Separatism and Oppression:
Comparative Analysis of Free Aceh Movement and East Turkestan Independence Movement

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

We examine the determinant of peaceful settlement between central governments and secessionist groups in the context of the Third World. There is a heated debate regarding the root cause of ethnic separatism movements. There is also fundamental disagreement among scholars regarding the role played by territorial autonomy in resolving ethnic separatist movements; some believe that the system of autonomy per se is the source of separatist rebellion, while some insist that autonomy agreements are effective in resolving otherwise insoluble conflicts. We investigate the validity of social-economic and political factors proposed by recent studies in explaining the origin of these secession movements. Applying comparative analysis between Indonesia and China, we find that those socio-economic and political factors shaped by the interaction between the central governments and ethno-political groups are not contributory factors. Instead, our results indicate that it is the states’ reconciliatory approach per se that matters in determining political outcomes of ethno-political secession in developing or transitional countries.
## Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iv

List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... vii

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Theories of Nationalism, Secession, and Autonomy .............................................. 2
   1.2 Research Statement ............................................................................................... 7
   1.3 The Free Aceh Movement/GAM .............................................................................. 9
   1.4 The East Turkestan Independence Movement/ETIM .............................................. 10

2. Comparative Analysis ................................................................................................. 13
   2.1 Method and Evidence ............................................................................................. 13
   2.2 Results and Discussion ......................................................................................... 15
      2.2.1 Overall Similarities ....................................................................................... 15
         2.2.1.1 Political Demand .................................................................................... 15
         2.2.1.2 Power-sharing Institutions .................................................................... 16
         2.2.1.3 Demographic Change ............................................................................. 17
         2.2.1.4 Political Representation .......................................................................... 18
         2.2.1.5 Economic Disparity ................................................................................ 19
         2.2.1.6 Access to Natural Resources .................................................................. 20
         2.2.1.7 Islamist Identity ...................................................................................... 21
         2.2.1.8 External Support ....................................................................................... 22
         2.2.1.9 Diaspora Communities ............................................................................ 23
2.2.2 Stage I................................................................................................................................................................. 24

2.2.2.1 Armed Crackdown............................................................................................................................................... 24

2.2.2.2 Human Rights Abuse .......................................................................................................................................... 25

2.2.2.3 Terrorism Allegations ......................................................................................................................................... 25

2.2.2.4 Religious and Cultural Restrictions .................................................................................................................. 26

2.2.3 Stage II and Crucial Difference ............................................................................................................................. 26

3. Supplementary Comparative Analysis and Explanations ................................................................................................. 30

3.1 The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh .................................................................................................................. 31

3.2 The Deep South in Thailand ....................................................................................................................................... 32

3.3 Supplementary Comparative Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 34

3.4 Alternative Explanations ........................................................................................................................................... 36

4. Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................................... 38

References........................................................................................................................................................................ 41
List of Tables

Table 1: Comparison between Aceh and Xinjiang ......................................................... 14

Table 2: Comparison between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Deep South ................. 34
1. Introduction

Conflicts associated with separatist movements pose a vital threat to not only integrity of a country, but also peace and security of the region. The post-colonial period has witnessed serious separatist movements in the Third World. On the one hand, deprived ethno-political groups\(^1\) equate independence with self-determination and sometimes use violence as a means to fulfill their political aspirations. On the other hand, transitional or authoritarian states vacillate between taking a repressive approach and a reconciliatory approach, trying to make a trade-off between the demands of separatist groups and unabridged sovereignty. There is fundamental disagreement among scholars regarding (1) the causal mechanism behind ethno-political groups’ decision to rebel against the states, and (2) the role played by territorial autonomy in resolving ethno-political separatist movements.

The chief goal of this paper is to provide preliminary insights into these two considerations. We investigate the validity of social-economic and political factors proposed by recent studies in explaining the root cause of these secession movements. Applying comparative analysis between Indonesia and China, this paper attempts to refute that those socio-economic and political factors are contributory factors in explaining why those repressed ethnic groups wage secession movements against central governments. Instead, we find that it is the states reconciliatory approach \textit{per se} that matters in determining political outcomes of ethno-political

\(^1\) In this paper, we distinguish the term “ethno-political groups” from “ethnic groups.” Borrowing Gurr (2000)’s terminology, we define “ethno-political groups” as “identity groups whose ethnicity has political consequences,” and we see these groups as the basis for political mobilization and action in defense or promotion of their self-defined interests.
secession in developing or transitional countries. Drawing from the experience of Indonesia, we also find that the absence of military and the peace agreement protected by legislature is an effective form of reconciliatory approaches that the Third World states can adopt to solve separatist movements peacefully.

In this section, we introduce existing literature on nationalism, separatist movements as well as autonomy, and then develop our own argument regarding states’ ethnic policies and separatism movements. Also, we articulate the research question, and provide backgrounds of two armed secession movements occurred in Indonesia and China. The rest of the paper is organized into three sections. In the following, we introduce a qualitative method that allows us to compare two separatist movements in Indonesia and China. In the second section, we present another “pairwise” comparison as supplementary analysis to modify our strategic weakness in this study. The final section concludes with a discussion of theoretical as well as policy implications.

1.1 Theories of Nationalism, Secession, and Autonomy

According to the literature on nationalism, nation is defined as a group of people in “an imagined political community” (Anderson 1983) who see themselves as distinct in terms of their culture, history, institutions, and aspire to self-rule in order to express and protect those distinctive characteristics (Snyder 2000). As argued by some scholars, popular nationalism typically develops amongst large segments of a population in the beginning of democratization, when political elites “use nationalist appeals to compete for popular support” (Hamilton 2002; Hale 2008; Martinussen 1997; Snyder 2000). These notions can be well applied to the Third
World countries where borders were drawn arbitrary by colonialist governments purely for administrative purposes, and where divided ethnic groups lack common identity that defines a new nation (Bertrand 2004; Kooistra 2001; Posner 2004). In this context, nationalist assimilation programs attempted to establish loyalties to the new states based on “membership to a new nation”, and enhance the integrity of the otherwise unstable states (Anderson 1983; Bertrand 2004; Posner 2004).

For the most part, however, the process of nationalist assimilation imposed by the central governments usually takes it for granted that the small ethnic groups should be integrated into the majority ethnic groups; as commonplace in the Third World, top-down nationalism and state-building efforts have made adoption of the values and institutions of dominant ethnic groups “a prerequisite for full entry into the nation” (Thanet 2008), and inevitably alienated the outlying ethnic communities. Consequently, what emerged in the Third World was “state-nation”, rather than “nation-state.” In other words, the state-building efforts preceded the consolidation of nations (Martinussen 1997). The narrow conception of an “imagined” identity has marginalized or excluded particular ethno-political groups, who have adopted the identity formation as a counter-strategy to hegemonic nationalism (Bertrand 2004; Mohsin 2003).

