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# Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang

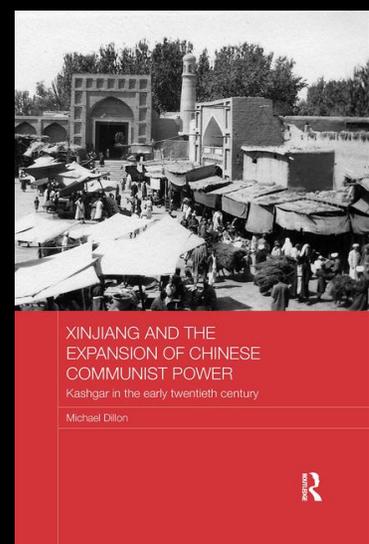
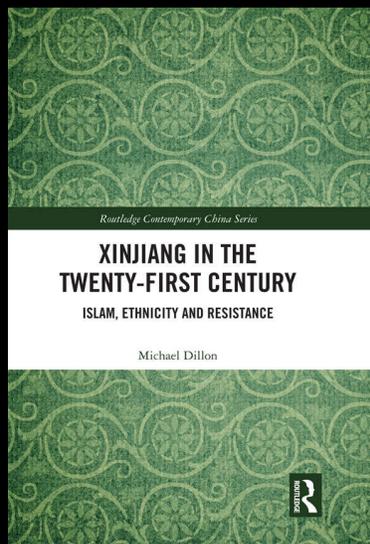
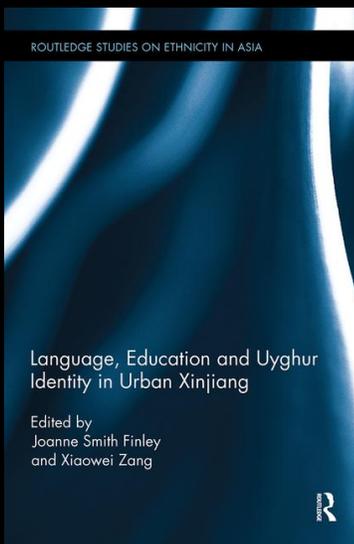
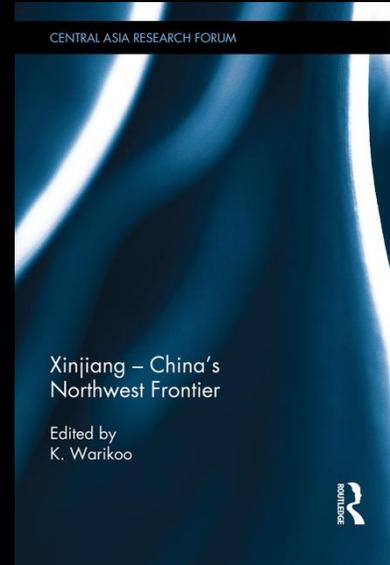
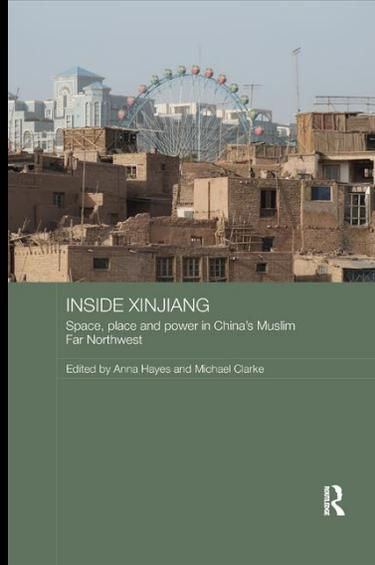
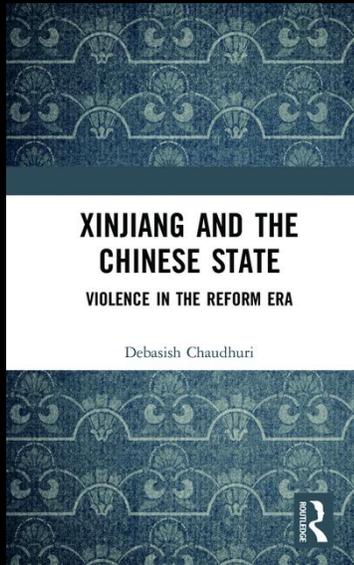


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# Introduction

There has been significant coverage in the media in recent years on the increase of violence towards the Xinjiang Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in China. This Freebook explores how the Uyghur language, Uyghur culture, Xinjiang geopolitics and Chinese state response have all resulted in and affected the violence in Xinjiang in the Twenty-First Century.

The first chapter, by Michael Dillon, gives a brief introduction to Uyghur history including an overview of Xinjiang and its location, Uyghur language and culture, the religious restrictions imposed over the years and various occasions of violence starting from the 1900s.

The next chapter, by Joanne Smith and Xiaowei Zang, explores the language and education of the Xinjiang Uyghurs and how this had a direct impact on their identity. This chapter further defines ethnic identity and questions its relationship to social, cultural and religious practices.

Chapter three, by Michael Clarke, delves into the problematic nature of geopolitics and explores how Beijing and the West's geopolitical perspectives have influenced and constrained the Uyghur domain.

The following chapter, by Debasish Chaudhuri, evaluates the nature of protests and violence led by the Uyghur and how the Chinese state responded.

Chapters five and six, both written by Michael Dillon, give an overview of the insurgency in Xinjiang and the resistance of the Uyghur from the 1950s through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.

The final chapter, again written by Michael Dillon, is a recent addition on the subject of the re-education camps that were introduced in 2014.

## **Note to Readers**

References from the original chapters have not been included in this text. For a fully-referenced version of each chapter, including footnotes, bibliographies, references and endnotes, please see the published title. Links to purchase each specific title can be found on the first page of each chapter. As you read through this Freebook, you will notice that some excerpts reference previous chapters – please note that these are references to the original text and not the Freebook.

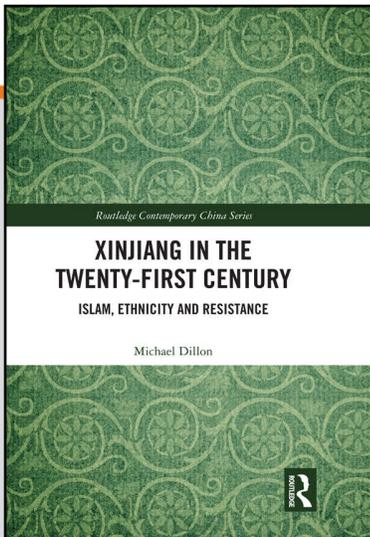
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CHAPTER

1

# XINJIANG AND THE DEAD HAND OF HISTORY



This chapter is excerpted from

*Xinjiang in the Twenty-First Century: Islam, Ethnicity  
and Resistance*

by Michael Dillon

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# Introduction

## Xinjiang and the dead hand of history

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.<sup>1</sup>

Xinjiang is unable to escape its history of conflict between two apparently irreconcilable forces. On the one hand, there is local Uyghur nationalism, sustained by the authority of a distinctive variant of Sufi Islam. On the other are the attempts by successive governments of China to incorporate this far western region: from the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) to the Republic under ineffectual presidents; warlords; the Nationalist Guomindang (1912–49) and finally the People's Republic of China (PRC) under the Communist Party (1949–present day).<sup>2</sup> For centuries the dominant culture of Xinjiang has been Islamic, and the Turkic language, Uyghur, has been the normal medium of discourse among the majority of the population. In spite of increased Chinese migration to parts of Xinjiang, from the viewpoints of geography and culture it remains in essence a region of Central Asia. Conflict between the cultures of local Muslims and the Han Chinese has been endemic for centuries. It is not simply a dispute between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and 'Islamic fundamentalists' as it often maintained.

This new book, *Xinjiang in the Twenty-First Century: Islam, Ethnicity and Resistance*, continues an enquiry into the ongoing conflict in Xinjiang that began with *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far North-West* (London: Routledge, 2004) and was developed in *Xinjiang and the Expansion of Chinese Communist Power: Kashghar in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2014).<sup>3</sup> The underlying rationale of those two books and the present volume is that it is impossible to comprehend the ongoing conflict and the sporadic violent clashes in Xinjiang without a proper appreciation of the history of the protracted and difficult relationship between the Chinese state and Turkic-speaking Uyghurs from which this conflict has emerged. Far from being simply a battle between the Uyghurs and the Chinese Communist Party, the competing traditions of the 'dead generations' – on both sides of the conflict – continue to weigh heavily on the antagonists. The Chinese Communist Party and its government are attempting to resolve, or at least suppress, social

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and political conflicts while developing the economy of Xinjiang in the interests of China as a whole rather than solely the people of the region. The priority of many Uyghurs is to achieve, if not genuine independence, at least a degree of self-determination in social and religious affairs.

These two traditions are mutually incompatible and in direct opposition to each other. On the one hand, the spirit of pan-Chinese nationalism and revolutionary Marxism still permeates the Chinese Communist Party, however much it appears to act as a modernising ruling party controlling a rapidly developing capitalist economy. It also has the advantage of controlling the Chinese state and its armed forces. On the other hand, there is the historical legacy of Islamic culture, which is an integral part of the identity of the Uyghurs. For the Uyghurs the authority of Islam lies in their inherited traditions but also in the knowledge that Islam in Xinjiang is part of a world-wide religion. Devout Muslims claim for their beliefs a spiritual authority that in their eyes cannot be countermanded by any secular power. For the government of the PRC, the authority of the CCP is absolute.

Moreover, the traditions of this age-old conflict are ingrained in the collective memory of Xinjiang (and to a lesser extent China) and form part of the continuing narrative of Uyghur resistance to Chinese control. These traditions include, on the Uyghur side, the veneration of shrines, including the pilgrimage to the desert tombs of Imam Asim and his son (the Muslim victors over Buddhist rulers in the twelfth century) that is described in this book, and the narrative of Yakub Beg who founded an independent Islamic khanate in Kashgar in 1867. On the Chinese side there are the recollections of the CCP members who worked and served in Xinjiang in the 1930s, and whose lives and political missions have been described in detail in *Xinjiang and the Expansion of Chinese Communist Power: Kashgar in the Twentieth Century*. These traditions inform the competing and apparently irreconcilable claims to the sovereignty of Xinjiang but for those involved they also hinder any attempts at resolving the conflict over these claims.

Since the end of the twentieth century the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as it has been known since 1955, has experienced a marked increase in both the frequency and the intensity of violent incidents involving Uyghurs – the Turkic-speaking people who historically constituted the majority population in Xinjiang. This violence has usually involved conflict with the Han-dominated state authorities or Han residents of the region, although on occasion it has taken the form of conflict with other Uyghurs who are considered to have collaborated with the Chinese authorities.

Some accounts have attempted to date this escalation from the attack on the United States by Al Qaeda on September 11, 2001 (9/11). This was only of peripheral significance on the ground in Xinjiang. The roots of the conflict in Xinjiang are deep and the violence of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is simply the most recent phase. It is certainly the case that the attack on New York and Washington by Saudi militants associated with Al Qaeda, and the subsequent Global War on Terrorism launched by the Bush administration in the United States, hardened the attitude of the Chinese towards protest and dissent. It enabled Beijing to legitimise its description of all activities relating to the independence

of Xinjiang as a form of terror, but it had little immediate effect on the trajectory of violence in the region.

The conflict in Xinjiang had already increased in intensity after two uprisings in Ghulja in the north-western part of the region in 1995 and 1997 and in response to the Chinese state's Strike Hard campaign that was launched in 1996. There were fears in Beijing that 9/11 might be followed by a major uprising in Xinjiang: the borders of the region were temporarily sealed, especially to foreigners, and normal academic exchanges and many other links were suspended. The anticipated uprising failed to materialise but sporadic and sometimes deadly outbreaks of violent conflict between Uyghurs and the state have continued, mostly in remote rural and mountainous areas.

The most dramatic and most widely reported of these disturbances, however, was not in the mountains or the countryside but in the regional capital, Urumqi. In July 2009 an unprecedented clash between Uyghurs and local Han Chinese residents of the city led to the death of at least 200 people; it also significantly increased international awareness of the Xinjiang issue which has never had the prominence in the West enjoyed by the movement for the independence of Tibet. Since 2009 outbreaks of violence in Xinjiang have been more numerous, or at least more frequently reported. They have taken place mostly in the region around the cities of Kashgar and Khotan in the south of Xinjiang; these are poor rural areas bounded by the Pamir mountain range and the Taklamakan Desert. There have also been reports of violent conflicts farther north in Aksu Prefecture – including the September 2014 bombings in Luntai (Bügür) – and farther east, close to the city of Turpan. These parts of Xinjiang are predominantly Uyghur areas and have not been affected by Han Chinese immigration as much as have Urumqi and the north of the region. Most of these violent incidents have taken place in remote locations and, although there have been impressive improvements in communications throughout Xinjiang since the 1990s, it is likely that there have been other incidents of serious violence in similar isolated areas of the region that have so far gone unreported.

After the attacks on the United States by Islamist radicals of Saudi Arabian origin on 9/11, the concept of a Global War on Terrorism that was declared by the George W. Bush presidency provided a convenient template for analysts of conflict and insurgency in many different parts of the world. This template has been applied, often in an unsophisticated and uninformed way, to any insurgency, irrespective of local causes and conditions. The Chinese government and its official media have consistently blamed the conflict in Xinjiang on 'terrorists', who they claim are inspired – if not directly organised – by external forces. These external forces include an organisation that is known as the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). There has never been independent evidence of the existence of this group, let alone that it is responsible for any of the violent incidents that have taken place in Xinjiang or elsewhere in China. Uyghur émigré organisations in the United States and Europe, especially the World Uyghur Congress, are also accused of supporting this terrorist activity and the name of Al Qaeda is frequently introduced as a source of support, again with no concrete evidence that Al Qaeda has had any real influence inside the region.<sup>4</sup>

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The simplistic analysis put forward by the Chinese government is not supported by independent and detailed studies of the conflict in Xinjiang: the picture that emerges from these is of a conflict that has evolved out of long-standing internal tensions and unresolved problems in relations with the Chinese government. It is the continuation of unequal and antagonistic relations between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese that predate the establishment of the People's Republic of China by decades or even centuries. In the absence of an internal political resolution of the conflict in Xinjiang, it is reasonable to assume that some militant Uyghurs have sought and will continue to seek outside financial and military support. A number of Uyghurs were detained in the US prison facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, after the fall of the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in November 2001 during the Afghanistan conflict, and there have been reports that Uyghurs were trained during that conflict and by other groups in the areas of Iraq and Syria controlled by the organisation variously known as Islamic State, Daesh (an acronym for *al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi'l Iraq wa 'al Sham* – the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), ISIL or IS. For many years there was little reliable evidence for any of these claims, but it now seems likely that small groups of Uyghurs have been trained and are involved in the conflict in Syria.

In March 2015, Zhang Chunxian, the Xinjiang Communist Party Secretary who had been the political head of the autonomous region since 2010, spoke during the annual full session of the National People's Congress in Beijing: he declared that, 'I believe there are extremists from Xinjiang who have joined Islamic State. We have recently arrested some groups who have returned after joining'. He did not provide any further information or evidence.<sup>5</sup>

The response of the Chinese government to the increase in violence since 2009 has been draconian. Additional units of the People's Liberation Army and People's Armed Police have been moved into Xinjiang, and the military and police have raided villages, houses and mosques and detained thousands of individuals on suspicion of some connection with groups promoting the idea of independence. One of the most public of these draconian actions was the prosecution of Ilham Tohti, a professor of economics at Minzu University in Beijing, who was not an advocate of violence but merely encouraged independent discussion of the Xinjiang question. Ilham Tohti is an Uyghur from Artush in Xinjiang but has for many years been part of the Beijing intellectual elite. He openly criticised government policies on Xinjiang but did not advocate support for separatist activities. On September 23, 2014, he was sentenced to life imprisonment with the confiscation of all his property, an 'unusually harsh' sentence according to the *South China Morning Post*:

An outspoken ethnic Uyghur economics professor has been sentenced to life in prison on charges that he sought to split China. Ilham Tohti, a Beijing-based economics professor from Minzu University, was handed the jail term by the Intermediate People's Court of Urumqi in Xinjiang this morning. The court also ordered that all his property be confiscated.<sup>6</sup>

It was a vicious and vindictive sentence, more redolent of the despotism of the Manchu Qing dynasty than of a modern state that claims to be adopting the policy of ruling the country according to the law (*yifa zhiguo*). It was undoubtedly intended to deter any open discussion of the background to violence in Xinjiang that differs from the narrative authorised by the Chinese Communist Party. More details are included in Chapter 6.

\*

In this new book I have attempted to account for the escalation of violence in Xinjiang since the start of the twenty-first century, to consider some ways in which it might develop and to suggest some approaches that might make a resolution of the conflict possible, although a detached appraisal of the situation at the time of writing in spring 2018 does not inspire optimism.

The introductory chapters give a brief overview of the character of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs for readers who are new to this region of Central Asia. The narrative originally outlined in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far North-West*, which was published in 2004, is then developed. The opportunity has been taken to update, rewrite and where necessary to reassess this material, particularly those sections that recount the conflict from the 1950s to the 1990s, in the light of information that has subsequently become available. The record of resistance to the government of the Chinese Communist Party is an important part of the historical background to the conflicts of the twenty-first century. This includes the Khotan risings of the 1950s; the Eastern Turkestan People's Revolutionary Party and the battle at Khaluja in 1968; the revival of the Uyghur independence movement in the 1980s; the rise of insurgency after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991; and the focus on terrorism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks of 2001. This discussion draws on Chinese, Uyghur and Western accounts of the violence, and material from these narratives is supported by information obtained during research visits to Xinjiang, notably an extended stay in southern Xinjiang in the spring and summer of 2010 which yielded detailed information on religion, repression and the condition of traditional Uyghur culture in southern Xinjiang.

The second part of the book contains three chapters. The first analyses the unprecedented outbreak of violence in the regional capital of Urumqi in July 2009. This interethnic conflict triggered a systematic programme of sustained and escalating repression that began in the immediate aftermath of the riots and has been in operation continuously to the present day. The Urumqi violence may well prove to have been a turning point in both Uyghur militancy and state repression. It can be compared with the impact of the Ghulja violence of 1995 and the Strike Hard campaign that was launched in the following year and which contributed to a second wave of violence in that city in 1997.

The second chapter, which includes material from field research carried out in the Kashgar and Khotan areas in the summer of 2010, illustrates the paradoxical nature of the religious and political landscape of southern Xinjiang in the early twenty-first century. The destruction of the traditional, and architecturally

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important, bazaar and residential quarters of the ancient Uyghur city of Kashgar proceeded in spite of furious local protests. At the same time a traditional annual Islamic shrine festival in honour of the revered historical Sufi *shaykh* Imam Asim took place in the Taklamakan Desert north of Khotan where it was attended by thousands of pious Muslims, a clear indication of the persistence of religious practice among the Uyghur people of rural Xinjiang. Both of these factors contributed to the rising militancy in the region between 2010 and 2015.

The third chapter considers the public narrative on terrorism that has been developed by the government in Beijing since 2001 to account for the violent conflict and to legitimise the repression that the Chinese government has carried out in Xinjiang. The unambiguous message that emerges in this narrative is that any dissent, opposition or resistance by Uyghurs, whether violent or not, is classified as ‘terrorist’ by the government in Beijing and its media. Demands for, or even the discussion of, independence are completely illegitimate and are invariably described as ‘separatist’. The contrast between this narrative and the real nature of violence in Xinjiang that the official image conceals is considered, and the concepts of ‘terrorism’, ‘jihadism’, Uyghur national resistance and the role of émigré groups are investigated.

The final section of the book offers a retrospective analysis of the violent conflict in Xinjiang and a typology of the violence. Possible resolutions to the conflict and the difficulties that are likely to frustrate such a resolution are examined in the light of this analysis. Various scenarios for developments in Xinjiang are considered, including the changing international context and the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and some strategies for conflict resolution are outlined.

The ‘fifth generation’ leadership of the Chinese Communist Party which was inducted in 2011–12, has set itself the task of developing a new strategy for Xinjiang, but at the time of writing this approach appears to be merely a continuation of the existing repression, although implemented more comprehensively and with greater severity. At the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP that was held in November 2013, it was announced that:

China will establish a state security committee, improving systems and strategies to ensure national security, according to a communiqué issued Tuesday after the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee. China will improve social governance and safeguard the interests of the people, according to the communiqué. The communiqué urged better social development, safeguarding state security and ensuring people’s livelihood and social stability. It called for the innovation of systems to effectively prevent and end social disputes and improve public security.

Details of the precise remit of the new committee and its relevance to the Xinjiang conflict are still awaited two years after the decision to establish the committee.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter 7 concludes with the draconic changes in Xinjiang’s security regime that began with the transfer of Chen Quanguo from Tibet to Xinjiang as Secretary

of the regional Communist Party in August 2016. Chapter 8 offers a summary of the nature of the conflict and the possibility – rather remote – of a resolution.

\*

Xinjiang, in the far north-west of China is, with Tibet, one of the two regions currently governed by Beijing in which there is an established and active movement demanding independence or at least genuine autonomy. Inner Mongolia could be added but demands by some Mongols for the independence of what they prefer to call Southern Mongolia are less prominent and have been thoroughly repressed by the Chinese authorities. Militant Uyghurs reject the Chinese name for their region, Xinjiang, which dates back to the eighteenth century, and prefer to think of it as Eastern Turkestan: this connects it directly with Western Turkestan, the Turkic-speaking regions of former Soviet Central Asia which are now divided among Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. There is a persistent, and at times confrontational, movement for Uyghur independence or, as the Chinese government prefers, ‘separatism’ or ‘splittism’. This movement draws much of its inspiration from memories of two independent, although short-lived republics that existed in the region in the 1940s.

### **Xinjiang’s geographical position**

Xinjiang, or the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, to give it its full official Chinese name, lies on the north-western frontier of China on its border with the former Soviet Union. It stretches some 3220 miles (2000 kilometres) from east to west and 2660 miles (1650 kilometres) from north to south, has an area of more than 1.6 million square kilometres (almost three times the size of France) and is by far the largest administrative unit within the PRC. It lies so far west of Beijing that it is really two hours behind the Chinese capital: Xinjiang operates partly on Beijing time, the national standard in the PRC, in particular for long distance air and rail transport and communications with Beijing and government offices; it also uses local time for informal use. Local people almost always indicate which time they are using when making business and personal arrangements, and Uyghurs often insist on local time to draw attention to the physical and cultural distance between Xinjiang and the rest of China.

Xinjiang has common borders with Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India and with three of the Central Asian states that were part of the former USSR – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It is close to two other Central Asian nations, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and the Uzbeks are especially close to the Uyghurs in linguistic and cultural terms. Xinjiang’s nearest neighbours within China are Gansu province and the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, both of which have large and influential Hui Muslim communities; Tibet, which is usually considered to have been Beijing’s main separatist problem since 1949; and Qinghai, which is part of historic Greater Tibet, and is home to both Tibetan Buddhist and Hui Muslim communities.<sup>8</sup>

## 8 Introduction

Xinjiang is deemed by the Chinese government to be not a province but, since October 1, 1955, an autonomous region; this is in deference to the non-Han, that is, non-Chinese population. Non-Han people in both the region and émigré communities in Kazakhstan, Turkey and Germany often prefer not to use the name Xinjiang, which means literally ‘New Frontier’, because of its connotations of imperial Chinese colonisation, and many of them refer to the region instead as Eastern Turkestan, or, in the Uyghur language *Sharqi Turkistan*. The name Uyghuristan has also been used by some supporters of independence, but it is not favoured by the Kazakh and other non-Uyghur people of the region. Earlier studies of the region used the spelling Sinkiang, notably Owen Lattimore’s *Pivot of Asia* and *Sinkiang Pawn or Pivot* by Allen Whiting and Sheng Shih-ts’ai, and it has also been called Chinese Turkestan to distinguish it from the rest of Turkestan, which is an obsolete name that was used for the Muslim Turkic-speaking areas of the Russian Empire. In practice the name Xinjiang is used throughout the region by the Han Chinese, Uyghurs and members of other ethnic groups.

Xinjiang is divided by the great range of mountains, the Tianshan. The Zhungar Basin lies to the north, and the Taklamakan Desert and Southern Xinjiang, the settled region known as Nanjiang in Chinese and as the Altishahr or ‘six cities’ in Uyghur, are in the Tarim Basin. The two regions have significantly different histories and cultural identities. There is no definite agreement on which six cities comprise the Altishahr. Some sources give Kashghar, Khotan, Yarkand, Yengi Hissar, Uch Turfan and Aqsu; others as many as eight. The southern part of Xinjiang is the Uyghur heartland, a settled and mainly rural society which still lives by traditional oasis agriculture and which has experienced much less influence from the outside than has the north of the region. In the northern mountains and grasslands, Uyghurs have lived alongside Kazakhs and Mongols for centuries; pastoral nomadism is an important part of the way of life for some, and the influence of the Russian Empire and the USSR and its successor states has been significant. The north of Xinjiang is also the most industrialised part of the region, with many large cities devoted to modern industries such as oil refining and the production of gas.

Xinjiang has often been depicted by Chinese officials and writers who were posted or exiled there throughout the centuries as a desolate and isolated wilderness; it is in fact a region of extraordinarily beautiful landscapes and the attachment that the Uyghur and other native peoples feel for it is understandable. While foreign visitors in the past rarely failed to criticise the uninspiring Soviet-style architecture of the regional capital, Urumqi, and the other main industrial centres, travellers who venture off the beaten track are invariably captivated by the desert, the mountains, the steppes and the lakes. The vast Taklamakan Desert dominates the geography of Xinjiang and has made much of it inaccessible. In the north the snow-capped mountain range, known to the Chinese as the Tianshan (Mountains of Heaven) and to the Uyghurs as Tengritagh (Mountains of God or Heaven), towers over the plains and oases below and, with its northern extension the Alatau, forms a formidable natural barrier between the eastern part of the Turkic world, which finds itself within the borders of the PRC, and the much larger western part in what was once the Soviet Union and even before that the Russian Empire.

Xinjiang has been classified by geographers as part of the dry ‘dead heart of Asia’, which also includes Tibet, the Pamirs and Mongolia. This area is marked by a series of high inland drainage basins to the south of the Tianshan range, which run from the enormous Tarim and Zhungharian basins in the west to the smaller basins of Turfan and Ili in the east and west, respectively. The Taklamakan Desert occupies most of the Tarim basin and, rather than being a sandy desert in the familiar sense, ‘consists really of fine, disintegrated particles of rock and is of the character of alluvial loess’. Some of it at least is potentially fertile land, and there is archaeological evidence that certain areas were previously cultivated: it is the absence of irrigation that makes it barren. The Tarim Basin, named after the most important river in Xinjiang, is surrounded by narrow belts of sparse vegetation, and it is in these areas that the important oasis settlements have developed, some of them watered by small streams which flow from the Tarim River and its tributaries.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the settled population has always lived in these dry and dusty oasis towns and the villages that surround them. These settlements typically owe their development to an ancient system of subterranean aqueducts, the *kariz*, which supplement any existing irrigation from streams and rivers. The *kariz*, the idea of which may have originated in Persia, where they are called *qanat*, draw the melting snows from the mountains and carry them in underground channels to preserve them from evaporation while they flow to the oases. The *kariz* irrigation system, of which local people are intensely proud, is nowadays considered by the Chinese to be backward and inefficient and is being replaced by electrically powered pumps. It is estimated that Xinjiang had more than 1500 *kariz* in the 1950s, of which more than 1100 were in Turpan, but by the late 1990s there were fewer than 600 and very few craftsmen were capable of building them. The remaining *kariz* are being preserved, but only as museum pieces, and local farmers are not permitted to dig any new wells near them.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the oasis towns such as Kashgar, Kargilik, Yarkand and Khotan lie on the southern fringes of the Taklamakan Desert, as far away from Chinese cultural influence as it is possible to be within the borders of the present-day PRC. They are the home of the most traditional forms of Uyghur culture that remain in the twenty-first century and, as they also suffer from poverty and underdevelopment, they are the fertile ground in which militant separatist and, more recently, Islamist movements have flourished. In the north, the towns and villages in the foothills of the Tianshan in the Ghulja (Yining) and neighbouring regions also have their own traditional cultures, although these can be Kazakh, Kyrgyz or Mongolian as well as Uyghur.

Not only is Xinjiang unstable politically, but it suffers from chronic instability in its climate and geology. Dramatic and dangerous weather conditions are common, and the more remote communities in the mountains are often cut off by heavy falls of snow in the harsh winters. Earthquakes are frequent, especially in the mountainous border areas, as they are in neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan. Most quakes are mild, but occasionally they are severe enough to threaten lives and the livelihood of whole communities. Xinjiang has experienced earthquakes

so often that there is a genuine and pressing need for measures to ameliorate their effects. In August 1997 new building codes were issued by the local authorities with the intention of ensuring that all future construction was earthquake resistant.<sup>11</sup> When the decision was made to demolish the entire Old City of Kashgar in the early twenty-first century, principally the bazaar and residential quarters, the reason given was that old buildings were a potential hazard if the city were to be struck by an earthquake.

## **Uyghur language and culture**

The early history of the Uyghurs reveals the influence of the religion and culture of Manichaeism, a descendant (or some would say a heresy) of Zoroastrianism, but was also influenced by Gnosticism, a syncretic belief followed in an assortment of schools that flourished in Jewish and Christian communities during the first and second centuries AD. Manichaeism was transmitted eastwards from the Persian Empire. The teachings of its founder, Mani (c. 216–77), emphasised the duality of good and evil or light and dark and many scholars believe that these beliefs have influenced Sufi practices, even if indirectly. Manichaeism was superseded in Xinjiang by Buddhism which gradually spread eastwards from India into the Tang Empire of China from the third century onwards. Its legacy can be seen most vividly in murals painted on the walls of caves, such as those at Bezeklik, which survived the Islamicisation of the region, albeit with lasting damage caused by the erasing of images.

From the twelfth century Islam came to dominate Xinjiang, largely replacing Buddhism. The religion spread slowly, initially through proselytisation by Sufi missionaries and later as a result of the conquest of the eastern part of Turkestan by political leaders who had adopted the Sufi approach to Islam. It is difficult to say for certain when the conquest of Xinjiang by Islam was complete, but by the seventeenth century the region was governed under a political system that derived its spiritual authority from the Sufi orders of Islam. It is safe to assume that from this time onwards the majority of Uyghurs were Muslims.

Uyghur is a Turkic language that is very close to Uzbek; some argue that they are effectively the same language but both Uyghurs and Uzbeks prefer to maintain the distinction. Both are distantly related to the Turkish of Turkey. Uyghur is used in the mosques of Xinjiang in addition to Arabic (whereas Hui Muslims use Chinese and Arabic). Many Uyghurs, particularly in the more remote parts of the region, are also members of Sufi orders and worship at the shrines of their hereditary *shaykhs* who lead the orders. Political separatism and the defence of local Muslim culture reinforce each other, particularly to the south of the Taklamakan Desert around the cities of Kashgar and Khotan where traditional Islam remains strongest.

Because Xinjiang is almost three times the size of France it is not surprising to find that the Uyghurs of different regions have different customs, but there are also many common elements that distinguish the Uyghurs from other Muslims in China. Uyghur dress is not the same as that favoured by Muslims in other parts of China. Men's traditional head covering is normally the *doppa*, a round cap but

one that is usually elaborately embroidered, in contrast to the plain white caps of Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims. Poorer men in the villages may simply wear a cloth cap to accompany their denim work clothes. Generally speaking, Uyghur women are more heavily veiled than women in the Hui areas, but their head coverings can vary from flimsy and elegant silk scarves, used to great effect as a fashion statement by some young women, to the dull brown all-over head covering that is required of women belonging to certain of the Sufi orders. Some educated and professional Uyghurs, especially those in government or Communist Party employment, choose to avoid these forms of dress that identify them as Uyghurs, while others take pride in wearing them.

Uyghur food reflects the prohibitions of Islam: pork, which is almost universal among Han Chinese, is taboo and lamb is the main meat consumed, often in the form of kebabs. These are spiced to give a flavour that is unique to Xinjiang – somewhere between Indian and Pakistani and Chinese taste – and are made with a selection of different cuts of meat, fat and offal on the kebab stick. The celebrated whole roast sheep is only found at celebrations, either family ones or during the great religious festivals, such as the annual commemoration at the Imam Asim shrine in the Taklamakan Desert near Khotan where those pilgrims who can afford to do so eat from the roast in tents after having made the journey up to and back from the desert shrine.

Xinjiang is underdeveloped by any standard of comparison and much of the population is poor, so little meat is eaten on a daily basis and meals are often simple affairs of noodles, vegetables and spices. Everyday food has some similarity to Chinese-style meals. Noodles are the basic standby, mainly *laghman* (*lamian* in Chinese), which are heavily spiced and served with vegetables or in soup. Uyghurs also favour savoury pastries, including *samsas* (related to the Indian samosa) and other local variations, some of which do contain lamb. Although there are communities of Hui (Dungan) Muslims in Xinjiang, the Uyghurs do not usually consider the Hui standards of halal food to be sufficiently pure, and they have their own separate restaurants. Fruit, nuts and spices are prominent in local markets. Melons are a feature of Hami in eastern Xinjiang, and grapes celebrated for their size and sweetness are grown in Turpan. Uyghurs, who are usually observant Muslims, do not normally consume alcohol but there is a thriving wine industry which exports to eastern China and the wider world.

Knives are traditionally part of the local culture and most Uyghur men in the countryside carry a knife that might serve as a tool to cut meat for a meal or, if required, as a weapon. The craft of knife-making has become a specialist industry for sales to tourists, especially in the town of Yengishahar which lies to the south-east of Kashgar. The negative aspect of this knife culture has been demonstrated in some of the attacks by militant Uyghurs on Han Chinese and others.

The architecture of Xinjiang is of particular interest as it provides examples of traditional Central Asian building styles within the borders of China. Mosques are usually built in a manner that is reminiscent of Pakistan, Iran or former Soviet Central Asia, whereas in some areas farther to the east where the Muslims are Chinese-speaking Hui, their design has been influenced by Chinese aesthetics.

Vernacular Uyghur architecture at its best was found in the Old City of Kashgar; timber-framed houses, shops, bazaars, schools and mosques were built closely together and created a tightly knit community. Little of this now remains following demolition and redevelopment in the early twenty-first century. Many of the modern buildings that replace those demolished are in an ersatz style that does not meet with the approval of many Uyghurs. The destruction of the old centre of Kashgar left open the way for development and opportunities for construction businesses to rebuild the Old Town. Much of this rebuilding, however, was carried out by firms from eastern China that employed Han workers. This caused great resentment among the local Uyghurs, who were not considered qualified to carry out skilled work and did not even find it easy to find employment in the unskilled building trades.

### **Uyghurs and the Chinese state: centuries of conflict**

An appreciation of the historical background to the protracted conflict in Xinjiang is indispensable, if only to demonstrate that the violence that escalated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is not simply a clash between Muslim Uyghurs and the CCP, or a conflict created or stimulated by hostile external forces which is how it is portrayed by the government in Beijing.

Tensions and disputes over the control of the territory of Xinjiang and how the non-Chinese Muslim population should be governed can be traced back directly several decades to the Republican Period, during which China was ruled by the Nationalist Guomindang. Warlords, Chinese-speaking if not actually Han Chinese and sometimes nominally allied to the Nationalists, ruled Xinjiang. A powerful ethnic and nationalist movement against Chinese rule led to the establishment of two short-lived but influential opposition regimes in Xinjiang. The first of these was the Turkic Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan, which was established in Kashgar in 1933–4 by Uyghurs but only lasted for a few months. The second was the Eastern Turkestan Republic that was created in the north-west of Xinjiang and temporarily controlled the three districts of Ili, Tarbagatay and Altai from the city known as Ghulja to the Uyghurs and Yining to the Chinese. This administration was more enduring than the Kashgar regime and lasted from 1944 to 1949: it was multi-ethnic and secular nationalist rather than Islamic and was influenced by the politics of the Soviet Union in its Central Asian republics. Chinese sources invariably refer to it as the Three Districts Revolution (*sanqu geming*), preferring to avoid any reference to Eastern Turkestan as it is feared that even the mention of the name might excite separatist sentiment. Although neither of these regimes controlled the whole of Xinjiang, their subsequent influence has been vastly out of proportion to their power at the time and the memory of this brief and partial independence continues to inspire Uyghur activists in the twenty-first century, who regard the two regimes as models for an independent Eastern Turkestan that they hope will one day become a reality.

Even further back it is possible to see the roots of the present-day conflict in the Kashgar regime established in 1867 by Yakub Beg (1820–77?). This was

regarded as a rebellion by the ruling Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), whose emperors and aristocracy were Manchu rather than Han Chinese. Yakub Beg and his followers in turn relied in part for the legitimacy of their government on the tradition of Naqshbandi Sufi shaykhs, who had exercised both spiritual and temporal authority over Kashgar and other parts of southern Xinjiang since at least the seventeenth century.

The Uyghurs are not merely an appendage on the margins of Chinese history. In common with Tibetans and Mongols, they have their own history in which Islam gradually took control by virtue of the conquest and control of Sufi missionaries. The history of the Uyghurs was written primarily in the Turkic literary language Chaghatai, which is one of the forerunners of both Uyghur and the closely related Uzbek language. The only version of Uyghur history that is currently publicly available within Xinjiang is one that conforms to the official Chinese narrative of the region's past, but unofficial writings and the oral tradition keep this alternative history alive.

This Uyghur narrative runs parallel to Chinese history with which it often overlaps and interacts. After the fall of the Khanate of Saidiya, which ruled between 1514 and 1696, the region fell under the sway of the Khojas, spiritual leaders of the powerful Islamic Sufi organisation, the Naqshbandi, and they remained in control until Chinese rule was established in 1762. During this period there was no single power in the region but rather a religio-political administration based on what were effectively city states, the most powerful of which were Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan. Xinjiang was incorporated into the Manchu Qing dynasty from the second half of the eighteenth century; although Xinjiang's history from this period onwards also became part of the history of China, the independent narrative of Uyghur history has remained important to local people.

The ascendancy of the Sufis can be dated to 1679, when Appaq Khoja (sometimes written Afaq Khwaja), a Naqshbandi Sufi who was a descendant of the great *shaykh* of Samarkand, Makhdum-i Az'am (m. 1542), took power in Kashgar. The Sufi Khoja or Khwaja dynasty continued after the death of Appaq Khoja in 1694 and lasted until 1759, in which year the final Khwaja rulers, Burhan al-Din Khwaja and his brother Jahan Khwaja fled towards Badakhshan after a failed attempt at an insurrection against the new power of the Qing dynasty that was expanding into Central Asia.

In this isolated area on the eastern frontiers of the Islamic world the mindset of the victorious Sufis was that of conquering, militant proselytising missionaries. They were motivated by their mission to convert the non-Muslim people and their governments and compel them to submit to Islam. Kashgaria may have been remote, but the institution of Central Asian models of mystical theocracy in which political power was regarded as sacred was far from unique in the Islamic world. The institution operated in two ways: either the Sufis took power directly, as was the case with the Naqshbandis of Kashgar and the Safavids of Iran, or the rulers transformed themselves into Sufi masters, which was the case with the Moghuls in their conquest of India. In either case there was no real distinction between the terms 'disciple' and 'subject', and the outcome was the sanctification (or consecration)

of political power. In the Kasghar region, the influence of Sufism evolved over a long period and the Sufi masters (*ishan* – the Persian word for ‘they’) acquired power in a system that has been called *ishanat*. It is sometimes considered to be a model of religious authority that is particular, although not necessarily unique, to Central Asia. The distinctive role of Sufism in Xinjiang is examined closely in Chapter 1.

### **Mosques and mazars**

In Xinjiang, the Islamic traditions of Central Asia and China overlap although their adherents maintain a largely separate existence; the mosques of the Chinese-speaking Hui communities are quite separate from Uyghur mosques although there is some evidence of links between Uyghur and Hui members of the Khufiyya Sufi order.

The network of mosques across Xinjiang provides the framework for the complex system of worship, education and law that dominated the region before it came under the control of the CCP in 1949. It is difficult to obtain reliable statistics for the total number of mosques, but one estimate suggests that in 1949 there were 29,545 mosques in the whole of Xinjiang. By the start of the Cultural Revolution (roughly 1966–76) this had been reduced to 14,119: many had fallen into disrepair, some had been requisitioned by the government and others had been demolished or closed down during anti-religious and other campaigns such as the movement for land reform. During the chaos of the Cultural Revolution there were said to have been only 1400 active mosques but by 1990, after the relaxation in restrictions on religious activity, the number had risen again to more than 17,000 and there were more than 43,000 other ‘places of religious activity’, a figure which includes shrines and *madrasas*.<sup>12</sup> These figures almost certainly reflect only the registered and officially sanctioned mosques and other bodies. Many unofficial and unregistered places of worship and education existed and still exist today.

While mosques in Xinjiang are found in most villages, towns and cities, the *mazar* tombs of the Sufi sheikhs and the religious complexes that have grown up around them are usually in isolated rural settings. The Uyghurs use the Arabic and Turkic term *mazar* (tomb or shrine, *mezar* in Turkish) for the tombs of their founding sheikhs but there is also a tomb culture among the Hui (both within and outside Xinjiang) who use the term *gongbei*, a Chinese transliteration of the Arabic *qubba* (which means ‘dome’ or ‘cupola’ and refers to the dominant architectural feature of most of these tombs). The *mazar* tomb complexes, some of them sizeable, are the bases of the mystical Sufi orders (predominantly the Jahriyya and Khufiyya branches of the Naqshbandiyya). Members of the orders make pilgrimages to tombs on the anniversary of the death of a founding *shaykh* and on major religious festivals. These pilgrimages have on occasion attracted enormous crowds and at times the authorities have banned or restricted them. The *mazar* culture is viewed by the Chinese state as a serious threat to its authority and has been the subject of frequent repression by the authorities: it has also been attacked

by conservative Muslims and by Islamic reformers, influenced directly or indirectly by Wahhabi teachings that have spread to Xinjiang from Saudi Arabia, who regard the Sufi tomb culture as idolatrous.

It is impossible to estimate with any confidence how many active *mazars* there are in present-day Xinjiang, but a serious and authoritative study by an Uyghur scholar lists seventy-three major sites.<sup>13</sup> Because of the Uyghurs' dislike of the regulation of mosques by the government, this parallel Islam is becoming increasingly popular. The fact that these sects are part of a trans-national Islamic movement (notably the highly political Naqshbandiyya) is also attractive to the isolated Turkic-speaking Muslims of Xinjiang, but for the same reason it is considered by the Chinese authorities to be a political threat.

### **Resistance and control since 1949**

After the CCP took power in 1949 and established the PRC, violent resistance to Chinese rule was essentially a continuation of the historic conflict by individuals and groups connected with or inspired by the previous independent regimes and the religious tradition. The initial phase of the struggle peaked in 1954, but in 1962 violence that erupted in the Ili (Yili) region in the north-west of Xinjiang was followed by a large-scale migration of people from Xinjiang across the borders to the Soviet Union. This is sometimes referred to as the Ili-Tarbagatay disturbances; Tarbagatay (Tacheng), the neighbouring district to Ili, also experienced violent demonstrations. The region of north-western Xinjiang that includes Ili and Tarbagatay had the closest connections with the Soviet Union, and the most important city in the district, Ghulja, called Yining in Chinese, had been the location of the headquarters of the Eastern Turkestan Republic of the 1940s.

This outbreak of disorder and the migration to the USSR was not simply an uprising by Uyghur nationalists: complex domestic and international factors lay behind the exodus. The most significant internal problems were a system of grain rationing that had led to protests, objections by Uyghurs and Kazakhs to Han Chinese immigration into the region, and competition between the military land reclamation units of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) and local people for scarce agricultural land, water and pastures. The principal international issue was the escalation of the Sino-Soviet dispute, a disagreement between Moscow and Beijing over ideology and power within the international Communist movement.

There was a period of intense separatist activity against the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution which began in 1966 and lasted for a decade; conflict escalated again in the 1980s as China reformed its economy and some of its political structures and resistance were given a new lease on life after the collapse of the neighbouring Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of newly independent Central Asian states with Muslim populations.

During the 1980s the conflict was most intense in two areas of Xinjiang: the south-west, which is dominated by the great Uyghur cultural and Islamic centre

of Kashgar, and the Ghulja (Yining) region in the north-west, which is close to the border between China and Kazakhstan.

Major disturbances broke out in April 1980; there were riots in the town of Aksu, midway between Urumqi and Kashgar, following clashes between local Uyghur people and members of the quasi-military XPCC, and groups of demobilised Red Guards who were predominantly Han. This led to disturbances in Kashgar, student protests in Urumqi, and demonstrations by Uyghurs studying in the Central Nationalities Institute in Beijing, who protested against racial and religious insults against Muslims. Generalised disaffection at Chinese rule was gradually evolving into a broad opposition movement.

On April 5, 1990, in the town of Baren, Akto County, which lies close to Kashgar, the regular prayers at a mosque turned into demonstrations against the CCP's policies towards ethnic minorities. Some protesters called for a jihad against the unbelievers, and there were demands for the establishment of an Eastern Turkistan state. The demonstrators were able to ward off the police, and it took the intervention of units of the People's Armed Police and regular troops from the Kashgar garrison to subdue them. The Baren uprising was not simply a spontaneous act of defiance: it was the result of a carefully planned and organised operation by a group that was identified by the authorities as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party and explicitly linked politicised Islam with the call for the independence of Xinjiang. The rebels attacked military vehicles and launched an assault on the town hall, the local symbol of Chinese administration. Police, troops and the militia of the XPCC put down the rising after an early-morning counter-attack on April 6. The incident revealed the depth of anti-Chinese feeling, the degree of organisation of the rebels, and the beginnings of the Islamicisation of the independence struggle. There were also bomb attacks by separatist units on a bus in Urumqi in 1992 and on government buildings in the city of Kashgar in 1993.

