complete picture of the participants' activities.

5.6.3 Shortcomings of the data collection software

The shortcomings of the data collection software also constitute the limitations of this project. From my experience, when using the tools *Weibo-search* and *Weibo.Spider* to collect posts, program errors frequently occurred, like unexplained interruptions and early terminations. Under such conditions, I had to restart the program or do various segmented programs to try to cover all the related posts. However, by comparing the collection results via the software and that via my manual search, I found that sometimes the software also missed some posts

containing the keywords listed in codebook. Such shortcomings also result in potential data loss that may have harmed the objectivity and comprehensiveness of this research.

5.6.4 Potential bias caused by researcher

As mentioned before, since qualitative textual analysis is the main analytical method this research adopts, there is potential bias caused by subjectivity of researcher. In other words, since the texts need to be analysed by the researcher subjectively without any specific assistance from analytic technologies like that in quantitative analysis, there should be misinterpretation and misunderstanding due to the researcher's personal shortcomings, which will have negative impact on the results. However, by relying on scientific approaches and authentic data, I have tried my best to let the facts and evidence speak for themselves, rather than any potential bias in my mind.

Chapter 6

Case Study 1: anti-Halal event

6.1 Background

The anti-Halal event began on Sina Weibo platform in March, 2016. Although some popular ideas opposing Islam and Muslim minorities can be found even before that timepoint, such previous Islamophobic opinions had not provoked any protest in large scale or a social movement in mainland China. The genesis of the whole episode is a proposal concerning the legislation of Halal food standards submitted by members of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) to these two Houses during their annual conference of 2016 (Hernández and Wu, 2016; Li, 2016). At the same time, both the Ethnic Affairs Commission of NPC and the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of State Council requested that the central authorities should proceed with the Halal food legislation case as soon as possible. Although this proposal, expectedly, received positive reactions from Muslim minorities, especially Hui people, it resulted in drastic criticism and objection among non-Muslim people, particularly among non-Muslim netizens on Sina Weibo. Such criticism and objection have constituted the primary theoretical basis of the anti-Halal event.

After the Halal food legislation was successfully defeated by a collective protest with huge momentum on Sina Weibo, the anti-Halal collectivity developed from the anti-legislation group changed its targets from a particular legislative draft to specific issues surrounding Muslim minorities and Halal items, mainly the Halal foodstuffs, in everyday life. Their collective action then turned to calling for a revolutionary change of current ethnic policies enacted by the CCP regime since such policies have been acknowledged by the participants as the source of today's Halal issue. However, as the analysis shows, the process of constructing and developing such collective actions is not entirely spontaneous and it does not solely depend on the participants' own dynamics. In other words, the analysis finds that external factors, including the activities of government and the Sina Weibo platform, also influence the development of this event.

6.2 Timeline

This timeline is drawn based on examining the changes of the boundary, the shared ideas and views among the participants, as well as the differences of their actions during various periods. In other words, by exploring the shared viewpoints and actions of anti-Halal participants, it is found that throughout the event, basically there are four different phases. In each phase the anti-Halal participants held specific shared ideas, corresponding with their actions during the same periodical stage. Meanwhile, as found in the collected materials, between the adjacent periods, there are often the occurrence of certain significant incidents that led to or catalysed the changes and new orientation of both shared ideas and actions among the participants. Such incidents are actually the turning points between these adjacent periods, which will be used to mark the beginning and/or ending of particular stage in this timeline. However, though having

marked differences, those shared viewpoints and ideas in different periods are not entirely independent from or unrelated to each other. In contrast, as the analysis found, there is a gradual and progressive development of the shared viewpoints and ideas across these different periodical stages, which will be discussed in detail later. Thus, to reflect such gradual development, in this research, the term ‘phase’ will be adopted to describe such periodical stage. Hence, the four phases of the anti-Halal event are listed as below:

Phase 1: Protest against Halal food legislation on Sina Weibo [March - April, 2016]

This incident marked the beginning of the nationalist movement this research focuses on, which is not only the explosion point but also the initial phase or the theoretical basis for the formation of the shared viewpoints and ideas among the participants. For example, the emphasis on the threat towards national security as well as violation of rights and interests of ordinary Chinese people, which obscurely implied the negative side or the disadvantage of Islam and Muslim minorities, laid the foundation for the participants’ construction of thoughts in the following phases. Such logic was emphatically developed later to establish a full-scale criticism on the whole Muslim minorities and current ethnic policies. Meanwhile, the data analysis also proves that by the end of this phase when the targeted legislation was successfully defeated, the shared consciousness requesting a long-term and further boycott against Halal issues in a deeper and broader way has been formed among participants, which paved way for latter continuous actions.

Phase 2: Daily sustenance of anti-Halal views and ideas, [April, 2016 - November, 2016]

During this period, the participants have daily reproduced and developed the shared views and ideas against Halal issues as well as Muslim minorities on the basis of the logic formed in phase 1. However, the major difference between phase 1 and 2 is that in phase 2 the participants have formally extended their focus and targets to all the Halal issues and Muslim minorities in daily life, starting to deeply reflect and discuss the origins of those discovered or even perceived problems, rather than solely debating on one Halal food legislation. Compared with that happened in next phases, there was no formal official attitude concerning Halal issue or government action dealing with Halal issue found in this period. This means that all the production and reproduction of the anti-Halal views and ideas during this period are more dependent on the participants' own construction. Therefore, this period is considered as phase 2 of anti-Halal event, where the anti-Halal views and ideas entered a period of formal development but with fewer significant interaction between the participants and state power then.

Phase 3: Development based on government's new attitudes, [November, 2016 – April, 2017]

From November 2016, the CCP government has released several official statements and guidance to define and deal with the Halal issue in current Chinese society. Such formal official attitudes partially match with the shared anti-Halal views and ideas formed among the

participants in previous phase. Thus, during this period the anti-Halal participants refined their views and raised further ideas concerning Halal issue. Although there are still differences or even contradictions between the participants' and the government's standpoints, the data analysis shows that until the Baigou incident in April, 2017, the positive reactions to the new official attitudes concerning Halal issue were a mainstream trend among the participants and encouraged them to sustain and develop their anti-Halal actions.

Phase 4: new phase caused by dissatisfaction with the government since April 2017

The Baigou incident in April 2017 signified the outbreak of a new conflict between anti-Halal participants and the CCP government. However, rather than the hostile or apparent opposition against the CCP regime, the anti-Halal participants have criticized the government, especially several departments and local authorities, of being laissez-faire towards the current Halal issue and ignoring the rights and interests of the majority in this country, while requesting further and thorough reform. In this period, the participants began to overstep the government and request political reform within the CCP regime to solve the Halal issue, rather than solely blaming the Muslim minorities.

6.3 Construction of shared views and ideas among the anti-Halal participants

6.3.1 Phase 1 (based on analysis of post 1 – 9)

6.3.1.1 Shared views against the Halal food legislation

By analysing the materials collected from Sina Weibo, the phase 1 of the anti-Halal event is considered as formally beginning from one post published on March 4 2016 by a later significant influencer of the whole movement: influencer X. The original post, as the screenshot picture below which is stored by other participants shows, accused the national Halal food legislation of violating the principle of separation of religion and politics which is clearly stated in the Constitution of PRC:



Figure 3: screenshot of the initial post for anti-Halal event by influencer X

Translation of the post content: Dear deputies of National People's Congress: Separation of religion and politics is a basic principle of our country's constitution. The essence of Halal food is that it must comply with Islamic law. If the national legislation about 'Regulations on Halal Management' was passed, it will violate the spirit of the Constitution. Deputies, please think further: apart from Saudi Arabia and other countries that implement the system of unity of religion and politics, rule the country by Islamic law, and regulate Halal food through national legislation, is there any modern country that regulates Halal food with legislation? Please cherish the power entrusted to you by the people!

As the influencer her/himself recorded in other post found from her/his account that original post received 7837 retweets and 1754 comments before being banned by the platform, which eventually led to fierce controversy about the legislation draft among users on Sina Weibo, as shown in the screenshot below:

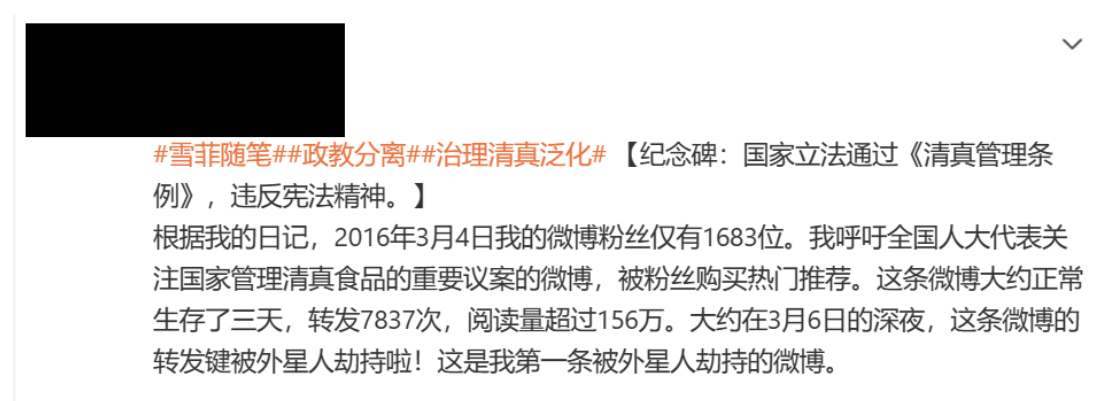


Figure 4: screenshot of influencer X's recording on the initial post of anti-Halal event.

Translation of the post content: #XuefeiEssays ##Separation of religion and politics ##dealing with the issue of generalization of Halal ## [Monumental: If the state passes the legislation of Halal Management Regulations, it violates the Spirit of the Constitution].

According to my diary, on 4 March 2016 I had only 1,683 followers on Sina Weibo. My post calling on the National People's Congress to pay attention to the important bill on national management of Halal food was purchased by my followers as a popular recommendation. The post survived normally for about three days with 7,837 retweets and over 1.56-million-page viewings. Late at night around 6th March, the repost button of this post was hijacked by aliens! This is my first tweet hijacked by aliens.

With more participants joining the opposition later, this shifted into a nationalist collective protest calling for the suspension and abrogation of Halal legislation in order to protect the nation-state. In detail, in this stage the nationalist discourse on Sina Weibo falls within three major themes: secularism, separation of religion and politics, and national security.

6.3.1.1.1 Halal food legislation contradicts secularism, violating the principle of separation of religion and politics

The selected posts from stage 1 show that the participants emphasized that religion and religious practice such as consuming Halal food should be considered as a personal lifestyle choice. Such view indicates that the religious practice like producing and consuming Halal food cannot be employed by anyone to demand or insult non-believers, the public, or the overall secular society. For example:

The Halal diet can only be personally requested by individuals [...] Since the Halal diet is a religious category, which means that each believer can choose whether to comply with it and whether it is true, believers have no right to make demands on each other or interfere with each other. This is even more so when dealing with the secular society outside the religion. Therefore, if we put too much emphasis on Halal in the secular society, it is an infringement on the freedom of others and an infringement on the secular world. [...] (post 1)

This point clearly claims that any practice surrounding Halal food, especially those requirements about it according to religious teachings, must be limited within the particular religion (Islam) and its believers rather than being extended to broader secular fields that include non-believers. Otherwise, it will lead to religious interference and infringement on the secular world.

Therefore, this point clearly constructs an anti-secular image for Halal food, highlighting its religious nature and potential damage to the secular Chinese society which is supposed to be independent from the shackles of religion to enjoy the authentic freedom. This negative construction of Halal food adopted the concept of secularism in modern Chinese discourse (Laliberté, 2011; Madsen, 2010; Morrison, 1984; Potter, 2003; Yang, 2011).

Based on this, the participants in stage 1 further pointed out that if the national Halal food legislation had been passed, it would not only have a negative influence on the secular world, but it would also formally and officially invite the religious power to regulate ordinary people living secularly. This would have serious consequences such as social barriers and conflicts between religious believers (mainly referring to Muslims in this situation) and non-religious people. The popularity of religious extremism would further break the longstanding stability and peace of the secular China. Eventually, as participants implied, this would be extremely harmful for a nation-state built on secularism:

we can say that any request to make religious doctrines as public regulation rather than doctrines obeyed by individuals has the characteristics of religious extremism (post 1 hot retweet 1)

[...] in any case, a secular life has been the major prerequisite for the peaceful coexistence of religions in China for thousands of years. In China, the national law is greater than the religious law, we must mutually respect and understand each other, and each other's interests will not be violated. [...] (post 4)

On the other hand, according to the participants, such legislation will de facto constitute the infiltration of religion into secular national law system since it follows theologies, teachings, values, and regulations belonging to religion rather than complying with official ideologies and principles enacted by secular state regime. Meanwhile, the possible success of passing this Halal food legislation would also prove the religion's sufficient influence on the national decision-making, which provides religion with political privileges in the general power structure of the state regime. Thus, the Halal food legislation has also been accused of apparently violating the principle of separation of religion and politics, which is another important dogma of secularism and is prescribed in the current Constitution of PRC as a significant political principle of CCP state regime:

[...] I doubt the national legislation governing Halal food to boycott against the infiltration of religious teachings into national laws. [...] My action is the implementation of the national law of "separation of state and religion", [...] Belief is a citizen's right and should be respected. However, there is no place for God and gods in national decision-making. (post 6)

In sum, since secularism is a public nationalist value developed and promoted by state regime in modern China, this kind of interpretation about Halal food legislation constructs a negative and anti-secular image of it. Such image corresponds not only with the enemy against secular Chinese society and secular Chinese people, but also with the potential destroyer of a great and sovereign Chinese nation-state built on secularism. Furthermore, since secularism, especially the principle of separation of religion and politics, belongs to the basic political principles prescribed in CCP's official ideology and PRC state constitution, the constructed antagonism between Halal food legislation and secularism also simultaneously produces the opposition between the legislation draft and the CCP state regime. In other words, the construction of Halal food legislation as anti-secular and as breaking the separation of religion and politics also endows it with the negative image as substantially anti-CCP, allowing the Muslim community to seize some state power from the CCP regime.

6.3.1.1.2 Halal food legislation will threaten national security

Furthermore, one can also find that participants have more directly accused the Halal food legislation of threatening national security and the maintenance of a modern nation-state. Participants highlighted or even exaggerated the potential negative consequences about national security, including national and social unrest, as well as the religious radicalization of secular Muslims which could result in religious wars and riots, destroying the nation-state and making future generations of national members live as refugees in fear and danger. For example:

[...] it will inevitably become the source of national and social unrest. [...] once it has formed considerable power and inertia, it will have a direct negative influence on national security. [...] (post 1)

[...] If the state unifies the Halal food certification system, it will pose a potential threat to the national security strategy. (post 2)

[...] Religious wars and riots should never and cannot occur in China. This is the responsibility of each of us, regardless of religion, not limited to theism and atheism, not limited to beliefs, and not limited to ethnicity! Don't let any Chinese child become a refugee like the one shown in the picture below, including Muslims, it is your freedom to choose your faith, but it is our common right to choose what life in China will be in the future! (post 4)

Thus, introducing the concept of national security and accusing the Halal food legislation of threatening it help enhance the legislation's negative image as destroyer of Chinese nation-state and the life of Chinese people. Moreover, considering the specific status of guarding national security in officially promoted public nationalist values and CCP's basic national policies as discussed in the Context chapter, again, this charge also implies an antagonism between Halal food legislation and the CCP regime, presenting this legislation as contradicting CCP's official ideology.

Summary

6.3.1.2 anti-legislation views evolved within a vaguely defined boundary

Therefore, the textual analysis demonstrates that in phase 1, the initial form of common views among anti-Halal participants solely focused on the opposition against the Halal food legislation at the national level, rather than boycotting against all Halal foodstuffs or Muslim minorities. By contrast to the views and ideas evolved in later phases which intensify the hostile attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, this initial form even highlighted all the citizens' private rights for religious practice, still appealing to respecting personal beliefs and religious habits of Muslims when opposing the Halal food legislation. Meanwhile, the samples of phase 1 also reflect that in this initial periodic stage, the boundary of the collective identity or identification was vaguely defined. The samples show that in this stage, the participants, especially the

influencers were attempting to appeal to the broadest audience on Sina Weibo to raise a powerful public opinion to help stop the legislation. The analysis shows that ordinary Chinese people including various ethnic groups, different religious believers, as well as other common citizens living in this country were repeatedly underlined to illustrate the wide range of potential victims of that legislation. Therefore, in phase 1 when participants were calling for participation in the collective opposition against Halal legislation, there was no specific emphasis on any particular group or particular requirement for individual's ethnic identity. Instead, they appealed to everyone in this country to take part, which provided a vague boundary definition between the in-group and the out-group. For example:

Everyone is responsible for his country's rise or fall! I started writing on Weibo on February 16th, just to call every friend's attention. If the state unifies the Halal food certification system, it will pose a potential threat to the national security strategy. In the era of We Media, great things may be done by mass effort! Dear netizens please support us! Retweet a lot! (post 2)

Meanwhile, although it is inevitable to concern the issue of Muslims when boycotting against a Halal food legislation, one can find from the collected materials that, unlike that in later phases, in phase 1 the actors have prevented themselves from illustrating Muslim minorities as enemies while also avoiding directly blaming or attacking Muslims for the concerned issue. Instead, the samples show that during this period the majority of Muslim minorities that are recognized as secularized ones were even considered by participants as the objects to be united and cooperated with to fight against the legislation since they were also constructed as potential

victims. For example:

*[...] Halal food legislation will draw a legal boundary between us and **all of the Muslims**, driving **ordinary Muslims** and extreme Muslims into one circle. ...In the long term, the **secular Muslims** who suffer the most from the Halal food legislation [...] To prevent Halal food legislation is to protect the **vast majority of peace-loving secularized Muslims** [...] (post 4)*

Hence, it is evident that in phase 1, the unambiguous definition of the ‘enemy’ or hostile ‘others’ against collective ‘us’ had not been well formed yet. On the other hand, it demonstrates that at the very beginning, the participants were appealing to a mass of participants from the whole society then to provoke a large-scale protest against the Halal food legislation to immediately stop the legislative process as soon as possible, rather than forming and consolidating a long-term movement as they eventually did later. This further proves that the boundary line between in-group and out-group of anti-Halal collectivity in phase 1 is not only vague but also open and inclusive for everyone, or specifically, for all the ordinary Chinese people including Muslims to take part in protecting the nation-state from the perceived dangers. Meanwhile, considering the concept of the Chinese Nation (中华民族) invented by CCP as discussed in chapter 1, one can find that the vague and inclusive boundary work here coincides with the identification of that meta-nation, since such national identification recognizes all the citizens living within the nation-state as the same national members without regard of any ethnic difference among them.

In sum, under such boundary work, by adopting the themes of secularism and national security, in phase 1 the participants successfully constructed a negative image of Halal food legislation which underlines its potential menace and harmfulness to secular Chinese society, the nation-state, and CCP regime. Hence, the participants were calling for actions like petitions sent to relevant government departments to oppose and stop the legislative process of passing the Halal food legislation.

6.3.1.3 Perceived temporary victory and evolution of emotional bonds

In April 2016, the participants found that both the National Congress and the State Council (central government) had cancelled the plans and agenda related to Halal food legislation in their future work schedule, which means that this legislative draft was finally. This result has been acknowledged by the anti-Halal participants as a sign of their preliminary victory for successfully defeating the conspiracies surrounding Halal food legislation.

One can find that upon such perceived victory, there also developed new emotional ties among the participants. As the analysis shows, the participants were not only celebrating this victory and praising their actions, but also encouraging or even urging each other to maintain the actions to further crack down more relevant or similar conspiracies in the future, in order to preserve the fruits of this victory as well as continuously protecting the nation-state. For example:

*Dispose those who are unwilling to fail... **Do it with confidence, do it boldly, and the public will support it~** (post 8 hot repost 3)*

*[...] It can only be regarded as a **temporary victory**. Anti-cult is **a long-term and arduous task that requires repeated struggles**. This battle is **just the beginning**, and everyone must be mentally prepared. (post 8 hot retweet 7)*

*[...] This means that at least during this term of the current government, the issue of national Halal food legislation should not be mentioned again, but **the battle** to prevent Islamic law from encroaching secular society **is not over yet!** (post 9)*

This illustrates that the common effervescence among the participants at the end of phase 1 successfully turned into the new emotional bonds or affective ties which constitute the basic morality of their actions, requesting further sustenance. The analysis also finds that even in the last phase 4, the participants have still repeatedly commemorated this preliminary victory to underline their fundamental justice and rightness from the very beginning, as well as calling for consistent actions to achieve the full-scale success since according to their acknowledgement that primary victory can prove such success is not impossible. For example:

[...] On March 3 2016, I wrote a post: '[...] the national security strategy should be aware of the potential threat of the 'united Halal food certification system'.' On March 4 2016, I wrote another post: '[...] it is violating the spirit of constitution if the state enacts the Halal food legislation [...]' For three days, the number of page views of this post reached near 1.5 million [...]. This means that my query against Halal food legislation has a broad social base. Netizens' enthusiastic voice formed public opinion and hot topics [...]. Then according to the decision of the Party Central Committee, [...] the Halal food legislation has been abrogated [...]. This action timely and powerfully stopped the coming of national united Halal certificated system and refrained the related potential threat to national security strategy [...]' (post 94 and 95 from phase 4)

This further affirms that such emotional bonds have remained as the basis of long-term affective ties among the participants, which particular belong to this movement rather than pre-existing nationalistic ones.

However, one thing that needs to be mentioned is that the government or any other official institution has never provided an explanation or clear statement about the real reason why this Halal food legislation was removed from the official legislative program. In other words, when the participants attributed the abrogation of Halal food legislation to the success of their actions on Sina Weibo, such idea was highly evolved from their subjective perception and

interpretation, not supported by any strong or rigorous proof that clearly confirms whether the government de facto listened to them or government's intention of abolishing the legislation was to comply with their demands.

6.3.2 Phase 2: Evolution of more general anti-Halal views, ideas, and actions (analysis based on post 10 – 23)

After the perceived temporary victory of defeating the Halal food legislation in April 2016, the anti-Halal participants extended the initial views and ideas which only concern the legislation to opposition against both Hui people and Halal matters in everyday life. This change primarily reflects that since this phase, the participants of anti-Halal event have tightened their boundary, which began to exclude Muslim minorities, mainly Hui people, rather than still recognizing most of them as secular and potential participants or bystanders that can be united and pulled into the actions. Thus, under this new boundary work, two key themes were identified from the shared views and common ideas circulated among participants.

6.3.2.1 Constructing the negative image of Hui people

In phase 2 the participants have made use of illegal acts and crimes committed by some Hui people who operate Halal restaurants or consume Halal food to produce a negative and

stereotyped image of all the Hui people who consume Halal items in accordance with religious teaching and traditional customs. Such overgeneralized and negative depiction of Hui people's ethnic and religious character has reproduced and even exaggerated the contradictions and antagonism between Hui/Muslim people and the secular nation-state. Such depiction accuses Hui/Muslim people of not only regularly breaking national laws or regulations in their daily life, but also of attempting to use religious teachings and commandments to override and replace the national laws. The following two examples well reflect the construction of such views.

Example 1: accusing Halal restaurants of customarily breaking tax law

In post 10 the anti-Halal user has provided a picture showing that one Halal restaurant announced in its menu that '*This is Halal restaurant, so we do not provide invoice*'.



Figure 5: The white text on a red background shown in the bottom right corner reads as 'This is Halal restaurant, so we do not provide invoice (本店清真 不提供发票)'

Invoices are a significant component of the Chinese tax system. Thus, this Halal restaurant's refusal of providing such invoice is considered by anti-Halal participants as disobeying the official tax system as well as objecting the state regime. Meanwhile, in religious practice of Islam as required by Sharia law, each faithful is obligated to pay a proportion of their income to the Muslim Ummah, the religious institution of Islam which normally operates as a grassroots Muslim community leadership agency under the supervision of religious organizations at higher level like Mosque. Such regular and obligatory payment is always

recognized as religious tax: zakat, which is distinct from the tax collection of the modern secular nation-state. The zakat has been well practiced among Chinese Muslims for hundreds of years, and they have used a very religious symbolic Chinese word to translate it: *tianke* (天课), which can be interpreted as homework (课) for heaven (天) in Chinese language. From the reposts and comments of this post, one can find that by comparing Hui people's well-known faithful performance of paying zakat with this Halal restaurant's illegal behaviour of not using invoice, the anti-Halal participants have charged those Hui people who operate Halal restaurants of only paying religious taxes, while ignoring the secular tax of the state. They thus suggested that Hui people maintain allegiance to religion over obedience to the state, apparently disobeying the secular government and breaking national laws, which is equal to rebellion against the nation-state:

It means they have paid the religious tax, so they don't have to pay the tax of the secular government [...] It implies that they will not pay taxes to the Kafir (unbeliever) government [...] (post 10 hot retweet 3)

This is to rebel the state and publicly declare that Islamic law is greater than Chinese national law. (post 10 top comment 5)

Example 2: rumours and conspiracies based on the conflicts around Halal ramen restaurants

In recent years, Halal ramen restaurants have been quite popular in China. Many Hui people from North-western provinces like Gansu and Qinghai with greater concentrations of Muslim inhabitants have migrated to various areas throughout the country, especially those inland cities, to run such ramen restaurants. However, due to the particular ethnic and religious nature of these businesses, Hui people often forbid non-Muslims from operating non-Halal restaurants and selling non-Halal food nearby to avoid the potential blasphemy or disrespect to their culture and religion from non-Muslim business competitors. However, such spontaneous ban by Hui people does not always effectively work or even get any response from their non-Muslim competitors, most of whom are Han people, actually. In other words, in practice, there are many non-Muslim merchants still insisting on opening their non-Halal restaurants near Hui people's Halal ones, believing in Freedom of Business and ignoring Hui people's prohibition. Non-Muslim merchants' actions have led to different kinds of conflicts between them and Hui people, sometimes even violent ones. In the last few years, this situation has worsened since sometimes even non-Hui Muslims or members from different sub-sections of Hui people will sometimes be forbidden by other Hui people from operating Halal restaurants near the existing ones, as a result of sectarian conflicts among Hui people and other Muslim minorities.

As mentioned before, this kind of practice does not accord with any national law or official regulation, which is entirely the spontaneous behaviour of Hui people according to their own interpretation and understanding of their culture, custom, and religion. However, although such behaviour is often illegal or at least lacking legal basis, the police and other government departments have always attempted to reduce the ethnic contradictions and maintain social

stability by reconciling both sides rather than simply prosecuting any side rigidly in accordance with the law. They often asked the new merchants to leave and even apologize to the existing Halal restaurant operators, not substantially punishing anyone but requiring everyone to prevent further conflict. This method of handling such conflicts has been provoking discontent for a long time, especially among non-Muslims like Han people, since it is thought to favour Hui restaurant operators who can benefit from unequal business competition rules due to their particular ethnicity.

