



Xinjiang in the Aftermath of Tiananmen: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the New Administration

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Abstract

The political conditions in Xinjiang and the Tiananmen Square demonstrations both remain taboo topics in China. Since 1978 when Deng Xiaoping took over the leadership of China after the demise of Mao Zedong in 1976, China including Xinjiang witnessed dramatic changes in the economic and political situation. This article examines the impact of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in 1989 on the political conditions in Xinjiang. Political violence and separatist activities in Xinjiang have increased in the 1990s despite some conciliatory measures which were undertaken by the Chinese administration. This article argues that one of the factors include the Tiananmen Square demonstrations which have provided a boost to some Uyghurs to openly challenge the Chinese administration. In addition, it also analyses the possible strategies that the new Chinese leaders can take into consideration to overcome the security problems in the province.

Keywords: *Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989, Xinjiang, Uyghur, Han, Central Asia*

JEL classification: *F54, H12, J15, Z13*





1. Introduction

This paper examines the impact of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in 1989 towards the political and security conditions of Xinjiang in the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, it also discusses the challenges faced by the new Chinese administration to resolve the conflict in Xinjiang. More specifically, it analyses pertinent issues related to the factors that have influenced the political scenario in Xinjiang, the prospect for regional economic development and also the reaction by the new Chinese leaders towards the security problems in the province. Unlike previous studies, this paper focuses on the multiple factors that have contributed to the civil unrests including lack of cultural and religious freedom, economic deprivation and incompetence of the local government. Apart from the common factors mentioned in the previous works, this study argues that the Tiananmen Square demonstrations has inspired certain Uyghur groups to openly challenge the Chinese administration.

This paper demonstrates that the province is rich with natural resources and possesses the potential to be developed as China's northwestern regional economic hub. In addition, Xinjiang also functions as a link between China and its Central Asian neighbours and other Islamic states in the Middle East. Unlike previous studies which only concentrate on major revolts or specific periods of Chinese administration in Xinjiang, this paper attempts to provide a fair analysis on the political conditions in Xinjiang. This study differs from previous works such as James Milward (2009), Dru Gladney (2004) and S. Frederick Starr (2004). These and other works have elaborated largely on the Uyghur's quest for independence. Xinjiang has been selected for this study because it is a unique Chinese province which has a large number of Muslims and non-Han populations such as the Turkic and Russian minorities. Besides, it is one of the richest provinces in northwestern China. Meanwhile, its security and political conditions are very challenging for the new Chinese administration led by Xi Jinping.



2. Background

Xinjiang is of strategic importance to China because it is located in an area that is rich with oil and gas reserves which are among China's major sources of energy. Xinjiang is situated in the northwest part of China, the largest province covering about 617,800 square miles (1,600,000 square km) or 1/6 of the total Chinese territory. It stretches 1,650 km from north to south and 2,000 km from east to west (Lutfi, 2001: 179-180). In addition, it also borders eight countries, namely the People's Republic of Mongolia to the northwest; the Russian Federation to the north; Kazakhstan to the northwest; Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the west; as well as Afghanistan, India and Pakistan (Jammu Kashmir) to the southwest.

Ethnically, Xinjiang can be divided into two major categories: the Turkics who are natives of Xinjiang and the non-Turkic people. The Turkics are further divided into the Uyghurs¹, Kazakhs, Kirghizs, Uzbeks and Tajiks with the majority of them being Muslims. The Tajiks speak Persian in addition to Turkic. The Uyghurs (45.2 per cent) are the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang followed by the Kazakhs (6.7 per cent), Kirghizs (0.86 per cent), Tajiks (0.7 per cent) and Uzbeks (0.6 per cent) (Department of Population, Social, Science and Technology Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics of China and Department of Economic Development of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of China, 2003). However, the Uyghur people are not confined to just Xinjiang as they are scattered throughout Central Asia in countries like Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and parts of Russia. The Uyghurs are ethnically similar although they may be divided politically and physically.