The focus of opposition moved to the main town in the Ili region, which is known as Ghulja to the Uyghurs and Yining to the Chinese. It is an important symbol to many Uyghurs as it was the seat of the independent Eastern Turkistan government in the 1940s. Unrest in the spring of 1995 began with demonstrations calling for an end to Chinese rule in the region; police stations and local government offices were attacked and looted. There were also verbal and occasionally, physical assaults on imams who were judged to be compromised by their willingness to cooperate with the Chinese authorities. The government mobilised 20,000 troops under the command of the Lanzhou Military Region to put down the insurrection. Its parallel political response was to launch a nationwide Strike Hard campaign, ostensibly a campaign against organised crime and hooliganism but, in the ethnic minority areas including Xinjiang, also designed to strike at the roots of opposition to Beijing's rule.

The Strike Hard campaign in Xinjiang led to harsh and sustained repression during 1996 and there were public trials of large numbers of Uyghurs who were accused of serious criminal offences, but who were also alleged to be linked to the separatist movement: many were executed. There were persistent reports of secret executions of separatists without trial. In this atmosphere of repression and anger,

young Uyghurs took to the streets of Ghulja on April 5, 1997, attacking Han Chinese residents of the city. Police action to stop the violence led to an escalation of the protests, and the following day there were additional attacks on Han residents and their property. The Yining rising has become notorious for the violence with which it was suppressed. Official figures claim that fewer than 200 people were killed by the police and military, but eyewitness reports suggest that the death toll was much higher and may have run into the thousands. The violence continued sporadically until April 9 and there were bomb attacks by separatist groups in Urumqi on February 25 and, unusually, in Beijing on March 7. Public security organisations were placed on the highest alert nationwide and launched a major crackdown in Xinjiang, arresting thousands of people in what was essentially an intensification of the Strike Hard campaign. The authorities also embarked on campaigns of political education around the theme of national unity. The Chinese authorities initially suppressed information about these disturbances although details leaked out through émigré publications and the monitoring of local broadcast and print media by the BBC Monitoring in the United Kingdom and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in the United States. In-depth accounts that were heavily slanted towards the Chinese government's perspective but largely confirmed accounts already in the public domain were subsequently published.<sup>14</sup>

### **CCP policy and the Religious Affairs Bureau**

Although the CCP formally espouses atheism, it currently tolerates religious organisation and the expression of religious belief provided that these are within precise limits that it sets. It has sought to regulate all religions, including Islam, through the Religious Affairs Bureau, which was established by the State Council in 1954, and subsequently its successor organisation, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), established in 1998. Subordinate to these general bodies is the Chinese Islamic Association with which all mosques, madrasas and other Muslim organisations are legally obliged to register. Many groups, including some Sufi organisations, have refused to register on the grounds that an atheist state should have no authority over their doctrines and forms of worship. This has created a conflict, not only between unregistered Muslim organisations and the government but also between registered and unregistered Muslim groups. The Chinese Islamic Association fell into abeyance during the Cultural Revolution but was resurrected in 1978 after Deng Xiaoping came to power. New mosques were built and older ones that had been damaged during the Cultural Revolution were restored or even extended; worship became more open and relaxed.

When the rise of political and ethnic dissent began to alarm the authorities in the 1990s, the attitude of the leadership to religious observance toughened abruptly. A confidential internal bulletin, *Document No. 7*, that was issued by the CCP in 1996, identified separatism in Xinjiang as the greatest threat to the region and to the nation as a whole. Among other provisions it demanded a crackdown on illegal madrasas, a restriction on the construction of new mosques, and an end

to independent classes in martial arts and Qur'anic study sessions; these latter two were suspected of having been used as cover for separatist activities. *Document No. 7* called for a purge of party cadres who were also devout Muslims and who had refused to give up their beliefs in spite of years of CCP ideological indoctrination. This was never fully complied with and many Muslim CCP members, some of them in senior positions, continued with their religious activities.<sup>15</sup>

### **Religious restrictions in Xinjiang**

After the publication of *Document No. 7*, state control over Muslims in Xinjiang was reinforced, and even further intensified after the uprising in Ghulja (Yining) in February 1997. The attacks by Al Qaeda on New York and Washington in September 2001 had no connection with Xinjiang or China, but they did serve to bolster China's fears about the links between separatism and political Islam. The attacks did not cause the repression in Xinjiang, which had already been in place for five years, but the Chinese government was able to use the tense atmosphere of the United States' Global War on Terrorism to shield itself from international criticism when human rights were infringed during the clampdown.

Under the new restrictions, children under the age of 18 were no longer permitted to enter mosques and the wearing of the hijab and other forms of Islamic dress was strictly forbidden in schools. Members of the CCP and the Communist Youth League and employees of government organisations, including retired members of staff, were forbidden to enter mosques, and notices outlining these restrictions appeared in Uyghur at the entrances to all mosques. Mosques were also barred from any involvement in disputes over marriage and family planning, and there was a specific prohibition on reading out the Islamic marriage contract, the *nikah*, in the mosque before a couple getting married had been issued with a valid civil marriage certificate. The aim of these restrictions was to assert the primacy of civil laws over Islamic law and to restrict the authority of the local *qadi* judges. Printed or taped materials, which related to anything deemed to be religious extremism or separatism, were also explicitly prohibited, and the teaching of religion anywhere other than in a registered mosque was also outlawed. The new restrictions limited the sale of religious literature in general, and a list of banned books was issued to booksellers.

### **The training of 'patriotic religious personnel'**

It has been estimated that there were 54,575 imams or more senior religious leaders in Xinjiang in 1949 but that, following the campaigns of the 1950s, that number had been reduced to 27,000 by the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Officially, few were active during the Cultural Revolution but in reality imams continued to operate in secret and without the knowledge of the Chinese authorities.

The only organisation for training imams from the whole of China, including Xinjiang, in the 1950s and 1960s was the Chinese Islamic Academy in Beijing.

In 1987 an Islamic Academy was established in Urumqi specifically to cater to Uyghur-speaking imams for Xinjiang, and the first graduates left the academy in 1992 to staff the mosques of the region. The Qur'an was also published in an Uyghur translation to cater to the majority of believers whose grasp of Arabic was too poor to read it in the original. The Religious Affairs Bureau exercised strict control over the training and curriculum of Islamic education.<sup>16</sup> At this time a separate academy was also established in Yinchuan, the capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, to train Chinese-speaking Hui imams.

During 2001, 8000 imams from the mosques of Xinjiang were compelled to take part in a 'patriotic education campaign'. This was organised by a special work team under the control of the central government in Beijing and ran from March 15 to December 23. Imams were required to attend seminars during which they were instructed in the CCP's thinking on legal, political and religious topics, and they were ordered to avoid any involvement with mosques or other groups that were considered to be involved in separatist activities. This campaign was designed to strengthen government control over the registered mosques and to increase the gulf between the officially sanctioned bodies and those that refused to register. There were few serious outbreaks of violence associated with separatists or with political Islam between 1997 and 2007, but Xinjiang remained tense and Uyghur Muslims continued to be subjected to close surveillance and severe repression, especially at work and in schools and colleges.

Preparations for the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which was celebrated on October 1, 2005, were accompanied by an increase in the rhetoric of political repression as Beijing warned of threats posed to the unity and stability of China by armed insurgents, allegedly linked to Al Qaeda. In reality, there was little change in the level of repression experienced by Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The surveillance and the restriction on religious activities and religious education have continued to be severe and relentless. Apart from a temporary period of tension, they did not alter appreciably as a result of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. Beyond the rhetoric, Beijing was genuinely concerned that a combination of Eastern Turkestan nationalism and political Islam would continue to destabilise the region and that a long-term climate of discontent could erupt into a popular movement that it would feel obliged to suppress with military force. These concerns had been aired most dramatically in the Politburo's internal communication, *Document No. 7*, which was published confidentially in 1996 but was then leaked in both Chinese and Uyghur versions. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the civil war in Tajikistan, and unrest in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan all persuaded analysts in Beijing that Central Asian Islam was a serious long-term threat to China's stability.<sup>17</sup>

## **Economic reform in Xinjiang**

Beijing has adopted a two-pronged strategy to deal with the problem of ethnic separatism in Xinjiang since the early 1990s. On the one hand, there has been

ruthless repression of any unofficial religious activity and any political or cultural activities that could be classified as separatist. On the other hand, the CCP has embarked on an ambitious programme of economic reform, on the assumption that the principal underlying reason for the disaffection of the Uyghurs is not ethnic nationalism but poverty and underdevelopment. The decision was made to confront the problem of the relative underdevelopment of China's western provinces as a whole and the policy of the Great Western Development, the Go West policy (*Xibu da kaifa*), was launched in 2000 in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province.

The development of the energy resources of Xinjiang has been one of the notable consequences of the Go West policy. An oil pipeline which links the region with Kazakhstan and another pipeline which transports much-needed natural gas to fuel the industrial and commercial development of Shanghai are two of the most important enterprises, although the impetus for both projects predates the announcement of the Go West policy. Both are major infrastructure projects that are designed to ensure that Xinjiang's vast natural resources are deployed to support the overall development of China's economy. Both have been financed through partnerships with foreign corporations although China has retained overall control of the process. Under the Xi Jinping regime these developments have been subsumed under the even more ambitious 'One Belt, One Road' policy that is designed to connect China economically and physically to the developed West.

There has also been substantial investment in the oilfields of northern Xinjiang, which has enjoyed far greater development than the predominantly agricultural south of the region. This has been achieved in part by the import of modern technology, technical expertise and labour, in some cases from abroad but mainly from the east of China. The expertise and labour is provided by predominantly Han Chinese engineers, technicians and workers, and their presence in the region in well-paid and high-status occupations has increased the anxiety of Uyghurs, who are usually less well educated and less competent in the Chinese language. Many feel that they are being marginalised in their own land.

In spite of the undoubted improvements in the economy of much of Xinjiang over the past five years, ethnic and political tensions remain unresolved. For the government of the PRC, the preservation of Xinjiang as an integral part of the PRC is non-negotiable: it is seen as a vital source of China's escalating energy requirements and is essential to the security of China's Inner Asian borders, especially since the establishment of US bases in Central Asia. It is also a matter of national pride that no part of the existing territory of China should be lost.

### **Renewed violence after 1997**

Although there was a lull in violent protest after 1997 and the associated repression, support for independence, or at least loathing of Chinese control, remained as strong as ever. This re-emerged dramatically in the Urumqi riots of 2009. Violent demonstrations erupted on July 5, 2009, in Urumqi, the administrative capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The riots cost the lives of at least

200 people and drew the attention of the world's media to an ethnic and political conflict that had been neglected for decades. Material circulated on the internet played a key role in the demonstrations. Towards the end of June, among the video clips and stories circling online, there had been reports of violence in Shaoguan, a city in the north of Guangdong province. Uyghur and Han workers had fought after accusations of rape. Some of the video clips showed Uyghur migrant workers being attacked on the streets and left badly injured by the side of the road. What particularly disturbed and angered many Uyghurs was footage of police officers who stood by and watched these attacks by Hans on Uyghurs.

Subsequently, more and more vicious and offensive propaganda about Uyghurs appeared on the internet, some posts saying that Uyghurs 'were dogs' and should be killed. This continued for several days, but there were no reports on the official state media. The predictable response of the authorities was to intensify the repression; security forces in Xinjiang announced that they would 'strike hard against crime and disorder'. In swift and secret trials that followed the 2009 unrest in Urumqi, twenty-one people, almost all of them Uyghurs, were sentenced to death and at least nine of the death sentences were carried out in the immediate aftermath of the disturbances. Although Urumqi was not formally placed under martial law, it was clear that even the normal legal processes (which are far from open or equitable in most of China under normal circumstances and are particularly problematic in Xinjiang) had effectively been suspended. Trials and sentences were used *pour encourager les autres* and it would not be an exaggeration to state that there was a reign of terror in Urumqi after the riots. In addition to the report in the official media that nine people accused of crimes connected with events of July 5 had been executed in Urumqi in late October or early November, a further five executions were announced in early December, all of them men with Uyghur names. It was also reported that eight people had been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, two of them to life terms.<sup>18</sup> Reporting from Xinjiang was even more restricted than previously but there was a suspicion that many death sentences had been carried out without trials or public announcements. The Urumqi disturbances are dealt with in full in Chapter 4.

### **After Urumqi: further restrictions on religious activity**

Official restrictions on the level of religious activity in Xinjiang have been inconsistent. Even in the south of the region the situation varies from city to city, and the experience of Uyghurs in the rural areas is not the same as those in urban areas. In 2010 there was more overt repression of religious activity in Kashgar than in the rural areas around Khotan: the concentration of people and mosques in Kashgar was perceived as a greater threat to social stability and the authority of the CCP and the state. In addition, the state has placed a high priority on the modernisation of Kashgar in order to drive the future economic development of the whole of southern Xinjiang.

Since 2011 the number of violent protests in southern Xinjiang escalated, as did prosecutions for separatist or illegal religious activities. In Kashgar twelve people

were sentenced to death in October 2014 following attacks in Yarkand in which thirty-seven individuals died. On November 11, twenty-two imams and other ‘Muslim preachers’ in Kashgar were sentenced to five to sixteen years in prison for inciting ethnic hatred and disturbing public order.<sup>19</sup> To deal with the escalating violence, new legislation ‘was approved unanimously by the Standing Committee of the Xinjiang People’s Congress’ in Urumqi on Friday, November 28, 2014. It came into force on January 1, 2015, and its avowed aim was to ‘protect legal religious activities’ and ‘target religious extremism’. Ma Mingcheng, the deputy director of the Xinjiang People’s Congress and director of its legislative affairs committee, explained that ‘the old regulation, which was passed twenty years ago, just cannot handle new situations, such as the spreading of terrorist or extreme religious materials via the Internet or social media, and using religion to interfere in people’s lives’.

The regulations include a prohibition on wearing ‘clothes or logos associated with religious extremism’ or forcing others to wear them. The regulations did not specify the precise types of clothing and logos, although the main targets were clearly the burqa, the hijab and other forms of Islamic dress. The Standing Committee of the Urumqi People’s Congress voted on December 11, 2014, to ban the wearing of the burqa, although the report about this vote was later deleted from the *Tianshan* website on which it had appeared: in any case, the proposal would have required ratification by the Standing Committee of the regional People’s Congress. There have been campaigns by county and district governments throughout Xinjiang to discourage the wearing of the burqa, which is favoured by women in the poorer and more isolated parts of southern Xinjiang, particularly those associated with the Naqahbandi Sufi orders. In 2011 a campaign of ‘beautification’, which was directed against the burqa, was launched at the regional level. In essence these new regulations codified a trend that had been in place for some time.

Other tough local directives that have been reported include threats by the authorities in Khotan to confiscate the ‘farmland and personal belongings of individuals found to be engaged in illegal religious activities and their family members’. This was backed by threats that the homes and gardens of ‘suspects’ families’ [would] be destroyed and ‘state benefits cancelled’. Passports were not being issued to anyone suspected of involvement in banned activities, and in some areas parents of school-age children were required to sign pledges that they would not allow their children to participate in any religious activities.

The regulations also prohibited the distribution of videos that dealt with jihad or anything that was considered by the authorities to be religious extremism or terrorism, whether inside or outside a religious site. Religious leaders were also required to report violations of these regulations to the authorities. The regulations specifically forbade religious activities in ‘government offices, public schools, businesses, or institutions’ and insisted that they be restricted to registered venues. Religion must not be allowed to ‘interfere with the judicial system or wedding and funeral traditions’. The new legislation applied to the whole of Xinjiang, but it has had the greatest impact in the south where traditional social and religious

practices are strongest. It is unlikely to resolve the conflict in Xinjiang and, if implemented in as heavy-handed and insensitive a manner as in the past, will only exacerbate existing tensions.

### **Complex conflict and simplistic government response**

The experiences of Kashgar and Khotan demonstrate that the conflict in Xinjiang has multiple dimensions. There is a social dimension associated with the speed and unevenness of economic development and Han in-migration, and a political dimension caused by the limited representation of Uyghur opinion. However, one key element is the tension between the strong religiosity of the Uyghurs and the Chinese state's insistence on equating all Islamic practice, particularly independent practice, with extremism and terrorism.

The official response to all these outbreaks of violence, whether initiated by Uyghur demonstrators or police repression, has been to characterise them as 'terrorist' acts and to blame outside forces – the 'three external forces', of separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. This is understood to include émigré Uyghur groups in the United States and Europe that actively promote the idea of an independent Eastern Turkestan, although there is no evidence linking them directly with violence inside Xinjiang. More recently Beijing has pointed to international terrorist organisations, including Al Qaeda, as possible culprits, but again no concrete evidence has been produced.

In 2003 the death was announced of Hasan Mehsum, who had been shot in South Waziristan on Pakistan's border with Afghanistan. He was identified as the leader of ETIM, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement. In the wake of the recent attacks in Khotan and Kashgar, the Chinese authorities have revived concerns about terrorists trained by ETIM in Pakistan, although most specialists are not convinced that ETIM even exists within Xinjiang as an effective organisation. At the root of the conflict is the dire situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Only when the real culprits – poverty, marginalisation and discrimination – are recognised and dealt with can the conflict be satisfactorily resolved. The nature of ETIM is examined in detail in Chapter 7.

### **Refugees and jihadist links**

Significant changes in the international context have included the weakening of Russian influence in Asia and, partly as a consequence, the increasing economic influence of China in its relationship with the post-Soviet Central Asian states. At the insistence of Beijing, political activities in the long-established Uyghur communities of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were restricted to the extent that they were no longer attractive destinations for Uyghur refugees and activists. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which was established to formalise relations with the states that were formerly part of Soviet Central Asia, has had some success in controlling the flow of people, arms and narcotics across Central Asian national borders. This has also had some effect on the movement of armed

militant Uyghur groups, but the SCO has not been a force for resolving the deeper issues that underlie the insurgency and related opposition movements throughout Central Asia.

Many Uyghurs, determined to leave Xinjiang after suffering religious persecution, chose to avoid the most direct exit route through Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan because of the increased security and border controls and instead travelled southwards through China and into South-East Asia via the province of Yunnan. This route, pioneered by Chinese people-traffickers, took them through Laos, Cambodia or Vietnam into Thailand. Hundreds were detained in refugee camps in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand where many were issued with Turkish passports to assist them to reach their preferred destination. One group of 173 Uyghurs, mostly women and children, was released on June 30, 2015, and allowed to travel to Istanbul where they were resettled by the Turkish government either in Istanbul or the province of Kayseri in central Turkey to the south-east of Ankara, both of which already have established émigré Uyghur communities. The women and children were released after having been held for over a year on suspicion of illegal entry into Thailand. However, male Uyghurs related to these women and children were not released at the same time. The Ministry of Public Security in Beijing accused the government in Ankara of issuing fake identity documents to some of these Uyghurs to enable them to enter Turkey. The Chinese authorities insisted that their actions were justified to prevent Uyghurs from travelling abroad to join radical jihadist groups such as Da'esh (Islamic State) in Iraq and Syria. Turkey had been experiencing a wave of protests against Chinese repression of the Uyghurs; the targets were manifestations of the Chinese presence in Turkey, including the burning of Chinese flags, attacks on Chinese tourists and a Chinese restaurant. These attacks were blamed on the Grey Wolves, a paramilitary group associated with the extreme right-wing nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party or MHP). But the organisation denied that its members had been involved.<sup>20</sup>

The controversy over the Uyghurs detained in Thailand re-opened the question of the relationship between the Uyghur insurgency and international Islamist or jihadist movements. At the beginning of the twenty-first century there were allegations that Uyghurs were moving out of China in some numbers to join the Taliban, Al Qaeda or other Islamist militant groups, but it is difficult to find reliable, independent confirmation of these links. The presence of Uyghurs in Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan after the city was taken from the Taliban by the northern Alliance and United States forces in November 2001 is, however, a matter of fact, as is the detention of twenty-two of their number in the US detention centre at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. It is possible that some of these Uyghurs had visited camps on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border that were supported by Al Qaeda, and there are reports of others who have escaped from Xinjiang and moved through Central Asia and Afghanistan to the 'tribal areas' of Pakistan, notably Hasan Mehsum, who was shot dead in south Waziristan on October 2, 2003.<sup>21</sup>

Since then some radical Uyghurs have explored the possibility of cooperating with Islamist movements in Malaysia and Indonesia, and firmer evidence of these

connections emerged in a court case in Indonesia. On July 13, 2015, three men with Uyghur names were convicted in the North Jakarta District Court of entering Indonesia illegally and attempting to join a terrorist group, the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (Eastern Indonesia Mujahidin or MIT), which is believed to be associated with Jemaah Islamiyah, an Al Qaeda affiliate in Indonesia. They were sentenced to six years' imprisonment and fines of USD 7500. They were traveling with Turkish passports and claimed to be Turkish citizens on holiday, but Indonesian officials insisted that their documentation was counterfeit.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

The evolution of the policy of the PRC government towards Xinjiang since 1949 and its efforts to control and suppress resistance and opposition have not resolved the conflicts, although from time to time they have been successful in suppressing violent activities. Neither the PRC nor any of its predecessors has ever succeeded in resolving the real source of the frustration that has led to outbreaks of violence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Over the centuries many Uyghur communities (especially in the rural areas) have become alienated from the Han majority and the political system that it dominates. At the root of this is their long-term marginalisation and exclusion from many sectors of the economy, including modern extractive and other advanced technological industries for which rural Uyghurs are not considered to have the technical education or an appropriate level of ability in the Chinese language. This does not mean that all Uyghurs are alienated. An urban Uyghur intelligentsia has emerged which has in many ways evolved a *modus vivendi* with the Chinese state, and fully bilingual Uyghurs can be found in professional roles in Xinjiang and other parts of China. This does, however, in turn create the potential for further levels of conflict as Uyghurs who appear to be too close to the Chinese may find themselves regarded with deep suspicion by the more alienated.

Since the outbreaks of violence in the 1990s, Beijing has deployed both the carrot of economic development and the stick of political and religious repression to maintain its control of the region. In the past Xinjiang has been described as both the 'pivot of Asia' and a pawn of the Soviet Union. Today it is the only part of Islamic Central Asia controlled by China, and it is China's land bridge to Eurasia. The importance of this has been emphasised through the 'One Belt, One Road' concept for the future development of relations between China and Central Asia. Xinjiang is intended to play a key role in the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' which, in parallel with the 'Maritime Silk Road', is designed to facilitate trade across Eurasia.

Discussions on the violence in Xinjiang have focussed on the conflict between ethnic Uyghurs and ethnic Han. The make-up of Xinjiang is more complex than this suggests. There are other Muslim ethnic groups, notably the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, but their numbers are much smaller. Those Muslims reported to be involved in acts of violence are almost always identified as Uyghurs. Kazakhs were involved in the independent government of the 1940s and in the mass

migration to the USSR in 1962, and there were calls for part of Xinjiang to be ceded to Kazakhstan in the 1990s, but most of the militant activity is carried out by Uyghurs.

The Xinjiang conflict is complex. It is political in the sense that demands for an independent government are raised. It is interethnic because at its core is the conflict between Uyghurs and Hans. Historically, other Muslim groups have tended to support the Uyghurs tacitly – and actually in the event of a Muslim administration – except for the Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims who have often been opposed to the Uyghurs. This indicates another level of conflict on the basis of language and culture. Religion forms an essential part of that cultural conflict, and the majority of flashpoints between Han and Uyghurs have involved a dispute about religious practice. It is not possible to disaggregate these elements: their relative importance varies from time to time, but it is the combination of ethnic, political and religious factors that is so explosive.

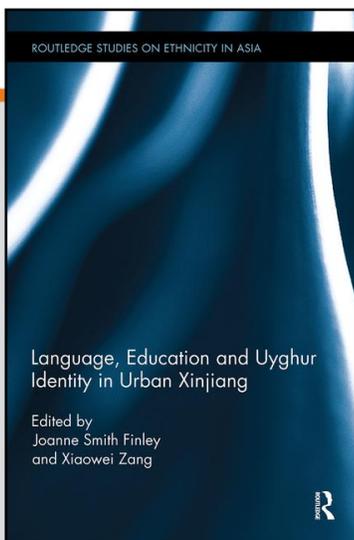


CHAPTER

2

# LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND UYGHUR IDENTITY

## AN INTRODUCTION ESSAY



This chapter is excerpted from

*Language, Education and Uyghur Identity in Urban Xinjiang*

by Joanne Smith Finley, Xiaowei Zang

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# 1 Language, education and Uyghur identity

## An introductory essay

*Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang*

This book explores the relationship between language, education and identity among the urban Uyghurs of contemporary Xinjiang. We start by defining the notion of ethnic identity: what are the processes involved in the formation and development of personal and group identities? In what circumstances do ethnic identities (rather than other available identities) become salient? How and why are ethnic boundaries constructed between groups? When might ethnic identity markers be employed in the pursuit of interests? How is ethnic identity expressed in social, cultural and religious practice? And what is the relationship among language use, education (including language teaching and learning), and ethnic identity formation and expression? To address these questions, we review some key arguments in the field of ethnicity theory, and then consider research findings around identity development. Next, we provide a basic outline of Uyghur ethno-history, and discuss self-representations among the Uyghurs of contemporary urban Xinjiang in the context of current language and education policies.

### **Ethnic identity**

Primordialism, a concept put forward by early anthropologists, refers to the tendency of human beings to attribute power to certain shared ‘givens’, such as perceived (or actual) origins, language, territory or cultural characteristics (Shils 1957). Ethnicity is not of itself primordial; rather, humans perceive it as such because it is embedded in their common experience of the world (Geertz 1973). The concept has been criticised as ‘essentialist’ insofar as it posits that ethnic identity is fixed, ‘natural’ and unchanging (Green 2006; Bayar 2009). Primordialism is also a subjectivist position in defining an ethnic group to be a ‘self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by the others with whom they are in contact’ (De Vos 1975, 9). Group members select ethnic identity markers with which to structure their group from within (Eriksen 1993, 37), and thereby define how the group differentiates itself from others (De Vos 1975, 16). In this process of ‘self-ascription’, the features taken into account are not the sum total of ‘objective’ cultural differences relative to other groups, but *only those which the actors themselves regard as significant* (Barth 1969, 14, our emphasis). ‘Criteria for cultural difference’ may include – but are not limited to – racial

uniqueness (a sense of genetically inherited differences), place of origin (territory), economic independence, religious beliefs and practices, aesthetic cultural forms (food, dress, music, dance), and language (De Vos 1975, 9). When ethnic identity is treated as 'primordial' by a group, that group's perception of irreconcilable cultural differences can make cultural assimilation difficult (Spencer 2006, 77), or provoke fear, conflict and violence between groups (Geertz 1973).

Advocates of the instrumentalist (also situationalist/circumstantialist or objectivist) school, frequently political scientists, hold that ethnic groups – and indeed nations – are the artificial constructs of modern political and cultural elites (Green 2006). These scholars emphasise the interest-oriented dimensions of ethnicity, such as a group's desire for political power or their articulation of demands for socio-economic equality (Keyes 1981). They hold that ethnicity becomes important 'only insofar as it serves to orient people in the pursuit of their interests vis-à-vis other people who are seen as holding contrastive ethnic identities' (Despres 1975, 199). Without the incentive of material advantage, some have argued, psychological boundary maintenance between ethnic groups would simply disappear (Despres 1975, 199). Others take the more nuanced view that in order to be viable ethnicity must involve both instrumentalist and primordialist elements, namely, it must simultaneously serve political ends *and* satisfy psychological needs for belongingness and meaning (Cohen 1974). Within this complex understanding of ethnic identity as an intermeshing of common origins and shared political or socio-economic interests vis-à-vis the 'others', the notion of 'homeland' may assume a prominent position:

The 'historic' land [. . .] where terrain and people have exerted mutual, and beneficial, influence over several generations. The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations [. . .] The land's resources also become exclusive to the people; they are not for 'alien' use and exploitation.

(Anthony D. Smith 1991, 9)

While re-introducing primordialism into the equation, these scholars departed from the earlier notion of culture as fixed, eternal and insulated from outside influence. Fredrik Barth famously argued that all ethnic groups 'must include cultures in the past which would clearly be excluded in the present because of differences in form' (1969, 12). He also proposed that ethnicity is not isolated, but relative, writing extensively on the role of psychological boundary maintenance: 'Categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation [. . .]'. (Barth 1969, 9. cf. Eriksen 1993, 10). In other words, ethnicity can only develop if an ethnic group is in regular contact with another group or groups from whom it considers itself substantially different. Drawing on Sartrean theory to expand this position, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993) argued that both 'we-hood' and 'us-hood' are essential for an ethnic category to come into existence: not only must group members have historical and cultural experiences in common, they

must also share a marked sense of feeling different from the 'others'. Ethnicity thus involves both commonalities (complementarisation) and differences (dichotomisation) between categories of people, and 'group identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not' (Eriksen 1993, 35, 10). It is for this reason that the relevance of ethnic identity has sharply increased in the context of human migrations and globalising flows. Most scholars today agree that ethnic groups are fluid and endogenous to a set of social, economic and political processes (Bayar 2009). Individuals and groups may adopt a variety of identities in different contexts and at different times. Identities are by nature transient; they can lie dormant for a time, then be re-created in modified or modernised form in reaction to certain stimuli. This is how, for instance, group consciousness of a shared heritage of values led young Mongols to create an ancient Mongolian identity anew in the form of modern pop songs about Chingis Khan (Gross 1992, 15).

Given the consensus that ethnic identity is contingent on the society around us, it follows that identity formation involves an interplay between the psychological and the social. Albert Epstein, while contending that identity is 'fed by taproots from the unconscious', notes that it is cognitive in another of its aspects (1978, 101). Eriksen emphasises the interdependence of the inner and social organisation, describing identity formation as a process 'located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture' (cited in Epstein 1978, 7). The identities we assume as adults consist of 'identity fragments' (Eriksen 1993, 147), understood as unconscious identifications made during childhood, combined with pieces of identity we consciously gather from the social world, based on positive and negative experiences. In this way, ethnic identity is constructed and modified as young people become aware of their ethnicity within the larger socio-cultural setting (Phinney 2003, 63).

Ethnic identity formation, like other forms of identity construction, becomes especially salient during adolescence. During this fragile transition period, ethnic discrimination in society (for example, a language policy that disadvantages a particular group) can lead members of socially devalued groups to internalise negatively perceived traits, resulting in a decreased will to achieve, self-degradation, or a sense of inferiority. According to scholarship on three generations of ethnic change in the US, minority individuals from the younger generations became increasingly embedded in the 'American' way of life, and gradually became detached from the neighbourhoods of their parents and grandparents. Ethnic characteristics (e.g. cultural expressions of identity, religious affiliations, language use) became less stable over time, and, with each successive generation, rates of intermarriage rose. On the other hand, these studies show that ethnic prejudice in society in some cases fuelled group pride, leading to the ethnic incorporation of the devalued group. Thus, some groups worked to reinforce their ethnic identity, and resisted ethnic assimilation in all its forms, including exogamy (Horowitz 2013). It was common for later generations to develop novel and different ways of understanding and connecting to their ethnicity, a phenomenon some called 'symbolic ethnicity' (Gans 1996).

### **Ethnic identity development**

We can gain further important insights into ethnic identity by looking at studies of identity development. Theories in this area are situated at the intersection of developmental and social psychology. Developmental psychologists built on Erikson's seminal work *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968), which explains how the 'identity crisis of adolescence' is resolved by reconciling identities imposed by family and society with the personal need for an identity that brings feelings of satisfaction and competence. Meanwhile, social psychologists centred on the sense of group belonging, and the negotiation of social identity in the context of the value placed on group membership by society (summarised in French, Seidman, Allen and Aber 2006). Findings showed that individuals belonging to highly valued groups in society need not modify their social identity, while those belonging to devalued groups usually resort to one of three strategies:

- (a) individual mobility – if possible, the individual chooses to physically leave the group and change group membership; where not possible owing to gender, race or ethnicity, the individual chooses to psychologically leave the group by dis-identifying with it;
- (b) social creativity – the group as a whole chooses to redefine the meaning of their group membership by comparing themselves with the out-group on a dimension on which they are superior, or by changing the values assigned to the attributes of the group from negative to positive; and
- (c) social competition – the group as a whole fights the current system to change the hierarchy of group membership in society.

(Tajfel and Turner 1986)

It was further suggested that people who are high in collective self-esteem are more likely to seek to actively redefine ethnic group membership (strategy b) or to restore a threatened social identity (strategy c), while people low in collective self-esteem tend to opt for individual mobility (strategy a) (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990).

Studies show that older adolescents are more likely to be at higher stages of identity development than younger adolescents, suggesting that individuals progress linearly as they age, although it is also possible for individuals to regress to lower stages over time. French, Seidman, Allen and Aber (2000; 2006) conducted two studies to measure factors influencing changes in ethnic identity during early and middle adolescence. Using subscales of 'group-esteem' (how one feels about ethnic group membership) and 'identity exploration' (the extent to which an individual searches for meaning in ethnic group membership) in the second study (2006), they recruited 420 students in the grade prior to the transition to either junior high or senior high school. Their average age at the time of the pre-transition year assessment (Time 1) was 11.28 years for the early adolescents and 14.01 years for the middle adolescents. At Time 1, both the early and the middle adolescents attended schools which were predominantly homogeneous in ethnic terms.

At Time 2 (the transition year), the early adolescents transitioned into similarly homogeneous junior high schools, but the middle adolescents generally transitioned into ethnically diverse senior high schools.

The results of this study are compelling: they indicate a significant increase over time in both group esteem and identity exploration, with higher increases occurring among the two minority groups (African American and Latino American) than among the majority group (European American). They also confirm a rise in identity exploration across the normative transition to ethnically mixed senior high schools. The authors explain this by noting that early adolescents live in racial and ethnic enclaves and thus may not interpret ethnicity as worthy of exploration. However, once adolescents leave the safety of the neighbourhood and are faced with persons who look and act differently, ethnicity becomes salient, and the process of exploration begins. At this point, negative ‘encounters’ with members of other ethnic groups may push individuals towards exploring the meaning of ethnic group membership. Despite this lack of exploration, however, early adolescents had already begun to develop positive group esteem. The authors suggest that this results from the positive social influence of parents, peers and popular media. When it came to the middle adolescents, the African American cohort reported low group esteem at Time 1. They appeared to hold a negative view of their group membership, and to be psychologically distancing themselves from their group. However, over the next two years, group esteem increased dramatically among this cohort, indicating a rejection of the standards by which their group is judged by the wider society. These findings, which indicate ethnic identity development towards higher levels with age, provide an important backdrop to the questions explored in this volume. Below, we consider ethnic identity development among the Uyghurs through history.

### **A concise Uyghur ethno-history**

There are 56 officially recognised nationality groups in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The Han Chinese are the ethnic majority, whereas the Uyghurs constitute the fifth largest minority nationality. There were nearly 3.3 million Uyghurs in Xinjiang in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over this vast region (Yin and Mao 1996, 43–4; Li 2003, 38–9; Toops 2004, 243–8). The first PRC census found 3.6 million Uyghurs living in Xinjiang in 1953; the second PRC census, more than 4 million in 1964; the third PRC census, nearly 6 million in 1982; the fourth PRC census, nearly 7.2 million in 1990; and the fifth PRC census, more than 8.3 million in 2000, respectively (Toops 2004, 243–8; Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Local History Compilation Committee 2004, 1). According to the sixth PRC census, taken in 2010, Uyghurs in Xinjiang numbered more than 10 million, compared with a regional Han population of just over 8.4 million (Australian Centre on China in the World 2012). The vast majority of Han residents inhabited the ‘economic belt’ and surrounding industrial cities of north Xinjiang in 2006, while over 80 per cent of Uyghurs were clustered around the impoverished southern oases of Artush, Kashgar, Yengi Shähär, Yarkand,

Khotän, Lop and Keriya (Harlan 2009). In 2009, there were 1.75 million Han Chinese resident in Ürümchi city (regional capital), compared with 310,000 Uyghurs (Howell and Fan 2011, 125).

Chinese sources claim that the origins of the Uyghurs can be traced back to the Dingling nomads of north and northwest China, and to the areas south of Lake Baikal and between the Irtish River and Lake Balkhash (in today's Mongolia), by the third century B.C. The Dingling were subsequently referred to as the Tiele, Tieli, Chile or Gaoche, and Weihe in Chinese historical documents prior to the seventh century (Chang 2003, 40). In 744 they formed a powerful Uyghur steppe empire, which would last for one hundred years. Inhabiting a vast territory, their capital was Karabalghasun, located on the high Orkhon River in what is now the Republic of Mongolia (Mackerras 1972). When the Uyghur khanate collapsed in 840 following an invasion by Kyrgyz nomads, the Uyghurs migrated towards the south and southwest in three streams. One stream fled south to China; the second eventually settled in Gansu; while the third crossed the Tianshan to the region now known as south Xinjiang. There, in the Turpan basin, they built the Buddhist kingdom of Qarakhoja/Gaochang (850–1250), and gradually fused with the high-nosed, bearded Iranian inhabitants of the Tarim basin (Geng 1984, 5–6; Barfield 1989, 150–7; Millward 2007, 42–6).

The Uyghurs did not fall under direct Chinese rule until much later, when the Qing empire gained control over Xinjiang following a series of successful military campaigns against the Dzungars (Mongolian warriors and rulers of the region at that time) in the seventeenth century. Qing rule in Xinjiang was contested in a series of local Turkic rebellions, of which the most serious was led by Yaqub Beg (1864–1877). Though feted as a Uyghur national hero today, Yaqub Beg was in fact a foreigner from the Khoqand khanate situated to the west of the region. Already at the beginning of his rule, local Kashgarians were collecting troops to oppose him (Kim 1986, 113–14), and over time they increasingly resented the privileges that Khoqandians held over them (Tsing 1961, 145) as well as the heavy taxation imposed by that regime (Tsing 1961, 149; Kim 1986, 189). Partly as a result of local disaffection with Yaqub Beg, the Qing Army was able to put down the local Turkic rebellion, and Xinjiang became a province of the Qing empire in 1884. Qing emperors relied on a *beg* system (*beg* was a generic term for the chief of a Turkic group in an oasis, appointed by the central government) to maintain their rule over the region. These indigenous leaders, who were bound by salaries and titles to the Qing empire, were frequently dubbed 'dogs with human faces' by their ethnic brethren (Kim 1986, 46). While Qing officials ran political and military affairs in the region, local peoples were able for the most part to preserve local languages, cultures and social practices under their jurisdiction (Newby 1998; Borei 2002, 276–80; Ji 2002, 95–162; Kim 2004, 11; Clarke 2011, 18–21).

After the Qing empire was toppled in 1911, Xinjiang was ruled successively by three Chinese warlords: Yang Zengxin (1912–1928), Jin Shuren (1928–1934), and Sheng Shicai (1934–1944). In particular, General Sheng sought to suppress the emerging Uyghur nationalist movement, was known for his extensive use

of torture in his campaigns against pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic activities, and was regarded by Uyghurs as a ruthless mass-killer (Forbes 1986, 151–61; Hyer 2006, 81). In 1933, Uyghur rebels formed the Turkish-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (TIRET), based in Kashgar. While this republic was suppressed by Chinese and Tungan (Hui) forces in 1934, the central government of the Nationalist (Guomindang) regime was nonetheless unable to place Xinjiang under its direct control until 1944. It appointed four governors of Xinjiang between 1944 and 1949: Wu Zhongxin (1944–1945), Zhang Zhizhong (1945–1947), Masud Sabri (1947–1949) and Burhan Shähidi (1949) (Clarke 2011, 28–41). Later, with the support of the Soviet Union, Uyghurs established the East Turkestan Republic (ETR) in Ili, Tarbaghatay and Altay in northern Xinjiang between 1944 and 1949. Together, the TIRET (1933–34) and the ETR (1944–49) are regarded as landmarks in the evolution of Uyghur nationalism, beginning in the 1920s (Forbes 1986; Benson 1990; Bovingdon 2001; 2010). The East Turkestan Republic was absorbed into the PRC when the CCP and its army entered Xinjiang in 1949 (Braker 1985, 109; Bai and Ozawa 1992; Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, Institute for Historical Research 1997, Vol. 2, 328–40; Vol. 3, 92–165, 166–85, 329–34, 335–6, 435–48, 483–5, 495, 511–27; Ji 2002, 252–78; Li 2003, 145–57, 218–23; Huang 2003, 79, 127, 144; Clarke 2011, 37–9). Some Uyghurs expected that they would soon enjoy full political independence in Xinjiang as they had been promised by Mao Zedong a decade earlier; instead, ‘CCP officials asked Uyghurs to be satisfied with autonomy’ (Bovingdon 2004, 5; Clarke 2011, 40–1). The region became the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on 1 October 1955.

### **The Uyghurs under the CCP**

During the Maoist period (1949–1976), the CCP promoted measures to integrate Xinjiang into the PRC, and prosecuted some Uyghurs with ‘deviant’ political or religious views (Millward and Tursun 2004, 88–9; Shichor 2005, 127; Van Wie Davis 2008, 2; Hess 2009, 85–6). In 1962, some 60,000 Uyghurs and Kazakhs fled northern Xinjiang into the Soviet Union, exasperated with CCP policies and with the number of Han migrants that had flooded the region in the wake of the famine associated with the Great Leap Forward (McMillen 1979; Niu 2005, 23; Bovingdon 2010, 51). Yet despite these incidents, there were relatively few examples of direct Uyghur–Han conflict between 1949 and 1966 (Dillon 1995; 2004; Millward 2004).

This situation changed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when the CCP carried out a draconian political campaign against the so-called ‘agents of local nationalism’ (local leaders and intellectuals who advocated cultural rights for minority groups) (Rudelson 1997, 104; Heller 2007, 47–8). During this ten-year period, 99,000 of a total of 106,000 minority cadres in Xinjiang were dismissed from their leadership posts (Koch 2006, 8). Large-scale religious repression took place, including the closing of rural bazaars, attacks on imams and mosques (with some turned into slaughter-houses for pigs), and the public burning of religious

scripts (Dreyer 1968; Fuller and Lipman 2004, 322, 326–8; Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004; Van Wie Davis 2008, 2; Hess 2009, 86). This campaign was perceived in Xinjiang as an all-out attack on ethnic minority cultures and religions by the Chinese government and the Han people, which is an important factor underlying the growth of ethnic consciousness and resentment towards the CCP among Uyghurs in the post-1978 era (Heller 2007, 49).

After the Cultural Revolution, the CCP recognised the damage that had been done. To attempt reconciliation, the Party introduced new policies which opened up a relatively tolerant environment for ethnic and religious expression from the late 1970s to the early 1990s (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004, 307; Hess 2009, 87). Uyghur intellectuals were given some freedom to express their versions of Uyghur history and culture, which were not always consistent with official rhetoric (Rudelson 1997, 115; Bovingdon 2001). Grose (2012, 372) shows that, during this time, Uyghur editorial teams were able to replace ‘rigid Han-centric imaginings of Chinese national identity’ in textbook content with ‘narratives that provide space for asserting a distinctively Uyghur ethno-national identity’. An example is one Uyghur language textbook published in 1991, compiled by two Uyghur editors, and ‘embroidered with markers of Uyghur identity’ (Grose 2012, 376). Written right to left in the modified Arabic script, it introduces Uyghur customs and festivals, the different oases of Xinjiang, daily life among Uyghurs, and the major religions that Uyghurs have followed. Crucially, the editors satirise the failure of Han Chinese cadres in Xinjiang to make efforts to learn about ethnic minority customs (Grose 2012, 376–7). Religion also flourished once more during this period. Pilgrimages to Mecca were resumed in 1979, after a fifteen-year break (Shichor 2005, 122), and some Uyghurs went to Malaysia, Pakistan and the Middle East to study Islam (Bequelin 2000, 88; Fuller and Lipman 2004, 330). By 1989, the number of mosques in Xinjiang had increased by 5.8 times compared with a decade earlier, to some 20,000 (Smith Finley 2007b, 634; Van Wie Davis 2008, 2). The Chinese government also accorded Uyghurs a certain level of preferential treatment in the areas of family planning, college admission, job placement and leadership representation (Rudelson 1997, 125; Koch 2006, 16; Reny 2009, 502).

Since 2000, the CCP has placed economic development and regional stability firmly at the centre of political rhetoric with the launch of the Great Western Development (*Xibu da kaifa*, 西部大开发) campaign. This campaign consolidates policies pioneered during the 1990s; with it, the government hopes to resolve the ‘nationality problem’, and strengthen ethnic unity in the region by way of accelerated economic growth (Sines 2002; Bequelin 2004; Goodman 2004, 317, 319–20; Hess 2009, 94–5; Koch 2006, 6, 14, 16; Van Wie Davis 2008, 4–5). At the same time, the CCP has endeavoured through its routine use of the phrases ‘Chinese person’ (*Zhongguoren*, 中国人) and ‘Chinese people’ (*Zhonghua minzu*, 中华民族) to include all nationality groups within the unitary ‘Chinese nation’. The CCP insists that China is a united, multi-ethnic nation. This nation, it argues, resulted from the ‘outgrowth of the historical development of the past several thousand years’, and consists of a ‘big fraternal and co-operative family composed of all

nationalities', within which ethnic minorities 'form with Han Chinese a single, unbreakable unit' (Bulag 2002; Hyer 2006, 76–7; Mackerras 2011, 114).

