

Analysis of the Interest of the Chinese Government in the Xinjiang Region in the Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Conflict

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Abstract

Muslims in China are one of the minority ethnic groups that still exist today. Ethnic Hui and Uyghurs are among China's most significant ethnic minority Muslims. The Uyghur Ethnic Conflict was based on discrimination by the Chinese government against Uyghur Muslims, which later led to anarchic acts and policies of persecution of the Chinese government towards Uyghur ethnicity. This study looks at the interests of the Chinese state government in the Xinjiang region in the occurrence of Uyghur Muslim ethnic conflicts. The approach used in this research is qualitative. Then the data used in this study comes from various research results and previous studies that are still related to the Uyghur Muslim ethnic conflict. This study found that the Uyghur Muslim ethnic group in Xinjian felt injustice, so they asked the Chinese government to separate Xinjian from China. Then this conflict is getting worse because the Chinese government uses violence and violates human rights. Despite getting a lot of criticism from various parts of the world, China still carries out this repression for its economic purposes.

Keywords: Uyghur Muslims, China, Interest, Ethnic Conflict, Xinjiang.

Abstrak

Muslim di China merupakan salah satu etnis minoritas yang masih eksis hingga saat ini. Etnis Hui dan Uyghur adalah salah satu etnis minoritas Muslim paling signifikan di China. Konflik Etnis Uyghur didasari oleh diskriminasi yang dilakukan pemerintah China terhadap Muslim Uyghur, yang kemudian berujung pada tindakan anarkis dan kebijakan persekusi pemerintah China terhadap etnis Uyghur. Penelitian ini melihat kepentingan pemerintah negara China di wilayah Xinjiang dalam terjadinya konflik etnis Muslim Uyghur. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif. Kemudian data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini berasal dari berbagai hasil penelitian dan penelitian sebelumnya yang masih terkait dengan konflik etnis Muslim Uyghur. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kelompok etnis Muslim Uyghur di Xinjian merasakan ketidakadilan, sehingga mereka meminta pemerintah China untuk memisahkan Xinjian dari China. Kemudian konflik ini semakin parah karena pemerintah China menggunakan kekerasan dan melanggar hak asasi manusia. Meski mendapat banyak kritik dari berbagai belahan dunia, China tetap melakukan represi ini untuk kepentingan ekonominya.

Kata kunci: Muslim Uyghur, Cina, Kepentingan, Konflik Etnis, Xinjiang.

Introduction

The People's Republic of China is the 4th largest country in the world, with an area of 9,598,094 and a vast land area. China is also known as a multi-ethnic country,

which is about 56 ethnicities. Most of the Han Ethnic control the entire country of China which has about 93% of the country's total population. Meanwhile, 55 other ethnic groups are referred to as ethnic minorities because the population is less than the Han Ethnic (Cho & Mosselson, 2018).

Various ethnic groups in China have been organized since the leadership of Deng Xiao Ping when China was involved in a multiculturalism project by recognizing the existence of ethnic minorities. With this project, Deng Xiao Ping is trying to build the image of a country with a prosperous society. Deng Xiao Ping sees that the Mao Ze Dong regime only provides conflictual relations and does not benefit China domestically and internationally (Woo et al., 2020). The benefits China has gained from this multiculturalism project align with the vision of China's future, which is to advance a prosperous economy and society. The implementation of the multiculturalism project is 1) granting autonomous ethnic minority regions (autonomy region); 2) freedom to embrace religion and carry out their respective worship; and 3) economic policies for the development of autonomous regions. The project aims to minimize the desire of ethnic minorities to break away from China (Lin & Jackson, 2021).

But China's goal of defending territories inhabited by minority groups is beginning to be threatened by the problems of existing internal conflicts, which are not far from different from ethnic minorities in China. An internal conflict is a new form of war that occurs in certain countries, both between communities and between the government and the community. Even though China has become a developed country with a high economic level, it cannot be denied that this country has not been able to escape the threat of internal conflict (Charisma) (Selvanathan et al., 2021). One of the increasingly heated internal conflicts in China has even become an international issue that must be resolved because it involves human rights, namely the Xinjiang riots. Xinjiang is one of the northwestern provinces of China, which often clashes with the political interests of the Chinese government. This conflict is between ethnic Han and Uighur Muslim ethnic, which later developed into a separatist movement (Zhang & Buzan, 2020).

