

THE XINJIANG UYGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

ANTECEDENTES HISTÓRICOS DA REGIÃO AUTÔNOMA UIGUR DE XINJIANG E SITUAÇÃO DOS DIREITOS HUMANOS DOS UIGURES

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Abstract: The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) started in 1865 when Tsarist Russia managed gradually to conquer the western part of Turkestan. Subsequently, The region Western Turkestan was established. Western Turkestan was divided into five republics with the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1924: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won the election against Kuomintang (KMT), The region's name was changed to Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. The race of Xinjiang (New Borders) can be separated into two groups: non-Turkic people (Han Chinese, Russians, Indians, and Manchurians) and Turkic people (Xinjiang indigenous). Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek Kirghiz, and Tajik are all Turkic languages, with the Uyghurs having the biggest community. Based on this description, this study examines the history of the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang and its existence within the framework of international relations as well as the human rights conditions of Uyghurs.

Keywords: Ethnicity. Human rights. Soviet Union. Tsarist Russia. Turkestan. Xinjiang Uyghur.

Resumo: A Região Autônoma Uigur de Xinjiang (XUAR) começou em 1865 quando a Rússia czarista conseguiu gradualmente conquistar a parte ocidental do Turquestão. Posteriormente, a região do Turquestão Ocidental foi estabelecida. O Turquestão Ocidental foi dividido em cinco repúblicas com o estabelecimento da União Soviética em 1924: Cazaquistão, Uzbequistão, Turcomenistão, Quirguistão e Tadjiquistão. Em 1949, quando o Partido Comunista Chinês (PCC) venceu a eleição contra o Kuomintang (KMT), o nome da região foi mudado para Região Autônoma Uigur de Xinjiang. A raça de Xinjiang (novas fronteiras) pode ser dividida em dois grupos: povos não turcos (chineses han, russos, indianos e manchus) e turcos (indígenas de Xinjiang). Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek Kirghiz e Tajik são todas línguas turcas, com os uigures tendo a maior comunidade. Com base nessa descrição, este estudo examina a história da Região Autônoma Uigur de Xinjiang e sua existência no contexto das relações internacionais, bem como as condições de direitos humanos dos Uigures.

Palavras-chave: Etnia. Direitos humanos. União Soviética. Rússia czarista. Turquestão. Xinjiang Uyghur.

Introduction

The history of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) or Turkestan can be traced back to 1865 when Tsarist Russia managed gradually to conquer the western part of Turkestan (Morrison, 2015). "Turkestan" is a Persian phrase that means "land of the Turkic people." The territory was renamed Western Turkestan after its capture. Western Turkestan was later divided into five republics when the Soviet Union was created in 1924: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (Becker, 2004). The eastern section of Turkestan was invaded and renamed East Turkestan by China's Manchu rulers in 1876. It is the birthplace of Uyghur history, civilisation, and culture. East Turkestan is a 1.6 million-kilometer-long country in Central Asia. The land is the largest province in China and accounts for one-quarter of the country's total territory. It is the site of the origins of Uyghur history, culture, and civilisation. East Turkestan is a Central Asian country that stretches about 1.6 million kilometres. The land is China's most populous province, accounting about one-quarter of the country's total land area. East Turkestan is bordered by Russia to the north, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan to the west, Afghanistan to the southwest, Pakistan, India, and Tibet to the south, China to the east, and Mongolia to the northeast (Xu, Fletcher, & Bajoria, 2014).

East Turkestan has a population of slightly more than 19 million people, according to the most recent Chinese official census. Uyghurs account for 9 millions of this population, Chinese for 7 million, Kazaks for 1.5 million, Kyrgyz for 170 thousand, Hui for 800 thousand, Mongols for 170 thousand, Manchu for 22 thousand, Xibe for 40 thousand, Tajik for 40 thousand, Uzbek for 15 thousand, Tibetans for 6 thousand, Tatars for 5 thousand, Dagur for 7 thousand, Russians for 10 thousand, and other smaller groups for 10 thousand. Uyghurs, on the other hand, dispute these statistics, arguing that the Uyghur population is closer to 20 million. In essence, Uyghur history is quite difficult (Deason, 2019). As a result, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore XUAR's historical context. This study was intended to provide significant insights about the origins and development of Uyghurs, as well as their human rights situation.