### **Rising Uyghur ethnic consciousness since the 1990s**

Despite the CCP's efforts to promote national unity in the PRC, ethnic consciousness has increased on a dramatic scale among the Xinjiang Uyghurs since the 1990s. Scholars report a growing discontent against a range of state policies (and in some cases Chinese rule itself), and there is an acute sense of separation between Us (Uyghurs) and Them (Han Chinese) (Cesàro 2000; Bellér-Hann 2002; Smith 2002; Koch 2006, 10–11; Van Wie Davis 2008). Within this context, a small number of Uyghur activists have taken direct (and sometimes violent) action against buildings, infrastructure and people representative of the Chinese government (Millward 2004; Shichor 2005, 121; Hess 2009, 89–90; Bovington 2010, 105–34). Yet the vast majority of Uyghurs have engaged in 'everyday' or 'symbolic' resistance of a non-violent nature (Rudelson 1997, 137; Smith 2002; Bovington 2002; Heller 2007, 8–9, 54; Smith Finley 2013a), a pattern that continues despite successive crackdowns following the Ghulja disturbances of 1997 and the Ürümchi riots of 2009. Of particular note is the process of re-Islamisation, which has gained momentum among a section of the Uyghur population, and which increasingly cuts across categories of age, gender, social/class background and oasis origin (Waite 2007; Smith Finley 2007b; 2013a; Harris and Isa 2014). It is significant that this pattern is also observable in the regional capital Ürümchi, a city formerly often viewed as a symbol of Uyghur linguistic and cultural 'dilution'. In the southern city of Kashgar, global flows have introduced reformist ideas, broadening local disputes over what are considered 'correct' Islamic beliefs and practices (Waite 2007). This process of re-Islamisation has been largely peaceful and cathartic, and there is a diverse set of reasons behind it (Smith Finley 2013a). While some articulate Islamic renewal as a symbol of local opposition to national (Chinese) and global (US, Russian, Israeli) oppression of Muslims (Smith Finley 2007b), others characterise it as a response to failed development (as perceived by those who failed to benefit from it), and a corresponding desire to return to social egalitarianism. While some have returned to Islam as a response to the frustrated ethno-political aspirations of the 1990s (failure to achieve independence along the lines of the new Central Asian states), others did so as a reaction against modernity and a return to cultural 'purity' – a process previously documented for many Middle Eastern societies (Ayubi 1991; Esposito 1997; 1998). For still others, Islam is a vehicle for personal and national reform in a context where (ethno-) political non-fulfilment is conceived as a divine punishment for moral decline.

The re-Islamisation process both reflects and reproduces a rising Uyghur ethnic consciousness since the early 1990s. As Fuller and Lipman note, Islam is most prominent among a set of distinguishing Uyghur characteristics, and attending mosque and engaging in other public religious rituals are 'consciously recognized as a means of reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Uyghur community from the dominant Han population and the Chinese state' (2004, 339). For Dwyer

(2005, 19, 22), being Turkic and Muslim is central to the modern manifestation of the Uyghur ethnic identity. Other scholars argue that in recent years the Uyghur national identity has come to be equated exclusively with Islam (Koch 2006, 10), and that those with questionable adherence to Islam are unlikely to be accepted as authentic members of the Uyghur nation (Hess 2009, 82).

Nevertheless, other Uyghurs, in particular the urban youth, have drawn on a wider variety of sources to define and celebrate their ethnic identity. One such source is transnational cosmopolitanism. In the early 2000s, a young musician named Arken Abdulla (also known as the 'Uyghur Guitar King') provided a contemporary role model for Uyghur youth, as it began to move between regional and national boundaries, and then stepped across the national boundary altogether. As Baranovitch shows, Arken was one of the first artists to make 'the move beyond Uyghur tradition and the geographical boundaries of Xinjiang', immortalising this act with his first studio album, *The Dolan Who Walked Out of the Desert* (*Zou chu shamo de Daolang*, 走出沙漠的刀郎), the title of which signals his aspiration to 'connect to the rest of the world' (2007, 70). This emerging cosmopolitanism among young Uyghurs should be regarded as both 'subaltern' and 'rooted' (or 'partial'). It is 'subaltern' because cosmopolitanism can never be gender or ethnically neutral, in other words, cosmopolitan sociability cannot negate pre-existing social relationships of unequal power. It is also 'subaltern' because cosmopolitan openness is constrained by the particularities of the historical moment; by time, place and circumstance (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, 411–13). It is 'rooted' or 'partial' because cosmopolitan sociability is embedded within practice-based identities, and can be found only in social relationships that do not negate cultural, religious or gendered differences. Transnational networks of connection between people of different cultural backgrounds do not necessarily produce cosmopolitan openness; rather, they involve limits (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, 403–4). For Uyghurs in urban Xinjiang, cosmopolitan sociability with other groups is limited by contestations over territory and culture, in a historical context of comparatively recent colonial domination (little more than two hundred years). They are therefore unlikely to enter into relationships of cosmopolitan sociability with Han Chinese. Instead, they seek out peoples with whom they have 'experiential commonalities despite differences' (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, 403). This goes some way to explaining the fascination of contemporary Uyghur youth with the Flamenco culture of southern Spain, itself heavily influenced by North African Sufism, or with politically informed hip-hop in the US (Smith Finley 2011b). As one leading Uyghur musician put it: 'Some cultures are more alike than others' (Smith Finley 2013a, 208).

Cosmopolitanism is often conceived as a threat to the claims of the nation-state; as sitting in opposition to national identity, and as seeking to transcend the nation (Catterall 2011, 342). Its trans-border loyalties may be seen as 'treacherous', indeed, as a critique of nationalism itself (Glick Schiller, Darieva and Gruner-Domic 2011, 401). In Xinjiang, where Uyghur continues to serve as the regional *lingua franca* despite increased levels of urban bilingualism, the popularity of

Central Asian and Turkish songs (with their vocals in Turkic- Altaic languages) derives from a sense of linguistic and cultural closeness. In the Uyghur-dominated Yan'anlu district in southeast Ürümqi, university students 'listened to music from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey rather than from other regions of China' in 2005, and the district was fast becoming 'a cultural hotspot influenced primarily by the Turkic west' (Eri 2008, 77–8). A shared linguistic identity also means that Uyghur customers will normally choose imported Turkish chocolate over locally produced Chinese chocolate, because it is labelled in the Latinised modern Turkish script and comprehensible to most Uyghurs, who retain familiarity with the *yengi yeziq* (the Latinised New Script in use before 1980) (Erkin 2009, 425–6). This food shopping phenomenon is of course also attributable to a shared cultural and religious identity. Uyghur customers are more likely to believe that Turkish brands of chocolate are halal (permitted in the Islamic religion). In this way, 'branding, like national identity, trades upon familiarity, trust and aspiration' (Catterall 2011, 337); only, in this case, identifications and aspirations are linked not to the bounded Chinese nation-state but to the transnational pan-Turkic world. Smith Finley observed an example of pan-Turkic identification in Ürümqi in 2004, when 18-year-old Uyghur students Ömär and Dilbär related the following story around international football:

During the last World Cup, it happened one time that China had to play Turkey. We were watching it in the big hall at school and, of course, China lost! It was really funny; every time Turkey began to do well, we cheered them, and our Han classmates looked askance at us and got really irritated!

(Smith Finley 2013a, 387)

She reports that, as they spoke, the two sat eating Turkish biscuits and chocolate, thus expressing (Pan-Turkic) cultural, religious and political affinities through the simultaneous consumption of international sport and halal foodstuffs. Such incidents fully demonstrate the importance of the notion of 'alternate centres' (Bequelin 2004, 377) in stressing an alignment away from Beijing and towards Turkey and the Turkic cultural sphere.

In another example of identification with alternate centres, recent studies find that a minority of students in Xinjiang prefer to learn a different foreign language in place of Chinese (Schluessel 2007, 268–9). Uyghur youngsters seemingly have no fear of the 'global advance of English'; for them, the threat to the Uyghur language emanates rather from Chinese, as the 'hegemonic language culture' in their region (Catterall 2011, 338). Their preference for the mother tongue (Uyghur) and selected foreign languages is further suggested by the fact that since at least 2008 the Yan'anlu district of Ürümqi, which regularly receives Russian- and Turkic-speaking merchant visitors, has been characterised by a trilingual language environment, with signs reproduced in Uyghur, Chinese and Russian (Eri 2008, 79). Uyghur students' preference for foreign languages other than Chinese suggests an alternative set of cultural and political allegiances in defiance of the Chinese state requirement of minority group alignment with the Han centre.

In addition to cosmopolitan goods, sports and foreign languages, many Uyghurs in Ürümchi seek to purchase real estate in ethnically Uyghur (*Uy. milliy*) districts of the city such as the Yan'anlu area. Yet this preference does not reflect an inward-looking, culturally exclusive myopia. Rather, many Uyghurs simply consider the district to be 'more cosmopolitan' than other parts of Ürümchi. As one Uyghur university professor observed, foreigners and elements of foreign civilisations can be seen there, and 'modern ideas and fashions reach Yan'anlu first' (Erkin 2009, 425). In this way, it is Central Asian businessmen – and the influx of Central Asian cultural products that they enable – who are viewed as bridging the gap between Xinjiang and the modern outside world. The emerging Uyghur middle class chooses to enhance its identity with reference points from *outside* China rather than from within (Erkin 2009, 420, 422). Another salient reference point for contemporary identifications is the Middle East. A fashion for belly-dancing has emerged in Ürümchi since the end of the 1990s, and spread to high-end Uyghur restaurants in Beijing and Shanghai. This new trend almost certainly emanated from the Arab world, which has become a major inspiration for young Uyghurs, who see it as rich, modern, Muslim (therefore culturally close) and autonomous (Harris 2005, 633). In this way, selective reception of global flows enables the evolution of a modern Uyghur culture that orients itself towards the Turkic and Arab west, while Yan'anlu becomes the locus for a selective cosmopolitan modernity.

Uyghurs have long been known as 'one of the most nationalistic and least assimilated minorities in China' (Heberer 1989; Dautcher 1999, 54–5, 337–9; Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004, 311; Mamet, Jacobson and Heaton 2005, 191; Kaltman 2007, 2; Millward 2007, 348–51). In the context of a rising Uyghur ethnic consciousness since the early 1990s, Chinese state actors perhaps feel that this is more true now than ever. In response, the government has carried out multiple 'Strike Hard' campaigns to target what it calls 'the three evils' of separatism, terrorism and religious extremism, in a bid to securitise Xinjiang (Fuller and Lipman 2004, 324–5, 330; Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004, 307, 316–18; Hess 2009, 90). So far, however, this repressive and punitive policy seems merely to have encouraged the further development of Uyghur ethnic consciousness *vis-à-vis* the Han Chinese (Dwyer 2005, 63; Hastings 2005, 32; Hyer 2006, 78–9; Hess 2009, 89–90). In 2013 and 2014, perceived state violence was met with indigenous violence on several occasions. These incidents, while unsophisticated, were significant in touching civilian victims in China proper for the first time in Uyghur history.

### **'Bilingual education' and Uyghur identity**

As suggested by the above discussion, a complex combination of factors may have contributed to a strengthened Uyghur ethnic identity in contemporary times. One possible factor is repression of the Uyghur language: the regional *lingua franca* in Xinjiang. In this volume, we ask: to what extent has the sense of Uyghur identity been either weakened or strengthened as a result of the bilingual education policy? Although there are several published articles on this topic, there is

yet to appear a book that empirically examines the relationship among language, education and Uyghur identity in the post-2002 era. This is therefore a preliminary attempt to narrow the knowledge gap by focusing on the patterns, effects and meanings of language use among contemporary urban Uyghurs. Scholars have consistently shown that the Uyghur language is central to Uyghur ethnic identity (Smith 2000, 155, 157–61; Smith 2002, 159–61; Dwyer 2005, 59; Hess 2009, 82; Schluessel 2007, 260; Reny 2009, 493–4). As the regional *lingua franca*, the Uyghur language has long underpinned Uyghur ethnic identity. However, since 1995 state education policy has steered away from accommodative pluralism towards assimilative monoculturalism (Dwyer 2005, 29, 38–9; Schluessel 2007, 256–8, 263). In particular, starting from 2002, the Chinese government has promoted the so-called ‘bilingual education’ (双语教育) policy in Xinjiang. The term ‘bilingual education’ is a euphemism for the imposition and mandatory use of Mandarin Chinese (i.e. the language of the majority Han) in what were previously minority-language schools or classes (Schluessel 2007). The new policy abolished the ‘separate-but-equal’ parallel education system, which formerly allowed Uyghur parents to choose the linguistic medium (Uyghur or Chinese) in which their children received tuition. By 2005, all minority-language schools and Chinese-medium schools in urban Xinjiang had been ‘consolidated’, with students from all nationalities taught together in one class (Schluessel 2007, 257). As a result, Mandarin Chinese has been rapidly institutionalised as the sole medium of instruction in the region’s higher, secondary and primary institutes of education. A secondary impact of the policy has been to relegate foreign languages such as Russian, English and Japanese to the status of third language, with pupils forced to study this third language through the medium of Mandarin Chinese.

Not surprisingly, a broad range of Uyghur social groups objects to ‘bilingual education’, even while the majority refrains from taking direct action to protest it. Studies suggest that despite the gradual institutionalisation of Mandarin Chinese, many Uyghurs continue to prefer the use of their mother tongue in all but the professional realm (i.e. situations in which they must converse with Han co-workers) (Smith 2002; Baki 2012; Smith Finley 2013a). Dwyer (2005, 55, 63; also Yee 2005, 47; Schluessel 2007, 262–3) writes that many Uyghurs consider their mother tongue to be the central aspect of their identity and inviolable. In this context, the bilingual education policy has been perceived as ‘linguicide’ or ‘linguistic genocide’ (the forced extinction of the minority language) and as a direct attack on Uyghur identity. Potential parallels may be drawn here with language trends among native Americans in the US. In her work on contemporary Navajo communities, Louise Lamphere (2007, 1, 133–6) points out that linguistic assimilation, in addition to occupational and residential integration, spatial dispersal and intermarriage, has been a key catalyst of structural assimilation.

Yet Uyghur objections to bilingual education do not mean an outright rejection of learning Mandarin. In fact, opinions among Uyghur parents as to the pros and cons of an education in the mother tongue versus an education in Mandarin have been divided since at least the 1990s. While some Uyghurs view their mother tongue as intimately bound up with Uyghur culture and identity and a cultural

property to be defended, other Uyghurs are more instrumentally driven, thinking strategically in terms of the potential socio-economic constraints associated with exclusively speaking the mother tongue, and the corresponding benefits of learning Mandarin (Benson 2004, 198; Reny 2009, 493–4). The latter believe that ‘we must compete with the Chinese on their terms’, and consider a Chinese-medium education essential for promoting Uyghur identity *from within the system* (Rudelson 1997, 128, 144). Nonetheless, it seems clear that the vast majority of parents would at least have preferred to retain the choice regarding medium of education. Few Uyghurs would describe themselves as actively choosing to ‘acculturate’ to Han culture; in their own words, they make a pragmatic decision to accommodate to the prevailing system. Via a process Schluessel (2007, 270) terms ‘instrumental acceptance’, they opt to use Mandarin Chinese as a tool to further personal and group interests, and to improve their life chances. At the same time, many continue to express their separate ethnic identity through certain patterns of language use (Smith 2002; Smith Finley 2013a, 135–9).

### **The Uyghur authentic**

The fact of Chinese as sole medium of education across all levels of schooling since 2005, combined with a heavily Han-centric curricular content, inevitably raises the question of cultural authenticity of the Uyghur youth trained under that system. According to Vannini and Williams’ social constructionist theory of authenticity (2009), negotiation of the ‘authentic’ is a flexible and powerful scheme of evaluation, which involves boundary-making and has direct implications for the shaping of in- and out-group processes. Thus, definitions of what is – or is not – culturally ‘authentic’ can affect relationships between Uyghur sub-groups as well as relationships between Uyghurs and other ethnic groups. Following state efforts since the 1950s to foster a Chinese-speaking minority elite, by the 1980s, two Uyghur linguistic sub-groups had emerged in urban Xinjiang: *minkaohan* (i.e. Uyghurs educated in Mandarin Chinese) and *minkamin* (Uyghurs educated in Uyghur). The *minkaohan* can be loosely divided into three generations, emerging within different political and socio-cultural environments. First-generation *minkaohan*, schooled in the 1950s–1960s, appear to have got on reasonably well with the first generation of Han Chinese who settled in Xinjiang. While newly appointed Uyghur cadres learned Chinese, many Han newcomers attained at least functional fluency in the Uyghur language, and nearly all abstained from cultural practices considered offensive in Islamic practice (Smith 2002, 172–3; Taynen 2006, 50–1). As a result, this early cohort of *minkaohan* was well placed to form a bridge between Chinese administrators and the local people.

The second generation was essentially the product of repression of minority languages and cultures during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). These individuals enjoyed no control over their education. Few Uyghur schools remained open during this period, and most children in urban areas were forced to attend Han schools (Dreyer 1976). There, they were taught in the Chinese language, which subsequently became their first language, if not their mother tongue.

At the same time, the Arabic script, used by the Uyghurs since their conversion to Islam (and known to contemporary Uyghurs as the Old Script, *kona yeziq*), was discontinued in favour of the New Script (*yengi yeziq*) based on the Latin alphabet (Bellér-Hann 1991; Dwyer 2005). The experience of this generation of *minkaohan* was characterised by an acute sense of schizophrenia; a lack of belonging, either to the Chinese social world to which they were expected to assimilate, or to their own people among whom they felt themselves ‘fakes’.

The third generation has grown up during the free market economy period in the context of accelerating Han migration to Xinjiang, and represents a conscious decision taken by urban Uyghur parents to increase their children’s life chances (education, employment, socio-economic status and stability) in a rapidly changing society. As numerous informants in Ürümchi explained in 2004: ‘A decade ago, private Han-run companies would only consider hiring *minkaohan* [not *minkaomin*]; now, many won’t hire Uyghurs full stop’ (Smith Finley 2007a, 220). For this third wave, there was an element of choice regarding medium of education, albeit within an ethnically stratified environment that seemed to point to only one course of action. The *minkaohan* of the 1990s grew up in Uyghur families, where most received a solid and positive home education in Uyghur socio-cultural practices, many of them deeply influenced by Islam. On reaching school age they went to Han schools, where Chinese gradually replaced Uyghur as their first language, and where they were exposed to contrastive Chinese notions of culture (Ch. *wenhua*, 文化), including different attitudes to education, social and gender relations, religion and so on. The transfer affected individuals in different ways, producing a myriad of ‘types’ on a broad spectrum of hybrid cultural combinations. For some, the experience produced a – temporary or permanent – sense of shame regarding their minority background, and a sense of cultural lack, as it had for second-generation *minkaohan*. Others enjoyed more positive identities, considering themselves ‘modern’, ‘progressive’ and ‘internationalist’. Often, third-generation *minkaohan* experienced all of these emotions, at once or in different moments. Upon leaving education, they entered adult life to find that their partial sinicisation earned them only partial entrance to the sphere of Han privilege, with access increasing in proportion to the degree of sinicisation, but not guaranteed. At the same time, the two worlds they spanned were fundamentally divided by inter-ethnic tension, and they were considered neither (wholly) Uyghur by *minkaomin* nor wholly Chinese by the Han.

The experience of Chinese-educated Uyghurs in many respects mirrors that of Russian-educated Kazakhs in contemporary Kazakhstan, where the Russian-speaking identity is several decades more established (Smith Finley 2007a). The Russified Kazakhs, product first of the language and cultural policies of Tsarist Russia and then of Soviet nationality policies, were moulded by an aggressive programme of ‘cultural colonization’ (including the introduction of atheistic education), intended to effect change in Kazakh self-identity (Akiner 1995, 51–2). As a result, some felt a sense of cultural deprivation regarding their limited command of the mother tongue (Akiner 1995, 58), while others began to associate the Kazakh language with ‘backwardness’ and stigma (Nazpary 2002, 155–6). Today,

many young ‘cosmopolitan’ Kazakhs prefer the Russian-language press to the Kazakh-language press, considering it a better medium for acquiring information from the outside world (Dave 1996, 56). Yet awareness of a specifically Kazakh identity persists, and young people generally name Kazakh as their mother tongue (Akiner 1995, 51–2).

In Xinjiang, the status of having Chinese as first language came to be perceived as a ‘minus’ by sections of the Uyghur community in the 1990s, and as representing linguistic and cultural ‘dilution’ (Taynen 2006, 46; Smith Finley 2007a, 229–30). *Minkaohan* were often accused of having incomplete Uyghur linguistic and cultural knowledge, and even of becoming ‘quasi-Hans’ (Smith 1999, 163–4). *Minkaomin* in particular claimed that *minkaohan* acted ‘less like Uyghurs and more like Han’ (Schluessel 2007, 259). Labelled ‘Xinjiang’s 14th nationality’ (Smith Finley 2007a, 229), *minkaohan* became the ‘preferred scapegoats’ of the *minkaomin* community and the butt of jokes; some even saw *minkaohan* as potential collaborators with Han Chinese, as ‘traitors’ and ‘sell-outs’ (Taynen 2006, 51, 57; Smith 2007a, 230). Meanwhile, the superior status of Uyghur – as the mother tongue – was symbolically underlined by the frequent sight of a Uyghur offering apologies to an ethnic peer after mistakenly addressing them in Chinese (Smith 1999, 217–18; Smith 2002, 159–60; Taynen 2006, 48–9). In Beijing, too, a similar language hierarchy has been observed among minority students; there, *minkaomin* have tended to consider *minkaohan* as only loosely representative of their ethnic group, causing *minkaohan* in Beijing to experience a ‘torn identity’ (Hasmath 2011, 1,850–1).

Several scholars have examined the psychological effects of a *minkaohan* education among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. They found that, if growing up in a predominantly Uyghur neighbourhood, individuals tended to be academically confident and socially well-adjusted. If, however, an individual grew up in a mainly Han neighbourhood, they were more likely to be quiet, withdrawn and uncertain about taking the lead in activities with Han children (Taynen 2006, 52). *Minkaohan* often felt isolated in the Han classroom, being slow to follow the jokes and banter (in Chinese) of Han peers. Inhabiting ‘an uncomfortable middle ground’, they had to contend with levels of ethnic discrimination not encountered by *minkaomin*, who studied in the linguistic and cultural safety of Uyghur-medium classes (Taynen 2006, 46; Smith Finley 2007a, 227–8, 230–1). One *minkaohan* father, who claimed it had taken him years to feel secure and capable, described the Chinese-medium classroom as ‘soul-destroying’ for Uyghur children (Taynen 2006, 53–4). The situation was equally unbearable when *minkaohan* returned to a Uyghur cultural environment. Put in a situation where they were expected to demonstrate Uyghur linguistic or cultural knowledge, many *minkaohan* felt trepidation and fear (Smith Finley 2007a, 226–7; Eri 2008, 76). Because they tended to be more articulate and comfortable using Chinese, they would shift easily between Chinese and their mother tongue. This frequent code-switching fed mistrust among *minkaomin*, and created a social barrier between the two (Taynen 2006, 48–9; Smith Finley 2007a, 229–30). Taynen cites a typical example of one Uyghur woman, who declined to dance at a Uyghur wedding because she felt she

did not know how to dance ‘correctly’; other guests took offence at this, viewing the woman’s refusal as a social ‘slight’ (2006, 56). In response to their experience of double prejudice from both Han and Uyghur communities, some *minkaohan* began to form a ‘third community’; others, however, remained the ‘perpetual outsider observing other people’s cultures’ (Taynen 2006, 46, 56).

Following the standardisation of Mandarin Chinese as sole medium of education in the post-2002 era, one might expect that the stigma attached to *minkaohan* should gradually fade, as the proportion of Chinese-educated youth increases. In 2006, Taynen (2006, 48) noted that *minkaohan* children were ‘irresistibly drawn’ to Chinese movies, TV shows, comic books and music. Eri similarly observed that the growing popularity of Uyghur performers singing lyrics in Chinese to Uyghur-style music symbolises ‘the current social expectation for young Uyghurs to be fluent in Mandarin at the same time as being proud to be Uyghur’ (2008, 78). Such developments may however be received with horror by the older generations. To give an example, older Uyghur musicians tend to see any musical innovation, such as a new style of playing the *tämbür* introduced by Nurmuhämmät Tursun, or the fusion of Uyghur sounds with the *rumba flamenca* gypsy style, as a shocking deviation from authenticity that must necessarily have resulted from Chinese influence. Their horror reflects core anxieties surrounding the retention or loss of Uyghur culture and identity in an environment increasingly dominated by the Han language and culture (Harris 2005, 642; Smith Finley 2013a, 208). Despite these growing anxieties within the Uyghur community, it is increasingly clear that a Chinese-medium education does not have to lead to deep acculturation. Young Uyghurs can – and often do – emerge with multilingual and multicultural proficiency, while continuing to identify themselves solidly as Uyghur. The trend is reminiscent of Lamphere’s study, in which she shows how young Navajos in the US are combining elements of their own culture with Anglo culture while continuing to view themselves as Navajo (2007, 1, 133).

Yet while young urban Uyghurs have become increasingly proficient at negotiating multiple languages and cultures, this proficiency has not improved their experience in an ethnically stratified labour market. In fact, employment opportunities have become increasingly scarce for Uyghur applicants, regardless of language proficiency. Poor labour market outcomes, including rising unemployment and under-employment, are another important reason for the growth and persistence of Uyghur ethnic consciousness. At the root of Uyghur disaffection is ethnically informed hiring discrimination, understood within a framework of relative deprivation. While it is true that economic development has been comparatively booming in urban Xinjiang, with a per capita GDP of 28,000–30,000 Chinese yuan in 2011 (Momtazee and Kapur 2013), and a regional GDP growth rate of 12 per cent in 2012 (China Briefing 2013), increasingly, Uyghurs are not accorded equal access to employment opportunities. In the early–mid 1990s, *minkaomin* faced discrimination in job search on the basis of insufficient fluency in the Chinese language. Following the Ghulja disturbances in 1997 (see Millward 2004), *minkaohan*, once ‘significantly better equipped to succeed economically’ (Taynen 2006, 47, 54–5), also began to be disadvantaged, as Uyghur applicants

were rejected solely on the basis of their ethnicity (Smith Finley 2007a, 220; 2013a, 44–55). It is common to see this caveat in the text of job advertisements in Xinjiang: ‘The above-described post is restricted to ethnic Han applicants’ (Ch. *yishang zhaopin xian Hanzu*, 以上招聘限汉族) (Uyghur Human Rights Project 2012, 3–6). Moreover, Maurer-Fazio, Hughes and Zhang (2007, 177) have provided quantitative data to show that Uyghur men have been badly affected by these changes, with the percentage of working-age males in employment falling dramatically from 80 per cent to 60 per cent between 1990 and 2000.

Even where Uyghurs are able to secure employment, they are often faced with poor or unequal progression opportunities. Relegated to lower administrative positions from where there is no hope of upward mobility (Taynen 2006, 51), or passed over for promotions, they watch as Han colleagues ascend within the hierarchy. Zang (2011; 2012) reports a substantial gap in income between Uyghur workers and Han workers in regional capital Ürümqi. As a result, many *minkaohan* experienced a strengthened ethnic awareness in response to workplace discrimination (Smith Finley 2007a, 228–9), and came to feel that they had sacrificed their culture and ethnicity (in the form of the mother tongue) to gain socio-economic advantages that did not materialise (Taynen 2006, 52).

## Outline of chapters

Given the institutionalisation of Chinese-medium education in Xinjiang since 2002, the relationship among language, education and ethnic identity constitutes an important direction for new research in Uyghur studies. Five chapters collected in this volume were originally explored at the workshop ‘Uyghur Youth Identities in Urban Xinjiang’, held at the School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield in July 2011. At the workshop, established scholars and talented post-graduates came together to consider ways in which Uyghur urban youth identities are evolving in response to the imposition of ‘bilingual education’. In particular, we attempted to gauge where individuals – including *minkaohan* and *minkaomin* – locate themselves on the various spectra of modernisation, sinicisation, re-traditionalisation and globalisation. Following the Sheffield workshop, we successfully solicited another three contributions to the project, and decided to include Xiaowei Zang’s paper on the major determinants of Uyghur ethnic consciousness, published in *Modern Asian Studies* in 2013, as a reprint. Below is a brief outline of the nine chapters.

In **Chapter 2**, Xiaowei Zang seeks to identify the causes of rising Uyghur ethnic consciousness in the post-1978 era. Using quantitative survey data gathered in Ürümqi in 2007, Zang asks: is there a high level of ethnic consciousness among Uyghurs? And, if so, is Uyghur consciousness based more on instrumental factors than cultural properties, or *vice versa*? To answer these questions, Zang examines five potential sources of rising Uyghur consciousness: Han migration into Xinjiang; social stratification within the Uyghur community; Han–Uyghur inequalities; Uyghur language use; and Islamic religiosity. Data

analyses show a high level of ethnic consciousness among urban Uyghurs in Ürümchi. They also suggest that the effect of Han migration on Uyghur ethnic consciousness is not statistically significant. In other words, increased Han immigration is not resulting in the cultural assimilation of local peoples; indeed, the opposite is more likely to be true. This finding demonstrates that levels of ethnic consciousness are not necessarily related to the relative size of minority and majority groups, and echoes patterns of ethnic revival observed among minority groups in the US and in Europe, where minority languages and cultures prevail despite the cultural and economic hegemony of white Americans and Europeans. On this basis, Zang concludes that levels of ethnic consciousness in Xinjiang are not dependent on the ethnic composition (majority–minority ratio) of the regional population.

On the other hand, his study indicates that religiosity and Uyghur language skills are both good determinants of Uyghur ethnic consciousness in Ürümchi, as too are class subjectivities (a Uyghur person's perception of their relative social rank). This latter should not be confused with level of income, which did not appear to be related to the degree of ethnic consciousness. So, why is a Uyghur high income earner not less nationalistic than a poorly paid Uyghur worker? Zang suggests that this is because Uyghur high income earners are more likely than other Uyghurs to work alongside Han Chinese. Many will have had to obtain higher qualifications or work harder than the latter in order to receive similar wages, in the context of ethnically based labour discrimination. Others, after comparing themselves with a Han counterpart, may place themselves on a lower rung in the urban social hierarchy, a comparison which in turn leads to resentment and heightened ethnic consciousness. Again, the perception of relative deprivation is salient here, helping to explain why class subjectivities are a good predictor of Uyghur ethnic consciousness, whereas income is not. Zang concludes that while levels of ethnic consciousness in the Uyghur community were based mainly on occupation in the 1980s (with intellectuals significantly more aware than either merchants or peasants), today, Uyghur language skills and Islamic affiliation are the key determinants of Uyghur ethnic consciousness in a context where cultural and religious factors have emerged as universal forces capable of promoting ethnic cohesion and unity.

In **Chapter 3**, 'Between *minkaohan* and *minkaomin*: discourses on "assimilation" amongst bilingual urban Uyghurs', David Tobin examines how Chinese party-state discourses on modernisation and 'bilingual education' seek to produce the boundaries of, and order the meanings attributed to, the national and the ethnic in Xinjiang. In representing the Uyghur language as 'backward', the state positions the Uyghur minority on a rung below that imagined for the majority Han. Furthermore, this model of nation-building seeks to disconnect Uyghurs from their existing linguistic and cultural community through the elimination of the Uyghur language in PRC education. However, as Tobin shows, as they receive, negotiate and resist such discourses, young, urban, bilingual Uyghurs produce communities of a different kind. These alternative communities find shape in shared practices and social relations, in daily experiences that are real and visceral

rather than ‘imagined’. While meanings attributed by individuals to the use of the Uyghur language vary, that language retains a fixed viscerality and symbolic power to determine who is, and is not, a Uyghur.

In seeking to predict possible futures for Uyghurs as ‘bilingual’ schooling is rolled out region-wide, Tobin presents two in-depth, ethnographic case studies. At the request of his interviewees, Mukhtar and Mahigül, interviews were conducted primarily in English – a circumstance which attests to the status of Mandarin as language of last resort among the Uyghur youth. Tobin’s case studies illustrate a divergent social trend apparent in Xinjiang since the second half of the 1990s. Mukhtar’s stance represents resistance to the imagined Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) while Mahigül’s position is better described as accommodation. Yet at the same time, the attitudes articulated by these respondents bring nuance to the fixed boundaries of *minkaohan* and *minkaomin*. Rather than language use itself, Mahigül and Mukhtar emphasise the importance of a person’s attitude towards language use. Through this lens, only those *minkaohan* who actively *prefer* to use Mandarin are placed outside of the self-identified Uyghur community (cf. Smith Finley 2013a, 368, 375; also Baki Elterish in this volume). For all other Chinese-educated and Chinese-speaking youngsters, Mandarin is simply seen as an unavoidable reality and necessity, which must be instrumentally negotiated to maximise the chance of finding decent employment in a labour market plagued by ethnically based hiring discrimination. As Tobin rightly underlines, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that by learning Mandarin, Uyghurs will ‘become Chinese’. After all, neighbouring Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks did not ‘become Russian’ simply by dint of being Russian speakers (cf. Smith Finley 2007a, 221–2). Ultimately, coercive integration or ‘impact integration’ (see Chen in this volume) is unlikely to produce a willing and united multi-ethnic, national community; rather, it will produce destabilising effects as it strengthens Uyghurs’ attachment to the mother tongue and their ethnic group.

Continuing the focus on ‘bilingual’ education, Ablimit Baki Elterish shows in **Chapter 4** how the use of Uyghur or Chinese in interaction reveals much about contemporary identity construction. Starting from the premise that urban society in Xinjiang offers spaces in which people may become bilingual naturally through social experience, he compares language use among older people (Uyghurs aged 30 plus) and the youth (those aged between 15 and 29), as well as among *minkaohan* and *minkaomin*. Baki Elterish pays special attention to the internal identity politics produced among Uyghurs by the state policy turn towards Chinese as sole medium of education. His study illustrates how judgments concerning authenticity are often based on an individual’s use of language: with whom and when does a person speak Chinese or Uyghur? And, more importantly, what is their personal attitude (see Tobin in this volume) towards the use of either language?

The most significant finding in Baki Elterish’s study, and one that helps to gauge the success (or failure) of the state’s ‘impact integration’ – or linguistic assimilation – agenda, is that next to no respondents use only Chinese (and no Uyghur) for verbal communication. While *minkaohan* use mainly Chinese for reading and writing, most use predominantly Uyghur – or code-switch – in verbal

interaction. The only time when Chinese is used exclusively is when respondents use the internet, write reports, read or send text messages. These are all domains in which the use of the Chinese script is institutionalised (state publishing; institutes of education; Han-managed work units or companies) or where the use of Uyghur script is not yet technically viable (telecommunications). The differences between *minkaohan* and *minkaomin* that emerge from this study could be construed as indicating a 'pure' (essentialist) Uyghur ethnic identity versus a hybrid Uyghur identity. However, the author's findings that in contemporary urban Xinjiang *minkaohan* youth use Uyghur regularly in verbal communication with parents and friends while *minkaomin* youth use Chinese regularly to engage with mass media suggest that this paradigm is in urgent need of revision.

In **Chapter 5**, Mamtimyn Sunuodula draws on Bourdieu's notion of the official national language as a 'legitimate' language imbued with symbolic capital to illustrate how policy makers over-promote the Chinese language in Xinjiang. One outcome is that there is no educational or socio-economic incentive for Han pupils to learn an ethnic minority language, despite the rhetorical stress the state places on the importance of reciprocal language learning. Another is the production of anxiety and resistance among ethnic minority students regarding the growing influence of the Chinese language and culture. Yet the study also contains clear evidence of group confidence regarding the ultimate retention of the Uyghur language and culture – a confidence Sunuodula attributes to 'the tenacity of indigenous cultures'.

When it comes to English language education for ethnic minority pupils, the study finds little active participation of policy makers, and no guarantee of the required resources being made available in schools. While the Chinese government had initially intended English language education policies to be rolled out nation-wide, the author notes that it later issued a modified directive that implicitly excludes speakers of minority languages from access to English language tuition. In seeking to understand the impact of language policies in Xinjiang, Sunuodula asks how changes in the linguistic marketplace relate to processes of social, ethnic, national and global identity construction among the Uyghur youth. He rejects the notion that the study of English endangers local languages, seeing it rather as a new domain within the multilingual repertoire – one that helps subalterns break with the constraints of ethnicity and class. Young Uyghur respondents demonstrated a keen interest in learning English, while the same motivation to learn was not in evidence when it came to Chinese. From their viewpoint, English is an important world language, mastery of which is essential to gain access to cutting-edge academic knowledge. Furthermore, an English language qualification can help a person find a better job and enable study abroad.

According to Sunuodula, the meaning of obtaining a multilingual and multi-literate repertoire goes beyond socio-economic benefits to also include socio-political and cultural gains. In the first sense, his respondents reported that they have a real chance to compete with Han counterparts in the area of English language education. While Uyghur students face difficulty in adjusting to university studies in their second language (Chinese), and are disadvantaged in this respect

compared with Han students, English is a foreign language for both groups. This area of study thus offers Uyghur students the possibility to balance the inter-ethnic power relationship. This finding is strongly borne out by the fact that Uyghurs have competed in the final rounds of almost every major English-speaking competition in China since 2004: despite representing less than one per cent of China's total population, they consistently beat Han contestants from the best schools in the country. Their cumulative success means that Uyghurs are learning to be confident in their English language ability starting from a younger age (Beige Wind 2014). In terms of cultural gain, Sunuodula's respondents expressed a desire to learn about the world through the medium of English rather than what they see as the limited and filtered information available in Chinese. This fully suggests the wish to transcend PRC state discourses and national boundaries and become citizens of the world. As one commentator on Xinjiang put it:

English study is fuelled by the desire to consume images that resonate with [young Uyghurs'] own aspirations [...] entering into an English-speaking world is also a way of drastically expanding the horizon of their imagination. Being able to watch and understand the lives of others in drastically different circumstances gives them ways of imagining a future life that might be different.

(Beige Wind 2014)

In this way, the willing investment in English as a third language is an investment in a young Uyghur's identity, one closely related to their relationship with the world and their understanding of possibilities for the future.

In **Chapter 6**, Janina Feyer considers the ways in which Uyghurs and the Xinjiang region are depicted in a set of contemporary school textbooks *Zhongguo lishi* (Chinese History). Comparing textual and pictorial depictions with the popular stereotypes of Uyghurs that appear in state discourses and circulate in Chinese society, she considers potential influences of 'textbook knowledge' on Uyghur identity construction. Because textbook knowledge is imparted at an age when children have not yet developed a value system and are most impressionable, textbooks – and particularly history textbooks – play an important role in the perpetuation of particular discourses and the shaping of young people's views. While the People's Education Press (PEP) no longer enjoys the exclusive right to publish textbooks in the PRC, because of textbook censorship and pervasive self-censorship, textbooks continue to be highly uniform in content. Feyer finds that minority nationalities are under-represented in *Zhongguo lishi*, as much of the text deals with the history of the successive Central Plains states. As she observes, if we take into account the implicit connection between the respective terms 'Xinjiang' and 'Western Regions', then Xinjiang receives the most attention. Yet this attention is conditional on a particular vision: the directional verbs employed in descriptions of envoys and merchants moving between China proper and Xinjiang show that while Chinese persons 'went west' (Ch. *xi xing*), those of the Western Regions 'came east' (Ch. *dong lai*). This language suggests an ingrained

Confucian worldview that sees central and eastern China as situated at the centre of the universe while the Western Regions sit at the periphery (Harrell 1994).

Feyel's second finding is that Uyghurs and Xinjiang, Tibetans and Tibet, are selectively deployed in the textbooks as a means of constructing a particular national history that serves the present. The Uyghur people are not mentioned in a chapter devoted to the Silk Road; rather, the text emphasises connections between the Han Dynasty and the 'Western Regions'. One might legitimately deduce that the Chinese interest in Xinjiang – now as then – concerns the territory more than the people. A classroom activity, which is dedicated to the territorial integrity of China past and present, and stresses that Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan have been part of Chinese territory since antiquity, further bolsters this suspicion. When Uyghurs do briefly appear, it is as defenders of the Chinese empire. We are told that the Khoja rebellions occurring during the Qing period were resisted by Uyghurs and other ethnic groups, who recognised themselves as victims of an exploitative local aristocracy, and that Uyghurs supported Qing efforts to recapture Xinjiang from the Khoqandian outsider Yakub Beg. Past events pointing to separatist movements or to ethnic tensions between the Chinese heartland and the far west are modified or omitted altogether; there is no mention of the independent states formed during the 1930s and 1940s. Nor is reference made to contemporary conflicts between Uyghurs (or Tibetans) and Han; the text consistently stresses good relations between the groups.

Feyel concludes that while earlier sets of history textbooks reproduced pejorative, discriminatory views of minority groups (Baranovitch 2010), Uyghurs and their ancestors are depicted in a neutral, perhaps even favourable, way in *Zhong-guo lishi*. Given that textbook knowledge is 'a powerful tool in the process of discourse constitution and modification', she ventures that such depictions could act to smooth away the discriminatory stereotypes held about Uyghurs by the Han public. On the other hand, a possible negative consequence is that young Uyghurs may internalise PRC state-sanctioned historiography, with direct impacts on identity formation and self-image. Ultimately, it remains to be seen how far 'textbook knowledge' can challenge the alternative histories circulating in the Uyghur community. The CCP's insistence on the 'fact' of Xinjiang as an inseparable part of China since antiquity may instead be recognised by a politically savvy youth as a reflection of state fear in the face of growing Uyghur resistance.

**Chapters 7 and 8** examine the impacts of the 'Xinjiang Class' (Ch. *Xinjiangban*) programme on Uyghur identity formation and identity politics. In **Chapter 7**, Yangbin Chen investigates the ambiguous impressions and images held by a unique Uyghur educational elite – *Xinjiangban* students – in regard to Han Chinese. The Xinjiang Class – a national-level boarding school programme created to educate Uyghur senior-secondary (Ch. *gaozhong*) students from Xinjiang in the eastern cities of China – was implemented in 2000. The state's hope and expectation is that this strategy will exert a positive influence on Uyghur–Han inter-ethnic relations. Chen asks three core questions: How do *Xinjiangban* students form their perceptions of Han people? Have their perceptions altered over the course of their studies in China proper? And what are the implications of their

perceptions for ethnic and national identity construction? Through a comparison of the responses of one group of prep students and one group of senior students to a writing task entitled ‘Han People through My Eyes’, Chen traces evolving views over a two-year period.

The students’ essays reveal a set of bipolar perceptions of Han people. On one hand, positive views seem to attest to the success of state discourses in disseminating an ‘ideal’ national identity in which the Han language and culture take centre stage. On the other hand, negative views reflect a more realistic understanding of Han people, and embody a strong sense of Uyghur ethnic dignity. The contrast, Chen suggests, is the result of changes over time in response to a prolonged encounter in a Han community (see our discussion of French et al.’s studies above). Positive perceptions directly reflect the manifested goals of the Xinjiang Class programme. Students’ admiration for Han Chinese, expressed along certain lines, stems not only from the essentialised images found in state propaganda but also from the attitudes expressed by their families (especially parents) towards Han neighbours and colleagues, and from their own positive inter-ethnic experiences during childhood in Xinjiang. Yet these positive perceptions of an ‘ideal’ Han people jar awkwardly with the more critical perceptions found among senior students, formed over time in everyday interactions. Negative images recorded in students’ essays include Han ‘cultural blindness’ (ignorance of Uyghur culture) and hostility from local Han residents. This finding reflects the fact that mistrust among Han Chinese towards the Uyghur ethnic group has deepened in China proper, as also in Xinjiang, following the Ghulja disturbances of 1997 and the Ürümqi violence of 2009 (Smith Finley 2011a). The articulation of critical perceptions of Han people enables *Xinjiangban* Uyghurs to resist state-sanctioned notions of the Han cultural ideal, while at the same time emphasising a superior Uyghur cultural identity. Ultimately, Uyghur ethnic dignity can be both damaged (via internalised oppression) or shored up by the experience of the *Xinjiangban* programme – and sometimes both at the same time.

Previous studies have shown that Uyghurs respond to negative cultural stereotypes circulated by Han Chinese (for example, the suggestion that Uyghurs are ‘dirty’) with counter-stereotypes of their own. These include negative stereotypes of Han culture and positive stereotypes of Uyghur culture, many of which are based on contrastive religious beliefs and cultural practices (Rudelson 1997; Smith 1999; 2002; Cesàro 2000; Bellér-Hann 2002; Smith Finley 2013a). This process is also in evidence in Chen’s study, where some Uyghur students condemned Han habits like spitting as ‘unhygienic’, while others pointed to superior Uyghur cultural practices such as familial commensality, elegant interior decor and female beautification, prowess in sports, and the art of hospitality. As Chen acknowledges, the persistence of negative stereotypes of Uyghurs among the Han, together with the creation of counter-stereotypes within the Uyghur community, can only hinder the development of mutual tolerance, understanding and respect. Chen concludes that, in the end, the apparent reduplication of ‘the Han ideal’ among *Xinjiangban* students lacks credibility. One reason given for his judgment is that all of the students had completed intensive training courses on ‘nationality

unity' and 'anti-separatism' before leaving Xinjiang, and were therefore prone to quoting the official line when describing Han people in the abstract. Positive perceptions are, however, less in evidence when the students reflect on individual experiences of real-life encounters. Moreover, students' capacity for independent judgement appears to strengthen over time, leading them to critically question official state discourses. In Chen's view, unless the negative perceptions of Han Chinese held by these Uyghur students are acknowledged and examined by the state and Han scholars, there is little hope of producing *Xinjiangban* graduates as a patriotic minority elite.

