Conflict Management in China: The Case of Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province[1]

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ABSTRACT—This research aims to examine the role of the Chinese government in managing conflicts in the case of Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang since 1949. A qualitative method has been used to reveal the causes of conflicts, China's ethnic policies and conflict resolutions in the view of the Chinese government, ethnic people and the West. The findings indicate that ethnic minority policy is the main factor that has intensified conflict. China's conflict management methods are forcing or competing to win over minorities, compromising in order to lessen conflict and collaborating to find a solution. China's ethnic policies depend on the internal and external situation and leaders. In the early years of the PRC, Mao Zedong's policy was cultural assimilation and Sinicization by eradicating religion and the Muslim Uyghur identity. During the reform period in the 1980s-1990s, cultural reconciliation and economic development were conducted to establish harmony between the ethnic minorities in China. In the 2000s -2010s, anti-government groups in Xinjiang were supported by radical and external Islamic groups and the government's ethnic minority policy was to balance between the forces and collaboration through economic development and cultural support.

Keywords: Xinjiang, Uyghurs, China's Ethnic Policy, Conflict Management

Introduction

In recent years various regions in the world have been facing issues of minorities, migrants and refugees that have challenged the stability of a region, a country and a third country. This study aims to examine the issue of Xinjiang in China. China is a place of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity concerned about the growing dispute arising from separatist activities in Xinjiang. Shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the central government began its ethnic minority policy by classifying different ethnic groups in the country into the majority Han (over 90%) and the other 55 ethnic minorities (8.4% of the population). Although ethnic people in China are a small percentage of the population they are spread all over the territory and today can be found in every province. Ethnic minorities live in three patterns, according to the categories of the government: living together over vast areas; living in individual communities in small areas; and minorities living in communities with the Han-majority community or the other way round (Yuen 2010, 3). Half of the ethnic population is currently settled in the border regions in provinces or are regional autonomies for ethnic minorities (RAEM) that have been established in 5 areas, namely, Inner Mongolia (1947), Xinjiang Uyghur (1955), Guangxi Zhuang (1958), Ningxia Hui (1958) and Tibet (1965). According to China's ethnic minority policy at the beginning of the PRC's rule, expressions of ethnic identity were allowed and respected. Also, the Constitution of the PRC states that all ethnic groups are equal and the state protects the lawful rights and interests of ethnic groups. Discrimination against any ethnic group is forbidden (Yuen 2010, 5). However, since the 1950s the ethnic issue has developed into a dramatic relationship between the Chinese government and the ethnic minorities, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang. The research questions here are how ethnic minority policies enlarge or lessen the conflict in Xinjiang; how effective the policies have been and what is involved in policy change. This study, which focuses mainly on the case of Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang, will analyze China' s ethnic minority policy since 1949, the causes of conflict and, also, the conflict management of the Chinese government.

Methodology and Materials

This study draws upon a survey relying on a documentary research methodology, analyzing China' s ethnic minority policy since 1949, the causes of conflict and, also, the conflict management of the Chinese government. Evidence for this paper has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are Chinese government publications, especially those in the form of public policy documents, print media and data from their websites. The secondary sources include research, books and articles. In addition, important data sources include newspaper articles from news agencies both in Chinese and English and web-boards.

Results

There have been many works on Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang, many of which have focused on the role of the Chinese government, the movements of Uyghurs and Uyghur immigrants, as well as on the re-education camps in Xinjiang. This paper is important as it deals with issues of ethnic minorities that occur every day around the world. It examines China's ethnic minority policy from 1949 to the present and illustrates the evolution of the policy at different periods, analyzes

the causes of conflict and evaluates the attempts of the Chinese state to deal with ethnic minorities. The study analyzes the solutions of the Chinese government. It is thus argued that the most significant factor that promotes the enlargement of conflict is the policy itself. Xinjiang has been a major hotbed of conflict in China because of the use of a Policy of restriction and Sinicization to eliminated ethnic identity which has provoked a deep-rooted conflict and created a separatist movement among ethnic minorities. The conflict became a major source of tension, particularly during Mao's era and under the current government. In addition to disputes over the drastic measures on various features, the Xinjiang Uyghur conflict has caused the unfair treatment of minority people by the Chinese state and an imbalance in economic development. Social and economic inequalities increase ethnic minority dissatisfaction. Moreover, minority policies under President

Xi Jinping, namely, the Sinicization campaign through the suppression of Uyghur nationalist movements and the Xinjiang re-education camps have created more tension.

