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**Xinjiang: Prospects for Development and Challenges for the
New Chinese Administration**

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Abstract

Xinjiang or 'the new territory' is unique because it is the only of the Chinese province located in Central Asia. Xinjiang can be considered a 'bridge' linking China with the Central Asian republics as well as other countries in the Caucasus region. Xinjiang has been a strategic area since the ancient times due to it being part of the 'Silk Road', which was a popular route used by traders and travellers between the East and the West. 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. These included development projects in the urban and rural areas, modernization of facilities, increase of foreign investments and job opportunities, freedom in performing religious obligations such as pilgrimage, for the Muslim Uyghurs, freedom to practice their culture and language. Hence, there was an overall improvement in livelihood in Xinjiang province. However, political violence and separatist activities in the province have increased since the 1980s and 1990s despite some conciliatory measures which were undertaken by the Chinese administration. This article examines the economic prospect of the province and the political challenges it encounters. 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.

Key words: China, Xinjiang, Uyghur, Han, Central Asia

Introduction

This paper examines the situation in Xinjiang and challenges for the new Chinese administration. 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.

This study has demonstrated that the province is rich with natural resources and has the potential to be developed as China's north western region economic hub. In addition, Xinjiang also function as a link between China with its Central Asian neighbours and other Islamic states in the Middle East. Unlike previous studies which only concentrated on major revolts or specific periods of Chinese administration in Xinjiang, this study attempts to provide a fair analyse for the political conditions in Xinjiang. This study varies 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 north western China. Meanwhile its security and political conditions are very challenging for the new Chinese administration led by Xi Jinping.

Background

Xinjiang is of strategic importance to China because it is located in an area that is rich with oil and gas reserves which is one of China's major sources of energy. It is situated in the northwest part of China and it is largest province covering about 617,800 square miles (1,600,000 square km) or 1/6 of the total Chinese territory.¹ It stretches 1,650 km from north to south and 2,000 km from east to west.² 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.³

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 Uyghurs,⁴ Kazakhs,

¹ <http://members.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=127771&sctn=6> (accessed 5 December, 2007).

² Ahmad Lutfi, "Blowback: China and the Afghan Arabs," *Issues & Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, (January/February 2001): 179-180.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The meaning of the term *Uyghur* is unclear. However, 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'. Uyghur is often pronounced /[wiɨr](#)/ by English speakers, though an acceptable English pronunciation closer to the Uyghur people's pronunciation of it would be /[u.iɨr](#)/. Several alternate

Kirghizs, Uzbeks and Tajiks with the majority of them being Muslims. The Tajiks speak Persian in addition to Turkic. The Uyghurs (45.2 percent) are the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang followed by the Kazakhs (6.7 percent), Kirghizs (0.86 percent), Tajiks (0.7 percent) and Uzbeks (0.6 percent).⁵ 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.⁶ 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.

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 developments. New pragmatic leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang knew that for China to progress economically, it requires the support of all the minorities, including the Hui Muslims and the Uyghurs. In October 1979, the Nationalities Commission of the National People's Congress (NPC) which was abolished during the Cultural Revolution was re-established.⁷ It was part of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP's) initial effort to bring back 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 emphasised the importance of national minorities. It guaranteed freedom for the minorities to maintain their language, customs and representation in the government.⁸

It is noteworthy to mention that the primary aim of the liberalisation 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

romanizations also appear: *Uighur*, *Uygur*, and *Uigur*. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region provincial government recommends that the generic [ethnonym](#) adopted in the early 20th century for this [Turkic](#) people, be transcribed as "Uyghur."

⁵ 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, *Tabulation on Nationalities of 2000 Population Census of China*, (Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 2003).

⁶ Dawamat Tomur, *Xinjiang-My Beloved Home*, (Beijing: China Today Press, 1993), 79.

⁷ Michael E. Clarke, "Xinjiang in the 'Reform' Era, 1978-91: The Political and Economic Dynamics of Dengist Integration," *Issues & Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, (June 2007): 43.

⁸ June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1976), 206.

