

Analysis on ICCAs in the Region of Xinjiang

(Summary version in English)

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Xinjiang is part of Chinese territory and is the largest province, with an area of more than 1.6 million square kilometres, which accounts for about one-sixth of China's total land area. It has a unique and rich natural and cultural landscape and is very culturally diverse. Historically, Xinjiang is the intersection of many ethnic groups, at present, a total of 49 ethnic groups live in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, of which 13 are native peoples.

1. Basic Condition of ICCAs in Xinjiang

As in other parts of China, ICCAs (territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities) in Xinjiang are faced with a deficiency in legal and policy provisions, this is universal in China as a whole. As a result of the vast and rich ethnic and ecological diversity of ICCAs in Xinjiang, their characteristics can be listed as: wide-spread distribution; ecodiversity; ethnically very mixed; an extensive range of ecological ethics and cultural governance; and mixed habitation with Han Chinese and others.

At the same time, ICCAs in Xinjiang are also confronted by many threats and challenges, which arise mainly from external and internal factors, such as **unsustainable uses of natural resources, community fracture caused by ecological migration, conflicts with natural protected areas and identity crises.**

In Xinjiang *de facto* ICCAs still exist and comprise of the community managed natural resources including forests, pasture, mountains, etc, in the areas of Altay district of Xinjiang, North part of Xinjiang as well as South part of Xinjiang. Their key features are showcasing mainly in the following: 1) clear defined territories; 2) effective and spirit-attached governance (governance in which worldly and spiritually perspectives coexist); 3) indigenous wisdom and knowledge able to play role in sustainable results of natural and cultural protection and development ; 4) community vitality and cohesion; 5) cultural and psychological identity. The concept of "ICCA de facto" in the indigenous context of Xinjiang sheds light on unique local interpretations from place to place that—however-- possess the above characteristics in common.

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2. Local Case Studies

Altogether, Xinjiang has 49 ethnic groups, of which 13 are native peoples. This report mainly focuses on a discussion of the Tuva, Uyghur and Kazakh ethnic groups but, to some extent, they are representative of the basic condition, predicament and governance model of all ICCAs in Xinjiang.

2.1 The Tuvans

Tuvan people were ancient hunters and nomads and their history can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. Nowadays, Tuvan people are scattered throughout Xinjiang in China, Outer Mongolia and the Republic of Tuva. Chinese Tuvans live mainly in three villages: Kanas, Hemu and Baihaba. Currently, Chinese Tuvan Lamaist beliefs are integrated into their naturalistic worldview with its system of nature worship and various ecological and life taboos. These are clearly visible in their rituals and everyday life, and affect their perception of, and dealings with, the relationship between man and nature. Although Tuvan people live around forests which are abundant in forest resources, they **never use living trees for the construction of housing** but only trees that have fallen naturally. **Animism, shamanism and nature worship** are the motivating factors for Tuvan people to live in harmony with nature, water, forest and mountain. Worship of these elements manifests not only in daily life but also in **ritual practices**, the **wellbeing of humans remains strongly connected to that of nature and animals as a whole.**

Tuvan leaders, through daily life practices and ceremonies or festivals, educate young people to be fully involved in nature worship and shamanism in a manner that is different from traditional school education. Through a body of practice they learn about and perceive the close relationship between man and nature. In this way, 'natural relations' are established between humans and nature, animals and spiritual beings. The ecological perspectives of the Tuvans are reflected in **taboos**, children are educated to abide by natural rules without breaching taboos, they are taught **not to harm plants and animals** and to live in harmony with their own well-being and happiness. Examples are: the belief that pock marks will appear on the face if bird eggs are broken; contracting the 'maladie des tics' if a living tree is cut down. With respect to harvesting natural resources, Tuvan people strictly observe the following taboos. Firstly, **no immature material is to be collected**. Secondly, there should be **no extensive or deep digging into the earth**. Thirdly, there should be **no repeat collections in the same location**. Fourthly, **no tree branches should be broken** while collecting resources. In addition, Tuvan people utilize a variety of **annual ceremonies and rituals** to educate youngsters on how to deal with the relationship between humans and nature as

well as giving them an insight into shamanism and nature worship.

