

Survival of Uyghur Ethnic Identity: A Case of Self Preservation

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ABSTRACT

In a world of increasing globalization, ethnic minorities and marginalized societies are in danger of being smothered by the nations that surround them. The Uyghurs within China are in a position of becoming assimilated into the larger Han culture despite the policies that are in place to protect them. The survival of the Uyghurs as a distinct ethnic group depends on their ability to secure economic stability within their region by increasing education and job opportunities within their communities in order to take advantage of the economic opportunities that have arisen due to the region's abundant natural resources. Education and job opportunities within Xinjiang are also dependent on the protection of their language and the ability to stem the migration of young Uyghurs as well as the immigration of Han Chinese. The ability to protect the cultures within its borders will reflect on China's position on international ethnic disputes.

Introduction

Uyghurs, today, are in a position where the survival of their culture is threatened. To ensure the survival of their culture, the Uyghurs must create an environment within China that would encourage the protection of their culture, promotes economic possibilities, and safe guards their land against Han Chinese infringement and environmental damage. The challenge of securing and protecting the Uyghur culture is of great importance to not only the Uyghurs, but also to China and the world at large. The unique mixture of influences that shaped the Uyghurs culture is a testament to the grand cultures of China, Persia, and Eastern Europe and the survival of the Uyghur culture is paramount in the increasing globalization of China. This globalization, however, has created tensions between the Chinese government and the Uyghurs, and China's minority policies are falling short of their intended uses.

Uyghurs are the largest ethnic nationality in Xinjiang and are the second largest Muslim minority within China after the Hui. Uyghurs are a Central Asian people that differ from the Han Chinese by their religion, language, and culture. The Hui are ethnically Han Chinese who practices Islam. The Han Chinese composes about 90% of the population within China and is the dominant ethnic group both culturally and politically. Uyghurs are descended from the traditional regional nomads, merchants, and Arab traders that have traversed the Silk Road. This combination of cultures has led to a uniquely independent culture that is distinctly different from Han Chinese society.

The tensions and problems of today have roots that date back to the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. In a Communists display of power and its quest for legitimacy, it became important for the Communists to acquire all lands that have traditionally been a part of China, and in 1950 once again Xinjiang was under control of China. Under the new government the traditional connections to surrounding nations and culture were severed in an attempt to unite all of China. Xinjiang, a rural frontier for China, was one of the places that the government used to send former members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and created the Production and Construction Corps (PCC). One of major reasons for this was to strengthen the ties between Xinjiang and China by creating infrastructure that orientated the region toward Beijing and settled Han Chinese in Uyghur land to force assimilation into Chinese culture. The government also sent the PLA into Xinjiang to secure the newly expanded borders.

The policies and regulations of the Communist Party toward minorities were based on the idea that everyone was equal regardless of their ethnicity or race. The Party ideals were that the minorities should be allowed to express their culture and lifestyle without fear of direct government control as long as the minorities were striving toward the national goal of a united China. Autonomous regions were created to protect the minorities and give them control over local and cultural areas. The presence of the

PCC and the PLA, both of which were Han Chinese controlled, in Xinjiang created friction and resistance among Uyghurs that can still be detected today.

Since the integration of Xinjiang into the PRC, some Uyghurs both within and abroad have advocated secession and the creation of an independent Uyghur state. Han nationalistic tendencies and state enforced assimilation policies undermine Uyghur identity and feeds secessionist aspirations. Xinjiang secession and the creation of an independent Uyghur state is neither a plausible option nor is it achievable within the near future because Xinjiang would be unable to achieve economic stability without international support. However, government infringement and threat to the Uyghur autonomy and identity are issues that need to be addressed in order for both Uyghurs and Han Chinese to coexist.

Literature Review

The study of Uyghurs and their culture intensified in the 1990's with the opening up of China's borders to the West. The interest with the Uyghurs spans the gamut from international political implications to the study of ethnic cultures and nationalism. The study of Uyghurs has been done mostly by Western scholars and Chinese living abroad. While the Chinese government did give a certain amount of access to the scholars and their research during the 1990's, the subject of Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups was and still is a sensitive subject.