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).⁹ Urumqi was transformed from an oasis town to a bustling commercial and tourist centre while the gross domestic product (GDP) of Xinjiang was 105 billion yuan in 1997.¹⁰

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), 134)

Therefore, Xinjiang is no longer considered an isolated province located in the northwest of China. Events which include political and socio-economic conditions have become a major concern of the international community. Hence, the CCP has been very careful about the socio-economic 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*,¹¹ *White Paper on the History, Development of Xinjiang*¹² in its effort to portray a positive impression and to respond to the international criticism on the human rights conditions in Xinjiang.

The gross domestic product (GDP) of Xinjiang showed an increase from 11,200 million yuan in 1985 to 220,000 million yuan in 2004.¹³ In fact, in 2000, Xinjiang was ranked as one of the top

⁹ *Beijing Review*, (7-17 November, 1994).

¹⁰ <http://www.unescap.org/pop/database/chinadata/xinjiang.htm> (accessed 17 December, 2008).

¹¹ "Situation in Xinjiang" in *White Paper*, (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, August 2009).

¹² "History, Development of Xinjiang" in *White Paper*, (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, May 2003).

¹³ *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*, (Beijing: Beijing Information Press, 2005), 86.

western provinces in terms of its GDP.¹⁴ In the first two decades since Deng's reformation policies, Xinjiang has experienced several developments in the infrastructural sector such as connecting the international airport in Urumqi to other major cities in central China and cities of Central Asia and Russia.¹⁵ Other than that, there were developments in the areas of transport, telecommunications and postal services, which contributed to the improvement contact among the minorities in Xinjiang. Hence, there were increases in trade and economic activities among the non-Hans.

The agricultural sector in Xinjiang has also seen an increase in production, especially in cotton. 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.¹⁶ However, it is noteworthy to mention that the success has also contributed to the influx of Han immigrants into Xinjiang with 40 per cent of the cotton produced managed by the Xinjiang Production-Construction Corps (XPCC).¹⁷ This has caused mixed feelings among the locals because the economic development of Xinjiang benefited the Han migrants compared to the Uyghurs.

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 1987.¹⁸ Both are located in the Tarim Basin area. By mid-1989 about 10,000 Han workers had been dispatched to Xinjiang by the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to develop the energy reserves in Tarim Basin. Among the major oil and gas projects in the late 1980s were the development 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.¹⁹

In addition, the Chinese government during the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1990-94) had announced that it would construct a petrochemical plant worth US\$600 million in Dushanze, Xinjiang.²⁰ By 1995, the central government had invested 18.196 billion yuan in the areas of oil and gas explorations to set up petrochemical enterprises in Xinjiang. In 2004, it managed to produce 22.60 million tonnes of crude oil in which Xinjiang contributed 25.5 per cent of China's inland oil resources. It was estimated that by 2010, Xinjiang will produce 30 million tonnes of oil and 18 billion cubic metres of natural gas.

However, it is important to point out that most of the oil enterprises such as China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China Petroleum Corporation (SINOPEC) are owned and managed by Han Chinese. Therefore, the non-Hans especially the Uyghurs, are mere labourers in these companies whereas the managerial positions are dominated by Han Chinese.

¹⁴ Debasish Chaudhuri, "A Survey of the Economic Situation in Xinjiang and its Role in the Twenty-First Century," *China Report*, 41 (1), (2005), 17.

¹⁵ China attempts to promote Urumqi as a transit city for business men and travellers from East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia who are on their way to Central Asia. The China Southern Airlines offers flight routes to all major cities in Central Asia and the Urumqi International Airport which was built in the 1990s provides transit services such as banking and hotel for passengers to and from Central Asia. (author's observation on 19 July 2011 and 27 July 2011).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nicolas Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," *The China Quarterly*, no. 179, (June 2004): 369.

¹⁸ Felix K. Chang, "Chinese Energy and Asian Security," *Orbis*, vol. 45, no. 2, (Spring 2001): 220.

¹⁹ Michael E. Clarke, 73.

