

Xinjiang: The human rights turbulence persists (1978-2007)

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Abstract: This article analyses the human rights condition in Xinjiang. The aim is to analyse the changes in the human rights conditions influenced by internal and external factors. Noticeably, the human rights conditions in Xinjiang have never been static experiencing a rather “turbulent” journey. This article covers a timeframe of four periods. The first part refers to the human rights conditions prior to the 1978 reforms. The second part discusses Deng’s reforms in the 1980s and how they have improved conditions in Xinjiang. The third part elaborates on the human rights conditions in the 1990s. It is essential to note that during this period, human rights and security conditions started to decline again. The final part focuses on the human rights conditions in the aftermath of September 11, 2011. This article demonstrates the “up and down” trends in the human rights conditions in Xinjiang.

Keywords: Xinjiang, Uyghur, human rights, China, Muslim minorities.

Introduction

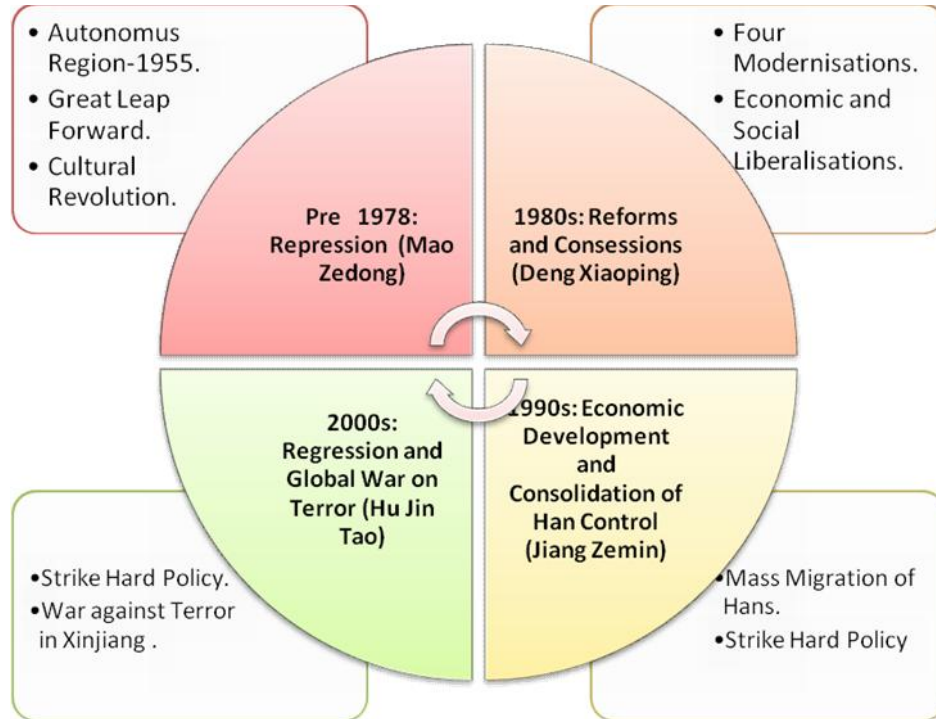
Xinjiang or Sinkiang is situated at the northwest of China about 4000 km from Beijing. Xinjiang is located on the ancient ‘Silk Road’ which was a popular route between the East and the West. Xinjiang was formerly known as East Turkestan and became a Chinese territory during the Manchu dynasty in the mid-eighteenth century and was administered by the military. In 1884, it was declared a Chinese province and renamed Xinjiang which means “New Borders” in Chinese. In 1911, after the fall of the Manchu dynasty, Xinjiang became part of the Republic of China under the Kuomintang Party (KMT). In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of Xinjiang from the KMT and declared that Xinjiang was to be an autonomous region in 1955.

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Ethnicity in Xinjiang can be divided into two main categories: the Turkic people who are natives of Xinjiang and non-Turkic people such as the Han Chinese, Russians, Manchurians and Indians. The Turkic people are made up of the Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Uzbeks and Tajiks with the Uyghurs being the largest. The Uyghurs in Xinjiang are Muslims and they share a common heritage, language and religion with other Turkics living in Central Asia. The objective of the study is to analyse several pertinent issues regarding human rights in Xinjiang. As shown in Figure 1, human rights condition in Xinjiang can be analysed by dividing the period from 1978 to 2007 into four phases. Keeping the phases in view, this study attempts to answer the following questions: what is the condition of human rights in Xinjiang? In what ways are the human rights conditions in Xinjiang different between 1978 and 2007? Besides, what are the internal and external factors that have influenced China's policy towards human rights condition in Xinjiang since 1978?

Human rights conditions in Xinjiang prior to the 1978 reforms

In September 1949 (Millward, 2005: 237) the Kuomintang (KMT) forces surrendered to the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The initial task of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was to establish a new administration in the province by gaining support from the various parties including the Uyghur nationalists and the disbanded KMT forces. At that moment the CCP adopted a tolerant policy with the aim of creating a "united front." Prior to 1949, the Muslims in Xinjiang were allowed to practice the *sharġ'ah* legal system in line. The Islamic religious authorities at that time were funded by tithes or *zakġt* and rent from endowment landholdings or *waqf*. In 1949, there were at least 12,000 mosques in the city of Kashgar and 300 Muslim religious teachers or *ahung* (Millward, 2005: 247).