Gladney, perhaps the most notable scholar on Muslim ethnic nationalism and history, has written several books and articles during the 1990's. Gladney, and most other scholars, place the Uyghurs within the larger context of Muslim Chinese despite the fact that Uyghurs are not ethnically Chinese¹. Gladney and most other scholars deal with the tensions between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government which run along the lines of economic, political, and racial inequality reducing the Uyghurs to second class citizens.

Yee did a study in 2000 that focused on the views of both the Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Yee found that there was discrimination and prejudices between the two groups among half of those surveyed². His study also found that there was a discrepancy between the income of Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Urumqi as well as in the positions of power within local government³. The tensions between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese have caused both groups to remain somewhat separated from each other with most of the contact happening in business or governmental arenas.

Lipman states that the Uyghurs belief in Islam sets them apart from not only mainstream Chinese but also other Muslim communities. Lipman details the rise and changes of Islam in the Uyghur community throughout its introduction in the seventh and eighth centuries as well as the divisions between Uyghurs themselves. Lipman's work examines the development of a distinctly Uyghur Muslim religion and their role in the political and culture fabric of China⁴.

These issues of racial discrimination and inequality are covered by Dikotter, who has been extensively cited by the majority of scholars interested in ethnic minorities within China. Dikotter follows the evolution of the construction of race within China and the attitudes of the Chinese to those that they consider to be 'others'. The idea of barbarians on the frontiers was a prevailing thought of the Chinese until the rise of the Communist Party. It was during the 1920's and 1940's with the rise of the Communist Party that the idea of equality between ethnic nationalities within China was first introduced⁵. Rudelson,

¹Dru Gladney, "Relational Alterity: Constructing Dungan (Hui), Uyghur, and Kazakh Identities across China, Central Asia, and Turkey" *History and Anthropology* Vol. 9, No. 2

²Herbert S. Yee, "Ethnic Relations in Xinjiang: A survey of Uyghur- Han relations in Urumqi" *Journal of Contemporary China* 12, No. 36 (August 2003) : 439

³Ibid. 444, 449

⁴Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997)

⁵Frank Dikotter *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst & Company, 1992)

however, suggests that the model for the minority policies of the Communist party have more to do with the late Qing dynasty than any socialist ideology⁶.

The Chinese policies toward ethnic nationalities and minorities have been heavily studied. The policies have been set up to protect the rights of minorities but in the case of the Uyghurs there have been some problems. One of the most contentious problems has been the immigration of Han Chinese into the Xinjiang. The influx of immigrants has shifted the balance of power in the larger urban areas and in government. Buchman states that the Chinese government has used economic incentives and the formation of the Production and Construction Corps (PCC) to encourage Han migration into Xinjiang⁷. The improvements to the economy have been somewhat limited to the northern portion of Xinjiang where most of the Han Chinese are concentrated in the urban areas.

Qiang and Xin also found that the immigration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang has been a stimulus to the economy and hence has created a little more stability. This economic boom, however, has caused some environmental concerns and point to the fact that the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese must become educated as to the ways to coexist with nature instead of exploiting the natural resources. Qiang and Xin have also pointed to the migration of young Uyghurs to other parts of China in search of educational opportunities⁸. Rong has stated that Han Chinese are more likely to be employed in higher paying technical and governmental positions due to better education. The Han Chinese immigrants are generally better educated than the local Uyghurs and have caused, along with a recent decrease in Han immigration, a vacancy in higher paying jobs that the local Uyghurs cannot fill⁹. Hu found that many Uyghurs are moving to the larger urban areas so that their children can receive a better education. This movement has created a strong sense of community within the urban areas due to the fact that most Uyghurs rely on other more established Uyghurs that already live in the urban areas. Hu states that this has led to an increased sense of ethnic identity due to the juxtaposition of the Uyghurs, Han Chinese, and other minorities. Hu also states that it is particularly important for Uyghurs to be fluent in Chinese in order to communicate and thrive in the urban areas which has begun to undermine the Uyghur language¹⁰.

Economically Xinjiang is an integral part of China and will only become more important in the future. Gang and Felmingham state that Xinjiang will become China's main producer of oil and natural gas which has caused China to begin investing heavily in Xinjiang's infrastructure. Gang and Felmingham, along with Hu, believe that this investment and some of the new policies have caused tension between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. The Uyghurs feel that these policies benefit the Han Chinese who have a higher level education and live predominately in the urban areas. Gang and Felmingham also state that the Xinjiang will become an economic link between China and the Central Asian countries¹¹. This fact alone has become increasingly important when the issue of secession arises.