Brubaker (1996) argues that nationalism of ethnic minorities flourish today, in large part, because of such “state nationalism” policies. The reinforced ethnic identity, in turn, is more likely to facilitate separatism, when the former is combined with majority-minority power relations and constraints in upward political mobility (Rogowski 1985; Schaeffer 1998). In this regard, politically marginalized ethno-political groups equate separatism with a promising way to seize greater power for self-governance, and sometimes use violence as a means to secure their political interests. Nevertheless, there is disagreement among scholars regarding the mechanism
behind the ethno-political movements. At least, three theses are identified: (1) The “provocation” thesis stresses the role of political elites in mobilizing ethnic violence; (2) The “ethnicity-as-conflictual” thesis holds that collective ethnic behavior is driven by conflictual nature of ethnicity itself; and (3) The “ethnicity-as-epiphenomenal” thesis emphasizes socio-economic grievances and their relationship to the central government (Bertrand 2004; Hale 2008).

On the other side, many scholars have explored potential prescriptions for containing violence associated with separatist movement. One of magic bullets proposed by intellectuals is territorial autonomy, often expressed in federalism (Diamond 1993; Iwasaki 2001; Lijphart 1977). Nevertheless, there is considerable disagreement on the role played by autonomy in the crisis. On the one hand, some scholars claim that instead of resolving ethnic conflict, autonomy actually increases it. They argue that systems of autonomy, through the safeguard of the distinct ethnic identity, the implementation of local decision-making and regional institutions, as well as the local control of media and education, increase the likelihood of conflict and thus contribute to disintegration of the state (Brancati 2006; Brubaker 1996; Bunce and Watts 2005; Cornell 2002; Roeder 1991). On the other hand, some insist that autonomy agreements can be a solution to contain rebellions “if they balance the interests of states and ethno-nationalists” (Gurr 1993). The pro-autonomy theorists identify “ethnic autonomy”, “territorial autonomy”, “ethno-federalism” or “asymmetrical federalism” as a key instrument that mitigates the negative effects of majority rule in multiethnic societies, and thus prevent the escalation of secession movements (Diamond 1993; Esman 1973; Lijphart 1977; Lijphart 1991; Walker 1998; Roeder 2005).

Another set of considerations relates secession movements with the type of political regimes. On the one hand, Bakke and Wibbels (2006) believes that a liberal-democratic society has more advantages in containing ethnic violence than an authoritarian one, as the former
provides channels other than violence to express political demands of ethnic minorities. On the other hand, according to Snyder (2002), the transitional stage of democratization tends to increase the possibility of ethnic conflict. Given the fact that the post-colonial period has witnessed serious separatist movements in the Third World, it might be helpful to examine the role of autonomy arrangements in the context that lacks a democratic political environment, which is more conducive to “successful devolution of political power” (Bertrand 2004).

Then, how are we to conceptualize mechanisms potentially underlying the transformation of separatist movements into peaceful resolutions in the Third World contexts? As the “provocation” and “ethnicity-as-conflictual” theses appear to be weak and more susceptible to criticism in recent studies, this paper attempts to concentrate on examining socio-economic as well as political factors associated with the ethnicity-as-epiphenomenal” thesis. This thesis links separatism with various factors include local grievances in economic and political spheres, as well as the bargaining power relative to the state (which depends on control over resources), and the existence of important allies (such as the “reference state”) (Hale 2008). The reasoning of the current ethnicity-as-epiphenomenal” thesis, however, can be challenged. For one thing, it does not provide the clear answer concerning which variable is more dominant in determining the political outcomes of secession movements. For another, it does not sufficiently explain why ethno-political groups get united under the banner of “separatism” or “anti-state” in the first place.

By contrast, Aspinall (2002) suggests that secessionist nationalism has been shaped in response to the brutal way in which central governments implement “state nationalism” policies. To translate this argument in the context of the paper, we can expect that the states’ oppressive approach overrides those socio-economic and political factors that resulted from the interaction between the central governments and ethno-political groups. Indeed, it seems plausible that those
secession movements emerge as a reaction to the states’ repressive nationalist constructions, and that those separatist movements are likely to subside when the states abandon the oppressive approaches toward ethnic minorities.

Intuitively, ethnic minorities with political demands for greater power of self-rule are unlikely to escalate to violent secession movements unless the state tries to crack them down with iron fist. It can be also argued that with the presence of strong military, the negotiation and trust-building is less likely to be achieved. Therefore, ethno-political groups have more incentives to resort to violence as a means to secure their political interests and ignore the cost of rebellions. In other words, states’ oppressive approach is actually helping ethno-political groups to overcome their collective action problem. Even if the ethno-political identity per se is unlikely to be an explanatory factor here, common history and ethnic identity get bound up with separatism in opposition to the state-sanctioned identity and “state nationalism” efforts, given the popular state-sanctioned nationalist assimilation programs in the Third World. Meanwhile, we expect that when the states approach separatism demands with the reconciliatory means, the costs of violent secession will be overshadowed by benefits of being incorporated in the existing state. In this view, an ethnic conflict is more likely to be settled peacefully when the state offers rebel groups a peace agreement, completely withdraws military from conflict areas, and respects unique life of ethno-political people.

Consistent with anti-autonomy theorists, we argue that the system of autonomy per se is insufficient to resolve separatist rebellion peacefully. The main objections are twofold. First, territorial autonomy can still be penetrated or threatened in the Third World as long as strong military is present in the autonomous region. Admittedly, autonomy is one strategy to solve the commitment problem of the majority-group-dominated central governments, yet it does not
necessarily indicate that the bargaining power of ethno-political groups against the central governments can be great enough that the former can protect itself, not to mention the fact that power for defense and security is usually not included in autonomy arrangements. Second, autonomy transfers institutional and material resources to autonomous units, which in turn makes the central governments more susceptible to separatism (Bertrand 2004); ex-separatist groups in the Third World countries can continue to express their political demands using violence, as long as the central governments are signaling their willingness to resolve the ethnic conflicts by fair means or foul. In order to avoid risky mobilization, the central governments need to guarantee that formal channels other than violence are always available for those ethno-political groups.

Taken together, we generate a hypothesis for comparative analysis:

H1: The separatism demand of a particular ethno-political group in the Third World is prone to escalate into a violent movement when the central government resorts to an oppressive approach; whereas when the central government use a reconciliatory approach, both parties are more likely to peacefully resolve the ethnic conflict.

1.2 Research Design

The post-colonial period has witnessed serious separatist movements in the Third World, regardless of the regime type of the central governments. It is commonplace that traditional borders of ethnic groups in the Third World were arbitrarily ignored by the colonialist administrations. Moreover, after the inception of new states, those central governments initiated top-down nationalism and state-building efforts that adopted the values and institutions of dominant ethnic groups. Unlike Western states, the Third World states such as Indonesia and
China were typically “created” or “imagined” in the absence of consolidation of national identity (Anderson 1983; Martinussen 1997). Furthermore, scholars and policy makers associate the increasing number of secessionist movements led by Muslim groups with terrorists, and worry about the contagion effect of Muslim mobilization. Therefore, by investigating the root cause of secession movement as well as the relation between states’ ethnic policies and secession movements in the context of the Third World, we attempt to provide theoretical and empirical insights into peaceful settlement of secession movements in those authoritarian or transitional countries that share these common histories. Based on the theory development above, this paper attempts to supplement the “ethnicity-as-epiphenomenal” argument by proposing the states’ approaches toward ethnic minorities as an alternative explanatory variable, and provide evidence for anti-autonomy theories from comparative perspective. We thereby contribute to the growing literature that studies political institutions and secession movements.

