Original article

# Cultural security of minorities under threat
# The situation of the Uyghurs in the People's Republic of China

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**ABSTRACT**

The main objective of the article is to analyse the state of cultural security of the Uyghur minority. Due to the fundamental significance of identity and culture for the functioning of national minorities, it belongs from their perspective to the most crucial sectors of security, especially since a whole range of threats concerns it. The text uses the case study method, and the situation of the Uyghur minority in the People's Republic of China has been chosen as an example. The following parts of the study define the terms used in the article, characterize the Uyghur minority, and indicate the most critical threats to its cultural security. These include the processes of migration together with the accompanying processes of urbanization and industrialization, the destruction of cultural heritage, threats in the area of culture and education, and dangers related to the state's policy towards Islam and the potential radicalization of its Uyghur followers.

## Introduction

Cultural security is one of the most significant security sectors from the perspective of national minorities. Its importance stems from the importance of national culture and a sense of separate identity for their survival and functioning, for a threat to the cultural heritage and identity of a minority group is tantamount to a threat to its continued existence. The subject of interest in this paper is the Uyghur minority living in the Xinjiang region of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The minority numbers about 10 million and also constitutes a religious minority in the country. The main objective of this article is to analyze the cultural security status of the Uyghur minority. Hence, the primary research method used is a case study.

The literature on the Uyghurs' situation is relatively affluent, primarily in English, Turkish, and Russian. However, in Poland, the Uyghur subject has not received much attention, although some interesting studies have appeared [E.g., 1-5]. The development of the situation in Xinjiang and the role of this province in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (Yi dai Yi lu)

will probably lead to greater interest in the subject in Poland in the future. However, there is no text on the cultural security of the Uyghur minority among the existing studies. The author intends to fill this gap at least to some extent. Due to the limited size of the text, the Uyghurs' history has been presented minimally and omitting the analysis of the Sino-Uyghur conflict and other threats to Uyghur security (e.g., social, health). It was also impossible to provide even a brief overview of the endogenous and exogenous determinants of Uyghur cultural security. Instead, it was decided to focus on the analysis of the most severe threats to that security.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the article consists of three substantive parts. The first one introduces the definitional and methodological issues and defines the main hypotheses. In the second part, the Uyghur minority in the People's Republic of China, the subject of interest, is characterized. In the last one, the most relevant current threats to the Uyghurs' cultural security are discussed.

## 1. Definitional and methodological issues

Cultural security belongs to the non-military security sectors and is analysed primarily in the context of state security. Cultural security of the state refers to two fundamental categories – cultural identification and cultural heritage (tangible and intangible). It is a state of existence of conditions for preserving (cultural) identity and the development of cultural heritage. That has to be confronted with the challenges posed by an essentially changing international environment that affects the state. Increasingly, cultural security is also analysed about social groups. Such groups include national and ethnic minorities. Cultural security for national and ethnic minorities can be defined as "a state in which they can consolidate their ethnic identity and distinctiveness, as well as cultivate and develop their cultural heritage (tangible and intangible). Simultaneously, they can draw on the cultural heritage of other ethnic groups, including the majority group in their state of residence, not only without detriment to their own culture but enriching it as a result" [6, p. 35]. The essence of cultural security is to preserve a group's identity and sense of distinctiveness and protect and develop its heritage. Several factors, internal concerning the "national condition" and the functioning of a given minority and external ones, influence the realisation of goals defined that way. The former includes, among others, demographic factors (population, density of residence, age structure, birth rate), internal differentiation of the group (social, economic stratification, political, linguistic, religious divisions, and so forth), the minority members' education level, the degree of institutionalisation of national life, and the degree of minority members' national awareness. The latter include, among others, the policy of the state of residence towards minorities, the proximity of the home state and its policy towards "its" minorities, migration, the interest of international organisations and international opinion in the situation of a given minority group, and climatic and ecological changes in the region inhabited by the minority [6, p. 36-39]. The scope of influence and importance of individual factors change over time; moreover, in the case of some of them, we can speak of both positive and negative influence.

Among the determinants of minority cultural security, the process of securitization stands out. The concept of securitization is related to the process of constructing threats. The securitizing actor, addressing the recipients of his/her message, presents a given issue as a threat to security and postulates introducing unique solutions that would eliminate that threat. It does not matter whether the actor's version corresponds to reality. The essential thing is that the recipients of the message believe that it is so. Then the above-mentioned extraordinary

solutions will be introduced. In the process of securitization of national and ethnic minorities, it is they who are presented as a source of threat to entities or phenomena, the catalogue of which can be extensive (e.g., survival of the state, culture and national identity) [7, p. 364-367, 369-371]. The very definition of a minority in the category of threat affects its situation, and the introduction of emergency measures has a multifaceted impact on its fate and can be highly disadvantageous for it, thereby resulting in displacement.