The non-Uyghur category consists of the Han Chinese, Hui, Mongolian, Dolan, Lopliks, Abdal, Salar, Dongxiang, Zhung, Tibetan, Taranchi, Sibo, Solon, Bonan, Manchurian and Russian peoples (Tomur, 1993: 7). The large number of nationalities in the province is due to migration from China proper since the late 1950s. The Chinese Hans are concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of Xinjiang.



3. Economic Development in Xinjiang since 1978

The demise of Mao Zedong marked the end of an era of ideological narrowness in China and ushered in a period of reorientation and restructuring based on economic development. New pragmatic leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang knew that China requires the support of all the minorities, including the Hui Muslims and the Uyghurs in order for the country to progress economically. In October 1979, the Nationalities Commission of the National People's Congress (NPC) which was abolished during the Cultural Revolution was re-established (Clarke, 2007: 43). It was part of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s initial effort to bring about reconciliation between the government and the ethnic minorities after the Cultural Revolution.

In Xinjiang, the CCP adopted liberal policies for minority nationalities with the aim of resolving the problem of ethnicity and creating a common identity through economic development. For example, the 1978 Constitution emphasized the importance of national minorities. It guaranteed freedom for the minorities to maintain their language, customs and representation in the government (Dreyer, 1976: 206).

It is noteworthy to mention that the primary aim of the liberalization of policies was to gain the support of the Uyghurs in order to develop China's agriculture, industry, science and technology and defence. The ultimate aim was to serve China's national interest by providing some basic freedoms to the Uyghurs so as to seek their cooperation in developing Xinjiang's economy. The CCP was aware of the economic potentials of Xinjiang especially its vast natural resources. Therefore, it required the support and cooperation of the Uyghurs.

The dramatic economic development experienced by Xinjiang between 1980 till 2000 led to drastic changes in the social structure of the Uyghurs. In the early 1950s, over 95 per cent of Xinjiang's population was illiterate, but by 1990, illiteracy was reduced to 12.75 per cent. In 1949, Xinjiang had had only one institution of higher learning with an enrolment of only 379 students, but by 1991, the province had 21 institutions of higher learning. Similarly, in 1949, Xinjiang had 363 industrial and mining enterprises but by 1990, Xinjiang's total industrial





output value rose by 142.73 per cent (please refer to Table 1). (*Beijing Review*, 7-17 November 1994) Urumqi was transformed from an oasis town to a bustling commercial and tourist centre.

Table 1 Industrial Output in Xinjiang in 2001

| Commodity | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| Oil and petrochemicals | 71.7 |
| Agriculture | 8.6 |
| Textiles (cotton) | 7.8 |
| Smelting and metal pressing | 6.6 |
| Non-metal minerals | 5.3 |

Source: *Xinjiang Yearbook 2001*, Urumqi: Xinjiang Yearbook Editing House, 2002, p. 134.

Therefore, Xinjiang is no longer considered an isolated province located in the northwest of China. Events which include political and socioeconomic conditions have become a major concern of the international community. Hence, the CCP has been very careful about the socioeconomic conditions in order to promote a positive image and to attract foreign investment into the province. As a result, the CCP has published several white papers such as *White Paper on the situation in Xinjiang* and *White Paper on the history and development of Xinjiang* in its effort to portray a positive impression and to respond to the international criticism on the human rights conditions in Xinjiang.

Other than that, there were developments in the areas of transportations, telecommunications and postal services which contributed to the improvement in contact among the minorities in





Xinjiang. Hence, the trade and economic activities increased among the non-Hans.