Discussion

1. China's Ethnic Policy as the Cause of Conflict

This study examines the multiple and complex causes of ethnic conflict in Xinjiang, China. I argue that the main cause, however, is Beijing's policy itself. China's ethnic policies since 1949 have both intentionally and unintentionally exacerbated the entire situation.

Xinjiang Uyghur is an autonomous region in western China, home to the Uyghur people. The Uyghur is a Muslim Turkic ethnic group that uses the Turkic language. Islam is an essential part of their identity. Previous studies have reviewed the causes of conflict in Xinjiang by focusing on internal and external factors. Some studies have proposed that the diversities of language and religion, geopolitics and the late integration into China have been the main causes of conflict. (Lai 2009; Yuen 2010). Many say that ethnic tensions resulting from patterns of inequality in income, the deprivation of legal rights, a suppression of the cultural and religious rights of Uyghurs and other forms of discrimination have fueled the conflict - especially the growing discontent among minorities in Xinjiang (Lai 2009; Yuen 2010; Dincer and Wang 2011; and Dabphet 2016). Cultural assimilation and Sinicization that destroy ethnic identity have also been pernicious. Castets (2003) explores the rise of Uyghur nationalism in a socio-political context, seeing it as mainly driven by nationalist ideology in China and Central Asia after the Cold War and then by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America.

The Xinjiang conflict primarily involves historical and political disputes resulting from China's occupation of Xinjiang in 1949. The Uyghurs formed their independent kingdom called East Turkistan from 1933-1934 and again from 1944-1949. China's seizure of this region only intensified Muslim separatism and the calls for independence. The Chinese Communist Party first developed its ethnic policy during

the civil war of the 1930s in its competition with the Nationalist Party to win over minorities. Several empirical studies have focused on the characteristics of China's ethnic policies. Liu and Li (2012) and Yuen (2010) showed that the CCP's ethnic policy in the 1930s and 1940s was to show respect for ethnic identities and religions, to use a policy of intermingling between the Han and ethnic minorities in order to achieve national unity and to guarantee self-autonomy to minorities. These principals were officially recognized from 1949-1957, as stated in the "Summary of the Party's Main Experiences in the Works of Ethnic Minorities in the Past Several Years," submitted to the National United Front Work Conference in July, 1953 (La Jia Dang Zhou, 2015). That report indicated that the mission of the party in the transitional period with regard to ethnic issues after the establishment of the PRC was to consolidate national unity, to build "the great family of the motherland" and to implement ethnic regional autonomy. All ethnic groups were guaranteed equal rights and a vow was made that the politics, economy and culture of all ethnic groups would be developed. The government thus officially performed its ethnic policy, aiming to sustain the unity of the state and the integration and the co-existence of ethnic minorities with the Han Chinese.

In the early 1950s, the government of Mao Zedong attempted to compromise with ethnic minorities. Cultural and social policies were issued based on the concept of Chinese multiculturalism and showing respect for ethnic identity (Yuen 2010, 4; Liu and Li 2012, 46) However, the principle of living together and embracing cultural differences was suddenly jettisoned when the dictator decided to impose Chinese influence on Xinjiang by eradicating the Uyghurs' religion and culture. All forms of ethnic identity were banned (Dabphet 2020). Anti-government protests were suppressed. The 1957 Constitution provided citizens with the right to exercise their freedom of religious belief, however, only "proper" religious practices in ways that the CCP specified as acceptable were allowed. As stated in that Constitution, citizens of the PRC had "freedom of religious belief," as long as their faith and practices did not conflict with "national security" and/or subject China to the threat of foreign domination. Morrison (1984) and Laliberte (2011) investigated the phenomena of minorities and religious policies in China. According to Morrison, the CCP's religious policies regarding national