During the phase 2, two such incidents took place again in Shanghai, the economic centre and largest city in China. One occurred between two different Halal restaurants on 1 July 2016 and another took place between one Halal restaurant and a Han restaurant on 20 October 2016, both of which triggered large-scale and explosive discussion among anti-Halal participants. The textual analysis of the collected samples concerning these incidents proves that the anti-Halal participants have made use of such conflicts to charge those Hui people who operate the Halal restaurants of dominating the market through violence, disregarding of national laws, and abusing the ethnic and religious policies. In such construction, the Hui people were depicted as not only violating others' interests, especially non-Muslims' interests, when running the Halal ramen business, but also challenging the power of government:

*[...] In the Public Security Bureau, they use "ethnic unity" and "mosque worship" as magic weapons to **make the police helpless**. Under the flag of "ethnic unity" of ethnic minorities, and in the form of underworld organizations, **they bully the market through violence, blackmail, group attacks, intimidation, unscrupulous to the law, and***

threats to the security of individuals. [...] the legal effect of that internal agreement of a certain ethnic group from a certain place exceeds the Chinese government's business management regulations. Under the guise of ethnic unity, they play the gangsters, disregard the national laws and disciplines of the state, and destroy social harmony, which calls for deep thought. (post 14 and post 20)

These (Hui) people should not be allowed to use "minority and religion" as reasons to undermine the "fairness of the rule of law" in Shanghai and the whole country. (post 20 top comment 2)

The examples above show that Hui people are recognized as challenging the power of the secular regime since they set up their internal, private, and unofficial regulations concerning the ramen business above the national law and government agencies when dealing with the relevant conflicts.

Moreover, the anti-Halal participants indicate that Hui people have already undermined the authority of government in practice as well. According to anti-Halal participants' quotation of the details within such incidents, when government intervened to handle the disputes about Halal ramen restaurants, the Hui people who committed violent crimes abused the relevant official policies which guarantee their rights to preserve and protect their ethnic culture, custom, and belief as the pretence to justify their illegal and criminal acts like destroying and smashing

others' restaurants. For example:

[...] On that day, nearly 100 Qinghai Hui people wearing white hats blocked the door of the shop and entered the restaurant to intimidate and threaten the waitresses, the owner's friends and the owner's family, in the name that there could not be a second beeframen restaurant within 400 metres, ethnic unity, and that ethnic minorities should not be bullied [...] At the police station, the Muslims kept threatening the owner and his friends, even threatening to kill them and physically assaulting them in a vulgar and obscene dialect. They also took out the so-called 'Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Ramen Convention', which they said was agreed by the provincial governments, but in fact it was a sheet of the so-called internal agreement for the opening beef ramen restaurant in the Huarong Hui Autonomous County in Qinghai.[...]

After opening the door on 2 July. [...] Nearly 40 more people came. [...] They came in and pulled out the chairs and sat down and asked who let you open for business, and after we called the police, the police came. They dragged the waiters in front of the police and threatened to kill them and beat up a friend of the owner's on the grounds that the restaurant is not Halal. [...]

They roguishly screamed: near their beef ramen restaurant within 400 metres of the distance is not allowed to open other ramen restaurant. If so, or the restaurant being

smashed, or it moves away, there is no room for negotiation, the law in front of this group of people is a piece of wastepaper. [...]

The police arrived at the restaurant and saw that the scene could not be controlled, so they let the two sides of the main personnel to go to the Public Security Bureau. At the Public Security Bureau, they continued to intimidate the owner of Alilan Beef Ramen and his friends, and they questioned and abused the police uncritically in the name of ethnic unity and the need to worship at the mosque. The police were unable to solve the problem and asked the two sides to reconcile, but the troublemakers paid no attention and continued to act in their own way. [...]

Note: The materials above are taken from the report of Alilan ramen restaurant's owner published online concerning the incident, which was screenshotted by the poster of post 14 and can be found in the pictures attached to that post.

Such abuse of official policies forced the police and relevant government departments, and especially the local members of staff, not to deal with such disputes hastily since they dare not to violate national policy. As anti-Halal participants indicated, in such situation, even a national law enforcement agency like police is helpless and useless, which allows Hui people to become more unrestrained and unfettered. This phenomenon exposes that Hui people have successfully forced the government to fail to take corresponding measures as normal to govern them and punish their illegal and criminal acts, as participants understood. Therefore, the anti-Halal

participants indicated that such phenomenon proves the serious undermining of government authority by Hui people in related cases.

Meanwhile, when criticizing Hui people's acts in Halal ramen incidents, the anti-Halal participants have also adopted public values promoted by the state regime, such as '*social harmony*' and '*rule of law*' which emphasize the significance of social stability and the importance of national laws for the development of the Chinese nation-state (see Xi, 2020), to underline the perniciousness of Hui people's acts. According to anti-Halal participants, these acts also prove Hui people's opposition to official and public values of the state. Therefore, by portraying Hui people as ideologically ignoring government authority, undermining government authority in practice, and opposing official values promoted by government through acts, the anti-Halal participants made use of the Halal ramen incidents to underline the antagonism between Hui people and the secular state, which has developed as fundamental part of the common views among these participants throughout the whole event.

Secondly, the anti-Halal participants also underlined Hui people's particular threat to the Han majority. From the relevant comments and reposts surrounding Halal ramen incidents, one can find the amplification and exaggeration of several pre-existing cultural conflicts between Hui and Han people. Such conflicts are not new but have occurred over a long period of time. As discussed in the contextual chapter, in history such conflicts are mainly caused by Han people's discrimination, disrespect, and even oppression against Muslim minorities like Hui people based on Han chauvinism. The collected samples show that among the anti-Halal participants' citation of these negative cases, one crucial point they emphasize concerns the Halal diet and

Hui people's efforts to preserve and defend it when facing the negative situation where Halal diet might be abused or blasphemed or even seriously endangering culture and custom about it. Although in such cases, Han people have always played a de facto negative role that initially disrespects, insults, or even humiliates Hui people. Such negative behaviours include intentionally bringing them forbidden food, especially pork, to oppose the Halal diet. However, in the anti-Halal participants' narratives, contrary to the truth, Han people are always constructed as the victims of Hui people's extremist behaviours caused by their uncivilized ethnicity and irrational religious belief. In other words, the anti-Halal participants intentionally concealed Han people's responsibilities and faults which are the real reason that provokes Hui people's anger and counterattack in those conflicts. Instead, the participants were charging Hui people of being brutal, violent, and radical to defend and expand the barbarous Halal custom. Furthermore, the anti-Halal participants claimed that such phenomenon proves the serious threat of Hui people to the Han majority since Han people's rights and interests are ignored and seriously violated by Hui people in everyday life, for example:

*When Hui people go to Han's inhabited area, Han people are not allowed to eat pork.
When Han people go to Hui's inhabited area, Han people are not allowed to eat pork
either. Anyway, we must follow them, this is that putting the cart before the horse. (Post
12 top comment 3)*

Note: putting the cart before the horse (本末倒置) is a Chinese idiom which describes that someone is doing things in wrong order, like focusing on the unimportant things but ignoring the significant stuff. Here it indicates that always respecting Hui people's Halal custom and habit rather than protecting Han

people's right of eating pork is wrong.

Therefore, the anti-Halal participants developed a shared view that in reality, Hui people have successfully established the hegemony through violence and aggression that forces Han people to follow the Halal custom and abandon their own lifestyle, posing a huge threat to Han majority's survival as the ethnic majority of China. However, in phase 2, participants still focused more on describing the general threat of Hui/Muslim people to the whole country or nation-state, rather than only highlighting the Han's loss and position as victim in current Halal issues. In other words, the reference to Han majority here does not exclude other non-Muslim national members or deny their rights and interests when appealing to anti-Halal actions, which, however, eventually took place later in the movement.

6.3.2.2 Constructing the negative image of Halal items

Like the negative depiction of Hui people, anti-Halal participants in this phase also produced a negative illustration of Halal items which are quite common in everyday life of contemporary Chinese society. By analysing the collected materials, three main points can be identified. Firstly, similarly to phase 1 where participants demonized Halal food legislation, the religious nature of Halal items was highlighted also in this phase and was connected with terrorism. For example:

92.67%: The University of Chicago Terrorist Attack Database confirmed that 92.67% of the terrorist attackers were people who were habitually consuming Halal food [...] Halal is not only a food culture, it's an explosive way. (post 16)

The example above shows how those participants link Halal food with terrorism: simply and directly making conclusion from rough information, claiming that Halal food represents a culture that nurtures terrorism. However, such kind of argument is lack of logic, de facto producing fake information. By researching the relevant information, especially the database the author claimed to find evidence from, there is no such data indicating that 92.67% of terrorist attackers consume Halal food. Meanwhile, even if such data was true, one still cannot conclude that Halal food represents terrorism since such data does not broadly represent all the Muslims or people consuming Halal food around the world. The significant chain of evidence proving the authentic connection between Halal items and terrorist attacks is missing. Thus, such claim should be recognized as participant's intentionally constructing negative image of Halal items (food) by falsifying data to produce misinformation and rumours.

Secondly, the anti-Halal participants also utilized negative news about food production safety to depict Halal food as filthy, unsanitary, and harmful to public health. For instance:

#Nanfang black sesame paste# News: In 2015, 5 batches of products exceeded the Escherichia coli standard. [...] The two production plants [...] are Halal lines, and

Imams and a certain number of Muslims working on Halal production lines are stipulated by Halal food regulations. [...] You pay religious taxes but eat Muslims' Escherichia coli-"Shit" (unclean left hand) (post 11)

Non-Halal food will be sampled by batch to check whether it meets the national standard or not. The Halal food is stirred, prayed and blessed with Escherichia coli by the Imam who has deducted the faeces, then being delivered. (post 16 top comment 2)

The news mentioned in the examples above was firstly reported on 6 October 2016 by Chinese official media like People's Daily (People.cn, 2016). However, different from the information provided by those anti-Halal participants, the original reports did not include any reference to Halal food. By contrast, the original reports exposed different food companies for having different safety problems by the relevant government department, while none of them was Halal food enterprise operated by Muslims (see newsfoodmate.net, 2016). Moreover, even the information provided by the anti-Halal participants about the Halal production plants of Nanfang black sesame paste company was false since no such evidence was found from public resources. Therefore, the charges made by anti-Halal participants against Halal food here are entirely based on distorted truth and fictitious information. The examples show that by making up these stories, the anti-Halal participants constructed a negative image of Halal food production to build connections between it and food pollution like Escherichia coli issue, which describe it as filthy, unsanitary, being produced by unhygienic Muslim staff, and inspected by clergy according to religious teachings rather than official standards of food safety. Thus, they have fabricated or reinforced the stereotype of Halal foodstuffs as endangering public health

and full of negative religious attributes related to Muslims, while calling for boycotting Halal food in daily life to safeguard public safety.

The third example is that the anti-Halal participants have raised up the criticism on the Halal diet service provided in flights by several airline companies. For example:

[...] "It's a partiality to Islam instead of treating all religions equally that they only provide Halal diet" [...] (post 13)

[...] Excuse me, why do most travellers who do not consume Halal food don't have the right to choose non-halal food? [...] (post 15)

[...] I am not a Muslim. I reject halal food and strongly condemn China Eastern Airlines' discrimination against non-Muslims [...] (post 15 hot retweet 1)

The background of such criticism is that some participants have published their own stories or others' contribution that share the experience of Halal diet in flights, which provoked heated discussion. This discussion has even continued until very latest phase of the whole movement and helped form a significant common view against Halal food among the participants. Such

view considers such Halal diet service as serious discrimination against non-Muslims as well as infringing their right to consume non-Halal food since most flights only provide Halal diet. So far, this viewpoint still sounds reasonable since this kind of approach to diet service indeed lacks the care for non-Muslim customers. However, the remaining part of this view turned it into an extreme argument full of subjective conjectures while again lacking factual evidence. The anti-Halal participants have further indicated that such Halal-diet-only service represents an evil practice today that intentionally promotes and forcibly generalizes the Halal diet in everyday life to imperceptibly enhance and consolidate the ethnic and religious particularities of Muslim groups as widely as possible, differentiating Muslims from ordinary non-Muslim people. According to the anti-Halal participants, this practice should be considered as a political and economic measure to realize particular purposes:

The generalization of Halal is actually a test of Sharia law on Chinese society! It seems to be to distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims and to self-isolate. In fact, it is an early attempt to establish a sharia district. It is the behavioural restraint and ideological mobilization for Muslims, and the rejection and squeeze of non-Muslims. [...] (post 18 hot retweet 1)

I realize the absurdity of using Halal to create ethnic segregation in China and think about the economic interests and political motives behind Halal. (post 21 hot retweet 1 and top comment 1)

Thus, as the anti-Halal participants pointed out, such practice, which can cause religious extremism, terrorism, and ethnic segregation, is ultimately serving the political conspiracy of Muslim minorities like Hui people to gain power and overturn the current political structure and state system to establish their own Sharia regime in China. At the same time, the non-Muslims will be excluded or forced to subordinate to Muslims. Such kind of consequence, as anti-Halal participants claimed, will inevitably split and destroy the current nation-state:

... dividing the masses according to Halal and non-Halal, and then splitting the nation-state is their (Muslims') ulterior secret! (post 18 hot retweet 5)

Cults (Muslims) are rapidly expanding and becoming more and more rampant. They have endangered regime stability and national security! Anti-cult (anti-Islam) legislation is urgent! (post 18 top comment 8)

Hence, this point has symbolically placed Halal food/diet on the opposite side of the secular society, the nation-state, and the CCP regime by negatively constructing it as the significant part of a nefarious political plot which seriously endangers the non-Muslim majority and threatens national security. Thus, the anti-Halal participants have been calling for a boycott against this Halal-diet-only practice by making complaints to airline companies and even government departments to request such practice to be abolished. However, no actual evidence or proof about the referred political plot has ever been provided by these participants, while

only subjective deduction and unilateral hate speech can be discovered.

6.3.2.3 Summary

In phase 2 the main targets of anti-Halal actions have been transferred after the Halal food legislation was thought to be defeated. Different from that in phase 1, the anti-Halal participants have generally expanded the targets they criticize and attack to Muslim minorities and Halal items in a broader view rather than a single legislative draft. However, the logic and ideas employed by anti-Halal participants which explain the reasons for such opposition were still in line with those developed in phase 1. Such ideological way has always constructed the main targets as the enemies of common people, secular society, the nation-state, as well as the CCP regime, no matter whether the main targets were the legislation or Halal food or Muslim minorities. From this phase on, the basic ideological foundation of the anti-Halal actions has been consolidated as boycott against Muslims and Halal items to defend secular society and nation-state which are under the leadership of CCP regime. However, new, or additional shared views and ideas have consistently been developed on the basis of such ideological foundation to enrich and sustain the anti-Halal actions due to the changes in both the external environment and internal conditions in later phases.

6.3.3 Phase 3 New phase in reaction to government's fresh statement and practice (analysis based on post 24 - 48)

On November 26, 2016, the 10th National Congress of China Islamic Association was held in Beijing. The China Islamic Association (中国伊斯兰教协会) is the official organization to help guide and regulate Islam religion under the supervision of the CCP government in PRC. In the opening ceremony of that congress, the Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs gave a speech discussing the status quo and current issues concerning both Islam religion and Halal matters in the country, which provided new official attitudes and standpoints to solve the relevant problems on behalf of the government for the first time. After that, especially on Sina Weibo, several official media accounts also began to publicly report on Halal issues and communicate ideas concerning these issues in line with the government's opinions expressed in the Director's speech. Since then, the anti-Halal event entered its phase 3. During this periodic stage, the anti-Halal participants commented, discussed, and reflected on the new official statements, as well as subsequent measures and actions taken by the government to handle the current Halal issue. Then, the anti-Halal participants have proposed various new ideas and appealed to further actions in order to help solve the Halal issue based on their reflection about the government's latest attitudes concerning it. However, the anti-Halal participants were still reproducing the views that emerged in the two past phases.

6.3.3.1 Aspect 1: Ideas evolved from the reaction to official statements and government activities concerning Halal issue

6.3.3.1.1 Official standpoints concerning Halal issue with differences against anti-Halal

ones

The first part of the newly evolved anti-Halal views and ideas in this phase was discovered in the participants' reaction to the official statement and subsequent government actions concerning Halal problems. Such statements and actions are de facto the implementation of the decisions made in the National Conference on Religious work held by the central committee of the CCP from April 22, 2016 to April 23, 2016. During that conference, the leaders of the CCP regime including President Xi decided that each religion in China must strictly be Sinicized in accordance with Socialism and Chinese culture, excluding any negative effect like radicalization, extremism, as well as influence from foreign forces. Such practice in fact belongs to the kind of neo-Sinicization discussed earlier in the Context Chapter. Meanwhile, President Xi emphasized that any religion can never have impact on the functions and powers of the state. In addition, as required by President Xi in the conference, the legal religious activities must be placed under the government's supervision and guidance to ensure that they comply with national laws.

Hence, when the government officially started to apply these decisions to the Halal problem, three main points can be found by analysing the official reports and documents related to this topic. Firstly, the government attempted to alleviate or at least highly reduce the influence of religious teachings when interpreting the concept of Halal in public. Secondly, the government urged merchants, factories, and business companies which normally produce and/or sell Halal items to reduce or control the use of the Halal logo or Halal certification on such commodities, especially foodstuffs. Thirdly, the government enhanced the promotion of secular values, as

well as the implementation of national laws to regulate and even restrict religious activities in everyday life. In particular, the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang were considered as the primary targets of this round of government actions, which will be discussed in detail later.

However, although one can find that there are some similarities between such official attitudes and previous anti-Halal standpoints developed by the participants, especially those calling for restrictions on Halal items and Islam religion, the official standpoints found in this stage were proposed with a different intention and goals. When criticizing the current Halal issue, the official standpoints determined that religious extremism is the main cause and promoter of the phenomenon of ‘generalization of Halal’ (清真泛化). Such extremism, as the official reports pointed out, is far beyond normal religious practice. Instead, it abuses religion to provoke extreme thoughts and behaviours which threaten national security:

[...] "Extremism" is the phenomenon of distorting religious teachings under the banner of religion, distorting religious doctrines, using extreme thoughts and extreme behaviours to endanger social harmony, national unity and national security. It is not a religion in essence, but is anti-humanity and sociopathic [...] (post 32, report from official media's Weibo account)

The ‘generalization of Halal’ (清真泛化) is acknowledged by government as a typical practice of such religious extremism in reality. Such practice is reflected as underlining and even

expanding the religious definition of Halal into various fields of society and promoting different kinds of items with Halal logo or certification in everyday life, contradicted traditional Chinese Muslims' habit that only uses Halal logo for meat food or animal products. This practice is described as being accompanied with the de-Sinicization of Islam, the radicalization of common Muslims, and the interference of religious power in secular affairs which is the jurisdiction of the secular government. Thus, the government officially called for a resistance against such religious extremism, underlining the necessity of preventing the 'generalization of Halal' in daily life:

[...] It is necessary to [...] seriously resolve the issues related to hype about the concept of 'Halal', expanding the scope of "Halal", abusing the "Halal" logo, and other 'generalization of Halal' phenomena [...] (posts 24, 25 and 26)

[...] It is necessary to guard against and prevent the phenomenon of 'generalization of Halal'. [...] It is necessary to promptly stop and rectify those in the society who seek to profit from "Halal" and expand the margin of ethnic groups. [...] (post 32)

Note: the texts above are taken from the original content of government statement on the problems about generalization of Halal. The post 24 (China's Daily), 25 (Global Times) , and 32 (Global Times) are from official media accounts on Sina Weibo. The post 26 was published by Influencer Xi Wuyi but it is a copy of the official statement as that in post 24 and 25.

Yet, although such criticism is similar to that voiced by anti-Halal participants in the previous two stages, there are still essential differences between them. While the anti-Halal participants negatively portrayed any Halal stuff as evil and a threat to the state and ordinary people, the official statements highlighted only the menace of generalizing, abusing, and expanding the use of Halal to broader non-religious and secular fields. The official posts do not reveal any clear intention or motivation to prohibit the normal use of Halal stuff, especially among Muslims. In other words, although the anti-Halal participants were totally opposing against Halal, the government was only trying to solve the problem of ‘generalization’ but still intending to preserve the regular practice of Halal for Muslims.

Secondly, in the official narrative, one of the main reasons behind the relevant religious extremism is that since the 1980s, as a result of reforms and the open policy, Chinese Muslims have communicated a lot with different groups abroad. Thus, as government indicated, some of them, particularly those living in Xinjiang, were deceived and utilized by various foreign forces to spread religious extremist ideas, bring chaos and disorder to Chinese society, overturn the CCP’s rule, and split the state, trying to establish their own country independent from China (Ma, 2013). As discussed in Context Chapter, when mentioning the term ‘Sinicization’ in today’s Chinese discourse and public values, especially concerning the topic of religion, it does not only refer to the traditional Sinicization basically at cultural level, but also indicates the obedience to and being transformed by CCP regime and its official ideologies, values, and rule.

Hence, it is obvious that such phenomenon or trend within Chinese Islam which seriously challenges the CCP’s rule can be recognized as opposing the modern Sinicization of religion,

or in other words, as the de-Sinicization of the religion. Thus, the CCP regime has determined that the de-Sinicization of the Islam, which is particularly in the form of Arabianization or Saudi-Arabianization as official statements claimed, is both the tool and accelerator of current religious extremism within Chinese Islam (see Gansu Daily, 2019; Sha, 2019). The CCP government has therefore started the new round of the Sinicization of religion to solve these problems, including forcing the religious practice to comply more with national laws and regulations as well as cracking down on the generalization of Halal:

[...] We must adhere to the rule of law and make good use of laws such as the Criminal Law, the Anti-Terrorism Law, the Religious Affairs Regulations and local laws and regulations, and severely crack down on speech and extreme behaviours that promote extreme ideas under various banners. [...] We must resolutely resist the infiltration and influence of foreign religious extremism on Islam in our country [...] Adhere to tradition and promote the direction of Sinicization of Islam in our country [...] We must be vigilant and promptly correct the phenomenon of "de-Sinicization" and "de-localization" [...] (post 32 by Global Times, see previous note)

Hence, one can find that the logic of government's standpoint concerning issue of 'generalization of Halal' (清真泛化) is: the extremist thoughts and ideas imported from foreign world led to the de-Sinicization trend and religious extremism within Chinese Islam, while generalization of Halal is one of extremists' tools or methods to enhance de-Sinicization and practice religious extremism in everyday life to expand their influence and obtain power to realize their political goals. This will seriously endanger national security and challenge the

rule of CCP regime. Although such official standpoint seems to agree with the anti-Halal points developed by the participants on Sina Weibo, the fundamental purposes of these two sides varied. On the one hand, from the analysis above, one can find that the CCP government has consistently focused on discussing and dealing with the issue of extremism, while never including those non-radical or common Muslims into the targets, at least superficially respecting their ordinary religious belief and practice. Furthermore, the government always emphasized that one of the disastrous consequences of extremism like generalizing Halal is that it will de facto create antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims, further threatening the national security and splitting the nation-state:

[...] At the same time, it also proves that they are [...] in an attempt to divide the population between Halal and non-Halal to create estrangement between different groups, eventually reaching a criminal plot to split the motherland. [...] (post 48, from Chinese Weibo account of Shanghai Cooperation Organization which actually represents official voice of Chinese government)

This kind of viewpoint still considers those secular or non-radical Muslims as victims or potential victims of religious extremism, arguing that they can be deceived and utilized by extremists to split the state, particularly through the practice of generalization of Halal:

[...] Obviously, these extremists have ulterior motives to create barriers between Halal

and non-Halal. They want to use religious people as a tool for their evil purpose of splitting the state, and ultimately lead them into the abyss of disaster. [...] (post 51)

Thus, the CCP government was looking at the Halal issue and through a vertical, ruler's perspective to solve the separatist problems mainly for protecting the national unity and safeguarding its regime over the state. Hence, the government was attempting to unite and Sinicize common Muslims under its sovereignty by only strictly suppressing the few extremists rather than opposing or excluding all of them, while allowing the existence and practice of Halal at a legal level rather than totally banning it. Moreover, this official position becomes clearer when analysis of the collected materials also finds that during this period, the government focused more on the Uyghur problems in Xinjiang rather than the Muslim minorities in the inland like the Hui people. This is evident in the repeated emphasis of solving Halal problems in Xinjiang in various official statements and new official regulations in this phase:

[...] We will vigorously carry out the work of "de-radicalization", [...] Efforts should be made to closely unite religious believers of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang around the party and government [...] Relevant provinces and cities should care about and support the Islamic work in Xinjiang and promote the harmonious development of Islam in Xinjiang [...] (post 32 by Global Times)

[Xinjiang passes the de-radicalization regulation which will take effect on April 1] It is forbidden to: [...] ② generalize the concept of Halal, expand the concept of Halal to other areas beyond the Halal food sphere, and exclude and interfere with the secular life of others in the name of being illegitimate [...] (posts 45 and 46, by official Weibo accounts of Central Committee of CCP and Central Committee of The Communist Youth League of China)

In contrast to inland China, the problems relating to Halal or Islam in Xinjiang overlap with the Uyghur independence movement that mixes the Islam religion, Uyghur consciousness of national independence, and the East Turkestan issue, as discussed earlier in the Context Chapter. The Uyghur independence movement was already, even before the Halal incident, considered by CCP as extremist, terrorist, and separatist and as seriously threatening national security and territorial integrity, and as challenging the CCP regime. Thus, when CCP government underlined the Halal issue and proposed a particular solution to that in Xinjiang, the regime intended to maintain and enhance its domination over this area by handling the problem of regional separatism at the level of national security rather than dealing with the daily conflicts surrounding the Halal issue at the public level.

On the other hand, although the anti-Halal participants also emphasized national security, the importance of the nation-state, and the sovereignty of the CCP regime, they focused more on the interests and rights of non-Muslim people, placing non-Muslims, the secular society, the nation-state, and even the CCP regime on the same side as hostile to Muslims. Thus, under such a horizontal view which highlights the antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims,

uniting non-radical Muslims or protecting common Muslims' regular religious life including Halal practices were no longer part of anti-Halal participants' thinking. Such common thinking was more apparent when the anti-Halal participants new ideas as a reaction to these government statements and actions, which will be analysed in following section.