Figure 1: Evolution of Human Rights Conditions in Xinjiang 1978-2007

It is essential to note that once the CCP took over the province, it continued to allow religious freedom and did not attempt to prohibit the rights and privileges of the *ahungs*. The CCP at that time needed the support of the local leaders including the *ahungs*. Therefore, in October 1955, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR or *Xinjiang Weiwuerzizhiqu*) was established (Dreyer, 1976: 104). The establishment of the XUAR has given the non-Hans the opportunity to govern the lower levels of administration with positions such as the chairmen of counties, districts and prefectures. This was part of the appeasement policy adopted by the CCP to obtain support from the Uyghur leaders. However, it is noteworthy to mention that where the non-Hans held the local chairmanship positions, the Hans held the vice-chairmanship positions (McMillen, 1979: 44). Although Xinjiang had been granted the status of an autonomous region, the actual administrative power of the province remained in the hands of the Hans in Beijing.

However, it gradually introduced atheistic principles in order to prevent ethnic and religious unrest. Nevertheless, the situation began to change when the CCP consolidated its position in the province. Hence, beginning in the 1960s, the

CCP started introducing repressive policies which replaced the gradual and accommodative policies. Both internal and external factors had contributed to the change of policies. This includes the Sino-Soviet rivalry which influenced Beijing to adopt harsh policies. In addition to the Sino-Soviet rivalry, the CCP also intended to eliminate the Soviet influence in Xinjiang especially in the economic sector and many Uyghurs at that time were educated in Russia and spoke very fluent Russian. Unfortunately, the political turmoil between China and the Soviet Union encouraged the CCP to adopt repressive policies which resulted in a decline of human rights conditions.

Besides, the CCP was suspicious towards Islam and the Uyghur traditions which they labelled as feudalistic and anti-revolution. Hence, they were convinced that the influence of Islam and Uyghur traditions should be wiped out. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards opposed the policies of accommodation and local autonomy; therefore, many Uyghurs were deprived of their jobs in the government. In 1962, there were 111,500 Uyghurs working for the provincial government holding various posts such as clerks, polices, district and county chairmen. However, in 1975, there were only 80,000 non-Hans left working in the government (Milward, 2005:270).

Uyghur political leaders such as Burhan, the former Governor of Xinjiang and Iminov, the Vice-Chairman of XUAR, were stripped off their positions in the government. They were accused of treason and purged. Apart from being deprived of their political and civil rights, the Uyghurs also encountered religious and cultural persecution. Religious tolerance as prescribed by the PRC Constitution of 1949 was as good as dead. All Uyghur traditional dance and music were prohibited. This included engagement and marriage ceremonies and circumcision rituals. They were not allowed to keep any traditional musical instruments. The conditions turned for the worse during the reign of the 'Gang of Four'. Mao's wife Jiang Qing, who was one of the members of the Gang of Four, had openly expressed her hatred of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. She was quoted as saying "what is special about your tiny Xinjiang? I despise you" (McMillen, 1979: 298). She even called the minority nationalities including the Uyghurs as "foreign invaders and aliens."

In addition, anti-Islamic and anti-Uyghur propaganda intensified. According to one of the Uyghurs who lived in Yengisar county, located not far from Kashgar in 1971:

Several white and black pigs were kept in a building people called 'mosque'. There was a small window on the wall. I was too short to be able to see the pigs from the window, so my elder sister put me on her shoulder. When I grew older I found out that almost all the mosques in our region were turned into pig houses. Even Uyghur songs were written in praise of pigs (McMillen, 1979: 298).

Deng Xiaoping's reforms and human rights conditions in Xinjiang in the 1980s

The demise of Mao Zedong and the failure of the Gang of Four to seize power in 1976 enabled Deng Xiaoping to return to power. In 1978, Deng was installed as the Chairman of the CCP during the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee held in Beijing which gave him full control in the administration of China. Hence, he started his reform policies which emphasized political stability through economic development rather than ideological approach.

Deng Xiaoping believed that the CCP should change its policies toward the minorities and that it should return to the accommodative policies of the 1950s, instead of conducting assimilation by force. Economic development in minority areas such as Xinjiang, Tibet, Kansu, Qinghai and Ningxia became a major concern of the CCP. Its aim was to integrate the economy of the western region with central China. Deng was convinced that through these accommodative policies, the CCP would be able to reconcile with the minorities and gain their cooperation in development. Therefore, in 1978, one of the earliest efforts undertaken by Deng Xiaoping was to restore the Nationalities Affairs Commission (NAC) (McMillen, 1979: 277). The objective of the NAC was to coordinate and oversee administrative matters in regards to the minorities. This was a part of Deng's efforts to restore the basic rights of the minorities.