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

"Turkestan" was renamed Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) beat the Kuomintang (KMT) in the 1949 election. The CCP, which was dominated by Han Chinese ethnicity rather than Uyghurs, made important decisions in Xinjiang. Xinjiang, sometimes known as Sinkiang, is a region of northwest China around 4000 kilometres from Beijing. Xinjiang is also China's largest province, accounting for approximately 617,800 square miles (1,600,000 square kilometres), or one-sixth of the total Chinese area (Kent, 1993).

Xinjiang is one of the world's most inaccessible regions, located in one of China's most strategically important defence and security zones, and shares borders with eight countries: Mongolia and Kazakhstan to the northwest, Russia to the north, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the west, and Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan (Jammu Kashmir) to the southwest. Xinjiang has more foreign boundaries than any other Chinese province. As a result, Xinjiang is an important region for China's security. Finally, the region is abundant in natural resources, especially oil and gas. The Tarim Basin is thought to hold 240 billion cubic metres of natural gas reserves and 11 billion tonnes of crude oil reserves (Ahmad Lufti, 2001). Other oil-producing locations in Xinjiang include the Zhungar Basin and the Turfan Depression, in addition to the Tarim Basin (Rogers 2010).

Ethnicity of Xinjiang

The ethnicity of Xinjiang can be divided into two groups: non-Turkic people such as Han Chinese, Russians, Indians, and Manchurians, and Turkic people such as Xinjiang's natives (Rogers, 2012). Turkic languages include Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek Kirghiz, and Tajik, with Uyghurs being the most numerous. The Uyghurs of Xinjiang are primarily Muslims who share lineage, religion, and language with the other Turkic peoples of Central Asia. They are not only present in Xinjiang, but also in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and parts of Russia. Although Turks are racially equal, they may be politically divided.

Furthermore, Uyghurs who lived in Xinjiang's Tarim Basin converted to Islam in the late 9th century. Islam reached Central Asia in the mid-seventeenth century via Arab traders and

Islamic schoolers travelling down the Silk Road to China. In 650 AD, one of Prophet Muhammad's associates, Saadi bin Abi Waqqas, visited China. As an official messenger of Khalifa Uthman bin Affan, the Prophet's companion visited China. Many Islamic scholars believe that this is when Islam first arrived in China (Baojn, 1998). Many tribes in Central Asia converted to Islam as a result of this mission, which was aided by Arab merchants who arrived to China through the Silk Road (Rogers, 2020).

Xinjiang is located on the old "Silk Road," which traders and travellers like Marco Polo and Ibnu Batuta used to go to the West and East. It was a Chinese province governed by the military during the nineteenth century Ching dynasty (1644-1911). The land was named a Chinese province in 1884, and it was the last site where the Chinese government was permanently present. The Ching dynasty dubbed the province "Xinjiang," which means "New Borders" in Chinese. Regardless, many western experts, notably Sven Hedin and Sir Aurel Stein, referred to the territory as "Chinese Turkestan" or "East Turkestan." Xinjiang remained a part of the Republic of China under the KMT even after the Ching dynasty was deposed in 1911. Local leaders conducted numerous revolts in Xinjiang with the objective of separating Xinjiang from Chinese control and establishing an Islamic sultanate. These battles, however, were in vain because Chinese troops defeated them. During the nineteenth century, Yakub Beg led one of the most popular Turkic uprisings against Chinese rule in Xinjiang, which lasted 13 years (1864 to 1877). (Rogers, 2020).

Following the 1911 Revolution, there was a shift in the Turkic separatist movement, with revolts being organised by Turkic nationalists educated in the Soviet Union rather than Muslim religious teachers (USSR). Turkic nationalists attempted to seize control of the region from the Chinese by establishing the Turkish Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan Republic (TIRET) in 1933-34, followed by the East Turkestan Republic (ETR) in 1944-1945. Wu, Zhan, and Krause (2010)

The CCP took control of Xinjiang from the KMT in 1949 and declared it an independent territory in 1955. Since then, the province has been known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). However, crucial decisions were still made by the CCP, which was governed by Han Chinese rather than Xinjiang inhabitants. The CCP implemented harsh assimilation tactics in the 1960s, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, when individuals were subjected to considerable abuses at the hands of the authorities. Deng Xiaoping succeeded

Mao Zedong as China's leader in 1978, following Mao's death in 1976. During Deng Xiaoping's presidency, Xinjiang's human rights condition improved. In the late 1990s, however, the CCP implemented tough policies. They instituted the "Strike Hard" policy, which authorised the use of torture and arbitrary detentions and resulted in significant improvements in China's human rights situation (Wu et al., 2010).