For the purpose of this study, a closer examination of case studies in the context of the Third World might be useful. It is interesting to notice that the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia and the East Turkestan Independence Movement (ETIM) in China share many factors in terms of distinct ethnic identity, history of rebellions, and grievances, yet the separatist movement by the former produced a distinctive political outcome compared to that by the latter. Therefore, we narrow the scope of analysis and reframe our question as follows: Why separatism movement took place in both Indonesian and China, and why the Indonesian government could achieve the peaceful settlement with the GAM, while the Chinese government has not resolved separatist movement in Xinjiang? In this regard, a “pairwise “comparison between the two cases can shed light on the root cause of secession movement as well as the relation between states’ ethnic policies and secession movements in particular settings. By doing so, this paper attempts to
generalize these theoretical and policy implications in the broader contexts, and provide insights into those two considerations.

In this paper, separatist movement\(^2\) is defined as full political secession from the rest of a country organized by ethno-political groups, and autonomy is defined as authorities for self-government in the regions concerned by ethno-political groups themselves. Also, we categorize both physical oppression (such as genocide, arbitrary arrest, and forced displacement) and intangible discrimination (such as exclusion from “membership of a new nation” and restrictions on their languages, traditions, and religions) against ethnic minorities as the states’ repressive approach. By contrast, we see the states’ approach as a reconciliatory one when the central government demonstrates its political will to peacefully resolve ethnic conflicts by means such as offering rebel groups a peace agreement, completely withdrawing security forces from conflict areas, and respecting unique life of ethnic people. Given our research interests and proposed hypothesis, we set a peaceful settlement between states and independence movements as our dependent variable and the states’ oppressive approach as our independent variable, and we measure our independent variable by the number of military personnel dispatched by central governments.

### 1.3 The Free Aceh Movement/GAM

The Acehnese people have maintained their strict devotion to Islam and stressed the glorious history of Aceh as an independent sultanate until the Dutch invasion (Askandar 2007; [in this paper, the term “separatist” movement is distinguished from “autonomist” movement, which is a broader term than the former (Roehner and Rahilly 2002).]
Malley 2002). Their strong regional and ethnic identity drove the Acehnese to resist the secular Indonesian nation-building project initiated by President Sukarno (Schulze 2004). The Free Aceh Movement or GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), established in December 4, 1976, aimed at and struggled for independence of the Aceh region from Indonesia (Kooistra 2001; Schulze 2004; Smith 2010).

GAM had undergone three distinct phases (Nishi 2001), and experienced the ebb and flow of conflict with the Indonesian Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI). The first insurgency was brought to end by the central government through counterinsurgency operations, and leaders of GAM were either in exile, imprisoned, or dead (Kooistra 2001; Schulze 2004). When the resurgence of GAM made its appearance in the 1980s, President Suharto responded it with iron fist, ordering the establishment of the military operational zone (Daerah Operasi Militer, DOM) in Aceh (Schulze 2004; Suraiya 2005). In the post-Suharto era, the independence movement in Aceh obtained its third momentum, which was initiated by local students’ demands for Jakarta’s approval of an East-Timor-style referendum (Endo 2007; Kooistra 2001; Malley 2002; Nishi 2001). It was in the third incarnation of GAM that challenged the Jakarta’s control of the province (Ross 2005). GAM was dissolved on 23 December, 2005, following the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indonesian government (Miller 2009). During this serious conflict, GAM organized attacks directed to not only TNI but also innocent civilians (Human Rights Watch 2003; Kooistra 2001; Sato 2001; Schulze 2004; Suraiya 2005; Van Wie Davis 2010; Woodier 2006).

1.4 The East Turkestan Independence Movement/ETIM
Annexed by Qing dynasty in 1759, Xinjiang made its first demand for independence in 1865. From 1931 to 1934, and again from 1944 to 1949, separate regimes calling themselves the Eastern Turkestan Republic were established in Xinjiang (Chung 2002). The Uyghurs who reside in this region did not acknowledge Beijing’s claims regarding Xinjiang as part of the “great family of the Chinese nation” after the inception of China (Bovingdon 2010). Instead, emphasizing closer social and cultural bonds with the Turkic peoples outside China, many Uyghurs identified themselves as a distinct nation of Uyghur and have challenged the CCP’s assimilation policies by means of “everyday resistance.” (Bovingdon 2002; Bovingdon 2010; Dillon 2006).

Unlike GAM, the East Turkestan Independence Movement or ETIM\(^3\) is not a unified separatist movement; rather it consists of different independent Uyghur separatist groups\(^4\) that openly advocate armed secession from China (Millward 2004). Despite chronic small-scale resistance, the armed uprisings in the 1950s posed a serious threat to the party’s control of the region (Bovingdon 2010). Disappointed and dissatisfied with the state’s penetration, over 60,000 Uyghurs and Kazakhs fled to the Soviet Union in 1962 (Bovingdon 2004; Dillon 2006; Shichor 1994). It was not until the mid-1990s that independence movement in Xinjiang culminated again; one thousand or more people participated in anti-state and ethno-political protests in four of the five years from 1995 to 1999 (Bovingdon 2010). In recent years, attacks on police and security personnel, bombings, and political assassinations in Xinjiang have been blamed on these Uyghur

\(^3\) It should be noted that the abbreviation “ETIM” used in this paper is the acronym of “Eastern Turkestan Independence Movement,” devised by Shichor (2003). His acronym must not be confused with that of the “Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement”.

\(^4\) They include East Turkistan Islamic Movement, East Turkistan Liberation Organization, East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah and other groups (Millward 2004).
separatist groups (Dillon 2006, Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2002). Till date, Beijing is still trying to crack down ETIM with the repressive approach.
2. Comparative Analysis

2.1 Method and Evidence

To answer the question regarding why GAM and the Indonesian government could resolve separatist movement peacefully in 2005, while ETIM still poses a threat to integrity of China, we mainly applies the Method of Difference, which was originally outlined by John Stuart Mill (Skocpol 1984). Given that the purpose of the study is to rule out competing socio-economic and political explanations identified in the “ethnicity-as-conflictual” literature, it is crucial to control for as many potentially confounding variables as possible. By collecting evidence from early literature and following the method mentioned above, we present nine overall similarities and one crucial difference between these two cases in Table 1.

An advantage of this approach is that it permits closer examination of less common political variations within the contexts analyzed. A disadvantage is that it has less potential to produce universally applicable generalization of our findings, yet this comparative analysis tries to “identify invariant causal configurations that necessarily combine to account for outcomes of interest” (Skocpol 1984). The comparative analysis is useful when it comes to proving an contributory factor “relative to a certain context or contexts” (Skocpol 1984) that accounts for different outcomes produced by two cases that have many aspects in common; the Method of Difference is applicable here to identify the causal mechanism behind the dissolution of GAM and peaceful settlement between the Acehnese rebels and Jakarta.
Apart from weak generalizability, this “pairwise” comparative methodology might suffer from other potential shortcomings, at least in so far as our theory is to be supplementary to the theories of political institutions and ethnic violence. To overcome these problems, we also introduce the Method of Agreement (Skocpol 1984), and cases of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh and Deep South in Thailand in the Section 3.
2.2 Results and Discussion

For convenience, we divide these two cases into two stages in order to analyze states’ reaction, namely the stage 1 and stage 2. At the stage 1 both central governments used the repressive approach against separatist movements, while at the stage 2 only the Indonesian government shifted from the oppressive approach to the reconciliatory approach, and managed to peacefully dissolve the separatist movement at the phase three in Aceh. As for the stage 1, we report four repressive policies adopted by both Jakarta and Beijing. Subsequently, we discuss the transition made by the Indonesian government at the stage 2, measured by changes in the number of military personnel in the conflict area.