The secession of Xinjiang has as many international implications as it does for China. Mackerras points to the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of ethnic nationalism world wide as the reason for the

⁶Justin Jon Rudelson *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 21

⁷David Bachman "Making Xinjiang Safe for the Han? : Contradictions and Ironies of Chinese Governance in China's Northwest," in *Governing China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (2004) 156

⁸Ren Qiang and Yuan Xin "Impacts of Migration to Xinjiang Since the 1950s," in *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies*, ed. Robyn Iredale, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo (New York: An East Gate Booke, 2003)

⁹Ma Rong "Population Distribution and Relations among Ethnic Groups in the Kashgar Region, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," in *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies* ed. Robyn Iredale, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo (New York: An East Gate Booke, 2003)

¹⁰Tsui Yen Hu "Uyghur Movement within Xinjiang and its Ethnic Identity and Cultural Implications," in *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies* ed. Robyn Iredale, Naran Bilik, Fei Guo (New York: An East Gate Booke, 2003)

¹¹ Liu Gang and B.S. Felmingham, *The Strategic Significance of Xinjiang for China in the 21st Century* available at http://www.utas.edu.au/econfin/library/discussion_papers/papers_98/1998_10.pdf

rise of separatist movements within Xinjiang in the 1990's¹². Mackerras, Zhu, and Blachford point to the ethnic tension between the Uyghurs and the Han within Xinjiang that is spurred by the Han immigration as one of the main causes of separatist movements. Mackerras as well as Zhu and Blachford feel that the international community is against the creation of an independent Xinjiang due to the current problems within the Muslim dominated Middle East¹³. Zhu, Blachford, and Mackerras agree that for Xinjiang to succeed in seceding that China would have to fail. This seems to be the prevailing thought among scholars on the subject based on the power of the Chinese government within its borders as well as its growing international position.

Ethnic Identity and Nationalism

In order to fully understand the complexity of ethnic minority issues within China it is important to understand both the Uyghurs and Chinese ethnic identities and nationalism. Ethnic identity and nationalism are at the heart of many problems and tensions between the Uyghurs and the Chinese. The Uyghur identity has developed in an area that traditionally has seen the ebb and flow of Chinese political dominance and this has allowed the Uyghurs to grow culturally separate from China. The Uyghur ethnic identity consists of, in part, to their belief in Islam and their feelings of being indigenous to the region. Islam is a major difference between Uyghurs and the Confucius based Chinese and from the atheist PRC.

