

The Mountains Are High and the Emperor Is Far Away: An Examination of the Ethnic Violence in Xinjiang

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Abstract

The summer of 2011 has been another violent one in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Despite the removal of hard-line party secretary Wang Lequan who was seen to have seriously mishandled the devastating outbreak of violence in July 2009, his replacement by the supposedly reform-minded Zhang Chunxian and the pumping of vast amounts of central government funds into the region, the XUAR is still an area of major concern for Beijing. This paper argues that the central leadership fears its control over the vast, strategically and economically vital province slipped significantly during the last year of Wang's leadership. It examines in detail the violent events of the summer of 2009 based on interviews with eye witnesses and contemporaneous accounts and argues that Xinjiang remains an unstable region with the potential for further serious unrest.

Keywords: Xinjiang, Beijing, Urumchi, Wang Lequan, central, provincial

JEL classification: H12, J15, N35, Z13

1. Introduction

The summer of 2011 was another difficult one with a number of violent incidents in two of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)'s largest cities resulting in the death of more than 30 people.¹ In the southern city of Hotan, according to official reports, 18 people (16 rioters and 2 policemen) were killed when a police station came under attack.² Just over a week later in Kashgar two men hijacked a truck and drove it into a crowd of people, killing eight and injuring 28. The following day an explosion hit a restaurant west of Kashgar's central square. Five men armed with knives then attacked police and bystanders. Six bystanders were killed and 12 were injured.³ Two ethnic Uyghur men, Memtieli Tiliwaldi and Turson Hasan, who

the authorities said were involved in the attacks were shot by police when found hiding in a corn field on the outskirts of Kashgar the following day.⁴

Chinese media and officialdom, as usual, immediately blamed outside forces for the violence (Pantucci, 2011). However, it was noticeable that the authorities have become much more direct in naming Pakistan, China's "all weather friend", as the source of these foreign-trained militants. Pointing the finger directly at the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Kashgar government published a statement in which it said that one of the men had confessed that some of the leaders of the group had trained in Pakistan in bomb-making and weapons handling and had returned to carry out terrorist attacks.⁵ Following the attacks, XUAR party secretary Zhang Chunxian 张春贤 ordered a crackdown on terrorists, religious extremists, and "illegal religious activities". "Strong and effective measures should be taken to prevent more terror attacks and guarantee people's safety, their assets and regional stability," he said. "(We should) resolutely punish terrorists according to the law, crack down on terror activities, resolutely crack down on extreme religious forces and effectively contain illegal religious activities."⁶ It was also announced that the elite Snow Leopard anti-terrorism unit would be sent to Xinjiang to boost security.⁷

It had all been very different just a few weeks previously when Zhang had surprised Urumchi (Urumqi) residents by turning up "unannounced" to hand out kebabs and beer at a street side stall on the 2nd anniversary of the July 5th riots. Official media reported that Zhang's visit to the Dawan Evening Food Court would "win a thousand times more trust from the people than an inspection of security work in the city".⁸

Zhang, who famously is the most senior official in China with an account on micro-blogging website Weibo 微博, has been in the top position since April 2010 having replaced long-term party secretary Wang Lequan 王乐泉. He was expected to adopt a softer line in Xinjiang than his iron-fisted predecessor. Zhang has been championing investment in the region as the best way to deal with violence, with a new focus on disaffected unemployed Uyghur youth.

Following the Urumchi riots, the central government significantly increased investment in Xinjiang, setting aside 11.4 billion yuan for infrastructure projects in 2010 alone.⁹ Beijing also revamped a programme under which richer provinces act as donors and investors for different parts of Xinjiang. It promised to bring in fresh investment and vowed that more attention would be paid to regional disparities.¹⁰ Slums were cleared in Urumchi, with new housing for the poor, mostly southern migrants to the city, and with more than 46,000 residents in the city's Heijiashan 黑甲山 slum alone, re-housed.¹¹

However periodic outbreaks of violence (usually in the hot summer months) remain part of life in Xinjiang. The violence of summer 2011 was

the second time Zhang faced a security crisis since he became XUAR party secretary. In August 2010 a man drove an electric tricycle packed with explosives into a crowd in Aksu city killing seven and injuring 14.¹²

As it has done since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power, Xinjiang continues to ebb and flow between periods of stability and outbreaks of violence, between relative openness and reform to harsh clampdowns (Bovingdon, 2010; Millward, 2007; Rudleson, 1997). Perhaps in Xinjiang more than in any other part of China, the CCP struggles to maintain what Zhao Suisheng calls “the myth of harmony” and claim that “equity, unity, mutual help, and common prosperity are the basic principles of the Chinese government in handling relations between ethnic groups” (Zhao, 2004: 166).