Subsequently, several missions were made by party leaders to investigate for themselves the actual conditions in the minority areas. In 1981, Deng Xiaoping himself made a ten-day tour of Xinjiang to observe conditions in the province (MacKerras, 1994:155). During his visit, he noticed that despite its economic potential, there was rampant poverty in Xinjiang. Deng was keen to restore autonomy to the province but he also emphasised that the principle of autonomy and self-rule should be enshrined in a special law. In May 1984, the National People's Congress passed a law which strengthened local autonomy in accordance to the Chinese Constitution of 1978 (MacKerras, 1994). The law allowed Uyghurs the right to observe their culture publicly and it even encouraged the usage of the

Turkic language in the administrative affairs of the province. The relations between the Chinese government and the Uyghurs suffered as a result of attempts made by the government during the Cultural Revolution to destroy the practise of Islam. Hence, the CCP took several measures to improve the living conditions and provided some basic human rights to the Uyghurs. One of the major improvements was the efforts to reconcile with the Uyghurs. Religious freedom was granted. Islamic religious texts such as *al-Qur' n* and *Hadith* were printed by the XIA and made available in bookshops (Debata, 2007: 87).

However, it is essential to note that greater religious freedom had been granted but the teaching of Islam in public schools was still prohibited (*China Rights Forum*, 2005:19). Formal Islamic education and classes were not allowed in schools; the government allowed the study of the *Qur'En* and *adth*, but they were considered as literature studies of the Uyghurs and Huis. However, the CCP stressed those Islamic religious activities should promote patriotism and never sow dissension or undermine national unity. One of the major reconciliatory efforts undertaken by Beijing was to declare that all minorities living in the PRC have equal rights. The 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy for National Minorities also created a quota system for minority participation in the state's administration. For example, the positions of chairperson or vice-chairperson of the standing committees of the People's Congresses of the autonomous regions, prefectures or counties must also be a member of the minority.

The provincial authorities of the CCP began to emphasize education and training of Uyghur cadres, especially in the areas of technical and skilled work. With such liberalisation, Uyghurs and other Turkics were allowed to wear their native costume replacing the Mao suits (*Beijing Review*, June 25, 1984). Special attention was also given to overcome the socio-economic problems in Xinjiang, especially in the south, where the Uyghurs form the majority. In socio-economic matters, the pragmatic policies adopted by Deng Xiaoping aimed at transforming Xinjiang into a major producer of cotton, vegetable oil and grain in China. The province had begun selling large cotton surpluses to eastern China for processing. Most of the goods from Xinjiang were transported by land. One of the most important international trade centres was Horgos in the Yili valley. This was due to the reopening of the northern Xinjiang-Kazakhstan highway in 1983. Other new border crossings such as the Karakoram Highway which linked western Xinjiang with Pakistan and the Torugart Pass linking Kashgar to Bishkek the capital of Kyrgyzstan were reopened in the 1980s (Calla, 2004: 170).

The expansion of railroads and related services not only made transportation of goods and commodities much easier but also enabled individuals and troops to travel faster (See Table 1). Since the 1980s, Uyghurs living in Xinjiang were granted the right to travel abroad and to eastern China to do business. Similarly, Arabs, Russians, Pakistanis and Central Asians were allowed to visit Xinjiang for the same purpose. This enabled the Muslim Uyghurs to interact with other Muslims from regions such as the Middle East and Central Asia even though it was still part of the Soviet Union. Some Uyghur merchants travelled to Almaty, Kazakhstan. Many of them had relatives who migrated to Kazakhstan (George, 1966: 106).

Table 1: Transport, post and telecommunication services in Xinjiang (1978-98)

Indicators	1978	1998	Growth (percentage)
Length of railways (kms)	1, 030.5	23, 818	2, 221.3
Length of highways (kms)	23, 818	32, 762	37.6
Passenger traffic (both railway and highway)	9, 410, 000	217, 470, 000	2, 211
Volume of freight (million tones km) both railway and highway	106.96	553.6	417.6
Number of civil motor vehicles	37, 683	313, 655	732.4
Number of letters posted	48, 427, 000	65, 821, 000	35.9
Local urban telephone subscribers	18, 594	881, 020	4, 638.2

Source: Leong H. Liew, (2004), "Reaching Out to Taiwan, Keeping in Xinjiang: The Impact of Marketization and Globalization on National Integration," Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang (eds.), *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 211. Mahesh Ranjan Debata, (2007), *China's Minorities Ethnic-Religious Separatism in Xinjiang*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 116.

Hence, these contacts eased travel into the Central Asian republics. Moreover, it also enabled the Chinese to spread its influence in the Middle East and Central Asia as well as to counter the Soviet influence in the region, especially in Afghanistan.

It is noteworthy to mention that by the late 1980s, the liberal policies were halted due to the fear that Islam might provoke Uyghur nationalism in Xinjiang. The opening up of borders had increased contacts between the Uyghurs with other

Muslims living in Pakistan, Central Asia and the Middle East, which exposed them to radical ideas (Roy Anthony, 2007:93). Although the CCP undertook some conciliatory measures, they were unable to appease the Uyghurs. The Uyghurs demanded better employment opportunities and greater autonomy. Moreover, they wanted the CCP to stop the policy of mass migration of Hans into Xinjiang. In the late 1980s, Xinjiang encountered a period of armed resistance. They alleged that the CCP favoured the Hans and demanded equality among the nationalities. The Chinese authorities responded by sending in more troops into the province to subjugate them. These incidents contributed to the hostility between the Han Chinese authorities and the Uyghurs.

