



Economic and Social Situation of Ethnic Minorities in China

“We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race.”

- Kofi Annan

Introduction

The People’s Republic of China is a multi-ethnic country with a high diversity of ethnic groups and minorities. Until today 56 ethnic groups have been identified and recognized by the Chinese government.¹ Most of these minorities live in Tibet or in the western Province of Xinjiang.²

There are many differences among the various ethnic groups. The largest Population is the “Han group” while other groups are relatively small. Therefore we will focus on the other groups, which are referred to as “ethnic minorities”. These minorities make up for about 104.49 million people, that equals roughly 8.41 percent of the Chinese population.³

Conflicts have recently occurred among the Uygur people and as well in Tibet. Autonomy for Chinese regions of ethnic minorities is difficult. The implementation of autonomy is critical, especially in those regions, since ethnic minorities are living in tight-knit communities. This can lead to problems between different ethnic groups regarding equality and unity of people living in these regions. It also has an effect on the economic and social development of those areas.

General problems

Ethnic minorities in China are facing many problems. In general they are very poor; about 70% almost do not have enough for a living; and their wages are normally considerably lower than the wages of the rest of the Chinese population. Since ethnic minorities mostly speak their own languages, and since it is not easy for them to get access to education, many of them do not speak Chinese and are not familiar with the outside world resp. civilization.

Many members of ethnic minority groups are afraid of being exploited and overrun by the much larger group of Han. Governmental policies and new laws are a threat to them, or at

¹ http://www.chinaethnicgroups.com/2009-08/12/content_8559271.htm

² <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

³ http://www.chinaethnicgroups.com/2009-08/12/content_8559271.htm

least appear that way, since they fear that those initiatives are only new customs initiated by the government to exploit manpower and resources in the affected region. Minorities also had a very bad reputation; they were in fact seen as “barbarians” by the Han majority. The Chinese character for “minority” actually contained the same symbol as the one for “dog”. It was only in 1949 when it was replaced by the character for “man”.⁴

Ethnic Minorities in China - Uyghurs



The Uyghur people are the biggest group of Turkic people in the Chinese autonomous region Xinjiang, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, (XUAR), which is also known as Uyghurstan. After the last population census in 1990, 7.2 million Uyghurs were living in the Peoples Republic of China, more than 99 percent of them in the autonomous region Xinjiang. Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, is a developed city with more than 2.3 million inhabitants. The biggest group are the Han with a part of about 75 %, the biggest minority group are the Uyghur, with 12,8%. 10 % of the population

belongs to other ethnic groups.⁵

As said before, Xinjiang is mostly inhabited by Turkic people. Islamist and pan-turkic organizations of Uyghuric separatists are responsible for regional unrests because of their request for independence from the People’s Republic of China. Already in ancient times Xinjiang has seen many hostilities between different peoples, since the Silk Road, leading through that territory, gave many reasons for envy, distrust and dishonesty.

Conflict in 2009

For several decades tensions between Uyghurs and Han occurred in the Xinjiang area; causing trouble and protests among the local population.

Many Uyghurs think they will be pushed out gradually by Han, who are seeking new economic and political opportunities. They also say that they are denied basic human rights, such as the right to travel. The Han on the other side believe the government is favoring the Uyghurs and are therefore dissatisfied with policies and laws submitted by the Chinese government.

Another cause of conflict is the ownership of the Xinjiang area. Uyghurs believe they or their ancestors are indigenous to that area, meaning it belongs to the Uyghurs from the beginning of settlements. The Han dominated government on the other hand considers all Chinese regions to belong to the Han since the Han Dynasty.

Those disagreements have led to violence and cultural and ethnic clashes.⁶

⁴ <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

⁵ <http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/minority/minority.html>;

<http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/index.htm>

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2009_%C3%9Cr%C3%BCmqi_riots

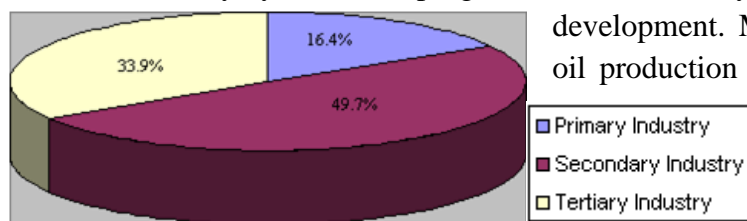
In July 2009 heavy riots took place in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang region. Catalyst for those riots was a disagreement in the Xuri Toy Factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong, near Hong Kong. These tensions at the Guangdong factory led to an ethnic clash between Uyghurs and Hans.⁷ Two Uyghur workmen were killed by two other Chinese men who belonged to the larger Han Group. Reason for that was the assumption, that six Uyghur men had raped two Han-Chinese women. Since many Uyghurs were dissatisfied with the action taken by the Chinese government and the police, a couple of days later, on the 5th of July, Uyghur people demonstrated peacefully in Urumqi for an analysis of what really happened. Uyghur People stated, that government and police failed to protect the Uyghur workmen and arrested only Uyghur people, none from the Han group.