2. Urumchi Aflame: The Causes and Consequences of the July 5th Riot

Beijing clearly anticipated trouble in the highly sensitive year of 2009 and had already moved an estimated 80,000 troops and People’s Armed Police (PAP) officers to Tibet and Xinjiang (Lam, 2009). Anniversaries are always a big deal in China and 2009 had lots: the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the 50th anniversary of the failed Tibetan Insurrection in 1959 and the 20th anniversary of the 1989 student protest in Beijing. Apart from the sensitivities of these dates a huge celebration was planned for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC and the central government was all too aware of how violence in Kashgar and Kucha had marred the opening of the Olympic Games.

Yet despite this massive security presence, on the evening of July 5th, 2009, XUAR capital Urumchi was the scene of the worst social unrest in China since the violent suppression of the 1989 student protests. The official *China Daily* went so far as to describe the violence as the “deadliest riot since new China was founded”.¹³ According to official figures, the riots which broke out in a number of areas in the city of 2.3 million people left 197 people dead and over 1,700 injured. As the crisis deepened President Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 was forced to leave a G8 summit being held in Italy in order to take personal charge. While most of the fatalities occurred on the night of July 5th, it took three days and the deployment of thousands of People’s Armed Police and regular soldiers onto the streets of Urumchi before the situation was brought under control.¹⁴

2.1. Rumours Spread over Internet

According to eyewitnesses I interviewed in Urumchi in November 2009, the violence was triggered when police attempted to disperse a large crowd which had gathered in People’s Square to protest what they saw as the inadequate

handling of a violent row which had broken out thousands of miles away in a toy factory in Shaoguan 韶关 City, Guangdong 广东 Province. The mass late night brawl at the factory involving up to 1,000 local Han Chinese and Uyghur workers who had been recently recruited from Xinjiang, led to two deaths and 118 injuries. According to an official investigation, the fight was triggered by a disgruntled former employee of the factory who had falsely written on the Internet of a young Han Chinese girl being raped by a group of Uyghurs after she mistakenly walked into the Uyghur dormitory at the factory.¹⁵

Rumours of much greater loss of life spread quickly through the Internet following the June 25th brawl along with gruesome pictures from Shaoguan that appeared to show more fatalities than the two reported. The original People's Square protest mostly involved students from Xinjiang University. The students had asked permission to hold a protest in the square but the authorities refused. However those behind the protest decided to go to the square anyway and a crowd numbering in the region of 300-400 gathered, calling for a proper investigation into the events in Shaoguan. Police attempted to disperse what was at this stage a peaceful protest and after a number of small-scale skirmishes the crowd seemed to disperse. According to a number of eyewitnesses (personal interviews) many in the crowd were angered by what they saw as the heavy-handed approach of police. By 8 pm a larger and more violent crowd had gathered at the Uyghur bazaar in Erdaoqiao 二道桥. The Erdaoqiao bazaar had once been the largest and most important Uyghur bazaar in Urumchi but has in recent years seen a large influx of Han traders and stall owners. It appears that this crowd began hurling bottles and stones at the small number of regular police who being outnumbered, quickly withdrew. For the next four hours the city descended into total chaos with mobs of mostly young Uyghur men attacking first Han store owners and then passers-by, taxi drivers and bus drivers while the police awaited reinforcements and orders on what to do.

By midnight with the trouble now spreading to a number of areas in the city, gun shots could be heard and People's Armed Police in their distinctive green uniforms attempted to restore order.¹⁶ In the early hours of the morning riot police and PAP spread out into residential areas detaining large numbers of Uyghur men. In the region of 1,500 mostly men and boys were detained in the raids which took place mostly in the Erdaoqiao and Saimachang 赛马场 areas of the city.¹⁷

On the night of July 5 Internet access was cut in Urumchi while text messages and calls from abroad were blocked. In the days that followed these restrictions were extended to the rest of the XUAR while social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter and video-sharing site YouTube were blocked throughout China. The authorities only gradually began to ease these restrictions in late January of the following year and the Internet in Xinjiang

remains heavily restricted. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and other sites remain blocked throughout China.

