

Lack of better jobs for China's ethnic minorities a worsening problem

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(Phys.org)—People from China's Uyghur minority are struggling to get higher status, higher paying jobs, which in turn is leading to a forced divide between different ethnic groups, according to a new University of Melbourne study.

The study found a combination of a jobs market that favours the dominant Han ethnic group, as well as crackdowns on Uyghur religious and [cultural practices](#), has fuelled tensions between the two groups.

Writing in a recently published paper for the *International Journal of Sociology*, Dr Reza Hasmath from the University's Faculty of Arts said that for the more than eight million Muslim Uyghur's living in China's Xinjiang region, a lack of top jobs is causing a rise in "religious and ethnic consciousness".

This may cause issues for the government said Dr Hasmath, as it could lead to violent dissent between the two groups in an economically important part of the country.

The two groups have already clashed publically on a number of occasions, most famously in the rioting of July 2009.

"From the government's perspective, a heightened conflict in Xinjiang is not something they want to deal with, as it is to one of the nation's largest and most important natural gas and [oil reserves](#), and occupying one-sixth of China's total [land mass](#)."

"However, Muslim Uyghurs are increasingly rejecting ideas of 'national unity', instead preferring to do business with fellow Uyghurs and reinforce the [negative stereotypes](#) they hold towards Han Chinese."

The problem, according to Dr Hasmath, is an unequal distribution of job opportunities and wealth.

"There is a clear tendency for Uyghurs to hold low-status and low-paying positions and so they are generally enduring lower [employment rates](#) and wages than their Han counterparts. Where Han Chinese are over-represented in high status and high paying jobs such as in education, health and public management, Uyghurs are over-represented in agriculture, where over 80 per cent of the group's working population is present."

China's changing economic landscape has not aided the situation said Dr Hasmath. While workers now have greater freedom to join their employer of choice, it has increased migration to urban areas.

"Migrants rely upon their hometown connections to gain an entry into urban life and given the job discrimination seemingly in place, this migration negatively reinforces the problem."

Dr Hasmath concluded that while recent economic incentives provided by Chinese authorities to the Muslim Uyghur population have been helpful, they don't solve the problem.

"Muslim Uyghurs continue to watch the better-paying [jobs](#) go to Han Chinese, while the more labour-intensive, poorer-paying positions are assigned to them."

"Until this situation has been corrected, the current divisions will remain and the Muslim Uyghur-Han Chinese conflict will continue to play a

significant role in the history of Xinjiang."

More information: [journals.sagepub.com/content/early/ ...
10.1177/0898010112459101.abstract](https://journals.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/11/22/10.1177/0898010112459101)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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