The paper is supposed to verify two research hypotheses. The first one assumes that there is a severe threat to the cultural security of the Uyghurs living in the People's Republic of China, and it has become apparent in recent years. Nowadays, there is an increase in the significance of factors that negatively impact culture and identity, i.e., on the pillars of cultural security. At the same time, there has been a decline in the importance of factors that previously stabilised the situation of the Uyghur population and determined its coherent character. The second hypothesis assumes that the factors that currently pose the greatest threat to the cultural security of the Uyghurs are exogenous. Such posed hypotheses require an answer, first of all, to the fundamental question: how can the state of cultural security of the Uyghur minority be currently determined? Thereby, some specific research questions must be responded: What socio-economic processes occurring in Xinjiang today have the most considerable impact on the Uyghur minority's cultural security level? Is there an intensified destruction of the Uyghur cultural heritage? Are there any factors limiting the Uyghurs' ability to participate in their culture and its creation? What role does Islam, the foundation of Uyghur culture and distinctiveness, play in defining the Uyghur identity? Finally: is there a danger that intergenerational cultural transmission among the Uyghur minority may be interrupted? The need to answer these questions is reflected in the structure of the article.

## 2. The Uyghur minority in the People's Republic of China

The Uyghurs belong to the Turkic peoples and are related to Turks and Turkic peoples living in Central Asia and Siberia. Like them, they also profess Islam [4, p. 171], and the most popular among them is the liberal Sunni Hanafi school. The Uyghur language is usually written in the Arabic alphabet in Persian script [3, p. 3]. They have had episodes of statehood in their centuries-long history, but maintaining their independence was not helped by the location of their homeland between two imperialist powers, China and Russia/Soviet [1, p. 294-305]. After the civil war in China ended and the Communists seized power, the government in Beijing included East Turkestan, inhabited by the Uyghurs, within its borders once again. Nevertheless, guerrilla fighting continued there until the early 1950s. To this day, it is in this region that the vast majority of Uyghurs reside and constitute the indigenous population here [4, p. 171-172]. The part of the Chinese state called Xinjiang (New Frontier, New Territories) by the Chinese is the largest region of the PRC, covering about 17% of its area but relatively sparsely populated. It is an area of geostrategic importance for China, among other things, since it borders eight countries[1] and is rich in deposits of raw materials such as natural gas, coal, and oil [5, p. 356-357]. It also plays a fundamental role in the currently promoted Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, which seems to be one of the most significant determinants of Beijing's policy towards the Uyghurs.

Many international and domestic factors influence the viability and escalation of the Uyghur-Chinese conflict [3, p. 8-14; 5, p. 341-347]. Among them, there are also cultural factors,

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[1]  With Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, India, and Pakistan.

such as religious differences, or rather the clash between atheistic ideology and religious worldview. According to some authors, Islam is the main factor behind Uyghur separatism [4, p. 175-179]. The role of religious issues in the Uyghur-Chinese conflict is confirmed by the fact that although the policy of the authorities in Beijing towards the Uyghur minority has changed over the decades, it has always been linked to the policy towards Islam. Meanwhile, the Beijing government's attitude towards the Islamic religion – as Dilmurat Mahmut notes – has evolved since 1949 from a policy of "'radical intolerance' especially during the 1960s and 1970s to 'controlled tolerance' with 'the relative openness' starting from the early 1980s". The symbol and culmination of this policy of openness were the Regional Autonomy Act of 1984 [8, p. 27]. The act, broadly speaking, regulated the policy of territorial autonomy of national minorities. The subject of autonomy was to be not only an ethnic group but the entire population living in a given area. Unfortunately, in 2001, the law was amended to limit autonomy [4, p. 173-174]. Today, there is no talk of any "relative openness" or "tolerance", neither towards Islam nor the Uyghurs, and the state rhetoric concerning Xinjiang constantly includes the terms "religious extremism" or "Muslim terrorism". It can be seen in the actions taken by the Uyghurs. From the 1990s, they were the perpetrators of several hundred terrorist attacks, and it is also worth remembering that these attacks were often a response to the actions of the Chinese authorities in the autonomous region, including the pacification of Uyghur peace protests. The participation of Uyghur fighters in the Middle East fighting on the side of the Islamic State (ISIS) and the activities of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), recognised as a terrorist organisation in 2002, are also well known [3, p. 7-8; 4, p. 177]. Moving onto the next part of the analysis, it is worth noting that the Uyghurs are not a monolith, and their internal divisions are a product of their social position, the standard of living, life expectations, and level of education. As Ponka, Shlentova and Ivashkevich note, these differences determine the Uyghurs' ethnic consciousness, their attitude to the Chinese state, and the direction of their identification as some of them identify with the Islamic world, some situate the Uyghur minority within the multicultural Chinese society, and some emphasise the Uyghurs' belonging to the Turkish world [9, p. 35]. The historically and geographically but also contemporary conditioned the so-called oasis identity is also worth mentioning. Its essence comes down to loyalty to one's local community. It competes with the Uyghur identity.