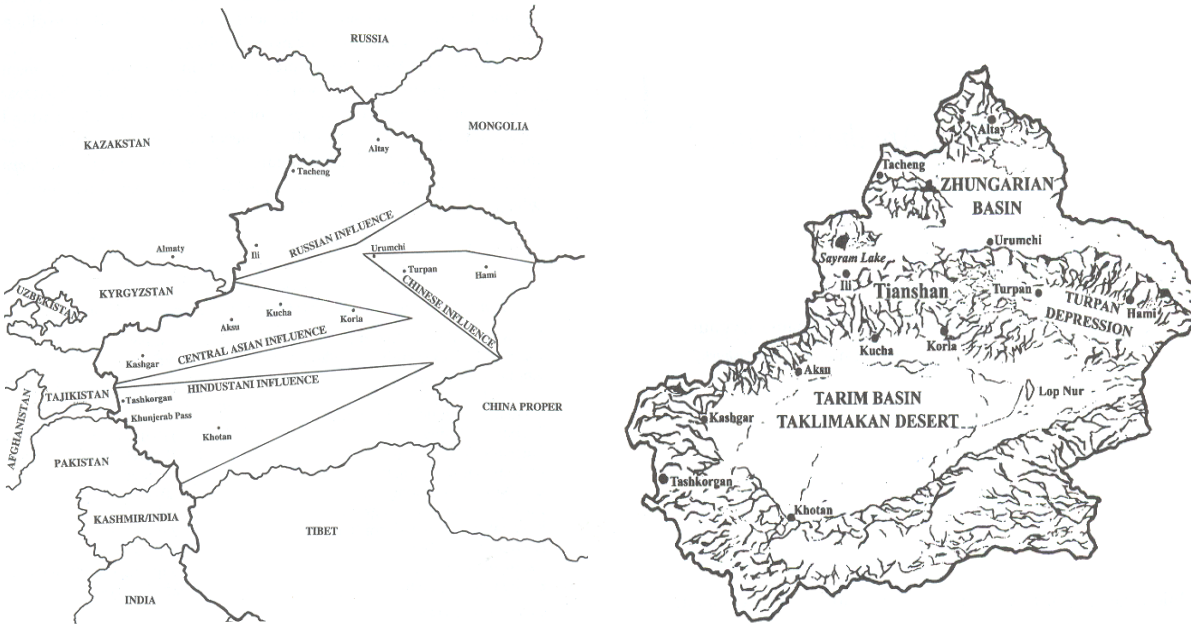
Uyghur ethnic identity and nationalism was not fully cemented until Communist China pulled Xinjiang into the sphere of Chinese influence. The name, Uyghur, which was used during the eighth and seventeenth centuries, resurfaced in the 1930's¹⁴. Historically Uyghur identity was more localized and somewhat disconnected from each other due to geographical barriers, such as mountains and deserts, where people would feel a sense of community with their own oasis. The internal mountains of Xinjiang caused the Uyghurs to have more contact with cultures bordering Xinjiang than interconnection between the regions. Four major influences have molded Uyghur identity; Russian influence in the Zhungarian Basin, Central Asian and Indian influences in the Tarim Basin, and Chinese influence in the Turpan Depression.¹⁵ These influences have caused some disconnection between the groups of Uyghurs living in these regions. The diversity that grew out of Xinjiang's geographical limitations survives to this day. The South half of Xinjiang, in close proximity to other Islamic peoples, is predominately Uyghur while the Turpan Depression in the Northeast has become dominated by Hui and has a close relation with Beijing.

¹² Colin Mackerras, "Xinjiang at the turn of the Century: The Causes of Separatism", *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 20, No. 3 (2001)

¹³ Yuchao Zhu and Dongyan Blachford, "China's Fate as a Multinational State: A Preliminary Assessment", *Journal of Contemporary China* Vol. 15, No. 47 (May 2006), 346.

¹⁴ Dru Gladney, "Relational Alterity: Constructing Dungan (Hui), Uyghur, and Kazah Identities across China, Central Asia, and Turkey", *History and Anthropology* Vol.9 No.2, 468

¹⁵Rudelson, 41



The Four Geographic Template Divisions of Xinjiang. The Physiography of Xinjiang ¹⁶

The ethnic identity of Uyghurs consists of three distinguishing aspects. The first aspect is the belief that Uyghurs are the indigenous people of the Tarim Basin. Their belief that the Xinjiang has always been under Uyghur occupation stems from their nomadic roots along the mountain ranges. The control of the trade routes throughout the region also gave the Uyghurs cause to view the land as theirs. This gave them some economic security.

The second is their belief in Islam. Uyghurs have developed differently from the other Muslim groups within China because unlike Hui, the largest Muslim minority within China, Uyghurs are not ethnically Chinese. Uyghurs are more closely related to the Central Asian peoples. The countries that border Xinjiang, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, all have a small numbers of Uyghurs living within their borders.

The third is their language which is a Turkish language and uses the Arabic alphabet. Language is important to the survival of the Uyghur identity since it is the vehicle of culture. Their language is also important to their Muslim heritage and culture.

Uyghur nationalism arose during the creation of the PRC. The incorporation into the PRC and the ideology of the Communists toward ethnic minorities forced the Uyghur community to band together despite geographical barriers. The creation the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the subsequent minority policies created a political space within China for the Uyghurs to firmly establish their identity against the Chinese.

Uyghur nationalism has manifested into rebellions several times under Chinese domination. Xinjiang is in a unique position within China. Xinjiang is one of two regions where an ethnic minority is so completely concentrated that they make up a majority of the population in that region. The push for secession and the creation of an independent Xinjiang has several international implications. The first major problem with idea of secession comes directly from the Uyghurs themselves. Those who advocate secession the loudest come from the Uyghurs who are living abroad¹⁷. The majority of Uyghurs within Xinjiang stops short of out right secession and advocate gaining the autonomy that is granted to them by the government. The threat of repercussions from the government on expressing support for secession, however, has a direct effect on the many Uyghurs from voicing their opinions.