2.2 The Uyghurs

The Uyghurs are mainly distributed in southern and northern Xinjiang and their activities are dominated by agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as commercial activities. These activities are scattered around oases, grassland, mountains, deserts and so forth, and give rise to the unique ecological ethics and outlook of the Uyghurs. They pay special attention to housing design and the beautification of the environment in which they live, and treat water as sacred as well as a symbol of happiness and prosperity. As a result, the protection of nature has become part of their daily habits and high moral qualities. Taboos play a crucial role in self-discipline in the Uyghur people's daily lives. These taboos concern prohibitions on destroying forests and the environment and deeply influence Uyghur behaviour accordingly. On a daily basis, people follow the principle of revering forest, grassland, water, fire and animals. If they don't, they are punished socially and psychologically. In the same communities, people tend to accept responsibility for one another and, therefore, there is less poaching, deforestation, pollution of the environment or destruction of grassland than in other communities. Rules for upholding these taboos are symbolic rather than a real punishment, they act more as a form of supervision and prevention and also utilise collective penalties.

2.3 The Kazakhs

Kazakhs mainly live in northern Xinjiang and rely on animal grazing, agriculture and business. Relative to the Uyghurs, Kazakhs are more mobility-oriented. From a faith perspective, as Uyghur the Kazakhs follow the beliefs of Islam. In the vast realm of Kazakh literature, there are a large number of proverbs related to taboos and regulations covering environmental protection. When elders explain about taboos to children, they always associate them with human life, so as to raise awareness of the importance of environmental protection, they link suffering from disasters to the violation of taboos. The Kazakh system of grazing is in strict compliance with the principle of a seasonal, rotational grazing system, in this way, humans, nature and animals build a favourable relationship. The Kazakhs attach great importance to children's words and deeds regarding their way of interacting with nature, humans, spirituality and animals. In the past, during holidays, Kazakh children tended to go with the adults to grazing lands. Although the distances travelled and the numbers of grazing livestock are now far smaller than ever before, this scenario often still occurs. In reality, Kazakh children who are exposed to such a nomadic grazing process are experiencing a past life and the closeness of man to nature. During this time, the adults do not preach much about their grazing knowledge, but they let the children participate in the actual processes of grazing.

2.4 Challenges

There are all kinds of problems in the process of self-governance of ICCAs in China, involving systemic, legal and institutional deficiencies, the decline of traditional authority, weaknesses of self-governance as well as community and cultural fracture and so on. In summary, the existing issues of ICCAs in Xinjiang are complex rather than simple, they refer to external and internal pressures as well as many other unexpected factors. Problems with capacity and resources, caused by legal and policy deficiency and ecological migration, impact community cohesion and vitality in a direct way and, especially, impede the sustainable development of the community itself as a whole. Nowadays, support from the Xinjiang Government for ICCAs is only available for cultural and economic purposes, but it fails to address legal and policy issues. This is not only the case in Xinjiang, but is a universal predicament throughout China. In short, the main issues are the lack of legal recognition, a lack of real empowerment and an identity dilemma for ICCAs in Xinjiang.

3. Efforts of Local Community Leaders

Despite the lack of legal and policy recognition and support from the Xinjiang government, the *de facto* existence of ICCAs provides them with the **opportunity to implement strategies of self-governance and environmental protection.** These strategies are drawn from implicit, explicit and indigenous perspectives, and support the attempts of leaders to maximise their advantages and develop their own voice and sense of identity in interactions with government and local interest groups.