Over the next two days crowds of Han Chinese, many carrying home-made weapons began massing in various parts of the cities demanding revenge and in some cases attacking Uyghurs. In a televised speech on the evening of July 6th, Wang Lequan announced that the city was now under night time curfew. He told viewers the unrest had been quelled but warned that “this struggle is far from over”. Earlier the same day Urumchi party chief Li Zhi 栗智, who would be sacked a few weeks after the riot, was forced to address a large crowd from the roof of a police jeep, calling for the protestors to return home.

By this stage foreign media had arrived in large numbers and were met with an openness that surprised many, especially in the light of the restrictions placed on traveling to Tibet following the Lhasa riots in March 2008. “Let the facts speak for themselves,” regional government official Li Wanhui 李万辉 told foreign journalists.¹⁸

2.2. Rebiya Kadeer and the World Uyghur Congress

It was only on July 8th following President Hu’s departure from the G8 summit that large numbers of security forces – some sources put the figure as high as 50,000 (Lam, 2009) – began to flood the city.

By July 9th, with the situation now relatively calm, helicopters dropped leaflets while trucks drove through the streets blaring messages appealing for calm and blaming extremists for orchestrating the riots. By this stage the authorities were pointing the finger of blame squarely at Rebiya Kadeer, the 62-year-old head of the World Uyghur Congress. In 1999 Kadeer was jailed by the Chinese for the crime of passing state secrets, although it appears that these “secrets” were contained in newspaper clippings she sent to her husband in America. Following her release in 2005 she fled to America, where she set up the Uyghur American Association. Before her imprisonment Kadeer had been a successful businesswoman and philanthropist, had been held up by the Communist Party as proof of the success of its ethnic minority policy and was named a delegate to the eighth session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference and the National People’s Congress. However she fell from favour when she began criticizing government policy in Xinjiang. She has continuously denied being behind the riots and insists that almost 200 Uyghurs were tortured and killed at detention centres in the immediate aftermath of the riots while up to 10,000 were detained.¹⁹

In August two of her children and her brother wrote open letters condemning her for orchestrating the riots. Five of Kadeer’s 11 children still live in Xinjiang. Her brother Mehmet, son Khahar who is currently in prison

convicted of fraud, and daughter Roxingul all appeared on state television condemning their mother.²⁰

2.3. Emergency Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo

On the evening of July 9th, Hu Jintao convened an emergency meeting of the Standing Committee of the Politburo to discuss the ongoing situation. Standing Committee members agreed that stability in Xinjiang was the “most important and pressing task”, according to a statement issued on Xinhua. The Standing Committee ordered authorities in Xinjiang to “isolate and crack down on the tiny few” and “unify and educate the majority of masses”. While “instigators, organizers, culprits and violent criminals in the unrest shall be severely punished in accordance with the law,” it said, “those taking part in the riot due to provocation and deceit by separatists, should be given education.” It was a serious crime which was masterminded and organized by the “three forces” of terrorism, separatism and extremism at home and abroad, and the unrest had resulted in great losses and done great harm to local order and stability, the statement said.²¹

At the meeting it was also decided that Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang 周永康 would travel immediately to Urumchi to take personal charge of the security operation. According to a high ranking XUAR official²², Beijing believed the local government had been too cautious in its use of force. While President Hu, no stranger to ethnic unrest from his time as Tibet party secretary, insisted from Italy on the night of July 5th that armed police use full force as soon as the gravity of the situation became apparent. Wang however was reluctant to open fire. While this may go against Wang’s hawkish reputation, there was clearly a breakdown in command on the night. Despite having troops available it took hours to bring the situation under control. The fact that the central government changed the law on how the PAP operate within weeks of the riot seems to backup this interpretation. The new law designated the PAP as responsible for dealing with “riots, unrest, large-scale violent crimes, and terrorist attacks” and crucially included new procedures for deploying PAP troops, drawn up by the State Council, and the Central Military Commission which took much of the control of the PAP away from local officials.²³

Three weeks after the riot, with the situation stabilizing on the ground, XUAR Chairman Nur Bekri set out the government line. “The riot is neither an ethnic nor religious issue, let alone a human rights issue. It is a political struggle between us and hostile forces on safeguarding national unity, opposing ethnic division, maintaining the socialist system, consolidating the Party’s ruling status and protecting core national interests,” he told a meeting of the XUAR legislature. He also pledged to find and arrest all other suspects

“at an early date” who had escaped “after committing crimes of vandalizing, looting and arson during the riot”.²⁴

A month later Hu Jintao visited Xinjiang where he told government officials, “the key to our work in Xinjiang is to properly handle the relationship between development and stability in the region”, emphasizing the “three unshakeable goals”: upholding the central task of economic construction; maintaining social stability and combating separatism; and upholding unity among the country’s different ethnic groups to ensure “joint prosperity and development” (Lam 2009).

