

ON THE FRINGES OF THE
HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

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Tibetans and Uyghurs in Socialist China

Edited by
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CHAPTER TWO

Labour transitions and social inequalities in Tibet and Xinjiang: A comparative analysis of the structural foundations of discrimination and protest

Andrew Martin Fischer

The minority nationality areas of Tibet¹ and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region share obvious similarities as two sparsely populated, resource-rich, and politically suppressed restive minority areas in the far western hinterlands of China, although they also exhibit certain notable differences. Most of the discussion about these differences has focused on culture and religion, on different political histories of integration into China, or on certain political variables such as the presence or absence of a unifying charismatic leader in exile. However, far less attention has been paid to the more structural aspects of socio-economic development and how these have conditioned the political dynamics of minority grievance and protest. One example of the latter is the issue of population and migration dynamics. As highlighted by Fischer (2008), despite similar discourses of 'population invasion', Tibetan areas differ considerably from Xinjiang in that Tibetans remain a predominant majority in their areas except in the case of major towns and cities, whereas large-scale population transfers have been far more evident in Xinjiang, both prior to the reform period and also in the 1990s and 2000s, as clearly evidenced by recent census data. This insight leads us to question more broadly the similarities or differences in the changing

1. In this chapter, the terms 'Tibet' and 'Tibetan areas' refer to all of the Tibetan areas in China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Tibetan areas that are incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. 'China' refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC).



LABOUR TRANSITIONS AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

The method derives from a structuralist development economics approach, focusing inductively on the evolution of aggregates, averages, and compositions, rather than on the statistical variations and associations of individual and/or household characteristics within a sample.

The use of this approach is not meant to suggest a deterministic understanding of the structural transitions studied, nor a homogeneous experience among the social groups represented. Rather, in combination with an institutionalist understanding of context, it is used as a means to reflect on the speed and characteristics of the socio-economic change that has been induced in these areas within a very short period of time – even after taking into account their very different starting points from other regions in China – with effects on people's lives and livelihoods that have been occurring in very real and rapid ways. These are in many respects irreversible and are quickly transforming the landscape faced by the current generation of young Tibetans and Uyghurs. The fact that these changes have been happening under conditions of political disempowerment and disadvantage for these minorities, which impede their ability to mediate the speed and course of these transitions, offers particular insight into the underlying causes of the recent outbursts of discontent in these regions.

For the purpose of analysing provincial aggregates, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) are compared to several other provincial cases in western China and the national average. The aggregate focus on the TAR (as opposed to other provinces with Tibetan areas) is necessary because, given the lack of socio-economic data disaggregated by nationality (except in the case of population censuses), the experience of Tibetans is easiest to decipher from the aggregate TAR data. This is because the entire province is made up of Tibetan autonomous areas, and Tibetans constitute the majority of the population – about 93 per cent according to the 2000 census and apparently still a little more than 90 per cent according to the 2010 data. In particular, the rural areas of the TAR are almost entirely Tibetan (at 97.6 per cent of the 2000 census population tally). In contrast, in Qinghai, the province with the next highest proportion of Tibetans and where Tibetan autonomous areas account for about 97.2 per cent of the territory, Tibetans are nonetheless a minority even in the rural areas because of the much more densely populated

demographic similarity is not matched by educational disparities, as discussed below).

As a means to overcome this problem of identifying Uyghurs in the aggregate statistics of Xinjiang, data from two predominantly Uyghur prefectures are used, namely Kashgar and Khotan (Chi.: Hetian). The very limited prefecture-level data available for Xinjiang restrict this technique to mere glimpses in many cases. The choice of these two prefectures is nonetheless relevant for comparison to the TAR because of similar concentrations of Uyghurs. According to the 2009 data cited above, these two prefectures together had a population of 5.83 million, of which 5.48 million were minorities, of which 5.42 million were Uyghurs. This Uyghur population approximates the size of the entire Tibetan population in China in 2000 (5.42 million according to the 2000 census), and is about double the Tibetan population of the TAR in 2010 (2.72 million according to the 2010 census). The Uyghur population of these two prefectures accounted for 54 per cent of the Uyghur population in Xinjiang in 2009, or about 27 per cent of the total population of Xinjiang. Similar to Tibetans in the TAR (especially outside Lhasa) or in remote regions of Qinghai such as Yulshul and Golok, Uyghurs accounted for 91 per cent of the total prefecture population of Kashgar and 96 per cent of Khotan. Both prefectures were as agrarian as the TAR in the late 1990s, the starting point of rapid labour transitions in the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

However, a strong contrast between the labour transitions of the TAR and Xinjiang became apparent in the 2000s. Development strategies in the TAR and other Tibetan areas appear to have placed an overriding emphasis on urbanization, to the extent that rapid subsidy-sustained growth has been associated with a rapid transition of the local (mostly Tibetan) labour force out of the primary sector (mostly farming and herding).⁵ As a result, within one decade the TAR to a considerable degree caught up with the (also rapidly changing) norm in China, albeit without the productive economic foundations to support these changes. In contrast, labour transitions in Xinjiang, and especially in Kashgar and Khotan, appear to have been exceptionally slow compared to elsewhere

5. 'Primary sector' is the national accounting term for farming, animal husbandry, forestry, and fishing. In Tibetan areas, the primary sector is about half farming and half animal husbandry (pastoralism).

years, maintaining a level of per capita GDP above the national average until 1995, whereas other previously privileged western provinces such as Qinghai fell below the national average in the 1980s or early 1990s. In response to such economic lagging, Beijing launched a variety of policy initiatives in the mid-1990s. These culminated in the Open Up the West campaign (Chi.: *xibu da kaifa*, hereafter, OWC), announced in 1999, which was complemented by the Tenth Five-Year Plan in 2000.⁶ These general initiatives were supplemented in the TAR by the Fourth Tibet Work Forum in 2001.

