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While China maintains an official policy of inclusion towards its minority groups, this stance has not been accompanied by a comparable process of political empowerment. In particular, the concentration of natural resources, minerals and petroleum in parts of the country with a large minority presence, such as the western region of Xinjiang, has strongly informed its relationship with these areas. As a result, while it has established a number of autonomous regions across the country, including the Tibet Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, these in practice remain heavily controlled by the central government.

Of the hundreds of ethnic minorities in China, only 55 are officially acknowledged and many of these are now facing pressure to assimilate to the Han majority culture. The government's attempts to depoliticize and control the representation of minority cultures – for example, its announcement in 2013 that it would be commissioning 55 films to represent each of its recognized ethnic groups – has been criticized for excluding the voices of the minorities themselves. Tibetan and Uyghur communities, in particular, are also struggling to maintain their identities as large-scale investment programmes and state-sponsored migration of Han Chinese are transforming these areas. While these interventions are often presented as a process of modernization and development, some critics have argued that they actively undermine minority cultures. In particular, the Chinese government has been accused of actively promoting labour transfer and relocation programmes to alter the population composition in ethnic minority areas of the country.

In 2013, the impact of state-led urbanization policies continued to be felt in many historic cities long associated with minority communities. In May, reports emerged of a vast shopping mall under construction in the heart of the historic Tibetan city of Lhasa, next to the UNESCO-listed Jokhang Temple, widely regarded as the holiest site in Tibet. The demolition of Kashgar's Old Town, until recently a well preserved urban centre dating back to the Silk Road, also continued during the year. The redevelopment of the city centre, previously reflecting centuries of Uyghur culture, is justified by the Chinese government as a necessary intervention to replace the old building stock with earthquake-resistant housing.

However, the manner of the intervention – in particular, the limited involvement of the Uyghur population themselves in the planning process – has sparked criticism that the programme is also politically motivated, given the region's recent history of unrest. It is estimated that 85 per cent of the historic quarters of the city will eventually be destroyed.

In some cases, the large volume of investment channelled into Xinjiang may be exacerbating resentment among the minority population. Heavy-handed and insensitive redevelopment programmes have sometimes served to reinforce divisions and tensions between minorities and the Chinese government, as well as members of the Han majority. In October, protests broke out among Uyghurs in the city of Shihezi over proposals to move a 200-year-old Muslim cemetery to another location after the site was sold to a businessman based in the eastern city of Wenzhou.

The region continued to be troubled by tensions between the Uyghur community and the Chinese government, resulting in repeated outbreaks of violence during the year. In April, a shoot-out between police and an armed gang in Kashgar left 21 people dead. While authorities alleged that the group was planning 'terrorist activities', representatives of the World Uyghur Congress and other groups denied this, arguing that the state's accusations were intended to increase their control in the region. Other incidents included a riot at a police station in Lukqun township in June, leaving 35 dead, followed by another attack at a police station in Hotan shortly afterwards. At least 11 people were killed in November in Serikbuya township, near Kashgar, in another assault on a police station. In a similar incident near Kashgar at the end of December, eight people were shot dead by police. While the government has repeatedly linked violence in the region to global Islamist extremism, it has been accused of overlooking the role its domestic policies in the region, such as controls on local religious and cultural expression, have played in triggering violent unrest.

Elsewhere in China, following a car crash in Tiananmen Square in October that killed five people including the driver and two passengers, Chinese officials characterized the incident as the work of an Islamic militant group. However, some minority and rights groups questioned the evidence behind the claim and suggested that the allegation was politically motivated. The worst violence occurred in March 2014 when a brutal attack by masked men and women with knives in Kunming train station left at least 29 people dead and over 130 injured. It was subsequently reported that the perpetrators were Xinjiang separatists. The next day, police in Guanxi province posted a notice urging locals to report any people from Xinjiang to the authorities. The World Uyghur Congress, while condemning the violence, called on authorities 'to refrain from using this as a pretext to further and indiscriminately crack down on Uyghurs as precedents suggest, and to show a measured response'.