Suo Longge is one of these leaders. He is a Tuvan, who not only has his own Tuva Museum, but actively participates in activities to strengthen Tuvan identity and self-governance capabilities by means of educating youngsters at various festivals of Tuvan history and culture. He also plays a key role in Tuvan people's rights claims, as well as drafting applications to rediscover the culture of Tuva. In the applications, he skilfully chooses his words and makes intelligent and thoughtful suggestions to highlight not only to the idea of developing eco-tourism, but also to explain how to revive traditional culture, promote indigenous ecological knowledge, develop the local economy and consolidate community cohesion. While Suo Longge believes in the importance of financial support for cultural renaissance, he also endeavours to achieve a fusion of cultural understanding and appreciation of landscape with the development of eco-tourism. In order to attract attention from the government and emphasise the importance of Tuvan culture to tourism, Suo Longge puts forward the idea that incorporating Tuvan culture into the self-governance of the local environment is beneficial for building harmonious relationships between humans

and tourism. Furthermore, the particular cultural development project of Tuva proposed by Suo Longge, involves many aspects of Tuvan culture including history, oral literature, music, dance, song, handicrafts, snowboards, archery, wrestling, hunting skills and the production of hunting gear and horse racing.

Suo Longge **does not confine himself to just unifying Tuvan village leaders**, he takes pains to include leaders from other scattered settlements as well as those people who have sympathetic feelings towards them. He proposes **seminars** for the purpose of bringing Tuvan leaders together to determine action strategies to be submitted to higher authorities. This unites the leaders, helps them **reach agreement and strengthens their effectiveness** in achieving greater benefits from these higher authorities. The strategy of Tuvan leaders to **make the most of cultural policies supported by higher authorities to fight damage to the local environment and culture from tourism** is clear. The leaders are very competent in dealing with the authorities, local government and local interest groups. To obtain approval for and adoption of applications, Suo Longge also proposes a step by step implementation process.

Suo Longge has also organized and paid for the **First Tuvan Culture Festival**, inviting mass media including TV, newspapers, and experts to participate in a seminar discussion to expose the living, environmental and cultural situation of Tuvans to the public and to the attention of higher authorities. This event was not only a one-way dissemination of information nor just designed to attract official attention, through contact with many different people, **all kinds of systems of self-governance and protection of cultural knowledge and ideas were discussed which will result in better protection for local communities**. One of the main protection methods for communities to govern themselves and revive traditional culture is the establishment of an **indigenous museum**.

As a cultural practice to protect the environment of ICCAs in Xinjiang, ritual plays a more important role than oral or written education. It is a way of combining spirituality and physical experience to convey a sense of cultural identity and ecological wisdom to community residents, especially young people. Alongside this implicit way of intensifying self-governance and environmental protection of ICCAs in Xinjiang, the explicit strategy of local leaders is collective petitions related to environmental and cultural claims initiated by them and focusing on calls for economic, cultural and environmental rights.

Overall, the action strategies of the local leaders and action groups of ICCAs in Xinjiang mentioned above, clearly demonstrate the **wisdom of a communication strategy that connects multiple forces** (internal and external, higher authorities and local government,

mass media and experts) to bring comprehensive powers into play. The community leader's cultural and ecological wisdom in using collective petitions, establishment of eco-museums, the media and scholars as well as ceremonial or ritual education, reflects the cultural awakening and self-governance demands of ICCAs in Xinjiang in the modern age. The **self-governance revealed here is not completely established, but is based on interactive self-governance practices**. In spite of the lack of legal recognition, many signs are appearing that the **de facto existence of self-governance practices is an important preparation and basis for achieving legal recognition in the future**. The current lack of legal recognition does not mean that nothing exists, consciousness and action concerning ICCAs in Xinjiang will be an important boost to efforts to promote legal recognition.

4. Future and Recommendations

The development and self-governance practice of ICCAs in Xinjiang are facing a number of difficulties from both internal and external factors, due to a lack of legal recognition and self-governance capacity. Nevertheless, the de facto existence of self-governance has become an important motivator to promote the development of ICCAs in Xinjiang. As a result, I propose the following recommendations:

4.1 The development of community conservation and livelihoods

In light of the development situation of communities, environmental conditions and other endogenous factors, it is necessary to develop a **community livelihood development model** which is **"pertinent" for the contextual situation of ICCAs, indigenous practice and cosmology**. Here the word 'pertinent' deserves particular attention and refers to close consideration by the community instead of through external enforcement. In other words, whether a community livelihood development model is pertinent or not should be **decided by the community members** rather than by monistic administrative measures. For example, modern tourism is not necessarily consistent with the protection of ICCAs, its transient material benefits are most likely to result from cultural, natural and livelihood fractures. Therefore, the decision on how to enact a desired and applicable policy in line with the development of minority communities is critical.