Since then, economic growth rates in western China have been very rapid in all provincial cases, often exceeding the national average. For instance, the aggregate GDP of the TAR grew by 332 per cent from 2000 to 2010 (in nominal terms), whereas the GDP of Xinjiang grew by 299 per cent, in comparison to a nominal growth rate of 304 per cent for China overall. Hence, rapid growth in most western provinces stalled the increasing lag with eastern China and, in some cases, even closed the gap with national average per capita GDP, with the exception of Xinjiang and Yunnan. Growth in Xinjiang lagged in the early to mid-1990s, when its per capita GDP fell below the national average for the first time in 1996, and then again after 2006, when it converged with the per capita GDP of Qinghai in 2009 and 2010 (albeit still growing rapidly). Besides Xinjiang and Yunnan, the shuffling of rank orders among the other western provinces was minor. The lagging of the 1980s and early 1990s was stalled as western China joined the national growth experience, although the region generally remained poorer than the national average. At the end of this period, the GDP per capita of the TAR reached 17,319 yuan in 2010, versus 25,034 for Xinjiang and 29,992 yuan for China as a whole.

Despite these otherwise similar growth experiences, the structural change accompanying such growth in the TAR was very distinct from all other western provinces including Xinjiang. Unlike the rest of China, economic growth was not only disconnected from productive sectors, particularly the primary sector (mostly farming and herding) – which is predictable in a context of industrialization in the wider economy – but also from manufacturing and mining within the secondary sector. Instead, it was heavily concentrated in urban services and construction,

6. See Fischer (2013) for a more detailed discussion of these earlier dynamics. Also see Szadziwski and Hann (chs. 3 and 7 in this volume) for a discussion of the OWC.

role for construction since 2000, reflecting the larger role of subsidies and investment under the OWC.⁹

Xinjiang was dissimilar to the experience of other western provinces in one important respect, which was not shared with the TAR: it had a more resilient share of primary-sector output, which amounted to 21 per cent of GDP in 2000 and, after a slight fall in the middle of the decade, recovered in share to 20 per cent of GDP in 2010. In this respect, Xinjiang was the only province in China (besides Hainan) that managed to sustain its primary-sector GDP share despite strong growth in other parts of its economy, which probably reflects the intensity of agroindustry in this province during this period (see further discussion of this below). Secondary activities were also strong in Xinjiang, with a share reaching almost 48 per cent of GDP by 2010, up from 43 per cent in 2000, although this was in line with the western provincial norm. Also similar to the western provincial norm, construction accounted for 8 per cent of GDP in 2010, while industry accounted for 40 per cent. Like in other western provinces, the strength of this manufacturing and mining activity was built on a period of intensive investment and construction activities in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 2000, for example, construction amounted to 12 per cent of GDP, whereas industry and mining amounted to only 31 per cent. The tertiary sector rose from 36 per cent of GDP in 2000 to a height of 39 per cent in 2002, but then fell back to 33 per cent by 2010, which was significantly lower than the national tertiary share and against the rising national trend, although it was in line with the trends in other western provinces besides the TAR, such as Qinghai and Sichuan.

Indeed, while both the TAR and Xinjiang experienced an upsurge in the share of the tertiary sector in the early 2000s, in both cases reflecting a sharp expansion in government administration alongside the OWC (Fischer 2005; 2009b), this similarity faded after the early years of the OWC. In Xinjiang, the boost to government administration and construction in the early years of the OWC were associated with subsequently resurgent productive sectors, whereas they were not in the TAR. This being said, the disaggregated tertiary GDP data at the provincial level ceased to be reported in the yearbooks after 2003. It might be the case that government administration continued to be dispropor-

9. See Fischer (2013) for more detail on Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, and all China.

financed locally to a much greater extent than would have been possible in the TAR, such as through various provincial investment vehicles or corporations, including the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (*bingtuan*).

As noted in the introduction, industry in Xinjiang is concentrated in northern Xinjiang or in various mining enclaves, whereas a focus on the two southern prefectures of Kashgar and Khotan reveal an economic structure quite similar to the TAR (particularly when Lhasa is taken out of the TAR economic data).¹² Both prefectures remained predominantly agricultural in 2010, with the share of primary-sector output in Kashgar falling from 52 per cent of prefecture GDP in 2001 to 42 per cent in 2010, and from 53 per cent to 35 per cent in Khotan. Like in the TAR, the GDP share of construction was equal to or exceeded the industry share within the secondary sector: construction amounted to 8.9 per cent of GDP in Kashgar in 2010 versus 9.2 per cent for industry, and construction amounted to 11.2 of GDP in Khotan versus 5.7 per cent for industry. Correspondingly, the tertiary sector had a strong weight in both prefectures, at 40 per cent of GDP in Kashgar (up from 32 per cent in 2001) and 48 per cent in Khotan (up from 33 per cent in 2001).¹³ Like in the TAR, both prefectures exhibited a missing middle between the primary and tertiary sectors of the economy, although unlike the TAR, both had sustained much greater shares of agriculture. For instance, the most agricultural prefecture in the TAR was Shigatse, where the primary sector accounted for 24 per cent of GDP in 2010 (calculated from TSY 2011: table 2-10).