¹⁶ Rudelson, 18, 41

¹⁷ Gladney, *Relational Alterity*, 452.

The international community also plays a large role in the suppression of any secession movements. Since 9/11 and the emergence of the several unstable Islamic nations, countries such as the United States and Britain have supported China's position against secession. China has used the crisis in the Middle East as an excuse to persecute Islamic supporters under the guise of the War on Terror. The Chinese government has connected any Uyghur secession movement to that of radical Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda. This has led China to partner with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as the U.S. to deal with terrorism, separatism and extremism¹⁸. The idea of adding another Islamic based nation to the Middle East is another reason for the international pressure against secession. The addition of an independent Xinjiang in the region could cause tremendous repercussions with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The international pressures have successfully stemmed any large-scale movement for secession on the part of Uyghurs. China has used these international pressures against radical Islamic groups to further strengthen its economic and military control on Xinjiang.

China's rapidly growing economy has created an enormous demand for oil and natural gas. The government is working with Kazakhstan to build an oil pipeline that would run straight through Xinjiang. This would benefit both countries economically and is another justification for the Chinese government to suppress any threat of secession in Xinjiang. Xinjiang is also the buffer for China against Russia and its influence and the trouble in the Middle East. The secession of Xinjiang would be politically, economically, and militarily disastrous for China.

Chinese ethnic identity and nationalism is that of a Han ethnic identity and nationalism. The Han are traced back to the Han Dynasty and make up 94% of people in the PRC¹⁹. Han attitudes toward other ethnic groups and races have been indifferent and superior if not downright hostile. Views of barbarians that live outside of the influence and scope of Chinese society shaped Han attitudes toward Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. The Han view of other ethnic groups consisted of "raw" and "cooked" barbarians. The "raw" barbarians are the people who lived outside of the scope of Chinese civilization. The "cooked" barbarians submitted to the dominance of Chinese civilization²⁰. However, it was not until Sun Yat-sen that Han nationalism became synonymous with the Chinese state. The creation of the PRC and the Communist Party adopted Sun Yat-sen's vision of Han dominance and his policies toward ethnic minorities²¹. Since the creation of the PRC, the minority policies and Han chauvinism have solidified the Uyghur community by defining the Chinese as Han and regulating the Uyghurs to the margins of society.

Ethnic Minority Policies and Their Effects

The PRC government's main goal is to create and support a strong national identity and will not tolerate allegiance to any other entity. However, the constitution gives national minorities' equality and the right to live according to their customs and beliefs as well as protects minorities from discrimination from the "greater nationalism and chauvinism"²². In practice, Han Chinese constitutes the majority of upper level governmental positions even within Xinjiang. Government enforced migration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang and their dominance within local and national government suggests that Han nationalism is supported by the state. The PRC has organized the state and its inhabitants around the idea that allegiance to China comes before all else. This became a particular sore spot with Uyghurs due to their belief in Islam and its doctrine. According to their traditional beliefs, devotion to Islam supersedes any devotion to a state or government. This has allowed the PRC government to effectively exclude Uyghurs from the high-ranking positions in government. Government policies that prohibit governmental

¹⁸Zhu , *Ethnic Minority Issues in China's Foreign Policy*, 244.

¹⁹Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism and the People's Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 81

