Ideology and Thought Work in Contemporary Xinjiang

Ondřej Klimeš (Oriental Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Since the beginning of reforms in 1978, China has been undergoing radical transformation in economy, politics, society, education, media, culture and other aspects of life, while the party-state has vacated many of the realms it had previously sought to control. The situation in Xinjiang presents an interesting case study of this trend in a framework where state policy is driven by a unique set of objectives based on the region’s unique geopolitical position and ethno-cultural context. In this vast, important and rich area inhabited by some 10 million Turkic Muslim Uyghurs with distinct national identity and long history of independent statehood, the People’s Republic has managed to attain only a low level of Uyghurs’ identification with its state project and is constantly dealing with a varying degree of dissent, tension or violent backlash. The state therefore seeks to devise and execute policies which aim to simultaneously shape multiple aspects of Xinjiang’s reality, namely economy, demography, social structure, education, religion and culture. Ideology, propaganda and political discourse are a powerful instrument of legitimation and implementation of these measures, and function as a crucial link between state and society. The presentation lays out preliminary findings on what are some of the state’s ideological concepts in contemporary Xinjiang.