However, unlike the sustained primary shares in Xinjiang as a whole, the higher primary-sector GDP shares of Kashgar and Khotan were probably not due to intensive agroindustrial modernization, as analysed in the next section. Notably, the per capita GDP of these two prefectures was relatively very low – even much lower than the poorest province in China (Guizhou) – reaching 8,748 yuan in Kashgar in 2010 and 5,181 yuan in Khotan, or respectively 35 per cent and 21 per cent of the per capita GDP of Xinjiang as a whole (25,034 yuan in 2010). Prefecture-

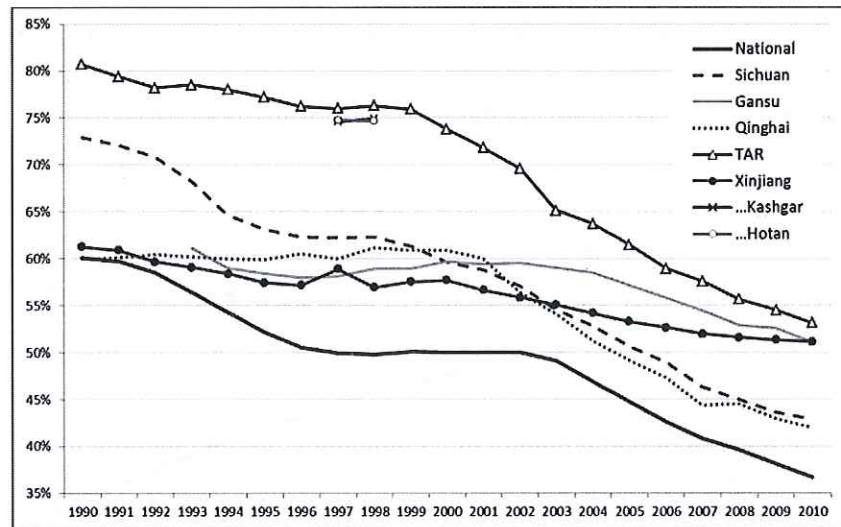
12. This comparison is not entirely fair to Xinjiang because remote rural regions of all provinces are likely to be far less industrialized than their urbanized core regions, although this point emphasizes the situation of the TAR given that the very weak manufacturing and mining output includes Lhasa.

13. Calculated from XSY (2011: table 2-10) and equivalent in earlier XSYs.

non-Tibetan (i.e. Han Chinese) out-of-province migrants might have had on the overall employment shares of the TAR given that very few of these migrants come to the TAR to work in agriculture in rural areas (besides temporary migrants working as vegetable farmers in cities such as Lhasa or Shigatse, although most of them are probably not reflected in these statistics in any case).

In contrast, the transition of labour out of agriculture in Xinjiang was much slower, similar to that of Gansu, falling only 10 percentage points over 20 years, from 61 per cent in 1990 to 58 per cent in 2000 and then 51 per cent in 2010. The relative slowness of the transition in Xinjiang was such that the share of people employed in agriculture in 1990 was more or less at the national average (like in Qinghai), whereas by 2010 it had converged with that of the TAR (and Gansu) and was well above the shares in China overall (37 per cent), Qinghai (42 per cent), and even Sichuan (43 per cent), which was much more agrarian than Xinjiang in 1990.

Figure 2.1: Primary-sector share of total employment, 1990–2010

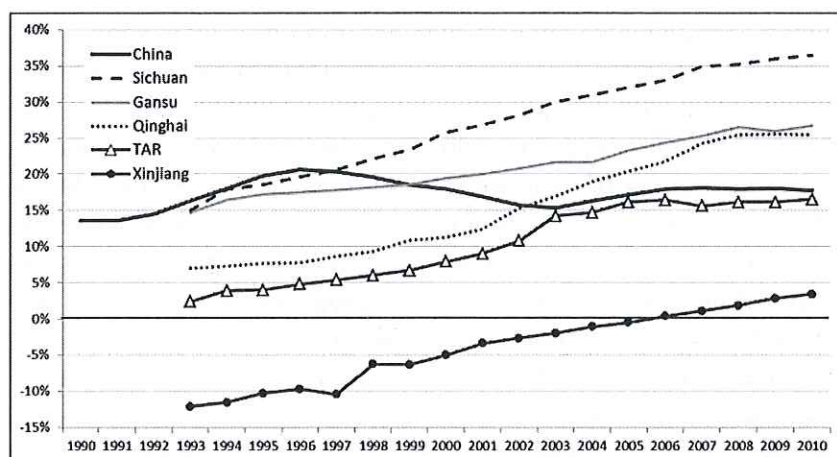


Sources: CSY (2011: table 4-4) and equivalent tables in previous yearbooks.