2.2.1 Overall Similarities

2.2.1.1 Political Demand

Hale (2008) defines ethnicity as a social uncertainty-reducing devise. Hale makes two important points: (1) Uncertainty reduction is a fundamental human motivation that drives humans to divide themselves into groups in almost all kinds of situations; (2) Motives behind ethnic group behavior are shaped, however, by different interests people have. To translate this argument in the context of this paper, it can be said that collective action of ethnic groups

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1 Even though in reality, the conflict between the Chinese government and ETIM is still ongoing, in order to analyze these two cases in the same time scope, we use the past tense to describe any related incidents at the stage 1. As for Indonesia, we treat GAM at its second phase as the stage 1, and the third phase GAM as the stage 2.
(whether they resort to violence or seek peaceful solutions) is the function of their various political demands. If this is the case, then we can assume that holding the other variables constant, the same political demand will lead to the same political outcome in the two cases.

It is obvious that both GAM and ETIM had the same political demand, namely to establish an Islamic state dominated by the ethnic minorities, yet these two independence movements produced different political outcomes. Since its establishment, GAM was seeking to set up an independent state governed by the Islamic law and “restore Islam as a dominant socio-political force” (Miller 2009; Schulze 2004; Smith 2010). Similarly, the aim of Uyghur groups was to establish an independent Turkic state in Xinjiang (Pereire 2006). Following the logic of the Method of Difference, we drop this variable from candidates of the explanatory factor.

2.2.1.2 Power-sharing Institutions

Some scholars believe that both power-sharing institutions and power-dividing institutions can prevent the escalation of secession crises (Lijphart 1991; Roeder 2005). For the purpose of this study, we only focus on power-sharing arrangements that emphasize on protection of ethnic minorities’ political powers from state penetration. Therefore, we examine whether the system of autonomy can be a determinant of ethnic secession movements in the later period.

Literature offers that the Special Region and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region respectively designated in 1959 by Jakarta and in 1955 by Beijing provided little actual political autonomy (Bovingdon 2010; Kooistra 2001). The special status to Aceh was de facto non-existent due to the Java-centered nation-building project, strong presence of armed forces, and
negligence of local demands under the highly centralized regime (Kooistra 2001; Van Wie Davis 2010). Although the autonomous region was an attempt to formally recognize the distinct ethnic identity of minorities and grant them part of authorities in China (Dillon 2006), a potentially larger role for Beijing was always recognized by legislation (Bovingdon 2010). Also, by creating “sub-autonomies” for titular minorities, Beijing attempted to “counterbalance the overwhelming political and demographic weight of Uyghurs” (Bovingdon 2004). Since both the Acehnese and Uyghur people were subject to circumscribed autonomy and similar center-periphery relations from the outset, it is safe to say that power-sharing institutions did not account for the different political outcomes between these two cases.

2.2.1.3 Demographic Change

The theory proposed by Goldstone (2002) attempts to link demographic factors with security; considerable demographic changes can alter power balance among local ethnic groups, which contributes to ethnic conflicts. It is also mentioned that when one distinct ethnic group migrates into “homeland” of another ethnic group, and challenges the latter’s dominance, the conflicts are prone to escalate. In this regard, we are particularly interested in the role played by transmigration programs in facilitating these two separatist movements.

The Acehnese constitute 50% (PCGN 2003) of the total population in Aceh, whereas Uyghurs are the largest non-Han population in Xinjiang, comprising approximately 45% of the region’s population (Bhattacharji 2012; Chung 2002; Wu and Song 2010). Under the Suharto’s regime, many Javanese moved to Aceh as part of his transmigration program, and GAM regarded the Javanese migrants as colonial settlers from Java and potential collaborators with the
Indonesian security forces (Schulze 2004). By the same token, tensions between Uyghurs and the Han population were exacerbated due to the influx of Han Chinese resulted from the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and “Go West” programs (Bhattacharji 2012; Bovingdon 2004; Wu and Song 2010). Given the similar patterns of demographic change in these two regions, it can be argued that this factor does not account for the distinctive political outcome of GAM vis-à-vis that of ETIM.

2.2.1.4 Political Representation

The “realistic conflict theory” provides another competing variable for the root cause of ethnic violence, that is, conflicting claims to scarce resources, including power and prestige (Tajfel and Turner 1979). In this framework, political grievances such as circumscribed political representation of the group’s interest and restrictions on the political upward mobility in the central government are major forces behind the mass mobilization and collective violence (Brancati 2006; Gurr 1970; Hale 2008; Rogowski 1985).

Despite the de jure special region and autonomous status, the Acehnese and Uyghur population were both politically underrepresented. Contrary to the Acehnese’s expectation, the Indonesian government appointed Aceh’s governors, usually from Java, instead of allowing them to nominate their leaders. (Ichikura 2008; Malley 2002). The prestigious and influential ulamas (religious teachers) in Aceh were brought under the control of the state and lost their traditional role as political and religious leaders (Kooistra 2001). Likewise, the Chinese government kept a grip on real political power. Only “yes-man” minorities who were loyal to the regime were appointed by the CCP (Bovingdon 2002; Dillon 2006; Shichor 1994). Also, it is worth
mentioning that in 1987 only 38.4% of party members in Xinjiang were non-Han, though ethnic minorities comprised over 60% of the population at that time (Bovingdon 2004). Worse still, those non-Han officials were severely underrepresented at the higher positions (Bovingdon 2004). In this way, we control this variable constant in both cases and find that it can be excluded as an explanatory factor.

2.2.1.5 Economic Disparity

Ted Gurr (1970)’s theory of relative deprivation takes political factors as well as economic considerations into account; a high level of income disparity raises the possibility that deprived groups will organize aggressive mobilization (Horowitz 1985; Muller and Mitchell 1987). Consistent with these insights, Bakke and Wibbels (2006) finds that fiscal decentralization is also likely to contribute to ethnic rebellion if interregional inequality is high. Alternatively, the literature on horizontal inequalities concludes that not only “backward” but also “advanced” groups are more likely to secede than those groups whose wealth is closer to the country average (Cederman, Weidmann and Gleditsch 2011).

Between 1979 to 1989, per capita GDP (excluding the value of oil and gas) in Aceh, one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia, kept pace with Indonesia’s national average incomes (Miller 2009; Ross 2005) thanks to the formation of oil industries in North Aceh. Nevertheless, the Acehnese was not a major beneficiary of the economic growth; 70% of the local Acehnese did not enjoy the profits of their own natural resources and they were excluded from these companies (Suraiya 2005). Similarly, the CCP implemented development programs, such as agricultural reforms and reopening border trade with Central Asia in Xinjiang (Bovingdon 2004, Dillon
2006), yet scholars point out that the Han migrants enjoyed priority over minorities in obtaining urban employment, especially in the oil industry and in private enterprises, resulting in increasing inequality between the Han and non-Han population (Bhattacharji 2012; Bovingdon 2004; Howell and Fan 2011). By the same logic we applied in previous parts, we can exclude economic disparity as a contributory factor in this “pairwise” comparison.