## 3. Threats to the Uyghurs' cultural security

### 3.1. Migration, urbanisation, and industrialisation processes in Xinjiang

Migration is one of the most critical challenges to the cultural security of a state, nation, or minority group. Their impact on the ability to protect identity and culture is highly complex and multifaceted. In a minority group, emigration must deplete an already smaller group of users and creators of minority culture. On the other hand, immigration into minority areas of people representing the majority culture contributes to a change in the ethnic structure and the gradual marginalisation of the minority culture. Systematic and mass-scale resettlement by state authorities is generally aimed at changing the cultural and social landscape of a given region in the direction desired by the state, which is usually the gradual domination of the majority population and culture. Migration is facilitated by the urbanisation processes and industrialisation, which involve the movement of the population and a change in lifestyle and a rotation in the value system of the indigenous inhabitants of a region.

The Uyghurs were the dominant ethnic group in Xinjiang in the late 1940s. In the ethnic structure of the region, they accounted for 90% of the population at that time. However, these

proportions changed over the years. The number of Han Chinese in the population structure grew dynamically, and by the end of the 1970s, it reached just over 40% of the population. That can be reasoned by the increased migration of Han to Xinjiang from the 1950s onwards [10, p. 3-5]. That was because, despite its inland location, the region was one of the most popular destinations for internal migration in the People's Republic of China over the years. In the initial phase, it resulted from the systematic and organised actions of the authorities in Beijing. They aimed to populate the province with Han Chinese, who constituted the workforce there (peasants, workers, specialists) and were instruments of control (militia persons). Over time, the state ceased to control migration flows to Xinjiang, although it supported and encouraged Chinese migrants to settle in the province. As it turned out, it remained an attractive destination for internal migration, mainly due to the search for better wages and surplus labour in other provinces [11, p. 122]. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there were also fluctuations in the scale of Han inflows to Xinjiang. For example, in 2010, after the events in Urumqi, there was an outflow of Han people of a noticeable scale. It is also estimated that between 2015 and 2018, there was a decline in the number of Chinese by more than 800,000. In 2018, their share in the population structure of Xinjiang fell to 31% [10, p. 3-5].

However, the reasons for that decline should be sought not only in migration processes, i.e., the already mentioned waves of Han population outflows but also in the structure of natural growth. In the case of the Uyghurs, it was one of the highest in the country. In the districts inhabited by this minority, the population growth rates exceeded the national average and Xinjiang average. The trend was particularly evident in areas of Uyghur population residence. Between 2005 and 2015, the annual growth of the Uyghur population was 2.6 times higher than that of the Han population living in Xinjiang. The concerned Chinese pointed to the threats the phenomenon posed to national security, attributing the cause to the Uyghurs' religious beliefs and radicalisation. According to the Chinese, the increase in the birth rate among that ethnic group was the effect of the growth of fundamentalist sentiments and the growing popularity of religious extremism [10, p. 5-7].

The mass mentioned above and largely state-controlled Han migration into Xinjiang resulted in drastic changes in the ethnic structure of the region and an increase in its population. Nearly 25 million people now inhabit it. According to the trend noticed in statistics, the number of inhabitants of the region is systematically growing [12]. There is also a systematic increase in the number of urban residents at the expense of rural areas. While in 2010, the percentage of the urban population in Xinjiang was 43%, nine years later, in 2019, it exceeded 50% [13]. It is a phenomenon worth noting from the perspective of the situation of the Uyghur population, which, after all, resides primarily in the countryside in contrast to the Han Chinese, who dominate the large cities. Moreover, in the future, it means the risk of the Uyghurs' rapid assimilation, which their dispersion will facilitate in large urban areas. It should also be borne in mind that there is a dynamic increase in the population of the cities in the north of the province – Urumqi, Karamay, and Shihezi, where Chinese immigrants mostly headed. Settlements were built there for immigrants from other parts of China, and the state policy was aimed at the economic development of the north of Xinjiang. The effect was to widen the inequality between the north and south of the region. Moreover, the effect of northward-directed mass migration in Xinjiang was to significantly alter the distribution of the population in the autonomous region. While in 1949, 75% of its population lived in the south, the demographic centre has now shifted northwards. Furthermore, and worth emphasising, those arriving in Han province generally had minimal or no contact with the Uyghur population that was concentrated in southern Xinjiang for a very long time [11, p. 123-124].

Migration processes have also resulted in a change in the Uyghurs' distribution. While migration among them was rare until the 1970s, with economic changes, there was an increase in the number of Uyghur migrants. They began to move from rural to urban areas and from the south of Xinjiang to the more economically developed north. The cause of that was mainly the economic disparity between Han and Uyghurs. The latter's income was around 70% of the national average in the 1990s, and in 1993, for example, the income of Uighur peasants was just over 700 yuan, while that of Han living in Xinjiang was over 2,600 yuan. The local government also encouraged the Uyghurs o migrate [11, p. 124].