Note: Data for 2006 were not available in CSY (2007) and were taken from provincial statistical yearbooks, although where an obvious discrepancy was apparent in the case of Gansu and Xinjiang, an average was taken between 2005 and 2007 instead. Some data from the early 1990s were also taken from provincial yearbooks, although the discrepancies in these data were so severe in the case of Gansu before 1993 that they were not used. Also note that the data for Sichuan up to 1996 include Chongqing.

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Figure 2.3: Percentage difference between rural and primary-sector employment shares, 1993–2010



Sources: Calculated from CSY (2011: tables 4-2 and 4-4) and equivalent tables in previous yearbooks for provincial data. The same qualifications as specified in Figure 2.1 apply to this figure.

of China, whereas the slower transition out of agriculture in Xinjiang was marked by an apparent ruralization of the local labour force, in contrast to most other western provinces, especially after the early 2000s. This is shown in the next two figures. The share of total employment that is classified as rural from 1990 to 2010 is shown in Figure 2.2.¹⁵ This is based on the decomposition of employment data by urban or rural place of employment registration (which is not necessarily the same as place of residency registration), and is distinct from the sectoral decomposition in that much of rural employment is 'off-farm' or non-agrarian. Hence, there is a difference – often even in trend – between the shares of total rural employment and primary-sector employment. This difference, shown in Figure 2.3, could be taken as a very rough proxy for rural off-farm employment, although some of this difference might represent misclassifications of people who have migrated to urban areas but have maintained their registration status in the rural areas and

15. The provincial data for each year in these figures are derived from the subsequent annual yearbook, e.g. 1993 data are reported in CSY (1994). Hence, 1993 is the starting point because, starting with CSY (1994), there was a change in the reporting categories for these particular data, as a result of which they are not comparable with the reporting categories of previous years.

result, the TAR ended this period with a much less rural labour force than in Sichuan or Gansu, converging with Qinghai and in tandem with the national trend.

In contrast, the rural share of employment in the other western provinces (besides Xinjiang) fell later and by much less. If these data are accurate, three-quarters of the shift of labour out of the primary sector in Qinghai was absorbed by other types of rural employment. Similarly, Sichuan became a surprisingly rural province (at almost 80 per cent of total employment in 2010), despite the sharp reduction in primary share to 43 per cent, which was close to the national average and probably reflects strong rural off-farm employment generation over these years, as indicated in Figure 2.3. Thus, while the Sichuan labour force was apparently less urbanized than that of the TAR, it was also less agrarian. Nationally, trends between these two shares were broadly correspondent over this period, implying that by the end of the decade almost all of the labour that shifted out of agriculture shifted out of the rural areas altogether (in an aggregate sense). Among the western cases shown here, the TAR exceptionally shows the strongest shedding of primary-sector employment outside of the rural areas altogether, paralleling the national trend most closely albeit under very different economic conditions.

The heavily subsidized surge in rural development initiatives in the TAR under the OWC would have attenuated this trend in the TAR to a certain degree. As indicated in Figure 2.3, there was a substantial increase in the difference between the rural and primary employment shares in the TAR during the early years of the OWC, rising from 6 per cent of total TAR employment in 1998 to 14 per cent in 2003, and thereafter stabilizing at around 16 per cent. The OWC thereby appears to have generated a substantial increase in the share of non-agricultural employment in the rural areas, similar to other western provinces but at a consistently lower level, as would be expected of a more sparsely populated remote area. This would have been the result of efforts to raise rural incomes through the provision of rural employment opportunities in the TAR by means of intensive subsidization, particularly since 2003, as discussed by Childs et al. (2011) and Goldstein et al,

households in even the most 'entrepreneurial' of these villages.

In contrast to all of these cases, the rural share of total employment in Xinjiang continued to increase even after the early 2000s. In an apparent anomaly, the rural share had been in fact lower than the primary-sector share up until 2005, and only started to exceed the latter from about 2006 onwards. For instance, 53 per cent of employed people in Xinjiang in 2000 were rural, whereas 58 per cent were employed in agriculture. It is not clear why this is the case, although it might have something to do with the employment classification of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, Chi.: *bingtuan*) involved in agricultural production over this period.¹⁹ The anomaly is not evident in the data for Kashgar and Khotan – or at least the rural share in 2003 was marginally higher than the primary share in 1998 in both cases – which again might be related to the fact that the XPCCs are concentrated in the northern part of the province.²⁰ Similar to the TAR in the 1990s, it would appear that most of the rural employed in Kashgar and Khotan around this time were working in agriculture.