In **Chapter 8**, Timothy Grose offers an analysis of a recurring decision reached among *Xinjiangban* graduates to not return to Xinjiang after completing their schooling. The CCP has explicitly stated its expectation that *Xinjiangban* graduates will return to Xinjiang and enter strategically selected segments of the labour market, including education (teaching of the Chinese language, or through the medium of Chinese), healthcare (including dissemination of the state family planning policy) and agricultural technology. As an incentive to return, if *Xinjiangban* graduates agree to serve in Xinjiang for a period of five to ten years, particularly in the rural areas surrounding Kashgar and Khotän, their university tuition fees are waived. The state's hope is that through the *Xinjiangban* programme, students will be imperceptibly trained in the culture of the Central Plains, develop an attachment towards the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*), and deepen their sense of patriotism towards China. In this way, *Xinjiangban* students are expected to provide a stabilising, pro-CCP element within Xinjiang society. As Grose points out, such aspirations fully suggest a modern manifestation of China's ongoing 'civilising project' (Harrell 1994). In this study, he asks two core questions: how do *Xinjiangban* students experience ethno-national identities? How successful are these individuals in navigating between Uyghur and Han Chinese cultural practices?

Turning first to school life, Grose reports that *Xinjiangban* students commonly describe boarding school in China proper as like 'prison'. Expected to work up to fourteen hours a day, six days a week, they are rarely integrated with local Han students, and extra-curricular life is strictly monitored. Students complain in particular about the strict prohibitions placed on religious practice, with at least one case reported of expulsion of *Xinjiangban* students simply for attending prayer at a local mosque. Contact between students and their parents is limited. Following graduation, many *Xinjiangban* students are unwilling to return to Xinjiang because of earlier direct experience of ethnic discrimination by Han people resident in Xinjiang (cf. Kaltman 2007). For these individuals, the region is no longer considered 'home'. Other reasons include tightened restrictions on religious activities; hiring discrimination practised by Han employers; lack of employment opportunities suited to graduates' educational levels, abilities and expertise; lack of prospects to earn a sufficiently high salary to support a family; and better opportunities to advance their education abroad or in eastern China. Nevertheless, several respondents said that while they currently had no plans to return to Xinjiang, they may do so one day. This thought was motivated largely by the presence of family and friends in Xinjiang, the perceived need to raise children close to the

extended family in a community dominated by Uyghur cultural norms, and pride in Xinjiang as the cultural homeland.

Based on these findings, Grose contends that the decision to not (or at least not immediately) return to Xinjiang carries important implications regarding the ways in which these young Uyghurs interpret – and challenge – their assigned membership of the Chinese nation. Characterising their choice as both a form of ‘covert’ resistance and an assertion of Uyghur ethno-national identity, he posits that if these graduates had truly internalised state messages of ‘inseparability’, then they would consent to return to Xinjiang in service of the Chinese nation. The decision to not return suggests rather that they are not prepared to act as torch bearers for Central Plains Chinese culture. Instead, a significant number of these academically successful and often trilingual graduates of the Xinjiang Class seek to create new forms of political life through relocation abroad (see Sunuodula in this volume). Indeed, some seem to genuinely believe that pursuit of an overseas education – while optimistically waiting for China’s decline – is currently the best way to serve long-term prospects for the Uyghur nation.

It is perhaps in the area of personal commitment to Islamic practice that Grose’s most interesting finding regarding the *Xinjiangban* students emerged. Respondents complained about the strict prohibitions placed on even the most mundane forms of religious practice in the boarding school setting, such as greetings (‘Ässalammu Äläykum [Peace be with you]’), as well as those affecting explicitly religious rituals such as the recitation of post-meal supplications and the five daily prayers. Moreover, graduates of the *Xinjiangban* cited tightened restrictions on religious practice back in Xinjiang as a core reason why they chose to indefinitely delay their ‘homecoming’. According to Grose, their testimonies are an ‘outcry’ at the mistreatment individuals have experienced in Xinjiang since 2001, when, following 9/11, the CCP seized its opportunity to impose sanctions on religious practice in the name of fighting terrorism. Policies of securitisation increasingly infringe upon the daily lives of Uyghurs to the point where many feel they are treated as second-class citizens.

Finally, in **Chapter 9**, Joanne Smith Finley addresses the identity constructions of karaoke hostesses in Ürümchi – a stigmatised group in Uyghur urban society. Drawing on five case studies, she explores the ways in which family situation, the labour market, linguistic medium of education, and religion impact on these young women’s choice of work and the subsequent evolution of their identities. Different sub-groups in the Uyghur community seek to blame this humiliating phenomenon variously on Uyghurs from the north or south of the Tianshan (Heavenly Mountains), from other oases, from ‘broken’ families, or from particular linguistic/educational backgrounds. However, Smith Finley finds no evidence to suggest that hostesses originate particularly from northern or southern, or from rural or urban, parts of Xinjiang. What does emerge is that hostess girls can operate more easily outside of their hometown, since they can then evade the social supervision of parents and communities. When it comes to educational background (i.e. the linguistic medium in which education was received), it seems that, contrary to community expectations, *minkaomin* (Uyghur-educated) individuals

are more likely to enter the industry than *minkaohan* (Chinese-educated) individuals. Furthermore, while a small proportion of better-educated (as measured by a sino-centric education system and social hierarchy) and highly acculturated *minkaohan* might consider entering into a genuine romantic relationship with a Han person (cf. Smith Finley 2013b), *minkaohan* interviewees consistently assigned the ‘immoral’ world of hostessing to the socially ‘damaged’ (those from broken families) or to *minkaomin*, characterised as less well educated and of ‘lower quality’ (Ch. *suzhi di*). All women interviewed for this study were *minkaomin*, and all hailed from families that were in some respect ‘broken’.

Smith Finley acknowledges that ethnic discrimination in the spheres of language use, education and employment could potentially lead to low individual and group self-esteem. However, her findings suggest conversely that these factors have led to a strengthening of ethnic awareness among her female respondents. The young women’s indignation when describing the hiring discrimination they face demonstrates a keen awareness – and resentment – of ethnic inequalities vis-à-vis the Han majority. Furthermore, their determination in the face of such difficulties to do whatever it takes to better themselves, support parents and siblings, and achieve upward mobility, suggests a strong sense of self-respect at individual and group levels. Most important of all, the girls’ deep awareness of Islamic cultural mores (current profession notwithstanding), and their articulation of a superior morality compared with Han clients and Han hostesses, suggests a robust Uyghur ethnic identity, within which religion is the core element. By refusing to perform genital or oral sex acts, or to allow clients to kiss them on the mouth, respondents draw clear moral boundaries based on Islamic religious prescriptions of female chastity before marriage, male circumcision and abstention from forbidden foods.

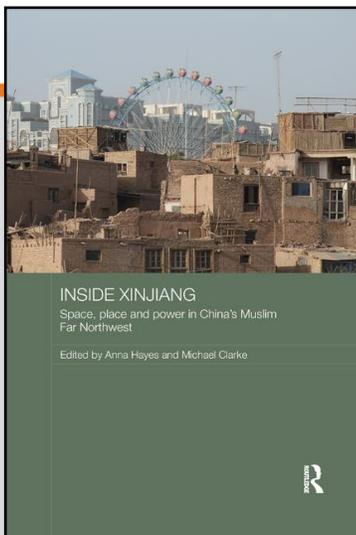


CHAPTER

3

# XINJIANG FROM THE 'OUTSIDE IN' AND THE 'INSIDE OUT'

## EXPLORING THE IMAGINED GEOPOLITICS OF A CONTESTED REGION



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by Anna Hayes, Michael Clarke

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# 10 Xinjiang from the ‘outside-in’ and the ‘inside-out’

Exploring the imagined geopolitics of a contested region

*Michael Clarke*

## Introduction

Gardner Bovingdon has demonstrated that narratives about, and representations of, ethnic and social identity within Xinjiang not only ‘matter’ but have become a key domain in which politics is contested in the region.<sup>1</sup> Taking inspiration from Bovingdon’s approach this chapter seeks to explore the dominant geopolitical narratives of Xinjiang that have been deployed by important state and non-state actors. Ultimately such narratives, whether elucidated by prominent policy-makers, scholars, non-government organisations or sub-state actors can be characterised as predominantly ‘outside-in’ approaches to Xinjiang that often attempt to incorporate or subsume the identity politics of the Uyghur and Xinjiang into the predominant discourse/narrative of the external observer. Through the deployment of such narratives Xinjiang and the Uyghur in fact become the ‘subject’ of the politics of representation by external actors wherein they are embedded within wider international relations and foreign policy discourses which reduce the complexity of the region in favour of readings that conform to the dominant political discourse of the actors concerned. The presence of a number of conflicting geopolitical narratives of the region and its place in the world is itself noteworthy as it is symptomatic of Xinjiang’s (and Central Asia’s) ‘reconnection’ to major currents of contemporary world history. Additionally although the existence of such competing narratives signifies that Xinjiang (and Central Asia) are contested spaces it is a contest that is conceived of as being played out at the inter-state level. The dominant geopolitical narratives of the region either ignore or purposefully obscure the (potential) existence of what might be termed ‘inside-out’ perspectives on Xinjiang and its place in this contested environment.

I argue that there are two prominent, and indeed hegemonic, ‘outside-in’ geopolitical narratives of Xinjiang. The first can be characterised as a neo-liberal geopolitical vision that has been deployed by the United States (US), and other prominent Western states, since the end of the Cold War in 1991. In brief, this particular geopolitical narrative is anchored in a judgement that only the spread of ‘free markets, democracy and human rights’ can bring stability and development to the post-Cold War order. Significantly, this normative agenda is also coupled with the continued influence of what might be termed as ‘classical geopolitical’ analysis of international politics which, particularly from the US perspective, is

increasingly intertwined with foreign policy debates about managing the ‘rise’ of China.<sup>2</sup>

The second geopolitical narrative that I have characterised as ‘outside-in’ is that which emanates from Beijing. While this perhaps is a contradictory designation given that Xinjiang is recognised as part of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) – indeed an ‘integral’ part according to the Chinese government – I believe that such a designation is warranted. I suggest that the geopolitical vision of Xinjiang espoused by Beijing can be defined as a ‘developmental’ one that at its core is concerned with state-building and the increase of China’s material power. The content and dynamics of this state-building project ironically illustrates Beijing’s enduring anxieties regarding the ‘integral-ness’ of Xinjiang. If the neo-liberal geopolitical narrative is concerned with the spread of free markets, democracy and human rights, Beijing’s vision, in contrast, is concerned with the achievement of three core goals for the Chinese state with respect to Xinjiang – legitimacy, control and development – which are seen as vital to the consolidation of China’s ‘rise’ as a great power.

There remains the potential for these dominant ‘outside-in’ geopolitical narratives of Xinjiang to be challenged by ‘inside-out’ perspectives derived from aspects of Xinjiang’s ethnic, social and religious ‘reality’. Some of these have potentially troubling implications for not only Beijing’s state-building project in the region but also the West’s neo-liberal agenda. However, I argue that the ability of such ‘inside-out’ geopolitical imaginings to positively affect the politics of the region is limited by the constraining effects of the two hegemonic geopolitical scripts elucidated by the West and China.

The chapter will proceed in four parts. The first will explore the problematic nature of the concept and discourse of geopolitics. This section is informed by the approach of the ‘critical geopolitics’ literature that seeks to deconstruct dominant or hegemonic geopolitical narratives in order to document/illustrate how states and policy-makers spatialise international politics. The second and third sections will then explore some representative elements of the neo-liberal geopolitics of the US/West and what I have termed the ‘developmentalist’ geopolitical narrative of Beijing and explore how these narratives shape these actors’ approaches to the region. The final part of the paper will then turn its focus to examining how the potential for the generation of ‘inside-out’ geopolitical perspectives of Xinjiang has been constrained by those emanating from Beijing and the West.

### **The problem of geopolitics**

‘Geopolitics’ is often invoked to describe and explain the contemporary politics of Xinjiang and Central Asia with little by way of explanation as to what exactly the term means. Popular usage of it is often shorthand for a particular version of analysis that seeks to explain the dynamics of international politics through reference to the enduring effect of the physical and geographical environment on societies and states. In this understanding of the concept, the physical and geographical characteristics of the world are conceived of as *the* determining factors

of human history. The implications of this particular conception of geopolitics are far reaching:

The materiality of this world is assumed to be objective, and as such it is located beyond the reach of any sort of human intentionality, including that involved in the negotiation of political power. Rather space is understood to represent an existential *pre*-condition for all politics, impacting – variously but always decisively – on the political process, for which reason it must serve as the point of departure for all political analysis and policy formulation. Meaning is not projected onto a geographical subject-world, but rather inheres in it as an essential quality, and the task of geopolitics is precisely to identify and analyse it.

(Murphy et al. 2004, p. 621)

This particular understanding of geopolitics is arguably that which underpins what may be termed the tradition of ‘classical geopolitics’ that emerged from elements of European imperialist statecraft of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The geopolitical tradition that emerged during this period – especially from the writings of such Anglo-American figures as Alfred Thayer Mahan and Halford J. Mackinder and the European (largely German) tradition associated with Rudolf Kjellen, Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer – was characterised by many of the themes noted above by Murphy et al. (2004). Admirers of this tradition often construed the writings of these figures as representative of a geopolitics that was something akin to a neutral and even ‘disembodied science’ that revealed certain ‘truths’ about history derived from an understanding of the operation of set of enduring and geographically founded oppositions – most notably for example between ‘sea power’ and ‘land power’, ‘heartland’ and ‘rimland’, ‘pivot’ and ‘periphery’. Significantly, such geographically founded oppositions were also conceived of as producing parallel political or ideological oppositions between individualism/democracy (sea power, rimland) and authoritarianism/totalitarianism (land power, heartland).<sup>3</sup> For purveyors of ‘classical geopolitics’, then, international politics throughout history can be understood as the interaction of, and conflict between, these opposing forces.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the emergence and development of classical geopolitics as a concept and discourse is inherently problematic due to its entwinement with European imperialism. As Gerry Kearns (2006, p. 75) has noted Mackinder’s geopolitical vision, for instance, was underpinned by the deployment of discursive strategies that justified the maintenance of the British Empire. First, Mackinder (1904, p. 421) asserted that by the dawn of the 20th century the world had entered a ‘post Columbian epoch’ in which the lands of the globe had been almost completely politically appropriated and demarcated by European ‘civilisation’. In this ‘closed space world’ the ‘British had a legitimate interest in the affairs of every single part of the globe’. Second, international politics was a zero-sum game as the natural environment shaped ‘cultural identity in ways that produce a world of . . . mutually hostile peoples’, and in a ‘closed space’ world this presaged increased conflict between

such ‘mutually hostile peoples’ (Kearns 2010, pp. 187–88). Finally, for Mackinder international political conflict was understood as being primarily carried out through territorial strategies that prioritised control over natural resources. The deployment of these discursive strategies – the claim of the ‘closed space’ world, the division of humanity into incompatible ‘aggregates’, and the fundamentally territorial nature of international conflict – permitted Mackinder to represent the British Empire as an ‘organic’ or ‘natural’ entity (Kearns 2006, p. 75).

The school of *geopolitik* associated with the German geographer Karl Haushofer has also been broadly condemned for contributing to aggressive and expansionist imperialism. Indeed, as Haushofer conceived of the state as analogous to a biological organism that had to struggle for survival in a hostile environment, his geopolitics was broadly implicated in the Nazi’s quest for *lebensraum*.<sup>5</sup> Although this geopolitics was tainted in the immediate post-1945 period, it nonetheless became a predominant form of analysis within Anglo-American strategic thinking during the Cold War. Perhaps the most significant example of the influence of classical geopolitical thinking on state policy was the discourse and strategy of ‘containment’ first elucidated by US diplomat George F. Kennan in the late 1940s. Kennan’s strategy of ‘containment’ was in important respects Mackinder’s ‘heartland’ thesis animated by the ideological threat of Soviet communism. Thus, the goal of ‘containment’ was to confine the Soviet Union and its communist ideology to its Eurasian ‘heartland’ through the creation and maintenance of a web of US-led alliances in Western Europe and East Asia.<sup>6</sup> For the duration of the Cold War US strategic policy appeared to be driven by an internalisation of Mackinder’s warning that the security of ‘free societies’ would be imperilled if one power was permitted to dominate the ‘heartland’ of the Eurasian continent (Dalby 1990, pp. 171–88).

Gearoid O’Tuathail has argued in contrast that geopolitics ‘is not an immanently meaningful term but a historically ambiguous and unstable concept’ (1994, p. 259). Such ambiguity and malleability however does not render the concept meaningless or without practical political consequence. To do so O’Tuathail argues would be to ‘assume a naive theory of language where words and concepts have stable, assured identities which refer unproblematically and unambiguously to a fixed set of referents’ (Ibid., p. 260). Rather than seeking to ‘define and isolate the essence of geopolitics’, the ‘critical geopolitics’ approach instead seeks to problematise the ways in which ‘geopolitics’ is made meaningful in political discourse. For O’Tuathail and Agnew (1992, p. 192), the purveyors of classical geopolitics are ultimately engaged in the ‘production of knowledge to aid in the practice of statecraft and further the power of the state’. Such approaches fail to acknowledge that geography ‘is never a natural, non-discursive phenomenon which is separate from ideology and outside politics. Rather, geography as a discourse is a form of power/knowledge itself’ (Ibid.).

While there are many perspectives encompassed by the label ‘critical geopolitics’ it is possible to identify five core arguments or claims of this approach that are relevant to the subject of this chapter. First, the geographies of global politics are ‘neither inevitable nor immutable’ but are ‘constructed culturally and sustained

politically through the discourses and representational practices of statecraft' (Atkinson & Dodds 2000, p. 9; see also O'Tuathail & Dalby 1998, pp. 1–15). Second, such representational practices impact on the politics of identity as 'distinctions drawn between the domestic Self and external Others are sustained by geopolitical imaginations and the moral and physical boundaries that divide the world into 'our' space and 'their' spaces (Atkinson & Dodds 2000, p. 10). Third, geopolitical knowledge(s) 'are not the exclusive preserve of political elites' but 'also find expression in the everyday realms of television and films, novels and newspapers . . . and the politics of banal nationalism'. This is significant as such popular constructions of geopolitical knowledge contribute to 'the production and circulation of 'common sense' geopolitical reasoning which impacts on public opinion' (Ibid.). Fourth, 'the intellectual practices and epistemological assumptions inherent to geopolitical thought' require investigation, not least the tendency of 'classical geopolitics' to appeal to synoptic visions of global politics in which the historical, political, ethnic and social particularities of specific geographic regions are ignored/subsumed in favour of a universalist narrative (such as the appeal of classical geopolitics to binary geographic-cum-ideological oppositions of sea power and land power or heartland and rimland). Finally, critical geopolitics draws attention to the 'situated reasoning' of geopolitics – that is, 'the social, spatial, political and technological parameters of the modern state system'. For Atkinson and Dodds, then:

At the core of critical geopolitics . . . is the belief that these geopolitical representations of global politics deserve serious attention, for it is such 'scripting' of the world that helps *constitute* and *legitimate* foreign policies.  
(2000, p. 11, emphasis added by author)

The significance of this approach for Xinjiang and the wider Central Asian region are considerable. There are perhaps no other comparable geo-cultural regions that have been as 'constructed' and as affected by the representational practices of external actors. Since the end of the Cold War alone these regions have been variously characterised and 'imagined' geopolitically as the heart of the 'world's axial supercontinent' (Brzezinski 1997, p. 50), a 'global fault-line' (Klare 2000, pp. 49–61), a potential 'shatterbelt' (Cohen 2005, pp. 1–22), and a 'Non-Integrating gap' (Barnett 2003). With respect to Xinjiang, prominent American scholar S. Frederick Starr has noted that the tendencies of external observers to fall back on such geopolitical representations are perhaps due to the fact that 'it is hard to find another region on which such diverse external cultural forces have been so consistently exerted' (2004, p. 7). Although this may in fact be so, it does not necessarily absolve us from failing to examine the potential for actors from within the region constructing and deploying their own particular 'imaginings' and representations of Xinjiang's place in the world. Prior to exploring this aspect of the problem in the final section of the chapter it is first necessary to explore how the US/West and China have geopolitically 'imagined' and represented Xinjiang and Central Asia as it reveals the respective political-ideological goals of each in

these regions. In particular, following Atkinson and Dodds, I suggest that the geopolitical representations of these regions deployed by the West and China produce a 'script of the world' that 'helps constitute and legitimate' the foreign policies of the US/West and the foreign *and* domestic policies of China in the region.

### **Central Asia in the Western geopolitical imagination: toward a synthesis of neo-liberal narratives**

Xinjiang and Central Asia have often been depicted in classical geopolitical terms as the 'pivot' of history. Most famously Halford J. Mackinder conceptualised this broad region as the 'pivot' of world history between the 5th and 15th centuries due to the military and strategic advantage accruing to the mobile, horse-riding nomad through the geographic conditions of the region. This 'pivotal' nature, however, was overturned in the early sixteenth century through the circumnavigation of the globe and expansion of the sedentary-based states beyond their 'homelands' on the periphery of the Eurasian continent (Mackinder 1904, p. 257). For Mackinder the dawn of the European 'Age of Discovery' and subsequent development in the power of European maritime-based states/empires overturned the core strategic advantage of the 'pivot' region (that is, the military prowess of horse-riding nomads). S. A. M. Adshead (1993) also developed a similar periodisation of Central Asian history, although going beyond a geopolitical description through the ascription of a specific function or role for the region. Thus, the 1200–1650 period is asserted to be the climax of Central Asia's 'active' phase in world history whereby it became a point of diffusion to the sedentary 'homelands' of Europe, Iran, India and China for political, military, economic, technological and cultural developments. Adshead's second period, from 1650 onward, is deemed to encapsulate Central Asia's decline into a 'passive' role in world history whereby it gradually became a point of 'convergence', and a recipient, for political, military, economic, technological and cultural developments generated from the surrounding sedentary civilisations.<sup>7</sup> Such schemas thus relegated Central Asia to a peripheral position in world history after the European 'Age of Discovery', whereby it was gradually absorbed into the expanding Russian, Manchu and British Empires.

This theme of the decline of the broad Central Asian region as a site of strategic, political, economic and cultural importance over time has been an influential one and has clearly informed what I have termed in this section the contemporary 'neo-liberal' geopolitical vision of the region. For much of the Cold War era Xinjiang and Central Asia were strategic backwaters for the United States and as such did not figure predominantly in the dominant geopolitical discourse of the era other than as constitutive parts of the 'Communist bloc' that was to be 'contained'. This was underlined with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which was construed by Washington as the first step in the Kremlin's attempt to 'break out' of its Eurasian 'heartland' by securing access to a warm water port on the Arabian Sea. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 however removed the *raison d'être* of the strategy of 'containment'. A number of prominent observers/scholars subsequently attempted to construct alternative narratives of international politics in

the early 1990s that nonetheless betrayed the influence of classical geopolitical thinking.

Francis Fukuyama's article (and subsequent book) examining 'the end of history' (1989; 1992) and Samuel Huntington's article (and subsequent book of the same name, sans question mark) 'The Clash of Civilizations?' (1993; 1997), to name but two of the most prominent examples, echoed the discursive strategies employed by Mackinder. Both invoked a moment of 'crisis' and emphasised the importance of spatialised cultural-ideological or civilisational blocs in order to 'naturalise' a case for the hegemony of the United States (Kearns 2006, p. 79). For Fukuyama, the collapse of the Soviet Union signalled the 'end of history' as the failure of state socialism meant that there were no longer any viable alternatives to the liberal-capitalist model of political and economic organisation (1989, pp. 8–13). Thus, history understood as the evolution and competition of ideal political and economic systems or forms had ceased. Those who lived 'in stable, long-standing liberal democracies', Fukuyama argued, existed in a 'post-historical' world as they could not imagine 'a world that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist' (1992, p. 46). Meanwhile those who did not live in the 'post-historical' West, and in the 'Third World' in particular, would not only remain 'mired in history' but their countries would 'be a terrain of conflict for many years to come'. Crucially, the *only* path out of this 'historical' world was to emulate the liberal democratic West. Citing the example of the Soviet Union, for example, Fukuyama argued that 'it can start down the path staked out by Western Europe forty-five years ago, a path that most of Asia has followed, *or it can realize its own uniqueness and remain stuck in history*' (1989, p. 13, emphasis added by author). Under Fukuyama's schema historical progress for the non-Western world is predicated on jettisoning cultural or national 'uniqueness' or tradition in favour of a 'modernity' authored by the West.

Huntington, like Fukuyama, identified the collapse of the US-Soviet bipolar order as a moment of historical rupture that presaged a coming era of geopolitical conflict. For Huntington the end of the Cold War marked not the 'end of history' but the beginning of a new era in which the most fundamental sources of conflict in international politics would be cultural rather than ideological or economic in nature: 'The end of the Cold War has not ended conflict but rather given rise to new identities rooted in culture and to new patterns of conflict among groups from different cultures which at the broadest level are civilizations' (1997, p. 30). As Bassin has noted such conflicts for Huntington were 'interminable' as their sources lie 'in the very deepest core of social psychology, where self-identity is inextricably fused with a perceived opposition to an external Other' (2007, p. 354).<sup>8</sup> Huntington also opened his famous article with an assertion reminiscent of Mackinder's invocation of a 'closed world' moment by stating that 'The world is becoming a smaller place' (1993, p. 25). This 'closed world' moment was significant as the increased contact between civilisations that this compression of space entailed would not decrease but rather heighten recognition of, and anxiety about, cultural difference in a world that was 'for the first time in history . . . multipolar and multicivilizational' (Huntington 1997, p. 21).

In terms of prescriptions for US foreign policy the greatest ‘lesson’ of Huntington’s civilisational geopolitics was that the US was the ‘inheritor and defender’ of ‘Western civilisation’, most particularly its values and institutions, ‘notably its Christianity, pluralism, individualism and the rule of law’ (1997, p. 311). The task of the United States in this multi-polar and multi-civilisational world is to ‘preserve Western civilization’ through a number of means including support for the ‘Westernization’ of parts of the developing world, restraining the military power of the ‘Islamic and Sinic countries’ and to ‘maintain Western technological and military superiority over other civilizations’ (Ibid., p. 312). Significantly, the key ‘danger zones’ for the US were the ‘fault lines’ created by the overlap of civilisational blocs which, according to Huntington’s map of civilisations, occur in the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia. Thus, in their attempts to move beyond the ideologically defined geopolitics of the Cold War, Fukuyama and Huntington simply substituted other subjective factors – the non-geographical factors of ‘liberal democracy’ (Fukuyama) and social psychology (Huntington) – in its place.

The influence of such thinking on the policy approach of the United States toward the broad Central Asian region in the post-Cold War era has been significant. Prior to 11 September 2001, however, US and Western attention to Central Asia was often fixated upon specific issue areas directly impacting on Western interests rather than upon the trajectory of the region’s development as a whole. For example, Western concern focused sporadically on issues surrounding the fate of former Soviet nuclear weapons and materials in Kazakhstan in 1992/1993, the ‘pipeline politics’ surrounding the Caspian Basin between 1996 and 1998 or the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan after 1996.<sup>9</sup> Many concurred with President Clinton’s Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott’s assertion in 1997 that this lack of focus was due to the fact that Washington had no compelling interest in Central Asia that would encourage it to become a competitor in the so-called ‘new great game’ for strategic influence in the region. Yet Talbott’s subsequent iteration of what Washington’s interests actually were in the region illuminated the continued influence of not only the classical geopolitics of Mackinder but also the post-1991 belief that the spread of Western-style liberal capitalism held the key for the region to wrench itself from the ‘historical’ and into the ‘post-historical’ world and thus avoid a Huntington-esque future.<sup>10</sup>

The United States, according to Talbott, wished to avoid the ‘atavistic outcome’ of a new geopolitical arm-wrestle for the region between major extra-regional powers such as Russia, China, Iran and Turkey. In fact its policy toward Central Asia would be guided by the overall goal of assisting the region’s states in making the ‘transition’ toward liberal market democracies. Thus US policy toward the region would be framed by four objectives: the promotion of democracy, the creation of free market economies, the sponsorship of peace and cooperation within and among the countries of the region and their integration with the larger international community (Talbott 1997). ‘If reform in the nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia succeeds’, Talbott (1997) argued:

... it will contribute to stability in a strategically vital region that borders China, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan and that has growing economic and social ties with Pakistan and India. The consolidation of free societies, at peace with themselves and with each other, stretching from the Black Sea to the Pamir Mountains will open up valuable trade and transport corridor along the old Silk Road between Europe and Asia.

However, in an echo of Fukuyama, Talbott immediately noted that if Central Asia did not make this transition to liberal market democracy then it would remain 'mired' in history and 'become a breeding ground of terrorism, a hotbed of religious and political extremism, and a battleground for outright war' (Ibid.).

Left largely unspoken however was that Washington's active promotion of free markets, democracy and human rights in the region also clearly served an enduring geopolitical goal. The evolution of Central Asia into a region of stable, liberal, free market democracies well integrated into the global political and economic system would make it less likely that an extra-regional power or powers (such as Russia or China) could come to dominate the heart of Eurasia. These concerns were also apparent in some legislative initiatives in the US Congress in the late 1990s, most notably in the 'Silk Road Strategy Act' of 1999. This act, an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, presented Congressional views on what US goals should be in Central Asia. By and large it both reflected the views expressed by Talbott and the imprint of the dominant 'end of history' geopolitical narrative in which the spread of free markets and liberal democracy was perceived as the panacea for a variety of ills. According to the Act,

United States foreign policy and international assistance should be narrowly targeted to support the economic and political independence as well as democracy building, free market policies, human rights and regional economic integration.

(Silk Road Strategy Act 1999, p. 3)

Such a policy approach it was felt would 'foster stability in the region' and assist in the development of strong relations between the region and 'the stable, democratic, and market-oriented countries of the Euro-Atlantic Community' (Ibid. p. 4).

The subsequent events of 11 September 2001 only served to heighten these themes. In fact the relative neglect of Central Asia and Afghanistan by the West prior to 9/11 contributed to the resurfacing of pre-existing 'imaginings' and representations of the region in policy circles, scholarly treatments and popular media (Watson 2009, pp. 75–93). Thus the region was conceived of as a 'black hole' (Simpson 2001), a geopolitical 'cockpit of terrorism and ideological confrontation' (Blank 2005) or as part of the 'non-integrating gap' of the global system (Barnett 2003). The implication common to such perspectives was that the region remained 'outside' of the trajectory of 'modernity' as defined by the West. Perhaps the most 'tabloid' version of this argument can be found in Thomas P. Barnett's

essay, 'The Pentagon's New Map' (2003). Barnett conceived of 9/11 as a historical rupture that ushered in a 'new security paradigm' where 'disconnectedness' from 'globalisation' and its attendant 'emerging global rule set of democracy, transparency and free trade' defined the fundamental geopolitical map of the world:

Show me where globalization is thick with network connectivity, financial transactions, liberal media flows, and collective security, and I will show you regions featuring stable governments, rising standards of living, and more deaths by suicide than murder. These parts of the world I call the Functioning Core, or Core. But show me where globalization is thinning or just plain absent, and I will show you regions plagued by politically repressive regimes, widespread poverty and disease, routine mass murder, and—most important—the chronic conflicts that incubate the next generation of global terrorists. These parts of the world I call the Non-Integrating Gap, or Gap.  
(Barnett 2003, pp. 174–175)<sup>11</sup>

The assertion that the region's lack of integration with the liberal global order (understood in both political and economic terms) arguably remains an article of faith in US policy and rhetoric. The latest iteration of this narrative is contained in Washington's 'New Silk Road Initiative' that aims to promote the liberalisation of trade, economic cooperation, and 'people-to-people' links between Central and South Asia.<sup>12</sup> The impetus for this initiative derives from the Obama administration's efforts to extricate itself from Afghanistan and its desire to create conducive conditions for the consolidation of an independent and stable Afghanistan after that withdrawal. In 2005, prominent American scholar and Eurasianist S. Frederick Starr (2005, pp. 164–65) began promoting the idea of a 'Greater Central Asian Partnership for Cooperation and Development' (GCAP). In a subsequent publication Starr defined 'Greater Central Asia' (GCA) as not only the five post-Soviet states of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – but also the Chinese province of Xinjiang, Afghanistan, Mongolia, the Khorasan Province of Iran, 'the northern part of Pakistan' and 'even that part of northern India extending from Rajasthan to Agra' (2008, p. 6). The 'pacification' of Afghanistan through the consolidation of the Karzai government in Kabul would be the core prerequisite for such an initiative to be feasible as it would transform not only Afghanistan but the broader Central Asian region, 'into a zone of secure sovereignties sharing viable market economies, enjoying secular and open systems of government and maintaining positive relations with the United States' (Starr 2005, pp. 164–165).

Significantly, the 'New Silk Road Initiative' unveiled by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011 was modelled on Starr's GCAP. According to Undersecretary of State for Economic, Agricultural and Energy Affairs, Robert Hormats (2011), the 'basis for the 'New Silk Road' vision is that if Afghanistan is firmly embedded in the economic life of the region, it will be better able to attract new investment, benefit from its resource potential, and provide increasing economic opportunity and hope for its people'. Key to this vision would be for the US to assist countries

in this region to reorient their key infrastructure (such as highways, railways, telecommunications networks and so forth) southward and assist in 'removing the bureaucratic barriers and other impediments to the free flow of goods and people'. For the US, as noted by Secretary of State Clinton, the core assumption underpinning the strategy was that 'lasting stability and security go hand in hand with economic opportunity' (Ibid.).

Yet the geopolitical reasoning behind the Obama administration's 'New Silk Road' initiative was also clear: consolidation of an amenable regime in Afghanistan would provide Washington with the capacity to develop a north-south linkage between Central and South Asia to compete against the west-east linkages being developed by China and Russia. Such a development would ultimately contribute to Washington's enduring geopolitical interest on the Eurasian continent to ensure that no one power or group of powers would dominate.<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest expressions of this was the Obama administration's effort to expand the so-called 'Northern Distribution Network' (NDN), several transit corridors crucial to supplying US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces in Afghanistan. Entrenching the NDN as the 'linchpin' of US strategy in Afghanistan and Central Asia, according to a number of advocates, would assist in building a 'Modern Silk Road' that 'could promote security, prosperity and connectivity within some of the most volatile, impoverished and isolated nations on the planet' (Kuchins, Sanderson & Gordon 2010, p. 39). Perhaps most symptomatic of this agenda has been Washington's promotion of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (TAPI), the construction of which is projected by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to cost approximately \$US12 billion (Petersen 2012). However, as pointedly noted by Joshua Kucera (2011), the TAPI is also clearly driven by Washington's contemporary geopolitical calculations:

Look at a map of South and Central Asia – ideally, one where you can see topography and the quality of roads – and it's apparent that the most sensible way to ship goods from India west is not the northern route over the massive mountain passes and crumbling roads of Central Asia. It's the southern route, through Iran and Turkey. But, obviously, a US-backed plan can't include Iran.

As such current US policy toward 'Greater Central Asia', in Starr's terms, is ultimately constrained by Washington's broader geopolitical narrative that seeks to 'contain' a variety of adversaries that do not abide by its neo-liberal agenda.

### **China's 'developmentalist' geopolitics: Xinjiang from 'buffer' region to a 'Silk Road' to great power-hood?**

China too in the post-Cold War era has constructed a geopolitical narrative of Central Asia but one that is intimately connected to its control over a core constituent part of that region – Xinjiang or East Turkestan.<sup>14</sup> Ever since Xinjiang was 'peacefully liberated' by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949, China's approach to the region has been defined by one over-arching goal – to integrate Xinjiang

with China. This has been a quest not only to consolidate China's territorial control and sovereignty over the region but also to absorb, politically, economically and culturally, the various non-Han ethnic groups of Xinjiang into the 'unitary, multi-ethnic state' of the PRC. In this context, 'integration' encompasses two core meanings. First, integration can refer to the relationship between the majority and minority populations of a given state and second, to 'the patterns by which the different parts of a nation-state cohere' (Mackerras 1994, p. 7; *see also* Dreyer 1976). Accordingly, this first meaning

implies a political, cultural, social and economic structuring of a larger state which sees the minorities maintaining their own cultures and identities, but influenced by the majority and not seeking secession in a new sovereign state with its own independent government.

(Ibid.)

The second aspect concerns 'the manner and degree to which parts of a social system (its individuals, groups and organs) interact and complement each other' (Seymour 1976, p. 6). The first understanding of integration can be seen as a means by which a large, multi-ethnic state can ensure and maintain sovereignty over its territory, while the second concerns the operation of society once the territorial integrity of the state has been ensured. In the first respect – incorporation of territory – the state has clearly been successful. Yet, in the second respect, although the Chinese state has *managed* the tensions arising from its governance of the non-Han peoples of Xinjiang, the question of the ultimate incorporation of these people remains unresolved.

This second aspect of Beijing's attempts to integrate Xinjiang centres ultimately on the question/problem of legitimacy. Legitimacy has been sought through the application of two broad instruments across two major historical periods. First, from 1949 to 1976 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sought to establish its legitimacy in Xinjiang through a strategy based on three planks: the application of its interpretation of the Soviet model of 'national self-determination'; the application of the revolutionary Maoist model of political and economic organisation; and the isolation of the region from Soviet Central Asian influences. After Mao's death, however, the Party moved decisively away from the Maoist model to increasingly rely on its capacity to deliver continued economic growth and development to the region and its peoples as its primary mode of ensuring legitimacy.

Yet, the various instruments that Beijing has deployed to this end have arguably contributed to growing insecurity among the non-Han population of Xinjiang. Despite this, however, it is clear that the PRC has achieved a level of control and power in Xinjiang that its Qing predecessors would have envied. The basis for this lies in Beijing's gradual recognition that to simply conquer and hold a particular territory will not necessarily make it an 'integral' part of the state. Rather, as Charles Maier has argued, territory must be made to work, to be 'productive' whereby the incorporated territory 'will no longer be construed as a passive enclosure to be policed and kept orderly; it will be a source of resources, livelihood,

output, and energy' (2000, p. 818). Conceived in this manner the incorporated territory 'is envisaged not just as an acquisition or as a security buffer but as a decisive means of power and rule' (Ibid.). Under the PRC (and especially since the late 1980s) Xinjiang has increasingly been viewed in this manner whereby it is no longer conceived of as a strategic buffer region (as it had arguably been perceived of historically) (Millward 2007) but as a potential strategic and economic asset that can actively contribute to the power of the state.

In some respects, this geopolitical re-imagining of Xinjiang reflects elements of what Christopher Hughes has recently characterised as a *geopolitik* turn in Chinese nationalism (2011, pp. 601–620). As noted previously *geopolitik* thought, associated with such figures as Kjellen, Ratzel and Haushofer, has been widely implicated in the aggressive imperialist expansion of European powers in the late 19th and early 20th century. These figures not only developed a conception of geopolitics that analogised the state to a living organism struggling for survival in a Darwinian international system but also claimed, as Hughes notes, 'that their own country's expansion was different from the 'imperialism' and 'hegemony' of the United States and the 'West' because it was aimed at restoring justice in an unjust international order' (Ibid., p. 605). This worldview, as I will suggest below, has a resonance not only with some contemporary Chinese commentary on international politics but also with the rhetoric associated with Beijing's 'Great Western Development' campaign. Both of these narratives intersect to produce an over-arching geopolitical narrative that justifies both Chinese diplomacy in Central Asia and its increasingly assimilationist governance of Xinjiang itself.

### ***Constructing Xinjiang as China's 'Silk Road'***

The tipping point for the shift in the Chinese state's geopolitical perception of Xinjiang occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the decline and ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union and internal dynamics associated with Deng Xiaoping's 'reform and opening'. The collapse of the Soviet Union heightened the Party's concern for Xinjiang's security as the independence of Central Asia, and ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, augured an Islamic 'revival' that had potentially destabilising implications for Chinese rule in the region. Within Xinjiang itself, the extension of 'reform and opening', including relaxation of restrictions on ethnic minority religious and cultural practices throughout the mid-to-late 1980s had generated increasing demands by ethnic minorities for greater political autonomy and contributed to a wave of ethnic unrest in Xinjiang. This culminated in what appeared to be an Islamist-inspired rebellion with the Baren Incident in April 1990, in which a group of Uyghurs reportedly with arms supplied from nearby Afghanistan, attacked the town's police station and called for an independent 'East Turkestan' (Clarke 2007).

China's response to these challenges was to diverge from its traditional approach of attempting to isolate Xinjiang from Central Asian influences. The attempt to isolate Xinjiang had, as Rudelson (1997, pp. 39–41) observed, worked against the 'geographic template' of the region which 'produced axes of outside

cultural influence that penetrated the region' determining that the major sub-regions of the province were in fact oriented 'outward' toward the proximate external civilisations, be they Indian, Central Asian or Chinese. Since 1991 China's approach to the region has appeared to be guided by the realisation that this 'geographic template' need not be an obstacle to Xinjiang's integration but rather an asset in the prosecution of this project. Indeed, Beijing initiated a 'double opening' strategy in Xinjiang in the early 1990s that sought to facilitate not only both greater economic integration between the region and the national economy and but also between the region and neighbouring Central Asia. In this latter instance, it was envisaged that Xinjiang's ethnic and cultural ties/affinities with Central Asia could be profitably leveraged to connect the region's economy to that of the 'Great Islamic Circle' – or rather, Central Asia and the Middle East (Christoffersen 1993, pp. 131–36).

This logic has achieved particular intensity since the launching of the Great Western Development or *Xibu da kaifa* (GWD) campaign in 2000. While this campaign was a nationwide one, its operation in Xinjiang reflected the intensification of the long-standing state-building policies in the region. Xinjiang's economic development assumed national importance under the GWD as it was envisaged that the region would become an industrial and agricultural base and a trade and energy corridor for the national economy (Becquelin 2004). This goal could only be achieved with the development of greater interaction and cooperation between China and the Central Asian states – a point underlined by Chinese diplomatic rhetoric throughout the 2000s which has sought to frame Xinjiang as a 'Continental Eurasian land-bridge' that links not only the major economies of Europe, East Asia and South Asia but also enmeshes Xinjiang with China (Clarke 2008). Much of the GWD-oriented state investment in Xinjiang has thus been channelled to large infrastructure projects, such as building highways, power plants, telecommunications networks, oil and gas extraction and the construction of pipelines – developments that Beijing hopes will establish Xinjiang as a crucial trade and energy transit hub (Niazi 2005; Handke 2006; Weimer 2004; Garver 2006). Such imperatives have recently been reinforced with President Xi Jinping's 2013 exhortation for greater Sino-Central Asian cooperation to consolidate what he has termed a prospective 'Silk Road Economic Belt' (*Xinhua* 2013).

Yet such rhetoric is also clearly linked to Beijing's broader geostrategic interests in the post-Cold War era and, in particular, how to make good on the Party's claims to spearhead the country's 'national rejuvenation' to great power-hood. The integration of Xinjiang in this context not only serves core internal functions (that is, to ensure social stability) but is perceived as contributing to China's strategic position in international affairs. As noted previously, the removal of the Soviet threat to Xinjiang after 1991 offered Beijing the opportunity to capitalise on Xinjiang's geopolitical position to not only tie the region closer to China but also to develop it as an avenue through which to expand China's influence. Central Asia presented fewer obstacles, both in terms of competing powers and strategic concerns, for the expansion of China's political, economic, strategic and military influence than any other region (Xiang 2004). Prior to 9/11 in particular, the region was perceived

as offering China a strategically 'safe' axis for the expansion of its influence, primarily because it offered China relatively favourable conditions for the expansion of its influence due to the desire of the newly independent Central Asian states to diversify their foreign relations in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the absence of a significant US presence (Ibid., p. 109). This was not isolated to China's Central Asian diplomacy, with observers such as Zhao (1999) and Shambaugh (2004/2005) noting an over-arching theme of 'engaging the periphery' in China's post-1991 foreign policy, whereby China sought to construct conducive relations with its immediate neighbours on the basis of shared economic and security concerns/interests in order to counter perceived US 'containment' of China.

The insertion of major US military, diplomatic and economic power into Central Asia after 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan however threatened this strategy. This development reanimated perceptions in Beijing that Washington was bent on the strategic 'encirclement' of China. US strategy in Central Asia was explicitly perceived in geopolitical terms with Washington's core post-9/11 goals identified in a commentary in the current affairs magazine, *Liaowang*, as the containment of Russia, the 'encirclement' of Iran and Iraq, the expansion of US influence in South Asia and the 'containment' of China's rise (Gao 2002). Washington's aim, according to this view, was not only to weaken China's position in Central Asia, and therefore jeopardise the integration of Xinjiang, but also constrain China's wider foreign policy strategy:

China has constantly strengthened its political, security, economic and trade relations with Central Asian countries . . . China is the 'potential enemy' of the United States; and *Central Asia is China's great rear of extreme importance*. The penetration of the United States into Central Asia not only prevents China from expanding its influence, but also sandwiches China from East to West, thus 'effectively containing a rising China'.

(Ibid., emphasis added by author)

Such perceptions reflected the inter-linked nature of China's interests in Xinjiang and Central Asia, and their role in Beijing's broader foreign policy strategy of 'peaceful rise'.

The subsequent souring of US relations with key Central Asian states by the mid-2000s, largely due to the George W. Bush administration's support for the 'Color Revolutions' in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2005, provided Beijing (and Moscow) with an opportunity to reassert their nascent regional hegemony. China's diplomacy, particularly through the region's major multilateral forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), focused after 9/11 on establishing it as a reliable security and economic partner for the Central Asian states without any of the normative agenda often associated with US diplomacy. As a number of observers noted, China worked assiduously to frame the organisation as a model of 'new regionalism' defined by 'open, functional, interest-based cooperation' and adherence to a doctrine of sovereign equality and non-interference/non-intervention among the member states that contrasted it from the model of regionalism practiced by

such western-led multilateralism as the European Union (EU) which is ‘closed, identity-based, and ideologically buttressed by liberal democratic values’.<sup>15</sup>

The SCO, and the principles behind it, therefore reflected China’s endeavour to establish multiple regional and global relationships in order to counter US primacy in the international system – a goal achieved in the Central Asian context with the souring of US relations after the ‘Color Revolutions’. According to an editorial in the *People’s Daily* (2006), the ‘Color Revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space in 2005, ongoing US military campaign in Afghanistan and the Bush administration’s ‘freedom agenda’ (or rather, active promotion of democracy) were constituent parts of a nascent strategy designed to ‘open the south door to Central Asia’ in order to ‘separate Central Asia’ from the post-Soviet dominance of Russia and China and undermine the SCO’s influence.