Communist Party Nationality Policy

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) labelled independence movements as "reactionary" after assuming power in 1949. The CCP reluctantly acknowledged the "loss" of "Outer Mongolia" as a foregone conclusion; nonetheless, the new Communist regime powerfully seized Xinjiang and Tibet (Eastern Turkistan). In these locations, independence movements have endured to the present day (Anand, 2019). Although the Communists championed the right to national self-determination before achieving power, once in power, they limited their definition of self-determination to autonomy inside a united China.

China was designated a "united nation of different nationalities" by the new Communist government in 1949. This policy was seen as the culmination of thousands of years of historical development. China has been defined as a giant fraternal and cooperative family made up of individuals of all nationalities (Wu, 2014). The First National People's Congress produced a constitution that did not recognise secession as a genuine right and defined non-Chinese-populated areas to be "inalienable components of the People's Republic of China." The "Program for Enforcing National Regional Autonomy" authorised the establishment of autonomous regions, but stipulated that "all national autonomous districts must constitute an inseparable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China" (Hyer, 2006).

The Chinese Communists inherited an ethnocentric mindset. Because of the Sino-centric vision for a powerful, centrally managed China, federation following the Soviet model was rejected. This policy was justified by claiming that, led and instructed by the CCP, people of all nationalities had already greatly heightened their patriotic consciousness, greatly changed and transcended their initial situation of mutual antagonism, and gradually formed bonds of equality, unity, mutual aid, and cooperation as a foundation for realising common political aims

and interests. As a result, the vast majority of the country's residents of all ethnicities desired the establishment of a united, multinational state (Hyer, 2006).

In a 1957 address, Premier Zhou Enlai stated that assimilation is a "progressive deed if it symbolises the natural merger of nations striving for wealth," and that "assimilation, in and of itself, has the ability to foster progress." This point of view is based on the assumption that non-Han peoples are economically and culturally drawn to China and readily adopt Sinification (Hanhua), as was the case for many minority nations during much of China's history, but not for Turkish nationalities in Inner Asia. With the end of the Cold War, however, the world entered a new age of national independence movements. The dissolution of the Soviet Union had a dramatic effect on nationalist movements all over the world, and the impact on China was obvious in the well-publicized revolts in Xinjiang and movements to build an independent Uighur nation-state (Hyer, 2006).

Chinese government employed repressive policies against the Uyghur ethnic group in Xinjiang, resulting in a serious violation of human rights (Greitens, Lee, & Yazici, 2020). Xinjiang's tyranny is possibly incomparable to that of Tibet, and it is practically China's sole province where the execution of political detainees is still widespread (Greitens, Lee, & Yazici, 2020). Uyghurs face severe restrictions, torture, brutal treatment, arbitrary arrest, and disproportionate punishment for their offences, as well as lack of due process. The Chinese government defends its actions as vital to maintain order in the face of terrorist activity. Though the likelihood of Uyghurs becoming terrorists is doubtful, China has obviously extended its "anti-terrorist" techniques to fight any sort of Uyghur opposition and has adopted what amounts to the criminalization of Uyghur culture (Becquelin, 2004). The region's ethnic disputes, which play on China's fear of losing control of that important territory, are at the heart of official brutality in Xinjiang. Resolving these difficulties and assuaging China's concerns will increase human rights while decreasing Chinese persecution (Shchukin, 2000).

Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang

When the Baren incident happened in Xinjiang in 1990, the Uyghurs were subjected to atrocities. Following the July 5th event, demonstrators were brutally treated, and scores of people were imprisoned, the most of them were Uyghurs (Greitens, Lee, & Yazici, 2020). Eleven of these

detainees were Uyghurs, and twelve of them had previously been executed by Chinese officials. Many demonstrators were condemned to long prison terms, while others were executed summarily in group executions. Aside from lawful executions, rioters were frequently killed by police in extra-judicial killings while committing a crime when it was not obvious that they represented a threat. The Chinese government has identified twelve people who were killed in the July 5th riots (Shchukin, 2000).