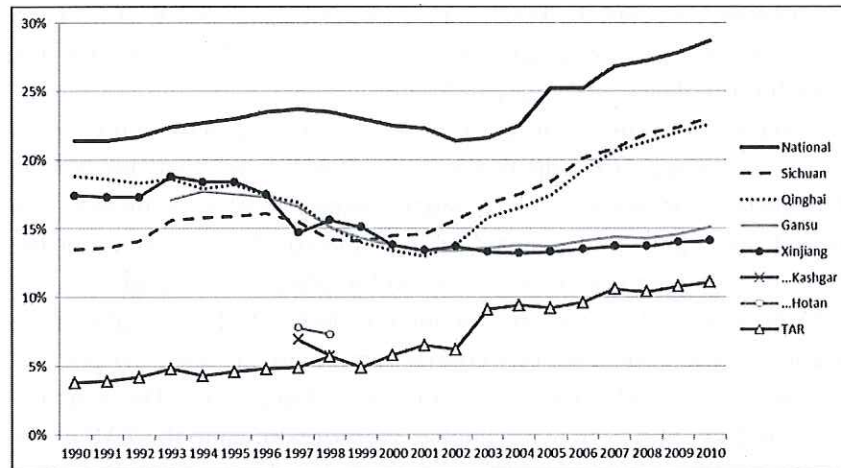
In both of these cases and in Xinjiang overall, the rural share increased slightly over the 2000s, from 53 per cent in 2000 to 55 per cent in 2010 in the case of Xinjiang, from 76 per cent in 2003 to 78 per cent in Kashgar, and from 81 to 82 per cent in Khotan over this same period. This trend in the latter two prefectures, in combination with the respective economic data showing limited secondary activities by the end of the decade and hence little potential for rural off-farm employment, supports the suggestion made earlier that the primary-sector employ-

19. As noted by Spoor and Shi (2009), the XPCCs were originally organized as large-scale state farms (also known as 'regiment farms' because of their military command structure). Hence, a bi-modal agrarian structure emerged in Xinjiang, with small-scale peasant farming (e.g. with 0.7 hectare of farmland on average) co-existing with the large XPCC farms. In this regard, if some of the XPCC employees working in agriculture are categorized as urban employees, this would explain the discrepancy. This is possible given that 583,455 people employed in urban units (i.e. a formalized category of urban employment) in Xinjiang in 2010 were working in agriculture (and most of these in state-owned units), or about 23 per cent of total urban unit employees, equivalent to almost 12 per cent of rural employment (XSY 2011: table 3-11) and 6.5 per cent of total provincial employment. This proportion of urban unit employees working in the primary sector was much higher than in any other province besides Heilongjiang in the north-east (20 per cent) and Inner Mongolia (11 per cent). The proportion was 4 per cent in the TAR and 3 per cent in Qinghai and Gansu (CSY 2011: table 4-6).

20. Again, the high proportion of urban unit employment in the primary sector in 2010 was concentrated in Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Tacheng (Tarbagatai) Administrative Offices, and several other northern prefectures.

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Figure 2.4: Secondary-sector share of total employment, 1990–2010



Sources: Same as Figure 2.1.

Xinjiang – despite no increase in the industry share of GDP (i.e. most of the increase was due to construction and related activities). The limited data from Kashgar and Khotan reveal that the share of employment in the secondary sector was about the same as in the TAR in the late 1990s, at around 7 per cent, as we would expect from the GDP structure.

Transition out of agriculture in the TAR (and likely in Kashgar and Khotan, to the extent that there has been transition) and, for the large part, into urban areas has resulted in an equally rapid transition towards tertiary employment in the TAR, largely bypassing employment in the secondary sector (especially manufacturing). The increase in the TAR secondary employment share following the beginning of the OWC, particularly between 2002 and 2003 when the share rose from 6.2 per cent to 9.1 per cent of total employment in the TAR, corresponds to the beginning of major railway construction in the TAR and related OWC projects. The increase was sustained and rose further to more than 10 per cent in 2007 and 2008, even after the completion of the railway construction in 2006. This corresponds to the boom in rural construction activity generated by the Comfortable Housing Project (CHP) under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, which started in 2006 (see Goldstein et al. 2010). Notably, most of the increase in share was due to sharp increases in the numbers of people registered as employed in construction: 63 per

value added per employed person in the secondary sector was 3.4 times the overall average for all employed in the province in 2010, or 8.8 times the value added per employed person in the primary sector (up from 3.1 and 8.5 in 2000). This ratio of value added per employed person in the secondary sector to the overall average in Xinjiang was similar to other western provinces in 2000, but the increase in this ratio up to 2010 was in contrast to a decline in other provinces, e.g. from 4 to 2.9 in the TAR (albeit mostly from construction, not industry), from 3.2 to 2.4 in Qinghai, from 3.2 to 3.2 in Gansu, from 2.9 to 2.2 in Sichuan, and from 2.0 to 1.6 in China overall. Hence, the increase in the ratios in Xinjiang reflects polarization in the economy driven by the secondary sector, alongside intensification in agriculture, in contrast to other western provinces where the secondary sector became less polarizing and much more labour absorbing through the course of industrial expansion over the decade (besides Gansu), while the contribution of agriculture was much more marginalized. In Xinjiang, secondary-sector expansion was particularly employment inelastic (and hence less labour absorbing and more exclusionary).

To the extent that such sectoral polarization overlaps with the segregation of Uyghurs and Han Chinese in different economic sectors, with the latter dominating capital intensive and high value-added manufacturing and mining (and capital intensive agriculture for that matter), this would further suggest a form of ethnic economic stratification that is quite distinct from the TAR. Stratification in the TAR was structured more by access to high value-added construction (as opposed to lower value-added construction in rural areas) and in tertiary activities, both heavily subsidized, hence facilitating an institutional form of discrimination through the application of universal and meritocratic hiring standards within such sectors, particularly within public employment, as analysed below. We can speculate that the situation was even more polarized in Kashgar and Khotan, given the much more limited role of construction in these two prefectures (in comparison to the TAR), and hence an especially stark duality in the local economy between primary and tertiary-sector employment.