Finally, the problem of Uyghur emigration outside Xinjiang to China proper is worth highlighting. The Uyghurs leaving the province often head for large Chinese cities located on the east coast, i.e., the economically more developed part of the Chinese state. They do not constitute a homogeneous group and differ, among other things, in their knowledge of Mandarin and Uyghur languages and their level of education. In China proper, a significant proportion of them is affected by problems, such as social marginalisation, serious health problems with a high percentage of HIV infections, lack of access to health care, discrimination in the housing market, addictions, including drug addictions, negative stereotypes and prejudices from the Han side. According to the Uyghurs, they are often treated as second-class citizens there, and they feel that way [14, p. 47-49].

Another direction of Uyghur migration is abroad. The Uyghurs head for Central Asian countries, North America, the Middle East, Europe, and Turkey [3, p. 5]. They are linked by cultural proximity with the latter country. There is already a large, well-organised Uyghur diaspora in Turkey [15, p. 1-11].

## 3.2. Processes of destruction and commercialization of Uyghur cultural heritage

The threat of irreversible loss of cultural heritage and limited opportunities for its development and cultivation belongs to the most significant threats to the cultural security of any nation and state. It, even more, concerns the situation of minorities. In the case of the Uyghurs, the culture is very different from the Chinese one in every respect, and at the same time strongly associated with Islam, namely, a religion that the authorities in Beijing perceive as a threat and a driving force for extremism and terrorism [8, p. 25].

In recent years, especially after 2014, the autonomous region has seen a considerable loss of tangible and intangible cultural assets (see further below). Moreover, there is a process of commercialization of Uyghur cultural heritage and alienation of its components. It is unknown, alien, and unattractive for the "new" inhabitants of the Uyghur homeland. It seems that it is gradually becoming so also for the next generations of the Uyghurs, dispersed among the Han Chinese. These phenomena are primarily the result of Chinese state policies – ethnic, cultural, Islamic, security, and economic – as well as the socio-economic processes that are taking place in Xinjiang.

As Rachel Harris, an Uyghur culture researcher, notes, thousands of mosques and secular shrines have been destroyed, along with their furnishings, including those on national or local heritage lists, since 2016. Key religious sites are preserved but *de facto* more tourist attractions due to restrictions on Muslim religious rights [16]. Some have been transformed into secular objects, with, e.g. museums, catering establishments placed in them [17, p. 71-72]. Muslim cemeteries, including historical ones of great importance for the history and tradition of the Uyghurs, are destroyed as well. In their place, new residential neighbourhoods are appearing along with the entire infrastructure. Rachel Harris described the demolition of sacred

architecture as a "policy of erasing Uyghur cultural memory" [16]. Besides, commercialization and alienation of cultural heritage are taking place. It is exemplified by the fate of the *Uyghur Muqam* arts (a collection of songs, dances, folk and classical music) and the *Meshrep* ceremonies (a collection of traditional customs and performances such as artistic performances, acrobatics, oral transmissions of literature, culinary practices and games, which is one of the most important vehicles of Uyghur cultural traditions). Both sites are on the prestigious UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. They were inscribed on it at the initiative of the People's Republic of China in 2008 and 2010, respectively [18]. Inscribing a site on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List is intended to facilitate its protection and promotion, and the state – initiator of the inscription, undertakes to take measures to achieve these goals. Meanwhile, in the case of *Uyghur Muqam* and *Meshrep*, there is a process of separation from Uyghur culture towards commercialization, with the approval of the Chinese authorities. As a result, the sites mentioned above have now become more a product of the cultural industry, stagings created for tourists and international promotion of Chinese culture than authentic *Uyghur Muqam* and *Meshrep* [16].

The changes in the cultural landscape of Kashgar serve as an excellent example of the loss of cultural heritage and its commercialisation and alienation. It is a city with a long and rich history and the cradle of Uyghur culture. Not only is it home to a large number of Muslim shrines, but it also boasts a unique Old City, the importance of which for the identity of the Uyghurs increased even more during the so-called Cultural Revolution. Then, in the face of the destruction of the material culture of the Uyghur minority, Kashgar's Old City, with its remarkable architecture, became a symbol of the survival of that people's culture, history and achievements, and a bastion of their lifestyle described as "communal-religious-cultural". Historian Georg Mitchell called Kashgar "the best-preserved example of a traditional Islamic city to be found anywhere in Central Asia" [19, p. 9-14]. The Chinese authorities had introduced architectural changes in Kashgar even before 2001, but they concerned specific buildings and were carried out relatively slowly. On the other hand, those introduced after 2014 were characterised by momentum and a breakneck pace of implementation. The reconstruction of Kashgar's Old City was realised at lightning speed – the old, dilapidated buildings were immediately replaced by new ones, employing technologies commonly used in China today. A suitably matched terracotta colour is now replacing the unusual and natural colour of the clay bricks[2]. The final product has little in common with the destroyed prototype. However, as part of the city redevelopment, many historic buildings, many of them religious and residential buildings inhabited by the Uyghurs, were destroyed. It is estimated that between 85 and 90 per cent of the previous inhabitants were displaced from the reconstructed Old City. The former unique food and service outlets, bazaar, shops, etc., were replaced by elegant restaurants and boutiques, souvenir shops, and so forth [19, p. 19-39]. The largely depopulated Old Town should be seen today as a product of the culture industry, aimed at attracting tourists, rather than an authentic testimony of the Uyghur culture [16].

