

Present-Day Ethnic Problems in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region: Overview and Recommendations

(Complete text)

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ChinaChange.org Editor's Note: [This article, a total of 24,000 characters in Chinese](#), was first posted on the Daxiong Gonghui (大象公会) website sometime after the Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti's arrest in January, 2014. Daxiong Gonghui described the origin of the article in a note: "This document was written by Ilham Tohti, Associate Professor of Economics at Minzu University of China (formerly Central Nationalities University), in response to a 2011 request from high-level officials in the Chinese government. Ilham Tohti made first-draft revisions to this document in October of 2013, but was unable to complete a final draft." The post has since been censored and is only available elsewhere as reposts. Ms. Yaxue Cao, the editor of China Change was able to confirm the origin and the authenticity of the article with Mr. Huang Zhangjin (黄章晋), the editor of the online Daxiong magazine and a long-time friend of Ilham Tohti. ChinaChange.org is pleased to present a complete translation of this important article to all who are concerned about Chinese government's gross mistreatment of Professor Ilham Tohti who was sentenced to life in prison in September, 2014, on charges of separatism. The translation was first posted on China Change in eight installments from April 22 to May 19, 2015.

Since Zhang Chunxian took office, a big push on Xianjiang policy by the Chinese central government and a series of initiatives by Zhang Chunxian himself have rekindled hope among ethnic population in Xiangjiang for the region's future social stability and development prospects.¹ Furthermore, Zhang Chunxian has managed, in a very short period of time, to win high praise from local ethnic minority officials and intellectuals alike.

At present, the new administration in Xinjiang is relying on increased economic investment and improvements in citizens' livelihoods to quell ethnic tensions. These policies will likely have a positive short-term effect, but because they do not address deep-seated problems, we cannot afford to be sanguine about Xinjiang's future, nor can we be certain that violence will not erupt again. If the government is to win broad-based popular support and achieve genuine long-term peace and stability, it must promote further systemic and social adjustments.

¹ In April 2010, Zhang Chunxian was appointed Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, replacing Wang Lequan, whose divisive policies may have helped to fuel ethnic unrest in the region. Zhang Chunxian's appointment was regarded by many as positive step toward defusing ethnic tensions in Xinjiang. - Translator

To this end, I have prepared a simple list of nine issues affecting ethnic relations in Xinjiang. For each, I have included an overview of the present situation, causes and contributing factors, and proposed solutions.

I. Unemployment among Ethnic Minorities

Overview

Unemployment is a social issue that affects all regions of China, but Xinjiang's unemployment problem tends to be concentrated among ethnic minorities. For Uighurs who migrate to the cities in search of work, employment opportunities are markedly limited, confined to a narrow band of service-industry jobs, mostly jobs in restaurants. There is a vast gap in employment opportunities available to different ethnic groups: Uighur and other ethnic-minority job applicants face significant employment discrimination. These factors, in turn, fuel resentment toward the government and toward the Han Chinese majority.

Because the factors driving urban and rural unemployment are so different, we can divide the employment issue in Xinjiang into two distinct facets: (1) unemployment among Uighur university graduates and (2) the rural labor surplus.

1. Unemployment among Uighur university graduates

According to official government data, only 17% of ethnic Uighur university students in Xinjiang manage to secure a full-time job by the time they graduate. This is far below the rate for ethnic Han Chinese university students. My own research reveals that the actual job-placement rate for Uighur university students approaching graduation is even lower, at less than 15%. The difficulty of finding work after graduation not only impoverishes ethnic-minority families who have sacrificed to send their children to university, it also contributes to the notion, widespread among Uighurs, that education is useless.

2. The rural labor surplus

The rural labor surplus in Xinjiang is a serious problem. The root cause of this excess rural labor force is lagging urbanization and industrialization in Uighur areas. In fact, the actual urbanization rate among the Uighur population is only about 10%.

Most of Xinjiang's Uighur population is concentrated in the rural south, where the average amount of arable land per capita is less than one *mu*, or one-sixth of an acre. This sort of marginal existence and inescapable poverty not only bottles up vast reserves of surplus rural labor, it also gives rise to lawlessness and criminal behavior, making these areas potential breeding grounds for future threats to the social order. If this vicious cycle is allowed to continue, it may even bring about the collapse of southern Xinjiang's fragile oasis ecosystem.

Causes

1. Given the absence or non-enforcement of national ethnic policies, the primary cause of employment difficulties among minority university students is blatant ethnic discrimination in hiring. Ethnic minorities are severely under-recruited for jobs in the civil service and in state-owned enterprises. Prior to the July 2009 ethnic unrest in Urumqi, many private-sector job advertisements openly stated that only Han Chinese applicants would be considered; some state-owned enterprises went so far as to recruit Han Chinese from other parts of mainland China, rather than hire local ethnic minorities. At some workplaces with no Uighur employees, Uighurs may be stopped by security guards and prevented from entering the premises. Severely curtailed employment prospects have given rise to an unusual phenomenon in Xinjiang: a craze for extracurricular foreign language training courses. Xinjiang's ethnic minority university students are keener on studying foreign languages than students at top-tier universities such as Peking University and Tsinghua University, because these students feel that their only hope lies in finding work in international trade, tourism, or overseas. Even the privileged classes are not immune to employment difficulties: one child of a high-ranking Xinjiang Uighur government official graduated from a prestigious mainland university and spent a year searching fruitlessly for work. It was only after securing a personal letter of introduction from Wang Lequan [then Communist Party Secretary of Xinjiang] that the young graduate was finally able to secure a job.
2. A unique feature of Xinjiang's natural geography is its desert archipelago of insular, isolated oases. Historically, there has been a vast gap in the amount of government investment given to these different geographical units. This is particularly true of the Uighur enclaves in Xinjiang's south, where urbanization and industrialization lag far behind the Han Chinese-dominated "Tianshan North Slope Economic Zone." (The "Tianshan North Slope Economic Zone," situated at the northern foot of the Tianshan mountain range, is the most economically developed region of Xinjiang. This highly concentrated swath of productive forces forms the developmental core of Xinjiang's modern industry, agriculture, telecommunications, education, science, information technology and other sectors. Home to over 83% of Xinjiang's heavy industry and 62% of its light industry, favored with ample natural resources and robust urban and transportation infrastructure, the zone accounts for over 40% of Xinjiang's gross domestic product.) Xinjiang's south is geographically isolated; the Han Chinese cities in the north tend to exclude Uighurs; and when the surplus rural labor force in the south tries to flow into the Tianshan North Slope Economic Zone, it is met with restrictions. All these make it even more difficult for southern surplus rural labor to migrate to urban areas.
3. Severe underinvestment in basic education: there is a vast north-south disparity in educational investment in Xinjiang. Even in southern Xinjiang, one finds stark ethnic inequalities in the allocation of educational resources, particularly in the area of secondary schools. Whether in terms of fiscal investment or number of

schools, the proportion of educational resources allocated to Uighur students is far below what it should be, given their percentage as a proportion of the local population. Moreover, the high school enrollment rate in southern Xinjiang is extremely low, due to the critical lack of investment in basic education: in large Uighur population centers such as Kuqa country and Shache [Yarkant] county, there is only one high school in each county offering Uighur-language instruction. As a result, average educational levels in Uighur communities in southern Xinjiang are extremely low, causing workers to be inadequately equipped for careers in modern agriculture or industry. The surplus rural labor supply spills into the cities, where migrants face severely limited job prospects, forcing them further afield into the interior to look for better opportunities.

4. Since the ethnic unrest of July 2009, nearly all of Xinjiang's Uighur enclaves have been subject to the constant pressure of "stability maintenance" policies. Rural migrants to the northern city of Urumqi have been expelled in large numbers, and forced to return to their villages in the south. At the same time, local governments have adopted stringent limits on outward population migration, thus exacerbating the problem of rural employment.

Thoughts and Recommendations

The Uighur unemployment problem is the cumulative result of numerous long-term forces. As such, resolving the dilemma will require a broad-based approach and systematic long-term planning; it will not happen overnight. Simply pouring money from central government coffers into Xinjiang to create a slew of make-work jobs is not the right approach: not only would this prove an undue fiscal burden for the government, it would also transform the Uighur population into a people dependent upon handouts, engendering a sense of shame and inferiority.

I have the following thoughts on how the issue of unemployment should be addressed systematically:

1. Article 23 of the "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China" expressly stipulates that ethnic minorities be given priority in hiring by government institutions and state-owned enterprises.² Even taking into consideration the practical difficulties of immediately implementing such a policy, steps should be taken to gradually expand Uighur employment opportunities and to phase in quotas for the hiring of ethnic minorities in the civil service and state-owned enterprises. At present, public services in Xinjiang suffer from a serious dearth of Uighur and other ethnic minority employees. Hospitals, post offices, banks, insurance companies, notaries, courts, municipal bureaus and other social service organizations are staffed mainly by Han Chinese who cannot speak Uighur, causing tremendous inconvenience to Uighur citizens in their daily lives.

² The English text of Article 23 of the "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China" reads: "When recruiting personnel in accordance with state regulations, enterprises and institutions in ethnic autonomous areas give priority to minority nationalities and may enlist them from the population of minority nationalities in rural and pastoral areas." - Translator

2. The government should take an active role in promoting internal population migration in Xinjiang as a means of alleviating unemployment in the south and preventing further damage to the fragile southern ecosystem. For example, it could oversee a controlled and systematic transfer of a certain proportion of southern Xinjiang's population to the northern industrial belt, or to farms managed by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). Instead of spending vast sums of labor and capital to organize rural migrant workers to culturally unfamiliar coastal cities thousands of kilometers away, the regional government should encourage rural-to-urban population shifts within Xinjiang's borders. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), currently suffering from severe manpower shortages due to population drain, has tried all manner of methods to attract labor from other areas of mainland China, but it has done nothing to absorb the surplus rural labor force that exists in southern Xinjiang.

By taking an active role in organizing and guiding population shifts within Xinjiang, the government can alleviate unemployment in the south, while also reducing ethnic segregation and helping to dispel the notion, prevalent within the Uighur community, that the XPCC and the northern cities are being used by Han Chinese to deal with the Uighur population.