The visit of Hu had intended to show that stability had returned to Xinjiang but the authorities were deeply embarrassed in September when a bizarre syringe attack panic broke out in Urumchi and then spread to other cities. The vast majority of these cases however seemed to have been imagined and the result of the hysteria that had gripped the region since July 5th. According to officials nearly 600 people reported being pricked with needles in Urumchi, but only 106 victims have shown signs of jabs, bumps or rashes, while the others were injured by sewing needles or pins rather than syringes, and some were insect bites. None of the reported victims have suffered from illness, poisoning or other effects.²⁵

2.4. Removal of Wang Lequan

The situation became even more serious when on Friday September 4th a large crowd of mostly Han protestors gathered in People’s Square demanding the government improve the security situation. Wang appeared on the roof of the square’s government building appealing for calm but was shouted down by the crowd, some of whom threw plastic bottles at him. Shortly after Wang left, riot police moved in to deal with the explosive situation, resulting in the death of five protestors.²⁶

For Wang, a hardliner known as the “King of Xinjiang” and a member of the Politburo who led the XUAR for 15 years – far longer than the usual 10-year limit designed to prevent regional leaders from becoming too powerful – to be shouted down by a clearly furious Han crowd was a disaster as far as Beijing was concerned.

3. A New Approach to the New Dominion?

It remains to be seen whether the appointment of Zhang Chunxian heralds a new approach in Xinjiang. Much has been made of Zhang’s reputation for openness and, ironically in a region where the Internet is even more restricted than the rest of China, his use of the web to communicate directly with the people. Announcing Zhang’s appointment, Xi Jinping 习近平 said the ex-Minister of Communication was a man endowed with “liberated ideas, a

clear-thinking mind and a spirit of creative thought".²⁷ Within days of his appointment it was announced that candidates applying for government jobs and those hired in the past two years would have to learn Uyghur or Mandarin.²⁸ The announcement was heralded as requiring officials to become bi-lingual. However even a cursory examination of the policy, which says that those who meet requirements but fail the language test will have to attend a three-month course, would suggest that officials might not be required to be all that proficient. While Mr Zhang will attempt to gain the support of the Uyghur population and disaffected Han, it would appear the central government has no intention of admitting it got Xinjiang wrong and rowing back on the policies of 15 years. In January it was reported that spending on security would be increased by almost 90 per cent to 2.89 billion yuan. Making the announcement, the region's finance department director Wan Haichuan 弯海川| said, "the government decided to increase the spending on public security this year to enhance social stability in Xinjiang." Speaking at the same press conference, Nur Bekri repeated the official assertion that the "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism were responsible for the rioting in Urumchi.²⁹ In February it was announced that Xinjiang plans to invest 120 billion yuan in 200 major projects in 2010 prioritizing the construction of "hydraulic engineering, transportation, communication, energy, ecological and livelihood projects".³⁰ The main theme of the March meeting was "uphold national unity and safeguard national security".

The appointment of Zhang who has spent much of his career in Beijing clearly shows the central government tightening its grip on the region. Before the riots Nur Bekri, who is Uyghur, had been signalled as a rising star within the party in an article in the official journal *Global Personalities* (Lam, 2009). It was thought possible that he could even get the top job of party secretary in Xinjiang. The XUAR party secretary, the position of real power in the province, has almost always been Han, while the relatively ceremonial position of chairman of the regional government is always Uyghur. It seems the old belief, that concessions in anyone one of China's contested provinces duly open a flood of "splittist and separatist" demands from other aggrieved provinces, who will presumably conclude that they now have a chance to make good their hopes for greater power, and in Beijing's eyes, thereby destroy the state (Blank, 2003), remains as strong as ever.