The Chinese government has repeatedly been criticized for its response to suspected separatist incidents. Shortly after the crash in Beijing, the Uyghur scholar and activist Ilham Tohti was arrested for 'incitement to ethnic separatism' in relation to the incident. According to Tohti, police had been subjecting him to systematic intimidation shortly before the attack. He was subsequently released and jailed again in January 2014. Human rights groups widely criticized the charges against him, which may carry the death penalty. Two months later, the organization PEN American Centre honoured Tohti with its Freedom to Write Award. However, while Tohti's case attracted considerable media attention, other Uyghur activists and dissident writers were also arrested during the year.

Increased repression of the Uyghur minority frequently follows incidents such as the crash in Beijing and the Kunming massacre. However, these crackdowns as well as more general discrimination fuel resentment towards authorities. Restrictions and obstacles regarding dress code, religion and employment opportunities even within Xinjiang have been blamed for further alienating the Uyghur community. According to a HRW researcher quoted in an October 2013 media report, 'Xinjiang is trapped in a vicious circle of increased repression that only leads to more violence.'

The repression of and discrimination against the Tibetan minority has also triggered a wave of self-immolations since February 2009 which continued throughout 2013. In February, the toll of reported incidents reached 100 when a former Buddhist monk, Lobsang Namgyal, set himself on fire in Sichuan. By the end of the year, the reported number had risen to more than 120. The

Chinese government presents these incidents as acts of terrorism and has responded by criminalizing self-immolation protests, including 'incitement', with many Tibetans sentenced to lengthy prison terms and even a suspended death sentence for allegedly 'abetting' others who had self-immolated. This was even reportedly extended in Dzoeg county, Sichuan province, to punitive economic and political measures against the family members and villages of Tibetans who self-immolate.

The Chinese government continued to respond to dissent through tight censorship and exclusionary control of the public sphere. This included heavy censorship of exiled Tibetan voices, in particular the Dalai Lama, shutting them out of television and online media. Discussion of sensitive minority-related topics, such as calls for expanded political freedoms in Tibet and Xinjiang, is also silenced. A number of Tibetan and Uyghur activists are currently imprisoned for their writing, including Gartse Jigme, who was arrested on 1 January 2013 in connection with views he had expressed on minority rights, the Dalai Lama and Chinese policies in Tibet in the second volume of his book *Tsenpoi Nyingtob (The Warrior's Courage)*. He was subsequently sentenced to five years in prison. The government has also been accused of barring internet access in Tibet and Xinjiang during periods of ethnic tension.

While state-controlled media have been criticized for representing minority groups in a negative light – for example, their coverage of the 2008 riots in Tibet – there are a number of legal measures in place to prevent discriminatory language. Articles 249 and 250 of the 1997 Criminal Law stipulate prison sentences of up to three years for 'those provoking hatred and discrimination' and 'persons directly responsible for publishing materials that discriminate or insult minority nationalities'. These legal provisions have at times been used to prosecute cases of denigration or incitement against minorities. However, the government's primary emphasis in the application of these laws has been political stability rather than minority rights. It has yet to tailor a comprehensive framework specifically addressing ethnic discrimination.

Censorship remains the main vehicle for preventing hate speech in China. However, minority groups are frequently targeted as part of security crackdowns. According to the *Xinjiang Daily*, 110 people were arrested and a further 164 issued with a warning in Xinjiang between 26 June and 31 August alone. The government's closure of online minority platforms has also had the effect of narrowing the space for open, multi-ethnic dialogue. At the same time, despite state monitoring, inflammatory rumours and discriminatory language concerning ethnic minorities have still appeared online in unofficial channels. In the wake of the March Kunming massacre, for instance, hate speech against the Uyghur minority appeared on websites such as Weibo. Importantly, however, positive messages urging users not to collectively blame a particular ethnic group for the violence were also disseminated through these channels. So while Weibo filled with rumours and invective following the Kunming killings, a comment on the same social media site calling for greater nuance and understanding was retweeted more than 200,000 times. This shows the important role that the internet can also play in promoting positive representations of minorities.

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