The agricultural sector in Xinjiang, especially in cotton, has also shown increase in production. For example, between 1978 and 1998, cotton production has increased more than 25 times and in 1992, the total production of cotton was 750,000 tonnes (*White Paper on the history and development of Xinjiang*, 2003). The Chinese government also emphasized on the development of oil and gas industry in Xinjiang especially after the discovery of the Yakela oil field in October 1984 and gas field to the south of Korla in September 1987 (Felix K. Chang, 2001: 220). Both are located in the Tarim Basin area. By mid-1989, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) dispatched about 10,000 Han workers to Xinjiang to develop the energy reserves in Tarim Basin. Among the major oil and gas projects in the late 1980s were the developments of polyester production capability in Urumqi petrochemical plant and construction of a power plant in Manas with a total investment of 2.575 billion yuan (Clarke, 2007: 73). However, it is noteworthy to mention that the success has also contributed to the influx of Han immigrants into Xinjiang (Becquelin, 2004: 369).

This has caused mixed feelings among the locals because the economic development of Xinjiang benefited the Han migrants more compared to the Uyghurs. The Han Chinese owned and managed most of the oil enterprises such as China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China Petroleum Corporation (SINOPEC). The non-Hans, especially the Uyghurs, were mere labourers in these companies. Whereas, the Han Chinese dominated the managerial positions.

As a result, the relationships between the Uyghurs and the Hans deteriorated. However, there were no serious incidents of civil unrests and riots in Xinjiang during the 1980s except for a few minor scuffles. Despite their frustration, the Uyghurs remained calm and the province continued its peace in the 1980s. What inspired certain Uyghur groups to clash with the Chinese authorities? Why were there violent ethnic riots in Xinjiang since the 1990s till now?



4. Tiananmen Square Demonstrations and Similarities with the Conditions in Xinjiang

The experience of Uyghurs in Xinjiang also bears similarities with the students who demonstrated in Tiananmen Square. It is interesting to note that the 1980s were a crucial period in the history of modern China. The reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping contributed to the betterment in the standard of life, economic development, and some political freedom compared to the Mao Zedong administration.

The hope of the people in China including the Uyghurs for greater political and economic reforms was manifested in the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989. The students who were dissatisfied with the authoritarian regime, corruption and nepotism in the government led the demonstrations. Similar to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the students were convinced that economic development must be accompanied by democracy. Therefore, they demanded democratization and political liberalization. It is interesting to note one that of the student leaders involved in the demonstration was Wu'erkaixi from Xinjiang.

The desire for a better future has inspired the students and ordinary citizens in Beijing to take to the streets on 22nd April 1989 demanding for democratization and fulfilment of the rights enshrined in China's Constitution 1982. It is noteworthy to mention that the economic reforms have contributed to the rapid urbanization in China. However, unemployment among workers had increased and their frustrations were not given proper attention when the authorities denouncing their protests as part of an effort to undermine the government. This further angered the students and protestors. Therefore by 15th May 1989, more people gathered at Tiananmen Square and thousands began participating in hunger strike. Nevertheless, the government still refused to acknowledge their appeal.

The situation in Tiananmen Square became very tense, and between 17th and 18th May 1989 it was estimated around one million people had gathered to demonstrate. Students from all over the country came to Beijing in solidarity. In addition, separate demonstrations were held at provincial party headquarters in Hubei and Fujian. During the same period, approximately 3,000 Uyghur students from the University of



Xinjiang and the Urumqi Institute of Quranic Studies demonstrated in front of the Xinjiang CCP headquarters to protest the publication of *Sexual Customs*, which allegedly contained insults and blasphemy against Islamic teachings. (Gladney, 2004: 231)

Demonstrations were also conducted in major Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Wuhan, Nanjing and Chengdu (Zhao, 2009). The participants of the demonstrations were not only from among the students but also from various groups with the needs to express their grievances. With the intention of gaining international attention, the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square also took advantage of the state visit of the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to Beijing on 13th May 1989. On the same day, as many as 300,000 people had gathered at the square. In spite of the demonstrations, Gorbachev continued his meeting with the Chinese leaders at the Great Hall of the People (*ibid.*: 169).

Initially the government did not know how to respond. It is important to note that the government was not prepared to face such an unprecedented situation. The government was split on how to deal with the situation, on what were their demands, and whether to negotiate or to crack down on the demonstrations by force. Zhao Ziyang, then Secretary General of the CCP, argued that the government should recognize the demonstrations as patriotic movement and hold dialogue with the students. However, the hardliners which included the military were worried that the demonstrations would cause the country to disintegrate and lead to a civil war.