2.2.1.6 Access to Natural Resources

Collier and Hoeffler (2004)’s model suggests that countries heavily dependent on natural resources are likely to get involved in secessionist movements. The reasoning of this branch of the literature is that primary commodities exports (such as oil) increase the risk of civil war, in that natural resources can finance rebellions (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Collier and Hoeffler 2005). Alternatively, Ross (2005) proposes that when the access to oil and gas resources for rebels is denied, the conflict can be aggravated through other channels, such as the presence of military and the government’s discounted credibility. If these theories are valid, we can expect that any secession movement is inevitably short-lived or weak when it occurs in the area where natural resources are scarce, while restricted access for ethno-political groups in regions richly endowed with oil and gas will exacerbate the political outcome.

Both Aceh and Xinjiang are abundant in natural resources, especially oil and gas. In 1997 liquefied natural gas exports from Aceh amounted to about $2 billion and accounted for nearly one-fifth of the Indonesia’s total oil and gas exports (Malley 2002). Similarly, Xinjiang boasts the country's largest oil and gas reserves in the Tarim Basin (Chung 2002). Nonetheless, both regions had not been able to plan their own economic activities and nearly all money from these natural
resources went to the national governments, the state companies, or foreign contractors (Malley 2002; Shichor 1994). The Ross (2005)’s explanation does not hold, either; it cannot explain why GAM at the stage 2 still intensified its operations in spite of Jakarta’s decentralized policies that allowed the Acehnese population to have more access to natural resources.

2.2.1.7 Islamist Identity

The “political process approach” put forward by Mohammed Hafez (2003) holds that exclusionary political system forces Muslim communities to undergo Islamist insurgencies (including ethno-political and separatist movements) as “a near-universal process of radicalization.” By “Islamist”, Hafez (2003) refers to those “Muslims who feel compelled to act on the belief that Islam demands social and political activism…to create a separate union for Muslim communities.” In this sense, with legitimacy, identity and organizational resources in hand, politically marginalized Muslims, whether in Muslim states or non-Muslim states, can presumably be political actors who pursue an independent state.

Islam had been an integral part of ideology of GAM and ETIM. Schulze (2004) reports that GAM had relied on widespread network through the mosque and pondok (Islamic boarding school) to reduce the cost of political mobilization. Moreover, GAM managed to stress its Islamist ideology by "involving the condemnation of the impious behavior of the rulers, promises of restitution of Syariah law and an Islamic base to an independent Aceh" (Aspinall 2002). Despite the Chinese official portray of ETIM as extremist and irredentist groups (Liu and Du 2003), rigid policies and crackdowns on dissent had actually diffused and intensified Islamist ideology among ordinary Uyghurs (Bovingdon 2004). In sum, we have found that both GAM and
ETIM utilized their Muslim identity, legitimacy and organizational resources to achieve their political aspirations, yet the former produced a distinctive political outcome compared to that by the latter; Islamist identity does not play a major role in mobilizing separatist movements.

2.2.1.8 External Support

Given the current globalized world, it is reasonable to presume that secessionist efforts consist of internal objectives (construction of the collective identity and legitimacy) as well as external objectives (interaction with and acknowledgement of the international system) (Aspinall 2002). Houten (1998) also hypothesizes that the existence of important allies (such as “the minority’s reference state”) can influence the direction of secession movements. Based on these propositions, we can measure the external support (including political, military, or financial support) by examining the interaction between separatist groups in homeland and the support provided by neighboring “kin states” or external groups.

It is reported that both GAM and ETIM received support from such “kin states” as well as pro-Islam organizations. The Indonesian and Chinese governments publicized that the separatist groups had a link with al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations outside their home countries. Ross (2005) and Schulze (2004) reveal that 700 to 800 GAM guerrillas paramilitary training in Libya during the stage 1, and that GAM sent its recruits to the military camp associated with Jemaah Islamiyah in Philippines. In the similar fashion, the Chinese government and Western intelligence agencies have collected evidence regarding the presence of an al-Qaeda cell in Xinjiang as well as military camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan that had trained Uyghur separatist groups since the 1980s (Bovingdon 2010; Chung 2002; Van Wie Davis 2010). Taking the
similarities of external support variable between these two cases into account, we can prove that this variable is not the contributory one.

2.2.1.9 Diaspora Communities

The last competing theory presented in this paper emphasizes the interplay between diaspora formation and secession movements; diaspora communities who preserve unfulfilled political objectives and political loyalties can not only reinvigorate the old ethnic identities but also awaken the new ones (Shain and Sherman 1998). Similarly, according to Brubaker (1996), “[a] state becomes an external national ‘homeland’ for ‘its’ ethnic diaspora when… [their political leaders] (added by the author) claim that they ‘belong’, in some sense, to the state.” Following these claims, we analyze whether the support of ethnic émigré communities generates separatism sentiments in the homeland and contributes to the escalation of violence.

The Acehnese and Uyghur diaspora communities are internationally well-known for their openly support for the homeland secession movements, their criticisms against their respective repressive states, and their efforts to lobby the international community to support their cause. GAM leaders who exiled to Sweden during the first phase had the authority to command and maintained the contact with GAM guerrillas operating in Aceh in the stage 1 (Endo 2007; Schulze 2004). Similarly, the Uyghur émigré community was also active outside China and provided financial supports for separatist movement in Xinjiang. Such organizations include the Uyghur American Association, the Eastern Turkestan National Freedom Center, Europe-based Eastern Turkestan Union, to name a few (Chung 2002; Van Wie Davis 2010). In this regard, we contest that diaspora communities do not matter when it comes to the outcome of secession movement in the homeland.
2.2.2 Stage I

As we have excluded nine competing explanatory factors in the previous parts, in the following, we try to identify the crucial difference that accounts for the different political outcomes between these two cases. Four oppressive approaches were adopted by both Jakarta and Beijing against the secession movements in the stage 1; nevertheless, only the Indonesian administrations in the post-Suharto period shifted its ethnic policy from the repressive one to the reconciliatory one. Thus, we prove that it is the states’ reconciliatory approach that contributes to the peaceful settlement of separatist movements in authoritarian and transitional countries.

2.2.2.1 Armed Crackdown

To suppress their internal challengers, both Jakarta and Beijing launched intensified anti-separatism campaigns (Bovingdon 2004; Shichor 1994). During the Suharto’s regime, violence, especially that of TNI was institutionalized as a mechanism to maintain and restore the order (Yamamoto 2001). The enforcement of DOM and martial law implemented in 2003 further gave TNI a free hand to do everything possible to crush the Acehnese separatists (Askandar 2007; Smith 2010). Production and Construction Crops in Xinjiang, on the other side, played a major role in preventing over 8,600 people from crossing the borders during the mass migration in 1962, and quelling the 1990 Baren uprising and other mass incidents (Bovingdon 2004; Dillon 2006).
2.2.2.2 Human Rights Abuse

The state apparatuses were reported to commit arbitrary arrest, extra-judicial executions, torture and disappearances of civilians in the two cases (Amnesty International 1999; Human Rights Watch 2003; Human Rights Watch 2009; Kooistra 2001; Shinmen 2003; Woodier 2006; Van Wie Davis 2010). During the armed confrontation in Aceh, especially during the DOM period (1989-1991), TNI was alleged to engage in crimes targeting the civilian Acehnese, including school and house burning, and sexual violence (Askandar 2007; Human Rights Watch 2002). In Xinjiang’s case, some Uyghur intellectuals, activists and persons of influence were clamped down during the “strike hard” campaigns (Bovingdon 2004; Shinmen 2003).