3. Provide more assistance to ethnic minority entrepreneurs. This is the most fundamental, long-term solution to Xinjiang's unemployment problem, and it relies on market-based mechanisms rather than governmental supervision. Since Secretary Zhang Chunxian assumed office, there has been a noticeable improvement in Xinjiang's level of assistance to ethnic minority entrepreneurs. I recommend broadening this approach to establish a long-term plan aimed at improving the modern management skills of ethnic minority entrepreneurs via exchanges with highly developed coastal regions and prestigious mainland Chinese universities, thus creating a long-term mechanism for the systematic training of minority entrepreneurs. Furthermore, we should foster closer cooperation between Han Chinese and ethnic minority entrepreneurs, encouraging them to bond together in their mutual interest. Having the government train and support a large contingent of minority entrepreneurs is the most convenient way to promote ethnic unity and harmony in Xinjiang.

One detail worth noting: the practice of prominently featuring minority entrepreneurs as speakers at government-organized ethnic unity rallies may not have the desired propaganda effect. Minority entrepreneurs should not be leveraged for government publicity: they have a far more important and effective role to play off the political stage.

4. Increase investment in basic education in minority-populated areas. The government has many long years of unfulfilled promises in this regard, but expanding access to basic education will transform minority peoples' ability to

adapt to industrialization and urbanization. In a mere five to ten years, we will begin to see a marked improvement. At the very least, better access to education will significantly reduce the barriers that ethnic minority migrants face when trying to enter the urban labor force. Now that the government has substantially increased investment in basic education in southern Xinjiang, there remain two problems that need to be addressed: countering the preconception that education is useless, and correcting misapprehensions and assuaging people's fears about bilingual education.

5. Establish systematic professional and technical training for ethnic minority workers. Xinjiang suffers from a serious lack of ethnic minority professional and technical personnel, which makes it difficult for ethnic minorities to enter the technical and industrial workforce. Entrepreneurial skill is also in short supply to start businesses. I propose increasing training for early-career and mid-career specialists in fields suited to the unique economy of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, in which resource-oriented and state-owned enterprises predominate. For example, the government could work with vocational and technical schools to increase employment opportunities for ethnic minorities in the mining, textile, and agricultural-processing sectors. In fact, work on this has already begun, to positive feedback from Xinjiang's Uighur community.

I also recommend that the Xinjiang Autonomous Region cooperate with localities in China's more economically developed coastal regions to systematically train up a cohort of technically-proficient ethnic minority youth who will form Xinjiang's future technological and entrepreneurial talent pool.

6. Establish brigades of ethnic minority industrial workers. Industrial workers are an essential component and driving force of industrial and economic development. They play a fundamental role in accelerating industrial transformation, promoting technological innovation, improving corporate competitiveness, and so on. Employers in Xinjiang are currently in need of a large number of industrial workers, but they face widespread difficulties in recruiting qualified personnel.

Training up and establishing brigades of ethnic minority industrial workers will help to expand employment opportunities and widen career horizons for minority university and polytechnic graduates. This, in turn, will increase the employment rate among ethnic minorities and help facilitate their adjustment to modern industrial society.

7. Leverage local and regional advantages to support the development of Xinjiang's own cultural and creative industries. This would both raise employment and allow Xinjiang's cultural influence to radiate across the Central Asian region. Targeted training and practical support would help creative entrepreneurs and small- and medium-size enterprises to expand into the broader Central Asian market. China's information technology, animation, advertising and other creative sectors enjoy a distinct advantage in the Central Asia market region, but Han Chinese enterprises

attempting to enter this market face tremendous cultural and linguistic barriers, whereas Uighur enterprises possess a natural advantage. By leveraging the technological strength of China's other regions, it is entirely possible for Xinjiang to cultivate local cultural and creative industries with a strong competitive edge in Central Asia. This would allow Xinjiang's ethnic minority populations to transform themselves from cultural importers to cultural exporters, an achievement of immeasurable importance.

II. Bilingual Education

Overview

Besides unemployment, the issue that provokes the most intense reaction within Xinjiang's Uighur community is the issue of bilingual education. In practice, "bilingual education" in Xinjiang has essentially become "monolingual education" (i.e. Mandarin-only education.) Within the Uighur community, there is a widespread belief that the government intends to establish an educational system based on written Chinese and rooted in the idea of "one language, one origin." Suspicions abound that the government is using administrative means to exterminate Uighur culture and accelerate ethnic and cultural assimilation. With the mandatory implementation of so-called "bilingual education," the Uighur language has become steadily marginalized, not only in the field of education but also in government administration, the judiciary, and other areas. Despite being one of the official languages of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, the Uighur language has long been deprived of the respect, attention, status and legal safeguards it deserves.

In practice, the greatest problem with bilingual education in Xinjiang is that it produces a large number of students who are proficient in neither their mother tongues nor in Mandarin. This has led to declining educational standards and difficulties for ethnical students, who dread attending school, to master subjects. The bilingual education system in Xinjiang mandates that physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics and other subjects be taught in Mandarin Chinese, which means that Uighur and other ethnic minority students are often unable to understand what they are being taught. This policy is responsible, to a large extent, for the steady increase in dropout rates for Uighur and other ethnic minority students. Another consequence is that many experienced Uighur primary school teachers have been forced into early retirement or made to leave their faculty positions for jobs unrelated to teaching. Thus, a large number of Uighur schoolteachers have become direct casualties of government policy on bilingual education.

"Bilingual education" in Xinjiang has increasingly given way to "monolingual education," raising grave concerns and causing serious repercussions. This has the potential to spark a larger-scale Uighur rights movement aimed at defending Uighur language education and preventing the extermination of local language and culture. In recent years, Uighur fears of cultural and linguistic annihilation have been greatly exacerbated by a sharp contraction in Xinjiang's local-language publishing and cultural industries.

This sudden dwindling of Xinjiang's Uighur-language publishing and cultural industries has profound and far-reaching consequences. Not only does it threaten the demise of Uighur culture and the suppression of Uighur intellectuals, it has also caused vast swaths of the Uighur community, most of whom live in isolated rural areas, to become completely cut off from contemporary civilization. Southern Xinjiang, taken as a whole, is extremely backward: it is a geographical backwater of scattered, insular oases, and the vast majority of its Uighur inhabitants do not understand Chinese. For these reasons, the majority of households in southern Xinjiang are cut off from books, newspapers, radio broadcasts and television programs offering up-to-date information or news about the outside world.

This severing of communication channels means that, notwithstanding a small number of Uighur elites fluent in Chinese, most traditional Uighur communities are utterly deprived of access to contemporary news and information. In an increasingly competitive and open social environment, this makes Xinjiang's traditional Uighur communities inherently less adaptable to external stimuli than traditional Han Chinese communities in other areas of China. When people are unable to attain the knowledge essential to a modern society, unable to cultivate strength of character for modern life, or to acquire healthy modern societal values such as rationality, tolerance and open-mindedness, they may find themselves in crisis, consumed by fear that they are being increasingly abandoned by modern society. The rapid disintegration of traditional society and the challenges of adapting to a new environment can leave people mired in ignorance, parochialism, savagery and despair.

Over the past ten years or so, traditional Uighur society has experienced an unprecedented surge in crime rates, the rapid disintegration of morals, and the spread of religious extremism and cultural conservatism. Add relative impoverishment and an increasing hatred of Han Chinese, and you have a vicious circle that intensifies day by day. It is this, combined with misguided government ethnic policies, that has allowed backward, ignorant, parochial, extremist, isolationist and fanatical ideologies to proliferate, creating a breeding ground for "the three forces" [of separatism, religious extremism and terrorism.]

Measures such as preaching national unity, making minorities reliant on government handouts, and accelerating the Sinification of China's Uighur communities are not a sufficient bulwark against separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. Contrary to the common perception of Uighur cultural, educational and publishing industries as being too prone to strengthen Uighur ethnic and cultural awareness, it is only by allowing these industries to develop and thrive, to keep pace with the times and with history, that we can weaken "the three forces" [of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism] by denying them ground in which to take root. This is the only feasible long-term method by which to defeat them.

Therefore, we may say that the backwardness of Uighur cultural, educational and publishing industries is not only the enemy of Uighur society, but also the enemy of Han Chinese society.

In fact, nearly all Uighur families want their children to receive a better-quality education in Mandarin Chinese, and they feel that genuine “bilingual education” has come too late. Yet at the same time, the prevailing view and mainstream opinion in Uighur communities is that “Bilingual education should not come at the expense of one’s mother tongue.” Mandarin’s special status as China’s lingua franca should not make it an excuse for linguistic discrimination or forced linguistic assimilation. In a nation of diverse ethnicities, shared cultural values should be expressed in diverse ways, not subject to standardization or unification. Education should not be made the “executioner” of native languages and scripts.

As for why “bilingual education” in Xinjiang has devolved into “monolingual education,” the answer lies in the slapdash way in which bilingual education policy has been implemented:

1. Deficiencies in technical and basic preparations (i.e. finding qualified faculty, investing in school and facilities construction); inadequate consideration of regional differences and local needs; implementing educational policy in a “one size fits all” fashion.
2. Academic content and curricula that do not take into account either the specific academic needs of ethnic Uighur students, or the successful experiences of schools in China’s other ethnic regions.
3. Xinjiang’s limited allotment of teaching staff, poor infrastructure and low student academic abilities were scarcely sufficient for a monolingual education program, much less a full-scale bilingual education program.
4. Implementing “bilingual education” has actually exacerbated the educational funding gap between Han Chinese and Uygur students. For example, in the city of Atushi [also spelled Atush or Artux], the Han Chinese population numbers 22,725, the Uighur population 198,217, and the Kyrgyz population 29,186. If we do not count the Municipal No. 2 School, located forty kilometers outside of the city, Atushi has only three high schools: one Chinese-language school (Prefectural No. 2 High School) and two Uighur-language schools (Prefectural No. 1 High School, and Municipal No. 2 High School). Class sizes in the Uighur schools average more than 50 students per classroom, whereas the Chinese school averages only 30 students per class. Differences in teaching quality and levels of educational investment have widened the educational gap between Han Chinese and Uighur students, both in terms of their access to knowledge and their ability to master new subject matter.

Thoughts and Recommendations

1. Xinjiang needs true bilingual education. The [Korean-language] bilingual education program in Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture is a typical success story. Xinjiang can draw from that experience in restructuring its own bilingual educational content and curriculum.