Conflict

Conflict is any disagreement or opinion between at least two people or groups. Rauf's definition of conflict is in line with the widely used definition of conflict by institutions such as The British Council, which says conflict is a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or feel they have incompatible goals (Haramain, 2021). According to Dean G. Pruitt and Jeffrey Z. Rubin raising Webster's opinion that the term "conflict" in the local language means a fight, war, or struggle in the form of physical confrontation between several parties. Therefore, it is stated that this understanding has developed so that it touches the psychological aspect that conflict means the perception of interests. Individuals or groups generate a natural conflict because those involved have different attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs (Klein, 2019).

According to Liliweri, conflict is formulated as follows: First, the form of natural competition is generated by individuals or groups because those involved have different attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs. Second, the conflicting relationship

between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have specific goals but are filled with inconsistent thoughts, feelings, or actions (Hanafi & Thoriquattyas, 2019). Third is conflict because there are differences in the needs, values, and motivations of the actors or those involved. Fourth, a process occurs when one party negatively influences another, by engaging in physical violence that disturbs other people's feelings. Fifth, the form of functional conflict, because such conflict supports the group's goals and renews the view, is dysfunctional because it eliminates the group's appearance (Hunsberger & Larsen, 2021). Sixth, obtaining a monopoly of power rewards ownership by eliminating or weakening competitors. Seventh, a form of resistance that involves two parties antagonistically. Eighth, the chaos of contradictory stimuli in the individual sense (Young, 2020).

Theoretically, conflicts or disputes can have a negative impact. The negative effects of conflicts or disputes include disrupting harmonious social relations, damaging common goals, causing hatred and confusion, reducing trust, and evoking emotions. The pre-conflict stage, or the complaint stage, refers to a situation or condition that a person or a group perceives as unfair and the reasons or grounds for that feeling. Violation of his sense of justice can be real or imaginary, depending on the perception of the party who feels the injustice in question (Wang et al., 2022).

In this case, it is essential to feel that their rights have been violated or that they have been mistreated. Fisher put forward a theory that causes conflict in society. The theory of public relations causes the existence of opposing groups so that hostility arises, and the theory of human needs causes conflict because it is not fulfilled or hindered by basic human needs, both physically and mentally (Bennett et al., 2021). In general, the consequences of conflict are:

- a. Positive consequences, in the form of benefits obtained through conflict, namely; 1) Helping to increase in-group solidarity (increasing group cohesiveness) in the form of improving cohesiveness and integrity; 2) Assist the communication function; 3) Clarify the position; 4) Stimulate the group to look for assumptions to make decisions/take appropriate actions; 5) Reconcile competing groups; 6) Can find better ideas; 7) Raises latent issues and hopes; 8) Clarifying group boundaries and norms; 9) Reinforce the goals to be achieved; 10) Directing parties who are struggling to express identity; 11) Reduce uncertainty by maintaining group boundaries; and 12) Stimulate to discover new values (Yakimova et al., 2021).
- b. Negative consequences in the form of losses arising from quarrels, hostility, differences, riots, threats, difficulties, or difficulties can be classified as physical and non-physical conditions. Physical losses are 1) Death and disability of humanity; and 2) Destruction of various natural resources and facilities. Non-physical losses are 1) Disruption to integration; 2) Interference with positive values; 3) The emergence of tension in society; and 4) Interfere with the development process, and so on (Peralta García & Ouariachi, 2021).

Method

This research will be carried out using a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The data used in this study are derived from previous studies and studies that still have relevance to the Uyghur Muslim ethnic conflict that occurred in

Xinjiang. The research data that researchers have found will be processed to see and analyze the interests of the Chinese government toward the Uyghur Muslim ethnic group in Xinjiang.

