



Conflict Of Interest Between State And Religion – Case Study Of Uyghur

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Abstract

Religion and State have often experienced conflict of Interest in history¹. At occasion nationalists ruled while at others religious clerics overpowered state administration. This went on for ages but secularism²helped people with diverse ethnicities live together. Even in the world of today there are countries that continue to face administrative issues due to conflict of interest with religious minorities within their administrative controls. For Instance China is one perfect case study where the rise of a separatist movement³ in the Uyghur Region lead to state's immediate and then strategic counter action leading to a significantly serious Humanitarian concern – The Uyghur Crises⁴. At first those involved directly into separatist movement were dealt with dab hands by Chinese Government and then the Communist Strategic Think Tank started off with yet another long term social transformation plan to keep China intact as one Giant which it already is. As a state a country always has the right to keep its National Power and geographic domains, Intact. Democracy does not mean every new group of people aligned on one or the other pretext start creating a state of their own specially if they have remained part of a particular regional identity for centuries and or if they have been provided satisfactory religious freedom and equal socio-cultural opportunities. Skeptics might be looking at Uyghur through a lens of Human Rights but we cannot ignore the rights of a state⁵ to defend its geographical frontiers. The aim of this paper is to throw light on what is being expressed about Chinese Administration of Uyghur and the balance between religious aspirations⁶ and rights of a state.

¹ Keith Ward (2000) "Religion & Community", Clarendon Press, pp277- 296

² Andrew Copson(2017) "Secularism - Politics, Religion & Freedom", OUP, p176

³Greg Botelho (2014) <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/30/world/asia/china-xinjiang-explosion/index.html> CNN

⁴ Nick Holdstock I.B.Tauris (2015)"China's Forgotten People - Xinjiang, Terror & the Chinese State" p288

⁵Ahsan I. Butt (2017) "Secession & Security -Explaining State Strategy against Separatists", Cornell University Press, pp17-41

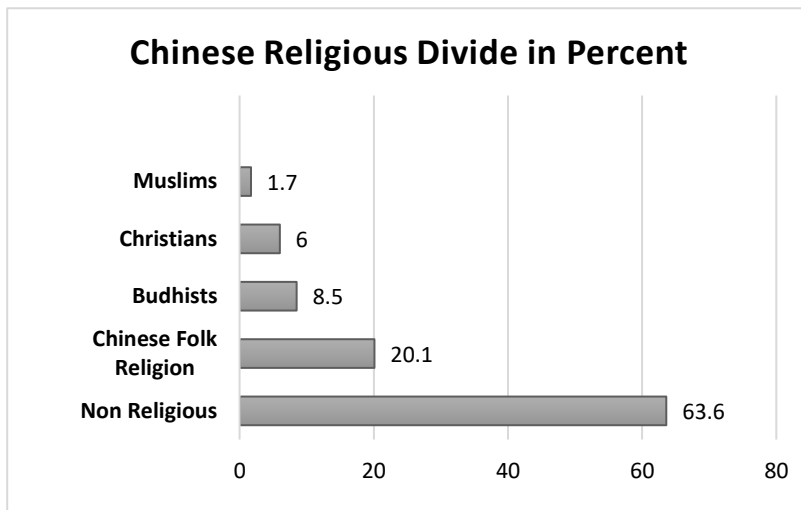
⁶ Elizabeth Shakman(2009) "The Politics of Secularism in International Relations", Princeton University Press, p264

China for centuries has lived in the shadows and was considered introvert⁷. A Communist country limited to the confines of its own geographical bounds with limited contacts⁸ with the rest of the world. Incidentally, From Hans to Mao and from Mao to Xi China underwent three major transformations. A warring ancient China under various dynasties till middle of the 20th Century followed by reformed Communists' but a closed China under Mao Tse Tung and his followers. And today an economically spreading out China in the 21st Century.

Till start of the previous century most Chinese followed one or the other religious beliefs largely Buddhism or Taoism, however the scientific age has made 47% of Chinese atheist⁹. Interestingly yet another 16% despite being attached to some religious faction never practice religion or are not ready to be bothered by religious influences. This change has begun transforming China into somewhat atheist country. According to one of the surveys by Gallup in 2015 China was amongst the top ten most unreligious countries sharing 10th position with Azerbaijan.