2. In ethnic-minority populated areas, increase investment in the hardware and software required to provide true bilingual education, and redress the grievous imbalance in educational resources allocated to different ethnic groups.
3. Train qualified teachers. Currently, the biggest impediment to bilingual education is a serious shortage of qualified teachers. It will be difficult to alter this situation in the short term, but by focusing on systematic training of existing teachers, we can gradually reduce or dispel the regional disparities among teachers of bilingual education.
4. Exam-based university selection of minority students: although the current system of adding points to the university entrance exam scores of ethnic minority test-takers is in line with the central government policy of favoring minority candidates, in practice, many of the true beneficiaries of this preferential scoring system are academically-accomplished minority students who do not require preferential treatment, or even affluent, well-connected Han Chinese students. It might be possible to replace the “added points” section of the exam with test matter related to Xinjiang’s ethnic and cultural diversity. Not only would this signal to Uighur students that Xinjiang’s multi-ethnic and multi-cultural traditions have not been forgotten by the educational system, it would also deepen everyone’s understanding of Xinjiang’s ethnic and cultural diversity, thus shaping a richer and more inclusive national identity and consciousness.
5. Raise the number and prestige of ethnic minority cultural and publishing endeavors, in order to reverse the rapid decline of minority cultural industries. In terms of fiscal policy, increase government investment and support for ethnic minority cultural, educational and publishing industries, and accelerate Uighur-language participation and access to modern information technology. Both the regional and the central government should advance Uighur rural society by promoting knowledge about modern social life and modern production methods, and making this a key element in long-term planning.

With regard to Uighur folk culture, the government of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region should search for ways to encourage and support grassroots cultural initiatives in this field. The regional government should also begin experimenting with gradual reforms of the ethnic minority cultural and educational publishing industries: for example, introducing market-based mechanisms or objective quality targets, harnessing the initiative and enthusiasm of existing staff, and avoiding the current problem of overstaffing.

6. Increase regional or national government support for specialized research and scholarship on the social transformations affecting Uighur communities. Encourage the participation of mainland Chinese and even overseas scholars and academics, so that China’s rulers may draw on their collective wisdom and counsel to resolve the nation’s ethnic and social dilemmas. In mainland China at the moment, there is an almost complete dearth of worthwhile academic research

on this topic. One hopes that if scholars are allowed more academic independence, it will help to fill this void.

7. Establish a plan and systematic targets for training a new breed of top-tier ethnic minority intellectuals, and incorporate them into national planning via funding for specially earmarked projects.

Xinjiang suffers from a dearth of ethnic minority intellectuals, at least those who meet the strict modern criteria for intellectuals. Moribund educational and research institutions and outmoded systems of personnel training and advancement have deprived Xinjiang of a true community of ethnic minority intellectuals. Whether the task is promoting social progress in Xinjiang, improving the lives of ethnic minorities, or advancing national identity and cohesion among minority elites, a highly qualified community of ethnic minority intellectuals is essential to the task. Allowing more ethnic minority intellectuals to enter the mainstream confers honor upon them and their communities, and that honor serves to strengthen their sense of national identity and cohesion.

III. Religion

Overview

Since the July 2009 ethnic unrest in Xinjiang, religious fervor within China's Uighur community has been rising steadily. Whether in traditional villages in southern Xinjiang, among urban officials and intellectuals, or even on college campuses in Beijing, there has been a quiet upsurge in religious conservatism—and the percentage of youthful conservative adherents is at an all-time high. Some observers have noted that, during religious services at mosques, it is not uncommon to see young people praying silently, with tears streaming down their faces. This is a social signal worthy of our close attention.

As an overt symbol of a people's cultural and ethnic identity, religion comes second only to language; in the most extreme circumstances, religion can become the final spiritual refuge for a people.

The two most serious aspects of the religious problem in Xinjiang are as follows:

1. First is the enormous backlash generated by strict government controls on religion. Xinjiang's south is home to approximately 24,000 mosques, and each mosque has a designated religious leader supported by the government: one cadre per mosque, responsible for denying admittance to outsiders, youths, or regular worshippers beyond the allotted quota. Such stringent controls display utter disregard for the feelings of believers, consume vast amounts of manpower and resources, and arouse great discontent among the citizenry.
2. Second is the proliferation of underground religious activities, in marked contrast to the government's failed religious policies of recent years. Ultra-conservative

and xenophobic strains of religious thought imported from Afghanistan, Pakistan and other places are spreading rapidly in Xinjiang, and being disseminated via the religious underground. Increasing numbers of extremely conservatively dressed citizens attest to the popularity of this religious trend. In private, some Uighur intellectuals decry the new conservatism, complaining that Uighurs no longer dress like Uighurs, but like Arabs.

Although Xinjiang has no shortage of Kazakh- and Chinese-language versions of the Koran, Uighur-language versions of the Koran are not available for sale on the open market. This distinction could easily incline people to suspect that restrictive government religious policies are being targeted at a specific ethnic group. Some years ago, the Saudi king sent one million free copies of the Koran to Xinjiang, where they circulated freely among the local populace. After incidents of ethnic unrest in 1996 and 1997, these copies of the Koran were recalled; these days, a pirated copy of the Koran sells for between 50 and 80 Chinese yuan on the underground market.

Most Uighur intellectuals are wary of and opposed to extremist religious ideology. They recognize the contributions of Communist Party atheism and secular education in abolishing superstition, fanaticism and ignorance within the Uighur community. And yet the government's current draconian religious policies in Xinjiang are repugnant to Uighur intellectuals, even to those most repelled by religious fanaticism.

Causes

Although the Chinese government is now much more tolerant of religious enthusiasm than it has been in the past, its long-standing adherence to atheism and lack of systematic research on religious issues means that, when confronted with issues involving religion, the government tends to find itself on the defensive.

Specifically, when it comes to dealing with religious issues in Xinjiang, official disdain for the special status of religion in ethnic minority communities makes it hard to see where government promotion of secularization ends, and the suppression of ethnic minority culture begins. Particularly with regard to Islam, the government tends to oscillate wildly between confidence and fear—confidence inspired by the machinery of the one-party state, and fear fueled by a basic lack of religious knowledge.

Since 1997, opposing “the three forces” [of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism] has been the paramount task of local government. Along the way, however, the policy of opposing religious extremism has morphed into a policy of opposing religious tradition and suppressing normal expressions of religious belief.

Recently, Xinjiang's government has launched a vigorous propaganda push on the dangers of religious extremism, and it is on high alert against religious extremism and its effects. Extremist religious ideology is certainly unacceptable: even from an Islamic perspective, it is a distortion of traditional religious thought. But government policy in practice all too often veers toward rigid uniformity: indiscriminately lumping the wearing of headscarves, veils or beards into the same category as religious extremism, for example, or banning men with beards and women with veils or headscarves from entering

buildings or public places. These and other persistent infringements on Uighur human rights are, to a large extent, responsible for creating antagonism between Uighurs and the government, thus amplifying Han-Uighur tensions.

While there is no denying that Xinjiang does indeed have a problem with religious extremism, it needs to be emphasized that extremist religious ideology has never dominated the mainstream in Uighur society, and its actual influence within the Uighur community is quite limited. More importantly, traditional Uighur culture has always displayed a marked resistance to extremist religious ideology. At present, the threat posed by religious extremism appears to be greatly exaggerated, both in government propaganda and in the public imagination. Enacting inappropriate control measures based on this flawed understanding will, objectively speaking, only drive people to embrace more extremist religious views. Moreover, when it comes to voicing criticism of extremist religious ideology, this criticism should come primarily from esteemed and learned leaders within the religious community, rather than from secular intellectuals speaking on matters outside their purview. And the minute details of citizens' sartorial habits – clothes, beards, scarves and the like – should never be singled out for criticism.

In order to understand the problem of religious extremism in the Uighur community, we must recognize the following key points: (1) It is of great importance to clearly define what is extremist religious ideology and extremist religious behavior; (2) The goal of opposing extremist religious ideology should be to protect and safeguard normal, everyday religious activity; (3) Within Uighur society, religion was originally closely tied to cultural customs and traditions, but now religion has been stripped of its status and deprived of its traditional authority figures; (4) Uighur society has lost its mechanisms for moral grounding and cultural adjustment; (5) There are no normal channels for positive voices to make themselves heard; and (6) In order to protect their posts and perks of office, some officials are more than willing to burn the wheat with the chaff.

Currently, Xinjiang's coercive stability maintenance policies, particularly in the area of religion, are having a grave impact on the lives, jobs and mobility of Xinjiang's Uighur population. If the government does not change its thinking and tactics with respect to religious issues, I fear that religion will become the single biggest cause of ethnic strife and social discord in Xinjiang.

Thoughts and Recommendations

The entire Islamic world, in fact, is being confronted with religious problems along the path to modernity. Turkey, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and other countries have found different and successful ways to balance religion and modernity. There is no shame in learning from their successes or adopting their methods of dealing with religion, in much the same way that China, in the early days of economic reform and opening, looked to the West for experience and guidance.

1. Establish institutional arrangements for the management of religious sites and places of worship. Places of worship offer a natural way for communities to bond, and the government can draw on foreign experience to develop standards governing the physical size, congregation size, social organization, etc. of places

of worship. To facilitate the ability of citizens to practice their faith, the government should allow one place of worship to be built within each defined area or range. Each place of worship should also be equipped with clergy who have been officially recognized and certified by the government, in accordance with clear-cut rules and regulations. This will help to avert the proliferation of home-based and underground places of worship that have sprung up in response to draconian restrictions on the ordinary religious needs of citizens. In establishing such a system, it would not hurt to publicize the fact that some elements of the system were adopted from abroad (from a secular country such as Turkey, for example) in order to defuse opposition.

2. Establish a system of religious training and certification for clergy members. There are some religious professionals who, despite their lack of certification or authority, still manage to attract adherents who believe them to possess religious wisdom. Professional clergy must complete systematic training and earn some official certification (for example, from the Islamic Association of China). In addition to systematic training in religious knowledge and scholarship, clergy should also possess some knowledge of the modern social sciences, to nurture a mindset that is open, progressive, and attuned to the needs of modern society. In particular, studying how religion and modern society interact and adapt in other countries and learning from their experiences will help provide clergy with a broader and more open-minded perspective.

Regarding the vocational and educational training of clergy, a long-range, well-organized system of religious training should be established in collaboration with top-tier institutions of religious learning in Xinjiang, nationwide and even overseas, in order to gradually train a core group of erudite and broad-minded clergy. In addition, allowing local institutions of religious learning such as the Xinjiang Islamic Institute to strengthen communication and ties with other institutions of religious learning at home and abroad will bolster the quality of local religious scholarship.