6.3.3.1.2 New ideas evolved from participants' reactions to official statements and actions

Then, the participants' reaction to these official statements and government actions can be explored. By analysing the selected materials, two main viewpoints among participants' responses can be discovered:

Firstly, in addition to affirming the perceived positive aspects of these official statements and government actions to handle Halal issue in their eyes, the anti-Halal participants were pointing out that the relevant improvement measures should be more drastic and expanded into more spheres of ordinary life. The participants were requesting for the abrogation of official policies benefiting Halal productions. From the materials one can find that those anti-Halal participants were calling for the cancellation of current official policies that are benefiting and subsidizing Muslims who produce, consume, and sell Halal items, including the tax exemption for Halal companies and preferential policies for Halal productions sold in the market. Such policies are considered as privileges for Muslim minorities. The participants thought that only by cancelling such policies and subsidies can the current Halal issues be solved:

[...] The various Halal policy subsidies have not been cancelled, the root problems have not been touched at all, and the preferential policies for ethnic minorities [...] have not been resolved. (post 42 top comment 1)

Only by cancelling the various preferential policies for Halal products can the problem be solved both on the surface and fundamentally. (post 51 top comment 4)

However, one point needs to be underlined here is that by checking and examining all the related official policies concerning Halal stuffs, there is no kind of tax exemption or tax incentives like the ones referred to above. Preferential subsidies for Halal items can only be found in regulations enacted by local governments, which usually grant the companies producing and selling Halal items financial subsidies and offer Muslim minorities allowances on consuming Halal foodstuffs like beef and lamb. Also, according to official regulations on Halal certification which were enacted before the anti-Halal event, the China Islam Association can charge fees when providing factories with certification for producing Halal items. Such fees of Halal certification are considered as China Islam Association's tax collection by participants:

Abolish the Islamic Association's Halal tax, abolish state subsidies for Halal enterprises, prohibit local governments from using administrative power to promote

*Halal products, and oppose the generalization of Halal. We have a long way to go.
(post 41 hot retweet 1)*

However, by examining the relevant policies, documents and even national laws about tax, such fee charge is not recognized tax collection.

This call to change official policies is not included in the official statements concerning the Halal issue during phase 3 as well. The government's statements concerning Halal problems only provided a practical solution to the generalization of Halal by strengthening the implementation of national laws and regulations when supervising religious activities, as well as de-radicalizing religion to prevent it from interfering with ordinary life and secular society. In other words, the request of those participants to cancel current official policies concerning Halal stuffs is beyond the original intention and plan of CCP government to deal with Halal issue in the moment.

Meanwhile, they were also requesting institutional improvements to strengthen the execution of official decisions on solving the issue of generalization of Halal. The participants underlined the problems of local governments, common Party members, and civil servants at the grassroots level in the current Halal issues. Therefore, the participants were calling for the strict governance of these local authorities and government staff to strengthen the execution of new official decisions regarding the Halal issue with enforcement of national laws at grassroots

level, for example:

Please clean up religious Party members and cadres. (post 32 top comment 3)

The central government is opposing extremism and terrorism, but the local governments don't listen to and work against it. (post 52 top comment 3)

We must put pressure the local governments so that some things are done by them. (post 52 top comment 8)

However, as mentioned before, although the official statements discussed the role of local authorities in dealing with the generalization of Halal, local governments were not accused as being the chief culprit of the problem. Instead, they were viewed as a public agency that could help central government to solve the problem, a positive role that has always been affirmed by the CCP regime during this time.

Furthermore, the participants were requesting broader measures to totally abolish the use of Halal in public areas. They proposed that the concept of Halal and logo or label of Halal on all daily items should be totally abolished when commenting on government action aimed at

reducing the use of Halal labels in public areas like supermarkets and dining halls:

We should go further and change the Halal label to 'pork-free products'. If someone must produce food in accordance with Islamic law, that's okay, then label it as Islamic food and keep the original source clear to avoid misunderstanding. (post 40 top comment 5)

However, such opinion is beyond the government's original intention and plan then to handle Halal issue as well, which only attempt to limit and guide the use of Halal in accordance with national laws but without harshly forbidding it, as analysed earlier.

The second main point is that anti-Halal participants were calling for the de-radicalization regulation in Xinjiang to be implemented throughout the whole country, for example:

Please popularize such policy (note: the de-radicalization policy in Xinjiang) throughout the whole country! Islamization has penetrated into all provinces of the country! (post 45 top comment 1)

I don't think it can be treated differently. It should not be only in Xinjiang but should

be implemented across the country. (post 46 top comment 1)

The example shows that several provinces with a high concentration of Muslim minorities especially Hui people, such as Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Shaanxi, and Yunnan have been specifically underlined as key regions where such regulation must be implemented:

Why didn't Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, and Yunnan jointly issue such regulations? Are they preparing to establish the Islamic Emirate of Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan? (post 46 top comment 5)

Such regulation should be expanded to all the 5 western provinces (including Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang) and Yunnan. (post 46 hot retweet 10)

However, as discussed before, the Xinjiang de-radicalization regulation is employed by the CCP government to mainly suppress the Uyghur independence movement, instead of dealing with more common Halal issues in inland areas or excluding any other ethnic group like the Hui people. Therefore, the call to implement such strict regional restrictions on Halal items and Muslim religious activities throughout the whole state is distinct from the original intention for the government as well. However, it still conforms with the participants' own anti-Halal views from phase 2 that emphasize the antagonism between Muslims and non-Muslims, while

appealing to the opposition against all the Muslims and Halal matters to protect the secular nation-state and non-Muslims' life.

In sum, from the participants' reactions to official statements and government actions on generalization of Halal issue, there are two main ideas evolved: firstly, requiring further and more restrictive measures to deal with Halal issues, including changing official policies, strengthening law enforcement at the grassroots level, and totally abolishing the concept of Halal in ordinary life; secondly, expanding severe regulations like Xinjiang de-radicalization one to a nationwide range. However, although these new ideas were sharing the same attitudes like safeguarding the national security and maintaining the state stability with government, they are far beyond the original intention of the later one which did not imply that all the Muslims and their normal religious life including using Halal items should ever be totally forbidden in China.

6.3.3.2 Aspect 2: Daily reproduction of anti-Halal views

Meanwhile, the daily reproduction of anti-Halal views among participants can also be discovered in phase 3. Except continually producing and reproducing the negative images of Halal items and Muslim groups as a threat to nation-state and to ordinary people as in phase 2, participants in phase 3 also engaged in criticism of national policies on ethnic and religious affairs. Beyond critiques of preferential policies for Halal items, criticism focused on more

general ethnic policies enacted by government at a national level, as well as criticizing the ‘Ethnic and religious affairs commission’, a government department that oversees the implementation of those policies:

The wrong ethnic and religious policies encourage extremes and segregation and are drifting away from modern civilization in the name of respect for ethnic minorities. I even suspect that religious figures of extreme sects have gotten into the system of ethnic and religious affairs commission. Ethnic and religious affairs commission, integration and modern civilization should be your primary goal, not extremism and segregation.
(post 43 top comment 3)

The background of CCP’s ethnic policies and the relevant controversies such policies caused when it comes to Muslim minorities have been discussed in the Context Chapter. The criticism by anti-Halal participants in this phase reflected these controversies. Participants considered the current ethnic policies as not only unequally biased against non-Muslims, and especially the Han majority, but also tolerating or even fostering religious extremism among Muslim minorities like the Hui. Therefore, as anti-Halal participants indicated, the current ethnic policies and relevant ethnic and religious affairs department are de facto the accomplice or accelerator of Muslim minorities’ evil activities that can split the nation-state, threaten national security, and endanger the life of non-Muslims. Thus, the anti-Halal participants formally put forward that current official ethnic policies and the relevant department in charge of implementing such policies must be carefully reviewed, and reformed or even abolished by the CCP regime to help solve the Halal and Muslim issue since they were at the root causes of the

issue. For example:

The ethnic policy of the Soviet model should be thoroughly reviewed! Inequality and the binding of ethnicity and religion are the root causes of extreme religions, which creates separatist forces and makes the state quickly enter turmoil. (post 23 top comment 4)

The wrong ethnic and religious policies encourage extremes and segregation and are drifting away from modern civilization in the name of respect for ethnic minorities. [...] Ethnic and religious affairs commission, integration and modern civilization should be your primary goal, not extremism and segregation. (post 43 top comment 3)

As I always say, the wrong ethnic and religious policies create the extremism. (post 43 hot repost 4)

Although there were various differences and even contradictions between government's new standpoints and shared ideas among participants in phase 3, such situation didn't create any serious conflict. Instead, due to the participants' perception that recognizes those new official statements and activities as the results of their voices and appeals being heard, as well as tremendous progress of anti-Halal actions, the analysis demonstrates that during this period,

the participants generally held a positive attitude and expected that more and further measures will be taken by the government in the future, while their demands will be finally satisfied. However, such shared optimism also led to a new wave of protests and public opinion erupting in the following phase as the situation related to Halal issue recurred and government action stalled.

6.3.4 Phase 4: New round of protest and more radical ideas evolved (based on analysis of post 49 – 100)

Phase 4 began with the ‘Baigou incident’ in April 2017, when a group of Hui Muslims smashed a non-Muslim Han restaurant in Baigou Town, Hebei Province, because they found Halal items mixed with non-Halal ones in the restaurant. This was considered as serious blasphemy according to Islamic doctrines. After that, the local police didn’t penalize any Muslim taking part in the smashing but arrested one non-Muslim netizen, who criticized Muslims online with offensive language, in the name of sustaining ethnic and national unity. The local police’s handling of this incident led to great indignation and triggered a massive protest against both Muslim minorities and the local police of Baigou on Sina Weibo. This online protest eventually started a new round of opposition concerning the Halal issue among the anti-Halal participants. Most of the shared views expressed by anti-Halal participants during this period are basically the repetition or enhancement of those developed in previous phases. There was, however, one new point proposed by anti-Halal participants during this period.

6.3.4.1 Criticizing Muslim minorities of infiltrating into the regime system

When criticizing the government's handling of the Halal issue, anti-Halal participants proposed that this was caused by 'two-faced' officials hiding in the political system:

[...] Two-faced people are [...] lurking in the Party, government, police, etc., seriously threatening the state regime. (post 84 hot repost 8)

This is to resolutely confront the central government in an open and above-board manner. If the two-faced people are not eliminated, there will be endless troubles! (post 97 top comment 7)

The 'two-faced people (两面人)' is a popular definition firstly invented by CCP to describe those corrupt and undisciplined officials within the government who superficially pretend to obey the law. In recent years, this term has been often used to describe officials in the Xinjiang local government who secretly cooperated with the Uyghur independent movement to rebel against the CCP regime and the Chinese nation-state, which is considered as treason (see thepaper, 2021; xjtz, 2021). Here the anti-Halal participants adopted this notion and expanded its meaning to refer to all Muslims suspected of infiltrating the state regime system to become officials working in various institutions and government departments. The participants made

use of the ‘two-faced people’ term to charge those suspicious Muslim officials of abusing their political position to secretly create privileges for Islam and Muslim minorities, especially in the form of helping promote Halal foodstuffs and enacting policies benefiting Halal products:

[...] Every time you buy Halal products, you are paying money to cultists, and cultists use this money to infiltrate the government and bribe two-faced people to influence national policies [...] (post 83 hot repost 2)

[...] for these guys (two-faced people), their main purpose is to seek benefits for themselves and certain groups. They either advocate religious food or ask money and land for building mosques [...] (post 91 top comment 8)

The state should restrict the participation of Muslims in politics because they are full of thoughts on how to expand Islam. Every year, the Islamic representatives’ (of NPC and CPPCC) proposals are the same, either building mosques or promoting Halal food [...] (post 91 hot repost 1)

Such practice is charged by anti-Halal participants as the Muslim minorities’ political measure to seize state power from the CCP regime to promote Sharia law and Islam in the secular society, in order to oppress non-Muslims, subvert the secular nation-state, and finally dominate this

country through religion:

Key positions in various industries have been invaded by Muslims and they have extraordinary power. [...] Once the public security, procuratorate, court and army are controlled by Muslims, the consequences are unimaginable! (post 53 top comment 5)

Religious extremist forces are again [...] trying to infiltrate and subvert China step by step, which is outrageous. (post 82 top comment 10 and hot repost 2)

Based on this narrative of current conditions within the government, though still mainly in support of the CCP regime in general, the anti-Halal participants' criticism of current official policies, relevant government departments, and local authorities have become much more apparent and fiercer than in previous phases. For example:

*We all know the problem. Only Halal salt is provided in the supermarket, which is very scary. But who has the power to push Halal across the country? The **Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission does not wake up**, or is the promotion of religion its political achievement? Is state religion to be determined? (post 70 top comment 7)*

***The Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission** quickly come out to support your dog (the Muslims) (post 80 top comment 2)*

*[...] **The Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission** has contributed to so many incidents (post 80 top comment 5)*

*So, it means that **the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission** doesn't think that Ramen Gang (the Muslim groups running Halal ramen restaurants while also committing crimes and having conflicts with non-Muslims) broke the law. (post 87 top comment 2)*

*[...] This is a place (the Halal restaurant) where the **Food and Medicine Safety Supervision Bureau, the police, the fire department and other administrative departments dare not investigate, and the urban management department does not dare to demolish.** (post 90 top comment 8 and hot repost 1)*

*Ironically, the **Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission**, a government department that was supposed to work on ethnic unity, has instead become a pusher behind the curtain for splitting the people! Dividing people into various classes according to their religious beliefs destroys national unity and causes extreme expansion of people with*

certain religious beliefs [...] (post 95 top comment 6)

*Unequal ethnic policies will naturally lead to ethnic differentiation, and different identities are one type of "differentiation". Unequal policies have also made ethnic issues more sensitive. **From senior officials to ordinary local police, no one dares to face up to and deal with ethnic issues, because once handled improperly, it will turn into a major political issue at the national level.** (post 99 hot repost 2)*

Thus, the anti-Halal participants call for thorough and radical reform of national ethnic and other related policies as well as the internal corrections and governance of government, especially local governments, in a much sharper manner than in previous phases. In addition, these participants were calling for the unity and collective actions of the common, non-Muslim Chinese people to fight against these Muslim two-faced people and help the government clean itself up.

Like the conspiracy theories developed by anti-Halal participants previously, the political conspiracy about Muslim infiltration is also fabricated without any reliable evidence. The collected material shows that anti-Halal participants presumed, deduced, or even invented the negative images of Muslim officials within the state regime, partially based on the negative portrayal of Muslim minorities evolved before, to produce those political rumours concerning Muslims and Halal issue. Such rumours also highlighted an infiltrated and corrupt political

system as well as failed ethnic policies which contradict both the CCP's rule and non-Muslims' interests, endangering the Chinese nation-state. Therefore, the anti-Halal participants concocted an Islamophobic, and politically right narrative in Chinese society to promote further political reform within the state political system, while also calling for the participation of common people in such political reform in the same politically right name of safeguarding both the nation-state and the CCP regime.

Thus, in phase 4, the anti-Halal participants have completed their ideological construction to legalize and normalize their anti-Halal actions in accordance with the CCP's official ideologies and narratives. Finally, the participants were leading anti-Halal actions to mainly focus on advancing policy and political reform concerning Halal and ethnic issues within the CCP regime rather than simply criticizing and attacking Muslim minorities and their customs.

Chapter 7

Case study 2: Anti-mark-adding-policy event

The collective protest against the mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities in some important fields of modern Chinese society like education and government's recruitment. In practice, such mark-adding policy is mainly applied to National College Entrance Examination and Civil Service Examination. This protest originally stemmed from the anti-Halal event in 2016 as one of its sub-aspects, initially focusing on the criticism of mark-adding policy in the Civil Service Examination for Hui candidates in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. This regional policy was enacted by local authorities in that area according to general national ethnic policies introduced before. Anti-Halal participants then criticised the irrationality and injustice of policies that only benefit Hui people or Muslim minorities, while also accusing Hui and Muslim people of abusing the policies to seek power for their groups, seriously threatening national security. Therefore, in the early phase of the protest against the mark-adding policy, the main views and ideas shared by those involved were basically in line with the anti-Halal event, highlighting the issues related to national security surrounding Muslim minorities, especially Hui people, and the relevant policies benefiting them. However, along with the development of the protest and changing circumstances, this aspect of the anti-Halal event has become more independent and developed its own peculiarities which may be distinguished from anti-Halal actions. This included expanding the targets to all non-Muslim minorities and emphasising the collective identity of the Han nationality among participants, particularly after July 2018.

The collected materials demonstrate that the timeline of Case 2 is simpler than that of Case 1, which can only be divided into two phases:

Phase 1: From April 2016 to July 2018, the participants focused on protesting against the mark-adding policy benefiting Hui people, especially in the Civil Service Examination in Ningxia. The analysis is based on posts 101 – 116.

Phase 2: From July 2018, after engaging with the offline action taken by Han candidates' parents against current mark-adding policy implemented in Guizhou for National College Entrance Examination, the participants started to protest the mark-adding policy for all ethnic minorities in both National College Entrance Examination and Civil Service Examination. Meanwhile, they also focused on appealing to the need to safeguard the rights and interests of the Han people as the main body of the Chinese nation-state during this period. The analysis is based on posts 117 – 140.

7.1 Phase 1: Criticising mark-adding policies for Hui and Muslim people

As mentioned before, alongside the opposition against policies benefiting Muslim minorities

on Halal issue from April 2016, anti-Halal participants also came up with criticisms of the mark-adding policies for Hui people, especially concerning the mark-adding policy in the Civil Service Examination in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.

As discussed in Context Chapter, the local Council and government of Ethnic Autonomous Region under CCP's national structure can exercise the relatively political freedom to officially enact and implement local policies to help major ethnic minorities preserve their ethnicities and develop their normal life to be liberated from the historical oppression by Han majority and overcome backwardness in various fields. Thus, the government and the local council of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region have formulated and implemented a series of regulations and policies to protect the rights and interests of the Hui people, the major ethnic minority living there. These policies include the controversial mark-adding policy for the Hui people adopted in both the Civil Service Examination and the College Entrance Examination in Ningxia. According to an official explanation given by the Ningxia government in 2018 (thepaper.cn, 2018), in recent decades, mark-adding policies have complied with related requirements in several national laws like the constitution, the Law on Regional National Autonomy, and the civil servant law. Such policies aim at helping select and train outstanding national cadres from ethnic minorities to promote ethnic equality and better lead ethnic minorities on the road of development. Until 2016 when the protest broke out on Sina Weibo, this policy stipulated that each Hui candidate would receive 10 extra points on the Civil Service Examination and 10 to 30 extra points on the College Entrance Examination depending on the various circumstances of each candidate's hometown. For example, if a Hui candidate comes from some seriously undeveloped counties in Ningxia, 30 extra points may be added to their total score after careful investigation.

Therefore, from the viewpoint of the Ningxia government, the mark-adding policy supports ethnic equality since it can help ethnic minorities obtain more opportunities to reverse their undeveloped situation, especially considering the uneven distribution of resources between Han people and ethnic minorities in general, as well as the uneven regional development between areas mainly inhabited by Han people and those of ethnic minorities. However, in phase 1, the Weibo users participating in the protest against the policy held a diametrically opposed point of view against the official one.

7.1.1 A racist policy discriminating Han people

From the collected materials from phase 1, the protestors on Sina Weibo had three main ideas concerning the mark-adding policy in Ningxia. Firstly, they indicated that such mark-adding policy for Hui people is a racist policy discriminating against the Han. Since under this mark-adding policy, Han candidates are the only ones who cannot enjoy the benefits of added points because of their ethnic identity, the protestors indicated the fundamental inequality prescribed in this policy. In other words, the protestors implied that Han candidates could lose out on opportunities and resources determined by the results of these examinations since Hui candidates of the same level can get extra points, which automatically offers Hui people more competitive strength and possibilities than Han in modern society. Therefore, protestors have accused this policy of being unreasonable based on their own interpretation of the situation of Hui people in this country:

[...] the mother tongue of Hui students is mandarin which means they do not have a language barrier, why can they get 20 extra points in the examination? [...] (post 102)

[...] we (Han and Hui people) have the same education and grow up in the same environment, why should we (Han people) suffer such unfair treatment in each exam? [...] (post 103)

[...] There are also Han people in Ningxia who live in poor areas, and who cannot have access to good educational resources. The number of such Han people is absolutely larger than the number of Hui people, why they cannot get the same treatment of adding points? The mark-adding policy should favour specific vulnerable groups rather than one particular ethnic group. (post 108, hot repost 1)

One can find from the examples above that the protestors emphasized the similarities, ethnic and otherwise, between Hui and Han people to prove that de facto Hui people do not deserve or need the current preferential treatment induced by the mark-adding policy. However, protestors also claimed that on some occasions, Han people of Ningxia are living in conditions that are even worse than those of Hui people. This was meant to indicate that these Han people are the authentic group in need of special care, rather than the Hui people who actually lead better lives than them. Furthermore, based on the perceived inequality of the mark-adding

policy, the protestors proposed that such policy is actually a policy of racism that ethnically discriminates against, oppresses, and even impels the ethnic cleansing of Han people:

*[...] I urge that any policy of ethnic inequality targeting the Han people should be abolished! **Han people are not the slaves of new China!** [...]* (post 103 hot retweet 2)

*No effort was spared to **ethnically cleanse the Han people!*** (post 106 top comment 2)

Han people are like ‘two-legged sheep’ (两脚羊) in Ningxia (post 106 top comment 7)

Note: ‘Two-legged sheep’ (两脚羊) refers to humans who are being eaten. When famines or wars occurred in ancient China, people often slaughtered and ate their own kind to survive. In that case, the people who were slaughtered and eaten were called two-legged sheep. Cannibals treated these people like ordinary livestock to assuage their moral guilt. The comparison of the Han people to two-legged sheep here means that these participants believe that in Ningxia, with the assistance of the extra-point policy, Han people have been oppressed and enslaved by the Hui people, even losing their qualifications as normal human beings.

However, this logic is a distortion of the truth and a disguised replacement of concepts about

racial discrimination and ethnic equality. As discussed in the Context Chapter, although Hui Muslims have accepted Chinese as their spoken language since they officially settled in China during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, this does not mean that Hui people have the same status and ability as Han people to access resources like education, culture, economy, and politics. In fact, for a long time, Han chauvinist Chinese governments placed great restrictions on Hui and other Muslim minorities, considering them 'aliens.' Such oppression reached its peak in the Qing dynasty. The Qing government prohibited the Hui people from practicing their religion and maintaining their traditions, forcing them to abandon their religion and culture. This provoked drastic resistance that caused repeated revolts among the Hui people and brutal repression of their rulers over the following 300 years from 17th century to 20th century. Thus, Hui people were not capable of participating in regular social affairs, meaning that they lost the chance to take part in the development of Chinese society in premodern and early modern times as the Qing dynasty is the last premodern feudalist period in Chinese history. Therefore, the Hui people, or the Chinese-speaking Muslims, generally have never obtained the same status as the Han majority, especially concerning the distribution of resources, in social life. They have always been stuck in poverty and underdevelopment. Though with the assistance of CCP government and ethnic policies, especially since the opening up and reform in 1978, the Hui people and other Muslim minorities have developed considerably, they are still lagging behind, particularly compared to the Han majority. Thus, those external and limited ethnic similarities between Hui and Han people indicated by protestors cannot objectively reflect or prove that Hui people today have no need of assistance, especially in the field of education resource allocation.

On the other hand, as discussed in Context Chapter, oppression from feudal rulers and

important Han figures made the Hui people more conservative, rejecting Han civilisation to effectively purify their own ethnicity. Therefore, although the Hui people use Chinese or mandarin as their spoken language, they have preserved their own ethnicity, while not integrating into Han civilisation, even adopting the Arabic alphabet to spell out Chinese words. Such historical disjunction and estrangement of Hui people from the mainstream Han-Chinese world has resulted in an uneven cultural and ethnic development between the Hui and Han people, which also leads to a lack of competitiveness for the Hui people. Therefore, those external ethnic similarities between Hui and Han people pointed out by the protestors are intentional misinterpretation of the reality to serve the protestors' false charge against the mark-adding policy. Meanwhile, it also proves that protestors can flexibly make use of ethnic similarities and differences between Hui and Han people, or Chinese Muslims and non-Muslims, to construct a negative image of Hui or Muslim minorities to support their standpoint. In other words, one can find that when constructing Muslim minorities as enemies of non-Muslim Chinese people and the nation-state, the protestors normally underlined the ethnic differences of Muslim minorities against general non-Muslim Chinese. However, when attempting to prove that Muslim minorities do not deserve the preferential treatment, the similarities of those minorities with Han people were ironically emphasized by the same action group to substantiate their point of view. This phenomenon does not only show the self-contradiction of the protestors, but also confirms that their construction of Muslim minorities and relevant policies as being racist are an entirely subjective narrative based on bias rather than facts.

Furthermore, the analysis also demonstrates the language implying ethnic cleansing and slavery adopted by protestors to charge the mark-adding policy. Such expression is far more

than the usual false accusations or misinformation but bringing the policy and Hui people to the level of anti-humanity and anti-civilization. By such serious and fake demonization, the protestors were attempting to portray non-Muslim people, especially the Han majority, as the innocent and miserable victims of such perceived racism like those victims of holocaust and slavery. In addition to strengthening the Muslims' role of common enemy, this kind of narrative also implies the justice and rationality of the protest performed by these participants since anti-genocide and anti-slavery are mainstream and universal values of modern human beings accepted by all the countries and societies especially after World War II.

7.1.2 The mark-adding policy and political conspiracies

Secondly, the protestors accused the mark-adding policy, especially the Civil Service Examination mark-adding policy, of being a Hui minority's political conspiracy to seek regional independence of Ningxia. As discussed in Case 1, a similar viewpoint already existed among anti-Halal participants when boycotting Halal stuffs. Anti-Halal participants indicated that Muslim officials within the government and other official institutions were abusing their political power to expand the influence of Muslim minorities, including the Hui people, to split the nation-state and overturn the state regime. Although the participants successfully constructed a political conspiracy theory to negatively illustrate Muslim minorities, the anti-Halal accusations did not clearly explain how Muslim officials had entered the government and were wielding their power to realise their political goals. The protest against the mark-adding policy, however, did partially give an explanation to this question.