It is fair to say that following the political liberalisation and implementation of China's economic reforms in the 1980s, the human rights conditions in Xinjiang have improved. The Constitution of 1982 provided some basic religious freedom. Islamic religious sites in Xinjiang were restored and the usage of Uyghur language in local schools was allowed. Minority nationality cadres were trained by the CCP and they were given the opportunity to hold important positions in the government. The socio-economic rights of the minority in Xinjiang were also restored. Therefore, it has resulted in the improvement of the living standards in Xinjiang. As in other parts of China in the 1980s, Xinjiang witnessed notable achievements in economic development and infrastructural construction. Gunnar Jarring, a Swedish diplomat who visited the city of Kashgar for the second time in 1978 was impressed with the modernisation the city had experienced compared to his first visit fifty years earlier (Jarring, 1986). However, the CCP had made it clear that the freedom should not disrupt the stability of the state.

The 1990s challenges and human rights conditions in Xinjiang

Admittedly, the economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping have improved the human rights conditions in Xinjiang. However, the 1989 crackdown on the Tiananmen protest drastically altered the CCP's policy on human rights. Repression intensified and the CCP became more rigid in areas pertaining to human rights and democratisation. Noticeably, the CCP was convinced that successful socio-economic development was important to ensure civil and political liberties. According to the CCP, collective rights were much more crucial than individual rights. It emphasised that an authoritarian government was required to ensure the establishment of a market-oriented economy at the expense of political liberties. The CCP announced that when China reaches a high level of

development, it will result in the creation of a middle class within the Chinese society as well as enlightened political elites (Sullivan, 1999: 32).

If this development were to take place, it would then liberalise the political system, allowing greater political liberties such as human rights protection and democratisation. Therefore, the CCP would do whatever it takes to make sure that the political environment and security of the state were conducive for economic development. It was willing to sacrifice economic, social and cultural human rights as well as political and civil liberties as long as stability can be achieved. In Xinjiang, the CCP began to intensify the development programmes after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is worthy to note that the CCP felt that Xinjiang is an inalienable part of China, and during the Cold War, it was strategically important as it functioned as a 'buffer zone' against any possible Soviet intrusion into the central region of China. Until the mid-1980s, Xinjiang was considered by the Chinese planners as a military zone to counter any possible Soviet invasion. Therefore, this explains the delayed development in the province compared to other provinces in the eastern part of China.

However, the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 accelerated the economic development in the province. In the 1990s, the CCP intensified its efforts to develop Xinjiang. Apart from the absence of the Soviet threat, the development programme also aimed at improving the living standards of the Uyghurs. This was to appease their demands for self-determination by encouraging them to be involved in economic activities and upgrade their standards of living; thus reducing the possibilities of ethnic clashes between the Uyghurs and the Hans. In fact, Jiang Zemin himself was a firm believer that ethnic harmony in the province can be achieved through economic development (Sullivan, 1999: 32).

According to the *White Paper* published by the CCP in 2003, the living standards in Xinjiang had improved. The *White Paper* claims that since 1985, almost every rural home in Xinjiang owns a television, washing machine and a tape recorder (People's Republic of China, 2003: 30-31). In addition, the document also claimed that the people in Xinjiang devoted 10 per cent less of their income to food than they did in 1978. Another important point to note is that a survey was conducted by the University of Hong Kong in 2000, which showed that about 47 per cent of Uyghurs sampled in Urumqi were convinced that their standards of living since the reforms in the 1980s had risen. This study also demonstrated the existence of a well-off Uyghur urban middle class. However, 38 per cent of the respondents believed that they were still behind the Hans (Yee, 2003: 443).

Most of the acculturated and educated Uyghurs were either serving as officials in the government or in the forefront of the Uyghur nationalist movement. Among the Uyghur intelligentsia was Turgan Almas who had written several books regarding the uniqueness of the Uyghur culture and history. He also challenged the notion that the Uyghurs were once part of the Chinese race. He was condemned by the Chinese government for allegedly advocating “separatist ideas” (Yee, 2003: 443). Besides the case of Turgan Almas, another Uyghur scholar, KurbanWali, an anthropologist who had published his research regarding the early Uyghur civilisation, was also branded a “separatist” (Kostrzewa, 1996: 255). This is a paradox which continues to haunt the CCP since it adopted the tolerant and assimilation policies, which led to the rise of a modernised Uyghur community whose awareness of their rights, identity and history that may often be at odds with the Chinese interest in the province.

Another effect of the rapid economic development in Xinjiang during the 1990s was the increase of Han migrants into the province. Jiang Zemin was quoted as saying, “*Bu dao Xinjiang, buhao Han*” or “if you haven’t been to Xinjiang, you’re not a good Han!” As a result, more incentives have been offered to lure more ‘hao Hans’ or ‘good Hans’ from Central China to migrate to Xinjiang with the justification that this would ‘develop the West’ (Millward, 2005: 310). If this were to happen, the Uyghurs who are subjected to birth control policy would become a minority in their own province. Despite the call by Tomur Dawarnet, the Uyghur Chairman of the Regional Government to control the migration of Hans to the province, the CCP has continued with the policy of migration (ibid.). It should be noted that in Xinjiang, Uyghurs living in urban areas are allowed to have two children and those in rural areas three. It seems contrary to the one-child policy in China proper. However, the family planning policy has triggered anger among the Uyghur Muslims. Non-compliance may result in denial of medical and health benefits as well as salary cuts (*Xinjiang ribao*, 11 November 1998). According to one Uyghur, who worked for the health department in Xinjiang, “if our children are limited, we will disappear” (*Xinjiang Ribao*, 11 November 1998). In addition, the Han migrants are also permitted to have two children. This has been considered as an incentive for the Hans to migrate into Xinjiang.