3. To satisfy public demand for religious texts, allow the legal importation and publication of overseas editions of contemporary religious texts. Uighur-language versions of religious texts are nearly impossible to find in Xinjiang today; the copies that do circulate underground are generally smuggled in from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. But in fact, Turkey, Malaysia and other successful secular Islamic nations have long been compiling and codifying contemporary editions of religious texts that have not only met the religious needs of their citizens, but also helped to usher in more open and modern societal values. If the government were to organize the translation and publication of these religious texts from abroad, it would satisfy the religious needs of the local community, impede the underground market for extremist religious publications, and promote the spread of moderate, open and inclusive religious values.

4. Improve research and investment in religion. China is a country with a vast Muslim population, but Chinese religious scholarship that meets modern academic standards of quality, particularly scholarship pertaining to Islam, is virtually nonexistent. China should have prestigious Islamic Institutes, as well as other respected institutions dedicated to the study of Islam. The government should also encourage non-Muslim scholars to participate in religious research and scholarship that satisfies the needs of religious believers and religious scholarship, and meets the demands of social development and transformation. Lastly, increasing research and investment in religion will serve to amplify China's voice in the Islamic world and allow it to play a more active role.
5. Leverage the influence of religion in traditional society to positive effect. For communities steeped in religious tradition, the clergy are an irreplaceable and profoundly influential component of society. Particularly in the comparatively insular, economically underdeveloped, and culturally conservative rural communities of southern Xinjiang, the best ways to disseminate modern ideas and information are via the market and via religion.

Indeed, religious leaders have also been thinking about how to address the issue of social transformation. The government has nothing to lose by creating the conditions and opportunities for the clergy to join in this effort, allowing them to contribute their experience, intelligence, wisdom, and considerable social influence. Religious leaders and ordinary citizens alike do not want to see a society plagued by unrest, chaos or hatred. Religion is the pursuit of virtue, after all, and religious leaders are cautious and conservative by nature. Instead of their voices being suppressed, they should be allowed to take their rightful place in the public discourse, so that they may use their own language to offer comfort and consolation to their community.

6. Make policy regarding the Hajj [the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca] more transparent and open. It would be fair to call the Hajj policy one of the greatest failures of religious policy in Xinjiang. Simply put, the Hajj is something that all devout Muslims aspire to; completing the pilgrimage to Mecca imbues a person with a certain amount of social prestige upon their return, but it does not cause them to become extremist or fanatical. At present, there are stringent bureaucratic criteria for being allowed to go on the Hajj, but this bureaucratic process need not be so opaque. Every year, Saudi Arabia issues quotas for the number of pilgrims allowed from each country. In Xinjiang, only a lucky few meet the qualifications. The quota process could certainly be carried out in a much more open and transparent manner: for example, by publicizing China's quota and explaining how this quota is allocated. As it stands, the quota system has bred serious bureaucratic corruption and has aroused intense feelings in ethnic minority communities.

IV. Ethnic Alienation and Segregation

Overview

Among the openly talked-about problems affecting ethnic relations in Xinjiang, perhaps the most important is the increasing sense of alienation among ethnic minorities. But beyond this psychological sense of alienation, there is another, even more severe problem that few people (Uighurs in particular) are willing to discuss openly: the problem of physical ethnic segregation.

By physical or macro-level segregation, I mean that Xinjiang's Han Chinese population tends to be clustered in areas of relatively high population density. In fact, the vast majority of Xinjiang's Han Chinese population is concentrated in three areas, all of which are effectively off-limits to Uighurs: Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) areas; Xinjiang's capital city of Urumqi; and cities, such as Shihezi and Kuitun, located in the Tianshan North Slope Economic Zone.

As for micro-level segregation, cities such as Urumqi with mixed ethnic populations (of Han Chinese, Uighur, and other minorities) tend to be heavily Balkanized, divided into distinct ethnic enclaves. This is particularly true since the ethnic unrest of July 2009: statistics on Urumqi, Xinjiang's largest ethnically-mixed city, in the most recent issue of the Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook, published in 2010, reveal an increased tendency among both Han Chinese and Uighur residents to evacuate from mixed neighborhoods and relocate to neighborhoods dominated by their own ethnic group.

This conscious decision to "evacuate from the ethnic enclaves of others" is unlike other forms of ethnic discrimination or animosity (for example, taxi drivers refusing passengers of another ethnic group) that can be easily identified and halted. The historical impact of this decision will be enormous and far-reaching, because if the daily lives of Han Chinese and Uighurs become separate, it will exacerbate mutual feelings of estrangement and alienation. To some extent, this is a subtle form of "Palestinization."

The flip side of ethnic segregation in Xinjiang is status segregation. Nearly all Han Chinese in Xinjiang live in urban areas or "within the system" [of government entities or government-controlled entities], while the vast majority of Uighurs live in rural areas or "outside the system." The two-tiered system that manifests itself in other areas of China as a divide between rural and urban manifests itself in Xinjiang as a divide between Han Chinese and Uighur. It goes without saying that this sort of ethnic segregation has a profound impact on the Uighur sense of ethnic and national identity. In fact, it calls to mind similar systems of segregation in Palestine and South Africa. Uighurs in China are "non-citizens" or "second-class citizens", and XPCC outposts are widely regarded as the equivalent of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. This status segregation has caused more than a few Uighur intellectuals to liken Han Chinese to white Afrikaners, and Uighurs to South African blacks.

The skewed ethnic population distribution in Xinjiang has created a subconscious dichotomy in the minds of Han Chinese people between "their part of Xinjiang" (i.e. the Uighur-populated south) and "our part of Xinjiang" (the Han Chinese-populated north). In truth, there is no concept of Xinjiang as unified community or polity.

Causes

The ethnic population distribution pattern in Xinjiang today is largely the product of historical and systemic causes.

After Liberation [the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949], the central government mobilized a large-scale effort to promote migration to Xinjiang. In line with the political climate of the time, nearly all of the Han Chinese migrants to Xinjiang were state employees, and most were assigned to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). Furthermore, central government industrial investment and systemic planning in Xinjiang was designed to complement the aforementioned migration program.

In recent decades, Xinjiang's urbanization and development have been concentrated in the north, with the bulk of development projects and support going to a few primarily Han Chinese northern enclaves, while Uighur enclaves in southern Xinjiang have received almost no material support for urban development. Meanwhile, the XPCC's ever-expanding urbanization has pushed beyond the big cities of Shihezi and Kuitun to create a new crop of cities such as Fukang, Wujiaqu, Tiemenguan and Beitun, controlled by the XPCC and populated mainly by Han Chinese. Between 2011 and 2015, the period covering China's Twelfth Five-Year Plan, the XPCC will accelerate construction on a number of cities: Wuxing (XPCC Fifth Division), Kokdala (XPCC Fourth Division), Huyanghe (XPCC Seventh Division), Hongxing (XPCC Thirteenth Division) and Yulong (XPCC Fourteenth Division). These XPCC cities have long excluded Uighurs and other ethnic minorities, thus further marginalizing these groups.

These systematic factors are tantamount to furthering the physical segregation of Han Chinese and Uighurs, intensifying the sense of unfairness and “non-citizenship” felt by the Uighur community, and reducing opportunities for Xinjiang's different ethnic groups to interact with one another in their daily lives. By pushing expansion and urbanization, the XPCC is tearing Xinjiang apart, worsening an already serious state of ethnic apartheid. In contrast with the XPCC approach, urban expansion in Shache County, Moyu County, Jiashi County and other areas of the south would be much more beneficial in reducing the disparities between north and south and allowing all ethnic groups a fair share of the fruits of development.³

Thoughts and Recommendations

The Hakka, Teochew and other ethnic groups of China's southeastern seaboard had a long history of clan warfare and centuries-old feuds—that is, until the advent of modern industry and commerce created deeper linkages between profits and the social division of labor, thus helping to bring about rapid social integration and dispel ancient enmities. In the long run, prospects for Xinjiang's ethnic relations may be similarly optimistic, but there is one important prerequisite: we must reduce or eliminate the physical separation between ethnic groups, rather than allow segregation to continue unabated.

³ There are numerous alternate spellings for these counties. Shache County is also known as Yarkant or Yarkand; Moyu County as Karakax or Qaraqash; and Jiashi County as Payzawat or Peyziwat. - Translator

In fact, in all multi-ethnic nations, the process of dismantling or destroying barriers of segregation is an important barometer of, and a means to achieving, peaceful ethnic relations.

1. Stop building mono-ethnic cities. Xinjiang's urbanization efforts are now targeted at building up number of key areas: if development in these areas proceeds according to current targets and plans, it will create an even greater number of mono-ethnic cities. When building new cities and towns, I suggest transferring a certain amount of population from the south, insofar as circumstances allow. Use the hand of government to guide population movements in the region and promote the formation of new, ethnically mixed cities. The government could also allow some flexibility in the use of financial resources to improve the ethnic balance of areas and operations within its purview.
2. Clannishness is part of human nature, but when it comes to allocating government resources, we should dedicate those resources to creating diverse and integrated communities. Singapore is an excellent case in point. As a multi-ethnic and multicultural rising city-state, Singapore has used its system of public housing to increase mutual understanding among different ethnic groups and promote a more tolerant, open, and pluralistic society. By deliberately bringing people of different ethnicities and cultures to live together in proportions that parallel the overall ethnic population distribution, Singapore has leveraged government resources to build an ethnically integrated and mutually inclusive society.

In ethnically mixed cities such as Urumqi, the government could provide low-rent, subsidized, or public housing in such a way as to encourage the formation of ethnically mixed communities and to avoid creating mono-ethnic urban enclaves. In addition, when hiring or assigning work to cadres, civil servants, state-owned enterprises or other entities under government control, the government should do its utmost to facilitate interaction and communication between different ethnic communities. This could include assigning Uighur cadres to work in mainly Han Chinese neighborhoods, and Han Chinese cadres to work in mainly Uighur neighborhoods, and doing everything possible to maximize opportunities for integration and daily contact between the two ethnicities.