Furthermore, repression did not stop with post-riot efforts. The majority of legal sanctions in Xinjiang are meted out to Uyghurs for "splittism" offences. By exploiting the "War on Terror," China connected all forms of criticism or dissent with terrorism, separatism, and extremism. In this framework, advocating independence and referring to Xinjiang as Eastern Turkistan are both considered expressions of terrorism. Many Uyghurs have been unlawfully imprisoned for practising Islam, while others have been detained for publicly and privately publishing, writing, or expressing thoughts that violate the Chinese party line (Clarke, 2010).

The Chinese government has been defending its anti-terrorist operations in the province (Xiao-xiao, 2004). According to the CCP, violent upheavals such as the July 5th riots are orchestrated by a small group of instigators who attempt to shatter ethnic unity and undermine China's provincial integrity. It should be mentioned that Uyghur terrorist organisations exist, some of which have ties to al-Qaeda. These organisations, on the other hand, are small in terms of size, resources, and capacity. They were unable to build a united front and hence failed to gain Uyghur independence. The links between these organisations and Muslim radicalism and organisations such as al-Qaeda are murky at best. Most importantly, it appears that these organisations' violent activities has declined during the 1990s. It's natural to have a strong reaction to events like the July 5th occurrence. China's response, on the other hand, is cruel, autocratic, and illegal, and it fails to address the root of the problem.

The violence in Xinjiang is not the consequence of a tiny group of zealots, as the Chinese government claims, but of a common emotion among the Uyghur people. The July 5th riots started from a nonviolent protest after a brawl at a toy factory in which Han residents killed several Uyghurs and maimed others (Shichor, 2002). The Chinese government's repression of the Uyghur ethnic population in Xinjiang is a serious violation of human rights (Greitens, Lee, & Yazici, 2020). Xinjiang's persecution climate may be unrivalled even by that of Tibet, and it is

practically the only province in China where the execution of political detainees is still common (Shichor, 2002).

China's Response to International Pressures

China emphasised that human rights are an important topic for international discussion as long as there is no interference in its domestic affairs (Rogers, 2012). One of the counter-arguments is that comparable regimes, such as the United States and Germany, have committed more horrific human rights violations than what occurred in Xinjiang, such as slavery and the Holocaust. China also stated that those that have denounced its Xinjiang human rights policy were applying double standards. The administration also claimed that the US has ignored other countries with far worse offences. According to China, the double standard was part of capitalist powers' efforts to prevent China from adopting their preferred political system (Nathan, 1994).

Furthermore, Chinese propaganda has emphasised the importance of sovereignty and national integrity. Foreigners who criticise China's human rights record, according to the Chinese government, are interfering in its domestic affairs. Locals who support international criticism are regarded traitors and may face charges of working with the state's enemies (Xiao-xiao, 2004). Many so-called "violations" of human rights in Xinjiang, according to China, were not violations at all since Western observers did not understand the "actual" situation in the province (Anand, 2019).

Furthermore, China asserted that cultural standards differed between China and the rest of the world, and hence foreigners could not impose their idea of human rights on China. The Chinese government considers any foreign interference in enforcing its human rights principles to be "cultural imperialism." Furthermore, China claimed that human rights conditions in similar countries are not ideal, and hence there is no moral authority to evaluate or criticise the country. "I cannot fathom those countries campaigning for human rights having a better record than ours," said former Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji (Nathan, 1994, p. 641). Another attempt was made to discredit Uyghur solidarity organisations by implying that they employ terror and violence to achieve their objectives. China has prioritised national security, accusing the great majority of Uyghur solidarity groups of being terrorists (Bovingdon, 2010). The Chinese government alleged that Uyghur rebels were behind the 2008 Olympic bombs.