Tertiary-sector employment

Inverse to the secondary sector, the tertiary sector in Xinjiang played a much less polarizing role than it did in the TAR, given the gener-

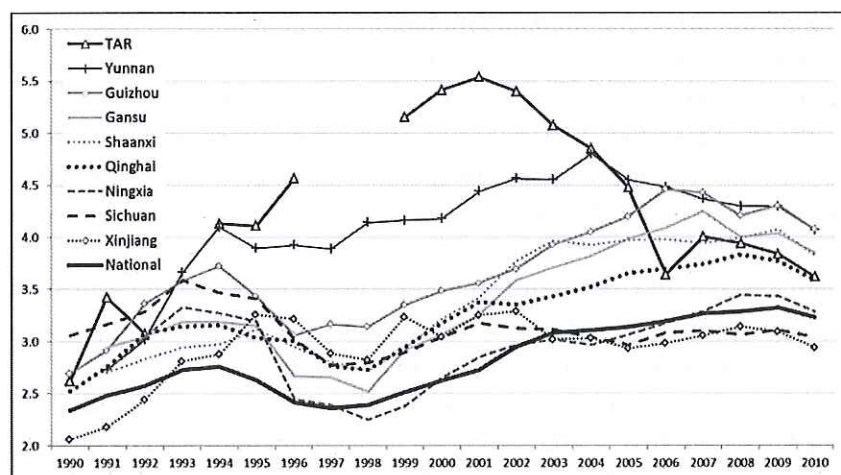
GDP/employment shares also fell below parity by 2010, from 1.64 in 2000 to 0.98 in 2010. These two and other western provinces besides the TAR thereby experienced depolarization between the relative value-added contributions of employed people in tertiary versus primary sectors. In contrast, the rapidly shrinking GDP share of the primary sector and the exceedingly rapid growth in construction and the tertiary sector contributed to sectoral polarization in the TAR economy.²³

The implication is that value-added incentives in China create a bias towards investment or employment in industry (especially manufacturing), whereas in the TAR they create a bias towards investment or employment in construction or tertiary services (especially state-sector employment). Moreover, the bias has been increasing over the decade despite the enormous expansion in construction and tertiary activities, and even though such expansions would tend eventually to lead to diminishing returns under most normal circumstances, especially at the scale and speed of expansion observed in the TAR, where the tertiary sector came to account for more than half of GDP since 2002 and construction came to account for almost one-quarter of GDP by 2010. Obviously, such an outcome in the TAR (both expansion and that this occurs with an increasing imbalance) is entirely guided by state policy; it is meaningless to refer to this as a 'market' outcome, even though discourses of market incentives and discipline might have been used in certain cases to justify certain policies (such as in the case of urban developments in Lhasa as discussed in Yeh and Henderson 2008).

The setting in the TAR is compounded by the fact that nominal value added per employed person in the overblown construction and tertiary sectors was significantly higher than the norms prevailing in western and central China (although an underreporting of migrant labour in these sectors, particularly in construction, might exaggerate this difference). In other words, the amount of value added per employed person in construction in the TAR reached 104,728 yuan per employed person in 2010, versus 38,490 yuan in Qinghai and 24,168 in Sichuan. Similarly, value added per employed person in the tertiary sector in the TAR reached 79,577 yuan in 2010, versus 59,557 yuan in Xinjiang, 45,147 yuan in Qinghai, 35,433 yuan in Sichuan, and 65,732 yuan in China overall. These interregional imbalances set the incentives for attract-

23. For further discussion of these ratios, see Fischer (2013: ch. 5).

Figure 2.6: Urban–rural household income inequality, constant 2010 yuan, 1990–2010



Sources: Calculated from CSY (2011: tables 9-5, 10-15, and 10-21) and equivalent in previous yearbooks.

panel data on rural household income distribution in the TAR were last made available in TSY (2000), for data up to 1999, making it impossible to evaluate both income poverty rates and income inequality in the rural areas of the TAR in the 2000s on the basis of publicly available statistics. Such data are available for Xinjiang,²⁴ although because they are aggregated for the whole province it is impossible to tease out regional or ethnic variations. Nonetheless, some brief explorations across several other dimensions of socio-economic inequality can help to infer a few more contrasts between the TAR and Xinjiang.