3. Employees of government bureaus and public service industries such as banking, transportation, utilities and insurance should be required to acquire, over time, a certain degree of fluency in local languages. If employees of these institutions can display a certain mastery of languages other than Mandarin, it will help convince ethnic minorities that the government is not merely a government for the Han Chinese, but a government dedicated to serving the needs of all of its citizens, regardless of ethnicity. It would also, in the minds of Han Chinese employees, help to reinforce the impression of Xinjiang as a multi-ethnic and multicultural autonomous region, markedly different from other regions of China populated solely by Han Chinese.

V. Distrust of Ethnic Minority Officials and Intellectuals

Overview

Widespread official distrust of ethnic minority cadres and intellectuals is one blatantly obvious and tremendously important facet of Xinjiang's ethnic problem. In 1997, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee's "Document No. 7" marked a watershed moment in Xinjiang's ethnic conflict: in it, the Party Central Committee expressed its belief that the biggest problem facing Xinjiang was the threat of the "three forces" [of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism.] In Xinjiang, this new policy thrust resulted in a series of policies that soon transformed the entire Uighur population into suspected separatists, and precipitated a rapid decline in the responsibilities and status given to Uighur cadres. This marginalization of Uighur cadres, in turn, bred a subtle climate of distrust between Han and Uighur officials as they went about their respective duties.

Although today's Chinese Communist Party is a political party that transcends ethnic, class and interest group boundaries, the consensus within Uighur society can be summed up as follows: Han Chinese equal power, therefore power equals Han Chinese; Han Chinese equal the Communist Party, therefore the Communist Party equals Han Chinese.

In reality, Uighur officials account for a very small proportion of total government officials, and Uighurs who occupy positions of real power – bureau-level cadres or higher – are even rarer. Some powerful governmental departments such as Finance, Public Security and the SASAC [State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission] have virtually no Uighur officials. The situation is even more glaring in Xinjiang's state-owned enterprises: one would be hard-pressed to cite even a single example of a state-owned enterprise headed by a Uighur.

Whether in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference [CPPCC], the National People's Congress [NPC], or the Communist Party Congress, the number of Uighur committee members and representatives is disproportionately low. Underrepresentation and low levels of political participation reflect the declining political status and increasing marginalization of Uighurs in China.

The CPPCC, entrusted with the role of "political participation and deliberation," is an important component of the Chinese political system, but the number of ethnic Uighur CPPCC committee members is disproportionately low, both at the national and the regional level. Among the thirteen chairmen or deputy chairmen of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region CPPCC, only four are Uighur. At the regional level, Uighur representation in the CPPCC is numerically and proportionally small, and the cadres tend to be low in rank.

In the Twelfth National Committee of the CPPCC, only 10 members [of 2,237] are Uighur, continuing the downward trend of recent years. And of the 107 members of the Xinjiang CPPCC new Standing Committee, only 27 (about 25%) are Uighur. There is a serious discrepancy between the small number of Uighur CPPCC committee members and the proportion of Xinjiang's population that is Uighur (about 47%), a discrepancy

that is at odds with the rightful stature of the Uighur people as a self-governing ethnic group within the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

Of the 2987 delegates who attended the 12th National People's Congress this year, only 409 were ethnic minorities, an average of one delegate for every 270,000 ethnic minority citizens. Among the minority delegates, only 25 were Uighur (23 from the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, and 2 from the People's Liberation Army delegation), which works out to one delegate for every 400,000 Uighur citizens. Although the overall proportion of minority delegates exceeded the proportion of ethnic minorities relative to China's total population, the opposite was true for Uighur delegates, whose numbers were disproportionately low.

As we can see from the above, Uighurs have been excluded from the center of power, and their political stature in China is in sharp decline.

In the early days of the People's Republic of China, the biggest issue facing the Chinese Communist Party was how to train up an echelon of competent and qualified ethnic minority cadres. Now that the Party has been in power for sixty years, however, finding talented minority cadres should not be a problem. There are long-term factors that impact the training of minority cadres, but the distrust of minority cadres derives from a certain historical context. It is widely believed that after 1997, the stature and perceived trustworthiness of minority cadres plummeted. This created a vicious cycle: marginalization bred distrust, which led to anger and alienation, and this alienation was then turned back into an excuse for finding minority cadres untrustworthy.

Political marginalization and the sense that they are not fully trusted can create problems for minority cadres. Compared to their Han Chinese colleagues, ethnic minority cadres tend to become more timid and risk-averse, afraid to voice their opinions, and inclined to grumble in private. A decade of tension has created a situation in which no one within Xinjiang's Uighur community dares to speak up. As Deng Xiaoping once said: "The silence of the masses is a terrifying thing." But having Uighur cadres who are afraid to speak up is an even more terrifying thing, because these cadres tend to have a fairly accurate grasp of prevailing moods and attitudes within the Uighur community. Over time, their silence makes it difficult for local government policy makers to hear the voices of the Uighur community.

Uighur intellectuals find themselves in much the same dilemma. Long-running social tensions and a coercive atmosphere have brought about a collective silence from the Uighur intelligentsia, a group that should, by rights, be more outspoken. Even their social contribution and creativity have, unlike in the past, diminished. And their sense of critical awareness and social responsibility is generally weak, especially compared to Han Chinese intellectuals in the interior.

Naturally, nationalism is the business of a nation's elite, and cadres and intellectuals represent a gathering of the national elite. Their ideas can sway the emotions of an entire community, giving expression to the vested interests of that community, while also serving as the voices of moderation and rationality. When cadres and intellectuals of the Uighur elite find themselves increasingly constrained by narrower and narrower

circumstances, their resentment, depression and ethnic grievances cannot help but spread through the entire community.

The existence of Uighur cadres reflects the issue of the political legitimacy of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. If the appointment of Zhang Chunxian fail to restore the trust of Uighur cadres and intellectuals to pre-1997 levels, then the Uighur elite will likely lose confidence altogether and perhaps even plunge into despair, for Zhang's appointment has so far given hope to a considerable number of people who have long believed that the present mistrust of Uighurs is an exception to the rule, the product of stability policies run amok under a few dictatorial leaders, rather than a true reflection of Han Chinese attitudes toward Uighurs.

Causes

1. Inadequate training of ethnic minority cadres.

Selecting and training a cohort of minority cadres was an important component of national ethnic policy during the first few decades of Chinese Communist Party rule. Because of low education rates, lagging social development, and a shortage of qualified candidates in minority areas, the government put a great deal of effort into selecting and training minority cadres who would later help to implement national ethnic policy.

These days, however, the selection criteria and training methods used for minority cadres seem to have fallen behind the times. Qualities such as competence, vision and breadth of knowledge should be considered just as important as political reliability. The present system of training does not adequately factor in just how much Xinjiang lags behind other areas of mainland China. Some key postings may simply require higher levels of conceptual skill, knowledge, governing ability and cognitive capacity.

2. Stability maintenance policies have elevated perfectly normal feelings and expressions of ethnic pride and ethnic self-interest to the level of secessionism. By constantly emphasizing the dangers of local ethnic nationalism, the government has overlooked growing Han Chinese chauvinism. In Xinjiang, the inverse of local ethnic nationalism is a growing trend toward Han Chinese chauvinism and ethnocentrism.

Thoughts and Recommendations

1. Ethnic sentiment is an innate and natural emotion, but it can also be controlled, guided and balanced. In the same way that we recognize that different economic classes have different interests and demands, we should also recognize that different ethnic groups have their own specific interests and demands, and take this into consideration when balancing the government's interest in national unity with respect for the interests of ethnic minorities. Originally, there was a tacit agreement to respect Uighur ethnic sentiment, and such unwritten rules and their underlying logic should be clearly spelled out.

2. Overall, there are too few Uighur cadres, particularly in the upper echelons. We should look to the long run and begin to train a cohort of qualified, top-tier ethnic minority cadres. To enhance Xinjiang's long-term development prospects, we should consider a bold plan to send young ethnic minority cadres from Xinjiang to undergo intensive study and field training in the economically developed regions of China's southeastern seaboard. Training minority cadres in the southeast would not only help spread progressive ideas, it would also fundamentally deepen emotional ties to other areas of China among Xinjiang's minority elites.
3. According to the "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China," Uighur and Mandarin enjoy equal status as working languages, but at present, few Han Chinese cadres speak Uighur. This is especially true in southern Xinjiang, where poor language skill among Han Chinese cadres has been widely criticized. The government should encourage local Han Chinese cadres to work harder to attain at least a certain level of proficiency in Uighur or another minority language, and these language skills should gradually be incorporated into the performance assessments of local party cadres and civil servants. Central government staff would be exempt from this rule.
4. In conjunction with ethnic demographics, pay more attention to the proportional ethnic distribution of cadres. Xinjiang's demographic pattern of small ethnic enclaves will not change overnight, but we should try, as much as possible, to facilitate integration and exchange via staff assignments and transfers. In regions populated mainly by Han Chinese, it might be appropriate to increase the proportion of Uighur cadres; in Uighur-populated areas of southern Xinjiang, it might be appropriate to raise the proportion of not only Han Chinese cadres, but also of Kazakh, Mongolian and other ethnic minority cadres.
5. Cultivate a group of talented Uighur intellectual elites. At present, Xinjiang has not yet given rise to a true community of modern intellectuals. There is a shortage of Uighur talent at party- and state-run research institutions, particularly in the social sciences. Systematically cultivating a group of top-tier Uighur intellectuals will not only help lead traditional Uighur society into modernity, it will also, over time, imbue the Uighur elite with a broader national perspective and help inspire confidence in them—this, indeed, might be the greatest contribution of all.
6. Commission research on the topic of social development in Xinjiang. Academic research regarding Xinjiang's social development lags Xinjiang's reality: Xinjiang's particularly closed nature means that local research on the subject is somewhat out of date, in terms of conceptual and theoretical tools. To a certain extent, some of the academic research being done in Xinjiang today serves little purpose but to endorse existing local policy decisions. The issue of social development in Xinjiang is particularly complex, and will require research projects, commissioned at the highest national level, capable of attracting the

long-term participation of outstanding intellectuals nationwide. We should also encourage more local intellectuals in Xinjiang, particularly Uighur intellectuals, to participate in these long-term studies.

VI. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC)

Overview

Today's Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps [XPCC, or simply "the Corps"] is a most insular and unique organization. It is often informally described as "an army with no military budget; a government that pays taxes; a labor union made up of farmers; and a business that is a society of its own."