2.2.2.3 Terrorism Allegations

Since September 11, 2001, Jakarta and Peking attempted to label GAM and ETIM as terrorists; by doing so, the two governments tried to justify their oppression toward the separatist groups. There is no denying that some members of GAM and ETIM did have connection with terrorist groups, yet scholars see terrorist allegations as an excuse to victimize the innocent population (Bovingdon 2002; Chung 2002; Dillon 2006; Van Wie Davis 2010). After the Bali bomb attack in 2002, Indonesian officials blacklisted groups such as GAM with the term ‘terrorist’ (Askandar 2007). Beijing pressured the other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to crack down on Uyghur “terrorists” active within their countries (Bovingdon 2004).
2.2.2.4 Religious and Cultural Restrictions

As President Suharto prohibited political activities by any organizations, activities of *ulamas* in general, and those of All-Acehnese Ulama Association (PUSA) in particular, were restricted (Kooistra 2001). The freedom to undertake educational and religious activities based on the Islamic value in Aceh was undermined by the introduction of Law No.5/1974 (Ichikura 2008). Meanwhile, the Chinese government adopted Muslim-unfriendly policies such as imposing prohibitions on clandestine Koran study classes, breaking up unauthorized *madrassah* (scripture schools), and examining loyalty of imams to the communist party (Bovingdon 2004; Shichor 1994). Furthermore, when students asked for greater respect for Uyghur culture, Beijing decided to phase out bilingual education and degrade the use of Uyghur language (Bovingdon 2010).

2.2.3 Stage II and Crucial Difference

All the four presidents in the post-Suharto period employed the dual-track “strategy toward GAM, namely trying to solve the conflict via political channels on the one hand, and reinstalling security operations on the other. Those presidents attempted to signal their willingness to solve the conflict in Ache through enactment of legislation, peaceful dialogue and withdrawal of TNI form Aceh. However, as Miller (2009) argues, the presence of the relatively powerful military in Indonesian politics and the battle fields in Aceh prevented the complete reconciliatory approach from the outset. It is reported that around 12,000 military personnel were still stationed in the province during the final months of DOM (Miller 2009).
The Habibie administration not only implemented the non-organic troop withdrawal from Aceh represented, but also passed Law No. 22/1999 on ‘Regional Government’ and Law No.25/1999 on ‘Fiscal Balance Between the Central Government and the Regions’, which are conceived as foundation for an autonomy framework (Miller 2009). Moreover, by issuing Law No.44/1999 concerning ‘Special Status of the Province of Aceh Special Region’, the state formally recognized its special status in Indonesia. However, these efforts were unable to prevent further separatist sentiments and the Habibie administration could not fully implement its reconciliatory approach (65% of TNI personnel was temporarily withdrawn from Aceh), for the authority over Aceh security decision was later transferred to General Wiranto, who undertook a new round of military operation in Aceh (Askandar 2007; Miller 2009; Nishi 2001).

Similar to his predecessor, President Abdurrahman Wahid also signaled reconciliatory gestures by ordering a complete withdrawal of non-organic troop from Aceh, launching human right investigations, and releasing GAM political prisoners. With the help of Henry Dunant Centre (HDC), a Geneva-based NGO, both parties signed a ‘Joint Understanding of Humanitarian Pause for Aceh’ on May12, 2000. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) did not bring peace to Aceh, in that after the official non-organic troop withdrawal, Jakarta (especially TNI) insisted on the continuation of military operations in Aceh. As Aceh’s security situation deteriorated, some 20,000 security forces were allowed to operate military campaign in Aceh in mid-2000 (Miller 2009).

Upon coming to power, Megawati Sukarnoputri prioritized national cohesion and territorial integrity over the democratic solution in the conflict with GAM. She did not order the withdrawal of any military personnel from Aceh; instead, approximately 30,000 security forces and 5,000-6,000 militias were active by 2001 vis-à-vis some 3,000 GAM members (Miller 2009).
Even though the Megatawi administration introduced the Law No.18/2001 on ‘Special Autonomy for the Province of Nanggrooe Aceh Darussalam’ that gave more wide-ranging autonomy to Aceh, and both sides signed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in 2002, the cease-fire was not realized. Following the breach of agreements, the martial law status and the repressive approach were put in place. Consequently, 38,000 to 44,000 military personnel were involved in the military operations (Miller 2009).

President Yudhoyono, who sought to reopen formal peace talks with GAM, did not immediately change the repressive approach toward GAM, either. The number of the military personnel in Ache reached to 50,000 by 2005 (Miller 2009). However, with the international community’s assistance and pressure, both GAM and Jakarta accepted the Crisis Management Initiatives (CMI)’s offer and entered into negotiations in the post-tsunami period. After three rounds of talks, Jakarta conceded to grant greater powers to Aceh, while GAM gave up its demand for independence and agreed to dissolve its military wing, which finally led to the signing of the Helsinki MoU on August 15, 2005. Provisions of the Helsinki MoU included withdrawing all non-organic armed forces from Aceh except 4,800 TNI and police forces who were assigned to safeguard the peace process and public order, and introduction of Law No. 11/2006 on ‘the Governing of Aceh’ (LoGA) (Miller 2009).

As we can see from the description above, all four Indonesian presidents applied the dual track strategy to settle the separatist movement in Aceh. However, these “half-minded” efforts of the Indonesian administrations during the post-Suharto period failed to end the conflict in Aceh. It was not until the Yudhoyono administration fulfilled its obligation to withdraw all non-organic armed personnel from the prince that the dissolution of GAM and the peaceful settlement were realized. This is consistent with our hypothesis: the states’ reconciliatory approach is more likely
to peacefully settle the secession movements. This claim can be tested in Xinjiang, China where the conflict between ETIM and Beijing is still ongoing in the absence of the reconciliatory approach that offers ethno-political groups a peace agreement, completely withdraws security forces from conflict areas, and respects unique life of the Uyghurs. In this regard, at least in the contexts of transitional and authoritarian regimes, it appears that the reconciliatory approach, especially the withdrawal of military personnel and the peace agreement protected by legislature, is a contributory variable that accounts for explaining why some separatist movements can be settled peacefully.
3. Supplementary Comparative Analysis and Explanations

In this section, we compare political movement led by the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, and sporadic rebellions allegedly led by various political organizations in three southernmost provinces of Thailand. To modify our strategic weakness in this study, we include another “pairwise” comparison to our study as supplementary analysis, and use the Method of Agreement to identify a crucial similarity between these two cases that lead to the same political outcome, despite all the other factors being different.