²⁰Dikotter, 9

²¹Gladney, 82, 88-89

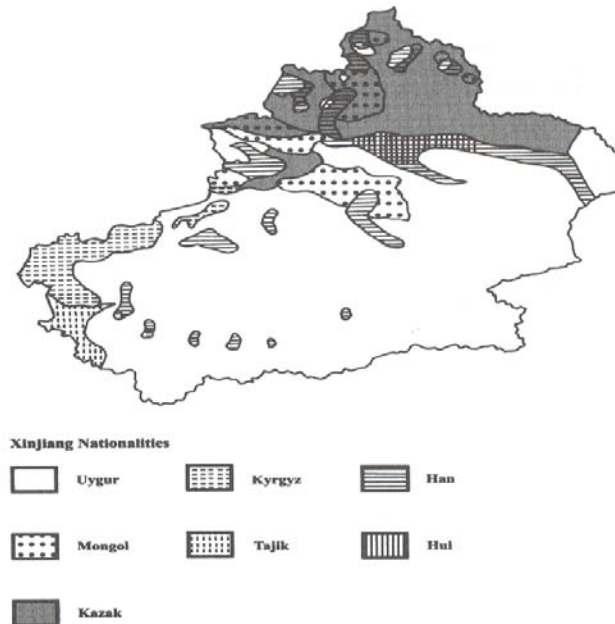
²²The common program of the Chinese People's political consultative conference, art. 50, 1949

officials from participating in religious activities is an effort to ensure complete allegiance to the party and has prohibited some Uyghurs from office²³.

Preferential policies that are meant to encourage and enable national minorities to gain the necessary education for job opportunities have had mixed results. The most notable preferential policy concerns education. Under the preferential policies, universities require a lower test score for ethnic minorities than they do for the Han. This is in response to a general poorer educational system in regions that have a higher concentration of ethnic minorities and a language barrier. Han feel that these policies allow unqualified individuals into positions and some Uyghurs believe that the policies will affect the quality of Uyghur students²⁴.

Language is a serious obstacle. Uyghurs schools are allowed to be taught in their own language; however, universities and governmental operations require the use of Mandarin Chinese. The communication between Han and Uyghurs within Xinjiang is limited, and Han officials cannot talk to their constituents²⁵. Uyghurs by default are required to use a foreign national language to have communication with their own local government. The language barrier has allowed the Uyghurs and Han to remain segregated even in the urban centers in Xinjiang. In many urban centers like Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital, a Uyghur must learn Mandarin in order to gain employment or educational opportunities²⁶. Mandarin's use in government and universities has led to the decline of the Uyghur language which, in turn, is leading to the decline in cultural identity.

The Communists believe that race and discrimination is a byproduct of class struggle and that once the feudal class was abolished then racial and ethnic discrimination would be abolished as well, yet, the Communist government has been the vehicle of Han nationalistic intentions. The heaviest concentration of Uyghurs are in the Southwest portion of Xinjiang which remains economically far behind the rest of Xinjiang. The concentration of Uyghurs has allowed their ethnic identity to remain strong and governmental policies and economic inequality has created discontent among many Uyghurs²⁷. Another issue of discontent among Uyghurs within Xinjiang



Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang²⁸

²³ Yee, 449

²⁴ Ibid, 443

²⁵ Ibid., 449

²⁶ Ibid., 436

²⁷ Bachman, 170-172

is the immigration of Han Chinese into the region. Government enforced Han migration into traditional Uyghur lands has created a tense and resentful relation between the Uyghurs and the Han. This influx of Han Chinese has caused tensions that are due to competition of jobs, cultural and language differences, and discrimination from both sides²⁹. Han also dominate the jobs in many of the large state run farms, oil fields, and the PCC. The Han migrated specifically for these jobs and intend on returning to their homes at some point³⁰. This has created some Uyghurs to look badly on the new migrations and reinforces the segregation between the two communities.

Protecting Uyghur Ethnic Identity

The protection of ethnic minorities is required under the constitution of the PRC. The preferential policies are in place to allow the ethnic minorities to start on even ground with the Han. However, these policies have not only created hostility between the two communities but have also had many Han claim to be of an ethnic minority group to reap of the rewards of the policies³¹. The protection of ethnic minorities relies on the government to enforce policies that are already in place as well as to allow some changes.

One of the ways to protect the Uyghur culture is to improve the economic situation within Xinjiang by gaining control of the natural resources. The ability to gain employment and control over the natural resources would allow the Uyghurs to not only protect their environment, but also to reap the economic rewards. This could reduce the amount of Uyghurs that migrate to other parts of China for employment. Xinjiang has abundant resources that China is in dire need for such as water, oil, and natural gas. Xinjiang has 25.2 billion cubic meters of groundwater and run off and the estimated petroleum and natural gas deposits make up 25% of China's national totals³². The PRC's constitution states that "in developing natural resources and building enterprises in the national autonomous areas, the state shall give due consideration to the interests of those areas,"³³ so in theory the Uyghurs should benefit from the extraction of the natural resources. However, the PCC and other private companies have very low numbers of Uyghurs within their ranks so most job opportunities are given to Han. Many of the jobs also require some degree of specialized education or skills that the Uyghur community lacks. Education in the technical and scientific fields could increase the involvement of local Uyghurs in jobs that are created.