Opinion regarding the role and function of the Corps is polarized. Officially and in public, the Corps is portrayed as a protector and symbol of social stability in Xinjiang, as well a symbol of Xinjiang's pioneering spirit. Private opinion is a different matter: privately, a large number of ordinary Corps members complain that the Corps system is the root cause of their growing impoverishment and backwardness. And within the Uighur community, the Corps stands as a symbol of ethnic antagonism.

A social survey we conducted reveals that Uighur attitudes to Han Chinese vary depending on the type of Chinese community. For example, Uighurs felt closest to locally-born Han Chinese, and most at odds with Han Chinese Corps members; Uighur attitudes toward other Han Chinese migrants to Xinjiang fell somewhere in between.

In fact, the vast majority of ordinary Uighurs have few opportunities to interact with Han Chinese Corps members. As such, they lack a basic understanding of realities within the Corps, and may even harbor profound misconceptions. For many Uighurs, their sole impression of the Corps comes through television news footage, which may lead them to believe that everyone in the Corps lives in places like Shihezi: lovely cities with broad avenues, forests of tall buildings, pristine environments, and living standards that far outstrip the rest of Xinjiang. In fact, most people in the Corps live on farms; they work much harder and earn much less than non-Corps Han Chinese living in nearby rural areas. For many years running, the income of Corps members has ranked dead last in the national income rankings. The reality of life in the Corps is that it is insular and increasingly impoverished.

Not coincidentally, Uighur antipathy for the Corps is the direct result of a constant stream of government propaganda trumpeting the political role and accomplishments of the Corps, particularly its role in "opposing the three forces" [of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism.]

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) was initially established to serve three main functions: military, political, and economic. In today's environment, the Corps' military role has all but disappeared, while its political role has been bolstered. The political functions of the Corps can be outlined as follows: (1) maintain social

stability and deter separatism; (2) promote ethnic interaction and national unity; (3) effectively manage the continued existence and development of the Corps itself.

Truly, only the first two functions have any value or inherent meaning. Yet judging by the current state of the Corps, those two functions have long since ceased to exist. Various official publications repeatedly cite the same example of the Corps' role in maintaining stability and deterring separatism: quelling a 1990 "counter-revolutionary armed rebellion" in Baren Township, Akto County, in Xinjiang's southwest. In fact, although the nearby Corps militia was called up, it played no substantive role in putting down the rebellion.

If something were to happen in the present situation, it should be the People's Armed Police that responds, rather than the XPCC militia. Taking the unusual step of mobilizing the Corps' civilian militia would be politically inappropriate in the extreme: after all, why should Han Chinese civilians be given the responsibility, or even the right, to use armed force to suppress an uprising among Uighurs? This would only serve to inflame ethnic tensions. Another fact we cannot help but mention is that the Corps has almost completely lost its ability to mobilize and mount a rapid armed response in the event of an emergency. This is partly because the Corps does not, at a grassroots level, have control over the movements of its young labor force of fighting age, and partly because the young labor force of the Corps is declining due to manpower drain.

As for using the Corps to promote ethnic interaction and national unity, it is out of the question. In China, combining insular political structures with local communities all too often leads to antagonism and estrangement: witness the estrangement between inland rural communities and China's "Third-Front" factories, or between Beijing's traditional *hutong* neighborhoods and massive Socialist-era government compounds.⁴ The XPCC is an insular institution by nature, isolated even from Xinjiang's local Han Chinese community. Far from being a symbol of ethnic interaction and national unity, the fact that the Corps has come to be seen by the Uighur community as a symbol of ethnic segregation says a lot about its character.

The current status of the Corps is summarized below: on the political front, not only has the Corps lost its role as a deterrent against separatism, it has lost its political *raison d'être*; on the fiscal front, the Corps has become a financial burden to the government; on the social front, the Corps is facing a severe population drain; on the economic front, the Corps must contend with an increasingly impoverished constituency; on the legal front, the precise legal standing (or even the legality) of the Corps has never been adequately established; on the ethnic relations front, the Corps has become a symbol of ethnic antagonism; on the institutional front, the Corps is the last bastion of centralized economic planning in China—it has failed to implement even the "contract responsibility

⁴ The "Third Front" program, carried out between 1964 and 1971, was an attempt to create a secure inland military-industrial base that could serve as a bulwark in the event of China being drawn into a war. The program involved large-scale investment in defense, technology, basic industries, transportation and infrastructure, and the relocation of factories from vulnerable coastal ("first front") and central ("second front") cities to remote rural regions of southwestern and northwestern China. - Translator

system,” a system of market-based economic reforms that have been in place in other areas of China for over three decades; on the status front, the Corps is an awkward amalgam of “party, military, government and private industry”: it is all of the above, and yet none of the above; and finally, on the local relations front, the Corps has never served its stated purpose of “clarifying and coordinating” relations with the local population.

Causes

The XPCC is essentially a modern version of the ancient “biantun” system [of agriculturally self-supporting military garrisons.] It is the outgrowth of a particular system during a particular period of history. More than any other organizational system, the Corps is an embodiment of China’s six decades of centralized economic planning. That it continues to exist at all is due, not so much to Xinjiang’s unique frontier environment, but to two decisive factors: the first involves a certain conceptual understanding; the second involves the problem of vested interests.

The Corps continues to exist as a highly complex and redundant bureaucracy, a society unto itself, an administrative unit possessing provincial-level powers, having every comparable entity except for Congress of People’s Representative and the People’s Political Consultative Conference (although all of the Corps’ division-level farms and up have their own television stations), and serving as a vast support system for a large number of people. At present, an abrupt dissolution of the Corps seems highly unlikely. This is because the Corps has come to be seen as a tangible affirmation of certain specific historical achievements.

Nonetheless, regarding the continued existence of the Corps, we must consider the following questions:

1. As for the Corps being a deterrent to secession, is it necessary to entrust this task to an armed militia external to the country’s formal armed forces? Is the Corps, in its role as a unique social organization, an adequate military deterrent? And is it equipped to carry out this task?
2. If the answers to the above questions are affirmative, how then should we view the ethnic opposition and suspicion that the Corps has, in fact, provoked? How do we weigh the political pros and cons?
3. The Corps clearly has the strong backing of the central government, which trumpets the role of the Corps as a deterrent to secessionism. The implicit assumption is that the central government does not trust non-Han Chinese ethnic minorities. But is this worth the political cost?
4. With problems in Xinjiang attracting increased international attention, it is easy to view the Corps as nothing more than an organized militia of armed migrants. If the Corps is to survive in the long term, how do we address the problem of its identity in modern society?

5. Viewed from any angle, the organizational system of the Corps is grossly incompatible with contemporary Chinese society. Supposing there are no fundamental changes to Xinjiang's internal or external environment, is the continued existence of the Corps really necessary?

Thoughts and Recommendations

1. For both practical and technical reasons, it would be difficult to disband the Corps in the short run, and this would probably breed more problems than it would solve. Nonetheless, it is necessary to begin discussing and making arrangements for the Corps' gradual withdraw from the historical stage.
2. While recognizing the Corps' contributions to land reclamation and border security during a unique period in history, it is now appropriate to dial down the propaganda about the role of the Corps in opposing and deterring separatism, because this only serves to undermine national unity—the Corps is distrusted by the Uighur community, while Uighurs are distrusted by Han Chinese in the Corps.
3. Assuming that the Corps remains fundamentally intact, move forward with urbanization based on local conditions and considerations. In places where the process of urbanization is complete, pilot programs should be initiated to integrate Corps and local government;
4. Resolving the problem of population drain must begin with the land policy. A systematic plan is needed to sort out institutional conflicts about the long-term allocation of land, usage rights, income and shares between the state, the Corps, its divisions, regimental farms, and individual workers. Only by establishing a clear-cut, permanent relationship between land and individuals can we resolve the problem of population drain; otherwise, the cost of maintaining the Corps will become too exorbitant.
5. The transfer of high-quality local mineral resources to the private sector is not a lasting solution to the Corps' financial predicament. Given the institutional rigidity of the Corps, this seems to run counter to the spirit of reform, and may not be sound economic strategy.
6. The Corps should exercise its political function, as the state propaganda proclaims, of promoting ethnic exchange and ethnic unity. When addressing the issue of population drain, the Corps should remain open to outside perspectives, and maximize the benefits of local and regional labor surpluses by encouraging these workers to migrate to under-populated Corps areas.
7. In comparison to Uighur rural communities, the Corps has unparalleled advantages in agricultural production technology and techniques. The central or local government could appropriate special funds to create and broadcast, on Corps television stations, Uighur language programs and public-service-style broadcasts designed to share this wealth of knowledge. By sharing and spreading

its agricultural knowledge and experience with a Uighur audience, the Corps can help transform traditional, insular production methods and mindsets, and make an important contribution to fostering communication and cohesion between different ethnic groups.

VII. Governmental Competence and Credibility

Overview

There is a vast disparity between economic and social development in Xinjiang and in other regions of mainland China. This disparity extends to the official mindset: at all levels of government in Xinjiang, we encounter a mentality that falls far short of what is needed to govern and manage Xinjiang's societal complexities.

The class struggle and dictatorial mindset that died out so long ago in other parts of China (particularly in the economically-developed coastal regions) still exists, to varying degrees, in some places in Xinjiang. Compared to other regions of mainland China, Xinjiang retains more aspects of the planned economy: officials at all levels are inclined to be heavy-handed, and local officials have the final say in what crops farmers are allowed to plant. This occurs not only within the Corps: in some areas, it is only within the last year or two that farmers have won the right to manage their own agricultural activities. Uighur farmers in southern Xinjiang are still in the habit of referring to the township government as "The Commune," because many people don't sense that tremendous changes have transformed China's society.

Xinjiang's cadres and officials have a weak grasp of modern concepts of legality. There is a distinct "generation gap" in the mentality of cadres in Xinjiang's developed cities, such as Urumqi, and their contemporaries in even more developed regions of China; likewise, there is a "generation gap" in the mindset of cadres in rural southern Xinjiang and cadres in Xinjiang's more developed northern cities. During the July 2009 ethnic unrest, rural cadres from southern Xinjiang were transferred to Urumqi en masse to help maintain order; their behavior was so boorish that even the local cadres in Urumqi were appalled.

The program to transfer laborers from Xinjiang to Shaoguan in Guangdong Province [where the "Shaoguan Incident" of June 25-26, 2009, took place] started out as a positive and worthwhile endeavor.⁵ The way in which it was carried out, however, called to mind coercive methods that were more prevalent in the 1980s: home demolitions, forced relocations, land confiscation, and so on. Poor governance at the grassroots level doomed the program from the start, and bred a climate of suspicion and resistance.