minorities were planned as Beijing confronted Muslim separatism in Xinjiang, as well as Tibetan nationalism. The CCP's repressive control over religion was linked to Marxist-Leninism's atheistic ideology, which defines such faith and practice as "backward." Religious believers have long been under stringent regulations and prohibitions. The PRC government looks at religion, especially Islam and Christianity, as a "threat" (Laliberte 2011, 4) and a manifestation of foreign influence (Riyami 2018, 1). The campaigns of class conflict and struggles against the Four Olds (i.e., old ideas, customs, culture and habits), launched during the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976), led to the eradication of most religious practices, except in private. All forms of ethnic identity were prohibited and labeled as "incorrect and backward." Religious sites and figures such as imams, other clerics and laypeople became the main targets of attack by Red Guards. Islamic schools, mosques and Christian churches were destroyed or closed. Imams and civilians were mistreated. Clergy and laypeople were ridiculed and/or physically tortured. Muslims were forced to eat pork and drink alcohol. (Riyami 2018, 2 and Dabphet 2019, 77).

One of Mao's policies that has remained is the methodical migration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang as part of cultural assimilation and Sinicization, which has only intensified the conflict. Since the 1950s, Han migrants from other parts of China have flooded into northern Xinjiang. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Han migrants in Xinjiang were about 90 percent of the immigrants and the rest were Hui people. Since this migration, 90 percent of the population in Northern Xinjiang has been Han, while most of the Uyghur live in rural, underdeveloped southern Xinjiang (Guo and Guo, 2007). During the economic reform of the 1990s, the state sponsored Han migrants to move to areas with job opportunities, including Xinjiang. Then, the 10th Five-Year Plan (2001–2005) and the Go-West Policy, which was laid out in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015), contributed to the state's "Western Development" agenda. These programs aimed to boost the development of the central and western regions of China and to diminish regional inequalities (Dabphet, 2016). The migration considerably increased Xinjiang's Han population from 6.7 percent in 1949 to 40 percent in 2008 (Howell and Fan 2011, 119). Han migrants have gained significant economic privileges over ethnic natives. Minorities in Xinjiang

have enjoyed far fewer benefits from economic growth. Scholars have shown that inequality is a key source of separatist movements in Xinjiang (Gladney 2004; Howell and Fan 2011, 119; and Dabphet, 2016)

After the Cultural Revolution, the PRC's ethnic-minorities policy was reinstalled by denying the idea of class conflict and launching economic development. Yuen (2010, 6) argues that the Chinese government in the 1980s applied Confucian ideas of paternalism and the principal of "harmony with difference" and Marxist economic determinism in its ethnic policies. The paternalistic government would supposedly take care of the weak and poor through economic subsidies and there was a preferred policy of intermingling over assimilation or Sinicization as orchestrated by Mao. Also, practicing religion was permitted under the state's "guidance." The CCP Central Committee in 1982 issued regulations "Concerning our Country's Basic Standpoint and Policy on Religious Questions During the Socialist Period," known as Document No.19. This was published in Red Flag, the CCP journal, in June 1982, and provided the ideological foundation for CCP religious policy and advice regarding its implementation. The text reaffirms the CCP's official "freedom of religious belief" that was announced in 1949; however, it insists upon the CCP's atheistic view and the restrictions imposed by the CCP. As seen in Document 19, "all the normal religious activities… should be organized by the religious associations" (Morrison 1984, 249).

The state also provided political and social privileges for minorities, such as increasing the number of minority representatives in the national legislature, exempting people from birth-control strictures and allowing religious practices and the use of local languages (Lai 2009, 7). In areas such as Xinjiang where people are deeply religious, "Uyghur values" were revived and advertised by the Chinese authorities (Castets, 2003, 6). Cultural policy and religious relaxations were revitalized to improve the regime's relationship with the minority peoples. Mosques, Christian churches and Buddhist temples were reopened. Local CCP members received special permission to attend religious rituals and festivals, though they were expected to adhere to Marxist dogma. Morrison (1984, 252) has stressed that the revival of Islam and Lama Buddhism in minority regions shows that people in remote areas are more spiritual than Marxist. However, all religious activities are under the observation

and supervision of state-run religious organizations.

