

Faction: Staying Silent

Information about You

You study at the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing--known as China's MIT. But for weeks you have not heard anything from your parents or relatives. Like you, they are Hui Muslims, one of 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups in China with a population of 10.5 million. You've heard reports that thousands of Hui have been sent to "vocational training centers." You are flying from Beijing to Urumqi for winter break. At the baggage claim in the Urumqi airport, you've found other Hui students. They, too, have heard nothing from their families. Though the Chinese government has long been targeting Uyghurs, Hui Muslims are also getting arrested in and out of Xinjiang. Some believe their family has been tortured, others insist that they are being treated well. But if so, why have they not been able to respond to your phone calls and letters? You all sit down to talk. You know that, individually, you can do nothing. But if all of you come together, perhaps you can save your families. The great question: What should you do to get your family members out of "re-education camps" without sacrificing your own future?

Lessons from History

In the Mao years (1949-1976), students had no choice but to participate in mass campaigns. Especially in the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Mao motivated students to join the Red Guard Movement (1966-68), and rebel against their teachers. In a sense, staying silent was not an option back then. But the safest way was not to attract attention by making big-character posters, or to join any political factions. Following the majority and staying out of the spotlight was the way to survive.

In Tiananmen Protests of 1989, radical moves such as the hunger strike divided students, and many left the square and stayed silent long before the crackdown on June 4th. These students were equally dissatisfied with government corruption and economic inflation, but they did not view continued occupation of the square as a solution. After the crackdown, the public learned the lesson that it is better to stay silent and let the government leave you alone, rather than confronting the government that suppresses dissent at all cost.

Faction Advisory

Staying silent does not necessarily mean you agree with what the government is doing, but you want to behave well so that your family members might be released earlier. You know that if you complain, it might extend your family members' detention. This is not a cowardly option, but a strategic one. You know that you cannot directly confront the authorities, which will only make things worse.

All ethnic minority students benefit from the affirmative action policies that give bonus points in the college entrance exam, so that you can get into the top universities in China. You are grateful for the educational opportunity, and you want to be the next generation of Hui civil servants and teachers.

For a long time, the Huis are considered the good Muslims, and the Uyghurs the bad Muslims by the government. Uyghurs concentrate in Xinjiang province, while the Hui are spread out across the country. Uyghurs speak a Turkic language and look more like Central Asians, whereas the Huis speak Chinese, and look like the Han people. As Hui students, you just want to fit in, not stand out.

Objectives

- Introduce yourself to others, and articulate the similarities and differences between Huis, Uyghurs and Kazakhs
- Find evidence from the New York Times leaked document and other primary sources to support your position
- Remind others of lessons from history, and use it as guidance for your action
- Convince others that staying silent is the best solution

Sources

- Emily Feng, “‘Afraid We Will Become the Next Xinjiang’: China’s Hui Muslims Face Crackdown,” *NPR*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/26/763356996/afraid-we-will-become-the-next-xinjiang-chinas-hui-muslims-face-crackdown>
- Gene Bunin, “Xinjiang’s Hui Muslims Were Swept into Camps alongside Uyghurs,” *Foreign Policy*, February 10, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/10/internment-detention-xinjiang-hui-muslims-swept-into-camps-alongside-uighur/>

Faction: Going Abroad

Information about You

You study at the prestigious Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. But for weeks you have not heard anything from your parents or relatives. Like you, they are Kazakh Muslims, a Turkic ethnic group and one of the 55 officially recognized minority groups with a population of over 1.4 million in China. You have heard reports that thousands of Kazakhs have been sent to “vocational training centers.” You are flying from Guangzhou to Urumqi for winter break. At the baggage claim in the Urumqi airport, you have found other Kazakh students. They, too, have heard nothing from their families. Though the Chinese government has long been targeting Uyghurs, Kazakh Muslims are also getting arrested in Xinjiang. Some believe their family have been killed, others insist that they are being treated well. But if so, why have they not been able to respond to your phone calls and letters? You all sit down to talk. You know that, individually, you can do nothing. But if all of you come together, perhaps you can save your families. The great question: What should you do to get your family members out of “re-education camps” without sacrificing your own future?