⁵ The Shaoguan incident of June 25-26, 2009, was a violent dispute between Uighur and Han Chinese migrant workers at a toy factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. The dispute began with allegations of the sexual assault of a Han Chinese woman, and escalated into a conflict in which at least two Uighurs were killed and hundreds injured (witness reports and casualty estimates vary.) The Shaoguan incident was likely a contributing factor to the July 2009 ethnic violence in Urumqi. - Translator

In southern Xinjiang in particular, Chinese cadres are very nearly regarded as “stand-ins” for all Han Chinese, representatives of an entire race of people. As such, if their methods of governing are unjust or inept, conflicts between citizens and officials can easily escalate into ethnic conflict.

Therefore, we may surmise that the quality of Xinjiang’s cadres is a decisive factor in determining how smoothly the government can implement its policies there.

Zhang Chunxian now faces the test of rebuilding the government’s image within the community. There are two aspects to this test: the former is restoring government credibility, the latter is convincing citizens that they will not be punished for exercising their right to free speech.

Regarding the former: Between the Shaoguan incident of June 2009 and the syringe attacks later that year, there were all sorts of rumors flying in both the Han Chinese and Uighur communities. Certainly, this was the result of long-simmering ethnic tensions and mutual distrust, but it also reflected the local government’s approach to handling news and information. Over the years, this approach has eroded public trust in the media and made people unwilling to believe anything the government has to say.

Regarding the latter: in Xinjiang’s peculiar legal environment, people can be punished just for speaking out—and punished very severely. This pervasive, coercive atmosphere of fear still exists.

Causes

Xinjiang’s remoteness, an economy still dominated by centralized planning, social development that lags behind other areas of China, and two decades of political upheaval on its periphery have naturally led to the dictatorial mindset that prevails at all levels of Xinjiang’s local government.

In addition, local governments in Xinjiang are tasked with providing jobs to demobilized military officers, which means that a large proportion of Xinjiang’s grassroots cadres are former military officers. Long years of indoctrination about being the “first line of defense,” combined with military working methods, has given rise to a unique governing style among Xinjiang’s lower-level cadres. Particularly in southern Xinjiang, where living and working conditions are difficult, grassroots cadres are selected primarily for their political qualifications and reliability. As for overall mindset and quality of character, these are not even on the list of criteria, and Xinjiang’s limited resources make it impossible to provide systematic training for grassroots cadres spread far and wide.

Since 1997, overall society in Xinjiang has been in a state of high alert against “the three forces” [of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism], thus further strengthening the dictatorial tendencies of Xinjiang’s grassroots cadres. When it comes to dealing with societal and ethnic conflicts, they are resolved to do whatever it takes to smother potential conflict as quickly as possible before it can spread.

Thoughts and Recommendations

1. Crack down on corruption. Official corruption in Xinjiang is far more brazen than in other parts of China, and its methods and nature even more vile. The only way to restore people's confidence in government is to eliminate corruption.
2. Conduct training for all cadres in the areas of legal regulations, effective governance, and civilized law enforcement. Supplement this with various and convenient methods of social supervision and public reporting to enhance and improve awareness among Xinjiang's cadres.
3. Enhance information transparency. Learning from the experiences of more progressive areas of China and allowing local media more latitude to function will create a positive atmosphere that empowers the community and boosts public morale.
4. When transferring or exchanging cadres, focus on sending cadres to (or accepting them from) the southeastern seaboard region, the major metropolises of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and similarly developed areas, while reducing the number of cadres from the north. Use the latest ideas and concepts from these developed areas to influence awareness and promote a positive change in local attitudes.
5. When recruiting and promoting cadres or civil servants, focus on quality of character, vision, experience and other factors, and place less emphasis on political reliability or obedience.
6. At an opportune moment, release a group of intellectuals who have been unfairly detained, unfairly arrested and unfairly convicted—for example, Memetjan Abdulla of the China National Radio Uighur service, or Xinjiang Economic Daily reporter Gheyret Niyaz (Niyaz, an intellectual who grew up in a military family, repeatedly tried to warn local authorities of the danger signs before the July 2009 violence in Urumqi). Releasing some of these individuals as a sign of goodwill would send a positive message to the Uighur community and help to allay some of its pessimism and frustration.

VIII. Han Chinese Chauvinism

Overview

The preamble to the Chinese Constitution once read: “In the struggle to safeguard national unity, we must oppose Han chauvinism, as well as combat ethnic nationalism.” In the Mao era, the two phrases “ethnic nationalism” and “Han chauvinism” would often appear together in discussions of ethnic relations, but today, the phrase “Han chauvinism” has completely disappeared from everyday conversation.

Our government has always proclaimed its opposition to “Han chauvinism” as well as “ethnic nationalism,” yet virtually no one has ever been arrested or removed from office

due to “Han chauvinism.” Ethnic minorities account for less than ten percent of China’s total population, yet in the seventeen years before the Cultural Revolution, hundreds of thousands were arrested on charges of “ethnic nationalism” in the People’s Republic of China.

In reality, Han chauvinism is now more intense and more overt than it has been at any time in the past. Since “opposing the three forces” [of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism] became the main focus of all levels of government in Xinjiang, Han chauvinism has reappeared in the guise of “safeguarding national unity” and “preserving social stability.” No one dares to object, of course, or to criticize this emotional outpouring of Han chauvinism, lest they be accused of harboring separatist tendencies. This chauvinism manifests differently among the citizenry and among officials.

In recent years, discrimination against Uighurs has intensified to such an extent that it has become institutionalized nationwide. Uighurs routinely face discrimination in employment, passport issuance, rental housing, hotels, travel and many other areas of life; many domestic airports even have a designated security channel for residents of Xinjiang.

In Xinjiang itself, Uighurs are frequently the target of derogatory ethnic slurs by Han Chinese, such as “chan-tou” (“缠头”) or “wei-zi (“维子”). In other areas of mainland China, Uighurs encounter discriminatory treatment or even outright rejection when trying to register for hotel accommodation; when boarding planes, trains or other modes of public transport; and even at Internet bars and cafes. Often, a service employee will loudly proclaim: “We can’t let you register. It’s Public Security Bureau policy.” Those who have experienced this discrimination range from students and manual laborers to high-ranking provincial officials and eminent scholars. As for online discussion, it is even more extreme: self-proclaimed “imperial Han” lobbing insults at Xinjiang’s “barbarian” ethnic minorities are ubiquitous online.

Han chauvinism in official circles, on the other hand, tends to manifest itself in certain turns of phrase, stock expressions that the speaker uses unquestioningly. Phrases such as “*Yan-Huang zisun*” (“descendants of Yan Di and Huang Di”), “*long de chuanren*” (“descendants of the dragon”), “*Huaxia er-nu*” (“sons and daughters of Cathay”) are commonly used to invoke the Han Chinese people in their totality, but if a Uighur refers to their forbearer Oghuz Khan or a “wolf totem”, it is thought to be fraught with secessionist implications. Moreover, after the July 2009 ethnic unrest in Urumqi, every branch of every governmental organization in Xinjiang organized study sessions designed to refute the “parochial” view that “Xinjiang belongs to the Uighurs of Xinjiang.” The speakers and scholars at these meetings often claimed that, in fact, it was the Han Chinese forbearers who arrived in Xinjiang before the Uighur forbearers did, thus employing logic identical to the logic of the claim they were attempting to refute. Appearing as they did in an official capacity, these speakers and scholars were utterly counter-productive.

Incidents such as the aforementioned make Uighurs feel that society is becoming increasingly unjust and disrespectful of their culture and their feelings.

These slights pale in comparison to the pain and inconvenience ordinary Uighur suffer when using public services. To register for an identity card, for example, one is required to fill in a form with one's personal information. With no consideration for the majority of Uighurs who do not understand Chinese, the form only provides one column heading for "Chinese name." Even if one were to fill in Pinyin, the Chinese transliteration of one's Uighur name, the form is nearly impossible to fill out because it does not take into account differences in Uighur naming conventions. Since census registration was digitized, some local governments have introduced policies that force Uighurs to choose from a list of commonly used names; if their names are not on the list, they are not allowed to register.

A more serious problem is the Uighur community's growing fear of the government's increasingly chauvinistic ethnic policies. The government's sharp curtailing of bilingual education and Uighur cultural enterprises has led many in the Uighur community to feel that official ethnic policy is beginning to look like forced assimilation. In many public forums, particularly on the Internet, it is not difficult to find people openly discussing a point of view common among Han Chinese: that the only way to solve Xinjiang's ethnic problems is to accelerate Uighur assimilation.

The recent surge in theoretical inquiries that masquerade as critiques of national ethnic policy while negating the principle of regional ethnic autonomy and opposing updated concepts of ethnicity give the impression that virulent Han chauvinism has entered mainstream public discourse. Within the Uighur community, this has provoked intense fear and a sense of impending crisis, and has severely shaken the Uighur sense of national identity.

The natural merging of ethnicities and the creation of societies in which diverse ethnic cultures can coexist and learn from one another is an unstoppable historical trend that no one will really oppose, but a fear of forced assimilationist policies rooted in Han chauvinism has prompted more and more Uighurs to become suspicious of Chinese language education and *Nei-Gao-Ban* [the Chinese acronym for "Inland Xinjiang Senior High School Classes", which are elite courses designed to prepare minority students for entry into prestigious Chinese universities.] These doubts and fears have led many Uighurs to adopt a form of silent resistance by privately turning back to traditional culture, religious worship, and a strengthened sense of ethnic identity.

Thoughts and Recommendations

1. Enact policies that implement and respect regional ethnic autonomy; respect and protect the existing ethnic and cultural diversity and peaceful co-existence.
2. To combat openly discriminatory speech and behavior, we should take our cues from internationally accepted methods and standards: draft detailed prohibitions; gradually establish a legal and regulatory framework that protects the legitimate rights of minorities and forbids all forms of status discrimination (including ethnic discrimination); use legal means to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities in employment, public services and the cultural sphere; and eliminate forms of casual ethnic discrimination. On this basis, we can transform the culture

and habits of an entire society, creating a more “politically-correct” value system against discrimination.