3.1. *Hardline Policies*

Wang Lequan's term was characterized by a hardline approach of marginalizing religion and the Uyghur language, encouraging Han in-migration, numerous "Strike Hard campaigns" against suspected "splittists" and development of the region's economy (Becquelin, 2000; Bovingdon, 2004;

Clarke, 2007; Gladney, 2004). His approach won him praise at the highest levels and led to his appointment to the Politburo. He was seen as the Party's leading man on ethnic issues. His protégé in Xinjiang, Zhang Qingli 张庆黎, brought with him the same mindset when he was appointed party secretary in Tibet in 2005. While violent incidents occurred throughout his leadership, most notably a serious uprising in the northern city of Yining 伊宁 (Gulja) in 1997, Xinjiang has for most of the period been relatively peaceful. As the historian James Millward has shown, while concerns about Uyghur separatism have received increasing official and media attention from the 1990s onwards, particularly following September 11th, 2001, in fact, both the frequency and severity of violent incidents in Xinjiang have declined since 1997-98 (Millward, 2004). Economically under Wang, Xinjiang thrived; he opened the region's oil and gas fields to drilling, laid pipelines east to the Chinese heartland and west to Kazakhstan, and turned the Production and Construction Corps, a "creaky make-work project for mustered-out Han soldiers, into a moneymaker listed on the Shanghai stock exchange".³¹ However there is a widespread belief in Xinjiang that members of Wang's family and Shandong 山东 friends benefited more than most from these projects.

Following the riots the government published a white paper which trumpeted the fact that the local gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008 stood at 420.3 billion yuan, which is 86.4 times higher than that of 1952, up 8.3 per cent on average annually. In 2008, the per-capita net income of farmers in Xinjiang was 3,503 yuan, which is 28 times more than that of 1978, while the per-capita disposable income of urban residents reached 11,432 yuan, which is 35 times more than that of 1978 (*White Paper 2009*).

This makes Xinjiang, in aggregate terms, relatively affluent, its per capita GDP ranking twelfth out of China's 31 regions and provinces and trailing behind only the 11 provinces along the east coast (Wiemer, 2004). This has led to a high rate of in-migration which the government has encouraged but are less keen on publicly acknowledging. As Steve Hess has noted, in spite of an official emphasis on the region's economic backwardness implied in national programmes aimed at developing the west and dragging the province into modernity, Xinjiang is actually a leading importer of labour (Hess, 2009). According to C. Cindy Fan, the 1990 census revealed a net interprovincial in-migration to Xinjiang of 63,000, and the 2000 census showed that net interprovincial in-migration had reached 926,000, the fifth highest such rate of all provinces in China (Fan, 2008).

3.2. Security Implications

The central government's response to the violence has followed the usual pattern of security clampdown coupled with increased investment. However,

as the violence in Aksu, Hotan and Kashgar demonstrates, the region remains unstable. It remains to be seen if this approach can eventually suppress all unrest but for now Xinjiang remains a significant worry. As outlined above the central government has since changed the control structure of the People's Armed Police giving Beijing a greater say. Sending the elite Snow Leopard anti-terrorist unit to the province also suggests that Beijing is concerned that the security forces in Xinjiang are not fully up to the job of preventing violence.

While the assumption is that the security presence in Xinjiang is heavy, Yitzhak Schichor has shown that given China's policy of concentrating troops near Beijing, Xinjiang may have no more than 50,000 to 60,000 regular troops or one soldier per 35 to 40 sq km permanently based in Xinjiang (Schichor, 2004). He points out that following the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the United States, the government became deeply concerned about direct and immediate implications for Xinjiang. While concerned for some time about the spillover of ethnoreligious terrorism from Central Asia into Xinjiang and growing involvement of the US in the region it was only after the attacks in New York and Washington that large numbers of troops and security forces were sent to the region while the border with Pakistan was closed. The fact that when the crisis erupted the government immediately sent reinforcements to Xinjiang reinforces the conclusion that Xinjiang's forces are quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate to cope with emergencies (*ibid.*).