As the analysis demonstrates, the protestors primarily painted a picture wherein the basic structure of the composition of civil servants within the local government of Ningxia has been secretly changed with the assistance of that policy. For example, the protestors cited a report of the test results of the Ningxia Civil Service Examination published in 2011 to illustrate the benefits Hui candidates have received under the mark-adding policy:

[...] with the assistance of adding points, the numbers of Han candidates who were squeezed out by Hui candidates in the top 50, top 100, top 200, top 500, and top 1000 are 28, 51, 86, 167, and 273 [...] (post 103 and post 106)

[...] the top 35 in the original ranking included 26 non-Hui candidates, 9 Hui candidates, and Hui candidates accounted for 25.7% of the total candidates; after adding points, there were 5 non-Hui candidates and 30 Hui candidates, the proportion of Hui candidates in the total candidates suddenly increased to 85.7%. 21 non-Hui people were successfully squeezed out, and the squeeze-out rate was as high as 80.8% (post 106 top comments 1)

One thing needs to be firstly mentioned is that although the protestors claim that the report they cited can be found on an website (www.nxpta.com) of Ningxia government concerning the official examinations taking place in that area, there is no such results displayed on it now. This

suggests such data they adopted to develop the views against mark-adding policy may lack authenticity, or even be fake. This example further shows that the protestors intentionally emphasized or even exaggerated the high proportion of Hui candidates who came out on top in one single and specific civil service examination, even if the results are true. At the same time, they also highlighted the contribution of the mark-adding policy to such a high proportion, as well as suggesting a high squeeze-out rate of Han candidates. This strongly implies that in the civil service examination in Ningxia, the mark-adding policy has helped Hui candidates replace Han candidates with good grades and become civil servants in the local government. Meanwhile, the protestors claim that the mark-adding policy is a purposeful, planned, and organised replacement of Han civil servants, which has de facto changed the composition of the Ningxia government in favour of Hui people. For example:

A certain religion started infiltrating government offices years ago [...] (post 103)

This is a purposeful, planned and organised replacement, and the country is in the grip of traitors! (post 106 top comment 15)

[...] for 21 years, in civil service examination, on the grounds of due care, the Ningxia Hui force has excluded other ethnicities, monopolised public power, and exclusively dominated Ningxia in the way of substantially adding points [...] (post 107 top comment 5)

Furthermore, the protestors argued that this replacement is serving deeper, longer-term political purposes, including seizing state power, establishing a local Islamic regime, encouraging genocide against the Han people, and seeking regional independence. According to the protestors' descriptions, with the assistance of the mark-adding policy in the Civil Service Examination, Hui candidates who successfully become officials and occupy key positions in the Ningxia government are now secretly seizing political power from the CCP regime to produce more policies privileging the Hui people, consistently excluding the Han people. The protestors thus argued that these Hui officials are transforming the legally constituted authority of Ningxia through procedural justice:

The end result is that these Hui people head the civil service and then continue to give preferential treatment to Hui candidates and suppress the Han Chinese, creating a vicious circle that begins with the Islamisation of the civil service. (post 106 hot repost 3)

When 80% of officials have been replaced by Muslims, then, under the conditions permitted by the so-called Ethnic Regional Autonomy Law, they will promote the local legislative process to formulate mandatory legal norms for so-called local autonomy in accordance with Islamic law. (post 107 top comment 7)

First the entire civil service is vacated and replaced with a specific ethnic group, and then that group is tilted in favour of their own ethnic group in terms of political and economic policy [...] (post 108 hot repost 4)

In other words, the protestors suggested that Hui officials would abuse the power and freedom provided by the regional ethnic autonomy system to enact local regulations and legal norms based on Islamic teachings. This process might be superficially legitimate under the current political system and national laws of China but fundamentally contradicts the core ideology of the CCP regime. Such practice will definitely change the nature of local authority in Ningxia, making it more distinct and more independent from the Chinese state regime:

[...] The proportion of Hui in the civil service has reached fifty-five per cent. [...] Ningxia has become a de facto Islamic regime. [...] The Hui have already established an Islamic regime in the north-west without moving a muscle. (post 101 top comment 3)

In fact, it is already half-independent. These people have their own unspoken rules embedded in Sharia law, and all policies are there to support religion. The Han nationality can only bleed and cannot speak there. [...] The central government of these people is in Arabia, not in Beijing. What they lack is only to propose a national title. (post 111 hot retweet 2)

The protestors suggested that by successfully occupying and changing the composition of the local authorities, as well as by wiping out the influence of the Han people, the final step of the Hui people in Ningxia's plan would be to seek regional independence:

[...] If things go on like this, the Han nationality has completely become a fourth-class pariah in this place, and when this region is seeking independence, there will be no obstacles at all. (post 108 hot retweet 4)

However, this description of the mark-adding policy and Hui people's political conspiracy is based on no evidence. Except the problematic data like the suspicious test results mentioned before, the protestors did not provide any further evidence to attest to the existence of those supposed political purposes. On the contrary, by examining the collected materials, one can find that all of such political purposes and conspiracies attributed to the Hui people were the protestors' conjectures and inferences, which falsely illustrated Hui people as enemies of the Chinese nation-state who are attempting to split it and establish their Islamic local separatist power. Meanwhile, within such a narrative, the mark-adding policy in the Civil Service Examination was also falsely constructed as Hui people's political means that contradicts the facts. Moreover, this narrative implies that the Han nationality is the authentic and core foundation as well as the guardian of the modern Chinese nation-state, thus being oppressed by Hui people in Ningxia to reduce the obstacles for their evil plan.

7.1.3 Criticism on general ethnic policies and Ethnic and Religious Affairs department

Like anti-Halal actions of the era, the protestors against the mark-adding policy also criticised current ethnic policies in general and relevant government departments in charge of implementing the policies, calling for policy and institutional reform. Such criticism, like that in the anti-Halal event, attributed the theoretical origins of the mark-adding policy for Hui candidates in Ningxia to the perceived erroneousness and unfairness of ethnic policies focusing on helping and caring for ethnic minorities while ignoring the needs of the Han majority. Meanwhile, protestors also put forward further accusations against the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission, suggesting an unhealthy or even evil relationship between this department and Hui people when discussing civil service recruitment. Compared with the charges against the same department during the anti-Halal event, the criticism here gave a more detailed picture of its role and function in assisting the Hui people in achieving their political goals, suggesting that it challenged national security, not only in Ningxia but also in similar areas across China.

For example, the post 110 contains the content that a Han person in Jilin province complained that the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission in Jilin only recruits Hui candidates for new positions. By citing such example, the protestors argued that the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission is under the de facto control of Hui officials. To maintain this situation for the long-term political purposes mentioned above, the protestors argued that the Hui officials in charge of the commission continue to exclude old Han members and erase the influence of Han

people in the department, while constantly recruiting new officials solely from the Hui people. In that case, the mark-adding policy and ethnic restrictions for candidates set up in the Civil Service Examination were the powerful mean to realize such conspiracies. Therefore, the protestors claimed, Hui political groups have taken shape within the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission at all levels, eliminating the influence of other ethnic groups, especially non-Muslims like the Han nationality, making the government department their own political agency. In this scenario, the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission is no longer an institution serving the secular nation-state but a parasitic Hui-Islamic authority within the secular CCP government that only serves the interests of Hui Muslims and Islam:

As I have said before, the management of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission from the central to the local level is basically controlled by that certain ethnic group, and it would be surprising if documents are not issued in favour of that certain ethnic group and that certain religion! [...] (post 110 top comment 4)

[...] That's why the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission never speaks up for other ethnic groups like Mongolian, Tibetan, Zhuang, etc. Almost all the news we see about the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission has to do with the Hui people, because it's essentially the Hui Commission [...] (post 110 hot repost 4)

[...] These Muslim Party members (within the commission) they only subordinate to

Allah in their hearts. Three main things they are doing are: 1. Seeking privileges for Muslim ethnicities; 2. Seeking subsidies for Muslim ethnicities; 3. building Mosques everywhere [...] (post 111 hot retweet 3)

However, this portrayal of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission should also be considered as an intentionally negative construction with no factual basis. Firstly, after examining the composition of the main leaders of both the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and local ethnic and religious affairs commissions in areas like Ningxia and Jilin over the years, it is clear that the assertion about the Hui minority's occupation of that commission throughout the country contradicts reality. For example, the list of past leaders of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission since 1949 shows that apart from the Hui ethnicity, people from various non-Muslim ethnicities like Han, Mongolian, and Tibetan have held important positions in that department. In other words, the idea that Hui people have monopolised and controlled the Commission or excluded Han people from it is impossible, since the proportion of Hui members is no different from that of other ethnicities and Hui people have never monopolised any leadership positions in that department. The situation within local ethnic and religious affairs commissions like those in Ningxia and Jilin is similar to the national one, while Hui or Muslim minorities never monopolize or occupy such department. Meanwhile, officials from other non-Muslim ethnicities still play significant roles in such department, which can be examined by reviewing information about the composition and list of appointments and removals of members published by official documents and on official websites. This means that the protestors' accusation that throughout the whole country, the mark-adding policy is successfully being used by the Hui people to infiltrate and control Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission while cleansing officials of other ethnicities can be refuted.

Furthermore, a review of the policy documents issued by both national and local ethnic and religious affairs commissions under the reform and opening-up policy since the 1980s also refutes the claim that the Hui people have made the ethnic and religious affairs commissions their political agency. These documents show that in general, the commissions have been working under the supervision of the CCP authorities and in line with the official ideologies about ethnic unity and the secular nation-state discussed before. Although these commissions have enacted several policies to help Muslim minorities legally practice their ethnic and religious life, especially those concerning Halal matters in areas like Ningxia, they have also formulated and introduced several policies to help protect the everyday life and culture of other non-Muslim ethnic minorities, while also regulating and protecting the legal religious activities of other religions like Buddhism and Taoism, both of which are major religions among the Han people. In other words, there is no evidence that Islam or Hui ethnicity has ever received any special political position or privilege within the government that can challenge the state power or CCP authority. On the contrary, both Islam and Hui people in China are still under the supervision and guidance of the CCP, thus being constrained by the structure of national laws. Therefore, those relevant political conspiracy theories raised by the protestors do not match with the facts.

7.1.4 The shared ideas against the mark-adding policy built on anti-Halal thoughts

In summary, in Phase 1 of the protest against the mark-adding policy, the participants still held

the anti-Halal thoughts that had evolved on Sina Weibo in the previous event, and proposed several new points based on them. Such common views consistently expressed hostility against Muslim minorities, especially the Hui people, by portraying them as the natural enemy of the Han majority, the Chinese nation-state, and even the CCP regime. Meanwhile, by making use of the disguised replacement of concepts about ethnic equality and building political conspiracy theories based on falsehood and rumours, the protestors constructed a negative image of the mark-adding policy, particularly in Hui majority areas like Ningxia, portraying it as playing an important role in a series of political activities aimed at oppressing the Han majority, seeking regional independence, and overturning the secular government. Therefore, in Phase 1, the protestors were calling for the exhaustive reform or abrogation of not only the mark-adding policy in official exams but also the current national ethnic policies that formed the theoretical basis of said policy. The protestors appealed to stopping the Hui people's 'evil process' of ethnically cleansing the Han people, splitting the nation-state, and overturning the secular government by seizing state power, by such reform. This kind of reform, as protestors claimed, can also reconstruct a healthy political and social system under which the authentic ethnic equality and interests of non-Muslim ethnicities, especially the Han, can be guaranteed. Hence, the such shared views and ideas against the mark-adding policy were also superficially in accordance with the official nationalist theories of the CCP as both emphasise the unity and integrity of the Chinese nation-state and highlight the rule of the CCP over it.

7.2 Phase 2: Expanding the object of opposition from Muslims to other non-Muslim minorities

In July 2018, several offline protests organised by parents of Han candidates for the National College Entrance Examination took place in Guizhou, a province in southwestern China. The protests called for the abolition of the mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities to ensure equality for every candidate, especially Han candidates. At the same time with the offline protest, some parents proactively contacted some influential users, who had participated in similar online protests against the mark-adding policy on Sina Weibo although still mainly opposing the Hui people, to help spread their viewpoints and appeals on that platform. Thus, the protestors on Sina Weibo noted the parents' offline activities and began to communicate with them and take part in the protest in their own ways, while simultaneously influencing and transforming the anti-mark-adding policy actions into its Phase 2 as well.

Before entering the formal analysis, firstly, the related background of Guizhou province should be introduced to help explore the conditions of ethnic minorities and Han majority in that area, as well as the regional implementation of ethnic policies like the mark-adding policy. Unlike north-western areas like Ningxia, Guizhou is home to various non-Muslim ethnic minorities. According to the National Census data, ethnic minorities constitute 36.44% of the total population of Guizhou province, about 14.0503 million (GuizhouGov, 2021). The population number of ethnic minorities in Guizhou ranks fourth in the country, while the proportion ranks fifth. The top five ethnic minorities in Guizhou, by proportion of the population, are Miao (苗族), Buyi (布依族), Tujia (土家族), Dong (侗族), and Yi (彝族), all of which are non-Muslim minorities (GuizhouGov, 2021).

It is important to note the cultural and historical background of these minorities. Unlike Muslim groups like the Hui whose ancestors were from Muslim countries overseas, these minorities originated in China. Their ancestors coexisted with ancient Han tribes both peacefully and in conflict. Therefore, these non-Muslim ethnic minorities shared culture and customs with the Han people in many fields of everyday life, although they maintained their languages and original religious activities. Thus, even though there have been several clashes between these minorities and the Han people in history, these minorities have been living in peace with the Han people and never stopped communication, exchange, and intermarriage (Wang, 2000; Wei, 1996; Wei, 2004). However, due to the Han chauvinist policies of previous governments and dynasties, like Muslim minorities, these groups have also been oppressed and restricted from accessing various resources in the social and political spheres, which has caused them to experience relative poverty and lack of development compared with the Han people, especially in the field of modern science and education. Therefore, after 1949, according to the implementation of the CCP's ethnic policies as discussed in the Context Chapter, these ethnic minorities have also enjoyed several preferential policies, including the mark-adding policy, to help make up for the shortcomings caused by historical and external factors. Since the 1980s, under the national reform and opening-up policy, the implementation of these policies has been revived (Chen, 2019). Today all the candidates from ethnic minorities in Guizhou have enjoyed the right to extra points in the National College Entrance Examination.

Therefore, the well-practiced mark-adding policy and the large number of ethnic minorities in Guizhou could constitute a realistic basis for the dissatisfaction of the parents of Han candidates. The protesting parents clearly believed that the mark-adding policy was a de facto method of providing other non-Han candidates with additional opportunities to defeat Han candidates and

enter better universities because of their ethnic identity rather than any genuine ability or talent. Meanwhile, an analysis of the statements and actions of the parents who protested shows that their appeals and demands were relatively simple, only focusing on reforming the mark-adding policy and ensuring educational fairness for all the candidates of the college entrance examination, with no strong nationalist tendencies or clear hostile sentiment against ethnic minorities. However, when the anti 'mark-adding policy' protestors got involved and started protesting on Sina Weibo, they put forward nationalist ideas that extended the parents' simple criticisms from the level of personal interest to the level of national security and the survival of the Han ethnicity, furtherly nurturing their shared opinions that evolved in Phase 1. Thus, in the following sections, the development of the anti 'mark-adding policy' protestors' shared views and ideas based on the case of Guizhou will be explored and discussed.

7.2.1 Expanding the target to all ethnic minorities

In Phase 2, the Sina Weibo users who participated in the online protest expanded their target to all ethnic minorities, including non-Muslim ones. In other words, after being involved in a similar protest taking place in Guizhou, the protestors on Sina Weibo changed their attitudes towards non-Muslim minorities, which have been previously portrayed as victims of the mark-adding policy in areas like Ningxia, as well as Han people. The collected materials show that in the case of Guizhou, the Sina Weibo participants recognized that in places where non-Muslim minorities gathered and lived in large numbers, the mark-adding policy had also benefitted these minorities over the Han people. Therefore, by holding on to the political conspiracy theories that evolved in the previous stage, in Phase 2, the protestors on Sina Weibo

started to see all minorities, Muslim and non-Muslim, as a threat to and enemy of the Chinese nation-state.

Thus, by changing the subject of their complaints from Muslims to ethnic minorities, the protestors also tightened the boundary of their actions, which de facto coincided with the identification to Han majority in the moment. In other words, in Phase 2 of anti-mark-adding policy, the non-Muslim minorities, used to be acknowledged before as comrades of Han majority when fighting against Halal issue, Muslims, Hui candidates, and related policies, were no longer considered by the protestors as potential participants which can be united, motivated, or pulled into the actions. On the contrary, in this last phase, all the non-Muslim minorities have obtained the same status or label of hostile and outside 'Others' as Muslims minorities, while being formally excluded. For example:

*55 of 56 ethnicities can enjoy the extra points, the Han people become the only minority.
(post 129 top comment 9)*

*There are 56 ethnicities but the 55 (ethnic minorities) of which are 'noble'. (post 130
top comment 7)*

Therefore, under such sharp boundary of Han identification without vagueness, the protestors

on Sina Weibo also proposed two new viewpoints to further refine their nationalist ideas against ethnic minorities and the mark-adding policy.

7.2.2 The targeted policy reviving the ethnic consciousness of already 'Hanized' minorities

Firstly, the protestors on Sina Weibo pointed out that the additional benefits provided by the mark-adding policy to ethnic minorities represent a de facto strengthening of the ethnic consciousness of these minorities that had already been 'Hanized' over history. In other words, the protestors claimed that the mark-adding policy made ethnic minorities who were no longer distinct from the Han people in everyday life rediscover their own ethnicities to ensure their particular identity and status. Furthermore, as protestors indicated, this practice has been remoulding ethnic pride, as well as reinforcing a sense of ethnic identity among minorities that are independent of identification to either the Han ethnicity or the official Chinese nation-state. This influence, as the protestors argued, artificially created and expanded differences between ethnic groups, especially between Han people and ethnic minorities, while destroying the integration into and common consciousness of the modern Chinese nation-state among ethnic minorities. In the end, this would inevitably lead to the independence of ethnic minorities and national secession:

In Guizhou, many ethnic minorities have already been Hanized and assimilated. Their ways of life are basically close (to Han people). However, a mark-adding policy is to

be made, so that before the high school and university entrance examinations, a large number of ethnic minorities emerged, and this pile of minorities even do not know what their own ethnicity and culture are, just for the sake of adding marks. [...] Ethnic unity? Equality? On the contrary! (post 117 top comment 10)

[...] this kind of mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities in college entrance examinations is violating the principle of educational fairness and going against fostering the common consciousness of Chinese national community [...] (post 120)

If differences bring privileges and benefits, the beneficiaries will be desperate to maintain, amplify, and manifest differences. The result of expanding and manifesting differences is bound to be the rise and rampant expansion of separatist forces. All kinds of independent movements in China are fostered by this kind of privileged differential treatment. (post 123 hot repost 3)

Like other charges against ethnic minorities by the protestors, an examination of the collected materials shows that this viewpoint is a typical conspiracy theory without any tangible evidence based solely on the protestors' subjective conjectures and assertions. Intentional ideological construction can also be found among these expressions. Firstly, accusing non-Muslim minorities of de-Hanization to obtain benefits from the mark-adding policy does not correspond to the facts. As introduced in the Context Chapter, the term 'Hanization' (汉化) used here is

distinct from the Sinicization (中国化) proposed by the CCP for the political unification of the modern nation-state. Here, Hanization refers to the classical practice of assimilating ethnic minorities into the Han ethnicity, including language, culture, and lifestyle, which had been enforced by rulers in feudal times and the premodern period as discussed before. This practice was established based on classical Han chauvinism, which only recognises Han culture like Confucianism as an authentic civilisation and denies the value of civilisation created by ethnic minorities. However, even this policy of assimilation did not completely exterminate the ethnic culture and traditions of those minorities, which also dynamically gained vitality in constant resistance against repression by a series of rulers as introduced earlier. Also, as indicated in the Context Chapter, after the establishment of the CCP regime in 1949, especially since 1978, under the policy of reform and opening up, the CCP government has reinforced Marxist-Leninist ethnic policies and provided minorities with more freedom in the field of preserving and developing their ethnic culture and tradition, ensuring the survival of various minorities' ethnicities including both Muslim and non-Muslim ones. Hence, throughout history, a complete and absolute Hanization of those ethnic minorities described by the protestors on Sina Weibo was not consistent with reality and never existed; even under the strictest policies of ethnic assimilation in the premodern period of Han chauvinism, minorities in China still maintained their ethnic characteristics to a certain extent. Therefore, the accusation that the mark-adding policy was helping to revive the special ethnicity of already fully Hanized minorities and was reintroducing ethnic differences between those minorities and the Han people is an inaccurate allegation without any factual basis.

Furthermore, the protestors' invocation of the concept of the 'common consciousness of the Chinese national community (中华民族共同体意识)' when criticising the presumed negative

influence of the mark-adding policy is also an intentional misuse or adaptation of official nationalist theories to construct the unique nationalist ideas of the protest. As introduced in Context Chapter, the ‘new’ concept of Chinese national community doesn’t fundamentally change any point or part of CCP’s official ideas and policies concerning ethnic issue. On the contrary, it reaffirms the pluralist nature of Chinese nation-state and the basic right of minorities to sustain and develop their ethnicity, though with limitation. This means that the proposition of this concept doesn’t demonstrate or imply that those current official ethnic policies should be cancelled, while opposing Han chauvinism as well (see Xi, 2021). Therefore, the protestors’ use of Chinese national community concept to deny the rights of ethnic minorities and promote that Han ethnicity should be the only authentic Chinese nationality is a kind of intentionally distorting and deconstructing the original meaning of official national concept to produce their own Han chauvinist standpoint.

7.2.3 The mark-adding policy is changing the ethnic structure of certain areas of China

In Phase 1, the participants of the protest claimed that the practice of adding points for Hui candidates has been changing the composition of officials in local authorities, which serves the political goals of the Hui ethnicity. Similarly, in Phase 2, by criticising the case of Guizhou, protestors indicated that the implementation of the mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities in various official examinations has secretly changed the ethnic structure of that area, helping to achieve the political goals of non-Han ethnic minorities as well.

However, unlike Phase 1, the allegation here expands the perceived sphere of the targeted policy's influence from the field of political institutions to the whole social ecology including population structure and ethnic composition in general. In other words, the protestors claimed that the mark-adding policy has forced Han people to escape from the areas where such policies are implemented, to seek opportunities, resources, and authentic equality elsewhere which they are not able to obtain in those policy-affected areas anymore. The consequence is that such affected areas will become de facto non-Han zones or regions where Han people will eventually become minorities oppressed by other non-Han ethnicities:

[...] Why in less than 30 years, the local Han ethnicity has changed from the main ethnic group to the minority? [...] The mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities in the college entrance examination is one of the reasons for the great changes in the ethnic population [...] (post 120)

It's terrible that in less than 30 years, the Han population has unexpectedly dropped from 99.9% to 9.6%, and this terrible 9.6% has no preferential treatment, being oppressed. (post 120 top comment 10)

The biggest problem with this policy is the crowding out effect on Han people. (post 128 top comment 6)

[...] In areas where ethnic minorities gather and live, all kinds of preferential treatment for ethnic minorities, including extra points in various examinations, actually turned these areas into areas without Han people [...] (post 130 hot retweet 3)

By examining these allegations against the mark-adding policy, again, one can find that the protestors employed a post-truth methodology to construct their standpoint. For example, when the protestors quoted the data about the change in the ethnic population in one county of Guizhou province from 1982 to 2010 in post 120, they directly concluded that the change was partially caused by the mark-adding policy in the college entrance examination, without providing any background information to prove it. However, there is no proof of the relationship between the mark-adding policy and the dramatic change in the ethnic population, especially the Han population, which declined from 99.9% to 9.6% in that county, a point that needs further research. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the Han people living in that county are currently being oppressed, although the protestors were convinced that this was the ‘reality’. Meanwhile, an examination of the official data about ethnic composition in both Guizhou province and the whole country shows that the ethnic composition at both levels has essentially remained stable over recent decades, refuting the ideas about ethnic cleansing caused by the mark-adding policy. Hence, by highlighting the case of this particular county and repeating intentional inferences without evidence, the protestors reaffirmed the perceived negative impact of the mark-adding policy on changing ethnic composition in general without providing any further proof, forming a circular argument.

Based on such false charges, the protestors also suggested that the foreseeable consequence of

implementing the mark-adding policy and cleansing Han people from ethnic minority areas is helping local ethnic minorities to realise political goals such as achieving regional independence, which will eventually split the nation-state. This point is both a repetition and further development of the ideas that evolved in the previous phase, implying the ethnic minorities' politically conspiratorial occupation of particular areas by making use of the mark-adding policy. However, the protestors expanded their targeted group to all non-Han ethnic minorities here rather than emphasizing Hui people only. Therefore, this portrayal painted all the non-Han minorities as natural separatists, potential traitors, and enemies of the Chinese nation-state.

For example, the protestors quoted the case of An Lushan, who was a famous Tang dynasty officer and military leader from the Hu minority, an ancient ethnic group considered to be the ancestors of various minorities in China today. Although he was trusted by the emperor, he started a massive rebellion that directly led to the decline of the Tang dynasty and caused the emergence of various separatist forces, accelerating the later fall of the Tang empire. The protestors compared the mark-adding policy to An Lushan's rebellion:

An Lushan did the same thing in history. When he replaced all Han generals with Hu generals, he rebelled. (post 125 top comment 9)

Therefore, the protestors equated the mark-adding policy with the ethnic minorities preparing

to rebel against the nation-state. Furthermore, the collected materials show that the protestors consistently used historical rebellions by ethnic minorities or presumed that such rebellions would take place again if ethnic minorities obtained power, while emphasizing that only the Han majority can function as the authentic and fundamental guardians of Chinese nation-state. For example:

Self-deprecating and conferring privileges cannot bring some people's sincere recognition of Chinese culture, but it will weaken the basic group's (Han) recognition of China and confuse people's hearts [...] The main body of Chinese culture is Han culture. If there is no Han culture, Chinese culture will become water without a source. Suppressing Han culture will only have the effect of evacuating the core of Chinese culture, sowing the seeds of disaster for the desert culture to change the pillar of Chinese culture and to go public through a backdoor (post 117 comment no. 39 of 1500 comments in total)

Adding points in College Entrance Examination, adding points in Civil Service Examination, when they (minorities) drive away all the Han people, then they can peacefully build '-stan' (post 128 top comment 19)

[...] The loss of control of the frontier areas in all dynasties started with the decline and destruction of the Han ethnicity in these areas. It will be too late, when the Han

people in frontier areas have all run away or been marginalised, to find a way to stabilise the conditions in frontier areas [...] (post 133)

In other words, by repeatedly citing history to justify their inferences, the protestors presumed that without the assistance of Han people in stabilising and governing areas where ethnic minorities live, the minorities will rebel against the state to seek independence. This logic indicates that the mark-adding policy is also a political method used by ethnic minorities to eliminate the fundamental safeguard of the nation-state, the Han ethnicity, to clear the way for splitting the state.

In summary, as in the first point of this phase, inferences based on false accusations about the impact of mark-adding policy reflect an extreme Han chauvinist view that not only denies the contribution of ethnic minorities to building and maintaining the Chinese nation-state, but also portrays all the ethnic minorities as natural traitors and enemies intending to destroy and split the nation-state. Meanwhile, the implication that the Han ethnicity is the only authentic foundation and defender of the nation-state is also a deconstruction of the official concept of the Chinese nation-state, redefining it in an extreme Han chauvinist way that contradicts the CCP's nationalist ideology, as discussed before.

7.2.4 The call for a new mark-adding policy benefiting the descendants of national contributors

Apart from repeated appeals to abrogate the current mark-adding policy and fundamentally reform or even abolish current ethnic policies, the collected materials demonstrate that in Phase 2, the protestors proposed that a new kind of mark-adding policy should be enacted.

The protestors pointed out that according to the current mark-adding policy, the conditions in which the descendants of revolutionary martyrs¹ who sacrificed for defending the common people, the nation-state, and the CCP regime, could receive extra points in official examinations were extremely harsh, commonly only applying to their direct relatives (usually the biological children).