4.2 The recovery of ecological ethics and knowledge of ICCAs in Xinjiang

Throughout the historical development of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, ICCAs have formed their own eco-ethics and wisdom, this can play an important role in bridging economic, cultural and political gaps. As a result, efforts to exchange this knowledge among ICCAs in Xinjiang are vital and extend to the possibility of creating an information pool for knowledge

sharing, mutual learning and capacity building. However, currently **the level of knowledge exchange between different ICCAs in Xinjiang is insufficient**, giving rise to an absence of any form of consensus and common sense with regard to strategies and methodologies for the self-governance of ICCAs. In order to encourage and foster communication between residents and the government, between residents and the outside world and between ICCAs in different locations, it is necessary to strengthen traditional ecological wisdom and knowledge.

4.3 A re-examination and rationalization of eco-migration policy[®]

For economic, geographic, cultural or other reasons, eco-migration often results in people becoming stuck in a new situation to which they must become acclimatised. The complexity and diversity of factors involved in eco-migration must be recognised and they should not be regarded as standard. Eco-migration is driven by culture as well as by many other factors. However, culture is often overlooked and greater importance is attributed to economic-driven behaviour or attempts to improve residents' living conditions by administrative measures. Consequently, **ecological migration policy should be revised and rationalised to make it an interactive process, involving participation and decision-making of both communities and government**, with the aim of endowing residents and migrants themselves with full rights and opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. In particular, the views of the local leaders should be taken into consideration.

4.4 Seeking a balance between ecological conservation and tourism development

The development of mass tourism in Xinjiang has created all kinds of conflicts between humans, nature and culture which have directly affected the development and self-governance of ICCAs. Consequently, how to seek a balance between ecological preservation and tourism development, and how to implement this from the endogenous perspective, has become of great concern in policy making. The solution calls for the **democratic participation and governance of ICCAs in Xinjiang**, and the implementation of progressive practices. At the same time, further delineation of functional areas, grading protection and the development of communities should be based on the overall well-being of the ICCA rather than on the interests of other parties.

4.5 Establishing an eco-museum

Dynamism is an important feature of any eco-museum and this should not only be a theoretical consideration, but should actually be implemented into the **endogenous cosmology** and eco-logic of the museum. Focussing on indigenousness will draw a distinction with a physical object based museum concept. By establishing an eco-museum, public

¹⁰ NoE: More information about these "policies" woudl help betetr understand them.

awareness of the traditional culture of the local community will be raised in a dynamic and protective way.

5. Conclusions

Xinjiang, as China's most extensive area, exhibits a pluralistic nature, culture and beliefs and this diverse, rich complexity is reflected in the development and practical aspects of ICCAs there. The concept of ICCAs is new to the minorities living in Xinjiang, however, their cultures, beliefs and customs have, for a long time, resulted in the *de facto* existence of ICCAs. The endeavours of the locals to empower themselves and their awakening self-governance consciousness become apparent on examination of the difficulty of real development of ICCAs in Xinjiang and the traditional practices of indigenous knowledge. In terms of the current situation and development of ICCAs in Xinjiang mentioned above, the summary and conclusions of this report are as follows:

5.1 The diversity of ICCAs in Xinjiang

Xinjiang is rich in natural and cultural diversity and this is reflected in the distinctive and unique ethnic range of ICCAs. Geopolitics, history and cultural interest are the driving forces behind ICCAs in Xinjiang. These factors work together and impact on the indigenousness and heterogeneity of ICCAs. **Common ground is sought but always while preserving differences**. In this way, diversity management and the problems of managing environmental factors and system dynamics, in terms of cultural diversity, ecological wisdom and ethics and their practical application in the community's protection of diversity, are brought into focus.

5.2 Lack of government and legal recognition

ICCAs in Xinjiang are similar to those in other regions of China in that, despite their de facto existence, there is a **lack of recognition by government policy and law**. They implement their own individual strategies for interaction with local government and there are numerous differences among them. The strategies stem from the individual history of the ICCA and its interaction patterns, as well as the leadership strategies of the leaders.