The government began economic reform and an opening-up policy in 1979, guided by Deng Xiaoping, the former leader of the PRC. Scholars have investigated the effects of ethnic diversity and economic growth in China during that period. Yuen (2010) asserts that Deng Xiaoping's shared-economic-development agenda united ethnic minorities, and that this policy was adopted by his successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. However, Dincer and Wang (2011) found a negative relationship between ethnic minorities and economic growth from the 1980s to the early 2000s. Ethnic minorities gained only very limited benefits from the growth because the reforms were centered on the eastern coastal region, while minorities mainly live in border regions in the west. Research on China's economic development during the 1980s and 1990s indicates that the policies increased the inequality between urban, coastal areas in the east and the inland rural areas in western China (Dabphet, 2016).

China is one of the world's fastest-growing economies and has one of the world's highest levels of income inequality. Economic and wider social inequalities have affected ethnic minorities living in rural, western China, where some 40 million people live in poverty. Income inequality increases their discontent (Dabphet, 2016). Socio-economic inequalities between ethnic minorities and the Han people in Xinjiang have expanded. The level of income and development in Xinjiang was lower than the Chinese average; Han investors in Xinjiang gained far more benefits than did the ethnic minorities (Castets, 2003, 3; Shan and Cheng, 2009) As a result of this, since the early 2000s, Beijing has provided a large sum of money to Xinjiang to develop the minority regions. Xinjiang's economy has been developed; ethnic minorities receive tax exemptions and reductions. State support has contributed to the high growth of Xinjiang's GDP since 2003 (Shan and Cheng, 2009). The state has also supported the cultural identity of the Uyghur people, such as by permitting their use of local languages in schools and by funding the preservation of ethnic cultural heritage.

However, the birth of the Central Asian states after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 encouraged the growing strength of the Is-

lamic cultural movement and the independence movement in Xinjiang. Moreover, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the world has been focused on Islamic extremism. China's ethnic policy in the 2000s was to enhance national security, especially regarding the East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah (whose name recalls Hezbollah). China persuaded other Islamic countries to stop aiding Uyghur radical groups that joined extremist groups overseas (Castets 2003, 13). China, for example, called on Turkey to discourage foreign support for Uyghur separatist movements. Strict policies aimed at the Uyghurs in Xinjiang were enforced, such as imposing increasingly tight restrictions on religious worship and practices and launching a nationwide campaign against separatist movements in 1998.

All of this just fueled the tension and the minorities' dissatisfaction with Beijing led to Uyghur demonstrations in 2008. Lai (2009) has explored the evolution of China's ethnic policies and has focused mainly on the policies in 2008 and 2009 after the riots in Xinjiang and Tibet, respectively. As Lai explains, the ethnic policies were central to Beijing's national-unity agenda. Beijing granted regional autonomy to ethnic minorities at the borders to satisfy ethnic minorities and to secure "national unity." Since the early 20th century, various internal and external factors have contributed to the dissatisfaction and the freedom movements of the minorities, which have seriously challenged Beijing's idea of a "unitary multiethnic state." Ethnic minorities in Xinjiang felt they had been treated unfairly by the government across the board. Also, the lack of democratic practices and a weak system of regional autonomy undermined the "harmony and unity" which the regime gave lip service to. (Lai, 2009, 9-11; Yuen, 2010, 5)

In the 2010s, China's ethnic policy became more stringent. After the crackdown on demonstrations in Xinjiang and Tibet in 2008 and 2009, many activists went underground and participated in radical Islamic movements outside China. The spread of radical Islam in Xinjiang, and the role of foreign influence, led to the state's implementation of strict measures to monitor activists, religious activities and even prayers, and to increase the size of the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police in Xinjiang. After Xi Jinping took office as CCP head in 2012 and then as President in 2013, concrete measures,

namely, the Sinicization campaign and the re-education camps, were implemented to crack down on extremism and terrorist networks (Ramzy and Buckley, 2019).

Xi Jinping's drastic policies were a reaction to the Uyghur terrorism beginning in 2013, when public areas were bombed and innocent people were killed in many places in China. For example, in 2013, a car crashed into Tiananmen Square, killing two people and injuring 40. The authorities described it as a terrorist suicide attack and Uyghur separatists were blamed for the incident; there was also a knife attack by Uyghurs at a railway station in Kunming, Yunnan province, in March, 2014 which left 33 people dead; in May of 2014, two car bombs went off in a crowded market in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, killing 31 people with more than 90 wounded. The government called these "violent terrorist activities" and blamed separatism in Xinjiang, which was later associated with the rise of "ISIS/ISIL", later known as "IS" (Hope, 2018). 2014–2016 was a time of increasing contact between Uyghurs and Islamic militant organizations in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) joined local terrorist groups in Indonesia, al-Qaeda in Syria and "IS" in Syria and Iraq (Clarke and Kan 2017, 7-8).