Despite taking a defensive attitude in the face of foreign criticism, China has also issued a number of "white papers" on human rights and the realities in Xinjiang (Rogers, 2018). This occurrence indicates China's willingness to use propaganda to respond to international concerns in order to provide some explanation to the international community. "We believe that all humanity's human rights and fundamental freedoms should be respected everywhere," Premier Li Peng stated (Nathan, 1994, p. 642). According to Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Chinese government spent more than \$40 million in 2002 on a programme to restrict international broadcasts in Xinjiang. McGovern and Rubio (2005)

Furthermore, China released political detainees and imposed light sentences on certain of its political prisoners, particularly those who were well-known abroad, such as Rabiya Kadeer. At the international and regional levels, China has persuaded Central Asian nations who were once sympathetic to the Uyghurs, such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to abandon their support for the Uyghurs. China has put pressure on Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states to refrain from aiding Uyghur dissidents and political activists. China, for example, was successful in convincing Turkish officials to deny Rabiya Kadeer's visa application to attend the NED Conference in Istanbul in 2006. Human Rights in Xinjiang: Recent Developments (Human Rights in Xinjiang: Recent Developments, 2009). China issued passports to a small group of dissidents in response to international pressure. The majority of the dissidents, like as Wang Ruowang and Li Honglin, were Han Chinese (Nathan, 1994). They were Han political activists who pushed for democracy; nevertheless, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang were not so lucky. Many Uyghur leaders who challenged Chinese policies were jailed and imprisoned (ideological reform centers). They were treated harshly, and their requests for sentence reductions were denied.

Central Asian nations have also supported China in the deportation and extradition of Uyghurs. In 2006, for example, the Uzbek authorities deported a Canadian Uyghur to China. The next year, he was condemned to life in prison. Despite Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's intervention requesting the Chinese government to allow the inmate counsellor access, the request was denied (Human Rights in Xinjiang: Recent Development, 2009). Another example is that Pakistan has detained Uyghurs who expressed sympathy for their fellow Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The Pakistani government has returned them to China. . China has also pressed Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to put a stop to separatist activity in Xinjiang within their borders.

Kazakhstan, for example, stated in 1994 that it would not tolerate separatist activities in Xinjiang. Similarly, the Kazakh government declared in 1995 that it would not accept any separatist activities in Xinjiang, and Kazakh officials disrupted the World Uyghur Conference in Almaty in December (Kostreewa, 1996). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has refused Uyghurs permission to conduct Hajj unless they first obtain pre-approval or clearance from the Chinese government. For example, in 2008, approximately 1000 Uyghurs protested in front of the Saudi Embassy in Pakistan after their visa applications to enter the country for pilgrimage purposes were denied.

Furthermore, China has prohibited governments from providing humanitarian aid to Guantanamo Bay Uyghur detainees. It should be noted that the economic and political risk of damaging relations with China by supporting the Uyghurs was enough to dissuade states from assisting the Uyghurs in regards to the human rights situation in Xinjiang. Furthermore, Western nations do not share a common position on human rights in China. Their interactions with China are driven more by economic gains and security concerns than by worries about human rights. China has also declared explicitly that any "foreign intervention" in its domestic issues will jeopardise relations with other countries. On February 8, 1999, during the European Union-China Human Rights Dialogue, China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Guangya, stated that "any country that wishes to resume the Geneva scenario would undoubtedly harm not only bilateral relations but also the possibility of continuing the human rights dialogue" (Amnesty International, 1999: 23).

Conclusion

This study provided valuable information concerning the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang and the human rights conditions of Uyghurs. According to the current census presented by the Chinese government East Turkestan has a population of little more than 19 million people Uyghurs account for 9 million, Chinese for 7 million, Kazaks for 1.5 million, Kyrgyz for 170 thousand, Hui for 800 thousand, Mongols for 170 thousand, Manchu for 22 thousand, Xibe for 40 thousand, Tajik for 40 thousand, Uzbek for 15 thousand, Tibetans for 6 thousand, Tatars for 5 thousand, Dagur for 7 thousand, Russians for 10 thousand, and other smaller groups for 10 thousand. Uyghurs, on the other hand, dispute these statistics, arguing that the Uyghur population is closer to 20 million. The Chinese government has been explaining

its activities in the province as a counter-terrorist. According to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), violent outbreaks such as the July 5th riots are recognised by a small number of instigators seeking to shatter ethnic unity and damage China's provincial integrity. Finally, the study proposed that the international community and United Nations agencies seek alternatives to improve human rights circumstances in Xinjiang.

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