It is essential to note that most of the medical doctors in Xinjiang are Han Chinese who speak very little Turkic. In addition, the medical facilities in the Uyghur areas are poor and lack even basic medical equipment and medicine (Kostrzewa, 1996: 261). All these have contributed to the decline of health conditions among the Uyghurs. Apart from that, since 1961, there have been over

forty nuclear tests conducted at Lop Nor which have exposed the locals to the dangers of radiation. Cancer rates, infant deformities and ecological contamination have been reported and they have increased in recent years (Kostrzewa, 1996: 261).

Although Xinjiang experienced rapid economic development in the 1990s, it appeared to benefit the Han migrants more than the locals (please refer to Table 2). In addition, the real administrative power of the province was in the hands of the Hans. By 1992, Wang Enmao who was a pragmatic leader retired and was replaced by hardliners such as Wang Lequan. Under Wang Lequan's leadership, any Uyghur who criticised the government would face persecution. Crackdowns intensified on Uyghurs who publicly encouraged their cultural identity. In addition, various government institutions such as the judicial system seemed to favour the Han migrants. The CCP also tightened its restrictions on Islam, especially since the resurgence of interest in religion in Central Asia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Table 2: Uyghur-Han income inequality by selected groups for 2010 (in Yuan)

Background Characteristics	Hans	Uyghurs
Age Group		
18-39	1,123-1,385	871-900
40-49	1,382-1,982	1,020-1,060
50-59	1,140-1,950	819-867
60 and above	589-748	708-781
Men	1,362-1,975	1,198-1,899
Women	886-856	619-806
Education		
Illiterate/Semi-literate	410-419	400-445
Primary School	564-761	522-592
Junior High School	722-859	653-719
Senior High School	1,158-1,881	701-821
Vocational School	1,266-1,900	912-1,198
Community College	1,823-1,990	916-1,502
University	1,311-2,074	1,075-2,033
CCP Member	996-1,524	980-1,775
Non-CCP Member	883-978	760-807
State Employee	883-1,219	940-1,195
Non State Employee	893-1,110	445-600

Background Characteristics	Hans	Uyghurs
Urumqi	951-1,141	892-899

Source: Xiaowei (January 2011), Uyghur-Han earning differentials in Urumchi, *The China Journal*, No. 65, 152.

The Uyghurs responded in a variety of ways, one of which was demonstrations such as the incident in Baren, Kashgar, in April 1990; the Ili demonstration in 1995 and the Yining demonstration in 1997. All these demonstrations were suppressed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and crackdowns intensified. The CCP reverted to harsh policies although they may not be as extreme as policies during the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, they still impinged on the freedom and rights of the Uyghurs. In March 1996, the CCP Central Committee drafted a document known as "Document No. 7." Document No. 7 comprised of a set of recommendations on ways to overcome "separatism" and "illegal religious activities" in Xinjiang. The document also emphasised the relevance of transporting Hans to Xinjiang in order for them to occupy important positions. This Document No. 7 also expressed the CCP's apprehension about granting the Uyghurs various social and cultural rights (Kostrzewa, 1996: 343).

Subsequently, in April 1996, the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau held a meeting chaired by President Jiang Zemin to discuss the security problems in Xinjiang. After the meeting, the Chinese government issued a classified document known as "Strike Hard" or *yanda*¹ which was indicative of Beijing's leadership in dealing with the challenges confronting Chinese rule in Xinjiang. The aim was to counter security problems in Xinjiang including separatism, religious extremism and ethnic unrest. In addition, it was also intended to safeguard the interest of the Hans in the province. It is important to note that the region's natural resources, economic and strategic importance have also been a factor for China to adopt the 'strike hard' policy towards the separatist activities. The 'strike hard' policy had legitimised the CCP's actions such as arbitrary arrest, public executions and the closing down of mosques which were against human rights norms. In other words, CCP justified its actions in the name of economic development.

According to Tomur Dawarnat, the former Chairman of the Regional Government, "we must maintain high vigilance to be strictly on guard against

¹ *Yanda* is the abbreviation of *yanlidajiyanzhongxingshifanzuihuodong* or 'Campaign to strike severely at serious criminal offences.'

religious infiltration of hostile forces from abroad. All illegal religious activities must be stopped. Religion cannot interfere in state administration of justice, education, marriage, culture and health. No permission will be granted to build new mosques. Private Qur' n courses will not be allowed" (Kostrzewa, 1996: 265).

In the field of education, many new restrictions were imposed upon the Uyghurs. The Chinese government began to ban historical works by Turghun Almas, who claimed that the Uyghur civilisation predates the Han dynasty, thus it contradicts the official Chinese historical interpretations which claim that Xinjiang has always been part of China ((Milward, 2005:344). According to Daniel Southerland, the Vice President of Programming/Executive Editor, Radio Free Asia, Washington DC, textbooks were rewritten so that the Uyghurs will not recognise their own history. He adds that the RFA has two Uyghur broadcasters who were formerly working as historians in Xinjiang, however, they were forced to flee China as they had written against China's version of Xinjiang history. In fact, many Uyghur schools in Xinjiang were so poorly equipped and deprived of basic facilities that the students had to sit and write on the floor compared to those in the Chinese schools. Students from the Chinese schools had better chances to further their studies and seek professional careers in Xinjiang or elsewhere in China (See Table 3).