### 3.3. The situation of language and education
#### A threat to intergenerational cultural transgression

Language is the primary carrier of culture, the key to understanding its essence, the bridge between the achievements of past and future generations, and the material used by the creators of culture. As the number of speakers of a national language decreases, the scope

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[2]   A distinctive feature of the buildings in Kashgar was the colour of the clay bricks from which they were built.

of cultural heritage, the possibility of development, and intergenerational transmission becomes limited. The main tool for protecting a given language is the possibility of using it in public and private life and educating people with it. Restrictions in this area also threaten the intergenerational transmission of culture. The disruption of the process of transmitting cultural heritage to the next generation is one of the most severe challenges to the cultural security of minority groups.

The Uyghurs' inadequate knowledge of Mandarin was why the authorities introduced a model of language education in Xinjiang, called "bilingual education". Uyghur children were to speak both their mother tongue, Uyghur, and Mandarin. Over time, however, the state language has become dominant in this model, while Uyghur has become increasingly marginalised and is increasingly taught as a separate subject. Children enter the education system at an ever-lower level of education [17, p. 10]. It is also pointed out that funding for Uyghur language education is being reduced, and its development is not fostered by the widespread presence of Mandarin in the official life of the region. When parents choose the educational path for their children, they are guided either by cultural-identity issues or pragmatism. In the first case, the possibility of preserving culture and identity is decisive for them; in the other one, better job prospects for their children in the future are essential [20, p. 432].

In the context of threats to Uyghur culture, boarding schools and orphanages are worth mentioning, especially from the perspective of its transferability to future generations. The network of boarding schools and orphanages is constantly expanding, and Uyghur children from kindergarten to high school age are placed there. These are often children whose parents are in the so-called re-education camps. In those schools, young Uyghurs are "immersed in Chinese culture and language". Because of their age, they are very susceptible to the assimilation process [21, p. 12; 22, p. 19]. In addition, the government is also implementing a program to send Uyghur students to study inland [21, p. 12]. The repression and harassment against the Uyghur intellectual elite is also a vital aspect in this context. Uyghur scientists, writers, teachers, artists, clergy, etc., are interned in detention camps, isolated, dismissed from their jobs, and censored. That is because they play the role of knowledge holders about Uyghur culture and its creators in the Uyghur community [21, p. 10]. Therefore, they are a critical element in the intergenerational transmission of that culture[3]. In a publication published a few years ago, Joanna Wardęga called them "engineers of the nation", stating that they have "the greatest opportunity to strengthen Uyghur identity" [23, p. 209].

Another means of promoting the Mandarin language is the network of evening schools, which has been proliferating since 2016. The adult, rural, Muslim population learn Mandarin and is also introduced to government policies in them. Such schools are to be eventually established in every village to combat "backwardness and ignorance" [17, p. 69]. Moreover, Mandarin is learnt intensely among the primary instruments of "re-education" in the detention camps where many Uyghurs have found themselves. The use of the Uyghur language has been banned there [21, p. 9; 22, p. 12].

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[3] Prominent Uyghur intellectuals who have met such a fate include Peking University economist Prof. Ilham Tohti, anthropologist and expert on Uyghur traditions and folklore Rahile Dawut, journalist and editor of one of Xinjiang's leading state-run magazines Qurban Mamut, desert climate expert and president of Xinjiang University Tashpolat Tiyip, comedian Adil Mijit, singer Sanubar Tursun, and the late Professor of Literature Abdukerim Rahman. Desert climate expert and president of Xinjiang University Tashpolat Tiyip, comedian Adil Mijit, singer Sanubar Tursun, literature professors Abdukerim Rahman, Azat Sultan.