3. The government should organize systematic research and discussion among experts and scholars to determine which commonly used official phrases are most likely to be misconstrued or wound the feelings of ethnic minorities. Such discussion could be a form of social critique, a way of combatting unconscious racial bias in our speech. For example, describing the Han Chinese people as being uniformly “black haired”, “black eyed” and “yellow skinned” would, in the West, be considered a form of overt racial propagandizing inappropriate to public discourse.
4. The government should re-examine and reflect on the role of Han Chinese chauvinism and ethnic nationalism in Chinese society. When dealing with ethnic issues, it is not fair to stress only minority chauvinism and ethnic separatism, while completely ignoring the issue of Han chauvinism. At the very least, the government should allow citizens to freely discuss and criticize both Han chauvinism and ethnic extremism. For China’s future as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation, and as a rising international power, the strong strains of Han chauvinism and ethnic nationalism in today’s mainstream Chinese society are not a sign of healthy attitudes.
5. In theory, the People’s Republic of China is supposed to be comprised of 56 different ethnicities. Thus, the terms “overseas Chinese” or “Chinese diaspora” should refer not only to people of Han Chinese lineage, but also to people of other lineages as well. In fact, if the government treated all overseas people with ancestral ties to China even-handedly, the results might well amaze. For example, more than a year ago, the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan began to reach out to the local Uighur diaspora community: as a result, Pakistani exchange students of Uighur lineage could soon be heard on Beijing university campuses proclaiming themselves as “overseas Chinese” and taking great pride in their contributions to their ancestral land—whereas in the past, the term “overseas Chinese” was never used to describe diaspora Uighurs, because it seemed to refer specifically to people of Han Chinese descent.

IX. Ethnic Regional Autonomy and Anti-separatism

Overview

Upon the founding of the People’s Republic of China, China created a set of clear-cut national policies based on the principles of regional ethnic autonomy and ethnic equality, and backed by the Chinese Constitution, the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law and a variety of other legal mechanisms. Not only was this a fundamental leap forward for China, a vast improvement over the old system, it was also well ahead of many Western countries at the time. China’s system of regional ethnic autonomy was based on a fair distribution of dignity and power; it was meant to be an integrated institutional

mechanism capable of balancing the needs of the state with the needs of ethnic peoples, but it has never been carried out and implemented properly.

Although the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law was promulgated as a basic law nearly thirty years ago, there still are no regional-level regulations governing its implementation. The system of regional ethnic autonomy is a story of years of accumulated promises—promises that have, noticeably, not yet been honored.

There are a variety of reasons why regional ethnic autonomy has never been truly implemented: cultural and economic factors, the unique political climate of the times, and other factors. The Uighur community was never particularly vocal about this non-implementation, partly because of a lack of awareness or knowledge about their basic rights, and partly because they never felt that their legitimate rights and interests had been seriously undermined.

But over the last decade or two, at least in Xinjiang, the purely nominal nature of regional ethnic autonomy has become an increasingly serious problem. Legislative attempts to implement true regional ethnic autonomy have stalled or made no headway, which means that provisions contained in the Chinese Constitution and the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law – both of which include clear stipulations regarding minority employment, cultural protection, cadre functions, religious belief and other issues – are impossible to enforce. Ignoring the stipulations of China’s Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law has led to the ethnic problems we discussed earlier; it is also the reason that Uighur rights and interests have not received due legal protection.

Implementing and enforcing rules and regulations related to regional ethnic autonomy has been a difficult task from the beginning, but now there is new problem that makes the future of ethnic autonomy even more complicated and uncertain.

Today, the discussion is not about how to implement regional ethnic autonomy, but about whether or not to abolish it. This is particularly true since the ethnic strife that occurred in Lhasa in 2008 and in Urumqi in 2009. A group of scholars led by Ma Rong and Yang Shengming, in re-examining ethnic policies and the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, have begun to openly negate and oppose the concept of regional ethnic autonomy. Furthermore, in the name of eradicating ethnic separatist ideology, they have put forward a viewpoint that seems akin to “abolishing the idea of ethnicity altogether.”

At a time when even ethnologists are publicly questioning the regional autonomy provisions of the Chinese Constitution, rare are those who dare to publicly stand up for the principle of regional ethnic autonomy, much less demand the full implementation of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law. This will lead to the following effect: the public will come to believe that it is the intent of the government to abolish regional ethnic autonomy, and they will take it as a public expression of support for forced assimilation. And in today’s climate, anyone who dares to openly discuss implementing ethnic autonomy is automatically perceived as advocating ethnic separatism.

When academia speaks with a single voice, that voice does not necessarily reflect social reality. For example, before the 2009 ethnic unrest in Urumqi, Yang Shengming’s

published survey on ethnic problems in Xinjiang claimed that Uighurs had a stronger sense of national identity than even Han Chinese, and that Uighurs and Han Chinese showed similarly high levels of support for inter-ethnic marriage. The report concluded that the idea that Xinjiang had serious ethnic problems was “an alarmist viewpoint.” But our survey showed the exact opposite: the outlook for national identity in the Uighur community brooked no optimism, and every ethnic group, in fact, seemed to oppose and resist inter-ethnic marriage.

The lack of public voices supporting the protection and implementation of regional ethnic autonomy is actually quite frightening, because China’s ethnic minorities are crying out for genuine ethnic autonomy. If regional ethnic autonomy is not an option, only two possible scenarios remain: abolishing ethnic autonomy and enforcing assimilation, or ethnic independence movements.

Doing away with regional ethnic autonomy under the mantle of opposing separatism is an extremely dangerous idea because it will nudge more and more ethnic minorities from hopelessness into irrational support for independence movements. The true threat to China’s national unity and integrity is not ethnic autonomy: it is the prospect of abolishing ethnic autonomy.

To some extent, countering secessionism in Xinjiang is a race between the full implementation of regional ethnic autonomy and the forces of ethnic separatism.

Thoughts

Thus far, the path to addressing and resolving ethnic relations in multi-ethnic nations has involved some form of regional autonomy. Almost without exception, this has been the case in multi-ethnic nations formed by historical circumstance (typified by Switzerland, Spain, Belgium, Britain, France and other European countries), and in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nations formed through immigration (such as French-speaking areas of Canada).

Among the rare exceptions are the United States, Malaysia (with its Chinese immigrants) and a few other nations. In these nations, because multiple ethnicities and cultures later began to merge, they never formed into ethnic enclaves or regions.

The prescription that Ma Rong and other scholars are recommending for China today is patently mistaken and dangerous when they repeatedly emphasize the American experiences as a model without respecting the fact that China’s experiences and national conditions are vastly different from those of the United States.

Separatism exists in most every corner of the globe. Among advanced Western nations, France has the Corsican problem, the British have the dispute over Northern Ireland, Spain has the Basque and Catalan problems, Canada has the Quebec separatist movement, Japan has the Ryukyu Islands independence movement...even the United States has a few dozen separatist organizations.

No country has found a way to completely eliminate separatism. But through economic development, the implementation of civil rights, systemic design and the use of legal

means, some have consistently managed to marginalize and neutralize separatist movements, while at the same time enhancing solidarity, safeguarding national unity, and mitigating the pressures of globalization. There are many successful examples to choose from.

Perhaps the most worthwhile example is Spain. In the late 1970s, after Spain bid farewell to authoritarianism, the Basque and Catalan separatist movements broke out. Fueled by stark ethnic and linguistic differences, the Basque separatist movement enjoyed nearly unanimous support among the Basque people, and extremist separatist groups carried out constant attacks. In October 1979, referenda on the Statute of Autonomy that balanced the interests of the various parties were held in the two restive regions (Catalan and Basque) and each gained over 90 percent approval. Among today's Basques (the group with the most serious separatist tendencies) 64 percent oppose independence; in Catalonia, the figure is as high as 80 percent.

Chinese scholars frequently regard Yugoslavia as a case study in secessionism, but few people draw the correct lesson: although the separatist tendencies of ethnic peoples in Yugoslavia were far less serious than in Spain, the dominant ethnic group, the Serbs, cared less about the nation's territorial integrity than they did about competing with other ethnic groups for a bigger slice of the national pie. Fanatical Serbian nationalism played a destructive role in Yugoslavia's dissolution.

The most fundamental solution to Xinjiang's ethnic problem is to enforce Chinese constitutional provisions regarding regional ethnic autonomy, and to try to strike a balance between ethnic autonomy and national unity.

Recommendations

1. As soon as possible, promulgate and implement the statute of autonomy in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and the detailed rules for the implementation of the existing *Law of the Peoples Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy* in order to implement the law by establishing an institutional framework that provides sound legal protections for regional ethnic autonomy in China.

The statute of autonomy would be the most fundamental embodiment of the right of self-determination in China's ethnic autonomous regions. Yet as of now, not a single statute of autonomy has been put forward to protect autonomous government in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region or the five autonomous prefectures and six autonomous counties under its jurisdiction. In contrast, in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, legislative work on provisions for ethnic autonomy was complete by the mid-1980s. Yanbian can be regarded as China's most successful example of implementing regional ethnic autonomy.

2. Allow discussion and public dialogue on the subject of implementing regional ethnic autonomy while also safeguarding national unity. In practical terms, this is a necessary precondition to seeking equilibrium between national unity and regional ethnic autonomy in Xinjiang.

3. The current system of government should establish at least one benchmark for the progressive implementation of regional ethnic autonomy in Xinjiang. Such a benchmark would help to improve the status quo on such issues as Uighur employment, cultural protection, appointment of cadres and religious beliefs, and would help to greatly reduce current levels of ethnic resentment and strife.

Finally, when crafting policies designed to aid Xinjiang, the central government should cease favoring the economic sphere at the expense of the political and cultural spheres. It should also avoid unilateral “financial infusions” that ignore the local economy, particularly those that overlook the local Uighur socio-economic support system. Currently, government aid to Xinjiang revolves around bringing in big business and big capital from other parts of mainland China, but offers few opportunities for local capital or minority-owned capital. Some places in Xinjiang have already exhibited a crowding-out effect, as outside capital pushes out local capital; we should remain vigilant to such signals. Because they have no positive effect on local employment, and can even directly harm the interests of local industry and commerce, today’s government aid policies in Xinjiang will have even more negative consequences than similar wasteful and ineffective policies in Tibet (see Jin Wei’s *Aid Policies and Tibetan Economic Development* 《援助政策与西藏经济发展》).

The End

Also by Ilham Tohti:

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