Although the statistics published by the CCP indicated that the province experienced rapid economic development in the 1990s, unemployment had been high among the Uyghurs. Hans were concentrated in modern cities of northern and north eastern Xinjiang, including Urumqi, in comparison to the Uyghurs who occupy the south. The Uyghurs complained that racial abuse and discrimination against ethnic minorities became a common problem and they had no equal opportunity in employment.

Table 3: Comparison of Xinjiang's education level with other provinces

Regions	Provinces	No. of Universities and Colleges	No. of Middle Schools	No. of Primary Schools	Literacy Rate (percentage)
North China	Hebei	46	5, 076	46, 243	85.70
North East China	Liaoning	62	3, 517	14, 386	87. 87
East China	Zhejiang	35	3, 444	19, 700	82. 39
Central South	Guangdong	42	4, 795	24, 700	93. 14

China					
Northwest China	Xinjiang	18	2, 090	6, 962	75.32

Source: Abanti Bhattacharya, (July-September 2003) Conceptualizing Uyghur separatism in Chinese nationalism, *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 27, no. 3, 369. Mahesh Ranjan Debata, (2007), *China's Minorities Ethnic-Religious Separatism in Xinjiang*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 63.

Apart from racial discrimination, the social and cultural rights of the Uyghurs were also curtailed. For example, social and cultural forums known as the 'meshreps' was revived in 1994. However, the government was worried that the Uyghurs may use the meshreps to promote ethnic solidarity, therefore, in 1995 it banned them. In addition, any Uyghur leaders who publicly promoted Uyghur culture and traditions would be blacklisted by the government and they and their family members would suffer harassment (Amnesty International, April 1999). It should be noted that many Uyghurs considered the effort undertaken by the CCP in Xinjiang as "cultural genocide." The Uyghurs living in Xinjiang constantly cited three main principles of oppression which they had been facing. These are: 1) the efforts of the Chinese government to assimilate them into Chinese culture, 2) the Chinese efforts to expand and take over the non-Han areas and 3) the Chinese policy of encouraging divisions among the Uyghurs. Therefore, many Uyghurs viewed Xinjiang not as an autonomous region but a "Chinese colony" as well as a victim of "sinification" or "forced assimilation".

In order to control the Uyghur population in the province, the Chinese government initiated a birth control policy. The policy allowed Uyghur couples to have three children in rural areas and two children in urban areas. However, according to a report published by Amnesty International in April 1999, the authorities had exerted pressure on couples to reduce the number to two in the rural areas and one in urban areas. In addition, couples had to apply to have their child (Amnesty International, April 1999). In other words, pregnancies, be planned according to the quotas of permitted births allocated to a particular area for a given period. There had been cases where couples had to wait for a number of years until they were granted permission to have a child. If a woman became pregnant before obtaining the permission, she may be forced to abort the child although the practice is clearly prohibited by Islamic teachings. However, if the couple insisted on having the child, heavy penalties would be imposed upon them. Forced sterilisation had also been reported to be common practice in the province.

The harsh policies adopted by the government, to overcome the resistance from the Uyghurs, have deepened the anger and hatred between the two communities. A study conducted in 2000 by the University of Hong Kong revealed that there were deep rifts between the Uyghurs and the Hans. Although most of the Uyghurs were able to speak fluent Chinese, most of them (95 per cent) considered themselves to be residents of Xinjiang rather than Chinese citizens. In addition, most of the Uyghur respondents (91 per cent) took pride from being an Uyghur national (Yee, 2003: 437-444). It is also interesting to note that both the Hans as well as the Uyghurs agreed that the reforms in the 1980s had raised their standards of living. However, 40 per cent of Uyghurs believed that their standards of living had risen slower than those of Hans and most Uyghurs were convinced that there was a serious disparity of income between the Hans and the Uyghurs (Yee, 2003: 437-444).

Another source which reflected the human rights in Xinjiang during the 1990s was the report presented by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) in 1996 (Amnesty International, April 1999). China has been a signatory state to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) since the 1980s. In its findings, the UNCERD expressed concern over the lack of protective legal provisions for minority groups in China. In addition, the report also pointed out the problem of economic disparities, social and cultural benefits enjoyed by different ethnic groups which the UNCERD feared would lead to racial discrimination towards disadvantaged groups. The UNCERD also expressed concern over the lack of religious freedom in the provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet. The UNCERD reported cases of violations in Xinjiang of the right to security of persons and protection against violence or bodily harm as contained in Article 5(b) of the Convention. Apart from that, the UNCERD had also made several recommendations to the Chinese government. The recommendations were to review its policy on Han migration to the autonomous areas that would alter the demographic composition, to avoid restrictions on the practice of religion among the minorities and to make all acts of racial discrimination, as specified in Article 4 of the Convention, punishable by law (Yee, 2003: 437-444). However, China has yet to implement the recommendations made by UNCERD in Xinjiang. If they were implemented, human rights conditions would have improved and subsequent riots such as the July 2009 Riots would have been prevented.

