CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPACT OF CHINESE RULE TOWARDS THE TURKICS OF XINJIANG SINCE 1949

5.1 Socio-Economic

Xinjiang experienced dramatic socio-economic changes since the PRC took over the province in 1949. It is noteworthy to mention that never before in the history of Xinjiang, has the province ever undergone such radical socio-economic changes. The livelihood of the Turkics was greatly affected by these socio-economic changes. Prior to the 1950s, Xinjiang was considered a remote province. In October 1952, work on the Lughai Railway project that linked Urumqi to Lanchow in the Kansu Province commenced and by 1956 it was operational and hence Xinjiang was connected with Central China. It also connected Urumqi with other important cities in Xinjiang such as Hami and Turfan in the south.¹ The railway was eventually connected north to Soviet Kazakstan via the Dzungarian Gates.² In October 1959, the Xinjiang-Soviet Kazakhstn Railway was operational and it enabled the Turkics from Xinjiang to visit their fellow relatives living in Soviet Central Asia. Similarly, highways linking Xinjiang with Central China, Tibet and Inner Mongolia were constructed and were operational by October 1957. However, with the Urumqi-Lancow Railway operational, it also encouraged the mass migration of Hans into the XUAR with the Han population increasing rapidly from 1956 onwards.

Areas for cultivation and agriculture activities were also increased. The cultivated areas in Xinjiang were reported to have expanded from 300,000 hectares in 1949 to a total of 1,300,000 hectares in 1954. In fact by 1955 when the XUAR was established, more than 1,646,000 hectares were under tillage. Canals and reservoirs were constructed for irrigation in the Tarim Basin and with that planters did not need to depend anymore on melting snow from the Tien Mountains. The provincial government also promoted the cultivation of raw cotton for the textile factories in Central China. In 1967, Xinjiang produced 970,000 tons of ginned cotton as compared to only 35,000 tons in 1956. XUAR was the major supplier of cotton for the Chinese textile industry in the late-1950s and throughout the 1960s. One-fifth of the total cultivated area in XUAR was used to grow cotton.\textsuperscript{3} With the increase in cotton production in Xinjiang, the livelihood of the Turkics also improved.\textsuperscript{4} Nevertheless it is noteworthy to mention, that most of the cotton plantations were owned by the PLA members who were Hans and not Turkics. Further in 1950, Beijing ordered some 110,000 of 193,000 PLA troops stationed in Xinjiang to undertake cotton cultivation.\textsuperscript{5} Although, the cotton industry flourished in Xinjiang it only benefited the Han migrants who prospered.

The petroleum and mining industries started to flourish after the PRC took over Xinjiang in 1949 although the USSR was already involved in the industry during the administration of General Sheng Shih-tsai. The Sino-Soviet co-operation in the petroleum industry continued as a result of the Sino-Soviet Agreement of 1950. Nevertheless, in October 1954, the USSR transferred all its shares and equities in Xinjiang to China.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{4} Far Eastern Economic Review, 17 July 1952.
Hence, by 1 January 1955, the petroleum and mining industries in Xinjiang were fully owned by the Chinese government and Xinjiang enjoyed unprecedented economic development during the 1950s. According to the New China News Agency, the number of industrial enterprises in Xinjiang rose from 400 in 1957 to more than 37,000 in the next year.\(^6\) The number of people engaged in industrial production rose from 63,000 at the beginning of 1959 to 520,000 by the end of 1959.\(^7\) Most of these industries were operated by people’s communes established by the Han migrants.\(^8\) The economic development enjoyed by Xinjiang was one of the factors that resulted in the Turkic nationalism becoming dormant in the early 1950s. However, most Turkics failed to realise that although industrial enterprises flourished in Xinjiang they were owned by the Han migrants. Therefore, the Turkics were mere employees working for the Hans in their own homeland.

The economic development in Xinjiang started to decline in the late-1960s as a result of the Cultural Revolution as well as the Sino-Soviet split, resulting in most industries in Xinjiang to be shut down. As a consequence, Xinjiang remained one of the poorest provinces of China.\(^9\) It was not until 1979 and after the reform and opening-up policies advocated by Deng Xiopeng, that the XUAR placed great importance to the construction of basic communications, power generation and telecommunication facilities.\(^10\) Xinjiang enjoyed further economic development from 1991 onwards especially after the

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\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Ibid.
disintegration of the USSR. With the demise of Soviet threat, the Chinese government was able to develop the northwest region and attract more foreign investments.