Although China under influence of religious beliefs or inspirations is a matter of the past, the story of the religion is still not over. Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Confucius and Islam are some of the main religions that continue to prevail in China. During the past

decade there have been serious concerns raised in international media over Xinjiang due to uneasy reports and apprehensions with regards to Treatment of Uyghur's Muslims by state functionaries. Though Muslims live in almost every part of China. In the Northwest Region of Gansu, Xinjiang and Ningxia their



number is high apart from substantially large representation in Yunnan and Henan. China officially recognizes fifty-six¹⁰ religious minorities and Uyghur Muslims are one these.

It is pertinent to mention here that Islam was first brought in to China by famous Disciple of the Last Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him), Saad Ibn Abi Vaqas¹¹, who visited

⁷ Vo Glaahn, Richard (1996), "Pit of Money – Money and Monetary Policy in China", c. 1000–1700", University of California Press, ISBN 0-520-20408-5

⁸Kevin Newton (2011)The Ancient World in Twenty Minutes Kindle Edition

⁹ "Those who do'nt believe in the existence of any religion and are mentally secular or non-religious".

¹⁰Xinhua News (11 July, 2016) "Han Chinese Proportion in China's Population Drops" census data (2011-04-28)"

China, thrice as an ambassador of The Ottoman Empire between the Year 632-651 AD. The First Mosque in China was built in 8th Century during Tang Dynasty and is named as The Great Mosque of Xi'an. Today the total number of Mosques in China have risen to over 39,000. Out of these 25,000 are in Xinjiang (Often Pronounced as Sin Kiaang in Pakistan) where Muslims account for 55% of the total population, a north-west autonomous region. According to a Survey report published in 2010, there were more than 23 million Muslims in Xinjiang which account for almost 2% of the total Population of China.

Xinjiang is the largest administrative region of China having its border with Eight Countries such that Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. The bulk of the population are from Turkic Origin, "Uyghur" who are mostly Muslims.

Uyghur's¹² consider themselves as descendants, native to the area, whereas Beijing, cogitates present-day Xinjiang to have belonged to Mainland China even in 200 BC¹³. Muhammad Amin Bughra in his account, "A History of East Turkestan" proclaimed that Uyghur population originated from ancient Turkey with signs of origin as old as 6000 BC on the other hand yet another Historian and Turghun Almas felt Origin of Uyghur lies in Tarim Basin and dates back to 4000 BC. On the contrary the Chinese researchers are adamant that Uyghur's of Xinjiang originated from the Tiele tribes and organized themselves as separate entity in 9th Century AD and descendants from Mongolia. Most researchers agree that Uyghur's actually arrived and settled down in Xinxiang in 9th Century and they used to consider it as part of East Turkistan.

Historically, The Qing's the last imperial dynasty of China that ruled for almost 268 Years and is considered to have provided territorial integrity and base to what is the geography of modern day China. Though some of the earlier Qing Emperors were focused in main land China, the Qianlong Emperor after 1750 launched Ten Campaigns to extend Chinese influence deep into Asia. Instead of holding distant grounds they opted for control through Confucian style bureaucratic institutions which contained Manchurian and Hans Chinese notables.

During the Qing rule, Emin Khoja the Turfan leader defeated Dzungars in 1759¹⁴ Xinjiang (earlier pronounced as Tarim Basin) and they kept this region under their indirect Governance. There were few uprisings by the Muslims of this region who thought they should have more control over the regional stakes and administration as was in the past

¹¹ Khamouch, Mohammed (11 Aug 2012 Retrieved from 2005) "Jewel of Chinese muslim's heritage" (PDF). FTSC.

¹² Turghun Almas (*Uyghur nationalist historians*) proclaims that Uyghur's were discrete & independent from the main land Chinese for 6000 years and all non-Uyghur population can never be native of Xinjiang.

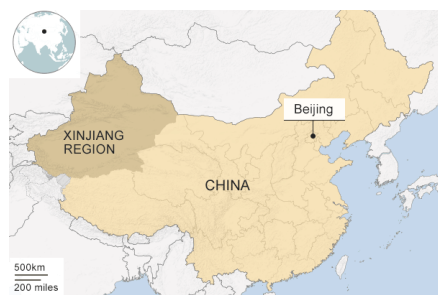
¹³ Bovingdon, Gardner (2010), "The Uyghurs - Strangers in their own Land", Columbia University Press, p79-84

¹⁴ L. J. Newby Brill (2005), "The Empire & the Khanate - A political history of Qing's relations with Khoqand" p297

but they were never able to succeed against mainland China. Between 1862-1877¹⁵The Dungan Uprising and Tongzhi Hui Muslim Minority Wars to oust Qing Governance by Hui Muslim from Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang. It was one of the drastic uprisings because more than 20 million population from North West China was reduced¹⁶ either through war related fatalities or relocations. War was further aggravated by famine during the same period. Even at that time the major uprising took course in Gansu, Shaanxi and Ningxia, on the western array of the Yellow River, but excluded Xinjiang Province. It was more of a chaos than revolt. A con joint delusion is that it was a revolt focused on the Qing dynasty but history bears witness that at no point those involved in uprising attempt to move towards or attack Qing Capital Beijing.