The Chinese leaders including Li Peng, then premier of China, attempted to meet the demonstrators on 18th May. During the meeting, the students demanded recognition from the government that the demonstrations were “patriotic”. However, the meeting did not manage to convince the demonstrators as Li Peng was more concerned that the students would call off the demonstrations. On the following day, Zhao Ziyang accompanied by Wen Jiabao also made a final appeal to the demonstrators in the square. He called on the students to end the hunger strike and return home.

Finally, on 20th May 1989, the government declared martial law and called the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into Beijing. The



government gave the demonstrators till 4th June to withdraw and clear the square. However, the students' refusal then resulted in the military being mobilized to crack down on the demonstrations. On 9th June, the government defended its actions instead of addressing the grievances of the students and the authorities discredited the demonstrations as anti-government with the objective of overthrowing the socialist system.

Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 symbolizes the aspirations of the people for progress but instead it has reversed the reform process. Progressive leaders within the CCP such as Zhao Ziyang were expelled. Ever since the demonstrations in 1989, the party has hardened its stance of refusing to accept political reforms.

It is interesting to note that the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989 happened when the economic development and reforms were reshaping China. The students were seeking for political reforms. Similarly, some Uyghur groups considered that the economic development in Xinjiang must be accompanied by political reforms. During the mid-1980s, Xinjiang experienced economic development especially in the field of agriculture and energy. As a result, it has attracted many Hans from other Chinese provinces to migrate to Xinjiang to work.

In addition, the government also supported the Han migration policy. This has created disgruntlement among the Uyghurs as they considered themselves to be "colonized" by the Hans. It also contributed to the increase of unemployment among the Uyghurs. In addition, they also feared their religious and cultural identity would be eroded due to the influx of Hans into Xinjiang. The Uyghurs demanded better employment prospects and greater autonomy. Furthermore, they wanted the CCP to stop the policy of mass migration of Hans to Xinjiang but their demands did not receive the attention of the government.

Both cases of Tiananmen Square demonstrations and Xinjiang have clearly demonstrated that the government is suppressing the voices of the people instead of fulfilling their aspirations. Yet, the spirit of freedom and aspiration for greater political reforms were far from being extinguished in China, especially in Xinjiang.



5. Tiananmen Square Demonstrations of 1989 as Impetus for Political and Security Challenges in Xinjiang

The failure of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 has deep impact on the Uyghur groups seeking greater freedom and political reforms in Xinjiang. They viewed the government as incapable of listening to the grievances of the people and intolerant to any political reforms. Unfortunately, the death toll as a result of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations also convinced some Uyghur groups that the so-called “peaceful demonstrations” would not provide the intended results; instead they were convinced that the only way to bring about change was through violence. Therefore, since the 1990s the outbreak of political violence has been serious that the province could be considered to be in a constant state of emergency.

One of the worst riots was in the 1990s which occurred in the town of Baren, 50 kilometres southwest of Kashgar. The Chinese authority held the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP) responsible for the riots. It started on 5th April 1990 when a group of Uyghur men criticized the Chinese policies towards the ethnic minorities while attending prayers at a mosque. It eventually developed into a mass demonstration against the Han Chinese. The police were unable to subdue the riots and their weapons were confiscated. In fact, the rioters threw bombs at police stations and attacked government buildings (Shichor, 1994: 74).

On 5th February 1991, several explosions occurred in Urumqi, the provincial capital of Xinjiang. The incidents had resulted in three persons being killed, four seriously wounded and another 11 suffering minor injuries. It was followed by another explosion at a bus terminal in Kuqa County of the Aksu Prefecture on 28th February which killed one person and wounded 13.