Since the 1990s, Xinjiang established co-operative economic relations with numerous countries and regions, including the United States (US), Japan and France. Foreign companies are currently engaged in ventures related to mineral exploration and mining, petrochemical industries as well as agriculture. The XUAR government has been organising the Urumqi Trade Fair since 1992 to attract more foreign investments. In July 1993, the provincial government initiated the Urumqi High Technology Development Zone (UHTDZ) as part of a plan to lure more investments into the region. This led to an increase of foreign investments in Xinjiang in 1995 that totalled to US $545 million. In the same year, a total of 26 foreign oil firms including Exxon established a representative office in Xinjiang. Exxon planned to invest US$18 million in the project.

Further, the XUAR also signed border trade agreements with neighbouring Central Asian republics and joint ventures in areas ranging from construction projects to processing supplied materials, both scientific and technological. Similarly, the PRC also undertook petroleum explorations with Kazakhstan, besides co-operation in the steel industry. In 1992, the trade between Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics was more

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Beijing Review, 8-14 July 1996.
than US$ 40 million. In 1997, Kazakhstan exported between 300,000 to 500,000 tons of steel products to China and the PRC continued to enhance greater economic co-operation with the Central Asian republics. Apart from that the PRC also began persuading other Central Asian republics to cease assisting Turkic separatist movements in Xinjiang as this has the potential of destabilising the whole region. Kazakhstan on the other hand, was warned not to jeopardise its close economic ties with China by providing assistance to Turkic militants. All these efforts also boosted the tourism industry of Xinjiang. In 1992, the province hosted 23.94 million tourists, including 219,000 foreign tourists, with total earnings from tourism in that year amounting to US$35.76 million.

The dramatic economic development experienced by Xinjiang in the last two decades changed the social structure of the Turkics. In the early 1950s, over 95 per cent of Xinjiang’s population was illiterate but by 1990 illiteracy had been reduced to 12.75 per cent. In 1949, Xinjiang 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 only 363 industrial and mining enterprises but by 1990, Xinjiang’s total industrial output value rose by 142.73 per cent over the 1949 figure. Urumqi had been transformed from an oases town to a bustling commercial and tourist centre while the gross domestic product (GDP) of Xinjiang was 105 billion yuan in 1997.

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21 http://www.unescap.org/pop/database/chinadata/xinjiang.htm
It is important to mention that despite the fact that XUAR experienced tremendous economic development, the Turkics living in the south still remained poor. Rapid development was concentrated in areas in the north of Xinjiang like Urumqi and Dzungar Basin where the majority of the population was Han migrants. The cities in south of Xinjiang such as Kashgar and Turfan, which were Turkic-dominated, remained backward. Although statistics showed that the industrial and mining enterprises increased in XUAR most of them were however, owned by the Hans, with the Turkics as mere workers.

There was racial discrimination even in employment opportunities where Han graduates enjoyed greater chances of employment than Turkics. For example, in Kashgar, only 3000 out of the 6000 graduates had jobs, even then most of the successful ones were Hans. More than 90 per cent of the unemployed were in fact Uighurs, mainly due to the fact that they did not possess the necessary academic qualifications to study in institutions of higher learning.\textsuperscript{22} In actual fact, with limited places in institutions of higher learning and a discriminative racial policy that favoured the Hans, most of the indigenes were also too poor to further their studies. Therefore, most of the students studying in the 21 institutions of higher learning throughout Xinjiang were Hans and not Turkics. Most of the Turkic students only managed to complete primary schooling when compared to the Han students. In 1997, there were only 50 Uighur graduates who were able to further their studies in the U.S whilst they were more than 150,000 Han students.

\textsuperscript{22} Asiaweek, 24 October 1997.
who managed to do the same.\textsuperscript{23} It is indeed ironic that thousands of Uighurs were deprived of employment in spite of the fact that the province experienced rapid economic growth. Thus, the Turkics remained the poorest community in their own homeland.

The massive migration of Hans to Xinjiang caused the Uighurs to be marginalized, and reduced to second-class citizens in their own land. In 1949, Uighurs accounted for at least 93 per cent of the region's population while the Chinese were at 7 per cent. However, according to official statistics in 1997, from a total population of over 17 million, the Uighurs accounted to 47 per cent of the population while the Chinese constituted 42 per cent.\textsuperscript{24} Although the province was declared an autonomous region in 1955 in accordance with the PRC Constitution and the Law on Regional Autonomy, the actual political power is still with the CCP in Beijing, with major decisions made by the CCP and important positions dominated by Hans. The Turkics who held top positions in the regional and local governments in Xinjiang were 'puppet' leaders because actual power still remained in the hands of the Hans. In local departments, Han workers were promoted quickly compared to Turkic workers. Promotions were based on the workers' ability to speak and write Chinese and not on work related performance.

