

A Time line

How did Uyghur conflict escalated in China?



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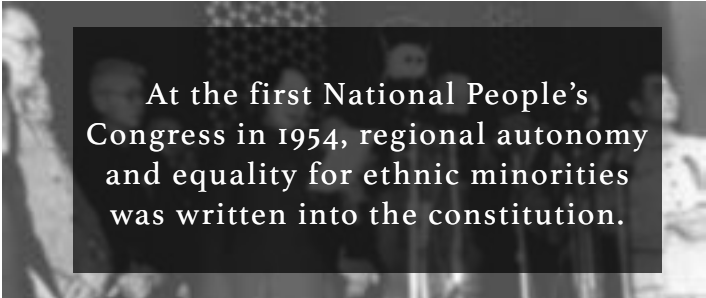
Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities

“China is a united multi-ethnic state with long history.”

State Council Information Office

The Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) brought about the first unification of the country, and since then, all Chinese governments, including the Yuan and Qing Dynasty which were established by the leaders of the Manchus, has “regarded the establishment of a united multi-ethnic state their highest political goal.”

Although the unification is achieved through a history of warfare and pacification, almost all the central authorities “ruled by custom” — preserving ethnic minorities’ own social system and culture, and adopted a diverse range of governing strategy according to the local characteristics, such as the religion-political rule in Tibet by honoring Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama in the Qing Dynasty.



Other than the Chinese Tang, Ming, and Qing, the Xinjiang region, including the current Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan had been under the ruling of Turks, the Mongols, Khanate of Kokand, and the Soviet Union. Qing regained control over the current Xinjiang in 1884.

After numerous revolts since 1884, it has officially become the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, with 14 historical ethnic groups residing in the province.

The Ethnic Policy: Good Intention, Bad Execution

Deng Xiaoping's Ethnic Policy

Deng first put forward his idea of a Ethnic Policy in 1952 to allow ethnic minorities gain special privilege in accessing higher education and governmental programs. This was two years earlier than the civil right movement in the U.S.. It was intended to increase social stability and encourage an unified economic growth within the country.

Although progressive, looking back at China's experience with ethnic warfare, some saw the complication of such policy.

In 1975 during a ethnicity symposium, Zhou Enlai, the first premier of China, discussed the possibility of it causing antagonism between the Han and ethnic minorities, and the need to set a common goal towards the construction and development of the homeland of "a big family."

Official Establishment of the Ethnic Policy

At the 11th National People's Congress in December 1978, Deng, the then leader of the Communist Party and president of the country, initiated the "Opening of China" and the PRC's Policy Towards Nationalities.

In addition to the localized strategies in the autonomous regions, the Ethnic Policy gives people who are identified as ethnic minorities special access to education and training programs to work in the government — which are still available today. It also protects the right of the ethnic minorities to practice their cultural custom and religion freely, and it supports bilingual programs in local schools to preserve traditional language and literacy.

Failing to Implement

1980, Hu Yaobang, the high official in the community party, visited Tibet and proposed "Six Requirements in Tibet" in May. Two months after, he made the same proposal for Xinjiang.

1. Let Tibet fully execute its autonomy under the guideline of the central government.
2. Reduce people's economic burden. Ensure husbandry tax exemption within a few years time.
3. Reduce the gap of development between Tibet and other regions, implement open and free policy in Tibet.
4. Increase national subsidy each year by 10% starting at ¥5 trillion in 1980 for the development of agriculture and animal husbandry.
5. Develop education, scientific, and cultural institutions to inherit, research and promote Tibetan Buddhism and significant cultural legacies such as dance, music, and medicine. An university is to be established with 98% Tibetan students. All Han government officials under the age 50 are required to learn Tibetan language and literacy.
6. More than 2/3 of the government official not engaged with production should be Tibetan.

According to the reporting of DW News based in New York, Hu's proposal incited strong objection from the Han officials, and it was not adopted by Deng.

"It is obvious from here, centered around the Tibet and Xinjiang policies is a enormous interest group. They will safeguard their own interest in the name of stability."

- DW News

"Two fewer, one leniency"

Nevertheless, the central government adopted a policy called "two fewer, one leniency," and established the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy in the same year. Under such policy, the law enforcement departments adheres to the principle of "less arrests and less capital punishment" towards ethnic minorities.

Yao Xinyong, a professor of Chinese language and literacy at the Jinan University, wrote in his article in 2009 that this policy has cut a deep chasm between Han and the ethnic minorities.