The aim of the attack was to create fear among the Han Chinese living in Xinjiang. Three years after the Urumqi bombings, Xinjiang was again faced with yet another civil unrest. It happened on 22nd April 1995 in the district of Ili, located in the northwest of Xinjiang. Residents of the district gathered at Yining, the administrative town of the district, demanding independence. They shouted anti-Chinese slogans such as “Long Live Uyghur Xinjiang” and “End Communist rule in Xinjiang”.



About 50,000 people gathered during the rally.

The province continued to experience ethnic violence. In fact, in February 1997, another insurrection against Chinese rule broke out in Yining. At least ten Hans were killed and more than 100 injured including police and paramilitary personnel. Consequently, the authorities imposed a curfew. Military units from other districts were called in to suppress the insurrection. Despite the efforts from the Chinese authorities to suppress any insurrections from occurring, the political violence in Xinjiang did not end. In March 1997, it was alleged that a group of Uyghur separatist was responsible for the bombing of a bus in the capital city of Beijing injuring 30 people (Dillon, 1995).

On 21st January 2002, the Information Office of China's State Council published a document entitled "'East Turkistan' terrorists forces cannot get away with impunity". The aim of the document was to highlight the security problems in Xinjiang caused by the alleged "East Turkistan terrorists". The document claimed that the international terrorist organizations such as the Uzbekistan Islamic Liberation Movement and Al Qaeda supported the Uyghur separatists. It also claimed that Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan trained the separatist groups in Xinjiang.

According to the document, the alleged East Turkistan terrorist forces carried out more than 200 violent attacks in Xinjiang between 1999 and 2001, killing 162 people and wounding more than 440; the victims were from every ethnic group, grassroots cadres and even Islamic religious figures. On two occasions the Chinese Foreign Ministry declared that Uyghur separatists had close connections with the Taliban forces in Afghanistan.²

The Chinese government declared that there were three forces which threatened the security of Xinjiang. They were separatist forces, religious extremist forces and terrorist forces (Wayne, 2008: 24). Hence, the authorities had strategized their efforts to fight against these three forces. The Chinese government had labelled them the "Three Evil Forces" and intensified the "Strike Hard" campaign to counter these "Three Evils" (*ibid.*). The "Strike Hard" campaign which started in the mid-1990s was initially targeted at organized violent crime. However,



the national and provincial authorities had expanded its scope to fight against political dissidents. In the case of Xinjiang, the CCP used it to eliminate separatism and illegal religious activities.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the US, China intensified its crackdown in Xinjiang. The Chinese government claimed that the security and stability of Xinjiang had been threatened by separatists and religious extremists. China even suggested that the separatists were linked to international terrorists.³ Ironically, prior to the attacks of September 11, China had never admitted that Xinjiang was facing problems, yet openly called for international support in their struggle against domestic terrorism.

According to Rohan Gunaratna⁴, “the Uyghur separatist groups such as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) were responsible for a series of bombings in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China in the lead up to the recent Beijing Olympics” (Gunaratna, 2009: 2). Gunaratna also claimed that ETIM had received training, weapons, finance and ideology from international terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda (*ibid.*).

It is undeniable that the cross-border trade between China and the Central Asian republics contributed to the economic development of the province but it also brought the Uyghurs into closer contacts with the Muslim societies in Central Asia. Beside closer contacts with the Muslims in Central Asia, the cross-border links enabled Pakistan to extend its cultural and religious influence in Xinjiang. According to Sean Roberts, “the most significant Pakistani influence on Xinjiang was through the education of Xinjiang’s mullahs and imams in Pakistani madrasahs.” (Roberts, 2004: 226-227). These led to the revival of Islam and the Uyghur identity.

However, this article argues that these factors alone are not sufficient to inspire the resurgence of Uyghur nationalism. The main motivating factor is the mass migration of Hans into the province and reluctance of the government to listen to the frustration of the people. Similar to the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989, the government responded with harsh retaliations which only caused more animosity between the Hans and Uyghurs. This paper does not deny the possibilities of the involvement of external forces such as Islamic



extremists and terrorist organizations from Central Asia which have managed to radicalize some Uyghurs. Nevertheless, the core factors are due to the economic deprivation and the inability of the Chinese government to hold dialogue with the people and provide greater political reforms. In addition, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 have become an impetus for the Uyghurs to continue their struggle.