The first is urban–rural household income inequality (Figure 2.6). The contrast between the two provinces is notable, in that urban–rural inequality in the TAR was among the highest in China, especially in the early 2000s, whereas in Xinjiang it was among the lowest in western China and lower than the national average (with the exception of the late 1990s). In Xinjiang, this was partly due to a stronger growth of rural than urban household incomes: rural incomes increased from 1,618

24. According to these data, 13 per cent of the rural residents sampled in the 2010 household survey had an annual net income of less than 1500 yuan, which was roughly the absolute poverty line used in China at that time (XSY 2011: table 9-20). It is quite likely that the bulk of these residents were based in Kashgar and Khotan given the low levels of average rural incomes in those two prefectures.

flected by the regional disparity of average net rural household incomes within Xinjiang in 2010, ranging from 2,754 yuan per person in Khotan and 3,270 yuan in Kashgar (0.59 and 0.70 times the provincial average of 4,643 yuan respectively), to 8,555 yuan in Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, or 1.84 times the provincial average and 3.1 times that of Khotan. In comparison, the range in the TAR was much less, ranging from 3,451 yuan in Ngari Prefecture (0.83 times the provincial average) to 5,411 yuan in Nyingtri (Chi.: Linzhi), or 1.31 times the average and 1.57 times that of Ngari. For further comparison, Sichuan had a disparity similar to Xinjiang, from 2,744 yuan in Kardze (Chi.: Ganzi) and 3,741 in Ngawa (Chi.: Aba), to 8,205 yuan in Chengdu, and a provincial average of 5140 yuan, although the population weight of Kardze and Ngawa was very small in the province and the average of Chengdu was exceptional, due to the proximity of those rural areas to the capital city. Otherwise, most prefectures in Sichuan were closely clustered around the provincial average.²⁷ The disparity in Xinjiang is exceptional given that the population of Kashgar and Khotan together amounted to 27 per cent of the provincial population and the three northern prefectures with relatively high incomes (Changji, Tacheng and Bayangol) also have a large population weight (17 per cent of provincial total between the three) and are not simply peri-urban areas. All three have high Han population shares, at 75 per cent of the total population of Changji, 59 per cent in Tacheng, and 58 per cent in Bayangol according to the 2000 census. From this perspective, lower urban–rural inequality in Xinjiang masks much higher regional inequality in rural incomes, corresponding closely with concentrations of Han and Uyghurs across the province.

Intra-urban inequalities appear to reflect similar comparative patterns insofar as there was a much greater increase in urban wage inequality in the TAR than in Xinjiang, as measured by the ratio of average wages for staff and workers over average per capita urban household incomes. This ratio in the TAR reached by far the highest levels in China by 2007, whereas the more gradual increase and level in Xinjiang was in line with other provinces such as Gansu and Sichuan.²⁸ In the TAR, this suggests a sharp upward adjustment of urban inequality over the 2000s, precisely at the same time as urban–rural inequality was being tempered and

27. Calculated from SSY (2011: table 9-21); TSY (2011: table 7-3); and XSY (2011: table 9-21).

28. See Fischer (2013: ch. 5) for further explanation.

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urban resident population. Calculating from TSY (2004: table 4-5), the share of Tibetans in total staff and worker employment in state-owned units fell from 71.3 to 64.6 per cent, while that of non-Tibetans rose from 28.7 to 35.4 per cent. At the cadre level, which accounted for two-thirds of permanent state-sector employment in 2003, the change was even sharper: overall cadre employment increased from 69,927 cadres in 2000 to 88,734 in 2003, while the number of Tibetan cadres fell from 50,039 to 44,069, or from 72 per cent of total cadre employment to just below 50 per cent, whereas the numbers of non-Tibetan (mostly Han) cadres actually increased. Hence, the shift in 2003 revealed a sudden move away from Tibetan representation in urban state-sector employment, that is, from the most privileged and formalized forms of employment in the TAR, and non-Tibetan cadres outnumbered Tibetan cadres for the first time since 1980. Government assertions that Tibetans were the dominant beneficiaries of increasing state-sector wages, thereby contributing to an emerging 'middle class' of Tibetans, became much more tenuous by 2003, after which the government stopped publishing this particular disaggregation of employment data for the TAR.

Rather, Tibetan employment was shrinking during these early years of the OWC in precisely the parts of the economy that were growing fastest. Up to that point, Tibetans working as staff and workers would have mostly been permanent urban residents, implying that the burden of such employment reduction was more specifically borne by these relatively privileged urban residents. As a consequence, the sharp wage increases were increasingly and disproportionately captured by non-Tibetans and by a shrinking share of permanently registered urban households, which helps to explain the growing divergence between average wages of staff and workers and urban per capita household incomes up to 2003. Unfortunately, we have no idea of these trends since 2003 because this particular ethnic disaggregation of the staff and worker data was discontinued after TSY (2004) and replaced by sex disaggregation. However, given the fact that the sharp urban wage polarization continued up to the end of 2007, similar exclusionary dynamics were probably at work later in the decade, which would definitely provide much insight into the outburst of protests that took place in Lhasa and elsewhere in March 2008.

Earlier statistical yearbooks for Xinjiang also reported the numbers of minority nationalities in staff and worker employment in Xinjiang

would have been used to implement such rationalization of state-sector employment, such as through the increased use of Chinese-medium exams, as described for Tibet by Fischer (2009a; 2013) and also by Zenz (2013).