Lessons from History

In modern Chinese history, many political leaders started as student activists living abroad. The last Chinese dynasty, the Qing, was overthrown by a group of revolutionaries who founded the United League while studying in Japan. Its leader, Sun Yat-sen (your university has been named after him), was actually in exile in the United States on the day of the 1911 Revolution that ended the Qing dynasty. Some Chinese Communist leaders, such as Zhou Enlai (the first premier of the People’s Republic of China) and Deng Xiaoping (successor of Mao), first learned about Communism while studying and working in France in the 1920s.

Many student activists in 1989 fled China after the crackdown, and have stayed abroad since then. One example is Wu’erkaixi (Uerkesh Davlet), a Uyghur born in Ili Kazakh autonomous prefecture, Xinjiang, studied at Beijing Normal University, and now a dissident living in Taiwan. Even though he cannot return to China, Wu’erkaixi works as a political commentator, and showed support for the Hong Kong protests in 2019.

Faction Advisory

Going abroad does not mean abandoning your family or hometown, but a strategic move to keep yourself safe. Despite studying at a top Chinese university thanks to the affirmative action policy, you lost faith in the Chinese government, and you are afraid that you will be arrested for “re-education” sooner or later. You are planning to study abroad, and continue to live abroad.

In comparison to Uyghur or Hui Muslims, Kazakhs have a relatively small population in China. The majority of Kazakhs, about 12 million, are in Kazakhstan. You might have distant relatives there too. Other countries with a significant number of Kazakhs include Uzbekistan, Russia, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, United States and Turkey.

Warning: By going abroad, you might not be able to come back to China or see your family members in Xinjiang for a long time. This is a huge sacrifice you need to be willing to make, in exchange for your freedom and a better future.

Objectives

- Introduce yourself to others, and articulate the similarities and differences between Huis, Uyghurs and Kazakhs

- Find evidence from the New York Times leaked document and other primary sources to support your position
- Remind others of lessons from history, and use it as guidance for your action
- Convince others that going abroad is the best solution

Sources

- Osama Bin Javaid, "Ethnic Kazakhs 'Detained and Tortured in Chinese Camps,'" *Aljazeera*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/ethnic-kazakhs-detained-tortured-chinese-camps-191230193900576.html>
- Associated Press, "China to 'Let Thousands of Ethnic Kazakhs Leave Xinjiang,'" *The Guardian*, January, 9, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/09/china-to-let-thousands-of-ethnic-kazakhs-leave-xinjiang>

Faction: Pursuing International Attention

Information about You

You study at the prestigious Fudan University in Shanghai. But for weeks you have not heard anything from your parents or relatives. Like you, they are Uyghur Muslims, a Turkic ethnic group and one of the 55 officially recognized minority groups with over 11 million in China. You have heard reports that thousands of Uyghurs have been sent to “vocational training centers.” You are flying back home from Shanghai to Urumqi for winter break. At the baggage claim in the Urumqi airport, you have found other Uyghur students. They, too, have heard nothing from their families. Some believe their family has been tortured, others insist that they are being treated well. But if so, why have they not been able to respond to your phone calls and letters? You all sit down to talk. You know that, individually, you can do nothing. But if all of you come together, perhaps you can save your families. The great question: What should you do to get your family members out of “re-education camps” without sacrificing your own future?

Lessons from History

In the 1989 protests, students sought the opportunity of Soviet leader Gorbachev’s visit in mid-May to broadcast their occupation of Tiananmen Square live on TV worldwide. They wrote slogans, such as “all power belongs to the people” and “liberty or death,” in English, and talked to journalists from the West. In a way, the protests lasted over a month from mid-April to early June before the crackdown thanks to international media.

In Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the ongoing protests against extradition bill since 2019, activists have been successful in drawing international attention, especially from the UK, Hong Kong’s former colonizer, and the US, which has passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act in 2019. Hong Kong protesters are well aware of the plight of Uyghurs, and they are afraid that “today’s Xinjiang, tomorrow’s Hong Kong.” They also warn people in Taiwan that “today’s Hong Kong, tomorrow’s Taiwan.”

Faction Advisory

There have been a number of successful cases where Uyghurs use social media and international attention to press the Chinese government into releasing their family members. In fact, the Chinese government only acknowledged the existence of “vocational training centers” after multiple reports from the West that over a million Uyghurs are held in “re-education camps.” You believe public appeals could pressure the authorities to release your relatives. The Chinese authorities dislike international media in covering its secrets, and would rather “save face” by releasing some Uyghurs than admitting that they have made a mistake.