Result And Discussion

Muslims in China are one of the ethnic minority Muslims who still exist today. Islam first entered China in 651 AD during the Tang Dynasty government. At that time, the Caliph Uthman bin Affan (644-656M) sent a diplomatic envoy to China. There the envoy then introduced his culture and customs, including introducing Islam. So it has grown and developed until now in China. There are at least ten Muslim ethnicities in China, namely Uyghurs, Hui, Kazakhs, Tatars, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Dongxiang, Tajik, Salar, and Bonan (Bao'an). Among the ten Muslim ethnic groups, the largest population is the Uyghurs and Hui (Wang, 2022).

Hui Muslim

Ethnic Hui Muslims are a minority ethnic group from two groups. Namely, the Central Asian, Persian, and Arab Muslims who were forced to move by the Mongol army and the Muslims in Arabia and Persia who traded with China. The two groups then intermarried with various ethnicities in China, such as most Han and Mongol ethnic groups. Hui Muslims live to assimilate with the Han Chinese, how to dress, and the language they use is the same as the Chinese people. Hui Muslims can adapt to Chinese culture so that later they follow it, but they are still Muslim (Wang, 2021).

Because of the attitude of Hui Muslims who can assimilate with the Han ethnicity, Hui Muslims rarely get discriminatory treatment from the Chinese government. Ethnic Hui, which is a Muslim minority group, but most have similarities with Chinese society compared to other Muslim ethnicities, and this condition does not make Hui ethnic never get cruel treatment from the Chinese government, which is proven by the destruction of several mosques, is not allowed to practice worship during the reign of Mao Zedong (Wroldsen, 2021).

One factor of Hui ethnicity did not get pressure from the Chinese government and was more accepted by the government, namely the territory issue. The Hui ethnicity is different from the Uyghurs who want to liberate Xinjiang, and Hui rarely opposes Chinese authorities regarding the territory. Hui's attitude shows their obedience to the government, but as compensation, they are not disturbed in practicing their religion (Eroglu Sager, 2021).

Uyghur Muslim

Uyghur is a minority tribe in the Xinjiang region, located at the western and northwestern tip of China. This tribe has its province with an autonomous status named Xinjiang-Uighur. The majority of the Uyghur are Muslim. "Uyghur" itself means union or fellowship. Uyghur Muslims speak local and Turkmen languages. Because, historically the Uyghurs in Xinjiang are of Turkish descent and are part of the Republic of East Turkestan, a region later annexed by China (Itasari, 2021).

Culturally, Uyghurs are more influenced by civilizations on the borders of Western China, such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kirghiziastan, Pakistan, and areas dominated by Islamic culture. Cultural differences make it difficult for Uyghurs to

adapt to the Han, even worrying about the elimination of their cultural survival. The concern of the Uyghurs about the loss of cultural identity due to the massive assimilationist policies of China caused the East Turkestan liberation movements to harden their attitude of rejection to join China. The repression of the Han by the Uyghurs, which had occurred for decades, marked the increasingly difficult for the two ethnic groups to coexist peacefully (Zelcer-Lavid, 2022).

After the Chinese Communist government took control of the Turkistan region in 1949, the number of Han Chinese followers of communism in the area increased from 67 % to 40.6%. This then makes all the main political functions and activities in the Xinjiang region controlled by Ethnic Han. With the support of the Chinese government, they also imposed conditions that isolated and limited the implementation of religious rituals and forbade Uyghur Muslims from using their language at school. The Chinese authorities also carried out racial discrimination by only accepting people from the Han tribe in the government bureaucracy. This discrimination then develops and impacts the survival of the Uyghurs so that as a minority, the Uyghur demands justice and their living rights are recognized, including their fundamental rights relating to religious freedom. However, the Chinese government refused and took repressive measures using a military approach. Because of the discrimination experienced by the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Uyghurs held various forms of resistance in response to the treatment and oppression from the government, which was felt to be very unjust and detrimental to the Uyghurs. Consequently, China became even greater for human rights violations committed by the Chinese government in terms of violence and murder (Leibold, 2020).