While Xinjiang has witnessed a large number of organized protests and violent events since 1949 (Bovingdon, 2010), it has never faced a large scale, well organized, well funded separatist movement. Large scale public demonstrations are also extremely rare. For the authorities, the protests against Wang Lequan must have been deeply worrying. Beijing knows only too well that there has always been a section of Uyghur society that has never accepted Beijing's control but for the Han to also take to the streets was something not seen since the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. That the government was unnerved by the so-called Arab Spring where popular protest swept aside long-lasting authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and then Egypt, was evident when it began rounding up dissidents, including the internationally known figures such as artist Ai Weiwei 艾未未. The efficiency of Xinjiang's internal-security apparatus and armed forces, which are subordinate to the Communist Party, were severely brought into question by the events of July 5th. But who knows how the security forces would respond if asked to suppress another mass uprising involving large numbers of Uyghurs and Han? They were ready to shoot protesters to quell unrest among Uyghurs in Urumchi in 2009. But even in 1989 the army did not prove wholly reliable – at least one general disobeyed orders to join the advance into Beijing.³²

Another factor as Schichor has pointed out is Beijing's increasing concern with US presence in the region. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Xinjiang was meant to be more secure than ever. Its Central Asian borders have been officially pacified, reflecting friendly economic, political and military relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as a joint struggle against perceived threats of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism. Yet though it shares, and even leads this struggle, Washington's intrusion into Xinjiang's backyard is causing grave concern for Beijing. In fact, one of Beijing's fundamental incentives for creating the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) had been to exclude the United States from Central Asia, something it had warned against even before September 2001. While the majority of its forces in Afghanistan are due to leave, a significant presence is certain to remain while the Americans show no sign of giving up key military positions in the region such as the giant Manas air base outside the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek. Beijing is concerned less with the possibility of an all-out military invasion of Xinjiang than with the prospect of Washington using Central Asian bases for a unilateral armed interference in Xinjiang following the precedents of Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq – especially if the situation in the Taiwan Strait deteriorates. Perhaps an even bigger fear is that the United States would encourage, incite, and urge separatist movements in Xinjiang to act against China, as it did in the later 1940s (Schichor, 2004).

3.3. Demographics

The fact that the worst outbreak of ethnic violence Xinjiang has witnessed in a century took place in its most Han of cities was another shock of the July 5th violence. Urumchi is 80 per cent Han, a relatively prosperous city with a higher average wage than any other city in Xinjiang yet. Violence has usually been confined to the southern cities of Kashgar and Hotan or Yining (Gulja) in the north which have majority Uyghur populations. The central government has long had a policy of encouraging Han settlement in the area which many observers have seen as playing the central role in its strategy to pacify the region and bring it fully under Beijing control. However, if the most serious violence seen in the region occurs where Han are in a huge majority, this inevitably raises significant questions for the strategy (Bequelin, 2000; Bovington, 2004).

As the tables outline, while the Han population has grown exponentially since 1949 the population of other ethnic groups has also increased dramatically since. This could have been caused by improvements in diet and healthcare since the Communists came to power as well as less rigorous birth control regulations for ethnic minorities.

Table 1 Xinjiang Ethnic Makeup (2000 Census)

Ethnic Group	Population	Percentage
Uyghur 维吾尔	8,345,622	45.21
Han 汉	7,489,919	40.58
Kazakh 哈萨克	1,245,023	6.74
Hui 回	839,837	4.55
Kyrgyz 柯尔克孜	158,775	0.86
Mongol 蒙古	149,857	0.81
Dongxiang 东乡	55,841	0.30
Tajik 塔吉克	39,493	0.21
Xibo 锡伯	34,566	0.19
Manchu 满	19,493	0.11
Tujia 土家	15,787	0.086
Uzbek 乌孜别克	12,096	0.066
Russian 俄罗斯	8,935	0.048
Miao 苗	7,006	0.038
Tibetan 藏	6,153	0.033
Zhuang 壮	5,642	0.031
Daur 达斡尔	5,541	0.030
Tatar 塔塔尔	4,501	0.024
Salar 撒拉	3,762	0.020

Note: Excluding members of the People's Liberation Army in active service.
 Source: State Bureau of Population, Social Affairs, Science and Technology Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics of China (国家统计局人口和社会科技统计司).

Table 2 Population of Xinjiang in 1941

Ethnic Group	Population	Percentage
Uyghur	2,984,000	80.0
Kazak	326,000	8.7
Han	187,000	5.0
Hui	92,000	2.5
Kyrgyz	65,000	1.7
Others	76,000	2.0
Total	3,730,000	100.0

Source: Chang Chih-Yi, "Land Utilization and Settlement Possibilities in Sinkiang", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, January 1949, p. 62.