Manchurian Emperor waged physical aggression in Xinjiang to take complete charge of the ground. Till that time it was semi-independent region with more connections with Khanates. There were threats from Russia in the North West. It was during this time that Mainland China¹⁷ declared Xinjiang as Province in 1884 after securing a Treaty with Russia which is called as Treaty of Saints Petersburg in 1881.

It is very unfortunate that Xinjiang remained under influences and threats from East – Chinese Main Land, West – Turks & Tajiks & Even North – Russia. In 1933 & 1944 there were few more attempts by Muslim Majority Uyghur's to take over Xin Jiang but they could not succeed. Critics observe that such uprisings were because of the development neglect by the main land China or even Khanates which initiated a feeling of isolation by inhabitants of Xinjiang, largely Muslims.



By 1949 China officially pronounced Xinjiang as its integral part. Yet another round of uprising took place but that was tactfully subsided by Mao Tse Tung¹⁸. He further decided to invest in its infrastructural and metropolitan development. The aim was to increase interaction between main land Chinese populations with the region in order to develop greater homogeneity between various regions of China. Such moves also helped in creation of more business and trade opportunities for main land Chinese people in this region. Focus on Chinese nationalism

¹⁵Jonathan Neaman Lipman (2004 Retrieved 28 Jun, 2010), "Familiar strangers - A history of Muslims in Northwest China" University of Washington Press, p132. ISBN 0-295-97644-6.

¹⁶Millward, James A. (1998 Retrieved 24 Apr, 2014), "Beyond the pass: Economy, ethnicity & empire of Qing's in the Central Asia", 1759-1864 (illustrated ed.), Stanford University Press, p298, ISBN-0804729336.

¹⁷Lipman, Jonathan Neman (1998 Retrieved 24 Apr 2014) "Familiar strangers - a history of muslims in Northwest China" Washington University Press, p53, ISBN 0295800550.

¹⁸Wakeman Jr. , Fredric (1986 Retrieved 24 Apr 2014.) "The Great enterprise", California University Press, p803. ISBN 0520048040.

was also enhanced through structured programs. Lot of Hans migrated from various parts of China who were mostly followers of Buddhism, Taoism and Communism. The demography of the region has also changed gradually in next half a century. There is no doubt that after 1949, Xinxiang was under direct control of the People's Republic of China (PRC), however after the civil war in 1954¹⁹, Xinjiang Bingtuan was assigned to improve the strategic defence line against the expanding USSR.

Though in 1955, Xinjiang province was declared as an autonomous region of China. But Beijing did not lose its administrative control over the province. On the other hand it also need to be understood that China has never been an anti-Islamic country. The Article 36 of Chinese Constitution noticeably states that “ The Citizens shall enjoy the freedom of religious beliefs and practices”. The Constitution further prohibits discernment built on ethnicity barring the state organs, political parties, public groups or individuals from compelling citizens to “believe-in” or “not believe-in” any specific faith. For almost four decades since Inception of modern day China in 1949 Muslims continued to live, worship and pray without any prejudice in various regions within China including Xinjiang.

In 2009²⁰ there were few public demonstrations, rallies against Chinese government policies in Uyghur which were dealt fiercely by state resultantly they turned violent and there were clear signs of a separatist movement. Because these rallies were largely run by Uyghur Muslims with some clandestine support from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan& Russia it was taken very seriously in Beijing.

In 2014 there were suicide bombing incidents followed by mass stabbing²¹ in which 31 people were killed. It alarmed²² the Communist Think Tanks and they decided to take on Uyghur through long term strategic de-extremification plan. The new rules were only set to crush all separatist mindsets. The government used huge sums of money to reform the education system. About 39 state of the art reformation schools were established by 2014 all across Xinjiang almost as big as 140 soccer fields accumulatively. The critics believe they are indoctrination camps where each Uyghur Muslim is forced to spend some time so he can be mentally transformed to support nationalist feel and do away with any separatist feel.