Beijing’s concerns regarding the security of its ‘great rear of extreme importance’ were further heightened with the inter-ethnic riots that erupted in Urumqi on 5 July 2009. While the authorities issued now boilerplate statements about the role of ‘hostile external forces’, such as the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), in fomenting such violence there was also explicit fingering of Washington for influencing these events. Even though the Obama administration’s reaction to the 5 July events was muted, with State Department officials for example calling on China to ‘exercise restraint’ in its response, Beijing trenchantly criticised Washington’s tolerance and support for the ‘criminal and terrorist’ organisations, the WUC and Uyghur American Association (UAA). An editorial in the *China Daily* (2009) argued that the US, through annual funding of \$250,000 provided by ‘its “private” Non-Governmental Organization, the National Endowment for Democracy’ to the UAA was ‘massively intervening into the internal politics of China’. Furthermore, such support ‘seems to have little to do with concerns over alleged human rights abuses by Beijing authorities against Uyghur people’ but:

... very much to do with the strategic geopolitical location of Xinjiang on the Eurasian landmass and its strategic importance for China’s future economic and energy cooperation with Russia, Kazakhstan and other Central Asia states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

(Ibid.)

From Beijing’s perspective, US rhetorical (and sometimes material) support for such Uyghur advocacy groups based in the West is thus not predicated on a genuine commitment to abstract notions of human rights or democracy but rather on its calculated geopolitical interests to ‘contain’, and ultimately prevent, China’s rise. That Beijing retains a geopolitically informed conception of the importance of Xinjiang for its rise to great power-hood has been most recently affirmed in the wake of an upswing of Xinjiang and Uyghur-related violence in 2014. With the 1 March knife attack at Kunming railway station in Yunnan and two bombings in Urumqi on 30 April and 22 May blamed on Uyghur terrorists, President Xi Jinping has not only called for a ‘people’s war on terrorism’ in Xinjiang but also explicitly argued that ‘the long term of stability of Xinjiang is vital to the

whole country's reform, development and stability; to the country's unity, ethnic harmony and national security as well as the great revival of the Chinese nation' (cited in *Xinhua* 2014). One Chinese international relations expert recently argued that Beijing's turn westward toward Central Asia can serve 'at least' four purposes in this respect:

decrease China's energy dependence on Russia and the Middle East, weaken Russian influence in Central Asia, induce Central Asian governments to be more cooperative in fighting against separatism in Xinjiang and possibly reduce support for separatist movements among residents of Xinjiang and Central Asia.

(Xie 2014)

As such President Xi's call for a 'Silk Road Economic Belt' constitutes China's own geopolitical 'rebalance' or 'pivot' to Asia (that is, westwards to Central Asia) (Ibid.).

### ***Integrating the inhabitants of China's 'Silk Road'***

Hand in hand with this re-envisioning of Xinjiang as the hub of a 'Silk Road' there has been a shift in emphasis in how the state has framed its approach to the region's ethnic minorities. One of the great themes of twentieth century China's history has been the struggle to establish a coherent national form that would not only consolidate China into a modern nation-state but also protect the territorial boundaries inherited from the Qing dynasty. The two dominant political movements of the twentieth century (the Guomindang and the CCP) based their strategies to consolidate the post-imperial state on the basis of Han racial nationalism and Leninist multiculturalism respectively.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the Soviet Union, however, the PRC did not maintain the fiction of a multi-national 'union' with a theoretical right to national self-determination, but implemented a system of 'national regional autonomy' for the fifty-five non-Han ethnic groups officially recognised by the state (Walker 1984, p. 38). In the CCP's construction, the various non-Han ethnic groups could only achieve their own social revolutions within a unified Chinese state and under the leadership of the Han-dominated CCP. Soon after establishing the PRC, the CCP adopted a number of core guiding principles for its handling of the ethnic minority issue including: no right to secession for ethnic minorities; opposition to both 'Han chauvinism' (or rather, assertions of Han cultural superiority) and 'local nationalism' (that is, separatism); implementation of 'autonomous' organs of government for non-Han populated regions; and preservation and development of ethnic minority languages and customs (Mackerras 2004). These principles, as Xiaoyun Liu (2004) has argued, protected cultural plurality while ensuring that the 'political unity' of the PRC remained Han-centred. While the Party's implementation of each of these principles varied with the ideological fluctuations of the Maoist era, they nonetheless remained entrenched in the Party's discourse on the ethnic minority issue.

Under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, however, the CCP has tended to emphasise its commitment to deliver economic development and modernisation to China's ethnic minorities, often to the detriment of its commitment to protect the cultural plurality of the PRC (Barabantseva 2008; Leibold 2013). The Party's reliance on development as an instrument to neutralise ethnic minority dissatisfaction in regions such as Xinjiang has failed to recognise that such an approach has contributed not only to the further political, economic and cultural marginalisation of the Uyghur but also provided the conditions for increased inter-ethnic tension due to a change in Han Chinese perceptions of Xinjiang stimulated by the rhetoric of such campaigns as the GWD. The long-standing Han perception of Xinjiang as a barren, isolated cultural backwater that served as a place of exile, for example, has given way to one that sees the region as a 'land of opportunity' (Kardos 2008, pp. 7–12). In addition, Han in Xinjiang are increasingly prone to be dismissive of Uyghur claims to disadvantage pointing to the government's preferential treatment of minorities – from exemption from the one-child policy to affirmative action-type quotas to tertiary institutions and political/administrative positions – and to the economic development and modernisation that Beijing has brought to the region (Sautman 1998). The prevailing attitude, and one that has been borne out during periods of unrest and violence in Xinjiang, such as the July 2009 Urumqi riots, has been that Uyghurs are ungrateful 'natives' coddled by the state (Millward 2009; Sommerville 2009; Han 2010).

A major problem with the state's approach is that it neither perceives nor acknowledges the hegemonic role and place of the Han in the PRC nor the fact that its reliance on economic development as the primary solution for China's ethnic problems has in fact played a large role in exacerbating those problems. This is reflected in the disjuncture between official and popular conceptions of Xinjiang and reality. For example, the notion that Xinjiang has 'untapped' resources and abundant land is undermined by the fact that most of the arable land in Xinjiang is already under cultivation and water resources are increasingly scarce, while there has been significant desertification due to urbanisation, extensive irrigation and land reclamation projects spurred by increased Han settlement since 1949 (Blua 2004; Becquelin 2004; *Radio Free Asia* 2006). While economic stimulus has been provided by the direction of state investment toward large-scale infrastructure or mineral extraction projects it has also led to competition for resources and jobs in which the region's ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage due to lower levels of education, particularly given their generally lower proficiency in Mandarin (Weimer 2004; Bachman 2004; Moeller 2006). Uyghur marginalisation is also reflected in their lack of representation in the Xinjiang CCP, with ethnic minorities comprising around a third of party members. Despite the fact that China's policy on regional autonomy explicitly states that the head of an autonomous region, prefecture or county must be a member of the ethnic group exercising autonomy, none of the first Party secretaries at any level of the party in the region are from an ethnic minority (Mackerras 2006; Becquelin 2004; Bovingdon 2011).

Such political and economic marginalisation has also been accompanied by well-documented demographic marginalisation and restriction of religious expression.

With respect to the former, that the region's ethnic balance has been transformed can be readily gauged by noting that in 1949 the Han population stood at approximately 5 per cent of the region's population while the Uyghur accounted for 75 per cent, but that this balance had shifted in 2010 to 40.1 per cent Han and 46 per cent Uyghur (Toops 2004; Mackerras 2012). In the latter instance, Uyghur religious expression has always also been closely managed by the state but in the past two decades the authorities have tended to increasingly rely on campaigns against religious education, 'illegal' mosque construction, mosque attendance by persons under eighteen years of age, and the 're-education' of religious leaders in order to manage the perceived threat from Uyghur religious identity (Fuller & Lipman 2004, pp. 333–34). The close link between Islam and Uyghur identity has meant that any attempt by the state to regulate religious practice and expression is a cause of resentment for the Uyghur and is often perceived as an attempt to weaken Uyghur identity. For the state, however, heightened Islamic consciousness, combined with economic under-development, is perceived to be at the root of outbreaks of opposition and violence (Shicor 2005). This dynamic has only been reinforced by the July 2009 Urumqi riots and the spate of violent incidents and protests seen in the region between 2011 and 2014.

Such a disjuncture is reflective of two significant changes: a change in Han conceptions of Xinjiang and predominant attitudes toward non-Han groups such as the Uyghur; and the embedding of the state's developmentalist approach to ethnic questions. Under the GWD, in particular, the balance the CCP had long-maintained between cultural plurality and Han-centred political unity has shifted in favour of a discourse that envisages 'China as a transformative force of civilisation' with the 'primitive' and 'underdeveloped' periphery, such as Xinjiang, as its subject (Fiskesjo 2006). Nicholas Becquelin (2004), among others, has suggested that this is analogous to a Chinese 'manifest destiny' whereby Xinjiang, with its relatively untapped natural resources, wide open spaces and, by Chinese standards, sparse population is simply awaiting the 'spiritual impulse of the Chinese nation' to transform it.<sup>17</sup> This tendency is reflected, Barabantseva (2009, p. 228) argues, in the official language of the GWD which embeds 'ethnic minorities in an exotic aura' and 'localize[s] them in one geographic area, the West, thus demarcating them as localized elements of the Chinese nation state'.<sup>18</sup>

Such a categorisation also locates ethnic minorities (such as the Uyghur) in a problematic zone of 'under-development' which has become increasingly perceived by both local and central authorities as a root cause of China's inter-ethnic problems.<sup>19</sup> An early and significant expression of this view can be found in a June 2000 article by the then head of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (SEAC), Li Dezhu. For Li (2000), the key to 'solving' China's 'ethnic question' lies in accelerating the development of the 'economy' and 'culture' of the ethnic minorities. The rationale of economic development as a cure-all for China's ethnic problems was clearly expressed, with Li asserting that, 'the final solution for these problems lies in developing social productivity in areas of minority nationalities' and that the GWD 'is a fundamental way to speed up the development of minority nationalities, and a necessary choice to solve China's nationality problems

*under new historical circumstances*' (Li 2000, p. 22), emphasis added by author). Li also elucidated the state's view that 'national unity' and 'development' were inter-linked, arguing that the GWD, 'will provide the material foundation for strengthening national unity and social stability; while national unity and social stability will create a favourable environment for implementing the strategy' (Ibid.). Significantly, in light of subsequent events in Xinjiang, Li also noted the dangers inherent in such an approach when he acknowledged that the process of accelerated economic development, integration and 'opening-up' could not only cause inter-ethnic 'contradictions and friction' but also provide 'overseas hostile external forces' the chance to 'penetrate China' (Ibid.).

More significant perhaps than Li's acknowledgement of this anxiety regarding a potential link between inter-ethnic tension in Xinjiang and external forces/influences was the equanimity with which it was accepted as an inevitable by-product of the implementation of the GWD. An explanation for this equanimity is hinted at in Li's assertion that the GWD would reverse one of the major dynamics of the 'reform' era – population transfers from the interior to the economically developed eastern provinces – and stimulate a 'population flow to the West' in which the more advanced Han will introduce 'talents, technology and capital' to assist in the development of the west (Ibid.). Li's perspective was arguably symptomatic of the beginnings of an elite debate in China about the necessity for a 'second generation' of ethnic minority policy. As Barry Sautman (2010), James Leibold (2013) and David Tobin (2014) have detailed, this debate has been generated by the perceived failure of the Party's 'first generation' of ethnic minority policy – based on the 'three planks' of identification of ethnic groups, a system of regional autonomy, and a system of preferential policies – in the wake of continued anti-state violence and inter-ethnic conflict in Xinjiang and Tibet throughout the 2000s.

The violence in Lhasa in May 2008 and Urumqi in July 2009, in particular, which saw Tibetans and Uyghurs attack ordinary Han rather than representatives of the state (for example, police officers and party officials) has arguably constituted a tipping point by providing those advocating radical change in the state's approach to ethnic issues with ample 'proof' of the failure of existing policy. For critics such as the prominent sociologist Ma Rong (2007, p. 214), the 'first generation' of ethnic minority policy based on the Soviet model, has politicised and institutionalised ethnic identity as it connects, 'each ethnic minority to a certain geographic area, provides these groups with political status, administrative power in their "autonomous territory", and guarantees ethnic minorities the potential to develop at a higher speed'. Ma argues that this policy framework emphasises 'equality between ethnic groups' rather than 'equality between citizens', and as such it has strengthened ethnic consciousness and entrenched inter-ethnic barriers (Ibid.).<sup>20</sup> In contrast, as Leibold (2013) has detailed, Ma advocates a reformist agenda that draws upon classical western liberal thought that stresses the importance of individual over group rights that, in brief, seeks to take the 'ethnic minority' out of ethnic minority policy. Thus for Ma, as Leibold explains,

The growing economic and social gap between Han and minority communities means that the Chinese state must continue to play a leading role in subsidizing marginalised communities – but these programs should be *minzu*-blind [i.e. ethnically blind] and instead target localities and individuals in need.

(Leibold 2013, p. 18)

### **The constraining effects of 'outside-in' geopolitical narratives**

The implications of the neo-liberal geopolitics sketched previously for the Xinjiang and Uyghur issues have been felt in two broad phases – the pre and post 9/11. In the pre-9/11 phase the Xinjiang and Uyghur issues were subsumed within the broader US foreign policy debate regarding the 'China threat'. The general tenor of this debate was fuelled by the convergence of two seemingly contrary dynamics in US foreign policy thinking – the triumphalism of the American 'unipolar moment' and growing fears regarding the 'rise' of China.<sup>21</sup> This contradiction was however more apparent than real due to the fact that although many in US policy and academic circles celebrated, in Fukuyama-esque fashion, the 'victory' of liberal market democracy over state socialism, China as a Marxist-Leninist state stood out as a historical anachronism in an era that was supposed to be defined by the burgeoning of 'free markets' and 'free societies' across the globe. In addition, American perceptions of China's increasing economic and military strength and development further confounded such 'end of history' assumptions (Roy 1996, p. 760).

In this context of growing American anxiety about the continued existence, and indeed increase in material power, of 'socialist' China, the plight of its ethnic minorities tended to become something of a lightning rod for criticism of Beijing. This support generally has been of a rhetorical nature (for example, US Congressional resolutions demanding protection for ethnic and religious minorities) and stands in stark contrast to Washington's active support (such as, provision of financial and military aid) to various ethnic minorities waging guerrilla campaigns against communist or socialist states throughout Asia during the Cold War. It is important to note here that the Tibetans, who were the only ethnic minority in China that were recipients of such support during the Cold War, have succeeded in maintaining Western support in the post-Cold War era. This, as Melvyn C. Goldstein notes, has been achieved by 'recasting the Tibet question not in geopolitical terms but in terms of the US commitment to freedom and human rights' (2006, p. 156). That is to say the Tibetan's have pitched their appeal in terms that speak directly to the core themes of the post-Cold War neo-liberal geopolitical vision (free markets, democracy and human rights) and have presented the Dalai Lama as a champion of the values expressed in that vision.<sup>22</sup>

The efforts of the Uyghur diaspora community to advocate for their nationalist claims vis-à-vis Beijing were hamstrung between 1949 and 1991 by 'subjective Uyghur shortcomings' and 'objective international constraints' (Shicor 2007, p. 118). With respect to the latter, the Uyghurs confronted an international situation that was not conducive to the successful prosecution of nationalist claims

vis-à-vis China. In contrast to the Tibetans, for example, the Uyghurs received no support from the US during the Cold War for a number of reasons not the least of which was the fact that when an East Turkestan Republic (ETR) was proclaimed by Uyghur and Kazakh nationalists in Xinjiang in 1944–45 it was done *with* Soviet support and *against* the US-supported Guomindang (GMD) government of Chiang Kai-shek. The geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union subsequently intervened at a crucial point to ensure that the ETR was dissolved and incorporated into the PRC in 1949.<sup>23</sup>

For the subsequent four decades the periodic re-emergence of the issue of Uyghur separatism was largely isolated within the context of Beijing's relationship with Moscow. While the immediate post-1949 years of Sino-Soviet comity insured that the issue effectively disappeared from the international spotlight the souring of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s provided Moscow with the opportunity to meddle. For example, when around 60,000 Uyghurs and Kazakhs fled Xinjiang for Soviet Kazakhstan in 1962 due to famine and persecution, Moscow attempted to incite further ethnic minority unrest in order to undermine China's control of the region and encouraged the organisation of Uyghur advocacy groups by Uyghur émigré leaders in Soviet Central Asia (Kamalov 2009, pp. 117–25; Sadri 1984, pp. 294–319). China's relative international isolation from the late 1950s through to the late 1970s and its activist diplomatic championing of 'national liberation' movements in the Third World also made it very difficult for Uyghur exile leaders such as Mehmet Imin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin (both based in Turkey) to gain significant 'traction' for their cause. Alptekin, who assumed leadership of the Uyghur community in Turkey upon Bughra's death in 1964, focused on a two-track approach. First, he actively sought to cultivate links to Turkish political and military leaders with pan-Turkist leanings, most notably Suleyman Demirel and Turgut Ozal. Internationally, Alptekin attempted to enlist support for Uyghur nationalist claims through a broad appeal to anti-communist sentiment in the Muslim world, the non-aligned developing world, and Taiwan (Shicor 2009, pp. 17–19). These efforts nonetheless bore little fruit due to Beijing's limited ties with Turkey, its ideological offensive in the Third World, and its ability to simply paint Uyghur nationalists as aided and abetted by both 'Soviet revisionism' and 'reactionary Turkey'.<sup>24</sup> The improvement in Sino-Soviet relations in the 1980s also contributed to the neutralisation of the Uyghur issue in China's foreign relations. For these reasons the Uyghur and Xinjiang issues were never truly embedded into the prevailing Cold War geopolitical discourse in the West.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent establishment of independent Central Asian republics however made Chinese anxieties about potential Uyghur separatism much more visible than was the case previously. Yet, throughout the 1990s Beijing succeeded in limiting the scope of its perceived Uyghur problem to Central Asia. While Uyghur advocacy groups proliferated in the Central Asian states, particularly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, they had a limited effect on Chinese policy in Xinjiang and upon the growth of Chinese strategic and economic influence throughout the region. The Uyghur diaspora beyond Central Asia, in Western Europe, the United States and Turkey, while able to take advantage of the

openness of these societies to advocate for greater Uyghur autonomy in Xinjiang were nonetheless hampered by the relative obscurity of Xinjiang, their profession of the Muslim faith and their internal disunity. In this latter respect, the Uyghur diaspora had splintered into numerous advocacy groups in the post-Cold War period spread across Central Asia, Western Europe and the United States without a single recognised leader and divided on ideology and tactics (Bovingdon 2011, pp. 142–44).

Significantly, as the centre of Uyghur diasporic activities gradually shifted from Central Asia to Turkey and Western Europe and then to the United States over the course of the 1990s, the ideology and tactics of Uyghur advocacy groups gradually changed (Ibid., pp. 144–45; Shicor 2007, pp. 117–25). In the early 1990s, for example, a number of prominent Uyghur advocacy groups based in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan actively advocated the achievement of independence for East Turkestan through armed struggle in rhetoric bearing the influence of pan-Turkic and even pan-Islamist ideology (Shicor 2007; Bovingdon 2011, pp. 142–43). China's growing power and influence in Central Asia by the mid-1990s and increasing relations with Turkey, however, resulted in increasing pressure on these states from Beijing to limit the operation of Uyghur nationalist groups within their borders (Shicor 2007, pp. 120–21). Partly as result of this dynamic the centre of gravity for Uyghur diaspora nationalism shifted to Germany where 'the fact that Germany is a democratic society that upholds human rights, freedom of speech and civil liberties has been an advantage the Uyghurs could not but highly appreciate' (Shicor 2013, p. 618). Another palpable effect of this transition was that the Uyghur groups based there, while still advocating independence for East Turkestan, began to do so in terms more palatable to Western governments/societies – such as focusing on explicitly nonviolent means and liberal models of political mobilisation (Bovingdon 2011, pp. 146–51).

This was not an unusual phenomenon in the post-Cold War, 'globalised' world, where many repressed and under-represented groups were competing for the attention and support of 'global civil society'. Clifford Bob (2002, p. 37) has argued in this regard that, in contrast to many of the positive assumptions about the effects of globalisation in the 1990s, 'global civil society' was not in fact 'an open forum marked by altruism' but rather 'a harsh, Darwinian marketplace where legions of desperate groups vie for scarce attention, sympathy and resources'. In an effort to 'sell' their cause in this marketplace, such groups 'may end up undermining their original goals or alienating the domestic constituencies they ostensibly represent' as they seek to 'simplify and universalize their claims' in order to make their cause 'relevant to the broader missions and interests of key global players' (Ibid.). This effect is perhaps most visible in the establishment and rhetoric of two key advocacy groups for the Uyghur – the UAA and the WUC – the former based in Washington, DC, and the latter in Munich, Germany. Both of these organisations advocate for the Uyghur cause in ways that are consistent with the dominant neo-liberal geopolitical vision of the West.

The UAA, established in 1998 by a number of US-based Uyghur scholars and activists, seeks 'to promote the preservation and flourishing of a rich, humanistic

and diverse Uyghur culture, and to support the right of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, democratic means to determine their own political future' (Uyghur American Association 2012). The organisation since the late 1990s has maintained an up-to-date website presenting news coverage of Uyghur and Xinjiang-related issues and actively lobbies the US Congress on behalf of the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. Since 2002 the UAA has also run the 'Uyghur Human Rights Project' (UHRP) to promote the improvement of the human rights of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang through the publication of detailed reports of human rights abuses throughout the region (such as restrictions on religious observance, Chinese population control policies and so forth) and challenges to the preservation of Uyghur culture. As noted previously, the UAA also receives \$250,000 annual funding from the US National Endowment for Democracy. In contrast to some of the Uyghur advocacy groups that emerged in Central Asia after the end of the Cold War the UAA avows that it 'does not take a position on independence for East Turkestan, but instead focuses its goal on promoting human rights and democracy for Uyghurs and others living in East Turkestan' (cited in Petersen 2006, p. 68). This suggests that the core premise behind the organisation is that the assurance of basic human rights for Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and throughout China will ultimately facilitate the 'democratic aspirations' of the Uyghur. Such a standpoint also positions the organisation well tactically to rebut Chinese claims that it is advocating for an exclusively Uyghur homeland.<sup>25</sup>

The WUC founded in April 2004 in Munich was the outcome of a number of years of internal debate among a variety of Uyghur diaspora groups in Europe and Turkey regarding how to best unify into a single advocacy body and thus present a coherent narrative of the Uyghur cause to the international community (Shicor 2007, p. 122). This latter point was of particular importance to counter the post-9/11 diplomatic offensive of Beijing that sought to frame all Uyghur nationalism and dissent as manifestations of 'terrorism'. Indeed, the mission statement adopted by the organisation, like that of the UAA, speaks directly to the neo-liberal agenda of the West, and the US in particular, by stating that its 'main objective' is 'to promote democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people and use peaceful, nonviolent, and democratic means to determine their political future' (World Uyghur Congress 2004–2015). Highlighting its role as the central hub of an emerging 'network' of Uyghur advocacy groups across the globe, the mission statement also asserts that the core goal of the WUC is to become the 'the sole legitimate organization of the Uyghur people both in East Turkestan and abroad'. In its attempt to be seen as such not only by the Uyghur diaspora community but also by the international community, the WUC has explicitly embedded itself in the neo-liberal narrative (Chen 2012, pp. 77–88). As such:

WUC endeavors to set out a course for the peaceful settlement of the East Turkestan Question through dialogue and negotiation. The WUC declares a nonviolent and peaceful opposition movement against Chinese occupation of East Turkestan and an unconditional adherence to the international accepted human rights standards as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, and adherence to the principals of democratic pluralism and rejection of totalitarianism, religious intolerance, and terrorism as an instrument of policy.

(Ibid.)

The WUC can be seen as the culmination of the process noted by Bob (2002) of the necessity for such unrepresented peoples and causes to effectively 'market' their cause to global civil society. And to date the WUC has been successful in raising the profile of the Uyghur and Xinjiang issues. This has been due not only to the shifting geographic centre of gravity of Uyghur advocacy from Central Asia to Europe and the US but to the parallel shift in the rhetoric and goals espoused by bodies such as the UAA and WUC. In a broad sense these groups have established a 'normative trap' for the West by explicitly framing their goals in the prevailing neo-liberal language of 'freedom, democracy and human rights' rather than the 'national self-determination' rhetoric of the Cold War era. Such a strategy enables these groups to link the Uyghur cause to Western, and especially US, concerns regarding the continued rise of 'communist' China. Such an approach was neatly encapsulated in an opinion piece on the *Foreign Policy* magazine website by Nury Turkel (2009), a prominent member of the UAA, when he argued that:

Uyghurs are not terrorists; nor are they a threat. In fact, Uyghurs could be a natural US ally. Uyghurs are the Tibetans you haven't heard about . . . Uyghurs have long faced discrimination and persecution as a minority – a fact recognized repeatedly by the US Congress and State Department, which has noted China's insidious strategy of using the US war on terror as pretext to oppress independent religious leaders and peaceful political dissenters. Uyghurs' struggle for self-rule is one against dictatorship and communism, not one to establish a *sharia* state through violence.

Thus, the UAA and WUC have focused much of their efforts on drawing the attention of western governments and publics to particular aspects of the Uyghur and Xinjiang issues that are of priority for these actors such as human rights abuses and the protection of 'indigenous' cultures.<sup>26</sup> Since 9/11, the UAA and WUC have also arguably sought to counter Chinese claims regarding the influence of radical Islamism by individualising the Uyghur 'struggle' via the construction of Rebiya Kadeer as a charismatic and recognisable leader. The success of this latter strategy can be gauged by the fact that Kadeer is now often referred to in popular media reporting on Xinjiang issues variously as the 'Uyghur Dalai Lama', 'the Mother of the Uyghurs', or simply as 'the Uyghur democracy leader'. President George W. Bush also met face-to-face with Kadeer in Prague in June 2007 and praised her as a 'human rights defender', while prior to attending the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics Bush also made direct reference to the Uyghurs and Tibetans in a speech celebrating the tenth anniversary of the US Congress passing the 'International Religious Freedom Act' (cited in Uyghur American Association 2007).

### **Conclusion: toward the colonisation of the geopolitical imagination of the Uyghur?**

Partha Chatterjee (1991) has argued that the agency of the colonised in the construction of their own post-colonial identities should be recognised as part of their resistance to colonialism itself. This informed his trenchant critique of Benedict Anderson's conception of nationalism as an 'imagined community' wherein post-colonial nationalism is conceived of as simply a product of the transferral of the concept of the 'nation' from Europe to the colonial world. For Chatterjee such a perspective condemns the post-colonial world to being nothing other than 'consumers of modernity' while:

Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that our anti-colonial resistance and post-colonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonised.

(Ibid., p. 521)

Yet Chatterjee suggests that 'fundamental' to anti-colonial and post-colonial nationalism is the reconciliation of two constituent domains – the material and the spiritual – and that the core struggle for anti-colonial and post-colonial nationalists is to retain and strengthen the 'spiritual' domain to preserve 'essential' markers of cultural identity while absorbing the material 'superiority' of the West. It is in this process of struggle that post-colonial nationalism:

... launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture which is nevertheless, not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being.

(Ibid., p. 522)

Importantly, Chatterjee argues that 'nationalism declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain'. I would argue that the post-1949 history of Uyghur nationalism has engaged in just such a material and spiritual struggle. Yet it is one that has been complicated, especially since the end of the Cold War, by the fact that Uyghur nationalists have had to prosecute this struggle at multiple levels including within the Uyghur population in Xinjiang itself, between the Uyghur and the Chinese state, and increasingly between the Uyghur diaspora community and the West. Structuring this multi-level struggle are the constraining effects of the two dominant geopolitical narratives of the West and China with respect to Central Asia and Xinjiang and the Uyghur that have in effect 'colonised' the Uyghur geopolitical imagination from two directions. First, China's developmentalist geopolitical narrative has narrowed the permissible material and spiritual domains of Uyghur national sentiment by identifying core markers of cultural identity (such as religion and language) as barriers to a Han-centred 'modernity'. Second, the West's

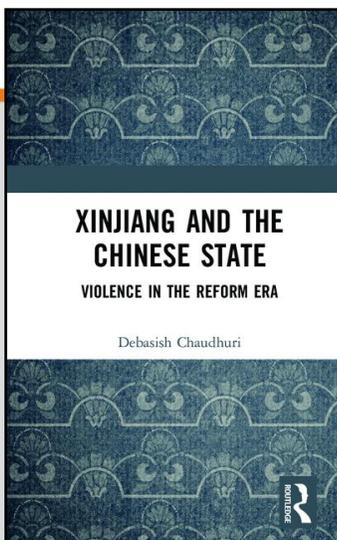
neo-liberal geopolitical narrative has also exercised a similar disciplinary function through its privileging of core Western principles/values (for example, free markets, democracy and human rights) that in particular imperils the ability of the Uyghur diaspora to achieve what Chatterjee (1991) identifies as the fundamental task of anti-colonial/post-colonial nationalism: to 'fashion a "modern" national culture which is nevertheless, not Western'. Ironically, then, both the West's neo-liberal geopolitics and China's developmental geopolitics have had a Fukuyama-esque tendency to view key markers of Uyghur-ness as impediments to the progress of their particular visions of modernity.



CHAPTER

4

# ETHNIC RESURGENCE AND STATE RESPONSE



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*Xinjiang and the Chinese State: Violence in the Reform Era*

by Debasish Chaudhuri

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# Ethnic resurgence and state response

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Social and political stability in the life of the Xinjiang people as well as state security got disturbed as it experienced transition from a dormant separatist sentiment to covert and violent conflicts in Xinjiang over the last three decades of the reform period. During the first decade of reform in the 1980s, the Muslim minorities of the region openly participated in the reform period like the Han population across China. There were widespread expectations for the imminent political reform, which the Uyghur and other minority population thought would help to acquire greater autonomous rights entitled in the Constitution and ethnic autonomy laws. The growing political conservatism among the top echelon of the CPC, deliberate discriminations and systematic marginalisation of the Uyghur in the name of development and criminalisation of all forms of dissent in the aftermath of the Tian'anmen Square incident contributed in changing the nature of protests in Xinjiang. Analysis of the Chinese state's attitude to civil rights of its people and the rise of protests across the country since the 1990s gives greater clarity in assessing the conflicts in Xinjiang and the government's coercive response towards the Uyghurs.

### Protests in the 1980s

In the early 1970s, activities of the East Turkestan People's Revolutionary Party (*Dongtjujesitan renmin geming dang*) were reportedly exposed and separatist forces of Xinjiang were severely punished. The 'foreign elements' involved in anti-China activities were also purged. There were possibly no major separatist activities in the region for about the next one decade, but intellectuals and religious personalities with the 'pan-Turkic' and 'pan-Islamic'

orientation remained at large. Issues like separatist thinking and erroneous judgements (*cuowei renshi*) of the 'national liberation movement' had a lingering effect on the regional politics (Li Sheng 2007: 38). It appears that the factors responsible for resurgence of separatist activities in Xinjiang remained until the reform period.

One of the first reports of interethnic tensions in the reform period involved the local Uyghur residents and the PLA regarding the death of a pedestrian in a road accident in Kashgar in which the local government took the side of the military personnel. This caused tension in the region and the Uyghur demonstrators attacked the Han settlers and a PLA base in Kashgar in June 1981 (Dreyer 1994: 47). There were other incidents involving the PLA and public security in the early reform period that caused local unrests. Moreover, factions of various cliques of the Cultural Revolution were still active among the army troops in the Urumqi Military Region. They were dissatisfied with Deng's liberal policies towards minorities and wanted to create disturbances (McMillen 1984: 578). There were strong ethnic biases among the Han military personnel and cadres, which affected their performance while dealing with interethnic disturbances in Xinjiang.

The early reform period was marked by pragmatism and commitment for greater openness, rationale and inclusiveness. A number of soft policies towards religious and cultural matters of ethnic minorities and interactions with foreign countries created widespread optimism for greater political reform. On one hand, the comparatively liberal atmosphere created a scope for convergence of interests between the local communities and central authority, and on the other hand, provided political opportunities to the Uyghurs and other nationalists whose aspiration was not fulfilled under the limited autonomy in the previous decades.

This encouraged hundreds of Uyghur students of the Central Institute of the Nationalities, Beijing, to demonstrate in protest against the family planning policies and nuclear tests at Lop Nor in December 1985 (SWB/FE/8144/B2/1). This was also the first open anti-nuclear demonstration in China. During this public demonstration, the Uyghur protesters addressed their grievances and raised demands for political, economic and civil rights. The student protesters demanded replacement of the Han officials with democratically elected minority candidates and political self-rule. The Uyghur students also carried out similar protests and demonstrations in Urumqi. Most of the demands were rejected by the local

and central leaders. The family planning restrictions for minorities were, however, relaxed. Some facilities in higher education were also granted to a few Uyghur students (Dreyer 1994: 49). Though the authority did not take immediate action, but after a few months' gap, 60 students who participated in the demonstration in Urumqi were taken away from the University Campus in May 1986. It was reported in a Uyghur news bulletin that the government never disclosed the whereabouts of these students (ETIB 1992).

There were also a few minor incidents involving minority nationals that occurred in 1987. In October 1987, a Chinese novel *White House in the Distance* was published in a literary bimonthly. It was reported that the author of the novel depicted the life of Kazakh women in a derogatory fashion and distorted the habits and customs of Kazakh nationals. In April 1988, hundreds of Kazakh students from six institutes of higher learning in the Ili region including the Ili Teachers College went on a strike in protest against the publication of the novel (Warikoo 1995/96: 34). In 1988, there were some other instances when the minority nationalities of the region strongly reacted because their sentiment was hurt. In June, some Uyghur students staged a protest movement after seeing anti-Uyghur graffiti in the Xinjiang University (Liu Alan P. L. 1996: 207). It was also reported that a few hundred Uyghur protesters held demonstrations in Urumqi with large flags bearing slogans in the Arabic script. The former regional CCP leader Wang Enmao and other leaders of Xinjiang expressed their concern over a growing separatist tendency among the Muslims of Xinjiang. In the following month, the Standing Committee of the Seventh RPC ratified a draft of provisional regulations on demonstrations in Xinjiang (Chang 1988: 9).

In May 1989, the Muslim minorities of Xinjiang participated in a nationwide movement against the publication of a novel titled *Sex Habit (Xing Fengsu)*. It is reported that the book made derogatory comments about the amorous behaviour of Muslims during pilgrimage to Mecca and described the design of mosques and other Islamic symbols in offensive language. The Hui Muslims in other parts of the country first came to know about the content of the book and launched protests across the country. The protests against the book gradually spread across the country and by the second week of May the Uyghur students also joined the movement in solidarity with the Huis (Gladney 1991: 1–7). The Muslim campaign coincided with the student movement at the Tian'anmen Square.

On 17–18 May, nearly 2,000–3,000 students from the Xinjiang University marched to the regional party headquarters in Urumqi to show sympathy for the hunger strikers in Beijing (Dreyer 1994: 50). This was also a rare moment in the modern Chinese history when many national minority students participated along with the Han students.<sup>1</sup>

In Urumqi, the situation changed dramatically when several thousand students from the Urumqi Quranic Studies Institute joined university students on 19 May. The second group of students came with the agenda of protesting against the publication of the controversial book, and they violently attacked the party headquarters. According to an official report, 40 vehicles were destroyed and more than 150 soldiers, police and cadres injured in this incident. The government maintained that the police had been instructed not to fight back (Dreyer 1994: 50). In order to avoid further religious upheavals, the central government banned the book and had it withdrawn from circulation. The government also accepted most of the other demands of the Muslim demonstrators, but to the surprise of the Uyghur student protesters the local authority ruthlessly suppressed their movement (Gladney 1991: 342n4). A few days after this, the student protestors on the Tian'anmen Square were also brutally treated by the people's army.

In fact, the ruthless massacre of student protesters on 4 June 1989 was just an extension of violent measures that have been commonly applied in the minority regions since the communist takeover. The coercive method of protests in the minority regions appeared first in Tibet in the reform period when 21 monks from the Drepung monastery staged pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa on 27 September 1987 (Tsering Shakya 1999: 416). From then on, protest movements took a violent turn in Tibet. Since the mid-1980s, a large section of intellectuals and students were very critical of the government's failure to control corruption and other unwanted byproducts of economic reforms in other parts of China. The student protests at the Tian'anmen Square in the summer of 1989 clearly expressed the discontent of a large section of the Chinese population, but in the official perception, student protest in the square was nothing but an unlawful gathering. Following the Tian'anmen Square incident, a conservative leadership was installed at the centre which reflected the CPC's determination to use coercive measures to suppress any kind of opposition.

## **Ethnic violence 1990–2001**

In the uneasy political atmosphere after the Tian'anmen Square incident, the central Chinese authorities left no room for dissent anywhere in China let alone a minority region like Xinjiang. The government took a more ruthless attitude in implementing its policy towards the minority region. The accommodative policies of the early reform period in religious and cultural matters were replaced by strict control and biased policies. The construction of new mosques was halted and many religious schools were closed. The new regulations restricted meetings between the Muslim clerics of the region and foreigners. The authority forbade teaching of sensitive subjects like the Uyghur history and greater restrictions were imposed to curb research activities on Xinjiang. Religious teachers from Muslim countries were no more allowed to work in the Xinjiang Theological Seminary in Urumqi which was opened with Saudi funding in 1987 and the seminary officials discontinued all ties with Egypt's Al Azhar University. The minimum age of the haj applicant was restricted to 50 years, and throughout 1989, a number of regulations were imposed to check the increasing contacts between the Muslims of Xinjiang and other parts of the world (Harris 1993a: 121). During 1989 and 1990, with the collapse of the communist states of Eastern Europe and the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the atmosphere in Xinjiang grew tenser. The decline of the communist world since 1989 forced China to impose further restrictions in the region to safeguard itself from real as well as perceived domestic and international threats. In the high tide of economic reforms, regional, interethnic and intra-regional economic inequalities, manipulative propaganda and coercion have considerably reduced trust among the ethnic Uyghur and Han population in Xinjiang. In this situation, the Uyghur separatist movement began to take a violent turn and fundamentalist forces began to enter the political scene of the region.

In consequence of the restrictions on religious matters in the region, the first major anti-Chinese riots broke out in Baren Township, Akto County, in the Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture in the southwestern fringe of XUAR on 5 April 1990. In the early reform period, Baren was designated as an Ethnic Unity Model Town. The riots here not only exposed the false image of ethnic unity (Millward 2007: 325), but it was also an indication of possible impacts of reversal of accommodative policies in the 1990s.

Two weeks after the incident, on 21 April, Xinjiang television transmitted news of the bloody incident and the whole story was reported in the regional television programme within the next one week. The official report blamed a 'handful of ruffians' who were accused of forming an organisation called the Islamic Party of East Turkestan and secretly recruited members for a holy war across Xinjiang. It was also reported that the organisation formulated the 'Holy War Law and Regulation', and since the beginning of Ramadan on 27 March, they tried to impose the Islamic code on womenfolk and businessmen. The official report said that in the early morning of 5 April, nearly 200 people assembled in front of the township government building with the intention of conducting a 'counter-revolutionary rebellion' (SWB/FE/0746B2/1-2). The official reporting is silent about reasons behind the outburst of the religious sentiment in the incident, but other sources reveal that the local authorities banned construction of a mosque in this township, possibly the immediate cause of people's resentment and subsequent anti-Chinese riots at Baren.

The leader of the agitation was Zahideen Yusuf, a charismatic religious student from Baren. He was inspired by the idea of the holy war practised by the Afghan *mujahideen* and established an organisation to carry out *jihād* in the whole of Xinjiang. Zahideen and other leading members of the group were killed after two days of fighting. According to the official reports, many insurgents and sympathetic people fled to the mountains. They were pursued by helicopter-borne troops and in a massive sweep operation hundreds of people were captured (Millward 2007: 326). There were contradictory reports about the death toll in this incident. According to an official report, the number of dead in Baren was about 22. It is highly possible that the actual figure of casualties was about three times the official data. Riots also spread in Kashgar and other important cities of south Xinjiang as well as in Urumqi. Xinjiang's armed police were considered inadequate to quell the rebellious Muslims, so troops from Lanzhou were airlifted to various cities. One Hong Kong source indicated that 100,000 troops were deployed in the region. It was estimated that 50-60 people died in Urumqi and 68 in Artush (Dreyer 1994: 50; Toops 1992: 92).

It was for the first time that an Islamic rebellious group openly challenged Chinese authority during the PRC rule in the region. The slogans 'Revive Islam' and 'Independent East Turkestan Islamic Republic' were frequently displayed during the incident

and the idea of a holy war was uttered. It was reported that the weapons used in Baren included pistols, machine guns, hand grenades, explosives and dynamites, and there was evidence of foreign influence in this incident. It is believed that arms were smuggled from the Afghan *mujahedeen* through Pakistan via the Karakoram Highway. Involvement of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in fanning unrest in Baren was also reported (FBIS-CHI-90-070 1990; Warikoo 1995/96: 37-8). As a precaution of cross-border penetration of Muslim militants, the Chinese government immediately closed the Khunjerab Pass and Karakoram Highway. China also warned Islamabad that it would reconsider its relation with Pakistan if the latter did not control the fundamentalist activities involving the Uyghur (Rashid 1994: 222). The official narrative of the riots in Baren and other violent incidents in the subsequent years was deliberately silent about the real situation in Xinjiang in the 1990s.

The intensity and frequency of violent activities remarkably increased from 1995 to 1999 (Bovingdon 2010: 113-5). Three major aspects of the Uyghur-led violence in the 1990s can be identified – violent response to unfavourable government policies in the absence of scope of peaceful protests; expression of resurgence in the name of religion; and spontaneous upsurge inspired by wishful and romantic ideals of independence. The year 1997 was especially remarkable because there was widespread belief among the Uyghur population that Xinjiang would become independent on the day of Hong Kong's return to China. Many scholars pointed out that there was no concrete plan of action matching to the blown-up ambition of independence. This, however, reveals deep-rooted separatist sentiments among a large section of the Uyghur population in Xinjiang (Smith 2000: 211-4; Bovingdon 2002: 62-5). In the face of strong anti-China sentiment and interethnic tensions, the Han population in the region developed a sense of terror and the regional government became extremely suspicious about the Uyghur activities.

In this highly charged political atmosphere, on the eve of Ramadan on 5 February 1997, the local administration in Ili arrested about 30 religious leaders who were alleged to have planned to carry out big pro-independence demonstrations in the area, which further intensified tension in Ili and the surrounding areas (Mackerras 2001: 291). The local Muslim population took offence against this official action and gathered in front of the city government office to demand the release of the detainees. It is not clear how the

riot started, but it continued for two days. The Chinese authorities confirmed the news of rioting in Ili by the Uyghurs and according to the report four or five people died in the incident and public security forces arrested 400–500 people. The final government report declared death of seven innocent people, more than 200 people injured and destruction of private and public properties in the riots. Some other source, however, mentioned that about 400 people were killed, of which 300 were Uyghur and 100 Han (SWB/FE/2841G/1; SWB/FE/2870G/5–6). It seems that the Chinese government successfully suppressed the news of the riot in Ili and there is no way of verifying the gravity of the situation from any reliable source.

In retaliation of suppression of the Muslims in Ili, the Uyghur separatists carried out attacks on the Lanzhou-Urumqi railway that caused derailment of a train on 12 February 1997. On 25 February, a group of terrorists planted time bombs on three buses in Urumqi that exploded simultaneously while passing through three different roads of the regional capital. According to a report, a total of 23 passengers were killed and 74 injured in the incident. In the following weeks, news about more attacks including one in Beijing was reported (Rudelson 1997: 171). The United Revolutionary National Front was accused of having designed the plot of the Urumqi bus explosions and the Chinese authority secretly executed 20 active members of the organisation (SWB/FE/2855G/12).

The symbolic nature of the incident of bus explosions in Urumqi is noteworthy. It was the final day of official mourning for the deceased paramount leader Deng Xiaoping when the explosions took place and the names of the three roads where the explosions occurred are Zhonghua (China), Minzu (nationalities) and Tuanjie (unity), respectively. There was a report of a fourth bomb that exploded on 1 March in an Urumqi building where police officers were holding a meeting. Some sources claimed that the last explosion was the work of a suicide bomber (SWB/FE/2858G/15). The Eastern Turkestani forces also started attacking Chinese people on foreign soil in the same year. In March 1997, some Uyghur separatist activists opened fire on the Chinese embassy in Turkey, attacked the Chinese Consulate General in Istanbul and burnt the Chinese national flag. This kind of violent protest by the exiled Uyghurs in Turkey occurred again in March 1998. The Uyghur-led violence also occurred in the Central Asian countries as well in 1999 and 2000.

There are other instances when the defence establishments and security personnel were attacked. Some unidentified persons reportedly attacked a guided missile base near Korla city in southern Xinjiang in the early months of 1999. The news came on a Taiwanese website on 27 February 1999. According to the news, 21 soldiers were killed and 6 others wounded by fire during the attack on the missile base next to the Lop Nor highway. The fire set off by the attackers destroyed 80 vehicles carrying military supplies (SWB/FE/3471G/6). From the sketchy descriptions of these two incidents, it seems that the attack on the missile base in 1999 was a far more skilful terrorist act than most of the violent activities. This may be a natural outcome of the rapid growth of subversive activities in Xinjiang since 1996. These incidents give a clear view of the potential and intensification of the separatist organisations in the region.