Uyghurs are the majority in “re-education camps” in comparison to Kazakh and Hui Muslims, and Uyghurs have been making testimonies at U.N. and the US Congress about their experience under arrest and their missing family members. The US Congress passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act in September, 2019. You believe speaking out is the best way to counter the state narrative of anti-terrorism.

Warning: By pursuing international attention, you risk being arrested yourself, and your family members getting extended stay in “re-education camps.” There is no guarantee that this action will work, but you are willing to take the risk rather than staying silent.

Objectives

- Introduce yourself to others, and articulate the similarities and differences between Huis, Uyghurs and Kazakhs

- Find evidence from the New York Times leaked document and other primary sources to support your position
- Remind others of lessons from history, and use it as guidance for your action
- Convince others that pursuing international attention is the best solution

Sources

- Asim Kashgarian, "Uighur Woman Uses Social Media to Pressure China into Releasing Her Father," *Voice of America*, January 29, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/uighur-woman-uses-social-media-pressure-china-releasing-her-father>
- Xinyan Yu, "What Happened to Our Parents? Uyгур Sisters Seek Answers," *South China Morning Post*, May 11, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/video/scmp-films/3007923/what-happened-our-parents-uygur-sisters-seek-answers>

Reincarnated Role

Information about You

You are now reincarnated as Xinjiang government officials. Some of you are Han Chinese, and some are ethnic Uyghur. You have heard of the gathering among returned college students at Urumqi airport, and you must take actions before the students make further moves. You have all the power to make any decisions, though you are also responsible for the fallout. You must reach a unanimous decision after a brief discussion, and announce your decision to the students.

What To Do About the Students?

You have a variety of options, and each has its own merits and problems:

1. Crush the dissenter - Any student gathering is a dangerous sign, and it should be nipped in the bud, especially if students want to reach out to international media. However, this response could create more terror in the short term, and provoke radicalization in the future.
2. Inaction/Follow the document - Though the Chinese government denounced the New York Times leaked document as fabricated, you as local officials know that these documents exist and you need to abide by them. All you can tell the students is that their family members are in “vocational training centers,” and they will return home after finishing their training. You can help arrange the meeting between students and their family members over video if both behave well.
3. Form a dialogue - You are willing to listen to students and hear their concerns. You can promise students an investigation into their family members’ whereabouts. In exchange, the students need to promise that they will not contact international media. However, such dialogue might be futile, as students and government officials have very different expectations of each other.
4. Make an apology - This is rarely taken, since the government does not like to be shown as weak. But you are willing to acknowledge that the local government has made a mistake on individual cases, and you would like to apologize to these students. You risk being forced to resign if you make this move.
5. Any other appropriate responses you can think of

You also have to think about whether to approach different ethnic groups in the same way, or different ways. Uyghurs are the majority minority in Xinjiang, especially in the southern part. Kazakhs and Huis are relatively fewer in comparison.

Lessons from History

In the 1989 Protests, student activists and government officials engaged in dialogues three times before the crackdown, though the conversation did not reach any compromise. Zhao Ziyang, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party at the time, visited students in Tiananmen Square, and asked for forgiveness. He was soon purged and put under house arrest till his death. After the violent crackdown on June 4th, the government arrested most activists, and university students and faculty had to write self-criticism in order to show loyalty.

In the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the Chinese government did not send in troops for a military crackdown like 1989. Instead, it has been waiting for the protests to peter out on their own. A few pro-China counter-protests took place, and rumors said they were paid by the Chinese government. The Hong Kong government seems rather weak, as it is caught up in between Hong Kong protesters and the Chinese government, and it cannot make any decisions on its own.

Objectives

- Introduce yourself, and announce your decision with your reasoning
- Find evidence from the New York Times leaked document and other primary sources to support your position
- Remind others of lessons from history, and use it as guidance for your action

Source

- Keegan Elmer, "China Says It Will 'Normalise' Xinjiang Camps As Beijing Continues Drive to Defend Policies in Mainly Muslim Region," South China Morning Post, December 9, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3041305/china-says-it-will-normalise-xinjiang-camps-beijing-continues>