Global war on terror and human rights in Xinjiang in the 2000s

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the US, China intensified its crackdown in Xinjiang. The Chinese government claimed that the security and stability of Xinjiang had been threatened by separatists and religious extremists. China even suggested that the separatists were linked to international terrorists (East Turkistan' terrorism part of international terrorism: FM spokeswoman). Ironically, China, which prior to the attacks of September 11 had never admitted that Xinjiang was facing problems, had openly called for international support in their struggle against domestic terrorism. On 21 January 2002, the Information Office of China's State Council published a document entitled *East Turkistan Terrorists Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity*. The aim of the document was to highlight the security problems in Xinjiang caused by the alleged 'East Turkistan terrorists.' The document claimed that the Uyghur separatists were supported by international terrorist organisations such as the Uzbekistan Islamic Liberation Movement and *al-Qaeda*. It also claimed that the separatist groups in Xinjiang were trained by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. According to the document, the alleged East Turkistan terrorist forces carried out more than 200 violent attacks in Xinjiang between 1999 and 2001, killing 162 people and wounding more than 440; the victims were from every ethnic group, grassroots cadres and even Islamic religious figures. On two occasions the Chinese Foreign Ministry had declared that Uyghur separatists have had close connections with the Taliban forces in Afghanistan (East Turkistan' terrorist forces cannot get away with impunity, 2002).

Since the September 11 attacks, the Chinese government declared that there were three forces which threatened the security of Xinjiang. They were separatist forces, religious extremist forces and terrorist forces (Wayne, 2008: 24). Hence, the authorities had strategized their efforts to fight against these three forces. The Chinese government had labelled them the 'Three Evil Forces'. The Chinese government intensified the 'Strike Hard' campaign to counter the 'Three Evils'(Ibid.) The 'Strike Hard' campaign which started in the mid-1990s was initially targeted at organised violent crime, but national and provincial authorities had expanded its scope to fight against political dissidents. In the case of Xinjiang, the CCP used it to eliminate separatism and illegal religious activities.

On 4 December 2001, the government organised a national conference on "Political and Legal Work" in Beijing. During the conference, the government called for more stringent laws to counter the so-called "three evil forces" (Muslims in China under repression after September 11). It is essential to note that the language used in these articles is vague, leaving it open to interpretation and

even manipulation for political purposes. For example, Article 120 of the Criminal Law makes it a criminal offence to be a member of a terrorist organisation. However, the term ‘terrorist organisation’ is not defined in the law. Therefore, the government may even consider a religious group or a peaceful political opposition as a ‘terrorist organisation.’ The vagueness of these provisions may enable the government to punish people peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Many Uyghurs have been detained because of alleged crimes they have committed against the state. For example, in January 2002, Tursunjan Amat, an Uyghur was sentenced to jail for reciting a poem in Xinjiang’s People’s Hall in Urumqi. The poem was considered inflammatory and was alleged to have a bad influence on the society. Similarly, in June 2003, Abdulghani Memetemin, an Uyghur teacher was sentenced to nine years in jail (Fahad, 2010). He was convicted of ‘providing state secrets to a foreign organisation’ but what he actually did was send news reports and the transcripts of the speeches of Chinese leaders to the East Turkestan Information Centre, a non-governmental organisation based in Germany. Anyone may risk being detained if they were discovered listening to Radio Free Asia (RFA). In 2005, Nurmemet Yasin, who is also an Uyghur, was sentenced to ten years in prison for writing an allegory comparing the Uyghur predicament with that of a pigeon in a cage (Fahad, 2010).

According to Amnesty International and Uyghur dissidents living abroad, prisoners have had their toenails extracted by pliers and were even burned with electric batons (Amnesty International, April 1999). In addition, it was reported that one of the prisoners was tortured by having horses’ hair inserted into his penis. He was so traumatised by this treatment in the prison that he attempted to commit suicide by beating his head against the radiator (Amnesty International, April 1999). The intense political crackdown in Xinjiang since 2001 may have caused thousands of people to be detained arbitrarily and some even sentenced to death and executed immediately after trials.

International human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have expressed concerns over abuses such as prolonged incommunicado detention, torture and harsh treatment towards political detainees. In 2005, Human Rights Watch reported that China “opportunistically used the post-11 September environment to make the outrageous claim that individuals disseminating peaceful religious and cultural message in Xinjiang are terrorists who have simply changed tactics.” According to the report, the Chinese government adopted a systematic repression approach in Xinjiang by closing

down mosques, vetting of Muslim religious leaders and executing of thousands of people (Nicolas, 2004).