Due to the limited space of this paper, we will not discuss Bangladesh-Thailand comparison in detail. The logic here is just opposite from the one we applied for the Method of Difference in the previous section. By demonstrating that all nine competing explanatory variables that we have rejected in the Section 2 are not consistent between Bangladesh and Thailand, once again we attempt to challenge validity of these variables. Furthermore, by showing that these two transitional democracies both shifted their strategy from the repressive one to the reconciliatory one, and that they generated the similar political outcomes, we conclude that it is this crucial similarity that accounts for peaceful settlement between rebels and states in our supplementary cases. Nevertheless, such settlements are far from complete. There is no denying that both Bangladesh and Thai governments sought peaceful settlement in handling with ethnic insurgencies, but their reconciliatory approach is less complete in relation to the one implemented by the Indonesian administrations.
The rest of this section is organized as follows. First, we introduce historical backgrounds for these two violent ethno-political movements respectively organized by the CHT people in Bangladesh and the Malay Muslims in Thailand. Second, we briefly compare these two cases and emphasize that these two movements produce the similar political outcomes, given nine overall differences and one crucial similarity. Third, we present short counter arguments for possible alternative explanations.

3.1 The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh

The CHT Manual introduced by the British, to some extent, enabled the CHT to remain as an “autonomous political entity” in the pre-colonial period (Ahsan and Chakma 1989; Rahman 2011; Tripura 2012). Grievances of the CHT people can be dated back to the Pakistan regime, which revoked the special status of the CHT and prioritized the large-scale development projects in this area over local interests (Rahman 2011; Van Schendel, Mey and Dewan 2001). A sense of frustration in the CHT became further intensified under the following Bangladeshi military and quasi-military rule (Mohsin 2003). To counter state-imposed “Bangladeshization” policy, the military-led genocide, and settlement program that violated their traditional land rights, the CHT people formed the PCJSS in 1972 (Arens 2011; Mohsin 2003; Tripura 2012). The CHT people and their organizations started to mobilize and raise their demand for regaining their lost political autonomy (Ahsan and Chakma 1989; Chowdhury 2008).

The civilian governments that came to power since 1991 initiated the peaceful settlement with the CHT insurgent leaders by offering manage power and locally-oriented administrative institution like regional council (Chowdhury 2008; Mohsin 2003). Pressure from international
donors and the withdrawal of India’s support from the PCJSS also pushed negotiations between the PCJSS leaders and the state, finally leading to the signing of the Peace Accord in 1997 (Mohsin 2003, Rahman 2011). Nevertheless, the process and objectives of peaceful settlement has been impeded by the following factors. First, the state failed to address the key demands of the PCJSS, namely the withdrawal of Bengali settlements, full demilitarization of the CHT, and formal recognition of the identity and rights (Arens 2011; Mohsin 2003). Second, as the Peace Accord is not protected by legislature, it is possible that a new regime could change its provisions (Mohsin 2003). Third, human rights violations attributable to the army continue (Arens 2011).

3.2 The Deep South in Thailand

The Malay Muslims in Thailand are mainly concentrated in the southernmost provinces that compose the territory of the former sultanate of Patani (Kobkua 2008). When Patani was forcibly incorporated into the Thai kingdom, the latter attempted to integrate the Malay Muslims by respecting their culture and religion, and granting Islamic legal autonomy and Malay political representation (Chalk 2008; Davisakd 2008; Liow 2006b). Thereafter, however, these Deep South provinces were placed under the direct control of the Ministry of the Interior, and aspects of the Malay Muslim way of life were circumscribed in the name of the nation-building program (Chalk 2008; Davisakd 2008; International Crisis Group 2005; Kobkua 2008). As a response, Malay Muslim leaders, who obtained de facto leadership after the removal of local government structure, made the first demand for more political autonomy in the 1940s¹, which

¹ The first Malay-Muslim resistance to Siamese occupation occurred in 1903 (International Crisis Group 2005), yet it focus on power, status, and interests of traditional elites rather than on ethno-political concerns. On the other hand,
was rejected by the then Thai cabinet (Thanet 2008). The Malay Muslim political movement in southern Thailand has maintained secular, insular and exclusive characteristics (Liow 2006b). Many believe that various ethnic groups that mobilized collective action of the Malay Muslims are mostly aimed at national liberation, local autonomy or establishment of an independent Muslim state, yet the connection between the mobilization and actual violence in the Deep South is poorly understood (CSR Report 2007, Jory 2007; Liow 2006b; Thanet 2008).

Reaction of the Thai government is somehow mixed. The Thai authorities blamed the Malay Muslim separatist groups on periodical attacks to police station, officials or schools in the early 1980s and late 1990s (Chalk 2008; Chongkittavorn 2004). Endeavor was made by Bangkok during the 1980s to 1990s includes local economic development in the Deep South, introduction of political representation, and establishment of Borders Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), a local conflict-resolution agency. During this period of time, violence dropped off significantly (International Crisis Group 2005). The Taksin administration, however, imposed martial law across the provinces of the Deep South, transformed authorities to heavy-handed police, and dissolved the SBPAC (Liow 2006b; Peter Chalk). Recently, the Thai government advocated negotiations with separatist groups, publicly apologized to Muslim leaders for the past repressive approach, and acknowledged the importance of Islamic law (Chalk 2008; CSR Report

Thanet (2008) argues that the charge of “separatism” movement led by Haji Sulong Abdul Kadir in 1947 was “in fact invented and reinforced by the Thai authorities in order to suppress and intimidate the regions, to discourage political assertions of their aspirations and identities.” Such allegation can be supported by the fact that not a single Malay-Muslim has so far been convicted of actual violence and that not a single militant organization has yet been accused based on concrete information in recent years (Liow 2006a). Meanwhile, other studies are concerned that the separatism movement might be influenced by the global terrorists and transformed into Islamic fundamentalist violence (Chalk 2008; Chongkittavorn 2004; CSR Report 2006; CSR Report 2007).
Nevertheless, without the withdrawal of security forces and the peace agreement protected by legislature, policy implementation and law enforcement are weak (CSR Report 2007).

**Table 2: Comparison between the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Deep Sout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall differences</th>
<th>The Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh)</th>
<th>The Deep South (Thailand)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Demands</td>
<td>political autonomy</td>
<td>mixed aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-Sharing Institutions</td>
<td>repealed autonomous status</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Change</td>
<td>transmigration program</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Representation</td>
<td>restricted representation</td>
<td>moderate representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Disparity</td>
<td>less income inequality</td>
<td>severe income inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Natural Resources</td>
<td>gas, coal, and copper</td>
<td>scant natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamist Identity</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
<td>support from India</td>
<td>alleged support from Islamic organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>exiled Muslims in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Crucial similarity | a repressive approach to a reconciliatory approach |

### 3.3 Supplementary Comparative Analysis

It is interesting to compare the CHT in Bangladesh and the Deep South in Thailand because all competing explanatory factors mentioned in the existing literature have nothing in common between these two cases but the state’s shift from the repressive approach to the reconciliatory approach (even if the transition was not complete). On the one hand, the violent ethno-political mobilization in the CHT was by no means a separatism movement. On the other hand, political demands made by the ethno-political groups in the Deep South were not unified;
some advocated for independence, while some sought local autonomy. The second difference is that when the two areas were incorporated into the modern states, the CHT enjoyed political autonomy under the British control but such status was revoked by later Pakistan and Bangladesh regimes, while only cultural and legal autonomy was granted to the region of the former Patani. Thirdly, we can rule out the democratic factor as grievances in the CHT were aggravated by the state’s transmigration programs, which were not implemented in the Deep South at all.