5.3 The predicament of modernity and the impact of tourism

ICCAs in Xinjiang are not only confronted by the **effects of modernity** but also the **impact of tourism**, both of these can act as negative forces. Eco-tourism can also act against the original intention of a community to protect its indigenous nature, culture and religion. This is generally due to a **lack of community participation in the decision-making process** and the **failure to apply local knowledge**. Therefore, strategies to empower communities and residents to really participate in decision-making are vital as an approach to dealing with the

crisis.

5.4 Cultural revival and self-governance under the guidance of leaders

In reality, the self-governance path of ICCAs in Xinjiang is closely related to leader politics, this in turn is built on links between the idealism and realism of the locals. In many ways, leaders combine multiple identities and wisdom, it is also true to say that they have a strong and comprehensive ability to consider both modern and traditional issues. However, as a result of these many identities and policy bottlenecks, the **leaders' efforts for cultural renaissance always encounter a lot of unpredictable obstacles and resistance**. This often leads to a transient and circuitous participation of indigenous leaders in the development of self-governance systems and policy decisions.

5.5 Mode of interactive strategies in practice

Under the leadership of community leaders, primary activities and strategies of ICCAs are enacted through **multiple measures** (for example, the revival of traditional culture, establishing ecological museums, raising petitions, the role of indigenous leaders and seeking support from academics). Cultural renaissance has become a key element linking diversity and modernity. The strategic patterns and practices adopted by ICCAs in Xinjiang fully showcase the complex relationship and power play between China's government and the locals. This phenomenon reveals the wisdom and action logic of leaders which is based on a kind of cultural consciousness and self-governance.

5.6 Culture and community disconnections resulting from the challenges of modernity

Besides a lack of legal and policy recognition for self-governance, as mentioned above, the cultural and community disconnections of ICCAs in Xinjiang resulting from the impact of tourism and modernity, pose a tremendous threat to the established harmonious relationship between humans and nature. With the encroachment of modernity, many aspects of ICCAs have been challenged, including by both **physical damage** (such as poaching and excessive tourism development) and the **cultural and community disconnections** which stem from the inadequate implementation of policies such as improper ecological resettlement practices.

5.7 Cultural position of the ecological knowledge of ICCAs in Xinjiang

To some extent, the indigenous ecological knowledge of ICCAs in Xinjiang has adapted and modified to cope with the challenges of the modern era. The wisdom of ICCAs is seen in the juxtaposition between mobility and mutual interactions with other parties, and achieves harmony and coexistence with nature by way of divine faith, customary laws and community-based authorities. As a result of the challenges faced by ICCAs in these modern times, **traditional ecological knowledge is declining** to varying degrees however, ritual (or cultural) education has become an important way to reduce this disconnection from the traditional ways of doing things

5.8 The modern enlightenment of indigenous happiness logic

The 'great happiness' world view which is rooted in the faith, culture and practice of ICCAs in Xinjiang, is centred on nature and extends the **idea of happiness to all nature, animals and divinity**. It states that **when others, including nature, animals and divinity, receive happiness, human beings will naturally be happy as well. This logic rejects an anthropocentric view** and is important, not only for culture, but also for government decision-making and local governance practices. It aims to establish the use of common sense in dealings between the government and locals, modernity and tradition, autonomy and heteronomy, culture and power as well as spirituality and material life, so as to provide the right conditions for self-governance and decision-making in ICCAs in Xinjiang, and achieve an effective compromise between autonomy and heteronomy for the government and locals.

In conclusion, governance methods, the challenges of modernity, the strategies adopted and the approaches taken in ICCAs in Xinjiang have all contributed to some extent to the present situation and plight of ICCAs. Through an examination of them, we can get an insight into China's overall situation, its commonality and its specificity. Positioning this report between a universal study and an individual one, I have endeavoured to produce a piece of work that gives a broad description of the situation of ICCAs in Xinjiang. The aim is to draw attention to the circumstances of ICCAs in China from a case study perspective, and explore the development models of ICCAs in the context of an extensive and comparative scenario.

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