On the contrary, as the protestors pointed out, ethnic minorities can enjoy unconditional extra points in examinations just because of their ethnic identity rather than being at expense of their parents' lives like those children of revolutionary martyrs. Therefore, this policy is particularly unfair to the exalted national contributors like revolutionary martyrs and their descendants, and a new kind of mark-adding policy benefiting such descendants should be immediately enacted to realise true fairness, reflecting the state and people's gratefulness and thanksgiving. Meanwhile, normal candidates from ethnic minorities should not get any kind of extra points

¹ *Revolutionary Martyrs* is the CCP government's classification for those who have died heroically in the people's revolutionary struggle, in defense of the state, or in the cause of socialist construction. On 4 June 1980, the State Council of PRC reissued the *Regulations on Appreciation of Revolutionary Martyrs*, and those who meet the official requirements can be approved to be Revolutionary Martyrs, including: those who died for fighting against the enemy; those who were killed for safeguarding national security; those who were killed for defending interests of the state and the people; those whose circumstances of the death are particularly outstanding and are sufficient to serve as a model for future generations.

and must be treated the same as those from the Han majority since they are common national members without any outstanding contribution. For example:

[...] Nobody cares about the revolutionary martyrs who sacrificed for the country, but the ethnic minorities can naturally enjoy the privilege and honour, bitterly disappointed! (post 127)

@Central Government, we want preference for children of revolutionary martyrs, while ethnic minorities should be treated the same as us Han people. (post 127 top comment 9)

These examples show that this appeal for a new policy also constructs an antagonistic line between national contributors like revolutionary martyrs and ethnic minorities, which repudiates the value of ethnic minorities in establishing and sustaining a modern nation-state. In other words, by calling for a new mark-adding policy, the protestors simultaneously portrayed ethnic minorities as invaluable or lacking special value for the state and as being unworthy of any kind of preference and subsidy. Furthermore, since 1949, the idea that every citizen in China must honour and follow the example of outstanding national contributors, especially revolutionary martyrs, to contribute to and defend the state, has been one of the most significant nationalist values promoted by the CCP regime. Under the guidance of such official nationalist values, any behaviours, speech, or actions disrespecting or insulting those

contributors, especially revolutionary martyrs, are illegal and supposed to be penalised under China's legal system (see General Principles of Civil Law (PRC), 2017; Law on the Protection of Martyrs (PRC), 2018). Therefore, by illustrating the current mark-adding policy as unfair to or even dishonouring revolutionary martyrs and their descendants, the protestors also implied that the policy contradicts national laws and official nationalist values, underlining it as hostile against the nation-state as well as CCP regime.

However, as discussed above, the mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities is intended to help them overcome the shortcomings caused by historical national and ethnic oppression and give them the tools to contribute to the development of the modern state. This practice does not contradict ethnic equality or benefits recognising national contributors. Meanwhile, by examining relevant policies and practices benefiting and subsidising national contributors like revolutionary martyrs and their relatives across China, it can be found that such policies are implemented well and in many occasions even their whole family can enjoy different kind of benefits and preferences provided by government across the country. This is inconsistent with the protestors' claim that nobody cares about the revolutionary martyrs and their descendants, but only ethnic minorities are well treated by the state. Therefore, such opinions are another disguised replacement of concepts and a distortion of reality that intentionally portrays both the mark-adding policy and ethnic minorities as enemies of the nation-state. Meanwhile, it also portrayed the protestors' appeals about reforming or even abrogating the current ethnic policies as pro-nation-state and in support of the CCP rule.

Chapter 8

The influence of the Sina Weibo platform on the movement

8.1 Sina Weibo and Digital sublime

While the previous two chapters mainly analyse the collective identity process occurring in the chosen cases, this chapter focuses on the influence of the Sina Weibo platform on the movement. To explore in-depth the environment provided by Sina Weibo for the nationalist movement, the factors that affected the participants' activities on the platform will be analysed in an ecological and diachronic view. Firstly, the analysis finds that during the movement the participants have shown strong confidence in the ability and power of Sina Weibo as a social media platform to help them in expanding their influence. The evidence demonstrates that at the early stages, the participants already believe that it is the power of Sina Weibo, in combination with their proper use of it, that can successfully bring relevant issues to the attention of the public and motivate common people to take part in actions to change the status quo. For example:

[...] I've been posting on Weibo since 16 February to call attention to this. [...] In the age of self-media, all hands are on deck! [...] (post 2)

A trickle of water makes an ocean. The Weibo post written on 2 March has been read by more than 470,000 people so far. [...] The cries of the people have moved heaven and earth. (post 2 hot repost 2)

[...] This post has been read by 970,000 people so far. [...] It is the millions of netizens on Sina Weibo who have shown great solidarity that makes me feel that those upholding justice will find help all around! [...] (post 7)

Meanwhile, some of the participants believe that with the increasing scale of participation among Weibo users through participatory power of the platform, their voice can be heard not only by the public but also by the government, pushing political leaders to listen to the vox populi and initiate reforms to solve the problems raised by these Weibo users. Thus, Sina Weibo is perceived not only a powerful instrument for organizing and enlarging the movement, but also as an effective medium for ordinary people to communicate their public opinion to the CCP regime. This perception has been repeated and affirmed by various participants throughout the movement. Especially after the perceived victories, the analysis shows that participants would summarize the positive role of Sina Weibo in helping achieve these results. This further indicated that Sina Weibo can assist with the national members or common people in safeguarding the nation-state and improving the secular world by effectively helping them realize, discover, and take action to solve current ethnic issues.

Then, the participants tended to emphasize that the existence and popularity of Sina Weibo do eventually change the current world while making it better than before. For example:

This is the power of Sina Weibo! [...]

(post 42 hot repost 5, the original post was communicating the news that the official China Islamic Association has stopped issuing Halal certificates for common foodstuffs, which is recognized by the participants as their temporary victory over Halal issue)

Finally. Sina Weibo is helping China become better [...]

(post 87 hot repost 2, the original post was communicating the news that government was cracking down on Ramen gangs across the country, which is recognized by the participants as their temporary victory over Halal issue)

Hence, it shows that by constantly relying on Sina Weibo, the participants have formally consolidated their positive perception about it into a stable commitment to these technologies, reinforcing their use of that platform throughout the movement. Therefore, one can find that among the participants this perception has been developed into a digital sublime implying that social media like Sina Weibo can help bring Chinese people into a more equal and perfect state. Furthermore, from the collected samples, one can find that such technological

commitment is particularly reflected in their consistent use of connective features provided by Sina Weibo to sustain and expand the movement, which will be discussed in the following sections.

8.1.1 Utilization of the ‘repost’ feature

The analysis demonstrates that various participants have always recognised the significance of enormous and continual data stream. This finding is based on their published content for proceeding the actions on Sina Weibo. The analysis shows that the participants have considered the ‘repost (retweet/转发)’ feature provided by the platform as the most important and primary function that they must employ. For example:

[...] In the era of We Media, great things may be done by mass effort! Dear netizens please support us! Please repost a lot! (post 2)

[...] Please don't just ‘like’ it [...] if the ‘like’ function is useful, then why do you need the function of repost! (post 17 hot repost 1)

Please repost and spread [...] it is a pity that these articles discussing the rationality of some terms in this law haven't been seen by enough people, the influence of which is quite limited now by comparing with the importance of this case.

Please spread it and act in the way provided below

Please spread it and act in the way provided below

Please spread it and act in the way provided below [...] (post 33)

If you and I didn't repost, then we deserve that nobody cares about the mark-adding policy! (post 140 hot repost 2)

The examples above prove that throughout the whole movement, the participants have been constantly calling for dynamic and massive reposting to spread movement-related content on Sina Weibo to expand its influence. Meanwhile, the analysis finds that the participants would also acknowledge that those posts receiving a large number of reposts can represent public opinion to a large extent that supports the movement's viewpoints and appeals. For example:

[...] The post on July 24 [...] is still alive, which has got 3266 reposts and 1.56 million page views. [...] That may be the reason why the controllers (of the platform) respect public opinion and did not hide that post. (post 118 top comment 5)

Therefore, it seems that some participants also believe in the impact of the ‘repost’ feature on the success of their actions. Such confidence can be considered as part of their commitment to Sina Weibo and relevant technologies on launching the movement as well, which explains their continuous employment of this feature during the movement.

8.1.2 Use of the @ function

The collected materials demonstrate that the participants have made use of ‘@’ function provided by the Weibo platform as well. The utilization of this function can be divided into two categories. Firstly, one can find that when the participants published posts discussing movement-related issues, they would tag others’ Weibo accounts in the posts to ask others to help repost, spread, forward, and communicate their opinions as their contribution to the movement. For example:



Figure 6: post 39 from case 1 phase 3 by common participant, which listed various Halal food products, made criticism against them, and asked for opposition, @ing both ordinary participants and influencers' accounts

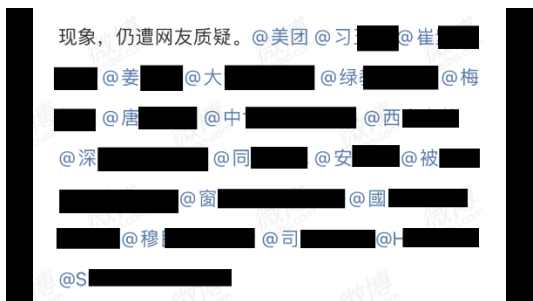


Figure 7: post 56 from case 1 phase 4 by influencer, which included criticism against Meituan delivery company that set up separate Halal box to deliver Halal food, @ing other influencers' accounts



Figure 8: post 73 from case 1 phase 4 by influencer, which appealed for actions requesting Airline companies to cancel Halal diet on their flights, @ing various participants including both ordinary ones and other influencers

Thus, with the assistance of the @ function, the participants could build or reproduce connections with others. Meanwhile, as shown in the examples above, such connections were not limited to any specific type of participants but were practiced by both influencers and ordinary participants. This implies the existence of dynamic networks of the movement as well as the participants' identification with each other. This means that when these participants were promoting or provoking movement-related actions, they were aware of the existence of other participants within the same networks, as well as recognizing them as comrades that can be tagged to seek further cooperation.

Secondly, the analysis shows that the participants have also used this function to communicate their appeals to the government and other institutions. For example, in case 1, participants often made complains to the airline or to railway companies about the service of Halal diet provided by these institutions by @ing their Weibo accounts:

[...] May I ask why the majority of travellers who do not consume Halal food do not have the right to choose non-Halal food? @中国南方航空 (China Southern Airlines) (post 15)

Strong protest@中国南方航空 (China Southern Airlines) I am travelling on CZ6747 from Sanya to Guangzhou today, and the plane issued Halal certified rice burgers to every passenger, which I have sternly refused and protested to the crew chief [...] (post 44)

@广州铁路 (Guangzhou Railway) come out and speak to us? (post 68)

In current Chinese society such companies are normally obtaining semi-official status, which means they are not government departments or directly belonging to government but are part of the government-controlled private economy, while not having any political function. This kind of tagging practices are thus more like employing the Sina Weibo platform as an

alternative complaint channel to inform the relevant non-political institutions like those big companies of the participants' views and requests on the civil side.

However, the analysis also finds that the participants have used this feature to communicate their opinions and demands to political institutions as well. For example, in both case 1 and 2, the participants have frequently tagged the official Weibo accounts of various government departments, including those of central and local governments, to directly express their dissatisfaction with ethnic policies and how these official institutions have implemented such policies, requiring deep policy reform or effective law enforcement:

[...] @上海发布 (Shanghai Official News) @警民直通车-上海 (Shanghai Police)

Expect strict enforcement by Shanghai's law enforcement agencies (post 20 hot repost 2 from case 1)

[...] The issue of how to adjust the bonus adding marks for civil service examinations in ethnic minority areas is on the schedule. @宁夏发布 (Ningxia Official News) @青海发布 (Qinghai Official News) Please verify the information of this netizen and pay attention to the netizens' demand that compatriots of all ethnic groups enjoy equal access to the civil service as soon as possible. [...] (post 113 from case 2)

This 'dissemination of Yi culture' account is typical ethnic independence. This is a substitution of concepts and incitement to secession. If this is not investigated and persons behind it are not arrested, should it be kept for the Mid-Autumn Festival? @国家网信办举报中心(Reporting Centre of the State Net Information Office of the People's Republic of China) @首都网警 (Internet Police of Capital) @公安部刑侦局 (Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB) of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS)) @共青团中央 (Central Committee of the Communist Youth League) (post 134 hot repost 2 from case 2)

The practice of tagging in the above examples shows that the participants have also explored the potential of Sina Weibo as new political channel connecting ordinary users with the CCP regime. The latter has already opened different official accounts on social media like Sina Weibo, as well as regularly running such accounts as Government Information Dissemination Channels in the era of digital media. Considering the fact that in China over a long time, ordinary people didn't have any effective channel to communicate and even debate about political issues with the CCP government, such phenomenon reveals that social media like Sina Weibo has transformed the previous political ecology. The analysis demonstrates that due to the depth of government control and involvement in social media in China, ordinary people like the participants of this movement have ironically obtained more opportunities to directly address their political appeals to government by tagging its official accounts, which they would have hardly gotten in offline life. Therefore, this practice of tagging official accounts facilitates the interaction between movement and CCP government on the platform.

8.2 Intervention from platform and government

Although the participants have been dynamically employing the features and functions provided by Sina Weibo to proceed and sustain their actions as proven in examples discussed above, it does not mean that they are completely unencumbered and unrestricted on the platform. On the contrary, the intervention on participants' activities can be observed by reviewing the collected samples. Such intervention is mainly divided in two sub-categories: the intervention from the platform, and the intervention related to government action.

8.2.1 Platform intervention: restrictions on the posts and penalties on participants' accounts

Platform intervention usually included restrictions on reposting and commenting on posts, deletion of posts, as well as freezing, blocking, or permanently cancelling participants' accounts. This point is discovered by viewing the Sina Weibo platform regulations, as well as analysing the participants' reaction to intervention from the collected data. The analysis demonstrates that the restrictions on communicating particular posts were frequently practiced. Such restrictions are often reflected by the abnormal state of several posts among the collected samples, like the incapacitation of repost and comment areas. For example:



Figure 9 and 10: (post 32) although the repost number shows like 1491, when clicking into the repost area it becomes 0 and all the reposts are unavailable.



Figure 11 and 12: (post 57) the numbers of both comment and repost areas are in subnormal state: while the number of repost shows as 2419, when clicking into the repost area, it shows as 0; same as the comment area, when clicking into it the number

changes from 8144 to 0 as well. Meanwhile, the content of whole repost area is unavailable, though all the comments are still accessible.



Figure 13 and 14: (post 129) the repost number reads as 1137 while turning to 0 when trying to view the repost area, the repost content is hidden as well.

The examples above show that the platform has made the affected posts unavailable for being effectively spread and disseminated, as well as hiding other participants' communication around these posts. In addition to this, the relevant intervention measures also include masking the pictures attached in original posts. For example:

【来稿选登：地标北京；告知：本区为回民小区，进入本小区严禁携带、食用非清真食品。】



Figure 15: screenshot of post 74

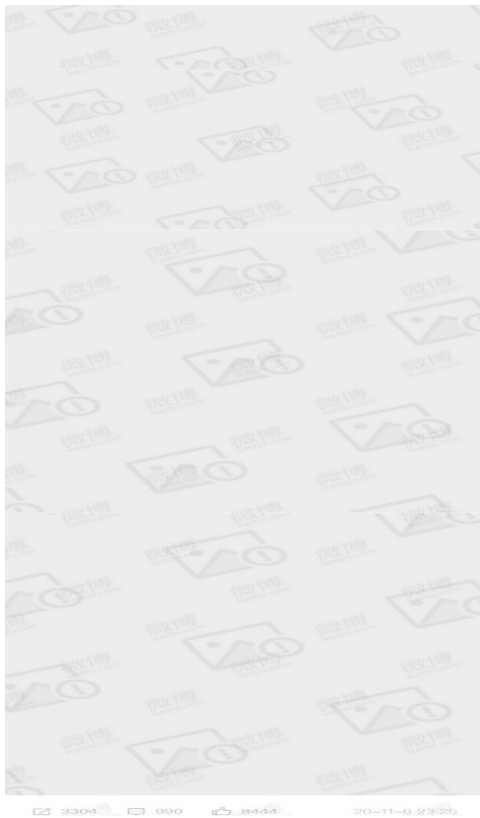


Figure 16: screenshot of post 140

Such measures would eventually lead to the ceasing or reduction of the targeted posts' influence since the messages they contained were mosaiced or lost. However, these posts can still be found and accessed by using searching function or viewing the publishers' account pages on Sina Weibo.

A more stringent measure is the total deletion of published posts. The existence of such intervention measure is testified by the participants' complaints. However, the exact details are lacked due to the loss of original data. For example:

The post on July 16 [...] was hidden by the platform [...] (top comment 5 post 118)

[...] Publishing relevant posts will most likely be hidden, and notifications about deletion have piled up in message boxes [...] (post 98 top comment 1)

[...] This professor L wrote an article [...] and could not post it on his own Weibo account and public news account, so he asked Professor X [...] to post it on her Weibo for him, and it was deleted in a matter of two days. Professor X herself posted another article on the reverse elimination of local Han Chinese candidates caused by the mark-adding policy for ethnic minorities in Guizhou's College Entrance Examination, and it only survived for one day on Weibo, and it was deleted as well [...] (post 133)

Such complains prove that the platform would directly delete participants' posts, without informing them in advance or providing further explanation. The users were simply sent a notification of the deletion.

Another severe type of platform intervention during the movement were the penalties directly imposed on participants' Weibo accounts. Such penalties include restricting various account functions, temporary blocking, and permanently cancelling. For example:

On why I haven't been posting this kind of scientific content as often in the last two years: [...] Policies have been introduced, the self-media environment has become increasingly hostile, and countless self-media colleagues have disappeared for no apparent reason. Accounts are downgraded and monitored, and the next step is to ban accounts from speaking or cancel them. [...] not allowed to report / repost breaking news, or it will lead to cancellation of the account [...] (post 98 top comment 1 from influencer XY)

*[...] From April 2017 to April 2019, my Weibo account has been blocked for 5 times
[...] (from a post published by Influencer X on 10th June 2021, see content highlighted in red in screenshot below)*

4月初，我收到会员报告时，曾发博告诉大家我的近期规划，逐步淡出微博，将精力转向科研工作。某些居心叵测人士，扬言██████被约谈后，选择淡出微博。为了不让他们幸灾乐祸，██老师将部分科研工作计划延期，继续坚持在微博上发声。

2017年4月至2019年4月，我的微博曾经被五次禁言。第一次禁言30天期间，███律师根据███捏造的谎言，向中国科技协会举报███。穆斯林极端分子的微博和微信公众号铺天盖地地恶毒诽谤███。███转发███的“举报函”阅读量超过30万。我多次向微博管理人员举报无效！禁言结束后，我立即发博抗议。我的抗议微博居然被屏蔽！真是百思不得其解，微博是何人的天下？

Figure 17: screenshot of a post by Influencer X on 10th June 2021

Among these penalties, permanent cancelling is the most serious and irreversible. It means that the impacted participants did not only lose all their published content, but they also disappeared from the networks established among the participants' Weibo accounts, as well as vanishing from previous communication content related to the movement on the platform. Therefore, permanent cancelling is much more detrimental to the sustenance of the movement than the other types of platform intervention mentioned above.

8.2.2 Government's offline intervention: warning and summon

In addition to the intervention at the level of platform, the government itself, has intervened in the movement, as the analysis shows. This brought more serious consequences for the participants than platform intervention since the government often took an offline approach to threatening them in real life. Such action posed challenges to the personal safety and security of the participants. For example:


 // @窗台 [redacted] “喝茶”12次 (没人比我次数更多了吧 🤔), 总有人跟我说应该通过所谓正规渠道反映问题。这时我都会告诉他, 那些渠道要么解决问题速度太慢, 要么根本没人理会, 可是往微博上一发, 分分钟就会有人紧张起来, 问题自然也能迅速解决 😄。

Figure 18: post from influencer X on 6th November 2019, reposting another influencer C's response which mentioned his engagement with government intervention: 'drinking tea' for 12 times (while nobody would get more than me, I suspect) [...]

😊//@绝 [REDACTED]:使用微博两年，多个号被封被夹，理由全是因为民宗，喝茶的理由也是哭笑不得，基层公安干警们的维稳意识让他们不问是非，依然是民团无小事，多一事不如少一事的心态，然后强迫说真话的人受委屈，理由就是以大局为重 😊

Figure 19: post from influencer X on 29th December 2020, reposting the comment from an ordinary participant, which mentioned her or his experience about government intervention: [...] The reason for drinking tea is also a crying shame. The grass-roots public security police officers' sense of maintaining stability makes them not ask about right and wrong, and they still have the mentality that ethnic unity is no trivial matter, and that it would be better to minimise one incident rather than fostering one more, and then they force those who speak the truth to be aggrieved, on the grounds of having the overall situation or 'big picture' as the overriding consideration.

线6.3小时。我最爱的大V@窗 [REDACTED]。

他是一位爱岗敬业的工程师，业余时间编写微博。他关注的热点话题是#遏制宗教极端##治理清真泛化#，成为 [REDACTED] 多年以来的好朋友。他的微博风格稳健，以事实为依据，不发表激烈议论。尽管如此，据悉他被喝茶N次，耐心与请喝茶者交流互动，分享自己的见解。希望网络上这样的朋友越来越多。

Figure 20: post from influencer X published on 10th June 2021, mentioned the experience of government intervention of another influencer C. Sentences highlighted

in red translated: [...] he focused on hot topics #countering religious extremism# #dealing with generalization of Halal# [...] Nonetheless, he is known to have been invited to drink tea N times, patiently interacting with those who asked for tea and sharing his insights. [...]

One point that needs to be clarified here is the term ‘drinking tea’ (喝茶) used to describe the government intervention. In context of the contemporary Chinese Internet, ‘drinking tea’ metaphorically implies the process of being summoned and investigated in-person by state authorities such as the police, the national security sector, anti-corruption agencies, etc. Today even the government acquiesces to such expression (see People.cn, 2016). Thus, the examples above demonstrate that the participants who were active on Sina Weibo would face offline warning or even summoned by police or the national security sector. Officials often ordered participants to cease discussing about those controversial topics, especially concerning the ethnic issue. Meanwhile, there is no evidence to suggest that there have been arrests or even imprisonment of any participant, which means the summoned participants would usually be released afterwards. However, after facing such pressure and menace from state power, although participants like influencer C in the examples continued to be active, there are also some participants, even influencers, that became less active or even stopped taking part. For example:

To be honest, I've been asked to drink tea for popularising this issue, so anyone with eyes can see that although I have still mentioned these things later on, in general I'm

mentioning them less often and less frequently [...] (post 93 top comment 2, from influencer XY)

Hence, like platform intervention, government intervention has also seriously damaged the movement since it limited or even completely stopped some participants' involvement.

8.2.3 Implicit and uncertain interventions reflecting the governmental will

A re-examination of the affected posts and users shows that the potential reasons behind both platform intervention and government's offline action discussed above are similar. In both situations, the users had provoked or been involved with overly controversial discussion and/or outburst of public opinion on the ethnic issue. Thus, since most of such posts or the controversy triggered by them were de facto attacking ethnic minorities, criticizing national ethnic policies, as well as challenging the CCP's official ideologies on ethnic issue, it may be easy to see why the platform and the government like intervening in such ways. The analysis of Chinese Internet regulation policies shows that under the rule and national law system of CCP regime, any kind of such content will be considered as seriously illegal. For example:

[...] Any individual or organisation using the Internet shall abide by the Constitution and laws, public order and social morality, and shall not jeopardise the security of the

Internet, or use the Internet to engage in activities that endanger the national security, honour and interests of the state, incite subversion of state power or overthrow of the socialist system, incite secession or undermine national unity, promote terrorism or extremism, promote ethnic hatred or discrimination [...] fabricating and disseminating false information to disrupt economic and social order [...]

- *Article 12 of Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China (2016)*

Producers of information content on the Internet shall not produce, copy or publish illegal information containing the following contents:

(I) Opposing the basic principles determined by the Constitution;

(ii) endangering national security, leaking state secrets, subverting state power, or undermining national unity

[...]

(vi) inciting ethnic hatred or ethnic discrimination and undermining ethnic unity

[...]

(viii) spreading rumours that disrupt the economic and social order

[...]

- *Article 6 of Internet Information Content Ecological Governance Provisions (2019)*

As the examples demonstrate above, the relevant laws and regulations on Internet in China strictly prohibit any kind of content that incites ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, challenge against ethnic unity, opposition against state power, as well as deconstruction of social stability, from being published in cyberspace. For any Internet service user who violates these provisions and still publishes such prohibited content, relevant laws and regulations also formulate corresponding disciplinary measures for the service providers to deal with the scenario. For example:

Follow-up comment service providers shall promptly take measures such as warning, refusal to publish, deletion of information, restriction of functions, suspension of updates and closure of the account to deal with the users that publish information content violating laws and regulations and relevant national provisions, keeping relevant records.

- *Article 8 of Regulations on the Administration of Internet Follow-up Commentary Services (2017)*

[...] If a Weibo service provider finds that a Weibo service user publishes or disseminates information content prohibited by laws and regulations, it shall, in accordance with the law, immediately stop transmitting the information, take measures

to eliminate it and other disposal measures, keep the relevant records, and report to the relevant regulating department.

- *Article 12 of Regulations on the Administration of Weibo Information Services (2018)*

If any Internet information content producer violates the provisions of Article 6 of these Regulations, the Internet information content service platform shall, in accordance with the law, take measures such as warning and rectification, restricting functions, suspending updates, closing accounts, etc., to eliminate the illegal information content in a timely manner, as well as keep records and report to the relevant regulating department.

- *Article 34 of Internet Information Content Ecological Governance Provisions (2019)*

Therefore, on the one hand, by reviewing these legal documents, one can find that the platform interventions on those movement participants discussed before, including restrictions on and deletion of the controversial posts, and penalties or even closure of the related user accounts, are de facto fully compliant with the provisions established by contemporary Chinese national law system on regulating Internet. Furthermore, it also proves that such interventions performed by Sina Weibo more reflect the will of the state power rather than the platform itself since it is the state power that determines the legal standards and punitive measures in general on this issue, requiring all the Internet service providers like Sina Weibo platform to strictly comply with and enforce them. Moreover, according to the

same documents, in practice, the official Internet administrative departments should also play the role of supervisor and regulator to monitor and guide those platforms like Sina Weibo to implement such provisions and enforce accompanying disciplinary measures. For example:

The State Internet Information Office is responsible for the supervision and management of law enforcement of the national follow-up comment service. Local Internet information offices are responsible for the supervision and management of law enforcement of the follow-up comment services in their administrative areas according to their duties.

Internet information offices at all levels shall establish and improve a supervision and management system that combines daily and regular inspections and regulate the behaviour of the follow-up comment services of various communication platforms in accordance with the law.