Xinjiang Region

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, also called Xin (for short), is located in north-northwest China and has been an autonomous province since 1955, with the name of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), the capital of Urumqi. Xinjiang is a village of Muslims in China, almost half of the population is Uyghur tribes from Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Hui. Located in the interior of the Eurasian continent, Xinjiang is bordered by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Mongolia, and Tibet. Its geographical position makes Xinjiang an essential strategic meaning for China and the surrounding countries. The history of Xinjiang is a crucial control part of the Silk Road, while today is an integral part of a train line that led to the second Eurasian Continental. Thus the Xinjiang region is a "home" of various descendants of Turkish civilization, such as the Kazaks, Uyghurs, Kirgiz, Tatars, and Uzbeks. Uyghurs are the largest ethnic group among ethnic groups in Xinjiang based of Turkish descent who have many languages. Because of its location on the famous Silk Road, Uyghurs play an essential role in the cultural exchange between East and West, so they have a unique culture and civilization (Tu et al., 2018).

This Xinjiang land is rich in an arid desert containing oil, natural gas, and coal. Oil reserves are estimated to be between 20-40 billion tons or about 20 percent of China's oil reserves. Natural gas is at least 12,4 trillion cubic feet. According to data reported by the Chinese government, in 2008, Xinjiang produced 27,4 million tons of crude oil or exceeded the production of fields in Shandong. The second biggest. To the extent that China is building a pipeline of 2,600 miles or around 4,000 kilometers,

which flows oil and gas to most cities, such as Shanghai to Beijing, from this region (Abhishek et al., 2022).

The Chinese invasion of the East Turkestan region (the name for the Xinjiang Uyghur sovereignty region) occurred many times, namely in 104 BC, 59 BC, 73, 448, 657, and 744, none other than because China was about to control Silk Road. In 1884, Xinjiang was incorporated into Chinese sovereignty by the Qing Dynasty. China's last attempt to occupy Xinjiang came in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party took power from the nationalists. In 1955, Xinjiang became an autonomous region under the PRC, having previously been integrated through "Peaceful Liberation" actions by the Chinese Communist Government. This action is the antithesis of China's promise to give Xinjiang the right to self-determination, which has been promised for a long time. Chinese annexation caused a negative reaction for the people of East Turkestan, and for more than a hundred years, the Chinese government could not truly control Xinjiang (Anand, 2019).

Xinjiang Province is inhabited by Muslim Uyghurs, who speak Turkish but are an ethnic minority. Since the communists took over the area in 1949, the Uyghurs have experienced religious and cultural persecution by Han Chinese. After discovering oil and other natural resources in the region, Han China flooded Xinjiang to exploit resources. The entry of the Han has strengthened the already weak relations between Han China and the Uyghurs due to religious, cultural, and social differences. However, the entrance of the Han into Xinjiang Province has caused the Uyghurs to feel left out by the repressive behavior of the Han supported by the Chinese government. This makes the Uyghurs strengthen their identity to give birth to extreme actions, namely demanding independence and establishing a separate state. One factor that strengthened their desire to secede was that the Uyghurs felt that Xinjiang was not part of the People's Republic of China. The Uyghurs' lack of recognition of Chinese sovereignty led to the Chinese government's weak legitimacy in the region. The Urumqi crisis in 2009 marked the failure of the Chinese government to deal with ethnic issues and demands for secession in the Xinjiang region. This marked the importance of the nationality problem (*minzu wenti*) for the PRC Government (Kasim, 2021).

Interest Of China Government In Xinjiang

Along with the repression carried out by the Chinese government against the ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang, based on several factors, namely the economy and security of China. For the Chinese Government, allowing the Uyghurs to escape would impact the strengthening of other nationalist movements that oppose the Chinese government, such as Tibet, Mongolia, and Taiwan. Based on these concerns, China took repressive measures to reduce the desire for Uyghur secession as well as the development of Uyghurs sentiments around Xinjiang. Xinjiang is a Chinese government assimilation project to maintain the region as part of the PRC country. Project '*nation-building*' China succeed, therefore, China shortly Uyghur is a big bet for China. If this project is unsuccessful, Beijing will suffer heavy losses in economic development and maintaining a unified China. Aside from Xinjiang, China still has problems with some regions with centrifugal tendencies, namely Taiwan, Tibet, and Mongolia.