During the preparations for the Olympic Games in 2008, the Chinese government increased its crackdown in Xinjiang. This was conducted in the name of security to counter the alleged “Uyghur Muslim separatists.” The Chinese officials alleged that the Uyghur separatists were planning to sabotage the Olympic Games by plotting to kidnap athletes and bring down commercial aeroplanes. As the official opening ceremony of the Olympic Games was drawing near, the government intensified the crackdowns. One of them was the closure of a mosque in Kalpin County, Xinjiang. The government accused the mosque of not putting up signs in support of China and for storing ‘illegal’ copies of the Holy Qur’ n as well as carrying out ‘unlawful’ religious activities. In addition, hotels in Beijing were told to be ‘extra cautious’ of their Uyghur guests as the government feared terrorist attacks by the Uyghur separatists. Unfortunately, this has increased the paranoia between the Hans and the Uyghurs. It was reported that some hotels in Beijing refused ethnic minorities, especially Uyghur Muslims, from renting their rooms during the Beijing Olympic Games (Ibid.). According to Nury A. Turkel, “large numbers of Uyghurs were evicted from major Chinese cities before the Olympics and they were not allowed to return after the Olympics.” (Congress of the United States of America, 2009: 4). Nury added that racial profiling targeting the Uyghurs is common in central China that caused the Uyghurs to be denied of basic services such as lodging, transportations and even public bathhouses. She cited an example of notices such as “No Uyghurs in our Hotels and Bathhouse” that was put up by hotel owners to discourage Uyghur guests (Ibid.).

In July 2009, President Hu Jintao, while attending the G8 meeting in Italy, had to cut short his trip and return to Beijing as riots broke out in Xinjiang. Subsequently, the President visited Xinjiang in August. He visited several Uyghur and Han villages. He expressed his gratitude to the police, militia and armed forces for their efforts in quelling the riots (<http://www.asianews>). President Hu Jintao condemned the acts of violence committed during the riots. Hu said that “the separatist forces are doomed to fail and their acts of sabotage will not shake the overall situation of the stable development of reforms in Xinjiang” (<http://www.asianews>). President Hu promised that more measures will be taken to increase economic growth and social development in Xinjiang and to improve the living and production conditions of the people of various ethnic groups.

In addition, he also expressed that future development in Xinjiang would be better and faster. Hu removed Wang Lequan from the post of First Secretary of the Communist Party of Xinjiang, which he held since 1995. Wang Lequan had been considered by the Uyghurs as a hardliner. His removal was part of Hu's goodwill effort to reconcile the Hans and the Uyghurs. Moreover, the victims among the Hans felt that Wang was not capable anymore of ensuring their safety. During Hu's visit, the *China Daily* reported that about 200 people were to be tried for taking part in the riots (<http://www.chinaeconomicreview.com>). Internet services, phones as well as various international social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter were blocked in Xinjiang. They were restored after several months. This was part of the government's efforts to block the flow of information in regards to the situation in Xinjiang after the riots.

Conclusion

The Uyghurs of Xinjiang have been governed by the People's Republic of China since 1949 and have gone through many changes under the different Chinese leadership (Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao). Despite the many struggles, hardships and discriminations, the Uyghurs have never given up their Turkic cultural and Islamic identity. For the Uyghurs, the Chinese have always been considered as a threat to their culture and identity. Under Mao Zedong's administration, the Chinese government had launched several attempts to separate the Uyghurs from their Islamic identity such as the Cultural Revolution.

The situation improved in the early 1980s after Deng Xiaoping took over the leadership of CCP. Religious and cultural practices were tolerated resulting in mosques re-opening. The new constitution guaranteed the basic political and social rights of the ethnic minorities including the Uyghurs. Unlike Mao, Deng Xiaoping was more pragmatic and keen on developing Xinjiang's natural resources. Deng needed support from the Uyghurs and he encouraged participation of locals in the administration. Therefore, the Uyghurs were trained and given opportunities to hold administrative positions. However, key positions such as the First Secretary of the Communist Party and Military Commander for Xinjiang were still held by Han Chinese.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Xinjiang experienced economic development especially in the field of agriculture and energy. This has attracted many Hans from other Chinese provinces to migrate to Xinjiang to work. In addition, the government also encouraged the Han migration policy. This made

the Uyghurs very unhappy as they considered themselves to be 'colonised' by the Hans. Therefore, relations between the Uyghurs and the Hans deteriorated. Some of the Uyghurs expressed their frustration with the Chinese policy through protests. There were even some who wanted to separate Xinjiang through violence. The Chinese government responded to these demands by intensifying their crackdowns. However, excessive force had been used in carrying out these crackdowns resulting in violations of basic human rights.

It is undeniable that the Chinese have shown great determination to rule Xinjiang at all costs throughout the centuries. They have always been interested in the natural resources of Xinjiang which are still favourable to the economic development of China today. Furthermore, the Chinese were aware of the geo-strategic importance of Xinjiang, especially during the Sino-Soviet rivalry. With great pride and integrity, China has continued to defend Xinjiang from separatist movements. The Chinese have adopted various policies and methods to subjugate and paralyse political protests by the Uyghurs, especially during attempts to separate the province. The separation of Xinjiang can have disastrous effects on China, as it would spur other Chinese provinces such as Tibet, Ningxia, Kansu and Inner Mongolia to revolt and perhaps declare independence. Hence, the Chinese remain extremely suspicious of the Uyghurs. They fear that foreign powers would make use of Uyghurs demands for independence to put pressure on China.

In view of this, China will most likely continue to defend its rule in Xinjiang at all costs even to the extent of violating international human rights norms. With the number of Hans almost equalling the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China will surely not let Xinjiang be independent. It can be safely concluded that in the next two decades or so, the Hans would have surely outnumbered the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, thereby making this province more Chinese and less Uyghur. Hence, with the passage of time and the influx of more Hans, Xinjiang would surely resemble a typical Chinese province such that perhaps one day nothing would be Uyghur about Xinjiang.

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