Although there were laws and regulations to encourage greater participation of Uighurs in the workforce of Xinjiang, these rules were not observed. The dichotomy existed in almost every sector in Xinjiang. According to the original factory regulations, Hans should only occupy 25 per cent of the jobs with the remaining 75 per cent reserved

\textsuperscript{23} http://www.ces.uky.edu/rakhim/doc_files/abuse.html
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
for the Turkics. However, in reality the Turkics who worked in most factories only constituted 30 per cent while the Hans took the lion’s share of 70 per cent.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, according to Ayxsem, a former local cadre for the Women’s Union of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (WUXAR), most heads of departments and senior researchers in Xinjiang were Hans.\textsuperscript{26} In fact, since 1949, a Han always occupied the post of Secretary of the CCP of Xinjiang, the most important position in the XUAR.

5.2 Nuclear Tests and Environmental Effects

The PRC denoted 42 bombs in Lop Nor in southern Xinjiang between 1964 and 1996. Upon signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1996 China declared a moratorium on all future tests. Nevertheless, the 32 years (1964-96) of nuclear tests in Lop Nor caused tremendous effects on the environment and health of the Turkics and China practically did nothing to address this terrible health and environmental ramifications. In June 1996, the PRC exploded a nuclear device in Lop Nor and according to Australian seismologists the test caused a medium-sized explosion of between 20,000 and 80,000 tons in magnitude.\textsuperscript{27} Although the Chinese claimed that the nuclear weapons did not cause any radiation, in reality, many Turkics suffered due to the nuclear tests. Moreover, if the nuclear tests were safe, Beijing should have been China’s nuclear testings site instead of Xinjiang.

Radioactive fallout effects from the nuclear tests at the site in Lop Nor caused an increase in cancer cases. It was reported that 10 per cent of Xinjiang’s population was

\textsuperscript{25} http://www.future-china.org.tw/spcl_rpt/uygr19991013.htm
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
plagued by cancer since the nuclear tests were first carried out.\textsuperscript{28} The rate of mortality from oesophagus cancer was seven to eight times higher in Lop Nor than the rest of China.\textsuperscript{29} Besides that, the nuclear tests in Lop Nor caused many innocent babies to be deformed. For example, babies were born without kidneys, mentally retarded and even mutants who were not human-like. Similarly the nuclear tests also caused some Turkics in Lop Nor to suffer from unknown diseases that resulted in the paralysis and loss of vision. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1988, there were 3961 people who died from this unknown disease in the cities of Yarkand, Kashgar.\textsuperscript{30} It was alleged that the PRC also conducted biological weapon tests in Xinjiang in the 1980s and the unknown diseases was most probably the result of the said tests.\textsuperscript{31} However, the Chinese government denied all these reports. Nevertheless it is undeniable that the nuclear tests in Xinjiang since 1964, has caused ecological disasters, endangered human life and polluted air, water and food products. It has also affected millions of domesticated and wild animals in the region.\textsuperscript{32}

5.3 The Future: Independence or Autonomy

The Turkics have been living under Chinese rule for the last 241 years (1756-1997) and have experienced various forms of Chinese governments (monarchy, warlords, republic and socialist) administering their state. Despite the many struggles, hardships and discrimination, the Turkics have never given up their nationalist quest to achieve independence and self-rule. Throughout the 241 years, the Turkics have launched several

\textsuperscript{28} http://www.asiaweek.com
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
attempts to separate Xinjiang from China and declare it an independent Turkic state. The Chinese have always been considered a threat to their culture and identity.

It is undeniable that, the Chinese have shown great determination to rule Xinjiang at all costs throughout the centuries. They have always been interested in the natural resources of Xinjiang, favourable to the economic development of China. Furthermore, even in the past, the Chinese were already aware of the geo-strategic importance of Xinjiang, and especially so during the Sino-Soviet rivalry. With great pride and integrity, China has continued to defend Xinjiang from separatist movements.