"In Xinjiang, most Han people know not to get into conflicts with the Uyghurs," he said. "Even if you are injured, as long as it's not so serious, the offender won't get punished."

He said this has also contributed to the stereotype of the "Xinjiang thief" in the inland China.

On the other hand, the central government continuously exert its control over Tibet and Xinjiang in attempt to eliminate separatism, making regional autonomy an empty statement.

While the government improved the living standard of these regions by building infrastructure, providing social programs, and encourages business privatization, the traditional ways of living has changed drastically.

While the government spent a considerable amount of money building mosques, making Xinjiang having about 24,000 mosques, more than ten times across U.S. — until the mass destruction in 2017, some schools in Xinjiang prohibited students from wearing head coverings.

In addition to the many flaws of various national policies, different factors combined and accumulated tension between the Uyghurs and the government.



Distrust and Violence

Challenges for the Uyghurs

It is especially challenging for Uyghurs to integrate into the Chinese society that is 90% Han, causing the Uyghurs to be increasingly marginalized.

Language: The Uyghur speaks a Turkic language that is distinctively different than the Chinese. Unlike the dialect in other regions in China, Uyghur comes from a different language family.

Lifestyle: While the vast majority of the Chinese enjoys pork, and has its prominent drinking culture, both are prohibited in Islam. One Calgary lady from Xinjiang said that a Han person needs to go through gastric lavage before converting to Islam if they want to get married to a Muslim in Xinjiang because a common interpretation locally is that pork is “dirty.”

“They look foreign, some of them very pretty. You can tell they are Uyghurs from just one look,” she said. “Many of them speaks Chinese, and lives no different than the Han people except that they don’t eat pork.”

Identity: With language and lifestyle differences, Uyghurs tend to stay within Xinjiang. Although the sense of “otherness” is common for cross-province migrants, Uyghurs can have a much more difficult experience calling elsewhere in China home. Around 2010, the Han population started surpassing the Uyghurs population with a massive influx of migrants.

Education and Poverty: As of 2014, more than 80% of the Uyghurs are farmers with an average of 6 -9 years of education.

The Outburst

Under a government program to relieve Uyghur youth unemployment, Early Light (Xuri), the largest toy company in the world hired 800 Uyghur men to work at its factory in Shaoguan, Guangzhou. Although the men didn’t speak Chinese, the vibe were friendly with other workers until two Han women were allegedly raped by the Uyghurs.

On June 25, violent broke out. About 120 men were injured, two of the Uyghur men were killed.

Major issues caused by the impractical execution of the ethnic policy, from criminal rate to distrusting the government in both Han and the Uyghurs, manifested in an extreme way.



More Violent Attacks in Xinjiang

Aug. 19, 2010, Asku: Bombing near a crowd of police killed 7, 14 injured. The bomber was reported to be a Uyghur, and local source said most of the injured were Uyghurs police officers.

April 13, 2013, Maralbexi: Ten Uyghurs killed 15 social workers and police, including 10 Uyghurs, three Hans, and two ethnic Mongols. World Uyghur Congress’s spokesperson Dilxat Raxit said the attacks were caused by the central government’s suppression after 2009.

June 26, 2013, Shanshan: Gang attacked police station and a local government building, 35 were killed, including 22 civilians, two police officer and 11 attackers.

Dec. 14, 2013, Shufu: Conflict with police left 16 dead, including two officers, and six arrested.

Feb. 14, 2014, Aksu: Gang attacked patrolling police car. Eight suspects were shoot dead at the scene, one arrested, three committed suicide, reported by the state media.

March 1, 2014, Kunming, Yunnan: A group of assailants armed with long-bladed knives and cleavers killed 31 and injured 143 in an indiscriminate attack at the Kunming train station.

April 30, 2014, Urumqi: Assailants attacked passengers at the Urumqi train station with long knives and detonate a bomb nearby. Three killed, 79 injured.

Hundreds of smaller scale conflicts were reported during between 2009 and 2014.

All incidents were reported to be terrorist attacks.

Chen Quanguo Appointed

In 2011, Chen was the top party official in Tibet to develop regional economy and increase surveillance. 2016, He was appointed to Xinjiang and constructed the “re-education camps.”

The idea of correcting “material” and “mind” problem was first mentioned during the 2014 Central Ethnic Work Conference.

Xia Ming, a political economy professor at the City University of New York, told BBC Chinese that this is “an inevitable outcome” from the 2009 incident, after not being able to solve the conflicts with the policies in the past decades.