Measures of urban wages or income are based on formalized employees in urban units and permanent resident households, and therefore have the serious deficiency that they do not include the lower, more informalized end of migrant or otherwise temporary resident workers. Similar to the case of urban–rural inequality, the lower level of urban wage inequality in Xinjiang might actually mask substantial wage inequalities between such migrants and the more formalized sectors of the workforce, particularly with respect to Uyghur migrants from southern Xinjiang in the northern parts of Xinjiang. Notably, Xinjiang stood out in the late 1990s as having an exceptionally high poverty rate among temporary migrants in Ürümqi. This insight is based on the work of Hussain (2003), who managed to construct the first available province-level urban poverty lines for each of the 31 Chinese provinces (albeit only for urban areas, not rural areas), based on local cost-of-living data that previously had not been made available by the government.³¹ Hussain applied these poverty lines to the results of a one-time urban survey in 1998 that incorporated all urban residents, permanent and migrant, in the main urban centre of each province in China (the TAR was not included in this survey). On average, urban migrant poverty rates in China were about 50 per cent higher than permanent resident poverty rates (15 per cent versus 10 per cent), as would be expected. In Lanzhou (Gansu), migrant poverty rates were also about 50 per cent higher, although poverty rates were actually lower than the national average, at 8.6 per cent for residents versus 12.5 per cent for migrants, reflecting a much more affordable cost of living. However, migrant poverty rates in Xining (Qinghai) were actually more than a third lower than the resident rates, similar to Chengdu in Sichuan and Xi’an in Shaanxi.

In this survey, Ürümqi stood out as a striking anomaly. Migrant poverty rates in Ürümqi were almost four times the permanent resident rates: 54 per cent of migrants sampled were poor (in absolute income terms) versus 14 per cent of the local residents sampled. This was also

31. These poverty lines were based on a notion of ‘absolute poverty’, meaning an estimate of the income required to be able to procure 2100 calories of food a day and to meet other essential non-food needs.

population, illiteracy rates were slightly higher, although still low in comparison to Tibetan areas. For instance, using the data on levels of schooling attainment for the population aged 6 and older and treating 'no schooling' and illiteracy as synonymous,³⁴ the no-schooling/illiteracy rate for all Tibetans in China was 45.5 per cent according to the 2000 census, whereas it was 8.8 per cent for all Uyghurs, 15.6 for all Hui, 7.3 per cent for all Han Chinese, and 7.7 per cent for the entire population. In this respect, the Uyghur nationality was more similar to the illiteracy/no-schooling rate of Mongolians, at 7.2 per cent.³⁵ This average for all Uyghurs did not appear to mask significant regional variations given that illiteracy rates in Kashgar and Khotan were not much higher than this average, at 9.5 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively, according to the 2000 census.

In essence, these rates describe very different socio-economic realities in terms of how Uyghurs and Tibetans faced the Han-dominated labour markets of their urban areas. Illiteracy essentially excluded almost half of Tibetans from competing in anything but the least skilled categories of employment in these urban areas, whereas far fewer Uyghurs would have faced such exclusions on the basis of lacking the most basic schooling criteria. Nonetheless, the fact that literacy in the census and surveys refers to literacy in any official language in China, the rates in Xinjiang (and in the TAR) underestimate the extent to which Uyghurs (and Tibetans) are illiterate in Chinese (as opposed to in Uyghur or Tibetan), given that primary schooling (and hence the formation of basic literacy) has until now taken place largely in the Uyghur (or Tibetan) language (see Hann, ch. 7 in this volume).

Accordingly, the relatively strong performance in basic literacy among Uyghurs was more tempered at higher levels of schooling, although they still significantly outperformed Tibetans, who were by far the least schooled of all of the major minority groups in China in the 2000 census. Secondary schooling is particularly important for such non-Chinese mother tongue minorities given that proficiency in spoken and written Chinese is typically only acquired at the secondary level, especially the senior secondary level. Tertiary levels of schooling are crucial criteria to be able to qualify for and hence compete in urban unit, especially state-

34. The previous measurements were based on the population aged 15 and older.

35. Calculated from Tabulation (2002: table 2-2).

disadvantage, their educational disadvantages are otherwise much less acute than in Tibetan areas, at least in the terms indicated by these aggregate measures, and the opportunities for non-state urban unit employment are also much greater than in Tibetan areas.

However, with the intensification of development strategies targeting the western regions and related political developments since the mid-1990s, it is likely that both regions witnessed an intensification of strong linguistic, cultural, and political modes of bias deriving from the dominant Han Chinese group in control of most of the power and financial flows from outside the province. These biases include Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures, and connections to government or business networks in China proper.³⁷ While the upper end of schooled Tibetans and Uyghurs can choose to attempt to assimilate into such networks, the degree to which direct discrimination might block them in such efforts is an important consideration for understanding the intensification of political protests in both regions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, a comparative analysis of Xinjiang and the TAR was sketched out, focusing on labour transitions in a context of rapid economic growth and various related dimensions of wage, income, and educational inequalities. Significant structural differences between the two provinces were analysed. However, beyond these differences, one strong similarity between the two provinces was that 'minorities' were hugely underrepresented in the respective provincial state-sector employment (or urban unit employment more generally) relative to their population share, at least up until 2002 or 2003, when these data were still being reported. According to the most recent data available, the Tibetan share of state-sector employment had fallen to 65 per cent by 2003, and their share of cadre employment to less than 50 per cent, despite a population share of almost 93 per cent in the 2000 census (apparently including migrants). In Xinjiang, minorities (mostly Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Hui) accounted for almost 30 per cent of urban unit employment in 2002 (mostly state-sector), for a population share of almost 60 per cent. This underrepresentation in Xinjiang persisted despite much higher levels of (modern, formal, mainstream) education among

37. See Fischer (2013) for a full elaboration of this argument.

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