Under the principle of majority rule, only three representatives were elected from the CHT (from 1996-2001) (Mohsin 2003), while moderate political representation of the Malay Muslims in Thailand has been sustained for almost seventeen years (Utarasint, 2005). Economic disparity is not an explanatory factor in this “pairwise” comparison, either. Household annual net income in the CHT was close to the national average level (Rahman 2011), whereas Narathiwat from the Deep South had a per capita GDP barely 0.40 times the national average in 1997 (Brown 2010). By the same token, we can ignore the access to natural resource variable; the Deep South does not boast natural resources such as oil and gas, yet its political movement had resisted for more than 50 years.

Obviously, the Islamist identity is not a contributory variable, given that the CHT people are not Muslims at all. Even though both movements received external support, it can be argued that they differed in the form. India was the “kin state’ for the CHT people and provided political as well as military support. Meanwhile, alleged military and financial support from the external Islamic organizations was considered as negligible in the case of Thailand. Despite the variations in this variable, these two cases produced the similar political outcomes. Thus, we contest this theory as well. Last but not least, it is safe to exclude the factor of diaspora communities; the
armed groups in the southern Thailand had connection with the émigré in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, while the ethno-political group in the CHT was free from such influence.

3.4 Alternative Explanations

We claim that it is the states’ reconciliatory approach, such as the withdrawal of military and the peace agreement protected by legislature that eases tensions between states and ethnic groups, and thus contributes to peaceful settlements. However, this paper can be challenged by alternative explanations. A first possible alternative explanation for the argument presented in this paper is that the change in the rebel group’s strategy causes the shift in the central government’s strategy, not vice versa. We turn to the case of Aceh to examine potential endogeneity bias. Whatever the rebels’ response, when the military had operations in Aceh and a stronger bargaining power in the decision-making process, and when any of the Indonesian presidents was not ready to use the complete reconciliatory approach, the Indonesian government tended to see annihilation of GAM as the best choice (Miller 2009). It can be further argued that GAM did not stop anti-regime rebellion until the provisions to withdraw all non-organic armed forces from Aceh was finally guaranteed by the Indonesian government.

A second possible alternative explanation for the argument discussed in this paper suggests that it is not the states’ reconciliatory approach but it is democratic institutions per se matter in solving secession movement. There is no denying that ethno-political movements were resolved peacefully in Aceh, and to a lesser extent, in Bangladesh and Thailand since their democratization. However, we argue that in transitional democracies, such as Bangladesh and Thailand, violent political movements have not completely solved. As a matter of fact, this can be
attributed to the fact that these two governments have not granted concrete political autonomy to the CHT and the Malay Muslims through legislation, and formally recognized these ethnic minorities’ unique identities. Another counter-argument can be made based on the Indonesia’s experience that these democratically elected administrations also attempted to end the conflict by resorting to the oppressive approach in the past.

Finally, a third possible alternative explanation for the argument presented in this paper is that the size of ethno-political groups relative to the size of the area where the political movement is taking place might have a crucial influence on the political outcome as well. According to this view (Posner 2004), a separatism movement will be more salient and less likely to be resolved peacefully, if members of the movement take up larger proportion of the population in the area concerned. The relative size of a separatism movement might have an influence on magnitude of the violence it causes, but this alternative explanation does not account for the variations in the political outcomes. On the one hand, more unified and widespread GAM was dissolved peacefully, while ETIM that had not escalated into a large-scale armed rebellion still survive in Xinjiang. On the other hand, widely supported ethno-political movement in the CHT as well as the Deep South that was unable to “command mass support” (Liow 2006b) had subsided after the central governments adopted the incomplete reconciliatory approach.
4. Conclusion

There is no denying that the Yudhoyono administration has its own shortcoming in the implementation; it is criticized that President Yudhoyono redeployed up to 1,000 troops to Aceh for security concerns, that in reality the LoGA delivered less than had been agreed upon in the Helsinki MoU, and that the legislative branch also failed to meet the deadline stipulated for enactment (Miller 2009). However, the reconciliatory approach can ease the pain caused by ethno-political conflicts, especially when it is combined with substantial political autonomy. The Indonesian government has demonstrated its determination to acknowledge its repressive approach during the past 30-year confrontation with GAM by offering amnesty to all GAM members, and establishing the Commission Truth and Reconciliation in Aceh. In addition, after the peaceful settlement, the Indonesian government respected the religious traditions and customs of Acehnese by allowing them to implement Islamic law and establish an Islamic judicial system in Aceh. More importantly, with provisions for direct democratic local election and formation of regional political parties, Aceh was given political privileges that other provinces did not have. It is worth noting that the former GAM leader was elected as Aceh’s new governor in the local election (Endo 2007; Miller 2009). It is clear that the reconciliatory approach of the Indonesian government, particularly those expressed in the spirit of the Helsinki MoU and the LoGa, played a major role in pushing GAM to give up its demand for independence, and finally settling the conflict that lasted more than three decades peacefully.

From the Indonesian, Bangladesh and Thai governments’ experience in containing the violent ethno-political movements, we reaffirm that systems of autonomy per se do not peacefully
settle conflicts between the states and the ethno-political groups who seek independence or demand greater self-governing powers in the Third World. Our objections are twofold. First, autonomy can still be undermined by the Third World states as long as strong military is present in the autonomous regions. Laws issued before the LoGA granted some extent of autonomy to Aceh, yet they did not prevent the recurrent military operations in Aceh and escalations ethno-political conflicts. Second, autonomy itself is unlikely to prevent another violent political movement once the central governments and ethno-political groups encounter conflicting interests. When the Indonesian administrations signaled their willingness to resolve the conflict in Aceh by adopting the oppressive approach and restricted political channels such as protests and freedom of speech, GAM continued to resort to violence as a means to fulfill its political aspirations. Therefore, our study also provides rudimentary evidence for supporting the literature on anti-autonomy argument.

Now that we have proved the reconciliatory approach as an effective mechanism for resolving ethno-political movements in the Third World such as Indonesia, Thailand, and Bangladesh, we have three recommendations for the Chinese government in respect to the Xinjiang issue. First, the CCP leaders should stop stamping out the separatist problem by deploying security forces and resorting to oppression. To avoid fuelling separatist sentiments, the Chinese government should change its high-handed attitude and try to offer negotiations with separatist groups in a fair and sincere manner. Second, the Chinese government should grant substantial autonomy to the Uyghur population, instead of maintaining the autonomous status in all but name. To safeguard autonomy granted to the ethnic minorities, relevant laws should be enacted to check the center’s discretionary powers and protect fragile rights of the Uyghurs. Third, the Chinese government should respect traditional practices of ethnic groups and uphold
religious freedom. It is true that separatist movement by Muslim minorities gained popular support through network of mosques; however, this should not be an excuse to violate the freedom of religion.

Nevertheless, these recommendations are unlikely to be implemented in China unless (1) democracy and legal system are fully developed, and (2) legal culture to respect human rights is nourished. In other words, this paper has not provided the causal mechanism behind the shift in the Indonesian administrations’ ethnic policies, particularly during the Yudhoyono administration. From the Indonesian experience, we might attribute the change to the personal charisma of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, dynamics of the power relation between the civil administrations and TNI, the role of international agencies, or 2004 tsunami that created “a new window of opportunity for both sides to reassess their own positions” (Willer 2009). It appears that the shift in the state’s approach was more related to changes in political arena per se than to what was happening on the ground. This might be the next Gordian knot that we are going to cut in the future.
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46