Protecting territorial integrity and national unity is the primary concern of the Chinese government. A wave of violent riots rocked Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang autonomous region, which left 184 people dead and more than a thousand injured in early July 2009. The Uyghur demonstrators demanded justice, and their actions were then increasingly out of control, where Uyghurs reportedly attacked Han businesses and Han Chinese individuals on the streets on July 5. 60 The Uyghur riots in Xinjiang province became a concern for the Chinese government regarding the stability the security of the country. Ethnic dissatisfaction with the Uyghurs over government policies considered unfair and siding with Han ethnicity triggered riots in Xinjiang until they formed a group that wanted Xinjiang to be free from China. The Chinese government regards Xinjiang fighters groups as terrorists. Terrorists, separatists, and religious extremists were merged into one by the Chinese government, where the government then took action to persecute the Uyghurs until now in the interests of China.

Besides these factors, the other fact is that Xinjiang has a geographical factor, which is why the Chinese government defends Xinjiang. Xinjiang, which has long been a bet for the “big game” of essential countries in the past, its geographical location today still makes Xinjiang always the center of attention. At present, Xinjiang and its surrounding areas are sensitive due to several issues, including the issue of the India-Pakistan conflict, India’s nuclear issue, the situation in Afghanistan that is still raging, the vulnerable situation in the Ferghana Valley between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and especially after the discovery an oil source in the Tarim Basin, Xinjiang, which gives Beijing new hope to strengthen its economy. Xinjiang, which are land borders Central Asian countries, a region rich in natural resources, but previously ignored and only occupies strategic positions in the vortex periphery country- great country. However, since the discovery of mineral and gas deposits in the Caspian Sea, the world has focused on this region.

China, a country with high economic growth, does not remain silent when it learns of the existence of natural resources, namely oil, in the Xinjiang region. China can be said to be very dependent on its country’s energy supply, so to fulfill that matter, China has established several collaborations with developed and developing countries rich in the supply of natural resources. China’s aggressiveness towards the existence of natural resources can be seen in the South China Sea conflict. Until now, the region is still a contentious issue, and China is not daunted by its claims to the region. As is known, this is done by China, none other than the supply of oil owned in the Sea region proficiency level, so that it becomes a struggle between countries.

One of China’s efforts to improve its economy is to establish economic cooperation in securing energy supplies to China. Energy is needed to strengthen the domestic industry and meet China’s growing energy needs. The current situation in Xinjiang is due to ethnic and social jealousy over discrimination by the Chinese government, which makes the domestic security area unstable and threatens the Chinese economy.

So that the Chinese government then carried out the persecution as a form of maintaining the region, which would later have an impact on the Chinese economy with the presence of oil resources in the Xinjiang region. In carrying out its actions,

the Chinese government is not based on the country's national interests in addition to other things.

Conclusion

Xinjiang is a Muslim village in China where almost half of the population are Uyghur tribes from Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Hui. The Uyghurs and Hui are the most significant ethnic minority among the ten Muslim ethnicities in China. However, the difference between the two ethnicities is seen from the attitude of the Chinese government, where the Hui ethnicity is more silent about territorial boundaries. The factor that the Hui can assimilate with the ethnic Han minority in China is different from the Uyghurs. They then feel the discrimination that makes the ethnic Muslims demand the Chinese government for its perceived injustice.

Apart from the Uyghurs wanting to separate Xinjian from China, this became more soluble and enlarged, leading to violence and human rights violations committed by the Chinese government. The thing that underlies the government's action towards the Uyghurs is none other than the interests of China. The country's national and economic interests form the basis of persecution and further repression by the Chinese government. China will not take actions that tarnish the country's image without a big profit factor, namely the economy. So, the current Uyghur ethnic conflict in China is nothing but based on the question of China's interests. And to achieve these interests, a country will do various ways to get them.

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