- *Article 3 of Regulations on the Administration of Internet Follow-up Commentary Services (2017)*

This indicates that those platform interventions performed on the movement may even be under direct supervision of particular government departments and/or be enforced by order of government, though more evidence needs to be found to support this argument by future research. However, as mentioned before, one thing is certain: this study's findings regarding the intervention of the Weibo platform fundamentally reflect the manifestation of

governmental will rather than the platform's own logic of profits maximum, whether in fact the platform received direct governmental order or not. In other words, such actions can be eventually viewed as an indirect intervention by the government through the Sina Weibo platform. In this scenario, the Sina Weibo platform acts as an agent of the government to implement related national laws and regulations for monitoring and regulating users' activities on it. Essentially, this further reflects the ongoing power dynamics between the CCP regime and the movement participants rather than the dynamics solely between the movement and the platform.

On the other hand, the relevant documents on Internet prove that those government offline interventions manifested by the Weibo data also accord with the laws and regulations enacted by state power in the moment. For example:

To maintain national security and social stability, individuals who commit any of the following acts using the Internet and constitute a crime shall be held criminally responsible in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Criminal Law:

Using the Internet to [...] incite subversion of state power, overthrow the socialist system, or incite secession and undermine national unity;

[...]

Using the Internet to incite ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination, and undermine ethnic unity

[...]

Article 2 of Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Maintaining Internet Security (2000)

Any individual or organization has the right to report behaviours that endanger Internet security to departments such as the Cyberspace Administration, Telecommunications, and Public Security. The departments that receive the reports shall handle them promptly in accordance with the law. If it does not fall under the jurisdiction of the receiving department, it shall be promptly transferred to the department with the authority to handle it.

Article 14 of Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China (2016)

Violating these provisions and causing harm to others shall result in civil liability in accordance with the law. If a crime is constituted, criminal responsibility shall be pursued in accordance with the law. If the act does not constitute a crime, the relevant competent department shall impose punishment in accordance with the provisions of relevant laws and administrative regulations.

Article 40 of Internet Information Content Ecological Governance Provisions (2019)

Such legal provisions help reaffirm that those offline government's interventions revealed by the participants have not exceeded the current legal provisions under the national law system of PRC, which regard the conventional measures for handling Internet speech that involves undermining ethnic unity, inciting ethnic hatred, fomenting ethnic discrimination, challenging state regime, or attacking official policies. In other words, the national laws and regulations in China grant those law enforcement and security agencies the legal authority to summon, warn, or even detain Weibo users who post and disseminate such content on the platform.

Hence, from the discussion above, it is evident that both platform interventions and offline interventions by relevant government departments reflect the unified stance and intentions of the CCP regime regarding ethnic issues and current ethnic policies: different from the movement participants' standpoints, it does not intend to completely overturn its ethnic policies, but remains committed to preventing ethnic division, hatred, and even conflict to sustain the ethnic unity and ensure the social stability. It also implies that the CCP government will continue to combat related speech and actions that attempt to challenge its authority. This phenomenon further corroborates the conclusions drawn in the previous two Chapters, namely that there is a fundamental divergence, and even opposition, in positions and views on ethnic issues and ethnic minority policies between the movement and CCP regime.

However, it is worth noting that the reviewing of Weibo data further reveals significant uncertainty and inconsistency in the execution of these two forms of interventions. Several posts with similar or even harsher criticisms of official ethnic policies and ideologies, as well

as hate speech targeting other ethnicities, remained unaffected, with their publishers' Weibo accounts intact. No strong evidence of severe intervention or permanent punishment can be found in these cases. In other words, neither the government nor the Weibo platform consistently intervenes strongly against the extreme speech and actions of movement participants, while in many instances, they even adopted a non-interventionist or tolerant attitude. This has contributed to the persistence of this movement on Sina Weibo, despite its later fierce criticism of the government and calls for policy reforms. This approach contrasts with previous discussions that highlight the fundamental differences and even conflicts between the government and the movement on core issues related to ethnic policies and the treatment of ethnic minorities, as well as the power struggle behind them. However, considering the findings in Chapter 6, which indicate that the government tends to use the nationalist and chauvinist rhetoric of movement participants to promote and legitimize its Xinjiang policies, this non-interventionist or tolerant stance could be seen as part of the CCP government's typical strategy to absorb and utilize populist nationalist movements as before. The phenomenon, to be discussed in the following section, where the government used official media accounts to directly engage with the movement on the platform, further proves this point.

8.2.4 Official accounts' intersection with the movement on Sina Weibo

As discussed in Chapter 6, this study identified the involvement of five official accounts in Case 1, the anti-Halal event. Some detailed information can be found in the following table:

Post No.	Timeline	Official account	Main theme of the posts
24	26 Nov 2016	China Daily	Reporting the government's new statement on opposing 'generalization of Halal'
25	26 Nov 2016	Global Times	Reporting the government's new statement on opposing 'generalization of Halal'
32	19 Jan 2017	Global Times	Reporting the State Administration for Religious Affairs' new statement on opposing 'generalization of Halal'

45	30 Mar 2017	Communist Youth League Central	Reporting the news about the passing of 'De-radicalization regulations in Xinjiang'
46	30 Mar 2017	Ziguangge	Publishing the detailed content of 'De-radicalization regulations in Xinjiang'
48	10 April 2017	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	Criticizing 'generalization of Halal'
57	19 July 2017	Global Times	Making positive evaluations of Islam, Hui people, Muslims, and Han-Hui relations

66	19 Aug 2017	Communist Youth League Central	Advocating correct and rational evaluations of Islam and Muslims
67	19 Aug 2017	Communist Youth League Central	Continually advocating the official stances and measures to deal with the Halal and Islam issues in Chinese society, which are different from movement participants' appeals then
69	6 Sep 2017	Communist Youth League Central	Criticizing and opposing 'generalization of Halal' issue, but emphasizing its focus on Xinjiang

Table 6. The involvement of official accounts in anti-Halal event

From the table above, it is evident that the intersection between these such official accounts and the movement primarily occurred during the third and fourth phases of Case 1. In the third phase of Case 1, all five accounts promoted the official stances of the CCP government concerning the governance of ‘generalization of Halal’ issue at that moment. Notably, the Communist Youth League Central (共青团中央) and Ziguangge (紫光阁, the official news account of CCP Central Committee) emphasized the newly enacted ‘De-radicalization regulations in Xinjiang’. As discussed in Chapter 6, these new statements and measures elicited a very positive response from movement participants, who generally expressed their support and also advocated for more further measures to thoroughly address the Halal issues. However, as previously discussed, these radical propositions didn’t comply with the authentic intentions of CCP government. The former represented Han chauvinism, aiming to deny the rights and interests of other ethnic minorities, especially Muslims, while the latter focused on maintaining national unity, social stability, and CCP regime’s effective rule over the whole state, particularly addressing the issue of Uyghur independent movement. Although their original intentions varied, during this phase, such fundamental contradiction did not erupt or become apparent during this phase. Instead, as discussed in Chapter 6, the movement participants and these official accounts co-evolved with each other to reproduce and enhance the anti-Halal sentiments in this situation.

Based on this phenomenon, it can be inferred that in phase 3 of Case 1, the CCP government deliberately used these official accounts to leverage the movement for its own propaganda purposes. In other words, by using these official accounts to engage the anti-Halal, anti-Islamic, and anti-Muslim sentiment provoked by the movement participants on the platform, the CCP government sought to promote and rationalize its new stances and measures dealing

with Islam and Muslims, particularly the Uyghur issue, among the Weibo users, thus helping create a related public opinion base supporting its decisions in cyberspace. This also explains that why under these circumstances, the fundamental contradictions between the government and the movement were overlooked by these official accounts, while the common aspects of their demands or viewpoints were amplified on the platform. Previous academic findings also support this inference since various scholars have found that using such official accounts to guide public opinion on social media platforms is indeed a propaganda tool of the CCP government, with the Communist Youth League Central account repeatedly confirmed to play the role of an official mouthpiece and such public opinion guiding tool of CCP in this kind of situations (Guo, 2018; Pan, 2020).

Moreover, in the fourth phase of the anti-Halal event, the authentic role of these official accounts was further substantiated. According to previous analyses, the outbreak of the Baigou incident on 21st April 2017 triggered a new wave of anti-Halal, anti-Islamic, and anti-Muslim sentiments on Sina Weibo, generally involved with the movement. During this stage, the negative construction of Muslim minorities, Islam, and Halal issue by movement participants was thoroughly reinforced, and from then on, they strongly demanded a comprehensive reform of current ethnic policies which even denied the basic rights of Muslim minorities, expressing strong dissatisfaction with the CCP government's current measures to deal with Halal issue in the moment. This eventually and completely exposed the fundamental contradiction between the movement and the government on ethnic issues and highlighted a fierce power struggle between the two as well. In this context, the collected samples demonstrate that the official accounts, including the Global Times and the Communist Youth League Central, in contrast to their previous engagement with

Islamophobic sentiments, suddenly began to call for a rational, objective, and correct view of Islam and the Muslims, advocating for equality, mutual respect, and ethnic unity, rather than misunderstandings, hatred, and division. For example:

[...] I want to say that the related controversies are becoming increasingly frequent and sensitive, and it is a reality that cannot be ignored. It deserves serious attention. Having travelled to many places around the world, I find that, compared to many other countries, the integration of Muslims with China's mainstream culture is relatively harmonious. This is especially true in the inland regions, where Han and Hui people live together amicably, and intermarriage is common. Such harmony is not easy to achieve. (post 57 by Global Times, speaking in the name of its Editor-in-Chief)

[China's Religion: A Correct Perspective on Islam] In recent years, influenced by International public opinion and some issues that have arisen within the field of Islam in China, certain segments of the population have developed misunderstandings, concerns, and a defensive attitude towards Islam. This has led to the emergence of some negative public opinion on the Internet. It is essential to correctly evaluate Islam, address the public opinion hotspots involving Islam and Muslims, and uphold ethnic unity and religious harmony. (post 66 by Communist Youth League Central)

Such examples further confirm that official accounts like the Communist Youth League Central and Global Times actually played the role of guiding and directing the nationalist sentiments on the platform, acting in the will and interest of the state power. In other words, when the statements and demands of movement participants seriously exceeded the government's original stances and plans, and even directly conflicted with the state power, the sudden rational advocacy by these official accounts at such timepoint indicated that they were attempting to control the overly radical nationalist sentiments then, trying to redirect the related public opinion back to supporting and complying with the official stances and decisions, reducing the further challenge and potential damage to CCP's rule.

Therefore, it can be summarized that, during this movement, the government not only intervened the movement through platform intervention and its offline actions, but also utilized the influence and authority of its official accounts on the platform to guide and leverage the movement. By amplifying the commonalities between its intentions and measures to deal with Islam and Uyghur issue, and the movement participants' views and demands, via the engagement of official accounts and the movement on Sina Weibo, the CCP government attempted to steer or even absorb the movement as an assistant to help shape related public opinion and enhance the populist support for its new measures, particularly regarding those in Xinjiang. When the differences between the movement and the government became more significant and irreconcilable, and the movement participants began to openly challenge its rule and power, the government would again use the same accounts to attempt to correct the overly radical nationalist sentiments, trying to bring them back to the previous state. Hence, this study finds that the intersection and involvement of official accounts with the movement on Sina Weibo also represents a form of governmental

intervention, though different from those performed through platform structure and legal system.

Furthermore, through an in-depth analysis of the movement, it can be observed that although the government successfully, or at least partially successfully, achieved its goals in the third phase of the anti-Halal event to gain broad support from movement participants and/or other movement-involved Weibo users for its anti-generalization-of-Halal decisions and anti-Uyghur policies through this official accounts involvement strategy, it did not achieve same effective results from subsequent corrective guidance in phase 4. The comment and repost sections of related posts in the fourth phase of Case 1 indicate that movement participants were not successfully steered by such governmental technique again but continued to adhere to their radical chauvinist views and demands then. For example:

'Especially in inland regions where Han and Hui people live together, they get along well, and intermarriage is common' -- this is a blatant lie (post 57 top comment 3)

As expected, the Global Times, with its green reporting, jumps higher than anyone else whenever something like this happens (post 57 top comment 5)

Stop trying to whitewash it; the problem doesn't lie with the Han people, okay? Why is it that out of the 56 ethnic groups, the other 55 can get along just fine, but this one is the only one that causes trouble? (post 67 top comment 1)

These examples show that although the CCP government still attempted to steer the movement via the official accounts, the movement participants demonstrated a certain degree of independence and dynamics to insist on their own stances and demands during this period, especially when their contradictions with government's will were completely exposed. With such dynamics, the movement participants were able to organically sustain and continue the movement on the platform, without being completely controlled or absorbed by the state power, even still under the pressures of various types of governmental interventions. In the following section, from the participants' side, more detailed analysis of such dynamics will be provided to further discuss the movement's specific measures for survival on the platform.

8.3 Avoiding intervention and surviving under censorship

Although the environment filled with strict surveillance and risks of being intervention by both algorithmic and state power provided harmed the movement's sustainability as illustrated before, it did not lead to its collapse. This is because participants adopted countermeasures to avoid potential intervention, to ensure the survival of their published content and thus sustain the movement on the platform. The analysis finds that there are at

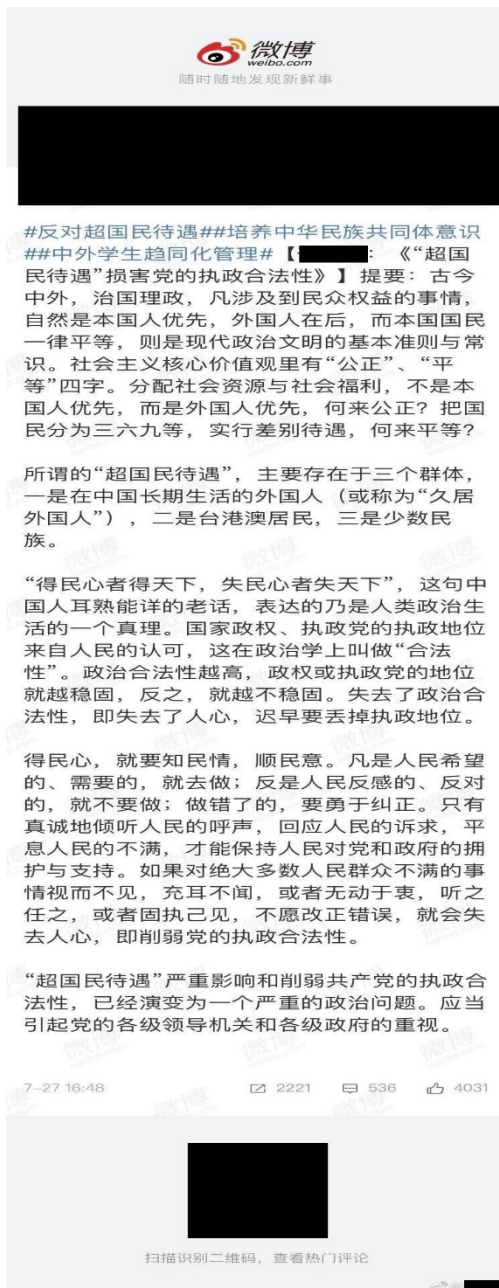
least three kinds of such countermeasures: alternative format, sensitive keyword replacement, and adoption of permitted discourses.

8.3.1 Alternative format

Within the movement, this measure consists of as spreading previously published content which was later hidden or banned by the platform in alternative formats, which Sun and Wright (2023) called ‘relay activism’. For example:

Professor Yu's masterpiece survived 24 hours on my Weibo, with over 920,000 viewings. After the article was blocked, I took a screenshot of the summary, sending it to Professor Yu as a memento. I am now sharing it with you. [attaching the screenshot] (post 133 hot repost 1)

The attached screenshot is as Figure 21 below:



The example above shows that participants would take screenshots of the banned posts and articles, and then spread the original information by continually publishing these screenshots on Sina Weibo. It proves that participants were aware of the platform's censorship system since they changed the format of text into image, technically making the textual content more difficult to detect than before. This can be recognized as their effort to escape censorship and

avoid new intervention. Furthermore, this phenomenon that the participants keep exploring alternative ways, rather than simply giving up, to ensure the continuity of information flow also demonstrates their motivation to transcend the limitations of the platform. Meanwhile, it also reveals the participants' effort to continue using the Weibo platform for circulating information and maintaining the movement.

8.3.2 Sensitive keyword replacement

Before formally discussing the keyword replacement measure, the background of the Internet hard censorship system based on sensitive words in China should be introduced. The well-known keyword filtering and sensitive words censorship system has been operated strictly on the Internet of Mainland China since the early 21st century. However, in recent years, especially with social media platforms such as Sina Weibo and WeChat transforming Internet conditions in Chinese society, this type of hard censorship has been enhanced and reinvigorated by the government to deal with issues arising in these platforms. In particular, the words censorship system, when applied to Sina Weibo, focuses on the content concerning political issues, especially those messages and information relevant to criticism of the government, officials within the CCP authority, and leaders of the party and state. In other words, under the hard censorship system on Sina Weibo, any content containing keywords or sensitive words which directly criticise, attack, or even simply mention the state authority, government, and name of specific political leaders, may face the risk of being restricted from communication or being permanently deleted (Fu, Chan, and Chau, 2013). Indeed, the basic operational principle of such hard censorship is that the content containing keywords or

sensitive words listed or coded by the system will automatically trigger platform intervention immediately after publication. However, just as mentioned before, the core issue of such system is that the exact coded sensitive keywords list, which is actually a part of the standards of intervention mentioned before, is transparent or available for the public. This means that users can only discover the sensitive words by repeated trial and error and by examining others' experiences and findings. This makes it difficult to explore the process used by the participants to discover the list of sensitive words during this movement, since many already-blocked or deleted content that triggered the platform intervention is no longer available.

However, from the collected data, one can still find proof of the existence, and the results of, such a process of interaction between the participants and the hard censorship system on Sina Weibo, which led to another kind of counter-intervention measure: replacement of sensitive words. Such measure takes the form of the replacement of various politically sensitive words or terms with other forms that would be misunderstood or misinterpreted by a non-human agent as 'safe' content and not in the range of those forbidden keywords. This helped the published content escape hard censorship. From the collected materials, one can find at least two types of such replacements: complete and incomplete replacement.

8.3.2.1 Complete replacement

Complete replacement involves making use of terms which are superficially irrelevant or distinct from the authentic meanings which the participants were going to express and communicate. Such terms, however, can be interpreted as intended by the participants, or assigned the intended meanings. In other words, being placed in the context of the movement on Sina Weibo, such terms were de facto signified with the same implications as those sensitive or unsafe words which they were employed to replace. For example:

Miao Tang (庙堂)

***The people in Miao Tang (庙堂)** are played by someone else like a monkey. Wish that there can be someone who can bring order out of chaos. (post 4 top comment 1)*

*This is well written. Are **the people in Miao Tang (庙堂)** all blind or stupid?*

Hierarchically categorising ethnic groups into different classifications will inevitably strengthen isolation and lead to splitting the country! (post 99 top comment 4)

The term Miao Tang (庙堂) is a word from classical Chinese that refers to the lobby of a royal or imperial temple where the ancient emperors and high-ranking or central officials worship gods and ancestors whilst also discussing and making decisions about governing the

state and handling government affairs. However, the utilisation of this term in the examples above has provided it with another meaning: the central government and CCP state regime of modern China, rather than those ancient regimes. Both examples above, which are taken from the anti-Halal case, clearly reflect the opinion that ‘the people in Miao Tang’ are fooled or deceived to enact wrong ethnic policies which will endanger national security. Therefore, when analysing in reference to the background and context, one can find that the phrase ‘the people in Miao Tang’ used here obviously implies the high-ranking officials within the CCP state authority or central government who can make decisions about the legislation and enactment of ethnic policies at a national level. Thus, rather than directly pointing out the name, identity, or the official position of those targeted people, using such a classic and traditional term is literally undetectable as it does not include any words. The survival of this content further proves that this kind of complete replacement did effectively help the criticism on national policies to dodge the hard keyword censorship.

8.3.2.2 Incomplete replacement

The incomplete replacement, as the analysis finds, mainly involves using acronyms, *pinyin*, the writing system representing the sounds of Mandarin based on Roman alphabet, and homophones of original words or terms in Mandarin. The collected materials demonstrate that, when the participants mention or criticised political leaders, government departments, and even the CCP regime itself, they were also using acronyms based on the *pinyin* of the authentic names of the issues or people they targeted to replace the original terms. Such practice aims to also reduce the risks of platform intervention, since those original names,

words, or terms are normally politically sensitive not only on social media platforms or the Internet, but also in the everyday communication, and are recognised as already being included in the keywords list of the hard censorship system. However, in contrast with the complete replacement of words, Chinese netizens, especially users of Sina Weibo, even those not belonging to the movement, can still identify the original meanings of such acronyms. For example:

Tg is the backstage of Islam. Look at the Ramen restaurants in Shanghai, the supermarket which is forbidden to sell pork, Halal food and Mosques everywhere, and Arabic guide boards. Think about the terrorist attacks in Xinjiang and Kunming. Such a good secular society has been transformed into the Holy land of Islam. This is cultivating their own gravediggers, and they will be the sinner of history. (post 23 top comment 1)

The example above includes a typical acronym ‘TG’, which is the abbreviation of initials from *pinyin* ‘Tu Gong’ of the Chinese term ‘土共’. The origins of this term can be traced back to the 1920s, when the CCP was conducting the first civil war with the Kuomintang government – the previous regime of the Republic of China (ROC) under the authority of the Nationalist Party of China. The Kuomintang government then referred to the CCP and its armed forces as the bandits (土匪, *Tu Fei*, in Chinese); the purpose of this was to illustrate the CCP and its armed forces’ illegality and brutality, so as to thus demonstrate the legitimacy of eliminating them. Thus, in mass media such as newspapers and radio, the Kuomintang

government often used the term *Tu Gong* (土共) to create its anti-CCP propaganda. This term was popular in the mass media that were then under the control of the Kuomintang government until 1949, when the CCP took over the country's regime. Despite disappearing from public use in mainland China for decades, the term *Tu Gong* has been enjoying a revival since the beginning of the 21st century. In the early 2000s, the version of the censorship system on the Chinese Internet was similar to that on social media today, although the former was based on a much simpler type of sensitive word filtration technique. Under this kind of censorship, the words and terms on the system blacklist were not allowed to be displayed on the frontpage of the websites. Simply put, even if people published content including sensitive words online, the final appearance of such content on the websites would exclude those sensitive words or use special symbols such as * to replace the original sensitive keywords. However, for serious cases that created storms of public opinion or other kinds of social influence, more severe intervention, such as deletion of posts and arrests of posters, would also take place. Thus, since the full names of CCP regime had already become sensitive keywords under that censorship, the Chinese netizens reintroduced the term *Tu Gong* (土共) to replace original terms such as *Gong Chan Dang* (communist party, 共产党) or *Zhong Gong* (中共, the official abbreviation of Chinese Communist Party) and to avoid internet filtering. However, with the development of the censorship system on the Chinese Internet, the literal form of the word *Tu Gong* (土共) was gradually recognised by that system and became one of the sensitive keywords on the blacklist. Therefore, in the era of social media, the abbreviation of the *pinyin* initials of the word *Tu Gong* (土共), which is written as TG/Tg/tg, enjoyed popularity amongst the users as the safe acronym of that nickname when referring to CCP, since it is still undetected on platforms like Sina Weibo. This is due to its

abstract form and lack of literal substance, only when it comes to detection by the non-human algorithmic censorship system.

Hence, participants adopted the acronym *Tg* to refer to the CCP regime when criticizing the current Halal and ethnic issue. In the text, the CCP regime was illustrated as the backstage or greatest supporter of extremist Islam which helps transform the secular society into the religious one, destroying the secular nation-state including CCP itself. Such narrative directly challenges the legitimacy and justifiability of CCP regime over the country, which is one of the absolutely taboo topics in modern Chinese discourse, whether online or offline, and will cause immediate intervention by both platform and government if published on social media or any website. However, with the use of *Tg* this post remained undetectable and was then accessible on the platform at the time of data collection.

8.3.3 Adoption of permitted discourses

The above discussed measure of replacing sensitive words reflects that the participants were attempting to avoid direct attack or conflict with the CCP regime while still criticising on the perceived issue around official ethnic policies. Meanwhile, the censorship and intervention system by Weibo and the government has led participants to abandon anti-CCP and anti-government speech to ensure the sustenance of their actions on the platform. Yet, participants

have taken another measure: the explicit adoption of permitted discourses, to build their activities on Sina Weibo.

This measure can be clearly observed in the latest phases of both anti-Halal case and anti-mark-adding-policy case. In the early phases of these two cases, there is no apparent conflict between the movement's ideas and government's activities. In other words, by reviewing the analysis, one can find that from phase 2 to phase 3 in the anti-Halal event, as well as phase 1 of anti-mark-adding policy protest, the movement participants' viewpoints and appeals had always been in line or partially in line with government's statement and actions concerning Halal issue. Differences still existed, but they were not turning to unreconcilable conflicts, as discussed before. Thus, although the analysis finds that participants were also employing official discourses to build their narratives during these periods, in such situation it is hard to discern whether this utilization of official discourses was a strategy to escape censorship and intervention, since this phenomenon could instead be the result of a peaceful co-evolution between the movement and state power at that time.

However, when both anti-Halal case and the anti-mark-adding policy case entered their latest phases, the sharp conflict between the participants and the government was revealed. In both cases, participants put forth radical opinions requesting in-depth policy reform with regards to ethnic issues. They also promoted Han chauvinism instead of the current official ideologies concerning ethnic minorities. As phase 2 of the second case demonstrates, the participants' ideas and appeals not only contradicted the CCP regime's official attitudes towards ethnic minorities, but also intended to overturn or destruct the structure of modern nation-state

established and sustained by that regime to rule over the country, seriously challenging state power. Hence, the participants' continual adoption of official discourses about the nation-state as well as defending the CCP regime, as discussed in analysis before, can be considered as a measure to avoid intervention. In other words, when the participants' authentic core ideas and intentions are clearly opposing the official ones, the consistent adoption of the opposite official discourses to construct narratives on the platform is obviously a strategy to keep their communication, and actions in safe from intervention by government.

Thus, different from the measure of replacing sensitive words, this measure employs a subtler and deeper camouflage technique, which appears on the very surface to be entirely pro-communist and pro-regime. This means that even if such narratives were taken in isolation and not viewed in the context of the movement, they would be assumed to have come directly from true supporters of the current CCP regime. On the other hand, the expressions using the replacement of sensitive words would be easily recognized as direct criticism to the government by human readers since they still contradict the official ideologies and challenge state power on the literal surface while just replacing keywords with homophones or abbreviations which are still highly recognisable among ordinary people to avoid censorship by non-human agents. In other words, the measure of replacing sensitive words is not able to escape manual intervention from human beings at both the platform and governmental levels. Therefore, the adoption of permitted discourses is much safer than the replacement of sensitive words, providing participants with more potential to sustain their actions on the platform. This explains the more extensive use of this measure within the movement than the replacement of sensitive words since it can be found from most of influential posts

throughout the movement while the replacement of sensitive words can only be detected in few texts.