The Chinese have adopted various policies and methods to subjugate and paralyse Turkic nationalism. The separation of Xinjiang can have disastrous effects on China, as it would spur other Chinese provinces such as Tibet, Ningxia, Kansu and Inner Mongolia to revolt and perhaps declare independence. Hence, the Chinese remain extremely suspicious of the Turkic nationalism. They fear that foreign powers would make use of Turkic demands for independence to put pressure on China. In view of this and more than two centuries of colonisation, China will most likely continue to defend its rule in Xinjiang at all cost in future. With the number of Hans almost equalling the Turkics in Xinjiang, China will surely not let Xinjiang go its own way. It can be safely concluded that in the next two decades or so, the number of Hans would have surely outnumbered the Turkics in Xinjiang thereby making this province more Chinese and less Turkic. Hence, with the passage of time and the influx of more Hans, Xinjiang would surely

31 http://www.future-china.org.tw/spcl_rpt/uygr19991013.htm
32 http://www.ccs.uky.edu/rakhi/doc_files/abuse.html
resemble a typical Chinese province such that perhaps one day nothing would be Turkic of Xinjiang!
CONCLUSION

The findings of this work on Turkic-Chinese relations demonstrates 'cyclic' relations between the two groups, meaning that whenever either party is stronger, it tries to overpower its opponent. This cyclic relationship can be observed throughout the historical evolution of Chinese administration in Xinjiang. An example to demonstrate this trend is Yakub Beg's revolt against the Ching Dynasty that occurred at a time when China was faced with attacks from the Western powers namely the British during the First (1839-42) and Second (1856-58) Opium wars. In addition, there was also an internal uprising in China proper -- the Taping Rebellion (1859-1864). As a result of the decline of Chinese power, the Turkics were able to liberate East Turkestan under the leadership of Yakub Beg for 13 years (1864-1877). However, events took a turn when the Chinese were able to regain power under the leadership of General Tso Tsung-tang. Subsequently, the Turkic rebellion was crushed and this resulted in Yakub Beg's suicide in 1877.

Similarly, the 'cyclic' relations once again emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. The Turkic nationalists were able to organise successful separatist movements to establish independent Turkic republics in 1933 and 1944. The main factor that contributed to their success was the failure of the Chinese to subjugate the Turkic nationalists. During the said period, the Koumintang’s (KMT) administration of China was plagued with both external and internal problems. On the one hand, the KMT had to consolidate its position in Xinjiang by winning the hearts of the warlords upon the collapse of the Ching Dynasty.
in 1911. At the same time, the KMT was trapped in a bitter struggle with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the 1920s and 1930s. All these political upheavals served a good opportunity for the Turkic nationalists under the leadership of Khoja Naiz to rebel against the Chinese and establish The Islamic Republic of East Turkestan (TIRET) in 1933. Nevertheless, the Chinese were able re-establish control with the assistance of the Soviet Union (USSR) and consequently crushed the Turkic nationalists’ attempts and dissolved the TIRET. A similar phenomena resurfaced in 1944, when Turkic nationalists under the leadership of Ahmadjan Qasimi, Ali Khan Ture and Ghani Batur established the East Turkestan Republic (ETR). The KMT forces failed to prevent this because they had to face the Japanese invasion of China. However, after the Second World War in 1945, the KMT successfully formed a coalition government with the Turkic nationalists through the assistance of the USSR. The USSR was interested in expanding its influence in Xinjiang and control over natural resources such that it was willing to assist the Chinese against the Turkic nationalists.

The cyclic relations were evident again during the early years of the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) rule over Xinjiang. In the 1950s, the CCP branch of Xinjiang had to consolidate its position by promoting liberalisation of ethnic rights and religious tolerance in order to win over the Turkics. However, upon consolidating itself, the CCP began curtailing the rights of the Turkics and instead implemented policies of sinofication and subjugation. Hence, the Turkic-Chinese relations have remained cyclic throughout the historical evolution.
Past historical events have also created a negative impression of the Chinese amongst the Turkics who view the Chinese as colonialists and whose presence in Xinjiang threatens the survival of the Turkic culture, tradition and the Islamic faith. Apart from this, the Chinese are also perceived as 'robbers' who have plundered the Turkic homeland and marginalised its populace. Similarly, the Chinese also have a negative impression of the Turkics who are considered an inferior ethnic group. In fact, they hold the view that the Turkics were once part of the 'Greater Hans'. Considering themselves to be civilised and superior, the Chinese treat the Turkics as barbarians who should be subdued and controlled.