The Chinese government's first report of violent incidents in Xinjiang between 1990 and 2001 titled "‘East Turkistan’ Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity" was published in January 2002 by the Information Office of the State Council. The report does not provide any reference to the background of the violent acts in the region and it is not possible to know the purpose and nature of the attacks in most of the cases mentioned in the document. Many scholars question the reliability of this official document, especially indiscriminate labelling of a wide range of activities as terrorist acts many of which possibly falls within the category of ordinary crime.

A stereotypical image of Islam as a force against economic development and in favour of militancy has been created through official as well as academic discourse which has made the situation in the region more complicated (Shen 1995: 59). The speedy decline of interethnic relations surprise many people in China (Li 2011: 2–3). Over the years, some Chinese intellectuals began to contradict the official position on violence in Xinjiang. According to them, the government policies and the attitude of the Han people in Xinjiang are the main reasons behind the deterioration of Han-Uyghur relations and intensification of interethnic relations in the region. The local Han population always treats the Uyghur from the ruler's perspective. According to Wang Lixiong's Uyghur companion in jail during his stay in Xinjiang, the official propaganda since the Baren incident in the early 1990s has immensely contributed in making an atmosphere of mistrust and hatred (Wang 2007: 56, 281).

## Stability maintenance and strike hard measures

In the 1980s, reform and liberalisation were considered as prerequisite of social stability by a host of reform-minded high-ranking CPC leaders who showed sympathy to the estranged masses at the risk of their political career. However, Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum 'stability overrides everything' (*wending yadao yiqie*) underlined the coercive method of maintaining stability, which was for the first time applied at national level during the Tian'anmen Square student movement. In the face of swift decline of communist regimes across the world between 1989 and 1991, regime stability along with social stability became a major thrust for the conservative faction of the party who took centre stage in the 1990s. Over the next two decades, stability maintenance turned out to be a major task of social control by the central and regional authorities in China (Feng 2013: 24–28).

In this stability discourse, the Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang is one among several other disruptive forces. During his inspection tours in the region, Jiang Zemin especially mentioned the impact of Taiwan on the growing separatist tendency in other parts of China, and stated that various separatist forces of China and all over the world colluded to intensify separatist activities in Xinjiang. The Chinese strategic experts view international terrorism, ethnic separatism, religious extremism and agents of evil religious groups (such as Falun Gong) as a combination of forces undermining the security situation in Xinjiang and other parts of China. They also include smuggling, drug trafficking and cross-border crime as serious challenges to economic, financial and information security (Zhang 2003: 454–62, 479–83). With this understanding, the third generation leadership formulated the strategy of preserving stability at any cost and vowed to crush every element of instability that had the potential to destroy the atmosphere of stability and unity.

In the early half of the 1990s, the high-ranking party leaders Jiang Zemin, Li Peng and Li Ruihuan maintained that the problem related to interethnic relations was internal contradiction among the people. At the United Working Conference in 1993, Jiang Zemin stressed the importance of national integration, ethnic unity and long-lasting political stability for economic construction and common development (Jin 2000: 105). In the case of Xinjiang, separatism was considered to be the major contradiction. On 19 March 1996, the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau

of the Chinese Communist Party held a meeting concerning the maintenance of stability in Xinjiang. The minutes of the meeting known as Document No. 7 of the Central Committee identified three forms of extremism (*jiduanzhuyi*) in the region, namely ethnic separatism (*minzu fenlizhuyi*), religious extremism (*zongjiao jiduanzhuyi*) and terrorism (*kongbuzhuyi*). According to the Chinese official and scholarly parlance, these three extremist ideas have constituted 'three evil forces' (*sangu shili*) in Xinjiang. The term has not only lost its explanatory power because of its indiscriminate use to describe a wide range of Uyghur activities and social behaviour, but also created confusion and complexities.

Document No. 7 set guidelines of a new phase of anti-separatist struggle called strike hard (*yanda*) in Xinjiang in the following years (Hari Bala 2008: 28–9). This document imposed restrictions on the local party cadres in participation of religious activities, strict control on Muslim religious establishments and personnel and increased vigilance on the Uyghur language education and publication of Uyghur language materials. The document also recommended training of a large number of Han cadres and assigning them to various positions across Xinjiang (Millward 2007: 342–3). Many scholars argue that strike hard measures witnessed a rise of 'logistically sophisticated incidents' and that 'the crackdown itself created new grievances', which once again testified that violence bred more violence (Hastings 2011: 903). Wang Lixiong criticised that Document No. 7 was solely responsible for the emergence of the Xinjiang 'problem', and pointed out that the number of death toll and casualties as well as instances of violence were much higher after the release of the document in March 1996. He cited some data that showed cause-effect relationship between the increase of magnitude of violence and intensification of anti-terror measures following the issuance of the above document (Wang 2007: 61–3 and Table 7.1).

The Chinese authorities initiated their crack down on separatism and crime in the region in April 1996 with their first strike hard campaign. In the first few months of the campaign, the local police arrested more than 2,700 suspects and traced 640 criminal groups (Becquelin 2004). Together with special short-term campaigns, the strike hard campaign has continued under different names ever since the government decided to launch armed suppression of separatist sentiments and dissents in Xinjiang. The 'Rectification of social order' was initiated immediately after the Ili riots in February

Table 7.1 Violence in Xinjiang before and after the release of Document No. 7

<i>Incidents</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Attempted explosion</i>	<i>Assassination</i>	<i>Raid</i>	<i>Poisoning and arson</i>	<i>Terror base</i>	<i>Riots</i>
Between 1990 and March 1996	12	73	13	1	—	—	1	1
Between March 1996 and 2001	44	292	17	16	2	39	13	5

Source: Wang (2007: 62).

1997. Following President Jiang Zemin's visit to the region in 1998, the authorities unleashed 'People's war' against separatists. In 1999, the 'Special hundred days strike hard' campaign and 'General campaign against terrorism' were launched. In 2000, the authorities launched 'Focused rectification of religious places' and 'Dine, live and work together' campaigns to monitor the Uyghurs' social life and trace the roots of separatism. In early September 2001, the XUAR authorities claimed that the situation in the region was 'better than ever' in history, but immediately after the 9/11 incident, China took a different stand on the issue of terrorism in the region and claimed Uyghur connection with international terrorist forces and a more repressive measure of 'Strike Hard, High Pressure' was launched soon after (Becquelin 2004: 42).

To reassert the strategic importance of the region and display its military preparedness, the Xinjiang Military Command launched a combined armed services highland training in the Karakoram Range at the end of May 2001. The exercise ended in early August 2001 with a four-day live ammunition war game held only 12 miles north of Kashgar. In order to prepare the XPCC together with the regional People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) to deal with sudden exigencies, another combined live ammunition exercise was held at the Tianshan and the Gobi Desert on 14 September 2001. Xinjiang has a highly developed intelligence surveillance stations that were previously used to gather signals from the USSR, and their combatting capability is unique in terms of missile impact zones and nuclear facilities (Shichor 2004: 121). These facilities came to be handy in suppressing the Uyghur separatists since the 1990s.

In spite of the series of crackdown measures since 1996, the region has been experiencing demonstrations, protest rallies, assassinations, bombings, riots and attacks on police and government institutions. In the asymmetric confrontation with the riot police, military forces and militia organisations, the Uyghur protesters, bystanders and their relatives were helpless victims. The incident in Ili on 5–8 February 1997 is a typical example when dozens of demonstrators were killed by the paramilitary forces, and for several months after the incident indigenous ethnic groups (both Uyghur and Kazakh) were haunted by the security forces. According to an Amnesty International report, between 1997 and 1999, roughly 30 persons were executed and 51 others were imprisoned in the Ili region. (Amnesty International 1999: 74–88).

At the institutional level, the Chinese authorities disapproved participation in religious activities by party and government officials and brought all sorts of Uyghur activities under the state surveillance and treated all forms of opposition by the Uyghur – be it cultural, religious and literary, or for the cause of AIDS and anti-alcoholism – as separatist behaviour. The Uyghur writers have been arrested by the police for writing about the sentiments of their community. Over the years, Chinese officials became intolerant towards the Uyghur language, culture and literature. For ‘correct management’ of religious activities, special political training was given to clerics in government-administered religious schools. Officials monitored activities in religious places. Any discussion on Islam was considered as punishable offence. All aspects of religious and cultural life of the local Uyghur Muslims were severely curbed and state propaganda machinery also coloured the mass political expression of Uyghur resentments in the light of ‘political’ Islam.

Incidents of violent activities had definitely reduced by 2000 and remained low for some years. It is, however, difficult to establish if relatively less violence in Xinjiang from the 9/11 incident to the Urumqi riots was an outcome of strike hard campaigns or owing to the low ebb of the Uyghur separatist activities in the changing global and regional atmosphere in the age of worldwide anti-terror war.

### **Definition of terrorism and *Dongtu* forces**

The worldwide anti-terror war following the 9/11 incident was considered to be an appropriate time for China to claim the Uyghur-led violence in Xinjiang as well as a broad range of activities of the

community as 'terrorism'. It was also claimed that the perpetrators of terrorist activities in the region were linked with global terrorism and international terror groups. The Chinese officials and scholars felt the need to understand international debate on terrorism and develop suitable definition of the term.

There is no internationally agreed definition of terrorism and different perceptions and definitions exist in every country. Difference even exists among different departments dealing with terrorism within a single country. There are differences in the official definitions of terrorism of the US State Department, the Department of Defense and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and all of them maintain separate institutional positions (Whittaker 2001: 3–4). The United Nations and other international institutions also have different definitions and understanding on terrorism. The UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004) describes terrorism as an act 'intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act'. This definition gives emphasis on the intention of terrorism and specifically indicates that both civilian and non-combatants is the most convenient target of terrorism.

The official as well as mainstream academic discussions in China highlight the multiplicity of definitions of terrorism (*kongbuzhuyi*) and lack of unanimity on the issue in the international arena. Moreover, it is usually emphasised that every form of terrorism grows, expands and stays on in a particular historical and social background and retains its own specific characteristics. The logical inference drawn from this is that every country hones to perfection its own definition of terrorism in accordance to the kind of threat it confronts with (Li Sheng 2007: 72–3). Broadly speaking, some Chinese experts believe that the definition of terrorism is a political rather than an academic issue. They also noticed that it is generally with the consideration of political interests that most of the countries and international organisations identify certain behaviour as terrorism. On the basis of various international conventions, the following four major aspects are emphasised by some scholars in China: terrorism is an illegal act in the eyes of international as well as national law; it can employ both violent and other combative means like cyber terrorism, financial terrorism and much more; it intends to create psychological panic in society and among masses;

and terrorist attacks harm targets when they are in a non-combatant position (*fei zhanzhi zhuangtai*) (Zhang 2002: 55).

Chinese scholars usually understand modern terrorism as a phenomenon of the late 1960s, which motivated by various ideologies, separatist aspirations, nationalism, religious fundamentalism and territorial claims grew stronger by acquiring advanced technology and spread across a large section of population in the subsequent decades (Anti-terrorism Research Center 2001: 2–11). Some Chinese scholars see the early form of modern terrorist activities in the assassinations carried out by the Russian anarchists in the 19th century (Li Sheng 2007: 73). It is interesting to note that the Chinese term for anarchism is *wuzhengfuzhuyi* – literally non-governmentism – and the term clearly reflects the Chinese attitude towards a wide range of political behaviour outside the realm of state authority and official initiative. The Chinese definition of terrorism not only identifies ethnic separatism and religious extremism as the main source of terrorism in China, but it also encompasses several violent as well as non-violent political behaviours of individuals, group of individuals or separatist elements belonging to national minorities or religious communities.

Since the 9/11 incident, all violent separatist activities in Xinjiang have been categorised as terrorism in official and academic writings on the subject. According to a Chinese scholar, terrorism in Xinjiang is a combination of the following ideological elements of the East Turkistan forces: national view – pan-Turkism; religious stance – pan-Islamism; guiding force – national self-determination; guiding ideology – Uyghur historiography; inheritance – Turkish cultural legacy; opponent – Chinese communist leadership; political target – socialist system; world view – Islamic extremism; and mindset – terrorist (Yan 2006: 152–4). The narrow interpretation of violence in Xinjiang along with social prejudice against the Uyghurs in the absence of adequate autonomy and weak social base for civil rights in the authoritarian state seems to be responsible for escalation of conflicts in the region.

The problem of this kind of argument is that it completely overlooks the fact that there are certain separatist tendencies and expressions that do not lead to violence and terrorism unless pushed to the end of human tolerance. Moreover, it would be a gross mistake to ignore that there has been continuous deterioration of interethnic relations in the region. The writer and expert on Tibet and Xinjiang, Wang Lixiong, tells us that in the 1980s the Uyghur and the

Han communities used to call on each other during festivals, but in the 1990s this kind of social exchange became limited to the party cadres and government officials and now it is restricted only within the top leaders of the two communities (Wang 2014a). It is evident that the increasing social cleavages engendered by the counterterrorism operations in China have the potential to create a breeding ground of terrorism. One Chinese expert working on terrorism reminds that the criminal acts qualified to be called terrorism as well as academic interests about the identical phenomenon are relatively recent in China. According to the scholar, there was hardly any book on terrorism in the Chinese language in 2001, while there were more than 200 books on the subject in English in the National Library of China (Liu 2013: 1fn.3). It needs to be noted here that some independent-minded Chinese scholars are not in consensus with the narrow interpretation of terrorism.

The official reporting on terrorism in Xinjiang is even more confusing. It is clear that the politics of anti-terrorism struggle cannot only give opportunity for the national leadership to gain international recognition of its actions against the Uyghur separatism, but also helps a section of politicians to strengthen position in power by orchestrating a hard-line approach. In January 2003, Wang Lequan promised to intensify crack down on ethnic separatism and punish them with devastating blows without showing any mercy. But the head of the Xinjiang government, Ismail Tiliwaldi, in a report observed that Xinjiang had not recorded any violent incident in 2004. Further, in March 2005, the Uyghur leaders reiterated that 'there have been no terror attacks in Xinjiang in recent years' (Ma 2006: 56). It is clear that Wang Lequan intended to consolidate his position as the local party boss of Xinjiang by proving his worth as a defender of state security and social order to the central leadership. The increasingly tough stand of Wang Lequan in fighting against terrorism helped him retain his position as party secretary in the region for over 15 years. Under his leadership, interethnic relations further deteriorated and interethnic tensions reached the climax during the Urumqi riots in July 2009.

The official news usually dismiss the notion that Xinjiang is a hotbed of ethnic unrest and project the Uyghurs as fun-loving and friendly people who are interested more in dancing, singing and hosting parties rather than making trouble (Reuters 2013a). This tacitly admits that the act of violence is not a dominant trait of the Uyghurs. It is often officially claimed that the troublemakers in

Xinjiang are ‘a handful of people’, but the rate of executions and detentions in the region suggests something else. There is possibly no standard criterion of conflict-resolution mechanism, and suppression still remains an effective mode of state response to both rightful resistance as well as ‘regime-threatening’ activities (Cai 2008b: 89). One important feature of the social movements in the post-1989 China is that the main targets of the protests in most of the cases are the local policies and local leaders. Decentralisation of power and shifting of decision-making and profit-making authority to local leaders is one of the important factors for concentration of social unrests at the local level. The official reports on violent incidents in Xinjiang invariably stress the connections between outside forces and local criminals and avoid giving any reference to the local factors.

### **Law, crime and punishment**

As terrorist phenomenon appeared late in the Chinese political discourse, its entry into criminal laws was also comparatively late. There was very little study on terrorism done by the Chinese experts of criminal laws until the introduction of legal provisions regarding organisers, leaders and active participants in terrorist organisations in the amended version of the Criminal Law of the PRC (amended by the Fifth Session of the Eighth NPC) on 14 March 1997. However, the study on the criminal offence of terrorism began to thrive after 9/11. In fact, the third amendment to the Criminal Law of China on 29 December 2001 has for the first time incorporated various aspects of terrorism within the Chinese legal framework (Liu 2013: 2–3; Criminal Law of the PRC 1997; Amendment III to the Criminal Law of the PRC 2001).

The stated purpose of the 2001 amendment of the criminal law is ‘to punish the crimes of terrorism, to safeguard the security of the state and of people’s lives and property, and maintain public order’. The amended version of Article 120 has broadened the scope of punishing not only leaders, organisers and active participants in a terrorist organisation, but also people belonging to a rather unclear category mentioned as ‘other participants’, albeit the nature of punishment for this category is stated clearly. Therefore, it is fully at the discretion of police, other security agencies and interpreters of law to label a person’s crime as a terrorist act for which he or she can be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than three years,

criminal detention, public surveillance or deprivation of political rights. The 2001 amendments added Article 120a, which deals with funding to terrorist organisations or individuals engaged in terrorism. In order to address the issue of funding terrorism-related activities, the crimes of terrorism have been listed along with crimes like drug trafficking, smuggling and mafia activities in Article 191, which has provisions of dealing with unlawful sources of the funds and corresponding punishments (Amendment III to the Criminal Law of the PRC 2001).

Article 291 of the criminal law can easily be used to interpret the Constitutional right of assembly, demonstration and protests by the citizens as a gathering to 'disturb order' at public places or 'undermine traffic order' or 'resist or obstruct public security administrators'. The amendment includes Article 291a, which has further broadened the scope of crimes related to disturbance of public order by including hoaxes on explosives or other deadly substances, fabrications of terrorist information regarding such threats or dissemination of terrorist information. Articles 114 and 115 enumerate several crimes that 'endanger public security', namely committing arson; breaching dike; causing explosion; spreading poisonous, radioactive, infectious diseases or other substances; inflicting serious injury or death on people; and causing heavy losses of public or private property. Articles 125, 126 and 127 also deal with issues like illegally manufacturing, stealing, seizing, trading, transporting or keeping guns and other weapons and storing radioactive and other hazardous substances pertaining to public security. There are some vague expressions like 'serious consequences' in all these articles and thus fail to clearly specify maximum sentence for the aforementioned crimes (Amendment III to the Criminal Law of the PRC 2001).

Many articles of the criminal law have changed 'fixed-term imprisonment of not less than 3 years but not more than 10 years' into 'fixed-term imprisonment of not less than 10 years, life imprisonment or death' (Liu 2013: 3). On the basis of many existing and revised version of criminal laws, the authority can detain for indefinite time, prosecute and execute large number of suspects in the name of anti-terrorism struggle. The crimes, which earlier used to be labelled as counter-revolutionary, are right away put into the category of terrorism since 9/11.

There are some articles that address issues like ethnic hatred (Article 249), publication of materials that discriminate or insult

minority nationalities (Article 250) and unlawful deprivation of citizens' right to religious beliefs and infringement of minority nationalities customs or habits (Article 251) in the criminal law. There were, however, instances when these rights were denied to the Uyghur people in Xinjiang while the Hui population across the country was allowed to enjoy them. Since the launch of strike hard measures in 1996, the central and regional authorities themselves have imposed stringent restrictions on religious practices, ethnic customs and social habits of the Uyghur, thus making these legal provisions ineffective.

According to Article 90, only people's congresses of the ARs are entitled to formulate alternative or supplementary provisions based on the political, economic and cultural characteristics of the local ethnic groups, and these provisions will be effective after the approval of NPC Standing Committee. One Chinese scholar argues that Article 90 of the criminal law restricts legislative power of the people's congress of the prefectures and counties (Zhang Dianjun 2009: 13). The actual intention of the objections stems from the Chinese notion of autonomy that undermines the authority of higher entities in the name of empowering lower autonomous units. It is, however, questionable whether more justice would be met if people's congresses at the lower level are allowed to formulate criminal laws.

The penal system was much lenient in dealing with cases involving crimes by the minority population in the 1980s. Document No. 5 of the central committee in 1984 had recommended that the criminals belonging to the minority nationalities should be met with leniency and the policy of 'less number of arrests and death sentences' (*shao sha shao bu*) should be practised, which is known as 'two less and one lenient' (*liang shao yi kuan*) policy in criminal proceedings. This policy was, however, never implemented in Xinjiang where the average rate of execution was the highest with 1.8 per week (Gladney 2004b: 375). In October 2006, the central committee revised this policy and replaced it with the policy of 'tempering justice with mercy' (*kuan yan xiang ji*). According to this policy, in dealing with crimes by the minority nationalities, the legal authority can be lenient or strict as and when required (Zhang Dianjun 2009: 16–7). The policy change in criminal punishment was done within the framework of decisions related to a socialist harmonious society under the leadership of Hu Jintao. It is, however, evident that the purpose of the new policy was to make criminal law free from bindings of other legal provisions and any accommodative policy.

Following the Urumqi Riots in 2009, the central authority became more active in making laws more stringent in fighting against terrorism. In February 2011, the NPC Standing Committee passed the eighth amendment of the Criminal Law, and on 29 October 2011, the NPC Standing Committee passed its decision on the issue of strengthening anti-terrorist work. The contents of this document are as follows: fighting all forms of terrorism has been considered as the fundamental position of China; national anti-terrorism work is to be conducted under a unified leadership; identification of names of terrorist organisation and terrorists; liquidation of fund and other properties of terrorist organisations and terrorists; international cooperation in anti-terrorism work; and giving authorisation to the State Council and its departments to decide on the list of terrorist organisations and terrorist elements. The decision of amendment of the Criminal Procedure Law was also taken, and in March 2012, major changes were also made in the code of criminal procedure to suit the anti-terrorism struggle (Liu 2013: 4–5).

The amended version of the Criminal Procedure Law of the PRC is even more explicit about punishing the crimes of terrorism. As per the amendment of Article 20 of criminal procedure law, the Intermediate People's Courts which previously had jurisdiction as courts of first instance over cases related to counter-revolutionary offences, ordinary crimes and crimes committed by foreigners were now entitled to deal with cases of endangering state security (ESS) or involving terrorist activities and cases punishable by life imprisonment or death (Criminal Procedure Law of the PRC; Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law of the PRC).

There have been considerable revisions in Article 37 of the criminal procedure law dealing with interviews between the defence attorney and criminal suspect or defendant held in detention. The article added three specific crimes, namely crime of ESS, crime of terrorism and particularly serious crime of bribery. As per the provision of the article, to meet the offenders, suspects and defendants of the above mentioned crimes during the investigation phase, the defence attorney requires seeking permission from the investigating authority and, in turn, the investigating authority informs the detention facility about the existence of such cases in advance. The older version of Article 37 allowed much greater freedom to the defence attorney, who with permission of the People's Procuratorate or the People's Court and with the consent of the victim could collect information pertaining to a case from the close relatives of the

victim and the witnesses (Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law of the PRC). Now, the defence attorney has a much limited role to play in administering criminal cases.

The crimes of ESS, crimes of terrorism, organised crimes with characters of the underworld and drug-related crimes have been included in Article 62 (Articles 62 and 63 of the previous version have been combined into one article), which ensures special provision for the personal safety of a victim, witness and their close relatives. According to Article 62, as a protection measure of the above persons, people's court, people's prosecutor's office, public security, and the regional authority can withhold their real name and other personal details, and even can withhold appearance and real voice in testimony before the court (Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law of the PRC). These legal provisions leave enough scope for the law enforcing agencies to fabricate court proceedings to suite their purposes.

Article 83 (previously Article 64), which deals with detention warrant, detention facility for custody and notification to the family about reasons for detention and the place of custody within 24 hours, does not ensure such provisions for suspected persons taken into custody in charge of crimes of ESS or crimes of terrorism (Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law of the PRC). This article allows the Xinjiang authority to indefinitely and indiscriminately detain a huge number of Uyghurs and the authority is not legally bound to share information about these unfortunate detainees.

Indiscriminate detention and execution of the Uyghurs for crime towards 'ESS' has been a regular phenomenon for a long time. During the last two decades, detention and execution rate on ESS charges has increased in Xinjiang and the number of executions go up whenever any major act of violence take place in the region (Bai 2009). The official statistics reveal that more than half of the total ESS trials of first instance in the country took place in Xinjiang between 1998 and 2003. The number of cases related to ESS jumped by 60 per cent after the Urumqi riots in 2009. One interesting aspect of these criminal proceedings is that in most of the cases the ESS trials are group trials (Dui Hua Foundation 2012).

It is interesting to note that the rate of criminal offences in China has increased leaps and bounds since the year of the Tian'anmen Square student movement. The total registered criminal cases increased from 827,000 in 1988 to 1,971,000 in 1989, to 2,216,000

in 1990 and to 2,365,000 in 1991, respectively. The high rate of criminal offences continued throughout the 1990s and made a quantum jump between 1998 and 2001. During this period, criminal offences increased approximately by 13 per cent, 62 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, on year-on-year basis. The number of criminal cases made another jump to 5,300,000 in the year the Urumqi riots took place (China Against Death Penalty 2012: 6).

In order to tackle criminal offences, the central government had so far carried out four large-scale strike hard operations in 1983, 1996, 2001 and 2010, along with numerous special short-term strike hard measures, and each time the strike hard operation was launched on a war footing, its purpose was lost and deterrence capacity weakened. The rate of capital punishment like the death penalty has increased following the first strike hard in 1983, and since then many courts in China issued death sentences in about 74.1 per cent of all criminal trials and in some places it was as high as 85 per cent (China Against Death Penalty 2012: 9–10). There are provisions of maximum punishment of death sentence in 39 articles of the Criminal Law of the PRC. Many provisions of death penalty seem to be applied indiscriminately in Xinjiang, and that is why a large number of executions by death penalty are given to the Uyghurs. As China has been going through legal reform, frequent and rampant execution of death sentences has not only become a contentious issue between the Chinese government and the Western human rights advocates, but also is a subject often discussed within the legal circle in China. There has been a visible reduction of death sentences in China since 2007 when the highest court began to revoke death penalties issued by the lower courts (Ren 2014; Langfitt 2014).<sup>2</sup> Recent reports, however, do not suggest much change in the criminal proceedings in Xinjiang, where separatism is continuously being seen as a top security issue.

### **Citizens, separatists and terrorists**

The first major ideological struggle against ethnic resurgence and terrorism started with the attack against the three books written by Turghun Almas between 1986 and 1989. The Chinese officials and intellectuals considered that Turghun's trilogy – based on 'wrong political' thinking of pan-Turkism- and pan-Islamism-shaped ideological foundation of anti-China separatist and terrorist elements in Xinjiang – instigated anti-Han sentiments (*pai Han qingxu*)

among the Uyghur population of Xinjiang. The officials and intellectuals from all over the country were mobilised in Xinjiang to criticise the trilogy for the next few years (Li Sheng 2007: 53–61). The entire propaganda machinery of the government unleashed all round attacks against the books and their author. The three books were banned and Turghun was virtually under house arrest until his death in 2011. Propagandist attacks, arrests, detentions, execution of Uyghur authors, poets and intellectuals have been continuing from the early 1990s to until recently for their alleged propagation of separatism, endangerment of state security and involvements with terrorist activities.

The legal system of China was so perfectly oriented to dissent control that any individual can be framed with any of the crimes mentioned above even for involvement in social or community services. It is obvious that this social control mechanism can do more harm by alienating those targeted and thus create more dissent. In this regard, the transformation of Rebiya Kadeer from an ethnic model businesswoman and an example of success of Chinese reform and modernisation to an anti-state actor is an interesting episode of contemporary Xinjiang.

Interestingly, Rebiya's autobiography *Dragon Fighter – One Woman's Epic Struggle for Peace with China* may have given the impression to readers that she projected herself as the emancipator and 'symbol of hope' for the Uyghur nation (Kadeer 2009: xv). The frequent use of words like freedom and independence in the book and her claim that she married a rehabilitated Uyghur political prisoner (Sidik Rouzi Haji) on the condition that he would never stop 'fighting for the freedom' sounds too idealistic. Her vow of liberating Xinjiang does not indicate any serious understanding of the real situation of the region. The portion of the book dealing with sequence during her first meeting with Rouzi is the height of romanticised depiction of the Uyghur aspiration for independence (134–7).

The fact is that people of all nationalities of China including the Uyghur benefitted from economic modernisation in the early reform period. Rebiya and her husband were no exceptions. Rebiya participated in China's reform process, she accepted the vices and virtues of the Chinese system and did not hesitate to bribe the corrupt Chinese officials to get her work done (307). Rebiya's success as the richest businesswoman in China is proof that reform and opening created immense opportunities for her to take part in the

race for attaining the 'glory' of getting rich first (122). Rebiya, who later emerged as a prominent advocate of independence and freedom of the Uyghur people, sincerely felt 'excited', 'grateful' and 'honoured' when the political leadership appointed her to the NPC of the PRC, and President Jiang Zemin exchanged greetings and showed interest to know her views (246–7).

When her husband Rouzi was settling down with his research and writings after getting a teaching position in a university in the early 1980s, Wei Jingsheng, a leading activist and advocate of human rights and democracy in China and a staunch critic of the pro-reform leadership, began his 18-year-long career as a political prisoner. This contrast leaves room for comparison between ethnic and Han dissent against the reform politics and modernisation.

Rebiya was several times at odds with the political leadership over her personal as well as business matters, but her actual confrontation with the local authority began when she initiated a campaign against heroin use among the Uyghur youths and established Thousand Mothers Association in 1993 (303–6). Already famous for her achievement as a successful businesswoman and entrepreneur, her social engagement against maladies of the Uyghur community made Rebiya extremely popular among the common people in the region. It appears that her officially unsanctioned anti-drug campaigns and popularity made the regional Party Secretary Wang Lequan suspicious about her intentions. This is also the time when the central and regional leadership were getting ready to unleash a series of strike hard campaigns in Xinjiang and the security forces began to take more and more pre-emptive measures to fight against separatist actions, behaviours, expressions, sentiments and inclinations.

Rebiya's 'epic struggle for peace' with China and its high-ranking political cadres also started at this time. When she got the chance to talk about the problems of Xinjiang to President Jiang, she gave candid and unequivocal description of corruption, tax burden, high unemployment rate, preference of Han in the job market to the Uyghur in Xinjiang and even complained against the high handedness of top officials like Wang Lequan. This shows that Rebiya had faith on the China's political system and expected that the president would take some measures to address her grievances (247–9).

Rebiya's autobiography narrates how over 10,000 people honoured her with a celebration of dance and music at the huge square in Kashgar a day after the Ili riots on 5 February 1997. She pacified

the jubilant crowd and promised to 'solve their problems without violence'. As a member of the NPC, Rebiya tried to convince the central government that what happened in Ili was not a rebellion and tried to air her views about excessive repression under Wang Lequan's leadership. Her autobiography suggests that she played tricks to get permission to talk in front of the Chinese delegates by submitting a written speech which was completely different from the speech she finally delivered. Her speech did not make any changes in the life of the Uyghur people but badly affected her own. Three months after the incident, she was stripped off all titles, offices and responsibilities (294–9). Finally, in August 1999, Rebiya was arrested for allegedly leaking state secrets to foreign agencies.

It appears that Rebiya lacked the political wisdom in dealing with an authoritarian regime and endangered her personal and family life in order to expose Wang Lequan. Wang is credited for the apparent success of his hardliner stance for the reduction of incidents of violence between 2001 and 2008. This earned him an appointment to the CPC Politburo in 2002 and nicknamed 'King of Xinjiang' for his tight grip on power in the region (Wang Weibo 2010). The social cost of strike hard measures during Wang's 15-year rule was exposed in the 7–5 incident. The Urumqi riots in 2009 is in fact testimony that his iron rule could neither improve interethnic relations nor stop violence nor even maintain law and order in the region. It is unfortunate that the central leadership allowed Wang to rein the restive Xinjiang recklessly for so many years.

Many alienated Uyghur intellectuals and personalities like Rebiya, labelled as terrorists since the strike hard measures were undertaken in the mid-1990s, were basically products of the Chinese political system. Logically speaking, if the state can find terrorist inclination among this section of the Uyghur population, one can infer that because of the extremely vindictive attitude of the state authority and repressive policies, groups and individuals of the Uyghur community were pushed to take the extreme view and develop terrorist tendency. It is in fact difficult to overlook the domestic roots of the Xinjiang problem in the minority policies towards Xinjiang, socio-political culture of China and profit-making institutions developed during the period of economic reform and modernisation.

Like Rebiya and her husband Sidik Rouzi Haji, many Uyghurs and other minorities who were brought up in China try to realise their personal aspirations as a member of the Chinese society as

well as strive to fulfil responsibilities for their community and make continuous efforts to reconcile with the Chinese political system. In this regard, there are striking similarities between the Han and the ethnic dissents. Though the Han also face continuous pressure of proving their loyalty to the party-state and patriotic credentials, the only difference with the ethnic minorities are that socio-political behaviour of the latter can easily be equated with separatism and terrorism.

In this context, Ilham Tohti, a professor of economics at the Central Nationalities University, Beijing, was a remarkable exception. Tohti belongs to a family of first generation Uyghur political elites in Xinjiang and enjoys supports of a large section of intellectuals in China. Tohti founded the 'Uyghur Online' website in 2005 and emerged as a prominent critique of government policies in Xinjiang. He viewed the problem of his people from an academic point of view and maintained his dissenting voice despite increasing restrictions on his activities till recently (Tohti 2014).

There are yet another group who are basically activists, participants and organisers of moderate as well as radical organisations working for the cause of the Uyghur community and independence of their perceived homeland. They are officially labelled terrorists irrespective of their preference for violent or non-violent means of struggle. This section of the Uyghur is accused of having strong affiliation with Islam and inclination to use religion for achieving their political objective.

According to a Chinese official source, the number of *Dongtu* (Eastern Turkestan) organisations across the world in the 1990s was 51, of which 19 were in Central Asia, 14 in West Asia and 18 in Europe and America (Liu 2004: 87). In other estimations, hundreds of organisations named after the Uyghur or Eastern Turkestan began to appear in the discussions on political violence in Xinjiang. One Chinese scholar claims that a total of 172 separatist organisations were uncovered between 1990 and 1997, 520 Eastern Turkestan terrorist organisations exposed and 3,800 members of these organisations captured between March 1997 and March 2001 (Yan 2006: 155–6). The appearance of such a huge number of Eastern Turkestan terrorist and separatist organisations in the region in the 1990s, especially since 1997, pose serious doubts about the criteria followed to identify these organisations. It is required to examine how many people constitute each of these organisations.

In 2003, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security, however, declared the names of the following four Eastern Turkestan terrorist groups: Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and Eastern Turkestan Information Centre (ETIC). These four Uyghur organisations were engaged in fulfilling their mission of establishing an independent Eastern Turkestan, but the ETIM is the only organisation which openly declared its association with terrorism and international terror groups. The Ministry of Public Security released names of 11, 8 and 6 Eastern Turkestan terrorists in three lists published in 2003, 2008 and 2012, respectively. A close look at the background of these terrorists clearly shows that the majority of them belonged to south Xinjiang and received a low level of secular education. In contrast to the 2003 list, all enlisted in the second and third documents claimed having affiliation with the ETIM and all of them were somehow related to probable terrorist strikes during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 (Table 7.2). It is clear from the available information that the persons mentioned in these lists spent the formative years of their lives in Xinjiang and only at the later stage that they came in touch with foreign *jihadi* ideology.

Like in many Muslim communities in the world, Islam does not have a unified leadership in the Uyghur society in Xinjiang, where ideologically driven religious policies pose a serious challenge to religious activities. All imams in major Friday and holiday mosques are employed by the government, whereas imams of small neighbourhood mosques are appointed by the local communities and they are respected for their knowledge of religious texts and moral character (Fuller and Lipman 2004: 334). This section of the Uyghur religious personalities face a greater challenge of state repression and gets involved in the struggle for the rights of local communities. A group of clerics no doubt share extremist ideals, but it is difficult to believe that they constitute the majority of religious personnel.

Under the legal bindings of new religious polices and state-imposed restrictions on Islamic practices, many rituals and customs which were traditionally part of socialisation of local Muslim boys and girls have become unlawful religious activities (*feifa zongjiao huodong*) since the 1990s. On one hand, religious policies in Xinjiang intend to obstruct natural socialisation process of Uyghur kids and artificially develop 'secular' habits among them, but on the

Table 7.2 China's most wanted Eastern Turkestan terrorists

Name	Place of origin and education	Activities
List released in 2003		
Hasan Mahsum (1964–2003)	Born in a peasant family in Shule county, Kashgar Prefecture. After his primary education, he acquired religious training under Abdul Hakeem, a fundamentalist scholar and founder of Hizbul Islam Li-Turkistan.	He was detained for the first time for participating in the Baren incident in 1990 and second time for organising an assembly in commemoration of his teacher Abdul Hakeem. He built a network with other Uyghur separatists and extremists during his two prison terms. He was also detained briefly after the strike hard campaign started in 1996. In January 1997, he visited Jeddah via Beijing and from there travelled to Pakistan and Turkey with his mission of mobilising the Uyghur community. In September 1997, he established the ETIM and sent 12 terrorists of the organisation to Xinjiang to carry out terrorist activities. They established secret cells in 10 different locations and trained more than 150 terrorists. The Chinese official release claims that Al-Qaeda and Taliban provided him with material support and direction. His meeting with Osama bin Laden in Kabul in September 1998 is also reported in the Chinese source. He was said to have developed intimacy with the Taliban during the US-led anti-terror war in Afghanistan and was killed during an airstrike on 2 October 2003.
Muhanmet Emin Hazret (1950–)	Originally from Moyu (Khotan), he received university education and worked in the Xinjiang Film Company until 1989 when he fled to Turkey.	In 1996, he became chairman of the ETLO and was active in West Asia and Central Asia. Between 1998 and 1999, he regularly smuggled firearms and other ammunition into Xinjiang and also sent terrorist teams to set up terrorist camps to train new recruits to carry out violence inside the region. The Chinese source also claims that he was responsible for carrying out several assassinations and other subversive activities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan between 2000 and 2003. In January 2003, he told in an interview with the Radio Free Asia (RFA) that in order to show their determination to struggle for independence it was inevitable for them to set up military units.

(Continued)

Table 7.2 (Continued)

Name	Place of origin and education	Activities
Dolkun Isa (1967–)	A resident of Aksu, he studied up to senior middle school.	He acted as a leading figure in the ETLO and worked under Muhammet Emin Hazret since he came to Turkey. In 1994, he established the Federation of East Turkestan Students in Turkey and served as editor of <i>East Turkestan Youth Bulletin</i> . On 14 December 1995, he claimed that anti-China uprising in Khotan was planned by his organisation. Dolkun migrated to Munich, Germany, in 1996 and joined the European East Turkestan United Alliance. In November 1996, he became chairman of the WUJYC and in 2002 he resigned from the position. In November 2002, he assumed a position in the Eastern Turkestan National Congress (ETNC).
Abudujelil Kalakash (1960–)	Originally belonged to Moyu (Khotan).	In 1987, he settled and established the ETIC and became vice-chairman of the WUJYC in 1996. He was elected as the vice-chairman of the ETNC and later held the position in ETIC and became vice-chairman of the German Uyghur Friendship Association. He also served as editor of <i>Uyghur Voice</i> , <i>Spark</i> and <i>Eastern Turkestan Youth Bulletin</i> . After the 5 February 1997 incident in Yining, he instigated the ‘Eastern Turkestan’ forces within Xinjiang to be more active and agreed to the plan of attacking some Chinese embassies across Africa. It is reported that he propagated through the Internet and other mediums among the terrorist elements within Xinjiang that the ‘Easter Turkestan’ organisations would be able to attract international attention only by disrupting the Chinese economy.
Abudukadir Uapqan (1958–)	He lived in Shufu county (Kashgar) and received junior high school education.	He fled China together with Hasan Mahsum in 1997 and became an important member of the ETIM West and South Asia were his area of activities. In 2001, he along with more than 50 others received terrorist training in Afghanistan. He also travelled to Saudi Arabia for raising funds and engaged in propagating his mission of <i>jihad</i> and independence of Eastern Turkestan.

Abudumijit Muhammatkarim (1967-)	Originally from Shufu (Kashgar), he received his education up to the junior middle school.	From 1991 to 1994, he engaged in several crimes of looting, plundering and other terrorist acts in Xinjiang. In 1992, he was involved in cases related to plotting abortive bomb explosions, giving protection to a culprit and maintaining a revolver during his stay in Akto county. In 1994, he was again involved in selling arms and ammunition and attempting terrorist acts. He led his accomplice in plundering and killing in Wensu on 10 February 1996 and a terror operation in a village in Kuche on 29 April 1996 when four people were murdered and three sustained serious injuries. On 12 May of the same year, he and three other members of the organisation severely attacked a cleric and vice-chairman of the Xinjiang Regional Committee of the CPPCC and his son. In 1997, he joined the ETIM.
Abudulla Kariaji (1969-)	He was from Shache county (Kashgar) and attained junior middle school.	In 1995, he fled to Afghanistan and received training in terrorist activities and later joined the ETIM. He organised and trained a large number of terrorists outside and sent them to China for conducting military actions, giving them physical training and planning and participating in terrorist acts.
Abulimit Tursun (1964-)	He was a resident of Urumqi.	He went to Kazakhstan in 1997 and joined the ETLO. In 1998, he smuggled weapons inside Xinjiang and sent terrorists who installed more than 40 chemical combustible devices that caused a series of arsons in the comparatively big markets and retail business centres in Urumqi. The fire in the markets caused huge economic losses. In June 1996, he was behind the killing of two Uyghur members of the ETLO.
Hudaberdi Haxer-bik (1970-)	He belonged to Yining.	Between 1996 and 1998, he worked with two terror groups. On 6 April 1998, he received a large amount of weapons and ammunitions smuggled inside Xinjiang by the ETLO at the Huo'erguosi port. He was also making preparations for terrorist attacks, but had to abscond when the case of armed robbery was discovered.
Yasen Muhammad (1964-)	He was from Zepu (Kashgar) and got junior middle school education.	In 1996, he organised and trained terrorists. On 23 August 1999, he along with other terrorists killed a Uyghur police instructor of a police station at Zepu and his son (a middle school teacher). In order to assassinate the local public security people's police personnel, he and his terror group attacked another police station in Zepu.

(Continued)

Table 7.2 (Continued)

Name	Place of origin and education	Activities
Atahan Abuduhani (1964–)	He was in Yecheng (Kashgar) and received primary school education.	In 1984, he was exposed to religious extremist ideas and maintained regular contact with the Eastern Turkistan forces in other countries. In August 1991, he managed to acquire arms and ammunition, and on 13 November 1991 he was involved in looting money from a vehicle of a rural bank in Shaya county (Aksu).
List Released in 2008		
Abdul Haq, alias	He was born in Chele	He worked for Islam Muhammad Said in a madrassa in Xinjiang until 1996 and was
Memetimin	county (Khotan) and	arrested and jailed for two months for inciting assault on government officials. In 1998,
Memeti (1971–2010)	had received primary education. He also received religious education under several Muslim clerics like Muhammad Amin Jan and Islam Muhammad Said of the region.	he travelled to Pakistan and Afghanistan and eventually became leader of the Kabul branch of the ETIM. He received further religious education and military training. He also came in contact with some Taliban leaders. Between 2001 and 2003, he recruited new members for the main branch of the ETIM. After the death of Hasan Mahsum in 2003, he took the lead of the ETIM and in 2004 he organised distribution of a CD with the content of the ETIM founder's activities. In January 2005, he appealed to the Muslims of Xinjiang to participate in <i>jihad</i> , support the Uyghur and help the ETIM. From 2007 on, he made specific plans to carry out attacks on Chinese targets during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and posted several threat messages through video statements on extremist websites and YouTube.
Emeti Yakuf, alias Seyfullah or Abu Abudurehman (1965–)	He attended primary school.	In November 1996, he was somewhere in South Asia and received training. He became one of the leading figures of the ETIM by September 1998 and took the position of 'military commander', and since then he is known as Commander Seyfullah. He was engaged in the ETIM propaganda work since 2007 and regularly issued threat videos regarding creating disturbances during the Olympic Games in Beijing.

Memeti Tursun Yimin (1974–)	He received education in a vocational secondary school.	In 1999, he joined the ETIM and between November 2000 and April 2001, he received training in an ETIM base in a South Asian country. From 2004 onwards, he took the responsibility of ensuring logistics for the ETIM and raising funds. In the first half of 2008, he was busy preparing for violent attacks in China during the Olympic Games in 2008 and travelled to a West Asian country for this purpose.
Memeti Tursun Abduhalike (1976–)	He received junior middle school education.	In May 1996, he left China and joined the ETIM in 1997 and went through terrorist training. In November 2003, he became one of the main leaders of the ETIM. In June and July 2008, on behalf of Abdul Haq and Seyfullah, he released statements about carrying out terrorist attacks during the Olympic Games in Beijing.
Xiamisiding Aihemaiti Abudumijit (1972–)	He attended university in Xinjiang.	In 1999, he left China and joined the ETIM in some South Asian country in May 2006. In October 2006, he received terrorist training and became a leading person in the organisation. In December 2007, he visited a country in the Middle East and carried out anti-China propaganda. He also planned to carry out explosions before the Beijing Olympic Games in a supermarket (in that country) where a large number of Chinese businessmen used to assemble.
Aikemilai Wumaierjiang (1977–)	He was educated up to junior middle school.	In 2006, he left China and received training under the ETIM and joined the group. In December 2007, under Xiamisiding Aihemaiti Abudumijit's instruction he bought a huge amount of explosives and planned to carry out explosions in a supermarket in a Middle Eastern country.
Yakuf Memeti (1976–)	He got education in vocational secondary school.	In 1999, he left China and joined the ETIM in a country in South Asia. He received terrorist training in 2007 and planned to enter China to carry out attacks as a human bomb during the Beijing Olympic Games.
Tursun Toheti (1975–)	He attended senior secondary school.	In August 1999, he joined the ETIM and after training he was sent to Central Asia and West Asia to carry out operations. In June and July 2008, he was also engaged in purchasing explosives to carry out attacks on Chinese targets in other countries during the Olympic Games in Beijing.

