

July 2019 marked the 10th anniversary of the deadly riots that took place in the capital city of the Xinjiang region, it all started with the Uyghur's protest, who were demanding justice for two Uyghur workers killed in a factory. This all led to the [ethnic clash between Uyghurs and Hans](#) where more than 190 people were killed and thousands injured. Now it's been more than ten years since the reason for the violence is still unknown. Uyghurs are already under heavy surveillance, which is getting stringent day by day. According to the report of the United Nations Human Rights Panel, up to one million people are under internment camps so far.

Forceful Disappearances, tortures, deaths are widely documented. A recent study of Australian strategic institute claims that since 2017 more than [sixteen thousand mosques](#) are either been destroyed or damaged and more than twenty-eight percent of sacred places are altered in some way or the other. The consistent effort to fuse the Uyghur culture with the dominant Han is erasing their social and cultural life.

What are the peculiarities of Xinjiang Region?

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is located in the northwestern part of China which shares its borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir region). It is the biggest province of china as it covers one-sixth of the total Chinese territory. Uyghurs are indigenous to the region and are largely Sunni Muslims. With an influence of Buddhism, Islam and Sufism, they do not belong to the Chinese race rather ethnically they are related to Central Asian countries, more specifically to Turks. Xinjiang which came under the control of the Chinese empire during the eighteenth century declared its independence in 1949. This independence could not last for a longer time. President Mao impelled the separatist forces to surrender and then sending PLA to capture the region, making it a part of the People's Republic of China.



TOPSHOT - A demonstrator wearing a mask painted with the colours of the flag of East Turkestan and a hand bearing the colours of the Chinese in front of the Chinese consulate in Istanbul/ Image source: OZAN KOSE/AFP/Getty Images

How does Geo-politics play in Xinjiang?

The gravity of the intervention of Chinese in international politics has increased very sharply, but the geopolitics is playing since the era of the silk route. Silk Road is an ancient trade and cultural route between China and Europe through Japan, India, Central Asia and then Italy during the Han dynasty about AC 200 BC. [Xinjiang played a pivot role to the traditional silk route](#) facilitating the exchange of trade and commerce, culture, religion, language etc. The geopolitical importance of the region has increase multiple times since the days of the cold war by becoming a buffer zone between Russia and China. In contemporary times, the role of Xinjiang is the most than ever. The region is rich in natural resources and raw material and provides a transit route for the import of oil and natural gases and access to the central Asian markets. The Belt and Road initiative aims to maximise the geopolitical benefits of the region. Even though the region was geopolitically

and geo-economically significant, the Chinese didn't develop the region for quite a long which led to the separatist movement.

How the Chinese are implementing Hanization?

To tackle the problem of separatism in Xinjiang Chinese government promoted 'Hanization' i.e. outnumbering the population of Hans in the region. Meanwhile, this process started in 1949 that changed the whole composition of the region. In 1950 Mao banned Islamic court system that automatically abolished the 'Islamic divorce system'. Religious texts were burnt down and demolished several mosques. During the regime of Deng Xiaoping cultural and religious opening helped in the expansion of Islamic literature, Arabic language, etc. The separatist movement also gained momentum in the 80s, but Deng's policies were short-lived. The government used violent suppression as a means to curb separatism and put many under detention. Later on the American president's call for 'global war on terrorism' acted as a justification for its policies changing demography and curtailing religious rights in the region. By 2000, the Chinese were successful in Hanization. According to the 2000 population census Hans constitutes more than forty percent of the population in the region. Now the population of Muslims is less than fifty percent and Hans became the second-largest community.