The police was trying to stop this demonstration, causing an escalation of the situation. Pictures of bleeding people, burning cars and shops were shown by the Chinese media. According to the Chinese news agency Xinhua at least 197 people got killed, more than 1000 were injured and 1434 persons were arrested.⁸ 200 of them, Uyghur and Han People, are supposed to get a trial in coherence with criminal action they committed on those demonstrations. In the middle of October six of them were sentenced to death, since the Chinese justice found them guilty of murder and partly of incendiaries. One other was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment.

Chinese government officials however have a different view on the demonstrations and the incident in the Xuri Toy Factory. They saw the riots as "a preempted, organised violent crime [...] instigated and directed from abroad, and carried out by outlaws in the country".⁹ Nur Bekri, the present Chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, held a television speech on July the 6th. He blamed an overseas opposition organisation to use the unrests over the factory incident to undermine "the ethnic unity and social stability in the autonomous region, with an aim to split the country."¹⁰ The Chinese government held the exiled independence group World Uyghur Congress (WUC), and its leader Rebiya Kadeer, responsible, for supervising and initiating those demonstrations via internet.¹¹

Autonomy in Xinjiang

According to the white paper, published by the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China in September 2009 the economic and social situation in Xinjiang is brilliant. Infrastructure, telecommunication and tourism are growing rapidly. A modern Industry system is in progress and the Industry became a major factor for the local development. Mining of mineral resources and the oil production advanced. Therefore Xinjiang is the gateway to the west.



www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/2009-09/21/content_18566005.htm

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2009_%C3%9Cr%C3%BCmqi_riots

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2009_%C3%9Cr%C3%BCmqi_riots

⁹ http://www.chinadaily.cn/china/2009-07/06/content_8379985.htm;

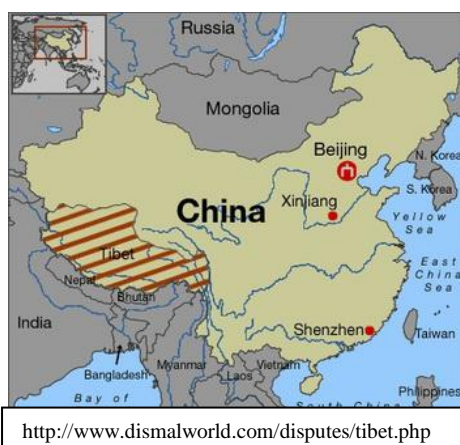
http://en.ce.cn/National/Local/200907/06/t20090706_19467759.shtml

¹⁰ http://www.chinadaily.cn/china/2009-07/06/content_8379985.htm;

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2009_%C3%9Cr%C3%BCmqi_riots

But this does not only have advantages. Many Uyghurs are not able to pay the rise of rents and food prices, being caused by the development. They have to leave their shops and move just outside onto the pavement. Their shops are taken by Han people. Around 90% of Xinjiang's population were Uyghurs in 1949; now it is estimated that Uyghurs only make up for about 45% of the population.¹² They are not longer the mayor ethnic group in Xinjian, they got supplanted by Han Settlers, who seek a new opportunity.¹³

Ethnic Minorities in China – Tibetans



The best known majority in China are the Tibetans. About 6.2 million of them are currently living in China. 2.1 million in Tibet itself, the remainder in the neighboring provinces.¹⁴

Most parts of Tibet are controlled by the People's Republic of China today and only a small part stands under Indian control. Tibet is situated in the Himalaya; its neighbors are India in the west and south, Nepal and Bhutan in the south, and China. For centuries Tibet as been an independent country.

Nowadays the definition of Tibet and whether it is allowed having own autonomous laws according to the international law, however is controversial. Beijing and the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile, after some discussion, have not yet agreed on Tibet's real size.

"While China sees Tibet as the area included under the Tibet Autonomous Region, Tibetans claim a much larger area where the culture and language are Tibetan," said Thuptan Samphal, a spokesman for the Tibetan exile government headquartered in northern India.¹⁵

The Dalai Lama claims more autonomy for Tibet. He is not seeking independence and is acknowledging that Tibet is a part of China. In the last talks, taking place in Berne, Switzerland, some main issues had been raised, but major differences still exist.¹⁶

The Chinese government does have its reasons to go against the autonomy of Tibet. If they grant autonomy to the Tibetans, it is very likely that other minority groups claim the same right. If Tibet is granted autonomy, the Chinese government will lose authority and further uprisings, unrests and demonstrations are not longer avoidable.¹⁷

Tibetans nearly face the same economic problems as the Uyghur minority. As in Xinjiang, there is an enormous fluctuation towards the region around Lhasa. According to Tibetan media, especially the "Tibetan Independence Movement", but some western media as well, migrants moving to Lhasa and its surroundings caused an increase of food prices and rents. Contrary to promises made by the government, prices did not lower by cheaper transportation

¹² <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/150/1/Chinas-Uyghurs-Lose-Out-to-Development/Chinas-Uyghurs-Lose-Out-to-Development.html>

¹³ <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/150/1/Chinas-Uyghurs-Lose-Out-to-Development/Chinas-Uyghurs-Lose-Out-to-Development.html>