In January 2016, in response to radical separatist groups, the Beijing regime instituted a new anti-terrorism law. It gives the Chinese government extraordinary powers. As Li Wei, an expert on counter - terrorism, has pointed out, "… As the main battleground of China's anti-terrorism campaign, Xinjiang is in urgent need of a more detailed set of regulations that target the specific form of terrorism the region is facing" (Singh 2018, 6). State policy in Xinjiang escalated into full-scale control in 2017. Restricted rules were implemented - called the Regulations on De-radicalization of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region - as part of tighter anti-extremist measures. The regulations list 14 kinds of statements and acts that are manifestations of radicalization. The definition of radicalization in the regulations particularly relates to "extreme" religious ideas. As President Xi said, "The root of violent terrorist activities is ethnic separatism, and the ideological basis is religious extremes. Religious extremism and its ideology are extremely harmful …" (Xinjiang Daily, 2017). The general section of the regula-

tions states that "religious extremism is not a religion, but it is only the dissemination of extremist religious ideas under the banner of religion. In Xinjiang, the act of spreading extremist ideas, creating violent terrorist incidents and carrying out ethnic division is a great evil." (Xinjiang Daily, 2017). The government asserts that, since the beginning of the 20th century, "double-panism" (i.e., "pan-Islamism" and "pan-Turkism") has been introduced into Xinjiang. National separatism, with the "East Turkistan independence theory" as its core idea, was ideologically and politically developed.

Therefore, according to Beijing, the government needs to strengthen the work of de-radicalization to secure unity and stability in several ways: 1) maintaining a strong crackdown on violent terrorist activities, 2) cutting off the means of spreading extremist religious ideas, 3) adhering to the basic principles of the Party's religious work, the "correct political direction," and the direction of Sinicization in religion, as well as 4) supporting the religious community to do a good job in "interpreting and preaching religious texts, and actively guiding religion to adapt to the socialist society" (Qian 2019) The list of restrictions are published on the government's website, and include prohibiting the "abnormal" growing of beards and wearing robes that cover the face and the whole body; disallowing the rejection of state media, family planning and public education; as well as banning marriage using religious rather than legal procedures, and naming children in a manner designed to "exaggerate religious fervor." Also, experts and US government officials estimate that at least 800,000 and possibly more than 2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, such as Kazakhs and Uzbeks, have been forced into concentration camps since 2017 (Busby 2018, 1), which Beijing officials describe as centers for "transformation-through-education," but which are in fact re-education centers, or, rather, prisons which turn inmates into slave laborers. (Ramzy and Buckley 2019) According to a Chinese government policy paper defending its controversial de-radicalization measures regarding Muslims in the restive far-western region, since 2014 state authorities in Xinjiang have eliminated about 1,588 violent and terrorist gangs, arrested 12,995 terrorists, confiscated 2,052 explosive devices, punished 30,645 people for 4,858 illegal religious activities and seized 345,229 copies of illegal materials (Noonan & et.al, 2019). These conditions

have intensified the animus between the state and the Uyghurs. Many Uyghurs have illegally left China for a third country, especially Turkey. Scholars indicate that at least one million Uyghurs now live in about 50 different countries (Beydulla 2019, 174). Members of radical Muslim Uyghur groups have participated in Islamic extremism and terrorist groups fighting for a Uyghur state. The Uyghurs' cause is a major thorn in the side of the Chinese authorities.

In the view of some Uyghur leaders, because of the intense pressure, migrant Uyghurs may be convinced or tricked into unintentionally participating in a radical Islamic group (Hope, 2018). Uyghurs have long been repressed religiously, culturally, and socioeconomically. They face oppressive restrictions on the practice of their religion. They have thus been forced to leave their homeland to join Muslim communities elsewhere (Beydulla, 2019, 175). In other words, emigration mainly stems from religious persecution. One Uyghur activist, Seyit Tumturk, said in an interview in 2017, "We (Uyghurs) are losing the de-radicalization battle." Uyghur community representatives in Turkey also stress that some migrants are lured by Uyghur members of the Islamic State into participating in the militant group and going to places like Syria. Christina Lin, an expert on Sino-Mideast relations, has noted that, since the war in Syria began in 2011, the region has been the "forward front for China's war on terror" (Hope 2018). It is estimated that as many as 5000 Uyghurs in Syria have joined the Turkestan Islamic Party; many of them are not radical activists, but they simply had to escape from the terrible conditions in Xinjiang.