In 2016, Chen Quanguo was nominated as the Communist Party Regional Chief in Xinjiang who was known for restoring order in the Tibetan Region through aggressive controls. He

¹⁹R. Michael Feener (2004) "Islam in world cultures - Comparative perspectives", ABC-CLIO, ISBN 1-57607-516-8

²⁰Reuter (6 Jul 2009 Retrieved 6 Jul 2009), "Scores killing in China protests" BBC News.

²¹Jacobs, Andrew (Aug 5, 2008 Retrieved Mar 27, 2010 "Ambush in China raises concerns as Olympics near" NY Times.

²²Rudelson, Justin Ben-Adam, (Feb 16, 2000 Retrieved Jan 29, 2010)"Uyghur "separatism - China's policies in Xinjiang fuel dissent". Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst.

Increased surveillance, police presence in the streets, watch over foreigners, Security checkpoints, recording data of every inhabitant, poly graph assessments, use of facial recognition technology, media control, ban on collective religious activities etcetera.

The Chinese State Council, approved some new guidelines on religious affairs, with effect from Feb, 2018. These guidelines further elaborated and continued state-registered religious officialdoms. All registered and state approved religious groups were permitted to have properties and collect donations for the community development and welfare. They were allowed to circulate pamphlets and literature to train and approve clergy. However apart from such leverages and privileges the government also enhanced their watch and administrative controls. The revised instructions included special by laws for religious schools and Madrasahs. There were some clauses that restricted on mass religious get-togethers and celebrations. The laws were also improved to monitor online religious activities. Religious Donations exceeding 100,000 Yuan (around \$15,900) are also supposed to be officially reported. For government these strategies were necessary to end religious extremism, but skeptics believe they are meant to curtail Islamic traditions and practices.

In late August, a dual-party group of 17 members of the U.S. Congress wrote to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and also the treasury secretary Mr. Steven Mnuchin advising them to impose prohibitions on seven senior Chinese officials for their undesirable role in the “ongoing human rights crisis”²³ of Xinjiang. At the top of the list was Chen Quanguo, the Communist Party secretary in Xinjiang, who had earlier made his name in Tibet through tough and ruthless crackdown on the local population for eliminating any voice against mainland china.

In 2018 United Nations raised alarms and concerns over how Uyghur Muslims were being dealt by China. The demographic analysts proclaim that the immigration from main land China during 1950 was taking course at an annual rate of 2-4% however in 2010 the percentage has gone up to as high as 40%. Even the overall ratio of Hans versus Uyghur’s have been drastically changed. For instance it’s reported that there are 40% Hans – main land Chinese and 45% Uyghur’s these days and the rest of 15% include some other races such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz’s etcetera. In Sept, last year one of the Chinese officials working in United Nations in Geneva blatantly expressed that the West could learn from his China’s vocational training program to discipline the undisciplined. He even commented that the west has already failed in dealing with anti west extremists and even if they feel it is not the best way, it may still be the necessary way.

²³Bodeen, Christopher (Jun 5, 2014retrieved Jun 6, 2014) "China sentence’s nine persons to death for Xinjiang Attacks", Time Xinjiang.

Whatever or what may the case be, it is important to note that almost two million people²⁴ have gone through various re-education and reformation programs in these educational camps? Some 1 million still undergoing paradigm and mindset education. UN expressed its concerns but China out rightly rejected the allegations. Apart from those suffering within Uyghur or Xinxiang according to an estimate more than 3 Million Uyghur refugees migrated out of Xinjiang in almost one century of Unrest and are settled in many central Asian states, Russia and some parts of Turkey. Their association with Xinjiang and Uyghur cannot be undone. The result is a continuous movement outside China against Chinese management of Uyghur. However China is adamant that it is only making an effort to educate²⁵ anti-Chinese radicals from its geographical frontiers and they are not forcing Muslims to convert from Islam into communism.

The world has to actually get more involved in understanding the whole situation with UN observers managing peace process on ground in Uyghur. China as a responsible state of the world must be ready to opt for more social and religious freedom to the Muslims of Uyghur provided they stop providing room and space to the separatist elements causing political and social turbulence within Uyghur majority areas. The in equal treatment with Hans and Uyghur Population needs to be immediately dislodged by China if they really wish to bring quicker peace in the region.

²⁴ "RFA: 120000 Uyghur's Held in Kashgar for Re-education" China Digital Times, retrieved 25 Jan 2018.

²⁵ "Permanent cure inside the re-education camps - China is using to brainwash Muslims" Business Insider Retrieved 17 May 2018.