¹⁴ <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

¹⁵ <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=10164&t=1&c=1>

¹⁶ <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=10164&t=1&c=1>

¹⁷ <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

costs, instead they are still rising. Also the Tibetan youth has problems. Namely difficulties finding a job and unequal job and education possibilities aroused their anger.¹⁸

Conflict in 2008

The Tibet-Conflict started with peaceful demonstrations, quite comparable to the beginning of the Uyghur conflict. Buddhist monks from Lhasa were demonstrating for the return of their spiritual leader, the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatsho from his exile in Dharamsala, India. The second reason for the protest was their claim for the autonomy of Tibet. Shortly after those peaceful demonstrations, violent breakouts of mainly young people followed. First only in Lhasa, then excesses in other parts of China where conducted. Investigations resulted in the conclusion, that those unrests were instigated by people from outside the country. The Chinese government strictly refused to allow an international investigation of the incident, and even the provision of independent UN people was denied because the government saw this as a disproportionate interference in internal affairs. The government accused the Dalai Lama of starting the demonstrations and violence; ignoring, that the Dalai Lama was the one calling for peace.

A short overview:

19th of March 2008 - the secretary of the communist party in china, Zhang Qingli, is speaking about a “fight on life or death” in Tibet, which is requiring harsher controls in the autonomous regions.

March 20th – the last foreign journalists were sent out of the country.

March 23rd – first critical opinions were voiced and a manifest to solve the situation in Tibet was introduced.

March 27th - foreign journalists are allowed to enter Lhasa again. Monks were using this to disturb the speech of a Chinese government official and to demonstrate against Chinese politics.

April 25th – the Chinese government suddenly greets talks with an ambassador of the Dalai Lama.

Many people have died because of the violence, many have been caught and taken prisoner by the police. Tibetans were accused of purposely hindering and sabotaging the Olympic games.

On march 17th 21 assumed participants have been imprisoned.

What has been done for minorities so far?

On the paper has been done a lot. In reality it does look a little different.

The government introduced new laws and policies to protect ethnic minorities, and encourages them to take part in the governmental work. Especially on media broadcasting from government sessions people from ethnic minorities are shown in their traditional clothes to show the dedication of those people and encourage others. Furthermore they are shown to

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Tibetan_unrest

disprove those critics who claim that there are not enough people from ethnic minorities represented in the government.

Another protection mechanism is the exemption of birthcontrol restrictions, which do not apply to minorities. This is supposed to prevent minorities from being outnumbered by the Han, since their birthrates are decreased by the one-child policy.¹⁹

There also are campaigns, such as the “go west” campaign, where trained doctors or teachers are sent to poorer western regions to pass on their knowledge and help where necessary.²⁰

Honorable Delegates,

The questions now are; what are the problems of the ethnic minorities? What can be done to change things? Do the mentioned regions have a right to be autonomous? And if yes, does the international community have a right to interfere?

We are looking forward to fruitful discussions and a great session.

Regards,

Your Chairs

¹⁹ <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

²⁰ <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

Useful links:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> - Information to all countries.

www.un.org – Homepage of the United Nations.

<http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/index.htm> - Overview: Minorities in China

<http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=192&catid=5&subcatid=29>

– Facts about minorities worth knowing.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_minorities_in_China - Ethnic Minorities in China

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkic_peoples - Wikipedia article on Turkic people

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/60th/2009-09/27/content_8743296.htm

- White Paper on ethnic policy.

<http://china.org.cn/e-white/index.htm> - White Papers of the government.

http://www.chinaethnicgroups.com/2009-08/12/content_8559271_2.htm

- Information about regional autonomy for ethnic minorities.

<http://www.uygur.org/english.htm> - “The World Uighur Network News”.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2009_%C3%9Cr%C3%BCmqi_riots

– Wikipedia article on the Urumqi riots.

http://www.chinadaily.cn/china/2009-07/06/content_8379985.htm

- China Daily, Online Newspaper; article on the Urumqi unrest.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aBWP2E9DJPIU>

- Online News; article on the Urumqi unrest.

http://en.ce.cn/National/Local/200907/06/t20090706_19467759.shtml

- Online News; article on the Urumqi unrest.

<http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/xinjiang.htm>

- Ethnic Conflict and Natural Resources; Xinjiang, China; ICE Research Team

<http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS011.pdf>

- Policy study on autonomy in Xinjiang

http://www.irmgard-coninx-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/roundtable07/DiDio.pdf

- Article abstract on Family Planning Law in China

<http://www.uyghuramerican.org/> - Article of the Uyghur American Association

<http://www.uhrp.org/> - Homepage of the Uyghur Humans Rights Project

http://www.globaltimes.cn/www/english/truexinjiang/docs/2009-07/445453_4.html

- Article on autonomy for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang

http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2005-07/28/content_18127.htm

- Official Publication; Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China (2005); Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

<http://www.dismalworld.com/disputes/tibet.php> - Article on Tibet

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Tibetan_unrest

- Wikipedia article on the Tibetan unrests in 2008

<http://www.undp.org.cn/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&catid=13&to pic=11&sid=314&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

- UNDP speech on ethnic minorities

<http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/minority/minority.html> - Ethnic minorities in China