Furthermore, the adoption of permitted discourses, especially discourses about maintaining the Chinese nation-state, has de facto helped preserve the openness of the boundary of the movement while also set up limitations on its orientation. For example, as discussed before, during periods like stage 2 of the anti-mark-adding policy protest, although participants have excluded all the ethnic minorities and depicted themselves as Han chauvinist, they were still using the official discourses related to the Chinese nation-state to construct their viewpoints and appeals. In other words, the participants continued to look like that they were still defending the meta nation-state by equally recognizing all the national members on the surface. This phenomenon would continually serve to unite those who have a high degree of identification with the modern nation-state but with less commitment to their own ethnicities, including Han people without strong Han chauvinist identity, as well as people from ethnic minorities who are more attached to the Chinese national community established by the CCP regime rather than the ethnic groups they were classified into. On the other hand, this strategy has also limited the participants' actions. This means that since the participants modelled their ideas and appeals as pro Chinese nation-state and pro-CCP regime, it would be impossible to take action beyond this framework. In other words, although the participants have deconstructed and changed the intrinsic meaning of those adopted official discourses, the external framework about safeguarding the nation-state and supporting the current regime has still remained in effect, preventing them from directly appealing any action like overturning the CCP government or totally destroying the current nation-state. This restricted the potential of its development into an outright anti-CCP and anti-state movement, leading it to

remain operating under the current political system and failing to produce a subversive or democratic direction.

Chapter 9

Discussion

By applying the theoretical framework established in Literature Review Chapter to the analysis findings, this chapter will discuss how the collective identity process has worked within this nationalist movement. In particular, the evolution of nation and national identity, as well as reproduction of nationalist discourses among the participants on the platform will be explored to answer the research question 1. Meanwhile, the influence CCP government on the movement will also be decoded from the findings of this research, which will contribute to answering research question 2.

9.1 Research question 1

How does the use of Sina Weibo affect the process of collective identity for the nationalist movement?

Firstly, the research finds that participants of this movement can use the technological features provided by Sina Weibo to effectively steer the movement, employing the

algorithmic power of the platform to serve their own purposes, as previous research indicated (see Bakardjieva, 2015; Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Dumitrica and Felt, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2015; Hoyng, 2020; Kavada, 2015; Kavada, 2018; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Stewart and Schultze, 2019; Stewart, Arif, Nied, Spiro, and Starbird. 2017; Treré, 2015; Treré, 2019; Treré, 2020). For example, as testified by the analysis, participants have been focusing on the continuous and massive utilization of the repost function of Sina Weibo to provoke, sustain, and expand the influence of their actions on the platform. Meanwhile, the study also finds that participants were using the tagging function to build and maintain connections between them. This contributes to the activation, dynamics, and sustenance of movement networks. Such phenomenon complies with what scholars have found about the common ways that movement participants would normally use to produce the continual information flows related to movement issues, as well as upholding the ongoing networks among them on social media platforms (see Dawson, 2020; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019; Evolvi, 2019; Geboers and Wiele, 2020; Lee and Lim, 2019; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, 2015; Stewart, Arif, Nied, Spiro, and Starbird. 2017; Treré, 2019; Williams, Mukherjee and Utsey, 2019).

Such adherence to the technological functions and algorithmic power provided by Sina Weibo for the movement can be further explained by the participants' imagination of and commitment to Sina Weibo, which has already developed into some kind of firm belief about the platform's ability to help bring them into a better state where current ethnic issues can be solved. This point is in accordance with the previous academic findings about the activists' optimistic perceptions and expectations on ICTs and social media, which drive them to

consistently employ such platforms to realize their political goals (Barassi, 2015; Couldry, 2015; Treré, 2019).

However, different from the digital fantasies or sublime which usually make users firmly believe in the platform and enhance their dependencies on its technological features, the research finds that in this movement, participants have also been capable of overcoming the obstacles of the platform. As demonstrated by the analysis, participants are aware of the limitations, interventions, and even penalties set up by the platform upon them during the movement. Instead of allowing the platform to intervene without any countermeasure, the study finds that participants have been reflecting about this intervention and taking various measures to deal with the platform activities that damage to the sustenance of their actions. Tactics like alternative formats, playing word games, and adoption of official permitted discourses helped to ensure the continuity and survival of the movement. This result confirms the autonomous and dynamic ability of actors that breeds the creative and strategic use of social media platform in proper and critical ways to foster collective movements rather than absolutely relying and depending on it, though still being shaped by technologies, as found by scholars (i.e. Bakardjieva, 2015; Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Dumitrica and Felt, 2019; Etter and Albu, 2020; Fominaya and Gillan, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2015; Milan and Barbosa, 2020; Papacharissi, 2016; Poell, 2015; Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada, 2018; Treré, 2019). In such conditions, this research finds that the collective identity process on this platform have been consistently activated and maintained.

a) *How does the definition or boundary of nation evolve on Sina Weibo?*

For the evolution of nation and national identity within the movement, on the one hand, the analysis reveals that during this movement the definition of nation has always been in line with a general Han chauvinist orientation. Such ultra-Han chauvinism, which discriminates against other ethnicities but insisting on a united state covering the lands those minorities are living in and dominated by the Han majority, is a reproduction of classical Confucianism and historical Han chauvinism as introduced in the Context Chapter. This means that it is not the brand-new product under the process of this movement but borrowed from pre-existing materials outside it. Similarly, the concepts, terms, and ideas related to modern Chinese nation-state which participants have been repeatedly highlighting and reproducing are the already existed political inventions of the CCP regime outside the movement as well. Hence, the study finds that the national identity the participants are co-producing within this movement relies on pre-existing nationalistic materials.

This phenomenon, at same time, matches with the framework of nationalism that indicates the influence of pre-existing nationalistic materials on forming later nationalist ideology which has laid the foundation for nationalist movements (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010). The framework suggests that in groups with rich and long cultural heritage the pre-existing and survival ethnic attachments which have been transferred and reproduced into daily nationalism will serve the basis of nationalist movements breaking up within them (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Brown, 2000; Day and Thompson, 2004; Eriksen, 2010; Hearn, 2006; Smith, 1991). The reproduction and employment of Han chauvinism among the participants prove this point since the Han Chinese majority, which most of the participants

come from, complies with the characteristics of such groups. Meanwhile, from a view of modernist nationalism, the framework also suggests that in societies with powerful political institutions, the nationalistic attachments invented or reproduced by political power to build the modern nation-state as well as being embedded into the ordinary life of common people can also play a significant role in both motivating the participation of the movements, maintaining, and legitimizing nationalist actions (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010; Hobsbawm, 1990; Özkırımlı, 2000). This point is now supported by the participants' consistent adoption and reproduction of official Chinese nation-state invented by the CCP regime as mentioned before.

Moreover, as scholars like Anderson (1983), Billig (1995), and Eriksen (2010) point out, the principle of national particularity and sovereignty has already been embedded into the routines of everyday life in modern nations, serving as the daily basis of banal nationalism. Such banal nationalism subconsciously educates and influences ordinary national members, deeply rooting loyalty and faith to the nation in their hearts. Thus, nationalist movements taking place within these established nations are always emotionally provoked and politically charged to recover the principle of banal nationalism. In other words, such movements are generally intending to maintain the persistence of nations when the national members feel that such principle and their ordinary life based on it are violated and disrupted (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Eriksen, 2010; Giddens, 1985). This research demonstrates that participants in this nationalist movement on Sina Weibo have acknowledged that the particularity and sovereignty of modern Chinese nation-state are seriously challenged and harmed by ethnic policies, as well as the ethnic minorities, especially Chinese-speaking Muslims like Hui people, that make use of such policies to destroy it. The case study 2

further proves that although its authentic core values were finally discovered to be Han chauvinism, participants of this movement have always been defending the integrity and persistence of the modern Chinese nation-state, which also belongs to the banal nationalism embedded into Chinese society under CCP's rule as introduced in Context Chapter. Thus, by reviewing the analysis findings, it can be primarily confirmed that although both Han chauvinism and banal nationalism about modern Chinese nation-state have laid the foundation for the further evolution of nation among the participants, the banal nationalism has basically played a role of motivation as well as providing the frame or skeletons, while the Han chauvinism has constituted the core component, or the flesh.

On the other hand, as discussed in Literature Review, Melucci (1996) conceptualizes collective identity as 'a network of active relationships between the actors who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions' (p. 71) about the movement since these interacting individuals are concerned with the orientation, opportunities, as well as constraints of their actions. Scholars further point out that under such framework, collective identity should be understood as an open-ended process, in other words, always in process and never complete (Fominaya, 2010; Kavada, 2015). Therefore, the collective identity process according to Melucci's (1996) framework is a dynamic and reflexive social construct rather than a simple, fixed, and solid collection of individuals who share the same values or ideas. As the research shows, within this movement, national identity is de facto reflected as a dynamic social process as well rather than solely as an unchangeable religious symbol under which nationalist worshippers gather and repeat fixed sacred nationalistic texts. The study demonstrates that participants have been communicating and negotiating their personal views about dealing with perceived issues of ethnic minorities,

as well as defending the nation-state, that helps produce common ideas and appeals of the movement. With the changing of environment outside the movement, which has been generally reflected as the uprising of new conflicts related to various minorities in the offline world, and changes about government attitudes and actions concerning these ethnic issues, participants have been developing their shared nationalist ideas and appeals to cope the actions with such outside change.

In detail, such evolution is particularly reflected in the formation of identity boundary on the platform. As the study finds, although the adoption of a meta-Chinese national identity can primarily offer the participants a ‘natural’ common identification based on the imagined community about Chinese nation-state in ordinary life as indicated by Anderson (1983), the exact boundary of the movement, however, has been fluidly defined and changed throughout the movement. As discovered by both case studies, in addition to drawing the line between ‘us’ and the constructed ‘others’, or the enemies of the nation, the boundary also served to promote broad participation while provoking large-scale and influential actions on the platform. Hence, as long as it does not contradict the core interests of the movement or temporary needs in the moment, the boundary would be opened up as much as possible to pull in and unite more outsiders and bystanders from users on Sina Weibo. For example, in the phase 1 of case 1, when the participants were calling for a general opposition against a specific legislative draft rather than boycotting any ethnic group, the boundary of nation was defined as all the national members of China, including both non-Muslims and secularized Muslims, only few radical Muslims were excluded. Also, for other phases of case 1 and first phase of case 2, only Muslims like Hui people were strictly excluded since during these periods, participants of both cases were focusing on the conflicts of interests between

Muslims and non-Muslims due to current ethnic policies. Therefore, although this movement obtained a strong Han chauvinist orientation from very beginning, in such conditions, the boundary between Han majority and other ethnic groups that were not considered as enemies yet was usually blurred by participants, under the flag of a meta-Chinese nation-state.

Meanwhile, the study also shows that during the development of the movement, there were existing participants from ethnic minorities which were not part of 'enemies' at the moment they took part in the actions. For example, in anti-Halal case, the study finds various participants who claimed as coming from other non-Han ethnicities but in general recognized themselves as Chinese to take part in the boycott against Muslims and Halal stuffs to defend the nation-state. This also proves the inclusiveness and fluidity of the national boundary depending on the movement situation in various periods. Meanwhile, this research also discovers that some influencers also used Sina Weibo to gather crowds while calling for emergent and immediate actions to solve an urgent crisis, like opposition against legislative drafts that would be passed soon. The study finds that these influencers would ignore the boundary of nation when publishing such content, while only emphasizing the terms like citizens and common people to invite users from outside movement to take part in the actions designed within the movement. This phenomenon supports Kavada's (2018) finding that the dynamic and core actors of social movements will also employ the platform to gather online crowds, while emphasizing the inclusiveness of the movement and blurring the boundary to covert more outsiders and bystanders from such crowds. However, the details of such practice performed by these influencers, as well as its final results and further influence, cannot be effectively explored due to the limitations of this study, which needs further research.

However, as the study shows, in the second phase of anti-mark-adding-policy case, when the main conflict of interests also took place between Han people and other non-Muslim minorities rather than the conflicts solely between Han and Hui as that in phase 1 before, the boundary was immediately tightened to exclude non-Han minorities as well as Muslims, formally expressed as Han chauvinism. This finding fits the scholars' point that although on social media platforms, social movements will be more inclusive, pluralist, and flexible, since more individuals are pulled in with the assistance of connective functions, they are still centring on deeper conflicts concerning resources and interests, involving solidarity (see Dolata and Schrape, 2016; Fominaya, 2010; Kavada, 2018). In other words, for this movement, this point can be illustrated as that although on the platform the boundary work would be more inclusive and flexible depending on particular situations, it has always concentrated on the deeper conflicts concerning the interests and rights of Han people, rather than that for other ethnicities or individuals.

Furthermore, as the study finds, this movement has also developed its solidarity to maintain such a process of evolution. The analysis demonstrates that the solidarity among the participants have been mainly generated by the hostility to the constructed enemies. As shown in the analysis, the construction and reproduction of 'Others' including various ethnic minorities especially Muslims outside the movement, as the enemies, while emphasizing their menace and harmfulness to both nation-state and ordinary people, have not only provoked the opposition against them, but also enhanced the sense of 'we-ness' among the participants. This finding fits the Jasper's (2014) view that shared affect and emotions are consciously

held by the movement participants simultaneously, antagonistic toward objects outside the movement, which can cooperate with reciprocal comrade ties by reinforcing each other to further sustain the solidarity and common identification to the movement.

Meanwhile, in addition to the use and reproduction of pre-existing affective ties based on banal nationalism and Han chauvinism, this study finds that new emotional bonds have also been created and developed among the participants. As found in the study, the celebrations and jubilation can be detected in the texts the participants shared after milestone achievements and temporary victories, which usually praised and gave positive evaluations about their actions, although many of such achievements and victories were their subjective perception. Such achievements and victories were often mentioned or referred to in later periods when new actions were emerging, or the contemporary actions were needed to be sustained. In that condition, previous victories and achievements were recognized as proof of the movement's legitimacy, justifiability, as well as the reasons for its perseverance. Thus, it proves that the participants have transformed their positive emotions triggered by various temporary victories into new affective ties within the movement, which eventually become part of its morality. This phenomenon matches with the findings about the internal production of new emotional bonds during the collective identity process to help foster, sustain, and reinforce the solidarity (Chan, 2017; Collins, 2004; Coretti and Pica, 2015; Fominaya, 2010a; Fominaya, 2010b; Fominaya, 2019; Jasper, 1998; Melucci, 1996; van Ness and Summers-Effler, 2019).

In sum, this section discusses how the definition and boundary of nation evolved among the participants on Sina Weibo based on pre-existing banal nationalism and Han chauvinism, but also depending on the changing of outside environment and being sustained by the solidarity developed within the movement.

b) How does Sina Weibo influence the circulation and reproduction of nationalist discourses?

In addition to the participants' own dynamics to define and control the boundary of nation, the Sina Weibo platform has been shaping their adoption and reproduction of nationalist discourses as well. The environment provided by Sina Weibo for social movements is in line with the societies of control on social media in authoritarian areas like China, which provides full-scale censorship and surveillance system to help reject and exclude the unacceptable and non-mainstream discourses that contradict public values and official ideologies manipulated by state power, with the assistance of digital technologies in much more serious degree than that in Foucault's (1977; 1980; 1991; 1993) panopticon theory, as scholars point out (i.e. Cobbe, 2020; Gibson, 2019; Hong and Kang, 2016). In such kind of environment, users will self-censor and self-discipline which will finally cause their adoption of the permitted discourses for security and survival on the platform (i.e. Cobbe, 2020; Hong and Kang, 2016). Such adoption, as analysed before, is not simply a strategic practice, but can also shape the participants' narratives and actions.

In this context, as the study finds, the nationalist discourses based on the official Chinese nation-state under CCP's rule has been forcibly adopted by the participants. Hence, the common ideas and narratives about nation within the movement have not been able to break out of this frame of meta nation, though only superficially. For example, as shown in both case studies, although the participants did exclude various ethnicities in practice, the meta nation-state that originally includes all 56 ethnicities in China has been constantly underlined as their common identification, rather than directly using the Han nationality. Even in the last phase of second case when only the Han majority was recognized as authentic Chinese and the sole foundation of the nation-state, considering all non-Han minorities as potential traitors and enemies, the movement still did not use Han identification to replace Chinese nationalist identity, or replace the Chinese nation-state with a Great Han state. This is due to the fact that Han chauvinism and great Han nationalism are rejected and prohibited by CCP regime as well, never a part of permitted things in modern Chinese society after 1949. Thus, this research finds that due to such influence of the Sina Weibo, the discourses surrounding nation within this movement have forcibly been obscured especially concerning the definition of Chinese nation-state, inevitably remaining relative inclusivity and openness to non-Han factors, even only to a very limited extent, to ensure the survival of the movement on that platform.

However, on the other hand, this forcible adoption, as the study finds, has de facto led to the deconstruction and reproduction of official Chinese nationalist discourses within the movement into a Han chauvinist form, twisting the core values and ideas but preserving the original shell that safeguards the united nation-state and supports the CCP regime. This phenomenon would have reflected the deconstruction of CCP's power of discourse on nation-

state in such case, while further research is required to explore the deeper influence this movement has brought to both CCP government and the general political ecology in China.

9.2 Research question 2

How does the CCP government influence the movement?

One of the most significant goals of this movement, especially in its later phases, is to call on the CCP government to drastically reform or even totally abrogate its ethnic policies that benefit ethnic minorities in various fields. In this respect, the movement made clear and strong political demands on the CCP state regime. Such direct politicized claims and demands by ordinary people to the government concerning national policies are usually severely prohibited under CCP's rule. In other words, such practice that amounts to direct participation in national political decision-making without the normative routines like through official congress or relevant government department but on public platforms is illegal and dangerous under CCP's rule. Normally such activities will lead to serious consequences like persecution or political purges in China, especially under Xi Jinping's new dictatorship which has completely denied the idea of direct popular or grassroots participation in politics in public. Since Xi Jinping came to power, the government has repeatedly and publicly declared that such practice is related to the erroneous Western ideology that does not apply to the Chinese state with its own socialist characteristics. Considering this background, and the

fact that this movement has been successfully running on Sina Weibo for several years (from 2016 until 2021, when this research completed its data collection), it seems that this movement has been tolerated by the CCP regime, even if there were interventions on the movement's operation on these platforms. Therefore, to answer the second research question, earlier findings about the relations and interaction between CCP and this nationalist movement in this research should be considered to better understand the government's role in the development of the movement.

a) How does state power affect the development and activities of the movement through policy and regulation? How has the government responded to the movement?

Firstly, this study reveals that although there is no explicit evidence suggesting that the government formulated specific policies or regulations to directly address or suppress this nationalist movement, state power nonetheless exerted a significant influence on it through existing laws, policies, and regulations related to the governance of Internet and social media. As discussed in Chapter 8, various interventions faced by movement participants, including the direct summoning by government departments experienced by some participants offline, were conducted in accordance with these Internet-related regulations by both the platform and the government departments. These experiences, as previously analysed, had direct impacts on the movement, including the reduction or cessation of activities by some participants, the disappearance of crucial data, damage to the movement's sustainability, and strained relationships among participants. Such impacts posed significant threats and challenges to the movement's survival and development. However, such situation, as

discussed before, further reinforced the phenomenon of movement participants employing various measures including alternative format, replacement of sensitive words, as well as adoption of the official discourses to avoid sanctions from state power, thereby mitigating risks to ensure the movement's maintenance.

Secondly, regarding policies related to ethnic issues, although this study shows that movement participants perceived that the government's newly issued measures to address the generalization of Halal and the Uyghur issue were a response to their calls during anti-Halal event, there is currently no strong evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, this study finds that the government was using the anti-Halal, anti-Islam, and anti-Muslim sentiments constructed by the movement on Weibo to publicize and legitimize those new measures, thereby building a relevant public opinion foundation to support its decision and rule.

According to previous discussions, these new measures have not fundamentally changed the CCP's current ethnic policies but are measures proposed to address specific issues, especially the Uyghur independence movement. In other words, the government does not intend to completely erase Muslim ethnic groups or cancel their rights to develop their own culture and follow their customs and religious beliefs, let alone overthrow its consistent Marxist-Leninist ethnic policy. Therefore, although the promulgation of these new measures had a significant impact on the movement, particularly on the shaping and development of the emotional ties among the participants, this study does not consider this as state power deliberately exerting active influence on the movement through the formulation of new ethnic policies, or actively responding to the movement's appeals, as the fundamental purposes of the two are different.

So, has the government ever responded to the movement? First, it is necessary to define what constitutes an official response. If a response refers to the government giving a positive answer to the main demands of the movement through official channels, formally affirming or denying the movement, or formally negotiating or communicating with movement participants, then according to the currently available data and information, there is no evidence of such a response. But if a response refers to whether the government and its official media have indirectly reported on the movement, evaluated some of the movement's demands, or interacted with the movement on the platform, then previous analyses and discussions prove the existence of such indirect responses. Among them, especially after the contradictions and conflicts between the movement and the government were fully exposed and intensified, the calls from the official media Global Times account and the Communist Youth League Central account on the Weibo platform to rationally view related disputes and correctly and objectively evaluate Islam and Muslim minorities best illustrate such indirect response, as discussed in Chapter 8. But overall, the evidence of such responses found so far is limited, while in the later stages of the movement, especially after it fully developed into ultra-Han chauvinism, evidence of such indirect responses also ceased to exist according to current dataset.

b) How does the government influence the participants' activities by intervening, implicitly or explicitly, on the Sina Weibo platform?

This study finds that government intervention on the Weibo platform primarily manifests in two forms. The first form, which is implicit, is carried out through the management and guidance mechanisms established by relevant laws and regulations for the government departments overseeing Sina Weibo. In other words, this study finds that the interventions and sanctions imposed by the platform on participants' illegal speech and behaviours during the movement, based on current data, essentially reflect the authority and will of the state power rather than the platform's own logic of profit maximization. Therefore, as analysed in Chapter 8, these platform interventions, which adhere to the procedures specified by relevant laws and regulations for handling illegal speech and behaviour on the platform as well as the supervisory or even direct guiding role of government departments, can be seen as implicit government interventions as well. However, although some of such interventions may indeed be directly guided or ordered by relevant government departments in practice, this research, due to its limitations, cannot obtain more detailed information to confirm this point at present. However, this still does not affect the interpretation of platform interventions under the influence of state power as a form of implicit government intervention.

The second form, which is explicit government intervention, is reflected in the study's findings primarily through the engagement of government-affiliated official accounts with the movement. This study finds that these accounts attempted to employ and leverage the movement to further governmental objectives. This is particularly evident in the anti-Halal event, where the government, through these official accounts, promoted new measures to manage the generalization of Halal problem and address issues in Xinjiang (in essence, to combat Uyghur separatism, maintain national unity, and effectively maintain state control over the whole country). The government engaged in positive interactions with movement

participants on the platform, successfully leveraging the Islamophobic and anti-Muslim nationalist sentiments created by the participants to legitimize and effectively promote these new measures, creating a foundation of public opinion. This, in turn, invigorated the participants, thereby forging the lasting emotional bonds within the movement and encouraging them to further develop their nationalist views against Halal, Islam, and Muslim minorities.

However, as the fundamental contradictions between the movement and the government became exposed and intensified, the movement began to openly challenge governmental authority, calling for a comprehensive overhaul of ethnic policies and the total suppression of all Muslim minorities. At this point, the government again utilized these official accounts to try to guide the participants to abandon overly radical views and demands to prevent harm to current ethnic unity, national unity, and social stability, which could endanger its own rule, though failed. Although these efforts were not always successful, this study at least demonstrates that the government indeed uses the official accounts on Sina Weibo to exploit, guide, and even attempt to steer this nationalist movement to serve its own political objectives in governing the nation-state.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1 Summary on this research

Therefore, it can be concluded now that this research generally explains how nation and identity evolve within one Chinese nationalist movement on Sina Weibo, considering the influence of both platform and government. This study further reveals that this Chinese nationalist movement on Sina Weibo is de facto a Han nationalism which adopts the official nationalist discourses about united nation-state to construct its Han chauvinism in the environment provided by Sina Weibo. The general aim of this movement is to urge the government launch political reform on ethnic policies to abrogate any preferential benefits for ethnic minorities in various fields, while provide Han people with more rights and interests in reality.

Moreover, in addition to the findings discussed in Chapter 9, this study also raises up several points for further and deeper research in future, which are listed in following sections.

10.2 Further research on emotional work

This research finds that it is difficult to quantify, materialize or textualize participants' emotions from the collected data. The limitations of this research make it not possible to accurately parse what specific emotions each individual participant was embodying in large-scale actions on social media if only based on qualitative textual analysis. Or if interpreting such emotions forcibly, it will trigger overly subjective interpretations and bias, which endanger the accuracy and objectivity of this study. Meanwhile, it is also found that this research is not able to improve the theories about platform's impact on movement emotions via affective infrastructures, as well as participants' appropriation of affective attunements, like that discussed by Papacharissi (2014). This situation is also caused by the limitations of this qualitative research based on texts that make it hard to explore whether the Sina Weibo enhances an environment of urgency during this movement. Thus, quantitative research as well as multiple methods including interviews and online survey are suggested for future exploration on this topic.

10.3 Data from ethnic minorities

This research also finds that the voices of ethnic minorities, especially Muslims, are generally missing during the movement. Even few participants from ethnic minorities were found from the collected data, they are not able to speak on behalf of the whole ethnic group they belong

to considering the limited scale of such participants and the low identification with their original ethnicity found in their expressions. Due to the limitations of this research, the ethnic minorities in real life cannot be investigated either, which might be capable of providing their own attitudes, reflections, and standpoints towards such movement, as well as upon their current situation in China today. Such data may be helpful to further explore the authentic conflicts behind Han majority and ethnic minorities today, as well as the in-depth reasons behind missing of minorities' voices on Sina Weibo during this movement.

Furthermore, the actual relationships between the movement and minorities, especially Muslims need more research as well. According to the post-modernist approach, it suggests that the nationalist identity should also be understood as being constantly redefined and reproduced according to the outsider relationship with 'Others' and inside negotiation, based on banal national identity (Özkırmlı, 2000). This research does provide a discussion on how the participants reproduced and sustained the national identity through their communication and negotiation process, as well as how nation evolved and developed upon that. However, the analysis on participants' outsider relationship with 'Others' is highly relied on the data from movement's side, while exploration about how such relationship actually worked and changed during the movement may still need more details from Others' or 'enemies'' side to improve the analysis into a more critical version. Thus, future research on the side of ethnic minorities is required.

10.4 Nationalism today on Chinese social media: pro-democracy or not?

Now, it comes to the question of how to characterise this nationalist movement. As mentioned in the Context Chapter, some scholars in earlier sources have argued that popular nationalist movements at grassroots level in contemporary Chinese society are often a complement to the lack of freedom and democracy, especially ordinary citizens' freedom of speech and freedom of participating in political stuffs. Based on the analysis of popular nationalist movements in China from the end of the 20th century up to the first decade of 21st century, this view suggests that nationalist issues constitute the only public sphere permitted by the government where people can freely express and discuss their political views, as well as organising related activities in public. Therefore, as those scholars argued, in China, nationalist court of public opinion has often become a space for ordinary people to participate in political life via kicking the ball from the side, in order to avoid the direct confrontation against government that will lead to serious consequences in real life (Gries, 2004; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016; Shen, 2007; Zhang, Liu and Wen, 2018; Zhong and Hwang, 2019; Zou, 2019). Thus, such viewpoint argues that Chinese popular nationalist movements should be characterised as progressive and pro-democracy in a pre-democratic society.