2. Conflict Management in Xinjiang

The causes of conflict in Xinjiang are internal and external. The internal ones involve the poor relationship with Beijing due to the invasion of this territory, the subsequent abolition of East Turkistan's independence, and then Uyghurs' seeking greater autonomy or independence, all of which have led to stricter policies, more unfair treatment, and greater socio-economic inequality. The external factors involve the emergence of independent Muslim states in Central Asia and some of

their support in stirring up Uyghur demonstrations and terrorism. The ways in which the Chinese government handles the conflict in Xinjiang are various, depending on the causes and conditions each time. In this paper, I propose that the conflict-management methods of the Chinese state used to include winning over the minorities, compromising to lessen conflict, and collaborating to find a solution.

Mao pursued Sinicization of religion, using stern measures to demolish ethnic identities and to spread Marxist and Maoist ideology, as well as to suppress minority resistance. Although this method may have seemed to have succeeded in getting rid of "backward practices" based on religious beliefs and replacing them with "Mao Zedong's thought" to build a strong socialist society, it, in fact, just intensified the conflict and tension (Dabphet, 2018). With the authority of the state, this method leads to a win-lose situation in which ethnic minorities feel like the loser and the oppressed. Xi's Sinicization of religion is akin to Mao's policy. According to Xi, Sinicizing religion is intended to integrate influential religious organizations and individuals into the CCP's system of rule (Xinhua News Agency, 2015). Drastic policies such as mass detentions and imprisonment have aimed to completely control and censor separatist movements, suspects and local people generally. Scholars have defined Xi's policy as "Absolutely no mercy" (Ramzy and Buckley, 2019). The policy of siege, suspicion and repression have been adopted to increase control and command under Xi's government (Singh 2018, 6).

A compromise method was used by Deng Xiaoping to reduce tensions resulting from Mao's policies. In 1978, Deng began economic reforms, opened to the West, and allowed freer religious practice. To reduce conflict in ethnic minority regions, many of the restraints on religious practice and cultural life ended. Sinicization wielded by Mao Zedong was repealed to diminish the conflict between the state and ethnic minorities. Political relaxation and economic support were prioritized in ethnic areas.

However, during the first two decades of economic reform, the main areas of development were in the eastern coastal region. The level of economic development and income in inland China and western areas

such as Xinjiang was significantly lower than the Chinese average (Lewis, 2013). Rural income was low in Xinjiang, compared with other parts of China. Not until the government began development plans in the 2000s did Xinjiang's economy grow. The government thus provided a national budget to invest in public infrastructure, education, health care and job training to stimulate the economy. Also, a fund was established to preserve the cultural and historical areas of minorities (Lai, 2009). However, because of the state policy, Han investors enjoy special tax and trade benefits in Xinjiang. They are the business owners, while the minorities are the low-level employees. The income gap between the Han and Uyghur people, as well as between urban, northern Xinjiang and rural, western Xinjiang, has become larger. Modern industries such as the cotton industry have destroyed Uyghur handicraft industries and trade (Shan and Cheng, 2009). The state also razed much of the old city's traditional Muslim residential architecture and replaced it with modern shopping plazas. These factors have just increased the minority's sense of alienation. Some policies, such as the state's sponsoring of Han migrants to Xinjiang and giving economic advantages to Han people, have led to acute strife between the two groups. Other major causes of Uyghur alienation leading to resistance are the unfair job and educational recruiting process, the injustice that is widely perpetrated by officials, such as enforcing birth control on Uyghurs and punishing them for clicking on a web-link and landing on a foreign website. Equal opportunity and fair treatment are essential.