²⁰ Ibid. See also, Christofferson, "Xinjiang and the Great Islamic Cricle: The Impact of Transnational Forces on Chinese Regional Planning," *The China Quarterly*, no. 133, (March 1993): 136.

External trade between Xinjiang and other states have increased since 1985. For example, in the same year, the external trade was worth US\$ 292 million and 20 years later it rose to US\$ 5,635 million.²¹ Furthermore, the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Sino-USSR rivalry has contributed to the rise of trade between Xinjiang and other Central Asian republics. The total export-import trade volume of Xinjiang between 1992 and 1997 was US\$ 6.99 billion.²²

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Xinjiang experienced economic development especially in the field of agriculture and energy. This has attracted many Hans from other Chinese provinces to migrate to Xinjiang to work. In addition, the government also encouraged the Han migration policy. This made the Uyghurs very unhappy as they considered themselves to be 'colonised' by the Hans. Therefore, relations between the Uyghurs and the Hans deteriorated. Some of the Uyghurs expressed their frustration against the Chinese policy through protests. There were even some who wanted to separate Xinjiang through violence. The Chinese government responded to these demands by intensifying their crackdowns.

Political and Security Challenges

It should be noted that based on data collected by Justin Rudelson and Ji Ping argue that the animosities between the Hans and the Uyghurs are deeply rooted in the history of uneven relations between them. According to Rudelson, the situation in Xinjiang has also increased the animosity.²³ Therefore, since the mid 1990s the outbreak of political violence has been serious that the province can be considered to be in a constant state of emergency. The primary concern of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been to ensure China's interest and stability of the province.

The PRC administration in Xinjiang has been encountering opposition from some Uyghur extremist. They considered the CCP to be a foreign entity which has taken over their homeland. As a result, there have been several waves of rebellions against the CCP. It must be noted that every ten years the province will experience a major rebellion. The objectives of these rebellions are to separate the province from China and establish an independent republic. This has caused the Chinese authorities to be sceptical in granting more freedom and rights to the Uyghurs. They fear such actions will further enhance their demands and spirit for independence.

It is undeniable that the cross-border trade between China and the Central Asian republics contributed to the economic development of the province but they also brought the Uyghurs to 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

²¹ *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*, 86.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Justin, Rudelson, "Uighur Historiography and Uighur Ethnic Identity Change," in *Ethnicity, Minorities and Cultural Encounters* edited by Ingvar Svangerg, (Uppsalla: Center for Multiethnic Research, Multiethnic Papers 25, 1991).

influence on Xinjiang was through the education of Xinjiang's mullahs and imams in Pakistani madrasahs."²⁴ These led to the revival of Islam and the Uyghur identity.

However, in the late 1980s, these liberal policies were halted due to the fear that religious extremism might provoke Uyghur nationalism in Xinjiang. The resurgence of Uyghur nationalism was contributed by the opening up of borders as part of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms which tolerated religious and cultural freedom. Although the CCP had undertaken some conciliatory measures, they were unable to appease the Uyghurs. For them, the liberalisation implemented by the Party since 1978 promised much, but in practice, it was limited and delivered very little. The Uyghurs demanded for better employment prospects and greater autonomy. Furthermore, they wanted the CCP to stop the policy of mass migration of Hans to Xinjiang.

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.²⁵ Ironically, China, which prior to the attacks of September 11 had never admitted that Xinjiang was facing problems, had openly called for international support in their struggle against domestic terrorism.

On 21 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 Uyghur separatists were supported by international terrorist organisations such as the Uzbekistan Islamic Liberation Movement and *al-Qaeda*. It also claimed that the separatist groups in Xinjiang were trained by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. 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 had declared that Uyghur separatists have had close connections with the Taliban forces in Afghanistan.²⁶

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.²⁷ Hence, the authorities had strategized their efforts to fight against these three forces. The Chinese government had labelled them the 'Three Evil Forces'. The Chinese government intensified the 'Strike Hard' campaign to counter the 'Three Evils.'²⁸ The 'Strike Hard' campaign which started in the mid-1990s was initially targeted at organised violent crime, but national and provincial

²⁴ Sean R. Roberts, "A Land of Borderlands: Implications of Xinjiang's Trans-Border Interaction," edited by S. Frederick Starr, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 226-227.