Moreover, the Hans consider themselves of supreme race. The overall Chinese culture has been the transformation of barbarians into civilized ones without undergoing any change which led to the disappearance of various groups and they end up becoming Hans without any ethnic clashes. In short, the relationship that exists between minority and majority is ethnic and cultural rather than political. It is surprising to see that there was no confrontation among these groups and assimilated into Chinese culture without hostility. Ethnic relations in contemporary times are influenced by the past. One can find the contemporary 'Hanification' of Xinjiang and Tibet has its historical roots in the Confucian way of life. But what doesn't resemble Confucianism is the violence and militarily suppression of the dissent voices.



KASHGAR/ Image source: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

Isn't Beijing Worried about International Backlash over Xinjiang Problem

Chinese government outrightly rejects the narrative of the 'Xinjiang problem'. However, for them, it's western propaganda to demonize and split china. Any form of protest or dissent is taken as an act of separatism and terrorist propagation to prevent the economic development of the 'Middle Kingdom'. Human rights and democracy as a concept is of western origin. The Chinese understanding of human rights and democracy is derived from Confucian literature. Rather than political and civil rights it emphasizes the 'mutual obligation' i.e. fulfilment of the desire of one's neighbour. Chinese ruling class never taught the masses to claim their rights. The parental relationship between the ruler and masses left the welfare of people on the conscious of the ruling class. As a parent/guardian, the responsibility of rulers was to protect their masses and to fulfil their desires. In the Chinese context, human rights are the product of western culture.

According to the communist government, it does not suit to the Chinese context. The preference of economic development over political rights and freedom of speech is what defines the 'Chinese model'. The government blames East Turkestan Party and separatist elements for ethnic clashes and riots. It identifies three evils forces (Sangu shili) terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. The vagueness of three evils allows the space for justification of the detention of thousands of young Muslim men in 're-education camps' or internment camps. Wives of the person detained in these camps are forced to marry non Uyghurs (mostly Hans). This may change the ethnicity of the entire generation of Uyghurs.

What are the Farcical Ways of People's Republic of China

The project of Sinicise Islam is given the name of 'de-radicalization'. In that process, tighter control over Muslim religious places and personnel is the key element. The local government launched a 'four entrance campaign' that forces mosques to hoist the national flag of China. The regional government of Xinxiang provided a list of 29 names which forbids parents from naming their newborn baby and non-compliance of law would exclude them from accessing education, healthcare and other basic needs. It seems that the government views Islam as a disease that needs to be cured. During the month of Ramadan, the government prohibited Uyghur officials from fasting, offering prayers and any sorts of religious practices.

The Constitution of China does guarantee the right to freedom of religious belief. The violation of human rights in China and the underdevelopment of Uyghur raise a serious question on the part of the Chinese government. It is widely argued from the side of the communist party that economic development is paramount. But the accusation of Uyghurs that Hans is the biggest beneficiaries of development and welfare schemes contradicts the argument of the govt. Income disparity and discrimination while applying for jobs are quite visible. It shows how farce the narrative of the Chinese government over economic development. The humanitarian crisis in Xinjiang raises the question on the silence of not only those who are the champions of Human rights and Democracy, but also on the ones who are the proponents of the 'Muslim Brotherhood'.



Hanization and its way ahead

Xi Jinping in his statement has defended his government policies in its north-western province. In the words of Mr President “Facts prove that the party’s policies on Xinjiang in the new era are completely correct and must be adhered to in the long term,”. The presence of ‘vocational educational centres (detention camps) into the region would ‘Purge religious extremism’. Internment camps and surveillance upon Muslims can suppress the protests but it creates a huge space for discontent among Uyghurs. Economic cooperation with many central and west Asian countries due to BRI may increase the separatist movement in the region. The future of the relationship between Uyghur and the state would depend upon the changing attitude of the Chinese government and response from Uyghurs.

Subscribe to the International Relations Updates by The Kootneeti

* indicates required

Full Name

Email Address *

Subscribe

made with  mailchimp



**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BY THE KOOTNEETI

JOIN TODAY!

team@thekootneeti.com
courses.thekootneeti.in
(+91) 120 4565994

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team

Facebook Comments