Table 3 Xinjiang Basic Census Data, 1982-2000 (percentages in brackets)

Year	1982	1990	2000
Total Population	13,081,500	15,156,900	18,462,600
Male	6,732,200 (51.5)	7,823,200 (51.6)	9,554,900 (51.8)
Female	6,349,300 (48.5)	7,333,700 (48.4)	8,907,700 (48.2)
Age 0-5	1,867,000 (1.4)	2,188,500 (14.4)	1,645,600 (8.9)
Age 6-14	3,308,500 (25.3)	2,821,200 (18.6)	3,396,000 (18.3)
Age 15-64	7,424,200 (56.8)	9,554,900 (63)	12,586,000 (68.1)
Age 65 and over	481,800 (3.7)	593,000 (3.9)	835,000 (4.5)
Han	5,284,000 (40.4)	5,695,400 (37.6)	7,497,700 (40.6)
Minorities	7,797,500 (62.4)	9,461,500 (62.4)	10,964,900 (59.4)
College Education	83,700 (0.6)	279,800 (1.8)	949,100 (5.1)
Senior Secondary	842,800 (6.4)	1,574,200 (10.4)	2,231,900 (12.1)
Junior Secondary	2,286,300 (17.5)	3,135,100 (20.7)	5,082,500 (27.5)
Primary	4,425,700 (33.8)	5,525,500 (36.5)	7,006,600 (38)
Illiterate and Semiliterate	2,653,900 (20.3)	1,981,100 (13.1)	1,026,400 (5.6)

Source: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Bureau of Statistics (新疆维吾尔自治区统计局), *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2001* (2001 新疆统计年鉴), Beijing: China Statistics Press (中国统计出版社), 2001, p. 93.

As Uyghurs become more urbanized it is likely that their population growth rate will decline. Stanley Toops has pointed out that the process of urbanization and industrialization are bringing about the development of a modern workforce in the region. The rural agricultural workforce is also changing, albeit more slowly. Natural increases in rural populations and improved efficiency in agriculture will gradually create a surplus of agricultural labour. The question is: will that often poorly educated population be able to find work in the cities? (Toops, 2004). Young unemployed Uyghurs from the south who had recently moved to Urumchi were blamed for being behind much of the violence on July 5th. The key variable is the flow of population across the region. Han migration has followed the most efficient transportation routes. Now that the railroad has been extended to Kashgar one can expect a substantial flow of migrants into the region (*ibid.*).

4. Conclusion

The continuing violence in Xinjiang demonstrates that the deep divisions between different ethnicities have, if anything, grown worse as the economy has developed while the gap between the government's official policy for the

area and minority policy in general and what is actually happening on the ground continues to widen. Wang Lequan came to personify this gap. His misrule also led to a major chasm opening up between Xinjiang and Beijing, one which Zhang Chunxian will have his work cut out to bridge. Xinjiang is vital to the PRC, in terms of its strategic location bordering Russia, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, its rich oil, gas and mineral resources, its complex ethnic demographics, and the fact that it makes up one sixth of the country, but perhaps more than any of these reasons it is vital in terms of national identity. Any threat to the position of Xinjiang within China is a direct threat to the CCP's hold on power.

When I visited the region in June 2009 and was struck by the tension that existed not just between Uyghurs and the authorities but also between Han and the authorities. The heavy restrictions that were put in place ahead of the Olympics and the severe clampdown that followed the attacks in Kashgar and Kucha in the run-up to and during the Beijing Olympics were criticized by both sides. Nowhere else in China, even in Tibet, are the public of all ethnicities subjected to such restrictive measures. As James Millward has pointed out, the readiness of both groups to believe Internet posting, tweets and old-fashioned word of mouth, while distrusting official news sources is a noteworthy aspect of the entire series of events; arguably non-transparency of information, the unreliability of official news sources and state efforts to block communication have done much to exacerbate the incidents (Millward, 2009). The speed with which the July 5th violence spread out of control clearly shocked the authorities and exposed the reality that Xinjiang remains a deeply unsettled region. Despite winning praise from Beijing for his hard-line stance, Wang Lequan's blatant disregard for non-Han minorities, his cronyism, and fierce suppression of any opposition allowed a serious situation to develop without Beijing ever being fully aware. The old adage "the mountains are high and the emperor is far away" was certainly true during the reign of Wang. Expect Beijing to keep a much closer watch over things in the future.

Notes

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