For example, the incidents occurred in March 2008 and July 2009 have shown that ethnic grievances, rather than external influences, were the factor. The death of two Uyghur workers in Guangdong and the way the Chinese government handled the case triggered the riot in July 2009. The Uyghurs alleged that the Han employers in Guangdong discriminated against and treated the Uyghur workers poorly. Besides, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang also alleged that their fellow Uyghurs working in Guangdong were also subject to discrimination by Han workers.

Hence, on 25th June 2009, a fight occurred between the two groups in a toy factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong, over a rumour that six Uyghur workers raped two female Han workers, which resulted in the death of two Uyghurs. The incident had caused the Uyghurs to be very upset. It had also triggered frustration and anger among them. On 5th July 2009, at least 1,000 Uyghurs protested and attacked the Han Chinese. The police attempted to quell the rioters with tear gas, water hoses, armoured vehicles, and roadblocks; the government imposed curfew in most urban areas. Two days later, on 7th July, the Han retaliated against the Uyghurs. According to the authorities, 197 people were killed and 1,721 were injured. In addition to the loss of lives, many vehicles and buildings were destroyed (Leonard, 2009). These incidents have clearly confirmed the argument of this article that the political violence which occurred in Xinjiang since the 1990s was due to internal factors which encompassed economic deprivation, failure of the government to hold dialogue with the people and its unwillingness for political reforms. What's more, as mentioned earlier, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations have taught the Uyghurs to be more assertive.



6. Looking Forward: Towards a Stabilized Xinjiang

This paper has recommendations for the Chinese government to consider. The first set of recommendations is directed towards the new Chinese leadership. These recommendations include reducing the mass migration of Hans to Xinjiang. Until the educational levels in the province are improved and the Uyghurs are able to compete with the Hans, the Uyghurs will not accept the increase of the Hans' presence in Xinjiang. The policy of mass migration of the Hans is exacerbating rather than alleviating the tensions between the government and the Uyghurs. Hence, it should be reviewed.

Moreover, this paper would like to propose to the new Chinese leaders to further upgrade the educational system within the province, especially among the Uyghurs. This is to enable them to have better opportunities to participate in the province's economic development and never consider themselves deprived or left behind. In addition, the Chinese government should offer more incentives to the middle-class and well educated Uyghurs to remain in Xinjiang. They should be recruited into the province's bureaucracy and promoted to high administrative posts instead of reserving such posts for the Han migrants.

The Chinese government should discourage the middle-class and educated Uyghurs from leaving Xinjiang to move into Central China. One of the strategies is to offer them more incentives and better positions. It is noteworthy to mention that the Chinese government's attempt to suppress Islam by confining it to tight state control may also produce negative impacts on Xinjiang. Suppressing Islam shall alienate the Uyghurs, drive religious expression further underground and encourage the growth of more radicalized and oppositional forms of religious identity. If this trend continues, it may result in more and more Uyghur youths to be radicalized and the number of moderate Uyghurs will decline.

According to Rohan Gunaratna, "Beijing will need to invest even more in developing Xinjiang and empowering the mainstream Uyghur community. Beijing will need to win over the Uyghurs who resent the Han settlers. Beijing and its representatives in Xinjiang also must work



with Xinjiang's community and religious leaders to build social resilience." (*op. cit.*) Therefore, this paper would like to propose that policies barring Islamic religious believers from being a member of the CCP or working for the government should be changed. In fact, the Uyghurs should not be deprived of their rights to retain their Islamic identities such as women wearing their headscarf or men keeping beard. This is to encourage greater participation of the Uyghurs rather than isolate them.