Education is another area where Uyghurs can contribute to the greater Chinese society and protect Uyghur ethnic identity at the same time. The PRC's constitution states that "national autonomous areas independently administer educational, scientific, cultural, public health, and physical culture affairs in the respective areas, sort out and protect the cultural legacy of the nationalities and work for the prosperity of their cultures"³⁴ yet one of the priorities of the 9th five year plan for China's educational development in the Education law of the PRC is to "establish a socialistic educational system framework with Chinese characteristics and orientated towards the 21st century" and "that schools and other educational institutions shall in their educational activities popularize the nationally common spoken Chinese and the standard written characters"³⁵. The two policies are at odds with each other and creates a situation that undermines Uyghur cultural identity within the school system. In early 2008, Uyghur scholars recommended to the government that the use of their native language should not be limited in grade

²⁸ Rudelson, 23

²⁹ Yee, 437

³⁰ Rong, 117

³¹ Dr. Litip Tohti of Central University for nationalities, Beijing University, interview by author, May 2008.

³² Crienglish available at <http://english.cri.cn/>

³³ P.R.C. Constitution, art. 118

³⁴ P.R.C. Constitution, art. 119

³⁵ Ministry of Education, *Education Law of the P.R.C.*

schools despite a 2004 policy ³⁶. This would ensure that the ability for children to learn in their native language would strengthen their cultural identity.

The control of Han immigration into Xinjiang would also secure the Uyghur culture from infringement. Limiting the number of Han that can enter Xinjiang for job opportunities would create a greater demand for Uyghur labor. This greater demand for Uyghur would then require better access to the education needed to enter the job force which in turn would create better economic conditions within Uyghur communities. The increased job opportunities and economic security within Xinjiang would also reduce the migration of Uyghurs to other parts of China looking for employment. The retention of Uyghurs within Xinjiang and the reduction of Han migration and influence would create a space where Uyghur identity could remain strong and unchallenged. Increased education and job opportunities would reduce the need for Han migration into Xinjiang. The retention of students and able, qualified workers would ensure economic success as well as strengthen their ethnic identity and culture.

Conclusion

Uyghur identity and culture are threatened by ineffective governmental policies, poor economic and educational opportunities, and the immigration of Han into Xinjiang. The restructuring of the preferential policies could allow Uyghurs a greater opportunity to excel in the Chinese society. The creation of jobs and economic opportunities created by better education and the reduction of Han migration into Xinjiang would allow Uyghurs to become self sustaining which would then strengthen their cultural identity. The reduction of migration of young Uyghurs to other parts of China for job and educational opportunities would also create a continuous and solid line for the culture and identity to be passed from one generation to the next.

The protection of indigenous cultures is a pressing problem throughout the world. The increased globalization and power of nations and governments is creating an environment that is strangling the individual and distinct cultures of small ethnic groups. The forced assimilation of these groups into the larger mainstream nations and international community is eliminating many cultures that have survived thus far. The Uyghurs' embody the problems and dangers that many small ethnic groups face in today's world. Each community and ethnic group should have the right to retain their own distinct cultures and lifestyles in a peaceful and productive manner. It is therefore the responsibility of the larger communities and nations to allow the smaller ethnic groups that live within their borders a place where the cultures and ethnic identity can live.

With its increasing participation within the international world and especially the third world countries, China should protect all the people within its own borders. The way that China deals with its own ethnic groups is a window into the way that it will deal with international ethnic problems. The increased power of China, both economically and politically, requires the action of the international community to assure that China is treating its own ethnic groups with respect and friendship. The Uyghurs are a unique people who are a testimony to the ability of combining several larger cultural attributes into one singular, rich ethnic identity. The future survival of Uyghur culture is a small victory in the battle to save the world's unique and diverse human mosaic.

³⁶ Dr. Litip Tohti of Central University for nationalities, Beijing University, interview by author, May 2008.

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