(Continued)

Table 7.2 (Continued)

Name	Place of origin and education	Activities
<b>List Released in 2012</b>		
Nu'ermaimaiti Maimaitiming (1965→)	Primary school education.	He is a leading figure in the ETIM who sent Maimaiti'aili Tielwa'erdı to China to reorganise the terrorist groups and raise funds. In July 2011, he and his terror group carried out a series of arson and killing in Kashgar. Nu'ermaimaiti claimed through Internet that the ETIM was behind the above attacks in Kashgar.
Abudukeyoumu Ku'erban (1982→)	Senior secondary education.	He is mainly engaged in propaganda work of the ETIM. In August and October 2011 he mobilised extremist and terrorist forces inside China through video release and advised to carry out terrorist attacks on innocent people by means of bombing and slaughtering.
Paruha Tie'ersun (1972→)	Junior middle school education.	He is a leading figure in the ETIM. In September 2009, he unlawfully entered a Central Asian country and later shifted to a South Asian country and there he joined the ETIM. In May 2011, he issued a declaration on a video release which appeared in more than 30 websites. He inspired many extremists and terrorists inside Xinjiang to carry out extremist attacks.
Tusongjiang Habibula (1981→)	Senior secondary education.	He is a leading figure in the ETIM. In 2005, he went to a West Asian country to study medical science and in 2008 he came to a South Asian country and joined the ETIM. Since 2009, he has been engaged in propaganda work to disseminate extremist and terrorist ideology. In August 2011, he established terrorist links inside China.
Nu'ermaimaiti Rexit (1970→)	Primary school education.	He is a leading figure in the ETIM and engaged in setting up ETIM organisations in Central Asia, West Asia and Southeast Asia. Since 2009, he is engaged in terrorist propaganda and accumulation of funds.
Maimaitiyiming Nu'ermaimaiti (1983→)	Junior middle school education.	He is a member of the ETIM. In July 2009, he planned to set fire on the Shache county centre and in October 2009 he was involved in a case of bomb explosion which killed one person and wounded one.

Source: Ministry of Public Security (2003); Ministry Public Security Website (2008); Xinhua News Network (2012a) and Gunaratna, Acharya and Wang (2010: Chapter 3).

other, the Uyghur separatist factions who cash on religious sentiments of the people must be keen on influencing young minds from their formative age. In this repressive atmosphere, the school students get easily influenced by the religious-minded separatist groups. One Chinese scholar identified a number of secret organisations which work among school kids across south Xinjiang. As a result, separatist tendencies among the primary, middle and senior schools and college students have increased in the last few decades (Yan 2006: 148). The connections between radicalisation of Uyghur sentiments and proliferation of mosques and religious schools in Xinjiang in the early reform period are undeniable, but as discussed in chapter five, the poor condition of education at primary level is not conducive to foster secular habits among the poor students of south Xinjiang.

It is clear that not all forms of dissents, protests and unrests in Xinjiang are motivated by the ideals of independence, ethno-national insurgency, separatism or 'Islamic' terrorism. As China has been going through rapid modernisation and industrialisation without ensuring adequate political rights, deep-rooted social resentments have grown across China. Since the Tian'anmen Square movement, social movements and social unrests are pervasive in the entire country. The ongoing political activism and collective resistance outside the realm of the CPC are categorised as mass incident (*qunzhong shijian*) and right protection (*weiquan*) movements. It is noteworthy that transition from non-violent protests to mass violence across the country has some resemblance with the radicalisation of ethno-national movements in Xinjiang during the 1990s. Since ethnic and religious dimensions are involved in the Uyghur movements, the post-1989 Chinese leadership invariably labels any form of protests as separatism and any form of social violence as terrorism.

### **Year of glory and agony**

The Hu-Wen administration was already in crisis management mood, especially since the SARS epidemic in early 2003, when President Hu Jintao put forward his idea of 'being vigilant in peace time' (*ju'an siwei*). Crisis management centres were established to handle incidents ranging from epidemic and natural calamities to man-made disasters including terrorism (Lam 2006: 45–7). Deng Xiaoping's earlier dictum on the importance of economic development

and stability were rephrased into a new slogan like ‘development is the unyielding principle, stability is the non-negotiable task’ (*fazhan shi ying daoli, wending shi ying renwu*) in 2005. Hu stressed that safeguarding social order and stability was the prerequisite for building a socialist harmonious society (Feng 2013: 28–9).

With the exponential rise of mass incidents or collective public security incidents (*quntixing zhi'an shijian*), maintaining stability (*weiwen*) became priority for the party leadership since the turn of the last century. In July 2005, in view of the staggering growth of public disturbances, the Minister of Public Security Zhou Yongkang pointed out that the mass incidents had already become prominent social stability issue (Liu 2007: 9). A broad range of activities, namely protests, riots, mass petitioning, troublemaking, gambling, obstruction of official business and mob fighting fell within this category. In some definition, all forms of terrorist activities, violent incidents, forming illegal organisations and assembly by hostile forces as well as separatists were also considered as mass incidents. According to official definition, an assembly of five people can be called a mass incident and large-scale incidents are those when the number of participants exceeds 500.

The Chinese scholars usually interpret these collective actions as manifestations of deep social contradictions resulting from the high-speed economic development and industrialisation. As China entered into a new stage of economic development, it has been facing livelihood problems related to housing, education, health-care and an aging population. The mass incidents often take place because of lack of governance, discrepancies in policy implementation, weak and corrupt practices at the grass-root level, inaccessibility of urgent administrative assistance and repressive ethnic and religious policies.

Most of the collective actions are phenomenon of local politics and not regime-threatening activities, but extreme sensitivity of the political leadership in China towards social movement and social unrests has complicated state-society relations. In the absence of any mechanism to communicate with the social actors, the authorities at different levels of administration often rely on the huge contingent of the PAPF to deal with the task of ‘maintaining stability’. In urban areas, various units of the PAPF were also formed to confront with sudden political exigencies, riots and terrorism (Guo 2013: 224). Interestingly, even before the 9/11 incident occurred in the United States, the PAPF had set up rapid response units to tackle

terrorism in urban areas, detonation of bombs and other explosive devices in public places (Lam 2006: 47).

In most of these cases, protests were launched against the public decisions taken by local governments and party organisations. Usually, peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins turned violent mostly due to the insensitivity of local party officials, administrative inefficiency and atrocities by overzealous local security personnel. There were instances when the PAPF and other public security forces were often called in to clear impoverished protestors. It seems that the government officials, party leadership and public security agencies have become increasingly intolerant towards public protests.

There existed a strange situation of maximising revenue-raising activities, levying fine and payments from citizens by local coercive and law and order agencies like police, courts and procuratorates as well as local governments and party units prior to 2003. This is how these local agencies covered their huge expenditure in the absence of adequate central funding. The central and regional governments encouraged them to continue with such extortionist practices which became a major source of popular discontent, social unrests and instability. This situation was even more acute in the poor western China where scarcity of funds had always been a problem since decentralisation process started during the reform period. To overcome this problem, the central government readjusted its financial system and promised budget allocation to law enforcement institutes at the local level as a step forward to improve the *weiwen* work (Xie 2013: 83). The Chinese leadership also took some measures in response to economic difficulties of the marginalised social groups such as poor peasants and rural migrant workers in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan announced in July 2005.

It was possibly in consideration of the widespread 'three rural problems' (*sannong wenti*) that for some time the state leadership showed leniency towards social unrests in the rural areas. A central minister objected reporting of some events in the rural areas as riots, instead called them mass incidents caused due to social contradictions (Zhang Aijun 2009). The political contentions between mass and local officials are not always viewed negatively by the central authority and often they get useful feedback about problems at the grass-root societies (O'Brien 2005: 240–4). However, top leadership and public security officials were not very sure about how far the government should tolerate protest activities.

In an effort to build capacity to handle popular movements at the local level, the central government increased spending on domestic security and stability in 2006, and since then budgetary expenditure in this sector tended closer to military expenditure (Xie and Wei 2013: 59). Meanwhile, in order to learn from the experience of the Athens Olympics in 2004, China sent officials of public security and other departments to Greece for counterterrorism and security training. Officials were also sent to other countries to learn their best security practices. In 2005, China staged anti-terror exercises in major cities and arranged anti-terrorism training programmes at several police academies across the country (Country Report on Terrorism 2005). The leadership gave utmost priority to holding the Beijing Olympic Games successfully and increased counterterrorism cooperation with various foreign agencies and international organisations.

During the following two years, the government continued with repressive mechanism to punish offenders of various backgrounds such as dissidents, *weiquan* leaders, journalists, lawyers, legal experts and peaceful petitioners on the pretext of the Beijing Olympic Games. The nationwide clampdown including arbitrary detentions, house arrests, abductions, severe intimidations, short-term *weiwen* measures and anti-terror struggles created potentially unstable political atmosphere throughout China in the Olympic year. As a result, China experienced more than a dozen major mass incidents along with Lhasa riots and a series of violent incidents in Xinjiang in 2008. A close analysis of these incidents reveals that the root causes were public resentment due to inefficiency and corruption of local party cadres and officials as well as excessive surveillance and social control measures (Table 7.3).

The Lhasa riots and anti-China campaigns by the Tibetan population in 2008 deserves special attention because of consistency of their movements, high moral ground of non-violent means of struggle and mobilising capacity in all Tibetan areas inside China and among its migrated population across the world. Discussion of social unrests and movements in the Han areas and minority regions in a comparative light confirms that the political authority not only was unable to handle conflict situations and maintain stability, but also excessive state coercion actually intensified mass violence.

As China decided to improve its image during the Beijing Olympic Games, the Tibetan population across the world took the

opportunity to attract attention of the international community to their plight. The exiled Tibetan communities demonstrated and protested wherever the Olympic torch rally was held. The Tibetans in China felt equally restive and despite the huge deployment of the PLA, PAPF, state security agencies and secret service agencies, the Tibetan monks and common people across TAR and four other provinces staged anti-China uprisings between 10 March and 14 March 2008. The biggest riots broke out on 14 March in Lhasa. On 21 March, a *Xinhua* report about the riots reveals that 18 civilians and 1 police officer were killed, 242 police officers and 382 civilians were injured and 7 schools, 5 hospitals, 120 residences, 84 vehicles were burnt down and 908 shops were looted. The total damage was estimated to be more than RMB 224 million. It is claimed in the report that at around 1,100 hours, monks of the Ramoche monastery suddenly started attacking on-duty people's police with stones and at the same time some 'unlawful elements' (*bu fa fenzi*) began to assemble (Xinhua News Network 2008a). Rest of the narrative repeatedly mentions about the undefined category of 'unlawful elements' and they appear to be responsible for the riots in the Tibetan capital. The official report does not even try to give any explanation about the possible reason for the sudden violent behaviour of the monks in the monastery. It is also silent about the death of 50–100 Tibetans at the hands of the security police (Smith 2010: 4). The image of on-duty police personnel and violent monks in the report follows the official narrative of a dutiful, vigilant and concerned state and hapless Tibetan mass under the deceptive influence of the Dalai Lama. The CPC leadership and the official media condemned the Dalai Lama and his followers for instigating riots and refused to review the existing official national minority policies and other repressive policies towards Tibetans.

In terms of number of participants, scale of violence and destruction of public property, some large-scale mass incidents are no less serious than the 2008 Lhasa riots. According to one report, about 30,000 Tibetans took part in nearly 100 'mass incidents' in TAR, Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai and Yunnan (Lam 2008: 13). In contrast, up to 80,000 workers and unemployed persons participated in a riot at Wangzhou city of Sichuan province on 18 October 2004, and this is often cited as one of most militant urban protests in recent times (Chan 2004). In protest against mishandling of the death investigation of a school girl by the police in Weng'an county, 30,000 people took to the streets at one point on 28 June 2008.

The protestors ransacked 104 rooms of the county government building, 20 police vans, 54 other vehicles and 15 motorbikes were damaged and 150 people were injured. The mass incidents are a testimony of deep resentment of people against official practices (Table 7.3). And in terms of intensity and nature of violence, mass incidents in the Han areas are not different from Tibetan areas.

Despite much greater congregation of mostly Han protesters, who are not less violent than their counterparts in Lhasa or Urumqi

Table 7.3 Some major mass incidents across China in 2008

<i>Mass incident</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Event</i>
20 April 2008	Mengdong village, Malipo county, Wenshan prefecture, Yunnan	More than 70 people attacked a group of party and government officials of the county with knives, rods and bricks while the latter were doing 'administrative' work in a mine in the village. Five people's police and 10 persons from the crowd were injured and 1 villager died in the incident. Later, 27 people were arrested. Official news claims that a group of lawless villagers were behind the incident (Xinhua News Network 2008b).
28 June 2008	Weng'an county, Guizhou	A protest broke out due to dissatisfaction of police investigation into the death of a school girl and about 30,000 people assembled. The mob vandalised and ransacked 104 rooms of the county government building, 20 police vans, 54 other vehicles and 15 motorbikes were damaged and 150 people sustained injuries during the incident. According to the official report, the incident was an outburst of accumulated social contradiction between cadres and masses (Liaowang 2008).
17 July 2008	Yuanzhou township, Boluo county, Huizhou prefecture, Guangdong	Several hundred people and police engaged in fighting over the death of a taxi driver, whose body was found within the compound of a county public security bureau a day after he was picked up by the local police. The police tried to make a secret deal with the family of the driver which was rejected. According to a report, eight rioters, six persons of the driver's family and two persons of his village were detained in charge of criminal offence (Online News Summary 2008).

<i>Mass incident</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Event</i>
19 July 2008	Meng'a village, Mengma town, Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa autonomous county, Yunnan	Clashes between villagers and police started following the arrest of five criminal suspects during seize of the village by 175 police personnel in the early hours of the day. It was a long-standing dispute between the rubber industry and rubber farmers on the issue of economic interest. In response to the arrest, when about 500 farmers attacked APFs, two farmers were shot dead, and 17 villagers, 41 police personnel and three local cadres sustained injuries in the incident (Liaowang 2008).
4 August 2008	Xingquan village, Lijiang town, Yunnan	The conflict started due to an unresolved environmental dispute between villagers and a pollutant factory. On the day of the incident, more than 300 people from both sides fought over the issue. Six villagers received injuries and 13 vehicles were damaged during the incident. The local public security organ booked 107 suspects and rioters ( <i>Chuncheng wanbao</i> 2008).
17 November 2008	Dongjiang town, Wudu district, Longnan city, Gansu	Thirty persons belonging to relocated households of a nearby village appealed to the city party committee for giving assurance about housing, land and livelihood. It was reported that under the influence of a group of lawless elements, the petitioners continued to demonstrate despite conciliatory assurances from the authority. More than 2,000 people assembled in support of the relocated villagers. The mob burnt down or damaged several buildings in the official premises. According to the initial report, 69 armed police, 2 people's police from public security organ, 3 reporters of local television were injured in the incident and 22 vehicles were destroyed. Total loss of public property was more than RMB 5 million (Sichuan News Agency 2008).
25 November 2008	Dongwan, Guangdong	About 1,000 workers attacked a factory in protest against the low wages. Five workers were injured and a police vehicle was destroyed (Xingdao Global Net 2008).

during some mass protests, total casualties among the protestors were much less than those in similar situations in Tibet. This mainly occurs because the law enforcement agencies are usually allowed to strike with maximum and disproportionate degree of force in quelling minority protestors.

### **Riots in Urumqi**

After a gap of seven to eight years, Xinjiang again became restive in 2008 and this turned out to be a prelude to the 7–5 incident. The central government, in order to enhance security before the 2008 Olympic Games decided to improve its line of defence comprising of the People's Liberation Army, the PAPF and the XPCC to fight against real or perceived terrorist threats in the region. The life of the common Uyghur became even more difficult under the renewed surveillance and restrictions by security forces. This created widespread mistrust among the Uyghur and deep-rooted interethnic tensions in the region. On 9 March, Wang Lequan warned that 'those terrorists, saboteurs and secessionists are to be battered resolutely, no matter who they are!' (Millward 2008). It is highly possible that the repeated threats of terrorist assaults before and during the Olympics by the ETIM were not entirely a virtual threat. However, the terror groups certainly never had the capacity to fulfil the claims made since the beginning of 2008.

There were reports of hijacking attempts, bombing plots on the Olympic soccer match at Shanghai Stadium, assaulting the PAPF personnel in Kashgar by two local Uyghur men and serial bomb explosions in Kucha from March to August in 2008. Many Western analysts do not agree with the Chinese official claim that the ETIM was responsible in all these cases, especially the killing of 17 and injuring 15 PAPF personnel in Kashgar. The incident happened when two attackers drove a dump truck into a group of 70 PAPF officers during morning exercises outside their barracks. The perpetrators of this violence, a taxi driver and a vegetable vendor, were arrested and sentenced to death. Some analysts questioned whether the 'ETIM had the resources to carry out such an attack and claimed the Chinese government was just trying to denigrate the group' (Gunaratna, Acharya and Wang 2010: 75–8). The issue is not just having the capacity of striking a specific target by a terrorist organisation located outside or giving bad name to a certain *Dongtu* terror group by the Chinese government. In this political atmosphere, a section of the community saw violence as the most effective expression to

respond to state repression. It is also not improbable that the attackers in the above incident were directly or indirectly influenced by the ETIM, but that does not give them reason for exaggerating the terror group's destructive capacity by a responsible state authority and overlooking other variables that are responsible for aggressive behaviour of the common people. The Chinese government officials even pointed out that the riots in Tibet motivated Uyghur separatists to create disturbances in Xinjiang in 2008. This is a typical example of 'seeking truth' away from reality and finding much talked about 'social contradictions' not in the immediate society.

The root cause behind the mass incidents in the Han areas in 2008 was economic difficulties, environmental issues and ineffective governance (police atrocities, official corruption and nepotism; Table 7.3). This is the reality of a rapidly modernising China including national minority areas where contradictions are sharper because ethnic minority societies are comparatively more traditional and the state is increasingly impatient in transforming these societies. The eagerness to transform traditional minority societies, however, does not conform to the positive social change and economic empowerment of national minorities. Exclusion of Tibetans from the benefits of Chinese modernisation is extremely acute (Hillman 2008). Though economic dimension was not the main reason for widespread social unrests in the Tibetan areas of China in March 2008, the ruthless destruction of Han business establishments by rioters in the Tibetan capital on 14 March is possibly a sign of growing frustration of the local people due to economic deprivation.

According to Gardner Bovingdon, most of the protests in Xinjiang and Tibet were not concerned with economic matters. He contends that only two demonstrations over purely economic issues in Xinjiang have been documented during the 30 years of reform (Bovingdon 2010: 109). It is, however, important to note that a wide range of social issues pertaining to the well-being of minority communities used to be in the agenda of peaceful protestors in the 1980s. Bovingdon, though, rightly points out that the Uyghurs as well as the Tibetans have not been able to find high officials sympathetic to their claim since Hu Yaobang lost his power, whereas peasants, workers and other sections of the society in the Han areas are treated with less repression even when they demonstrate without proper permission and get satisfactory response when they are lucky enough to find officials sensitive to their demands (Bovingdon 2010: 110, 122). Since protesters can clearly

express their rational demands in the mass incidents and *weiquan* movements, it is much easier to resolve conflicts in the Han areas. Following Coser's view on realistic and non-realistic conflicts, mentioned in chapter two, one can say that conflicts in Xinjiang and Tibet have become unmanageable because conflicting parties have deviated from their rational goal and become emotionally charged. The Chinese leadership is not even ready to acknowledge that the Uyghurs and the Tibetans can have any real reason for resentments. In this situation, all Uyghur grievances can be readily labelled as terrorist acts and their protests as local war against the state.

The unmanageable conflict situation has created immeasurable damage to interethnic relations in Xinjiang. The riots in the Xinjiang capital on 5 July 2009 shows how two conflicting parties – the state authority and the Han community on one side and the Uyghur on the other – consider each other as die-hard opponents. The official interpretation is that the 7–5 incident is ‘an extremely violent criminal incident of beating, smashing, robbing and arson’ (*dazaqiangshao yanzhong baoli fanzui shijian*). With 11 times more death toll than the previous year's riots in Lhasa, there is no doubt that in terms of casualties and destruction of public property, the Urumqi riot is one of the bloodiest interethnic riots during the reform period in China.

According to several accounts of the episode, a peaceful demonstration against official mishandling of killing and injuring of Uyghur workers during a brawl (*dou'ou shijian*) with the Han workers in Xuri Toy Factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong, turned into interethnic riots on the evening of 5 July in Urumqi because of police atrocities. The fighting between the workers of the two communities took place on 26 June in Shaoguan factory, where two Uyghur migrant labourers were killed and a total of 120 injured. Apparently, the main concern of the Uyghur protesters in Urumqi was the plight of poor migrant workers of their community who were transported from Kashgar under the labour transfer scheme (*jihua laodongwu shuchu*) in May 2009. According to the official version, the Shaoguan is an isolated case of public order (*yiqi dianxing shehui zhi'an anjian*) and was settled on time and just way (Chinese Embassy in London 2009). Surprisingly enough, a Chinese writer even argued that in legal definition the toy factory brawl is a ‘non-criminal’ case of public order (Zou 2009). On 6 July, the XUAR Chairman Nur Bekri pointed out that in order to destroy ethnic unity and social harmony, the ‘three evil forces’

instigated riots in Urumqi by frantically exaggerating the 26 July incident (Xinhua News Network 2009a). The exiled leader Rebiya Kadeer was blamed for orchestrating the riots and the government initiated an all-out propaganda campaign against her involvement in the violence in Xinjiang.

It is clear from the official reporting that the police had prior information about possible 'unlawful' assembly of Uyghur protesters on the People's Square in Urumqi on that day and that the local public security agency made adequate emergency measures by deploying the police force to the People's Square and Erdaoqiao area (Uyghur-inhabited areas of the city). The official report claims that several thousand mobsters carried out riots across the city and more than 1,000 attackers assembled in front of the gates of Xinjiang University alone. It is also reported that 20,000 extra security forces were brought in, who dispersed everywhere into small groups across the city and started hitting back and preventing rioters (Xinhua News Network 2009a). The official reporting clearly suggests that the number of attackers were much less than the security forces and there was no indication that the attackers possessed technically advanced weapons and professional skills. Therefore, it is clear that the perpetrators of 'terrorist act' on the evening of 5 July 2009 were actually protesters who turned into rioters, a very common phenomenon in today's China. In most of the cases of mass incidents and *weiquan* movements, protesters often end up in direct confrontation with the public security forces, which are certainly not the most vulnerable target for attack.

The 7–5 incident and subsequent development and manner in which the state projected the entire episode not only revealed inter-ethnic cleavages, but also exposed weak social foundation, poor social management and inefficiency and all-round failure of the regional authority. The residual effects of the riots continued for the next few days. The high pitch rhetoric of pledges of severely punishing the outlaws, cracking down on violence and taking stability as the top priority by the regional and central leadership further vitiated the interethnic relations in Urumqi. On 7 July, a group of Han protestors took to the streets to take revenge against the Uyghur citizens of the city and attacked innocent people of the community. According to a Uyghur source, some key government officials actively worked to exacerbate disharmony between the Han and the Uyghur during the riots. It claims that on July 7, the Xinhua reported that the Urumchi Communist Party Secretary Li Zhi's

inflammatory chanting of 'Down with Rebiya' at the scene of the unrest stirred nationalistic sentiment of the Han citizens and created further divisions between the two communities (UHRP 2009).

Senior CPC officials claimed that the government handled the situation 'decisively and properly'. Within a week of the riots, the government engaged once again in the craft of propaganda to create false notion of amicable interethnic relations and argued in favour of the existing minority policies in China. Liu Xianyong, deputy head of propaganda for Urumqi's Communist Party, expressed his satisfaction over his efforts to a new propaganda theme – 'We Are All One Family'. He claimed that traditional methods had been used in this new propaganda (MacLeod 2009). Chinese television also started telecasting political advertisements featuring a group of smiling ethnic Han and Uyghur men wearing matching yellow t-shirts and singing 'We are all part of the same family', and news programmes featured interviews with ordinary Uyghur citizens who praised interethnic relations in Xinjiang (Brady 2012: 175–7).

Amidst the propaganda of interethnic unity, top party officials of the central government kept issuing statements and the local administration continued with post-crisis preparations for punishing a maximum number of culprits as well as suspects involved in the 7–5 incidents. At the end of August 2009, Urumqi again turned restive due to the so-called syringe attacks where 531 people were reported to have been attacked with hypodermic syringes between August 20 and September 4. Though there were Han and other ethnic groups including Uyghur among the victims of syringe attacks, only the latter were arrested. A Hong Kong press reported that 10,000 Han citizens demonstrated demanding their protection and some also demanded dismissal of the regional Party Secretary Wang Lequan and the Urumqi Party Chief Li Zhi for their incompetence in protecting citizens from the Uyghur wrath. Ironically the Uyghur community in the region had also been demanding a replacement for the hardliner Wang Lequan for a long time. On September 5, Li Zhi was dismissed, but Wang was able to retain his position and finally transferred to Beijing with a higher position in April 2010 (Chaudhuri 2010b). The 7–5 incident exposed weakness of maintaining the long-desired stability and peace in the region by coercive means. Losses of many innocent people in the riots drastically reduced administrative credibility of the regional government. The incident left a deep-rooted psychological barrier and antagonism between the Han and the Uyghur communities which are mainly responsible for the present round of conflicts in the region.

## New leaders, old practices

In the most troubled time of Xinjiang's contemporary history, the central government removed Wang Lequan and appointed Hunan Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian. Zhang had experience in working in the minority-dominated province of Yunnan. During his tenure as party chief in Hunan, he gained credibility for handling complex issues and social conflicts and even got the reputation of a moderate party secretary (Tan 2010). Issues in Xinjiang are, however, a much different and difficult task to handle interethnic conflicts in this Muslim-dominated region. There is a rigid official line to formulate and execute policies to handle with the activities of 'three evil forces' – *Dongtu* terror organisations, impact of international terrorism in the region and imperialist designs of the West. It is difficult to deviate from the established guideline of maintaining security and preserving stability that aims at safeguarding the region from all forms of terrorist and separatist threats – real, perceived, virtual as well as symbolic.

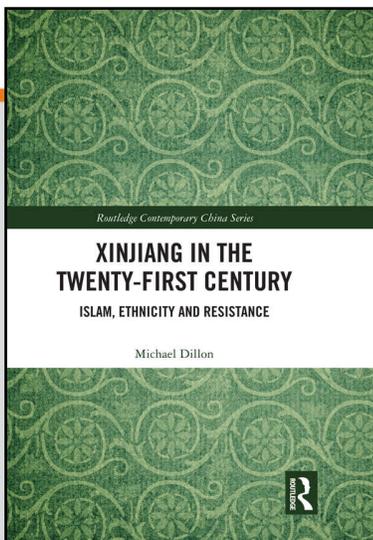
The Xinjiang regional security establishment enhanced vigilance during the one month of Ramadan fasting since the early 1990s and after 7-5 incidents; June and July were also considered as highly sensitive from the security point of view. During the first anniversary of the 7-5 incidents, the one-month long strike hard campaign was launched and in order to make the arrangement full proof, the authority installed more than 8,800 surveillance cameras across Urumqi alone (Ma 2010; Fenghuang TV 2010). It is, therefore, clear that the new leadership could not provide any alternative method to reduce violence and improve interethnic relations, but rather imposed greater restrictions and vigilance on the activities of local Muslims.



CHAPTER

5

# XINJIANG AND THE EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S POLICY ON TERRORISM: (2009-18)



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## 7 Xinjiang and the evolution of China's policy on terrorism: 2009–18

The long-standing conflict in Xinjiang between the Chinese state and groups of ethnic Uyghurs struggling for independence is central to the understanding of the development of Chinese attitudes towards, and policy on, terrorism. In 1996 a key Chinese Communist Party publication, *Document No. 7*, stated explicitly that 'separatism' in Xinjiang was the most serious threat to China's security and territorial integrity.<sup>1</sup> If the conflict in Xinjiang had not existed it would have been more difficult for Beijing to manoeuvre itself into a formal (although not an active military) alliance with the United States and other European states in the 'War on Terror' launched by Washington after the attacks on the United States by a group acting under the auspices of Al Qaeda in September 2001.

The controversy over territory and sovereignty in Xinjiang is in many ways parallel to those of Tibet and Inner Mongolia. In all these cases the conflict between non-Han Chinese communities and the Chinese state can be traced back to the westward expansion of the Qing Empire of the Manchus in the eighteenth century. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 the problem was first transmitted to the Republic of China controlled by the nationalist Guomindang and then inherited by the People's Republic which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established in 1949. The twenty-first century conflicts are in a sense only the most recent manifestation of an unresolved historical struggle.

The nature of the conflicts in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia are similar but there are also significant differences. All involve frontiers, national security and control over natural resources but, in addition, there are less tangible underlying issues of ethnic differences; language and culture; contested national aspirations; the patriotic pride of successive Chinese governments and the recollection of China's national humiliation during the period of Western domination which is normally considered to be between China's defeat in 1842 at the end of the Opium War and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The differences between the conflicts in these three regions lie in the precise nature of the frontiers, language, culture and religion that are involved.

Although the problems faced by Tibetans, and the significance of their case for independence or genuine autonomy, should not be underestimated, the situation of Xinjiang and its Uyghur population has been sadly neglected by comparison. The Tibetan case is very well known because of the work of the government-in-exile in Dharamsala, the high-profile internationally of the Dalai Lama and the

attention paid to the cause by prominent celebrities and active advocacy organisations in the West. The fact that the case is well known does not mean that it is very well understood, either by its supporters or its detractors: both sides frequently rely on simplistic accounts of the history of relations between China and Tibet, and this is also an issue in the understanding of the conflict in Xinjiang.

It can also be argued that the existence of a Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, and Beijing's perception that it is supported by forces hostile to China, makes the possibility of a resolution in the Tibetan case much more difficult. There has been no equivalent external component to the Xinjiang conflict equivalent to the Dharamsala administration of the Tibetans. The remnants of the government of the Eastern Turkestan Republic in the 1940s, exiled in Turkey or in Germany, have never enjoyed support or sympathy on the same level as the Dalai Lama and although émigré organisations in Turkey, Western Europe and North America have kept the memory of Eastern Turkestan and the Uyghur cause alive, they do not yet have the authority or the resources of the Tibetans. This may have changed with the emergence of Rebiya Kadeer as a potent symbol for Uyghur aspirations. Nevertheless, Beijing has come to treat Islamist terrorism as a more serious external threat than the Tibetan government-in-exile. The extent to which this is justified by the evidence is examined herein.

In contrast with the international prominence of the Tibetan cause, the case of Xinjiang is almost entirely absent from the public discourse in the West. It occasionally comes to the attention of the media as it did after the grenade attacks on a team of border police jogging between their police post and a hotel in Kashgar on August 4, 2008,<sup>2</sup> or the violent clashes between Uyghurs and Chinese in Urumqi in July 2009. The impression given in many media reports, and encouraged by official Chinese statements, is that these violent incidents were simply the extension of 'Islamist extremism' from the Middle East or South Asia (Pakistan or Afghanistan) into China. This suggests that they were the local expression of a worldwide phenomenon that was organised by, or in sympathy with, Al Qaeda rather than the result of genuine local grievances. There is little understanding of the low-level insurgency that has existed in Xinjiang for at least eighty years, if the establishment of the first Turkic Islamic Republic in 1933 in Kashgar is taken as a starting point. If Osama bin Laden was born in 1957, a date that is commonly given, the first recorded Uyghur 'separatist' activities against the CCP – guerrilla attacks on state organs of the newly established PRC by Sufi-influenced Muslim militants in the Khotan region of southern Xinjiang in 1954 – predate his birth by three years. Insofar as there has been any external Islamist involvement in the conflict between the Chinese state and Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang (and it is difficult in any case to establish any objective and reliable evidence of this), it cannot be said to date back any earlier than the 1990s.

### **Background to the insurgency in Xinjiang**

Before analysing the way in which Beijing's policy on the Xinjiang conflict has evolved in the twenty-first century, it is worth briefly recapitulating the significant

turning points in that conflict and considering what lessons, if any, the Chinese government has learned from them.

Resistance by the Uyghurs of Xinjiang to rule from China, and their wish to create or retain an independent Muslim state, predate the CCP's control over the region by more than a century. The military administration of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911), which took control of the region in the eighteenth century, encountered constant political and religious opposition from the Turkic-speaking Muslim population. This was often allied to Islamic forces from the neighbouring Khanate of Kokand, which is in the Fergana Valley and remains a powerful focus of Islamist militancy in present-day Uzbekistan. *Jihads*, or religious struggles against the Qing regime, were launched by Uyghur leaders as early as 1820 and, for some years during the 1860s, Kashgar was controlled by the forces of Yakub Beg who established an independent Muslim state in Kashgaria but was finally defeated by the forces of the Qing in 1878.<sup>3</sup>

Although contemporary Uyghur nationalists ('separatists' in the terminology used by Beijing) frequently invoke the name of Yakub Beg, their real inspirations are the two independent governments established in the first half of the twentieth century, the short-lived republic based in Kashgar in 1933 and especially the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) which controlled the north-western part of Xinjiang from its headquarters in the city of Ghulja (Yining) between 1944 and 1949. To some extent the second of these, the ETR, was a multi-ethnic administration, unlike the earlier Kashgar regime which was almost exclusively supported by Uyghur (and some Tajik) Muslims, but the basis for its appeal was also Islam and Turkic nationalism. When the CCP took control of Xinjiang in 1949, the ETR administration surrendered to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and was incorporated into the PRC with little resistance. As far as the Chinese Communist Party was concerned this resolved the Xinjiang problem at the time, but support for genuine independence persisted.

### **Resistance in the 1950s**

Resistance by Eastern Turkestan loyalists continued well into the 1950s, especially in southern Xinjiang. Small activist units launched attacks on police and military barracks to obtain weapons and conducted armed robberies to obtain funds. These groups were associated with Sufi orders, and this religious connection was important in their attempts to win popular support and convert small-scale insurgencies into large-scale resistance. The Sufis used their network of connections to visit mosques to rally support for the cause; members of the Sufi orders were invited to meetings where they swore an oath on the Qur'an that they would resist the infidel Chinese and support a *jihad* to install a Muslim government. The first major episode of armed resistance to the CCP after 1949, the 1954 uprising in Khotan, which featured an attack on a prison camp in Karakash, was mounted almost entirely by adherents of the Sufi brotherhoods. These activities were suppressed by local police and troops, but they also had the support of the militia of the quasi-military Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps that was

created by the PRC to farm and control China's north-western frontiers. The leaders of the Uyghur resistance groups were forced to flee the country but the idea of an independent Eastern Turkistan Republic did not disappear; it resurfaced in the Eastern Turkistan People's Party (ETPP) during the chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. Beijing has claimed that the ETPP was simply a creation of the Soviet Union, with which the PRC had been in dispute since the late 1950s, but it is clear that it was influenced by the tradition of local support for independence.<sup>4</sup>

After the defeat of the 1950s uprisings and the establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on October 1, 1955, the government of the PRC once again convinced itself that the internal conflicts in Xinjiang had been resolved and that the only opposition to Chinese rule came from those émigrés who had fled the country after the defeat and had established themselves mainly in Turkey. The emergence of the Eastern Turkistan People's Party and its brief period of influence during the Cultural Revolution were a lesson to the CCP that only strong central government could guarantee peace and stability in the outlying regions.

After the death of Mao Zedong in September 1976 and the eventual emergence of Deng Xiaoping as the single most important political figure in the PRC leadership, China's economic and social structures changed and many political controls were relaxed. Partly as a result of this, overt separatist activity began to surface again in Xinjiang. The first recorded major incidents were clashes between different social and ethnic groups in Aksu in the west of the region and in Kashgar in the South-West, both in 1980, but the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the emergence of independent Muslim states in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan fuelled expectations in the minds of some Uyghur activists that the establishment of an independent Eastern Turkistan state was imminent and there were many acts of insurgency throughout Xinjiang in the years that followed. For hardliners within the CCP, two lessons could be drawn: the relaxation of political controls would necessarily risk the rise of separatist activities, and the greatest threat came from outside the borders of China.

### **Ethnic and religious conflict in the 1990s**

The danger of contamination from Islamic and nationalist currents beyond China's borders became a central theme of Beijing's analysis of the Xinjiang issue after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Throughout the 1990s, political violence gradually spread throughout the region, emerging partly from the internal dynamics of Xinjiang's political, social and ethnic mix, and partly in response to the breakup of the Soviet Union and the formation of new states by the predominantly Turkic-speaking communities that lived across the border from Xinjiang. As the decade progressed, the conflict became more acute and the opposition to Chinese rule more organised.

The crucial events that initiated the region's slide into conflict and violence were the riots of April 1990, at the height of the spring ploughing season, at Baren in the Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture of southern Xinjiang. This escalated

into a mass protest with some activists calling for a *jihad* to drive the Han unbelievers out of Xinjiang and the establishment of an Eastern Turkestan state.

The next major reported incident occurred in June 1993 when a bomb exploded in Kashgar. Government buildings were damaged and as many as ten people were killed or injured in what was seen as a calculated attack on the representatives of the provincial government in the city.<sup>5</sup> Song Hanliang, the CCP Secretary for Xinjiang, visited Kashgar and told a multi-ethnic meeting of cadres that 'Nationalist separatists form the main danger to the stability of our region, Xinjiang is a land with rich underground resources; our main task in Xinjiang is to keep the stability so the other parts of China could develop smoothly'. A second explosion occurred on August 4 and additional bombs were planted in five different cities. Leaflets calling for independence and the cessation of Chinese migration into Xinjiang were distributed. Kazakhs in the Ili region also clashed with Chinese security forces during the summer of 1993, with some demonstrators demanding that the region be allowed to secede from China and be recognised as an independent republic within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

There was further serious unrest in six towns in the Ili region of north-western Xinjiang in April 1995.<sup>6</sup> On April 22, as many as 50,000 people were reported to have taken part in rallies and demonstrations against Chinese rule in the towns of Mongolküre (Zhaosu), Tekes, Kunes (Xinyuan), Gongliu, Qapqal and Nilka which surround Yining/Ghulja, the administrative capital of the Ili region, and are close to the border with Kazakhstan. Demonstrators handed in petitions to local authorities and called for the end of Chinese rule in the Ghulja region and its incorporation into Kazakhstan. They carried banners with slogans, including 'Establish a Kazakh State', 'End Communist Rule in Xinjiang' and 'Long Live Uyghur Xinjiang'.

The motivation and ideology of those involved in these demonstrations are quite complex. Underlying the protests was the resentment at the unjustified occupation of their ancestral territory by the Chinese who were neither Uyghur nor Muslim. Memories of the independent governments of the 1930s and 1940s were still strong, as were family connections to those who had served in those governments. There is no doubt that there was a highly developed sense of Uyghur (or Eastern Turkestani) nationalism, although it is difficult to document this precisely as it could only be expressed in private or clandestine publications, which would have been illegal, dangerous and even potentially fatal activities. There was always a religious component to the resistance, and this linked the demonstrators with those involved in the uprisings of the 1950s. The discourse of the demonstrators was frequently expressed in Islamic terms, but at this stage the movement itself was still more nationalist than Islamist. There is no evidence whatsoever that these demonstrations were precipitated by the intervention of outside Islamist forces, although Chinese official sources insist that external agents are the main cause of conflict in Xinjiang. As the history of the conflict shows, there are more than enough internal grievances to cause dissension, and this argument was strengthened when even more serious disturbances took place in Yining in 1997.

### **The Yining/Ghulja insurrection of February 1997**

The insurrection of February 1997 in Ghulja was by far the most serious of all the confrontations between the Uyghurs and the Chinese state in the late twentieth century. On February 5, young Uyghurs came out onto the streets holding banners in Arabic script (the script that is normally used to write Uyghur in Xinjiang) with two slogans. One read, 'It has begun', the other, 'Fight the unbelievers with all our might using the Qur'an as a weapon'. They gathered at the market on Victory Road and made their way along Red Flag Road, Stalin Street and Liberation Road 'in an illegal demonstration'. By the time they reached the Great Western Bridge (Xidaqiao) their numbers had risen to more than 300 and as they walked they chanted, 'Don't pay taxes' and 'We want nothing from the government'. This is a fair reflection of the attitude of many Uyghurs throughout Xinjiang who prefer to run their own businesses, avoid working for the Chinese state, and have as little as possible to do with what they regard as an alien and oppressive government.

The *Xinjiang Daily* on March 11 called for continuing class struggle against the separatists and once again blamed 'hostile foreign forces' for taking advantage of the changes that had followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and trying to 'split' China (these concerns were echoed by Tomur Dawamat, a former Xinjiang regional chairman, and later Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's parliamentary body).<sup>7</sup>

The authorities pursued militant armed groups and may even have eliminated some. Other groups are likely to replace those that have been neutralised or closed down and, given the challenging terrain of Xinjiang and the unreliability of Chinese intelligence gathering in the Uyghur community, it is unlikely that all have been wiped out. Low-intensity conflict continues, and this could include armed attacks on security forces, armed robberies and sabotage.

### **ETIM and Uyghur militancy in the new millennium**

Since 2001, reports from China on unrest, political violence or insurgency in Xinjiang have regularly referred to a separatist (*fenliezhuyi*) organisation that the Chinese government calls the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement – ETIM. This name had not been reported previously and was not familiar to specialists on Xinjiang, but it fitted in so neatly with the international consensus that emerged after the attacks on the United States in September 2001 on the existence of a widespread international network of terrorist organisations, associated in some way with Al Qaeda, that the nature – or even the existence – of this organisation has hardly been questioned. Such evidence as has emerged to substantiate the existence of ETIM all relates to individual activists in Pakistan, especially in the Gilgit or Waziristan regions. It is of course a truism in clandestine and covert operations that 'those who know don't tell and those who tell don't know' so it is hardly surprising that there is very little hard data on ETIM. When Sean Roberts interviewed Uyghurs who had been released from Guantanamo Bay and studied transcripts of interviews carried out at the prison, it became clear that

many militant Uyghurs had never heard of ETIM. It may or may not exist in Xinjiang or the name may simply refer to groups associated, in a general sense, with the Eastern Turkestan independence movement which have been in existence for many decades. Since 2001, no objective or convincing evidence has subsequently emerged to indicate whether ETIM is an active or effective movement within Xinjiang or whether it exists at all within the borders of China.<sup>8</sup>

The military, police and other security organisations in China are naturally the most active in gathering this kind of intelligence. For obvious operational reasons they prefer to keep most of the information that they obtain to themselves: to allow groups hostile to the Chinese government access to information about the level of intelligence that Beijing possesses about them would at the very least be a serious tactical error. It is, however, clear that the security organisations have from time to time briefed carefully selected Chinese academics on the current state of their knowledge of the Eastern Turkestan movement; these briefings have been reflected in some academic articles but not necessarily in the more simplistic pronouncements by the government about an internal terrorist threat linked to Al Qaeda.

Some Chinese academics who have been given access to briefings with security organisations have published articles linking named Uyghur opposition groups with specific attacks against Chinese state targets, but it is very difficult to know how much credence to give to these names. The name of ETIM began to be used widely by the media and international organisations after it was placed on a list of proscribed terrorist organisations by the United Nations Security Council on September 11, 2012, at the insistence of the government of the United States and based on information supplied by China. It was argued at the time that ETIM was working closely with the established radical Islamist group, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and with Al Qaeda to resist the establishment of US bases in the former Soviet states of Central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan, which was cooperating closely with Washington. Concerns were raised that these groups working in concert might attack the bases themselves and the hotels in which US personnel were staying, although no evidence was offered to support these fears.<sup>9</sup>

The name of another Uyghur organisation was also in circulation at the same time: the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organisation, ETLO (*Sharqiy Turkistan Azatliq Tashkilati*), which was presumed to be connected with ETIM and to have had a base over the border from Xinjiang in Kyrgyzstan where there is a significant community of Uyghurs. The Kyrgyz government in Bishkek denied that it was giving sanctuary to this or any other Uyghur 'separatist' organisation. An indication of the tensions within Kyrgyzstan that affected both inter-communal affairs and relations with China was the murder in 2000 of the chairman of *Ittipak* (Unity), an Uyghur community organisation in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>10</sup> The activities of all Uyghurs living or working in Kazakhstan were also monitored and restricted by the government of Nursultan Nazarbayev under pressure from Beijing. Neither the Kyrgyz nor the Kazakh administrations needed much encouragement on this matter. Both governments, but in particular that of the smaller and poorer Kyrgyzstan, believed with good reason that their states were under threat from

the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU, whose existence is not in doubt and whose activities are much more fully documented than those of ETIM, is an Islamist group which has its roots in the Fergana Valley. Ferghana is a historic religious centre which finds itself within the modern state of Uzbekistan as a result of the convoluted borders drawn up by the USSR in Stalin's time, but the population of Fergana also has a great deal in common with communities in Kyrgyzstan. There is a long-standing connection between Andijan, one of the Fergana Valley towns, and Uyghur communities in western Xinjiang which have enjoyed trading, family and religious links for decades, if not centuries. The IMU was suspected of operating illegally in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan where its activities were suppressed by the Kazakh National Security Committee. ETIM was alleged to have links with the IMU and, while this is credible as they would have had interests in common, there is no concrete evidence.<sup>11</sup>

Radio Free Asia, a broadcaster based in the United States which has good contacts with the émigré Uyghur community, is in touch with Uyghurs in Xinjiang and is broadly sympathetic to the Uyghur cause, reported in October 2003 that ETIM was also using the names 'East Turkestan Islamic Hezbollah' and 'East Turkestan Party' and noted China's claims that ETIM's factions had been responsible for 166 deaths and 440 injuries in terrorist attacks.<sup>12</sup> In December 2003, the Uyghur American Association, which was gradually emerging as the single most influential Uyghur émigré organisation, issued a statement that it was 'not aware of the existence of ETIM or its alleged activities'. As an organisation that has maintained contact with Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Uyghur American Association, together with other émigré groups, was aware of anti-government demonstrations and attacks on military and government installations in the region, many of which they have reported in detail, so its denial of any knowledge of ETIM increases doubts about the Chinese official portrayal of this group.<sup>13</sup>

## **Hasan Mehsum**

In 2002 an individual whose name was given as 'Khosan Makhsul' was interviewed by Radio Free Asia. 'Makhsul' claimed to be the leader of ETIM but foreswore any animosity to countries other than China. This is important in the light of the interethnic conflict between the Uyghur community in Kyrgyzstan and the government in Bishkek which was under pressure from Beijing to suppress Uyghur or Eastern Turkestan political activities on its territory.<sup>14</sup>

The death of a man by the name of Hasan Mehsum, almost certainly the same person and this is the spelling most commonly used for his name, was announced in December 2003. It was reported that he had been one of eight people killed on October 2, 2003, in South Waziristan when Pakistani troops attacked what they believed to be an Al Qaeda base. South Waziristan is a region in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Tribal Areas, as they are commonly known, are inhabited by various Pashtun tribes which administer their own affairs and are effectively independent of the Pakistani government in Islamabad. They are acknowledged to be the sites

of radical *madrasas* and militant training camps in which political Islam has flourished and from which terrorist groups linked to Al Qaeda draw their support.<sup>15</sup> Another source named the dead man as Hasan Mehsum *alias* Abu Muhammad Al-Turkestani but did not make it clear whether he had been killed by Pakistani troops or by US troops in a joint operation. Information from official Chinese sources about Hasan Mehsum is sketchy and contradictory: some sources claimed that he had been arrested in Xinjiang in 1993, had spent three years in a labour camp and was linked to a series of bombings in China in 1995.