The cause of the progressive marginalization of the Uyghur language should also be sought in the socio-economic changes in Xinjiang. As a result, the Uyghurs must have the same education as the Chinese do to have the same chances on the job market in their home region as Chinese immigrants. However, only schools with Chinese as the language of instruction allow for that. Besides, significantly, university education in Xinjiang is carried out in Mandarin [9, p. 37-38]. Thus, the prospects for education in the Uyghur language look hazy. As Turkish researcher Ayşe Çiçek notes, the Uyghur minority's natural need and right to be educated in their language conflicts with the Beijing authorities' efforts to unify society, including through standardization of education [20, p. 431]. As already mentioned, the current educational system abandons bilingual teaching, which, according to that author, lowers the position of the Uyghur language, hinders the development of Uyghur cultural life and literature in the long run, and narrows the areas of use of the Uyghur language [20, p. 432], just as it limits the number of Uyghur speakers of the language.

The demographic changes that have been taking place among the Uyghur minority in recent years are also a threat to intergenerational cultural transmission. These are primarily related to the "birth control" policy implemented in Xinjiang. Prior to 2015, it was a common practice among Uyghurs, especially those living in rural areas, to exceed the permitted limit of children. State control was, for various reasons, not strict, and "caught culprits" paid a fine[4] [10, p. 10]. The idea of taking stricter measures in family planning policies implemented for the Uyghur minority came after 2014 saw the highest birth rate in Xinjiang since 2000, with Uyghur-inhabited areas leading the way. As mentioned earlier, the reasons for the high birth rate were seen as the strengthening of religion and the spread of extremist ideologies among Xinjiang's Muslims. That was considered an unfavourable and even dangerous phenomenon that should be combated. One of the first steps to reduce the birth rate among Uyghurs was to diagnose the scale of violations of the number of children they had. The next one was to tighten the penalties for exceeding the limits. Other preventive measures were also introduced, including widespread and forced contraception, as well as forced sterilization. Forced abortions also occurred [10, p. 11; 22, p. 18-19]. The taken measures have an effect as evidenced by changes in the birth rate in Xinjiang, which dropped dramatically after their introduction. That was most noticeable in the countryside [10, p. 7-9]. It is evident that such a sharp and largely forced decline in the birth rate of Uyghur children is not positive for the future of the minority group.

Furthermore, it should be borne in mind the adverse impact of negative stereotypes about the Uyghurs still alive in Chinese society. The Uighur minority is regarded as backward and uneducated and treated as an "element of folk culture". Modernity and modernization are associated with the urban environment and Han culture. As Dilmurat Mahmut notes, education is knowledge of the Mandarin language and the tenets of Confucianism for a Chinese person. Thus, from such a perspective, the Uyghurs have little chance of changing negative stereotypes about themselves and are perceived as lacking culture and "uncivilized" [8, p. 33]. Negative stereotypes also affect the sense of identity. Often those who are better educated, such as students, are ashamed of their ethnicity [14, p. 49].

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[4] Noteworthy, under the law, the child limit was higher in rural areas than in urban areas; it was also higher for minorities than for Han Chinese. After 2015, this practice was changed by equalizing the limit for minorities and for Han, which was related to the move away from the "one-child policy".

### 3.4. China's policy towards Islam
### Religious radicalisation of the Uyghur and securitisation of Muslims
### as a challenge to the cultural security of the Uyghur minority

As already mentioned, Islam is one of the foundations of Uyghur identity and a fundamental component of Uyghur tangible and intangible heritage. Religious architecture, religious festivals, and places of pilgrimage have "always" been an integral part of the cultural landscape of Xinjiang. Religious education was an integral part of education [16]. The policy of relative openness mentioned above, symbolised by the 1984 law, allowed for private Uyghur religious education, tolerated until the last decade of the last century, and the construction of Islamic shrines. The situation changed drastically after the attacks of September 11, 2001 [8, p. 25]. It is worth noting that with the massive influx of Chinese into Xinjiang, the Uyghurs began to accentuate cultural differences, including religious ones, to emphasise ethnic distinctiveness vis-à-vis the Han and avoid "blurring" among the newcomers [9, p. 36]. Thus, Islam is the primary way to manifest their distinctiveness and the existence of the Uyghur minority [9, p. 39].

As previously mentioned, many religious sites in Xinjiang were destroyed after 2016. At the same time, the eradication of Islam from social life is progressing. For example, minors are not allowed to participate in religious practices, cannot attend religious schools, their parents are not allowed to teach them Islamic principles, and are forbidden to give their children Islamic names. Besides, practices such as, among others, fasting, praying, wearing beards, abstinence, wearing religious symbols, and making pilgrimages to Islamic holy places have become suspect [8, p. 27-29]. The Uyghurs and other Muslims are sent to re-education camps to cultivate these practices and violate the prohibitions mentioned earlier [8, p. 28; 22, p. 13]. What is more, it is forbidden to study Islam at foreign universities [8, p. 29]. Social customs related to religion have also become an object of interest for the authorities, and, in addition, the Uyghurs are pressured to observe Han holidays and traditions, such as New Year's Day, or their tradition are strongly interfered with [17, p. 72-73; 24]. Even traditional greetings of a religious nature are not allowed [17, p. 73]. Scholars of the Uyghur minority describe the authorities' restrictions concerning religion as a de facto outlawing of Islam [17, p. 71].