It can also be observed that the nature of Turkic nationalism has changed over time during the last 241 years under study. The early nature of the struggle were mainly feudalistic feuds by warlords like Djengir, Med Yusof and Yakub Beg, attempting to regain the control of East Turkestan from the Chinese during the reign of the Ching Dynasty.

The collapse of the Ching Dynasty in 1911 and the shift from monarchy to republic rule in China has helped transform the nature of Turkic nationalism from one that was feudalistic to one that is ideologically based. Besides that the drastic change was brought about because unlike the previous Turkic leaders like Med Yusuf and Yakub Beg who were chieftains, religious teachers and warriors, the Turkic nationalists in the 1930s and 1940s were educated in Russia and other western nations like Britain. Therefore, western ideas such as democracy became the motivating factor behind Turkic nationalism. This
was evident in the Kulja Declaration of the ETR in 1944, which called for the creation of a democratic government, included issues such as freedom of religion and upgrading of education and public health. The structure of the central government of the ETR comprised of a national council with ten ministries.

The nature of Turkic nationalism from the 1990s onwards is related to the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism whereby several factors motivated nationalism to resurface among the Turkics. Firstly, the independence of the former Soviet Central Asian republics as a result of the disintegration of the USSR became a source of inspiration to most Turkics to continue the struggle for their own independence. Secondly, the success of the Mujahiddins in defeating the USSR in Afghanistan motivated the Turkics, especially as many of their own countrymen were among the Mujahiddins who liberated Afghanistan from the USSR. In addition, there were also those Turkics who remained in Afghanistan and or moved to Pakistan after the Soviet occupation of the former. These men were trained and indoctrinated by Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Wahabbis. Although the influence of the Islamic fundamentalists among the Turkic nationalists is relatively small, it did create an impact because these groups organised terrorist attacks such as bombings, riots and assassinations in cities like Urumqi and Baren in 1997.

This study has also revealed the nature of Chinese policies of subjugation over the Turkic population that can mainly be divided into three major categories namely the policy of direct subjugation, indirect subjugation and the combination of both. Direct
subjugation involved the use of Chinese military might to defeat Turkic uprisings namely that employed by the Ching Dynasty during the Yakub Beg rebellion in the nineteenth century. The KMT also used the same approach when it defeated the separatist movements in the 1930s and 1940s such as the TIRET and the ETR. Although direct subjugation successfully defeated the Turkic nationalists, it was however, a short-term solution for the Turkic nationalists managed to organise other revolts once they regained their strength.

The PRC administration, on the other hand, employed policies of both direct and indirect subjugation over Xinjiang since 1949. The establishment of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1955 was a testimony of indirect subjugation. Through the XUAR, local Turkic leaders were able to administer the affairs at district and sub-districts levels and such an opportunity also managed to pacify them. However, major decisions were still made by the CCP and most of the Turkic leaders appointed to represent their respective province at the People’s Assembly were pro-Chinese. Another important aspect of indirect subjugation was the mass migration of Han Chinese to the province beginning from the 1960s – a move justified by the CCP by claiming that it contributed to the development of Xinjiang. This flow of Chinese migrants into Xinjiang subsequently changed the ethnic ratio of Xinjiang such that many cities like Urumqi, the provincial capital, had a bigger Chinese population when compared to the Turkics.

The Chinese also implemented a policy of sinification in order to transform the Turkic community as the latter were considered as being part of the ‘Greater Han’ race.
Among the many tactics that were carried included the prohibition of the usage of the Turkic language as well as a coercive birth control policy that greatly reduced the growth of the Turkic population. Apart from that, the CCP dramatically increased the presence of its soldiers in Xinjiang, effectively turning this province into a military zone.

At present, the Chinese are making efforts to develop the province with the hope that this will bring about greater economic prosperity to the region. The aim is to motivate the Turkics to focus their attention to economic affairs so that they will no longer harbour hopes of fighting for an independent nation.

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the historical evolution of the Turkics in their quest for an independent nation, despite Chinese policies of subjugation for the past 241 years (1756-1997). The Turkics have indeed displayed a high level of dedication in their struggle for independence for more than two centuries, but it is extremely uncertain whether they will ever achieve an independent state in the face of a strong central Chinese government. It is likely that with rapid economic development and massive Han migration into the region, the vigour uphold this struggle might die a natural death. Once the Turkics are outnumbered by the Hans the centuries old struggle to uphold and preserve a distinct identity might eventually fizzle-out amongst the Turks. On the other hand, in the face of 11 September 2001 and the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism especially across the Central Asian region, a different trend can also unfold.