Collaborating was another way of finding a solution in Xinjiang after violent resistance increased in the early 2010s. Uyghur separatist movements had perpetrated violence and nearly a hundred innocent people had been killed. Xinjiang was the "core hub" of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), initiated in 2013, and was the bridge to markets in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The central government needed to find a solution to the Uyghur issue. Collaboration with ethnic minorities was vital. Things that worsened the conflict -- namely, socio-economic inequality, unfair treatment and the support of extremists by external separatist groups -- had to be seriously addressed.

To partly reduce the inequalities, the Chinese government has continuously and greatly invested in Xinjiang since 2010, so as to end

poverty and to develop Xinjiang's economy. Trade and financial cooperation between Xinjiang and the BRI countries have been promoted. Also, the Uyghurs' Islamic culture and identity are closely related to the culture of Muslims in Central Asia and the Middle East. Xinjiang is thus important for China's BRI, in terms of economic and cultural expansion. The government has supported the Uyghurs' Islamic culture to gratify the Uyghur people and various Islamic countries as a BRI development strategy vis à vis countries with Muslim majorities.

Moreover, the current government has been trying to promote Marxism and "Xi Jinping Thought" in Xinjiang by emphasizing the significance of achieving ethnic equality (Singh 2018, 5). Besides economic development, the state has increased the right to education for Uyghurs and other ethnic groups, such as Hui, Tibetans, and Tajiks, in Xinjiang. In the last few years, the government has boosted investment in educational resources in Xinjiang to strengthen minority education. Uyghur Muslim students are encouraged to pursue vocational education so that they can get decent work.

China has urged other countries to stop supporting Muslim Uyghur separatist groups. Since the 1980s, the Uyghur diaspora has sought refuge mainly in Central Asia and Turkey, along with India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Canada, the US, Sweden, Germany and Australia. Some countries, such as Turkey and Kazakhstan, have officially acknowledged Uyghur organizations seeking independence (Castets, 2003, 18). The Turkish government in the 1990s assisted Uyghur immigrants to live in Turkey, gave them refugee status and supported Uyghur diaspora leaders and activities. During the 2000s and early 2010s, Turkey's political parties were interested in the Uyghur issue in two main respects: the situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and as a human rights problem (Kuşçu Bonnenfant, 2018, 97). China has been trying to foster international collaboration with other countries in which Uyghurs live, asking them to stop supporting the movement of separatist groups of Uyghur migrants. After the two countries began collaborating on the BRI project, the Turkish government's support of Uyghur immigrants remains, but those involved in violent activities or members of unlawful Islamic militant organizations are sent back to China. China has also increased pressure on countries such as Thailand,

Malaysia and Pakistan, requesting that they repatriate illegal immigrant Uyghurs to China. Greitens, Lee and Yazic (2020) have shown that the Chinese state also puts pressure on Uyghur diaspora networks by increasing surveillance and pushing other countries to support China's "counter-terrorism." This agenda is opposed by 22 countries that have sent a letter to the U.N. Human Rights Council to ask China to shut down its internment camps in Xinjiang, while 37 other countries support China's anti-terrorism agenda. The Xinjiang issue has accelerated tensions between China and the U.S. and led to U.S. sanctions against Chinese companies. In international politics, China is under increasing pressure regarding human rights abuses, arbitrary detention and the disappearance of Muslims in Xinjiang.

Conclusion

This study's aim is to analyze the issue of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China's ethnic policies, the causes of conflict and possible solutions. I argue that the ethnic policies pursued by the Chinese government have only made things worse. Sinicization, cultural assimilation, the special support of Han migrants and socio-economic stratification have all exacerbated the conflicts between the Uyghur and the Hans, the government and the separatist groups. Major protests and violent resistance have prompted the government to bolster security. Beijing's repression and various drastic measures have increased tension, while the state's prohibition of minorities' practicing their religion has also been a disaster. During Xi Jinping's rule, China's anti-terrorism campaign, the use of terrorism accusations and the ruthless crackdown measures, especially the concentration camps in Xinjiang, simply worsened the conflict between minorities and the state. Although the current government has collaborated with ethnic minorities through the BRI project, in terms of economic development and cultural support, China's human rights abuses have been egregious. The Chinese government has been internationally condemned and rightly so. China thus needs to find a much better solution to the conflict by exploring the roots of the issue, such as tensions between the Uyghurs and Hans caused by discrimination and unfair treatment, differences in religion and ideology and the socio-economic gap.

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