The securitisation of Islam and its followers and their actual and potential radicalisation pose a severe problem from the perspective of the cultural security of the Uyghur minority in the People's Republic of China. The fact is that after the end of the last century, the number of mosques in the autonomous region increased several times, pilgrimages to Mecca became more popular, and the Uyghurs gained more or less legal access to Islamic literature, including radical one. That period also marked the beginning of Uyghur terrorist activity [2, p. 153]. Initially, terrorist attacks took place only in the Xinjiang area, but already in 1997, there was a bomb attack on a bus in Beijing. Another terrorist attack organised outside the province – in 2014 in Kunming – also reverberated loudly. Twenty-nine people were murdered there by knifemen. The perpetrators of terrorist attacks are both Uyghur nationalists and people associated with religious extremism. Radicalism is also not alien to some Uyghur organisations [23, p. 207-208]. The best-known Uyghur extremist group is the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which the United States has recognised as a terrorist organisation[5]. It has been linked to radical Islamists in the Near and Middle East, including al-Qaeda. A manifestation of Uyghur radicalisation is also their fighting in the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq [2, p. 155-156]. The presence among the Uyghurs of adherents of radical Islam and

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[5]  In 2020, the US authorities removed (ETIM) from the list of terrorist organisations, explaining this step, among other things, by doubts about whether the Movement still exists.

nationalists seeking the secession of Xinjiang from the PRC is undeniably an indisputable fact, which is additionally used by the Chinese authorities as proof of the accuracy of the theses on the terrorist and separatist aspirations of the Uyghur minority. Those theses are an essential part of the securitising process of the Uyghur minority.

The breakthrough for the securitisation of Islam and the Uyghur minority was in 2001. After 9/11, the Beijing authorities began to portray Muslims as terrorists. Phrases about the threat of Uyghur terrorism appeared in the rhetoric of the Chinese government while taking advantage of the rise in anti-Islamic sentiment and the actions of other countries to combat Islamic extremism. "Uyghur separatism" has become synonymous with "Uyghur terrorism" and Islam with violence and extremism. There has been a synonymisation of Uyghur Muslims and terrorists. That perspective also began to dominate the state mass media [8, p. 25-27]. The thesis of the alleged vulnerability of the Uyghurs to the "three evils: separatism, terrorism, and extremism" began to be promoted [9, p. 39]. Thus, the Uyghurs became seen as a community of Islamic terrorists and separatists, threatening the People's Republic of China and its security. They have even come as a "biological threat", and as such, they are presented to the Chinese public [8, p. 29]. Although a securitisation process has been ongoing there, it does precisely take a classical form because China is not a democracy, and it appears impossible to determine what de facto the reception of such a message among citizens is. Nevertheless, in their role as a securitising actor, the Chinese authorities present the Muslim Uyghurs as a threat to the security of the People's Republic of China and its people due to their radical religious views and their desire to separate Xinjiang from China. There is a theme of confrontation in the authorities' narrative – "us" versus "them" (the Uyghurs). In such a situation, as Dilmurat Mahmut points out, the ethnic (Uyghur) and religious (Muslim) identity of the Uyghurs is attacked and questioned, which becomes China's focus in the fight against "terrorism" [8, p. 25] The authorities are taking extraordinary measures to combat "religious fanaticism" and Uyghur separatism to prevent that danger.

The so-called re-education camps are examples of such measures. Human rights activists have drawn attention to the alarming number of Uyghurs sent to these camps, which is currently estimated at between 1.5 million and almost 2 million adult members of the Uyghur minority. They also point out, among other things, the arbitrariness of the decision to place a person in these camps, the poor conditions for stay, including overcrowding in the cells, the use of detainees for forced labour and the violence used against them [21, p. 9; 22, p. 12]. It is also noted that the detainees are primarily people with a strong sense of ethnoreligious identity, expressed, among other things, by the observance of religious rules. As already mentioned, the use of the Uyghur language is prohibited in the camps. According to Ciara Finnegan, the purpose and result of the Beijing government's actions are to turn adult Uyghurs away from their culture and religion [21, p. 10]. Ditmurat Mahmut includes physical and psychological damage, and loss of identity, dignity and self-respect, among the consequences of the Muslims' stay and their "re-education" [8, p. 28-29]. The Chinese authorities have adopted a different narrative. In their view, their stay in re-education camps is voluntary and aimed at acquiring new professional skills and linguistic competence through, among other things, compulsory Mandarin language learning. They also play a vital role in ideological education. It is also stressed that these camps are an essential part of the strategy to combat Islamic extremism and separatism in the Uyghur Autonomous Region. According to the authorities, detainees are offered the opportunity to "cure a dangerous addiction to religious ideology". Leaving the camp becomes possible when there is a change in the inmate's beliefs and behaviour, i.e., the inmate no longer shows attachment to religion [22, p. 13-15].