²⁵ "East Turkistan' Terrorism Part of International Terrorism: Fm Spokeswoman," <http://english.peopledaily.com>
See also, "Uyghur Captives in Afghanistan are 'East Turkistan' Terrorist: Fm Spokesman," <http://english.peopledaily.com> (accessed 19 April, 2010).

²⁶ 'East Turkistan' Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn> (accessed 18 April, 2010).

²⁷ Martin I., Wayne, *China's War on Terrorism*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 24.

²⁸ Ibid.

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.

On 4 December 2001, the government organised a national conference on 'Political and Legal Work' in Beijing. During the conference, the government called for more stringent laws to counter the so called 'three evil forces.'²⁹ Hence on 29 December 2001, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress adopted amendments to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China. The amended articles were Article 120 of the Criminal Law, Article 191 of the Criminal Law and Article 291 of the Criminal Law. For example, the amended version of Article 120 of the Criminal Law empowers the government to increase punishments for those who organise or lead a terrorist organisation from a ten-year imprisonment to life imprisonment.³⁰

The province witnessed a series of explosions in March 2008 in which the Chinese authorities alleged the Uyghur separatists to be responsible. On 23 March 2008, the Uyghurs held anti-government protests in the town of Khotan, which is located in the western region of Xinjiang. According to the CCP, the Uyghurs were motivated by the 2008 Tibetan unrest. According to Rohan Gunaratna,³¹ "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."³² Rohan also claims that ETIM had received training, weapons, finance and ideology from international terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda.³³

In the following year, on 5 July 2009, another major riot occurred in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang. The riot was triggered by the death of two Uyghur workers in Guangdong and the way the Chinese government handled the case. The Uyghurs alleged that the Han employers in Guangdong discriminated the Uyghur workers and treated them poorly.

In addition, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang also alleged that fellow Uyghurs working in Guangdong were also discriminated by Han workers. On 25 June 2009, fighting 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 and on 5 July 2009, at least 1,000 Uyghurs protested and attacked the Han Chinese. 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 7 July, the Han retaliated against the

²⁹ "Muslims in China under further Repression after September 11," <http://www.khilafah.com> (accessed 12 April, 2010).

³⁰ Article 191, Article 291, Article 120, *Constitution of the People's Republic of China*, (Beijing: Fifth National Congress of the People's Republic of China, 1982). See also, Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China Gross Violation of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*, 3-8.

³¹ Rohan Gunaratna is 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).

³² Rohan Gunaratna, "Ethnic Violence in China: Time for a Change in Beijing's Approach?", *RSIS Commentaries*, 68/2009, (July 14, 2009), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*

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.³⁴

Looking Forward: Towards a Stabilized Xinjiang

This paper has recommendations to 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 education levels in the province are raised and the Uyghurs are able to compete with the Hans, the Uyghurs will not accept the increase Hans presence in Xinjiang. The policy of mass migration of Hans is exacerbating rather than alleviating the tensions between the government and the Uyghurs. Hence it should be reviewed.

Besides that, this paper would like to propose to the new Chinese leaders to further upgrade the educational system within the province, especially among 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 into central China. Hence, the way is by offering 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. This is because by suppressing Islam, it will alienate the Uyghurs, drive religious expression further underground and encourage the growth of more radicalised and oppositional forms of religious identity. If this trend continues it may result more and more Uyghur youths to be radicalised and the number of moderate Uyghurs will reduce.

According to Rohan Gunaratna,³⁵ "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."³⁶ 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 waived. In fact Uyghurs should not be

³⁴ Peter Leonard, "Kazakh Uighurs hold mass protest," *ABC News*, 19 July, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=8121182> (accessed 22 July, 2009).

³⁵ Rohan Gunaratna is 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).

³⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, "Ethnic Violence in China: Time for a Change in Beijing's Approach?", *RSIS Commentaries*, 68/2009, (July 14, 2009), 2.

deprived from retaining 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 and have no intention to destabilize the security of the province. The second group makes 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 consist of Uyghurs who are against the Chinese administration and are willing to adopt violent approach in order to achieve their political aims. The second and third groups are minorities among the Uyghurs but unfortunately thus far the Chinese government has focused its attention on either empowering Uyghurs who are members of the CCP (second group) or pursue 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.

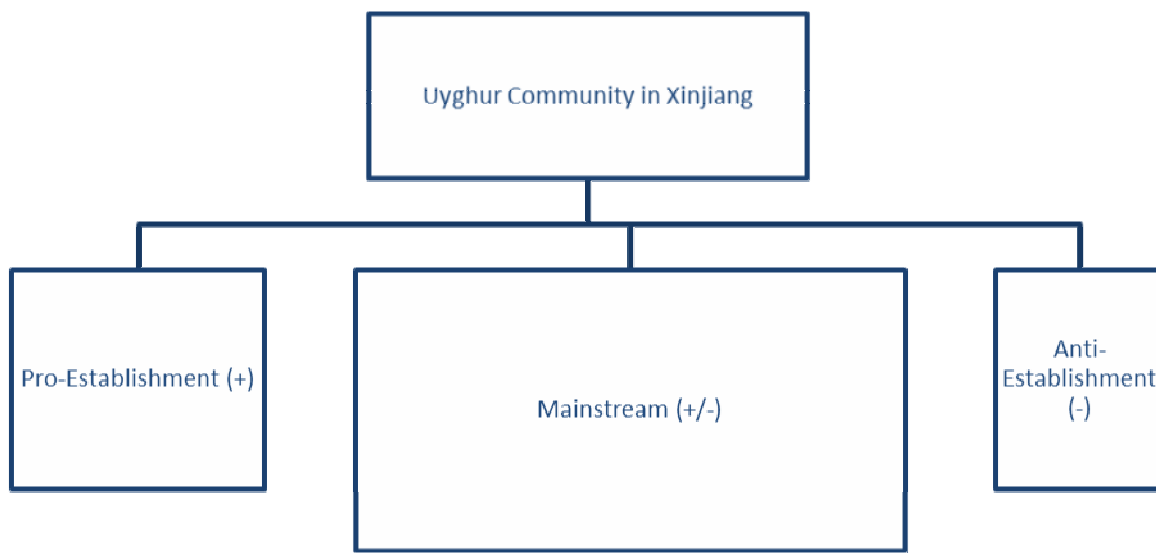


Figure: The divisions of Uyghur community in Xinjiang.

Conclusion

It seems that China has adopted the ‘carrot and stick’ approach in maintaining stability which has had tremendous impact on the socio-political 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 job employment in government departments. The ‘stick’ or coercive approach was used when the CCP was confronted by the

separatist groups demanding independence. China was even willing to take a hard line approach in order to defend its national unity and security. It also intended to send a signal 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 at 'Catch 22' situation where there is no-win situation. It is because, 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 Starr, "it is a terrible paradox the Chinese have created for themselves."³⁷ Scholars who have dealt with the issues relating to ethno-nationalism in Xinjiang such as Ji Ping³⁸ suggested that the higher level of education and higher socioeconomic status among the Uyghurs do not guarantee that it will dampen the desire of the Uyghurs from seeking independence.

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 to ethnic sovereignty. Scholars such as Rudelson³⁹ and Barnett⁴⁰ 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. This paper agrees with Rudelson and Barnett,⁴¹ but on another hand, it emphasises that China should also adhere to the provisions regarding the rights of the ethnic minorities in its own constitution.

³⁷ *China's Changing Strategic Concerns: Their Impact on Human Rights in Xinjiang*, 18.

³⁸ Ji Ping, "Frontier Migration and Ethnic Assimilation: A Case of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China," 200.

³⁹ Justin Rudelson. 125.

⁴⁰ Doak, Barnett, *China's Far West*, (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*