However, this research finds that this is not entirely the case for this movement on Sina Weibo today. First of all, as previously found, this movement did in fact deconstruct the CCP's discourse on the ethnic issues to a certain extent, and constructed new perspectives on the ethnic policy which were spread on the mainstream Chinese social media; at the same time, considering that this movement is a political movement that has continued to be carried out on Sina Weibo for many years since 2016, and that has repeatedly triggered heated

debates across the platform, it seems to be possible to affirm that this nationalist movement did indeed reach the level of a grassroots democratic one. However, in-depth analysis reveals that this movement is not progressive, but rather backward and radical, with the similar characteristics as extreme right-wing movements (Blee and Creasap, 2010; Caiani, 2017; Diamond, 1995; Rydgren, 2005). Through the analysis, this research has found that during the movement, the participants mainly stood on the position of the Han majority, and with the high orientation of Han chauvinism. The participants have constantly attacked the official policies and practices that could bring real benefits to the ethnic minorities though limited. They also have used conspiracy theories, rumours, misinformation, and other post-truth methods to stigmatise, attack, and discriminate against the ethnic minorities, and to construct extreme nationalist narratives, inciting the restoration of historical erroneous policies and practices of ethnic oppression. Furthermore, they have even denied basic interests and rights of ethnic minorities, as well as objecting to recognize the ethnicities of those minorities, implying those ethnic identities to be erased from reality. Hence, this kind of incitement to racial discrimination, Islamophobia, and support for the hatred and oppression of minorities by the dominant ethnic group is in no way progressive at any level, nor does it meet any modern definition of democracy (Arblaster, 2002; Dahl, 2020; Held, 2006; Saward, 1998; Tilly, 2007).

On the other hand, this research demonstrates that the conflict and power struggle between the movement and CCP regime are fundamentally due to the fact that the demands and ideas of the movement are far more extreme and more backward than CCP's ideologies and practices on the ethnic issue. Even in recent years, when Xi Jinping's government continues to tighten its ethnic policy and reduce the space for ethnic minorities to live, the movement's

views and demands, such as the re-establishment of Greater Han chauvinist rule, are still more radical than the official ones, and are clearly not accepted by CCP regime which has been consistently promoting a meta-Chinese national community recognizing 56 different ethnicities. Meanwhile, under Xi Jinping's rule, all the ethnicities including Han majority are forced to adopt the neo-Sinicization which emphasizes the subordination to the regime rather than to any specific ethnicity, even the Han majority. Therefore, again it proves that the participants' struggle with and deconstruction of CCP's power do not belong to the realm of democratisation but is merely the seizure of power from a backward regime by a more backward movement. If this movement had won outright, the Chinese society, especially on the ethnic issue, would have moved in a more sinister and unequal situation rather than successfully transforming into a democracy.

Furthermore, as research shows, even considering the fact that the participants have adopted the official discourses mainly to avoid intervention rather than totally agreeing with them, the main ideological perspectives and demands embodied in the movement did not include the intention or orientation to overthrow or subvert the current CCP regime. Although a very small amount of denial of the CCP rule did exist in the collected samples, as the analysis found, in general they did not have a major impact on the movement or ever became the part of common ideas. In other words, the movement has remained relatively supportive of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership and the current political system of the state. This fundamentally denies the viewpoint that such nationalist movement is progressive or democratic, as it remains essentially supportive of the existing non-democratic dictatorship and seeks to further aggravate its rule in the fields of ethnic minorities. This finding challenges the current literature about nationalist movements in China, especially those

popular ones on Internet, requiring further and fresh exploration about the nationalism on Chinese social media today.

10.5 CCP's schizophrenia on ethnic issue

This research also demonstrates the paradoxicality of the CCP regime towards the issue of ethnic minorities. On the one hand, in order to strengthen the effective rule of the regime over the country as a whole, especially under the influence of Xi Jinping's new political tactics, the CCP regime has begun to continually reduce the space for ethnic minorities to separately develop their ethnicities, cutting down on the cultural and other freedoms, in order to weaken their growing sense of ethnic independence or even separatism like the case of Uyghurs, promote the neo-Sinicization, and make them completely subservient to, and integrated into, the CCP rule and political system. At the time this research was completed, this trend has been intensifying and the oppression of ethnic minorities has become more and more severe. On the other hand, as discussed before, however, the CCP regime is clearly unwilling to give up the Marxist-Leninist tenets on ethnic minorities, which have long been regarded as the truth and official ideology for the communist countries, and is still willing to follow the teachings of such tenets by recognising the objective existence of these ethnic groups in reality, allowing them to retain their ethnicity rather than abolishing such identity, and granting them the corresponding preferential policies and subsidies to help them overcome the backwardness and inequality caused by historical problems. This aims to achieve the goal of uniting them within the framework of a united nation-state established by CCP, as introduced in Context Chapter. Upon the analysis of current national policies, laws, and

regulations, no noticeable or fundamental change has ever been made and promulgated on this point. This is also clearly reflected in the analysis of government's authentic standpoints and actions in this research. Hence, such contradictory practice of the CCP regime in helping and oppressing the ethnic minorities at the same time can be termed as the schizophrenia of the CCP regime on ethnic issue, in the light of the concept of capitalism and schizophrenia invented by Deleuze and Guattari (1983). This point also deserves deeper research in the future since previous research findings, especially those composed by Western scholars, only focused on the oppression on minorities but ignoring the benefits given by the same regime at same time.

Such schizophrenia has brought another consequence that since the government has consistently refused to take those radical policy reforms suggested by the participants, after 2020, the movement itself, though still not dissipating, has fallen into a low ebb, barely able to keep up with its daily sustenance on the platform by constantly repeating the existing ideas and honouring the previous achievements, without evolving any fresh opinions. Thus, compared with its development before, this movement has clearly lost its vitality, particularly after the outbreak of the pandemic since the focus of public opinion shifted from all other fields to the Covid -19 and lockdown issues.

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Appendices

Appendix I

The inductive thematic codebook for textual analysis

Case 1

Phase 1

Themes	Definition	Related codes
Halal legislation violates the principle of secularism, damaging the secular society	Since secularism is a public nationalist value developed and promoted by CCP regime in modern China, this theme indicates the participants' construction of a negative and anti-secular image of Halal legislation, describing it as potential destroyer of a great and sovereign Chinese nation-state built on secularism to provoke the opposition against it among	宗教/religion, religious 世俗/secular 政教分离/separation of politics and religion 极端/extremism, radical 国法/national law

	<p>national members. Furthermore, since secularism belongs to the basic political principles prescribed in CCP's official ideology and PRC state constitution, this theme also reflects the constructed antagonism between Halal legislation and secularism by participants which simultaneously endows the legislation as substantially anti-CCP, making the opposition pro nation-state and be in support of CCP regime.</p>	
<p>Halal legislation will threaten national security</p>	<p>This theme reveals the participants' efforts to enhance the legislation's negative image as destroyer of Chinese nation-state and the life of Chinese people by introducing the concept of national security, to provoke the opposition against it among national members. Meanwhile, considering the specific status of guarding</p>	<p>国家安全/national security</p>

	<p>national security in officially promoted public nationalist values and CCP's basic national policies, this theme also implies an antagonism between Halal legislation and the CCP regime constructed by participants, presenting the legislation as contradicting CCP's official ideology, making the opposition pro nation-state and be in support of CCP regime.</p>	
<p>Vague boundary of 'us', uniting secularized Muslims</p>	<p>This theme helps reveal that during the phase 1 of case 1, the participants were attempting to unite all the national members to help them oppose the Halal legislation thus they have defined a vague boundary line between 'us' and hostile 'others', even considering the secularized Muslims as the potential participants.</p>	<p>所有人/everyone 世俗化穆斯林/secularized Muslims</p>

<p>Evolution of emotional bonds and long-term commitment to anti-Halal actions</p>	<p>This theme shows that at the ending point of phase 1 when the Halal legislation was eventually abrogated by the state council, the participants celebrated this victory and evolved long-term emotional bonds based on it, which contributed to the sustenance of their collectivity, motivating their further actions.</p>	<p>胜利/victory 长期斗争/long-term fighting</p>
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Phase 2

Themes	Definition	Related codes
<p>Constructing the negative images of Hui people</p>	<p>accusing Halal restaurants of customarily breaking tax law</p> <p>By comparing Hui people's well-known faithful performance of paying zakat with one Halal restaurant's illegal behaviour of not using invoice, the anti-Halal participants have charged those Hui people who operate Halal restaurants of only paying religious taxes, while ignoring the secular tax of the state. They thus suggested that Hui people maintain allegiance to religion over obedience to the state, apparently disobeying the secular government and</p>	<p>宗教税/religious tax 造反/rebellion, rebel 教法/religious teaching, Sharia Law 国法/national law</p>

		<p>breaking national laws, which is equal to rebellion against the nation-state.</p>	
	<p>rumours and conspiracies based on the conflicts around Halal ramen restaurants</p>	<p>By taking part in the controversies around Halal ramen restaurants, the anti-Halal participants have enhanced their negative description of Hui people who invent, operate, and sustain such business as criminals, undermining the authority of CCP regime, destroyer of secular society and nation-state, as well as threat to Han majority and other non-Muslims.</p>	<p>黑恶势力/ dark forces 欺行霸市/ bullying the market 目无法纪/ lawlessness 暴力/violence 威胁/threat, threaten 打砸/smash, vandalism 人身财产安全/ safety of persons and property 依法治国/Rule of Law 和谐社会/Harmonious society 国家安全/national security 政府权威/Government authority 民族团结/ethnic unity 回汉冲突/Hui-Han conflict</p>

<p>Constructing the negative images of Halal items</p>	<p>Negative description of Halal food products</p>	<p>Anti-Halal participants negatively depicted Halal food as filthy, unsanitary, and harmful to public health, while also connecting Halal food to terrorism.</p>	<p>爆炸/explosive, explosion 恐怖主义/terrorism 大肠杆菌/Escherichia Coli 肮脏/dirty 粪便, 屎/shit, faeces 公共健康/public health</p>
	<p>Negative description of Halal diet service</p>	<p>Anti-Halal participants criticised that the practice of only providing Halal diet service in airlines is violation of non-Muslims' interests and rights, while also represents the invasion of religious teaching and sharia law into secular life. Generally, the anti-Halal participants believed that such practice is part of Hui/Muslims' political conspiracy to overturn the secular regime, exclude non-Muslims, and destroy the nation-state.</p>	<p>特权/privilege 歧视/discriminate 侵权/violate rights and interests 沙里亚法/sharia law 民族隔离/ethnic segregation 分裂/split 政治目的/political goals 邪教/cult 猖獗/rampant 扩张/expand</p>

			国家安全/national security 政权稳定/regime stability
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Phase 3

Themes	Definition	Related codes
Official new standpoints on Halal issue	CCP government has determined that the issue of ‘Generalisation of Halal’ must be formally resolved in order to enhance its effective rule over the whole country, especially Uyghurs in Xinjiang, while also helping reinforce the Sinicization of religion and other new measures under President Xi to maintain the CCP’s dictatorship. However, these new standpoints didn’t intend to totally ban Islam religion and Halal stuffs	清真泛化/generalisation of Halal 极端主义/extremism 分裂主义/separatism 恐怖主义/terrorism 三股势力/three forces

	<p>among Chinese Muslims, or deny all the rights and interests of Muslim minorities in China.</p>	<p>冒用宗教名义/Impersonation of religion 反人类/anti-humanity 反社会/sociopath 沙化/Saudisation 阿化/Arabisation 去中国化/de-Sinicisation 去本地化/de-localisation 境外宗教势力/religious forces outside China 制造对立/creating antagonism 分裂民族/split nation-state 分裂国家/split country 欺骗利用信教群众/deceiving and exploiting the religious masses 去极端化/de-radicalisation 新疆/Xinjiang 社会和谐/social harmony 民族团结/ethnic unity 国家安全/national security</p>
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<p>Anti-Halal participants' new viewpoints based on their reaction to the new official standpoints on Halal issue</p>	<p>In addition to affirming the new official standpoints on Halal issue, the anti-halal participants have proposed some other points including criticism on relevant policies, government departments, and officials, as well as suggestion on more severe actions to deal with Halal problems.</p>	<p>优惠政策/preferential policies 清真标签/Halal label 清真税/Halal tax 清真补贴/Halal subsidy 宗教党员/religious party member 地方政府/local government 基层/grassroot authorities 推广/promote, popularise</p>
<p>Daily reproduction of anti-Halal views</p>	<p>The anti-Halal participants during this period have also developed some other viewpoints focusing on criticising current ethnic policies and Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission.</p>	<p>民宗政策/ethnic and religious policies 民宗委/ Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission 不平等政策/unequal policies 错误政策/erroneous policies 教族捆绑/combination of ethnicity and religion</p>

Phase 4

Themes	Definition	Related codes
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<p>Much sharper criticism on Muslim minorities, relevant policies, and government departments</p>	<p>In addition to repeating the viewpoints evolved before, the anti-halal participants also proposed sharper criticism on Muslims minorities by charging them of being infiltrating into the government to seize the state power to realise their own political goals, while in such scenario, both current ethnic policies and relevant government departments were portrayed as Muslims' assistant and base camp.</p>	<p>两面人/two-faced people 渗透/infiltrate 入侵/invade 颠覆/subvert 参政/participate in politics 占据关键位置/occupy key positions 收买/bribe 窃取国家权力/seize state power 政治目的/political goals 民族政策/ethnic policies 民宗委/Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission 幕后黑手/pusher behind the curtain</p>
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Case 2

Phase 1

Themes		Definition	Related codes
Criticise mark-adding policies for Hui people	A racist policy discriminating against Han people	The participants have accused the mark-adding policy for Hui candidates in national examinations in areas like Ningxia of ignoring the interests and rights of Han people, while only benefiting Hui Muslims solely based on their ethnic identity, which makes such policy de facto racist and contribute to oppressing Han people.	打压汉族/oppress Han people 不公待遇/unfair treatment 种族歧视/racist discrimination 民族歧视/ethnic discrimination 种族清洗/ethnically cleanse 奴隶制度/slavery 两脚羊/two-legged sheep
	Political conspiracies behind mark-adding policy for Hui people	The participants indicated that the mark-adding policy, especially that for Civil Service Examination in areas like Ningxia, is de facto part of Hui people's political conspiracies that intend to split the nation-state and seek regional independence to eventually establish their own Islamic country.	排斥汉人/exclude Han people 挤走汉人/squeeze out Han people 四等人/fourth-class people 有计划/systematically 有预谋/with premeditation 有组织/with organisation 渗透政府/filtrate the government 优待回族/give preferential to Hui people

			<p>恶性循环/vicious circle</p> <p>置换/replace</p> <p>立法程序/legislative process</p> <p>合法化/legitimatis</p> <p>自治/autonomy</p> <p>独立/independence</p> <p>沙里亚法/Sharia Law</p> <p>伊斯兰政权/Islamic regime</p> <p>霸占/occupy</p> <p>叛国/sedition</p> <p>分裂/split</p>
	Criticise ethnic policies and government departments	The participants reinforced the viewpoint that in general current ethnic policies and government departments like Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission should be responsible for status quo while both should be seriously reformed and governed to solve the relevant issues today.	<p>民族政策/ethnic policies</p> <p>民宗委/ Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission</p> <p>回族事务委员会/Hui Affairs Commission</p> <p>代理人/agent</p> <p>穆斯林党员/Muslim Party members</p> <p>特权/privileges</p>

			补贴/subsidies
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Phase 2

Themes	Definition	Related codes
Expanding target to all the ethnic minorities	Since phase 2 of case 2, the participants have defined the boundary line as that between Han majority (us) and all the non-Han minorities (others or enemies). In this scenario, all the ethnic minorities were charged of receiving the preferential benefits which they don't deserve, while also abusing such privileges to oppress and exploit Han majority, making Han people the 'untouchable' in the society.	55 个贵族/55 noble ethnicities 汉族唯一少民/Han is the only minority

<p>The mark-adding policy revived the ethnic consciousness of those already ‘Hanized’ minorities</p>	<p>The participants indicated that due to the mark-adding policy, those ethnic minorities which have already been successfully ‘Hanized’ in the history have re-discovered the value of their original ethnicity thus seek ethnic revival again. The participants pointed out that such scenario will split the nation-state and destroy the ethnic unity due to the fact that they actually held a Han chauvinist understanding of the modern Chinese nation-state as well as the official definition of Chinese national community promoted by CCP regime, which eventually led to the deconstruction of that official idea, portraying both the policy and those ethnic minorities as the enemies of the state and regime.</p>	<p>汉化/Hanized 同化/assimilated 彰显不同/manifest differences 民族意识觉醒/the awakening of ethnic consciousness 分裂势力/separatist forces 独立运动/independent movement 中华民族共同体/Chinese national community</p>
<p>The mark-adding policy has been changing the ethnic structure of certain areas of China</p>	<p>The participants indicated that with the assistance of mark-adding policy, the non-Han minorities have successfully forced the Han people escape from certain areas where they gather and live, in order to further realise their political goals like regional independence since only Han people can truly safeguard the nation-state and ensure the national unity, while all the non-Han minorities were depicted as natural traitors and enemies of China. This also reflects participants’ Han chauvinist deconstruction and reproduction of the official definition of Chinese nation-state.</p>	<p>改变民族结构/changing the ethnic structure 主体民族/dominant ethnicity 压迫/oppress 挤出/crowd out 无汉区/non-Han areas 以胡代汉/replace Han with minorities 核心/core</p>

		<p>无水之源/water without source</p> <p>埋下祸根/sowing the seeds of disaster</p> <p>边疆失控/lose control of frontier areas</p> <p>叛变/rebel</p>
<p>Calling for a new mark-adding policy</p>	<p>The participants were calling for a new mark-adding policy that will add extra points for the candidates in examinations from revolutionary martyrs and other national contributors' families rather than that only for the candidates from ethnic minorities solely due to their identity, to realise the authentic fairness and express the state and people's gratefulness for the contributors of the nation-state.</p>	<p>烈士殉国无人问，少民天生高八等/nobody cares about the revolutionary martyrs who sacrificed for the state, but the ethnic minorities are inherently superior (to others).</p> <p>真正的公平/authentic fairness</p> <p>烈士子女/children of martyrs</p>

Appendix II

Official documents

Part 1

Documents on ethnic issues

Category 1

Documents Guiding Ideologies on Ethnic Policy

1978-2012: Post-Reforming-and-Opening-up Ethnic Policies

Basic Views and Basic Policies on Religion in China's Socialist Period (关于我国社会主义时期宗教问题的基本观点和基本政策), Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1982.

Selected Documents on the Implementation of Ethnic Policy (贯彻民族政策文件选编), Xinjiang People's Press, 1985.

Continuation of documents on the Implementation of Ethnic Policy (贯彻民族政策文件续编), Xinjiang People's Press, 1990.

Selected Documents on Ethnic Policy 1979 -1989 (民族政策文件选编 1979 – 1989), Guizhou Ethnic Press, 1990.

Selected Literature on Ethnic Work in the New Period (新时期民族工作文献选编), Central Literature Publishing House, 1990.

China's Ethnic Minority Policy and Its Practice (中国的少数民族政策及其实践), Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 1999.

Opinions on Further Strengthening the Cultural Work of Ethnic Minorities (关于进一步加强少数民族文化工作的意见), Ministry of Culture, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 2000.

Decision of the State Council on Deepening Reform and Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education (国务院关于深化改革加快发展民族教育的决定), Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2002.

Selected Literature on Ethnic Work: 1990-2002 (民族工作文献选编: 1990-2002), Central Literature Press, 2003.

Circular of the State Council on Issues Relating to the Strict Implementation of the Ethnic Policy of the Party and the State (国务院关于严格执行党和国家民族政策有关问题的通知), State Council, 2008.

China's Ethnic Policy and the Common Prosperity and Development of All Ethnic Groups (中国的民族政策与各民族共同繁荣发展), Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2009.

Guiding opinions of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission on Further Improving the Work of Ethnic Language Translation (国家民委关于进一步做好民族语文翻译工作的指导意见), State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2010.

Opinions of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission on Doing a Good Job in the Management of Ethnic Minority Languages and Scripts (国家民委关于做好少数民族语言文字管理工作的意见), State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2010.

Selected Literature on Ethnic Work: 2003-2009 (民族工作文献选编: 2003-2009), Central Literature Press, 2010.

Cadre Reader on Ethnic Theory and Policy of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党民族理论政策干部读本), Ethnic Publishing House, 2011.

2012-Present: Xi Jinping's Ethnic Policy Guidance Documents

Opinions on Further Reducing and Standardising Extra Points in the College Entrance Examination and the Value of Extra Points (教育部 国家民委 公安部 体育总局 中国科协关于进一步减少和规范高考加分项目和分值的意见), Ministry of Education, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Ministry of Public Security, General Administration of Sport, China Association for Science and Technology, 2014.

Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education (国务院关于加快发展民族教育的决定), Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, 2015.

Questions and Answers on Ethnic Theory and Policy in the New Era (新时代民族理论政策问答), Ethnic Press, 2019.

State Ethnic Affairs Commission, State Federation of Trade Unions, Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, All-China Women's Federation: Guiding Opinions on Further Improving the Creation of Ethnic Unity and Progress in the New Situation (国家民委 全国总

工会 共青团中央 全国妇联关于进一步做好新形势下民族团结进步创建工作的指导意见), State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2020.

Forging a Strong Awareness of the Chinese National Community - A Guidebook on the Spirit of the National Conference on Ethnic Unity and Progress Recognition (铸牢中华民族共同体意识——全国民族团结进步表彰大会精神辅导读本), Ethnic Press, 2021.

Introduction to the Chinese National Community (中华民族共同体概论), Ethnic Press, 2024.

Category 2

National-Level Laws and Regulations on Ethnic and Religious issues in post-1978 era

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国宪法), National People's Congress, 1982.

Regulations on the administrative work of ethnic townships (民族乡行政工作条例), State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1993.

Regulations on Urban Ethnic Work (城市民族工作条例), State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1993.

Law of the People's Republic of China on Education (中华人民共和国教育法), National People's Congress, 1995.

Tax Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国税法), State Administration of Taxation (SAT), 1996.

Law of the People's Republic of China on Ethnic Regional Autonomy (中华人民共和国民族区域自治法), National People's Congress, 2001.

Regulations on Religious Affairs (宗教事务条例), State Council, 2017.

Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Heroes and Martyrs (中华人民共和国英雄烈士保护法), National People's Congress, 2018.

Civil Code of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国民法典), National People's Congress, 2020.

Category 3

Local Ethnic Policy Documents and Regulations in Minority-Concentrated Areas in post-1978 era

Regulations on the Work of the Korean Language and Writing System in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (延边朝鲜族自治州朝鲜语言文字工作条例), People's Congress of Jilin Province, 1988.

Regulations on Halal Food Production, Management, and Administration of Qinghai Province (青海省清真食品生产经营管理条例), People's Congress of Qinghai, 2001.

Regulations on Halal Food Administration of Gansu Province (甘肃省清真食品管理条例), People's Congress of Gansu, 2002.

Several Provisions on the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Guizhou Province (贵州省实施〈中华人民共和国民族区域自治法〉若干规定), People's Congress of Guizhou Province, 2005.

Regulations on Halal Food Administration of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (宁夏回族自治区清真食品管理条例), People's Congress of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, 2021.

Part 2

Documents on law and regulations of Internet

Law

Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Maintaining Internet Security (全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于维护互联网安全的决定), National People's Congress, 2000.

Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Strengthening the Protection of Information on the Internet (全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于加强网络信息保护的决定), National People's Congress, 2012.

Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国网络安全法), National People's Congress, 2016.

Administrative Regulations

Measures for the Administration of Internet Information Services (互联网信息服务管理办法), State Council, 2011.

Regulations on the Protection of the Right to Information Internet Dissemination (信息网络传播权保护条例), State Council, 2013.

Circular of the State Council on the Authorisation of the State Internet Information Office to be Responsible for the Management of Internet Information Content (国务院关于授权国家互联网信息办公室负责互联网信息内容管理工作的通知), State Council, 2014.

Departmental Regulations

Administration of Internet News Information Services Provisions (互联网新闻信息服务管理规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2017.

Administrative Law Enforcement Procedures for Internet Information Content Management Provisions (互联网信息服务内容管理行政执法程序规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2017.

Internet Information Content Ecological Governance Provisions (网络信息内容生态治理规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2019.

Judicial Interpretation

Interpretation of the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate on Several Issues Concerning the Application of Law to the Handling of Criminal Cases Involving the Utilisation of Information Networks to Commit Slander, etc. (最高人民法院、最高人民检察院关于办理利用信息网络实施诽谤等刑事案件适用法律若干问题的解释), Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2013.

Interpretation by the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate of Several Issues Concerning the Application of Law to the Handling of Criminal Cases Involving the Illegal Use of Information Networks and Aiding Criminal Activities in Information Networks (最高人民法院最高人民检察院关于办理非法利用信息网络、帮助信息网络犯罪活动等刑事案件适用法律若干问题的解释), Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2019.

Normative Documents

Management of Internet User Account Names Provisions (互联网用户账号名称管理规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2015.

Interviewing Work of Internet News and Information Service Units Provisions (互联网新闻信息服务单位约谈工作规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2015.

Regulations on the Administration of Internet Information Search Services (互联网信息搜索服务管理规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2016.

Implementing Rules for the Administration of Internet News Information Service Licences (互联网新闻信息服务许可管理实施细则), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2017.

Regulations on the Administration of Internet Follow-up Commentary Service (互联网跟帖评论服务管理规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2017.

Regulations on the Administration of Weibo Information Services (微博客信息服务管理规定), State Internet Information Office (SIIO), 2018.

Policy Interpretation

Important Guidelines for the Rule of Law Process of Weibo (微博客法治进程的重要指引), 2018.

Security regulation of social networking platforms should be strengthened (应加强社交网络平台安全监管), 2019.

A Milestone in the Construction of the Rule of Law for the Ecological Governance of Network Information Content - Comment on the Introduction of Internet Information Content Ecological Governance Provisions (网络信息内容生态治理法治建设的里程碑——评《网络信息内容生态治理规定》的出台), 2019.

Creating a clear cyberspace and building a good Internet ecology (营造清朗网络空间, 建设良好网络生态), 2019.

Weaving a tight net of rules for clear cyberspace (织密清朗网络空间的规则之网), 2020.

Using rule of law thinking to grasp Internet ecological governance (用法治思维来抓好网络生态治理), 2020.

In-depth interpretation of the Internet Information Content Ecological Governance Provisions (深度解读《网络信息内容生态治理规定》), 2020.