It is interesting to note that the Uyghur community in Xinjiang can be divided into three different groups. The first group consists of the mainstream Uyghurs, who may despise the Chinese policies but want to live peacefully. They have no intention to destabilize the security of the province. The second group is made up of pro-Chinese Uyghurs, who are either member of the CCP or government officials. They receive preferential benefits from the state due to their support towards the government. The third group consists of the Uyghurs who are against the Chinese administration and willing to adopt violent approach in order to achieve their political aims. The second and third groups are minorities among the Uyghurs. Unfortunately, thus far the Chinese government has focused its attention on either empowering Uyghurs who are members of the CCP (second group) or pursuing harsh policies on the extremists (third group). China needs to re-focus its attention on the mainstream Uyghur community before they isolate themselves and turn towards extremism.

7. Conclusion

It seems that China has adopted the "carrot and stick" approach in maintaining stability which has had tremendous impact on the sociopolitical conditions in Xinjiang. The CCP adopted the "carrot" approach by granting some freedom to the Uyghurs such as the right to worship and use their language as well as some preferential policies like employment in government departments. The "stick" or coercive approach was used when the CCP was confronted by the separatist groups demanding independence. China is even willing to take a

Figure 1 The Divisions of Uyghur Community in Xinjiang

hard-line approach in order to defend its national unity and security. It has also intended to send a message to the international community that it will never give up its sovereignty over any of its provinces, including Xinjiang.

It is essential to mention that based on the political and economic developments that have taken place in Xinjiang since 1978, China is in a “Catch 22” no-win situation. It is due to the dilemma that if the Chinese government were to grant greater autonomy, it will not receive much appreciation but rather more demands for political and ethnic autonomy. According to Frederick Starr, “it is a terrible paradox the Chinese have created for themselves.” (Starr, 2004) Scholars who have dealt with the issues relating to ethno-nationalism in Xinjiang such as Ji Ping suggested that there is no guarantee that higher level of education and higher socioeconomic status among the Uyghurs will dampen the desire of the Uyghurs to seek independence (Ji Ping, 1990: 200).

However, this paper argues that if the new Chinese leadership can ensure the Uyghurs the rights provided by the 1984 Law and the Uyghurs’ economic and social rights as enshrined in the Chinese Constitution are protected, it will override any appeal for ethnic sovereignty. Scholars such as Justin Rudelson and Doak Barnett have also argued that if the Chinese economy continues to develop in

Xinjiang and it manages to improve the living standards of the Uyghurs, it is possible to overcome the problem of separatism (Rudelson, 1992; Barnett, 1993: 97). This paper agrees with Rudelson and Barnett; on another hand, it emphasizes that China should also adhere to the provisions regarding the rights of the ethnic minorities in its own constitution.

Notes

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1. “Uyghur is often pronounced /wi ɚr/ by English speakers, though an acceptable English pronunciation closer to the Uyghur people’s pronunciation of it would be /u .i ɚr/. Several alternate romanizations also appear: *Uighur*, *Uygur*, and *Uigur*. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region provincial government recommends that the generic ethnonym [j], adopted in the early 20th century for this Turkic people, be transcribed as ‘Uyghur.’ The meaning of the term *Uyghur* is unclear. Most Uyghur linguists and historians regard the word as coming from *uyughur* (*uyushmaq* in modern Uyghur language), literally meaning ‘united’ or

- ‘people who tend to come together’.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uyghur_people>
2. “‘East Turkistan’ terrorist forces cannot get away with impunity”, *People’s Daily* (China), 21st January 2002. <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200201/21/eng20020121_89078.shtml>
 3. “‘East Turkistan’ terrorism part of international terrorism: FM spokeswoman”, *People’s Daily* (China), 23rd November 2001 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200111/22/eng20011122_85127.shtml>. See also, “Uyghur captives in Afghanistan are ‘East Turkistan’ terrorists: FM spokesman”, *People’s Daily* (China), 22nd January 2002 <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200201/22/eng20020122_89137.shtml>.
 4. Rohan Gunaratna is a professor at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technology University in Singapore. He is also the head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR).

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