The implications of the Uyghur minority's securitisation are multifaceted. First and foremost, however, it justifies the use of "emergency" solutions as well as the qualification of the Uyghurs' religious and national activity, which is generally far from the extremist – "terrorist" and "dangerous" – behaviour. It also stimulates the negative attitude of the Uyghurs towards the Chinese state and fuels the ethnic conflict between Han and Uyghurs. It is also often seen as one reason for the radicalisation of the Uyghur population as a voice against Beijing's policies [8, p. 29]. In turn, the Chinese authorities are convinced that limiting the knowledge of Islam among young Uyghurs is supposed to prevent their radicalisation. However, as researchers of that issue have emphasised, the opposite may happen in practice. Young people with minimal and superficial knowledge of their religion may become easy prey for radical Muslim organisations offering an interpretation of Islam that is not in line with reality [8, p. 35].

Meanwhile, the religious radicalisation of the Uyghur minority poses a considerable threat to its cultural security. As already mentioned, a liberal variant of Islam is widespread among the Uyghurs and is the foundation of their identity and cultural heritage. In the long term, the rise in popularity of fundamentalist currents of Islam among the Uyghur population may result in the alienation of components of Uyghur culture not only in Xinjiang but among the Uyghurs. Moreover, the orientation towards the world of Islam, probably its fundamentalist current, resulting from religious radicalisation, may, for a small group, result in the domination of ethnic identity by religious identity and a 'blurring' of the pan-Islamic identity. Nevertheless, as practice shows, Islamic states, with few exceptions, do not stand up for the Uyghurs at all. Finally, radicalisation makes it easier for the Chinese authorities to securitise the Uighur minority and justify the introduction of successive emergency measures that strike at Uyghur culture and identity.

## Conclusion

The Uyghurs are a minority community in the People's Republic of China. Both within it and in its external environment, processes are taking place, more or less spontaneously, which impact its identity and culture. Some of them are controlled from the top-down; others would probably occur, although on a smaller scale and without the authorities' interference. The text has verified the initial hypothesis, which confirmed that the Uyghurs are currently facing severe threats to their cultural security. These include threats in the field of education and the use of the Uyghur language, intergenerational cultural transmission, destruction of cultural heritage and the alienation of its components, the forced secularisation of the Uyghur population and, at the same time, the radicalisation of part of it; threats resulting from migration processes as well as modernisation; and securitisation of Islam. However, these threats are primarily the result of processes outside the Uyghur population. Firstly, they are related to global changes, such as the rise of radical currents in Islam and the emergence of influential Islamic terrorist organisations. Secondly, changes taking place in the Middle Kingdom, namely socio-economic processes and the Beijing government's policy towards the Uyghurs and the region they inhabit. Such policy is the result of policies closely related to ethnic and religious minorities and foreign policy and security policy due to the geostrategic importance of Xinjiang for China. The factors are beyond the Uyghurs' control, and they do not have the means to mitigate their negative impact. It determines the very disadvantageous position of the minority. It will be increasingly challenging for them to protect their identity and cultural heritage. In the current situation, it is also de facto impossible to develop Uyghur culture and draw safely on the culture of the titular nation without harming Uyghur culture. In other words, the conditions for preserving the cultural security of the Uyghurs do not currently exist.

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**Bezpieczeństwo kulturowe mniejszości w zagrożeniu**
**Sytuacja Ujgurów w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej**

**STRESZCZENIE**   Głównym celem artykułu jest dokonanie analizy stanu bezpieczeństwa kulturowego mniejszości ujgurskiej. Ze względu na fundamentalne znaczenie tożsamości i kultury dla funkcjonowania mniejszości narodowych, należy ono z ich perspektywy do najważniejszych sektorów bezpieczeństwa, zwłaszcza, że istnieje cała gama zagrożeń tegoż bezpieczeństwa. W tekście zastosowano metodę studium przypadku, a jako przykład wybrano sytuację mniejszości ujgurskiej w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej. W kolejnych częściach opracowania zdefiniowano pojęcia stosowane w artykule, scharakteryzowano mniejszość ujgurską oraz wskazano na najistotniejsze zagrożenia dla jej bezpieczeństwa kulturowego. Do tych zaliczono procesy migracyjne wraz z towarzyszącymi im procesami urbanizacji i industrializacji, niszczenie dziedzictwa kulturowego, zagrożenia w obszarze kultury i edukacji oraz zagrożenia związane z polityką państwa wobec islamu oraz potencjalną radykalizacją jego ujgurskich wyznawców.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE**   bezpieczeństwo kulturowe, Ujgurzy, Chiny, sekurytyzacja

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