### **The impact of September 2001 and the 'War on Terror'**

China reacted immediately to the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington by restricting the access of foreigners to Xinjiang, which has a 70-kilometre border with Afghanistan (albeit one via the Wakhan Corridor that is difficult to access), and by declaring that separatism in Xinjiang was a terrorist phenomenon, similar to the one that the United States was facing. Beijing was effectively arguing that China should be given *carte blanche* to deal with the insurgency in Xinjiang as the authorities in China saw fit and without any interference from outsiders. This provoked international concern from representatives of Human Rights bodies, including the UN High Commission for Human Rights. Although the anti-terrorist rhetoric has been reiterated frequently since the autumn of 2001, China in fact did very little to suppress separatism in Xinjiang that it had not already done in the previous decade, continuing with the policies that it began in 1996 with the Strike Hard campaign. China used the cover of the 'War on Terror' very astutely to deflect criticism of its clampdown on the independence movement and on religious activities in Xinjiang, and implied that the Uyghurs' struggle for independence was nothing other than the activities of a branch of Al Qaeda. Since, as has been demonstrated, the Uyghur nationalist movement predates the establishment of Al Qaeda by many decades, this is not a plausible argument and any connection with Al Qaeda is tenuous and difficult, if not impossible, to prove.

Rohan Gunaratana has repeated assertions current in the Western media that the upsurge of militancy in Xinjiang dates from the return to China of Uyghurs sent to Afghanistan by the Chinese government or the People's Liberation Army to assist, or at least liaise with, the *mujahidin* who were resisting the Soviet invasion of 1979. The assumption was that Uyghurs, as Muslims, would have a sympathetic hearing in Afghanistan and would be useful interlocutors, especially with non-Pashtun forces such as the Northern Alliance as their Uyghur language is almost identical to the Uzbek of many Northern Alliance supporters.<sup>16</sup> While this would have been entirely consistent with China's interests at that late stage of the Sino-Soviet dispute, there has never been any clearly documented evidence that this took place, although this is hardly surprising. The presence of Uyghurs in Mazar-e-Sharif at the end of the war in Afghanistan in 2002 and the holding of twenty-two of them in the US detention centre at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is, however, an established fact. It is possible that some of these Uyghurs may have

been trained in camps on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border that were supported by Al Qaeda or the Taliban and there are reports of others who have escaped from Xinjiang and moved through Central Asia and Afghanistan to the 'tribal areas' of Pakistan, notably Hasan Mehsum who, as has been noted, was shot dead in South Waziristan on October 2, 2003. There is, however, no reliable evidence from any neutral sources to substantiate any of these assertions.

Nevertheless, the Chinese government has stated explicitly that its opposition to separatism in Xinjiang is part of the 'War on Terror'. At a press briefing in Shanghai during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in October 2001, Vice-Premier Wu Bangguo identified Eastern Turkestan insurgents as part of the global terrorist movement that the US-led coalition was fighting. Later that month, the Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, alleged that Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang had close links with Osama bin Laden and that some militants had been trained in Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. Many Uyghurs were outraged that their entire community was being maligned by these assertions. In any event Beijing's support for the 'War on Terror' was purely rhetorical. No Chinese military units were involved in any external conflict and 'anti-terrorist' operations were confined to Xinjiang. China benefited from the 'War on Terror' by offering its formal support to the US-led coalition in return for an agreement under which the ETIM, which Beijing had identified in 2002 as the main 'terrorist' group operating in Xinjiang, would be proscribed by the international community. It was accused of having links with Al Qaeda and was blacklisted by the United States and the United Nations. In December 2003, Beijing published the names of what it claimed were the main Xinjiang 'terrorist' groups. A statement by Zhao Yongshen of the Ministry of Public Security listed the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement, the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organisation, the World Uyghur Youth Congress and the Eastern Turkestan Information Centre. This list rather disingenuously combines two organisations which are alleged to be carrying out terrorist activities in Xinjiang and two public international organisations that represent émigré Uyghurs. The second of the émigré groups is based in Munich and is essentially a propaganda and mutual support organisation.

### **Xinjiang and the former Soviet Central Asia**

The long-term impact of the presence of US troops in Central Asia since September 2001 is difficult to assess, but there is no doubt that it has changed the geopolitics of Eurasia. During the Cold War the deployment of American forces in this region would have been completely unthinkable as it was under the absolute control of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, in spite of the loss of its authority in Central Asia following the collapse of the USSR, Russia still sees itself as the one power with a legitimate interest in the region, and this has effectively been recognised by its inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which was founded in 2001 on the basis of a smaller grouping that dates from 1996. Central Asian states were initially reluctant to accept US and allied troops on their territory in the war against the Taliban, but long-term military contact has been maintained,

partly because of concern by the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan at the threat posed by political Islam from the Fergana Valley and partly because of continuing unease about the influence of China in the region and the need to establish power structures to counteract this.<sup>17</sup>

The first deputy interior minister of Kyrgyzstan welcomed the presence of US troops in his country when it was agreed that they could use the main Manas International Airport near Bishkek and suggested that members of the coalition might have a long-term future in Kyrgyzstan, 'if the situation in the region deteriorates'.<sup>18</sup> Two hundred US service personnel had arrived at Manas by December 25, 2001, and were preparing to establish a more permanent base in Kyrgyzstan. The initial agreement for the US presence was for one year, but even at that stage local commentators thought it was likely to be for longer. Discussions on the establishment of a US military presence in Kazakhstan also took place in January 2002.<sup>19</sup> China and Russia were both concerned at what they perceived to be a threat to their influence in an area that has strategic and disputed borders with both states, and to the overall balance of power in Central Asia.

There are communities of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz living in Xinjiang who are from the same ethnic background as their counterparts in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. There are also Uyghur communities in both these former Soviet Central Asian republics; the Uyghurs are closely related to the Uzbeks of Uzbekistan; and there are Uzbek communities in other parts of Central Asia, including Xinjiang. The Uyghur and Uzbek languages are extremely close, and the two people share a common literary and cultural tradition. Many independent analysts consider that they are essentially the same people although both Uyghurs and Uzbeks prefer to emphasise the differences between the two communities rather than the similarities.

It follows therefore that although Xinjiang is firmly under the administrative control of the PRC, its most important social and cultural bonds are with the Turkic peoples to the north and west of the Karakorum Mountains. These bonds were severed during the Sino-Soviet dispute which began in 1960, if not earlier. A mass migration of Kazakhs, Uyghurs and others from north-western Xinjiang into Kazakhstan that took place in 1962 prompted China to seal its borders: contact between China and its western neighbours was minimal for decades. Mikhail Gorbachev's ill-fated visit to Beijing in 1989 was designed to heal the breach but it was overshadowed by the protests of students and citizens which were suppressed by the PLA in Tian'anmen Square, on June 4.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the creation of the new sovereign states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan changed cross-border relations dramatically. China was obliged to forge diplomatic relations with the new states, and discussions on long-standing border demarcation issues and troop reduction began almost immediately. The border routes across the mountains were opened to trade: informally they opened immediately, officially they were authorised from 1992 onwards. Families and communities, which had not enjoyed much contact for many years, renewed their acquaintance and trade developed at a rapid pace.

The new links were not restricted to commerce. Religious connections were also renewed and there were exchanges of political views. The newly independent

Turkic Islamic states were immensely attractive to Uyghurs who looked to them for assistance in their own bid for independence. Initially there appeared to be serious and genuine support for this independence from other Turkic states, including the most powerful, Turkey, but as China's confidence in dealing with its Central Asian neighbours grew, Beijing made it perfectly clear that any support for independence movements in Xinjiang would be treated as unwarranted interference in China's internal affairs and would not be tolerated. Beijing negotiated with the stick of its overwhelming military superiority and the carrot of lucrative trade and energy deals, and persuaded the Central Asian states that they should curb any political activities by their own Uyghur communities or on behalf of Uyghurs in China. The new Central Asian governments readily complied, partly because they were concerned about the threat to their own stability from political Islamist movements (particularly in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan). The demise of communist regimes in Central Asia had led, not to the hoped-for democratisation of the region, but to the emergence of authoritarian governments based partly on pre-Soviet clan and regional ties and partly on Soviet political culture. Although distrust of China persisted among the states of the former Soviet Central Asia, they shared a political language and common values with Beijing because of their experience of rule by Communist parties.

As part of Beijing's attack on separatists, both within China and across the border, a campaign was instigated to demonise them as criminals. Press reporting of trials of Uyghurs frequently included separatist activities in a list of charges that also referred to crimes such as armed robbery, murder and rape. In the minds of the reader, in particular the Han Chinese reader, the implication was quite clear: their activities were not in pursuit of legitimate political support for independence but the criminal activities of separatists.

### **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**

As China developed relations with its Central Asian neighbours and with Russia following the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, bilateral meetings on border and trade issues were found to be inadequate to deal with the changing geopolitical environment of East and Central Asia. Political Islam became more powerful in Afghanistan and Tajikistan and was perceived as a threat, particularly by the new governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: consequently, all of the regional powers discerned a common interest in combating this new force.

The first meeting of what was to become a major regional grouping took place in Shanghai in 1996 when the foreign ministers of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan met to discuss common concerns. An agenda was constructed around border security, combating insurgent Islamic forces and the smuggling of Islamic literature, weapons and narcotics. The grouping, which met regularly, was known originally as the Shanghai Five, but was renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in June 2001 when Uzbekistan was admitted. The new name was sufficiently flexible to allow for the admission of other members, although Pakistan, the only other state being seriously considered

for membership, was not permitted to join as there were serious doubts about the Islamabad government's relationship with political Islamist groups.<sup>20</sup> The SCO has met regularly since 2001 and has admitted representatives of a number of other regional governments – India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan – as observers; Afghanistan was added to this list in June 2012. SCO summit meetings are publicised and it issues policy documents and press releases about joint military exercises carried out under its auspices, but details of many of its discussions and operations on sensitive border issues and terrorism are not widely available.<sup>21</sup>

### **Impact of 2009 Urumqi protests**

Although overt and public resistance to Chinese rule was effectively suppressed after the 1997 demonstrations in Ghulja, the activities of small militant groups continue and it became clear that these activities would become more extensive and more daring as long as there were no alternative means of expressing separatist sentiments. During the late 1990s, émigré sources reported that militant groups within Xinjiang were trying to set up urban guerrilla units that would bring their struggle to major cities which, apart from Urumqi and on one occasion Beijing, had not been affected by separatist violence. To date, this has not happened, apart possibly from the Kunming attack, but it cannot be ruled out as a potential threat as it would be a dramatic way of conveying to the population of China the seriousness with which separatists in Xinjiang regard their struggle for independence. There could therefore be further bomb attacks in cities in Xinjiang other than Urumqi and in major cities throughout the rest of China. Large and relatively cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou where there is already a small but significant Uyghur population could be targets for this kind of attack. The public security forces are already on the alert and from time to time groups of Uyghurs in Chinese cities have been rounded up and arrested and sometimes sent back to Xinjiang or at least sent out of the cities in which they have been working, usually as traders. The reporting of these attacks, or fear of attacks, became more open in the period after September 11, 2001, and was reinforced by word of mouth and the informal system of communication that the CCP has maintained in its network of organisations since 1949.

Sabotage has also been one of the tactics of the more militant groups of separatists although it is extremely difficult to assess the effect that this sabotage has had, because the authorities are very reluctant to attribute damage to separatist activities. From time to time there have been disruptions to rail and road communications and it has been suggested by émigré organisations that these were the result of bombs or other kinds of damage to the track or rolling stock, but the government has frequently attributed these to natural conditions such as excessive rainfall, snow or landslips. The prevention and detection of sabotage is clearly one of the priorities for the public security forces in Xinjiang and it ties up the resources of the police and the security units of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC).

When urban violence did erupt, it was not in eastern China but in the heart of Xinjiang itself. The dramatic July 2009 demonstrations in Urumqi were not the

result of activities by militant groups but grew out of a popular response to reports that two Uyghurs working in southern China had been murdered. As protests escalated there were calls for more information about the deaths and demands for equal rights for Uyghurs. Fighting ensued between the demonstrating Uyghurs and Han vigilante groups. The details of the disturbances have been set out in Chapter 4; here the emphasis is on the response of the government and the media.

The immediate trigger for the July 5 demonstration was news of a brawl in the Guangdong city of Shaoguan in which two Uyghur men were reportedly killed by Han workers after rumours had been spread on the internet that they had attacked and raped ‘two innocent girls’ of the local Han community.<sup>22</sup> These rumours appear to have been without foundation but were enough to cause serious interethnic clashes in Shaoguan, in which, in addition to the deaths of the two Uyghurs, 118 people were injured. The earliest reports of the disturbances in Urumqi referred to a group of some 300 protesters, mostly Uyghurs, who organised a sit-down protest in People’s Square in the centre of the city at around 1700 to demand an investigation into the deaths in Shaoguan and to mourn the victims: the demonstrators believed that the real number of casualties in Shaoguan had been higher. The crowd gradually grew to around 1000 and when police arrived the demonstrators refused to disperse. Uyghur sources contend that riot police (units of the People’s Armed Police [PAP], or *wujing*) had beaten protestors with truncheons and electric cattle prods, fired shots into the area and pinned individuals to the ground before taking at least forty of them away in police vehicles. Xinhua, the official Chinese news agency, reported that protesters had ‘attacked passers-by, torched vehicles and interrupted traffic on some roads’ but did not make it clear whether this took place before or after the police intervention. There were a number of casualties, including possibly two deaths, the demonstrators dispersed under pressure from the police but regrouped later.<sup>23</sup>

By the following day, reports, even those from official Chinese sources which tend to play down unrest, were making it clear that the demonstration had been much more serious than previously suggested and that casualties were much higher. Reports from the China News Agency, not as authoritative as Xinhua but regarded as semi-official, quoted Li Zhi, the Urumqi city Communist Party Secretary, as having put the death toll at 140 during a press conference that he gave on the morning of Monday, July 6. Xinhua itself reported a death toll of 129 and put the number of injured at 816; government sources claimed that the demonstrations had involved 300–500 people while sources from the Uyghur community in China and in exile suggested that it had been on the order of 3000. An overnight curfew was strictly enforced, and Xinhua also reported that ‘the situation was under control’, which in effect meant that most of Urumqi was effectively under martial law and many of the city’s main routes were closed to traffic. Television news bulletins ‘showed footage of rioters throwing rocks at police and overturning a police car, and smoke billowing from burning vehicles’. Television in China is entirely controlled by the state, and Uyghur groups have argued that the picture painted by reports such as this is a misrepresentation of their peaceful protest which had been subject to a violent attack by the Chinese authorities and that

subsequent violence was a response to this attack. The chronology of the demonstration and the violence is contested, and it is difficult to establish an accurate timetable.<sup>24</sup>

Xinhua and the other state-controlled press and broadcasting organisations moved rapidly to establish dominance over the media coverage of the violence, not only domestically but also in the international coverage in both Chinese and English. Xinhua reports from July 6 onwards were remarkable not only for the level of detail, unprecedented in its reports on Xinjiang, but for the attempt at balance, even though the end product was predictable: the disorder was blamed on external forces rather than on the internal conflict that had been building for decades and the Han population of Urumqi were represented as innocent victims of Uyghur violence.

What had been detailed and at times surprisingly even-handed reporting merged seamlessly into an analysis of the causes of the conflict which moved swiftly to charge Rebiya Kadeer and the émigré World Uyghur Congress (WUC) with inciting the violence. On Saturday evening, according to Xinhua, 'information began to spread on the internet, calling for demonstration[s] in People's Square and South Gate in Urumqi City'. On Sunday, 'Rebiya called her accomplices in China for further instigation'. Following this, 'rioters came to the street at around 1900 Sunday. They gathered, marched and demonstrated, which developed into violent acts of beating, smashing, looting and burning in some places'. In the early hours of Monday morning the police in Urumqi issued an 'urgent notice' which read: 'From 1 am to 8 am on July 6, police will impose traffic control in certain areas in the city of Urumqi. Passage in these areas is not allowed for any vehicle'. The reports were accompanied by photographs of damage to shops (both convenience stores) on Tianchi Street and another location, firefighters of the People's Armed Police dealing with burning buses on Dawannan Street and casualties being rushed to the emergency ward in an unnamed Urumqi hospital.<sup>25</sup>

The level of concern of the Chinese government at the unrest in Urumqi was underlined when President Hu Jintao cancelled his planned visit to the G8 summit in Italy and flew back to China to deal with the crisis, leaving Dai Bingguo, a member of the State Council, to stand in for him. Not only was this inconvenient but it was also a considerable loss of face for President Hu and for China. The central government had not made any immediate statement on the violence but after a special meeting of the Politburo that was convened to discuss the crisis on President Hu's return to Beijing, Xinhua issued a statement threatening the severest punishment for anyone who had planned, organised or played a key role in the violence.<sup>26</sup>

On Thursday, July 9, four days after the initial demonstrations, Urumqi was effectively under the control of the military: thousands of troops patrolled the streets and 'helicopters dropped leaflets and trucks blared out messages, appealing for calm and blaming extremists for [the] violence'. Some shops and mosques were open but the presence of troops on streets that bordered Uyghur and Han neighbourhoods prevented many normal activities from taking place.<sup>27</sup>

Friday is the most important day of the week in Muslim communities as the *juma* prayers attract most worshippers to the mosque and mosques function as

social and community centres as well as places for prayer and study. In Urumqi, Friday, July 10, began with the re-imposition of the overnight curfew and an instruction that all mosques should remain closed. However, crowds of worshippers succeeded in opening at least two of the mosques and police reportedly allowed prayers to go ahead for fear of provoking another incident. The authorities were confused, and inconsistent and riot police did disperse a group of people who were demonstrating after having prayed at the White Mosque, arresting some of them. The atmosphere in Urumqi remained tense and many students and migrant workers were reported as having tried to leave the city.<sup>28</sup>

### **Southern Xinjiang in 2010–11**

Observations in Xinjiang during the summer of 2010 indicate that the level of religious activity in Xinjiang and the nature of restrictions imposed by the Chinese state are far more complex than is usually suggested. The situation varies from region to region and from city to city; the experience of Uyghurs in the rural areas is not the same as in the urban areas and social status is also an important factor. There is greater overt repression of religious activity in Kashgar than there is in Khotan, and particularly in the rural areas around Khotan. In general, the scattered villages appear to be left to their own devices, whereas the concentration of people and mosques in Kashgar is perceived to be a greater threat to social stability and the authority of the party-state. In Kashgar itself, it is apparent that religious activity in the major traditional centres has been either constrained or completely closed down. The Heytgah (Id Gah) Mosque remains open for regular prayers but it does not have the range of religious and commercial services that can be found in mosques in other parts of the Muslim world, including the Hui areas of China. The Appaq Khoja shrine is completely devoid of any overt religious activity and is simply a tourist attraction. It was the symbol of temporal and spiritual authority and the centre of administration for the traditional Sufi rulers of Kashgaria and because of this heritage of elite Sufism it remains a greater potential threat, however distant, to the Chinese authorities as a focus of Islamic and Uyghur nationalist dissent than other institutions in the region.<sup>29</sup>

### **Continuation of violent conflict, 2011**

In the aftermath of the Urumqi disturbances, China introduced strict security measures throughout Xinjiang. In Urumqi itself, thousands of surveillance cameras (a system that had proved successful in Kashgar) were installed throughout the city. Protected by a shell that was deemed ‘riot proof’, they were mounted at strategic locations, including bus and railway stations, schools and shops, and were reported to be monitored twenty-four hours a day. More than 5000 extra police were recruited in the year since the riots.

This was accompanied by mass detentions, arrests and reports of numerous death sentences, with or without trial. Amnesty International has maintained that nine death sentences had been carried out and twenty-six more people had been

sentenced to death. At least 1000 people were thought to have been detained for longer or shorter periods of time and countless others disappeared, many not of their own volition.

Official accounts of the violence recorded the deaths of 197 people, with 1700 injured. These figures are not disputed but the narrative and the analysis of the causes of the violence are. The authorities continued to maintain that violence erupted when Uyghurs attacked Han Chinese citizens, but this is challenged by Amnesty International and émigré Uyghur organisations who insist, on the basis of interviews with Uyghurs who had escaped China, that heavy-handed police tactics and attacks on peaceful demonstrators were the real cause. As has been shown in Chapter 3, the latter is the more convincing and the outcome was a continued feeling that the views of Uyghurs were not taken seriously and that they were still treated as second-class citizens.<sup>30</sup>

### **Wang Lequan replaced**

One highly visible change in the wake of the Urumqi disturbances was the recall of Wang Lequan, who had been appointed Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Communist Party branch in 1994 and had held the post for sixteen years. He was regarded as a tough and inflexible leader who had cracked down on any sign of resistance with a rod of iron. After the 2009 riots, however, the Han Chinese of Urumqi, whose support he had counted on, turned on him and criticised him for not bringing the situation under control quickly enough. He was removed but far from being purged he was appointed to the powerful Political and Legal Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, where he served as deputy to the ill-fated Zhou Yongkang. Wang retired from front-line politics in November 2012 at the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

Wang Lequan was replaced by Zhang Chunxian who was transferred from Hunan where he had been provincial party secretary since 2005. Zhang appeared to have a more flexible approach to resolving crises in Xinjiang, and within the year he had launched a public relations campaign focussing on the need for greater economic development in the region. He made highly publicised appearances in Urumqi, and two years after the riots he was seen 'talking, toasting and tossing back beers with hawkers and locals at two night markets' in the regional capital. Nur Bekri, the Uyghur chairman of the regional government, promised further opening to foreign trade and investment, the development of Special Economic Zones and closer economic cooperation with Xinjiang's neighbours. At a central work conference on Xinjiang in 2010, there were proposals that Xinjiang should become the 'bridgehead of China's opening-up policy to the West'. The isolation of southern Xinjiang was already being reduced by the construction of the Kashgar-Khotan railway which began in December 2008 and by December 2010 was being used for transporting freight. Passenger traffic began on June 28, 2011.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the move to a less oppressive approach to security, conflict continued in Xinjiang, especially to the south of the Taklamakan Desert. Both Kashgar and Khotan were the scenes of conflict and bloodshed in the summer of 2011. The

reasons behind the violence are confused and disputed but some of the essential facts are clear.

### **Khotan and Kashgar, continuing violence**

Violence continued after the replacement of Wang Lequan. In the Nuerbage Street area of Khotan on July 18, a group of Uyghurs armed with knives and explosive devices attacked first the local industrial and commercial office and then the police station located in a commercial quarter close to a mosque and a bazaar specialising in the sale of jade and carpets. Hostages were taken and during a rescue operation, at least one police officer, two of the hostages and some of the attackers were killed. Among the grievances of these Uyghurs were: the detention of many young male family members without trial around the time of the anniversary of the July 2009 Urumqi riots and attempts to ban women from wearing black headscarves and robes. A campaign to prevent Uyghur women from wearing 'black veils and traditional Islamic black outfits' had been under way for several months, the authorities insisting that this particular form of dress had only become popular after the July 2009 riots. The Great Bazaar in Khotan was banned from selling veils for a period of three months and the ban on veiling had been strictly imposed in Karakash (Qaraqash Moyu) County during May and June: Qaraqash extends northwards from Khotan city into the Taklamakan Desert and is a strongly religious area as it includes the shrine of the tombs of Imam Asim and his son. Although there were claims that more women veiled themselves after 2009, full black veils were not particularly in evidence in Karakash or elsewhere in the Khotan area during 2010.

The immediate trigger for the violence was a heavy-handed suppression by People's Armed Police and other 'security personnel' of a demonstration to protest at a decision by the local authorities to confiscate farmland for redevelopment. A number of Uyghurs were injured and thirteen were arrested. Uyghur émigré sources reported that twenty people died in this incident, fourteen beaten to death and six shot dead by the security forces.

Chief Regional Information Officer Hou Hanmin characterised this as an organised armed assault, alleging that the attackers were armed with explosive devices and grenades. Later, official reports confirmed that the death toll was much closer to the Uyghur estimates (eighteen, including fourteen demonstrators, two police officers and two hostages) but claimed that the rioters were 'armed with axes, knives, daggers, Molotov cocktails and explosive devices'. They 'crazily beat, smashed and set on fire the police station and hung flags of extreme religion on the top of the station'. Local people said that some of the attackers did not have local accents and may have been from Kashgar or Aksu. If this is the case it would indicate that activists were involved and that it was not simply a spontaneous local demonstration.<sup>32</sup>

The conflict in Khotan affected commerce badly. Many shops, particularly those owned by Han, were closed as their owners feared more attacks; there were rumours that the throats of a Han couple had been cut. Khotan is renowned for its

jade and one of the businesses closed was the Khotan Jade Market. Unity Square and the surrounding streets which had been a shopping and entertainment district were virtually deserted and in the Grand Bazaar and other mainly Uyghur areas there were no Han people to be seen.<sup>33</sup>

In Kashgar the violence broke out on July 30, just before the Ramadan fast. There had been announcements from the local authorities that there would be a crackdown on 'illegal religious activities' during the month of Ramadan. There were two explosions, one from a minivan late at night. A lorry was hijacked at traffic lights; the driver was stabbed, and the vehicle was driven into pedestrians on a crowded street where Han Chinese workers regularly gather at food stalls: six or seven people died and almost thirty were injured, most of them severely enough to be taken to hospital. On the afternoon of July 31, a restaurant in Kashgar was set on fire and the owner and a waiter were killed, although later reports put the death toll at six and claimed that five suspects had also been shot and killed. Although no specific grievances have been mentioned in connection with these attacks, the outrage of the citizens of Kashgar at the demolition of the traditional Uyghur houses in the centre of the old city is likely to have been a contributory factor.

Chinese sources claimed that suspects had been detained and that the ringleaders had received training in firearms and explosives from the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement in Pakistan before 'infiltrating' China again. Later reports indicated that two Uyghur suspects, hiding in a cornfield outside Kashgar, were shot dead by police.<sup>34</sup>

### **'Three external forces'**

In spite of what might appear to be overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence that the violence in Xinjiang is essentially the result of local issues and is the current phase of a long-standing historical conflict, the Chinese government insists that it is caused by external forces hostile to China and that without these the situation in Xinjiang would be normal.

The official Chinese position, which is also accepted by many otherwise well-informed Chinese (but not by most Uyghurs), further maintains that in general people in Xinjiang are content with government policies and that all the trouble has been stirred up by a small minority of malcontents, urged on by émigré groups with the support of Western governments. The official position is set out in two 'white papers' published by the State Council and in a report by the Xinjiang regional Communist Party Committee, policy documents that were part of the government's response to the 2009 disturbances in Urumqi.<sup>35</sup> Beijing blames the conflict on what have come to be known as the three external forces [*sangu shili*]: separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. There is no doubt that these exist both inside and outside Xinjiang. However, the influence of political Islam is not great and there have been relatively few terrorist assaults (as opposed to demonstrations and protests) inside Xinjiang. Uyghur émigré communities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – and Istanbul and Munich – have certainly kept alive the spirit of Eastern Turkestani nationalism, but there is no evidence to indicate that

they have actively organised terrorist groups in Xinjiang. More recently China has criticised the WUC, which is based in the United States and has been reinvigorated by the arrival of the exiled Rebiya Kadeer, for organising demonstrations and other anti-Chinese activities. Once again, although there is no doubt that the WUC actively supports the idea of independence for Xinjiang, there is no evidence that it controls groups within Xinjiang and indeed the difficulty of communication with underground political organisations in the region militates against this argument. In the past, Beijing has also blamed the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) for causing unrest. However, as has been demonstrated, there is no evidence that this organisation has ever existed as a significant political force in Xinjiang, although a small group with that name does appear to have been active in South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and possibly also in Gilgit.

It is the dire situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang that is at the root of the conflict. Only when the real culprits – poverty, marginalisation and discrimination – are defeated will the conflict be satisfactorily resolved. There is no immediate prospect of this being achieved. As has been shown, this is an ongoing conflict that dates back to the 1930s at least, and these latest clashes are local manifestations of the larger conflict. The motive for the conflict from the Uyghur side is primarily nationalist – independence from China. Islam is the central part of their culture and they believe that they would be freer to worship in an independent state. Islam is fundamental to their lives but there is very little evidence of Islamic fundamentalism or Islamism in Xinjiang in the sense that it is found in Pakistan. In the long-term they want independence; in the shorter term, they seek freedom to worship in their own mosques and Sufi lodges and to educate their children according to Islamic principles. They also fear that the Uyghur language is under threat and wish to see its teaching extended whereas it is being suppressed. China seeks to impose a single model of development on the whole of the PRC, based on the culture of the Han majority, and this has created serious problems in the frontier area of Xinjiang.

### **Death of an Uyghur militant in North Waziristan**

At the beginning of March 2010, the official English language newspaper, *China Daily*, reported a statement issued by Pakistani intelligence staff that three people, including the leader of a group it named as the Turkestani Islamic Party (TIP), had been killed on February 15 by a missile launched from a US drone in North Waziristan. This is one of the semiautonomous tribal territories in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) within Pakistan but on the borders with Afghanistan and is close to the area in which Hasan Mehsun, said to have been the leader of a small group known as the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement, was killed in 2003. The name of the militant killed in 2010 was given as Abdul Haq al-Turkistani; this is an Arabic style of name rather than an Uyghur one and is clearly a *nom de guerre*. He was said to have been linked to Al Qaeda but his death was reported by a spokesman for the Pakistan Taliban. In 2002 al-Turkistani is said

to have appeared in a video broadcast on an Islamist website in which he called for Chinese people to be attacked, both in Xinjiang and outside China.<sup>36</sup> Strange reports began to emerge in 2014 suggesting that he had not been killed after all. There is as little reliable information about TIP as there is about ETIM, although it has a significant internet presence and presents itself as a well-organised military organisation. As far as can be ascertained, TIP is probably the successor to ETIM, and operates in a small way inside the tribal areas. It is difficult to find compelling evidence on the size or effectiveness of any of these militant groups or whether they have any real, rather than imagined, links with Al Qaeda. The suggestion that they have connections with the Pakistani Taliban Tehrik-i-Taliban is more persuasive. As with ETIM, there are no clear links between TIP and violent incidents in Xinjiang itself.

For the Chinese authorities, on the other hand, the death of this militant was further evidence of external interference in the affairs of Xinjiang. It would be more accurate to characterise it as the externalisation of the existing internal conflict: some Uyghur militants have migrated from Xinjiang to the Pakistan-Afghan frontier after agreements between Beijing and Central Asian governments made it unsafe for them to stay in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan. By 2011 the TIP was beginning to recruit on a significant scale and, as the war in Syria became the focus of international jihadist militancy, there were convincing reports of Uyghur militants associated with the TIP fighting in Syria. The Chinese government's claims that there was an externally organised Uyghur fighting force were turning into a self-fulfilling prophecy. All avenues of non-violent opposition had been suppressed, and Uyghur resisters had no alternative to militancy and violence.<sup>37</sup>

At the time of writing the campaign by the Pakistani military to defeat the Pakistani Taliban continues. Life for guerrilla groups in the frontier area has become more difficult, and it has become more difficult for refugees from Xinjiang to move to Pakistan. Uyghur staking flight from repression and conflict in Xinjiang have begun to leave China via the province of Yunnan in the south; by 2014 many had sought asylum in South-East Asia, notably Laos and Thailand, and some militants may have established links with Jemaah Islamiyah in Malaysia and other Islamist groups in the region.

### **Chen Quanguo, Tibet and the establishment of a security state in Xinjiang**

In 2016 a new political initiative to resolve the violent conflict was launched in Xinjiang by Chen Quanguo. Chen had been Party Secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region from 2011–16 and was transferred to the equivalent position in Xinjiang in August 2016. As party secretary he is the senior political figure in Xinjiang and outranks the governor of the region. The governor, Shohrat Zakir, who had taken office in January 2015, is an Uyghur from Ghulja (Yining) whose family have had a long association with the Chinese Communist Party. Nur Bekri, the previous Uyghur governor, was transferred in December 2014 to a central government post that was not focussed on minority ethnic issues.

Chen, a Han Chinese who was born in Henan Province in 1955, was among the first cohort of students to graduate after the Cultural Revolution and rose through the ranks of the CCP and government before becoming Acting Governor (later Governor) of Hebei Province in 2009. In August 2011 he was appointed Party Secretary in Tibet, an unexpected move as he had no previous experience of working in ethnic minority areas. He remained in Tibet until August 2016 when he was transferred to Xinjiang, a move widely seen as a vote of confidence in the way that he had managed conflict in Tibet where he had introduced a new and more authoritarian security system.

Chen Quanguo's strategy for Xinjiang became more widely known after August 2016 when he succeeded Zhang Chunxian as Xinjiang's Communist Party Secretary. Zhang's performance had been low key, and he was criticised for being lacklustre and prioritising economic improvement over security. Chen proceeded to introduce new and draconian methods of repression to Xinjiang, almost all of which had previously been rehearsed in Tibet.

A network of new 'convenience police posts' was constructed. They are manned day and night and are supplied with first aid kits and other items to assist in emergencies. More significantly from the security point of view they are equipped with surveillance cameras and can rapidly be converted to checkpoints in the event of any disorder. Large numbers of auxiliary police have also been recruited. Families have been enrolled in a version of the 'double-linked household management system' that Chen had instituted in Tibet. In this system, groups of ten families are required to spy on one another to check on security threats and risks of poverty – the double link. The intention is to appraise households on a regular basis and reward or admonish them depending on their reports.

Although this and its predecessor in Tibet have been presented as innovations, they are essentially a revival of systems of local control that were practised in China under the Ming and Qing dynasties. The 'double-linked household management system' has been borrowed with little modification from the *baojia* system of social control that operated during the later dynasties of the Chinese empire.

These draconian surveillance methods have been paralleled by a further onslaught on religious activities in Xinjiang, including forcing restaurants to remain open during Ramadan, billeting cadres in the homes of families to monitor their religious behaviour and even prohibiting parents from giving newborn babies names that are considered to be dangerously Islamic. Some of these repressive measures have been implemented by the regional government for the whole of Xinjiang, but there are other local initiatives on similar lines. It is by no means clear that all these government instructions will be obeyed. On the basis of previous experience, it is likely that this additional repression will curb overt religious activity and related acts of resistance in the short term – perhaps while Chen Quanguo remains in post – but in the longer term will be the source of great resentment which is likely to erupt into further conflict. However, if the 'poverty alleviation' measures are genuine – and reduction of poverty is one of the genuine drivers of Xi Jinping's national political strategy – those could assist in conflict reduction.

The policy that attracted most international attention after Chen Quanguo's move to Xinjiang was the confiscation of passports by local police. This is not entirely new but the scale on which the procedure was carried out was unprecedented. The holding of passports by police, to be released in theory on request, was targeted directly at Uyghurs planning to travel abroad, because of government concerns about outside influences on militant activists, but some reports suggest that it affected all residents, including Hui Muslims and Han Chinese.

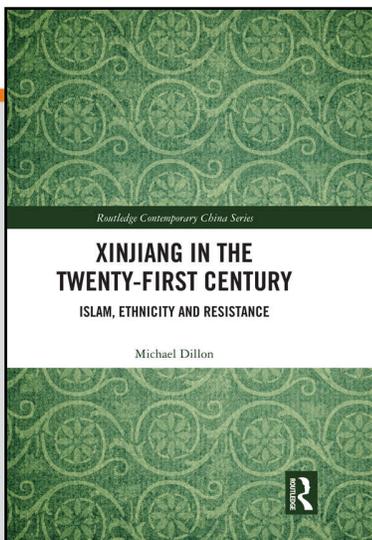
In May 2017, the authorities in Xinjiang confiscated all copies of the Qur'an that had been published before 2012, as part of a campaign against the ownership of 'illegal religious items'. Official translations of the Qur'an published in 2012 were said to contain less 'extremist' material, but it is far from clear how different this translation is from earlier versions. The following June, Muslims in Kashgar and Khotan were fined heavily and forced to attend re-education classes if they had observed Ramadan against official instructions to ignore the religious duty of fasting during daylight hours. Officials were assigned to monitor families during the fasting period, and some were said to be compelling Muslims to eat during the day, in contravention of strict religious observances. In another move, guaranteed to infuriate Uyghurs, a directive on the language to be used in schools was circulated by the Khotan Prefectural Education Department in late July 2017. Although it was phrased carefully, the implication was that Chinese should be prioritised in primary and secondary schools at the expense of Uyghur, in spite of what was supposed to be a bilingual environment.<sup>38</sup>



CHAPTER

6

# CONFLICT IN XINJIANG AND ITS RESOLUTION



This chapter is excerpted from

*Xinjiang in the Twenty-First Century: Islam, Ethnicity  
and Resistance*

by Michael Dillon

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## 8 Conflict in Xinjiang and its resolution

Any detailed study that seriously considers the historical, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and political structures of Xinjiang must conclude that the conflict in the region is so deeply rooted and exceptionally complex that any simplistic analysis of its progress or proposals for its resolution cannot be entertained.

Although the policies of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) towards Xinjiang since 1949 have sometimes succeeded in temporarily suppressing violent activities, they have never approached a resolution of the conflict. It could be argued that this is because no solution to the conflict is possible, but it is also because they have been constrained by Marxist-Leninist ideology or nationalist assumptions from comprehending, or even openly acknowledging, the depth and the complexity of the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Neither the Chinese government, nor indeed any of its predecessors, has resolved the real source of the frustration that has led to outbreaks of violence in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Over the centuries many Uyghur communities (especially in the rural areas) have become completely alienated from the Han majority and the political system that it dominates. At the root of this is their long-term marginalisation and exclusion from many sectors of the economy, including modern extractive and other advanced technological industries for which rural Uyghurs are not considered to have the technical education or an appropriate level of ability in the Chinese language. This does not mean that all Uyghurs are alienated. An urban Uyghur intelligentsia has emerged which has in many ways evolved a *modus vivendi* with the Chinese state: bilingual Uyghurs can be found in professional roles in Xinjiang and other parts of China. This does, however, create the potential for additional levels of conflict and Uyghurs who appear to be too close to the Chinese may find themselves regarded with at best deep suspicion by the more alienated. Some have been condemned as traitors to their own people.

Beijing is not prepared to accept that the violence is the outcome of a long and bitter historical conflict that has ethnic and religious dimensions and in which the Uyghurs might have legitimate grievances. The official standpoint of the PRC is that their correct policies, that would otherwise have brought peace and harmony to Xinjiang, are being undermined by an international conspiracy, including Uyghur émigré organisations, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement and other political adversaries.

Such is the commitment of the government to this way of thinking, particularly under the uncompromising Xi Jinping administration, that it is forbidden to discuss any alternative analysis, whether formally or informally in government circles, in the academic world or in the media. More concerning is the corollary that any proposals for conflict resolution that might arise from alternative judgments are not only dismissed out of hand but put in jeopardy the liberty and livelihood of anyone who voices them.

It is therefore all the more important that suggestions for alternative scenarios and approaches are disseminated as widely as possible, even though, if they emanate from the West, they will without doubt be dismissed as contributions to the conspiracy that many in Beijing believe is at the root of the problem. The following summary of the conclusions arrived at in this book is offered as a contribution to this dissemination which at some time in the future might extend to influential political circles in China:

- 1 The sporadic but often lethal violence in Xinjiang is the latest phase in an ongoing conflict that dates back at least to the 1930s, although it can be traced further back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the Manchu Qing dynasty. It is not simply a conflict between groups of Uyghurs and the Chinese Communist Party, and no solution is possible without understanding this historical perspective. The motive for the conflict from the Uyghur side is primarily local nationalism, combined with what is increasingly referred to as nativism, a determination to protect Uyghur culture and society from Han Chinese migrants. Many Uyghurs have a strong desire for independence from China, or at least genuine autonomy, although most recognise that this is not possible in the near future.
- 2 Islam is also a major factor. The religion is at the centre of Uyghur culture and most Uyghurs are convinced that they would be freer to worship in an independent state. Although Islam is fundamental to their everyday lives, there has historically been very little evidence of Islamic fundamentalism, Islamism or *jihadism* in Xinjiang, in the sense that it is found in Pakistan or other parts of the Islamic world. In the short term what many Uyghurs want is freedom to worship in their own mosques and the *mazars* of their Sufi orders and to educate their children according to Islamic principles. They wish to be able to do this without interference from a government that is not sympathetic to many aspects of their culture, is avowedly atheist and has actively been undermining and restricting their rights to worship. Uyghurs also wish to be able to educate their children in their own language. Many fear that the Uyghur language is under threat as speaking Chinese is increasingly essential for any Xinjiang people who wish to develop their careers and is increasingly the only medium of instruction in schools and colleges. In addition the authorities have tried to prevent different expressions of religious identity, including beards and veils, and this has also produced a negative response.
- 3 Racial discrimination is an important part of the problem. Uyghurs complain with considerable justification that they are treated as second-class citizens in their own country. It is an unshakeable official belief of the CCP leadership

that the ‘great unity of nationalities’, *minzu da tuanjie*, has successfully resolved ethnic conflicts. In practice, racial discrimination still exists.

- 4 Uyghurs involved in demonstrations or protests are automatically categorised as ‘terrorists’: This is a bad practice, which mimics the reaction of the United States to the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. China should avoid this model even though the Global War on Terrorism provided them unexpected cover for their own repression in Xinjiang. Most Uyghurs, whatever their feelings about Chinese rule in Xinjiang, are not involved in armed anti-Chinese activity but they do react strongly when they suffer discrimination at the hands of the police or the local government and this dissent should not be categorised as ‘terrorism’.
- 5 Some Uyghurs have been guilty of violent and often murderous attacks on Han Chinese, other Uyghurs with whom they disagree and institutions of the Chinese state. Some of this has been violence in response to heavy-handed police tactics in raiding houses and arresting large numbers of people suspected of separatist sympathies. Many of these individuals have been detained without trial for long periods, and there are credible reports of persistent ill-treatment and unexplained deaths in custody.
- 6 The official Chinese government position, which is also accepted by many Han Chinese – but not by most Uyghurs – is that in general people in Xinjiang are content with government policies and that all the trouble has been stirred up by a small minority of malcontents, urged on by émigré groups with the support of Western governments. This official position was set out in the two ‘white papers’ that were published by the State Council and in a report by the Xinjiang Regional Communist Party Committee, policy documents that were part of the government’s response to the 2009 disturbances in Urumqi.
- 7 Beijing blames the conflict on what have come to be known as the three external forces [*sangu shili*]: separatism, religious extremism and terrorism. There is no doubt that these exist, both inside and outside Xinjiang. However, the influence of political Islam is not great and there have been relatively few genuine terrorist assaults, as opposed to demonstrations and protests, inside Xinjiang. Uyghur émigré communities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – and Istanbul and Munich – have without doubt kept alive the spirit of Eastern Turkestani nationalism: that is part of their *raison d’être*. There is no objective evidence that they have actively organised terrorist groups in Xinjiang. The World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which is based in the United States, has been criticised for organising demonstrations and other anti-Chinese activities. The WUC actively supports the *idea* of independence for Xinjiang but there is no evidence that it controls groups within Xinjiang; indeed the difficulty of communication with organisations in the region militates strongly against this possibility.
- 8 In the past, Beijing has blamed an organisation named the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) for causing the unrest in Xinjiang. There is no hard evidence that this has ever existed as a significant political force in

Xinjiang, although a small group with that name does appear to have been active in South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and possibly also in Gilgit. A successor group, the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), also operates in a nearby region.

- 9 At the root of the conflict lie the economic and social conditions of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang: problems of poverty, marginalisation and discrimination must be overcome before the conflict can be satisfactorily resolved. China continues to insist on a single model of development for the whole of the PRC, based on the culture of the Han majority. This will not help to solve the problems of Xinjiang or other regions where non-Han cultures are in the majority, such as Tibet and Inner Mongolia. Indeed it is likely to exacerbate them.
- 10 A military or policing solution, such as that exemplified by the draconic rule of Chen Quanguo, can control conflict for a time but will inevitably build up resentment and resistance and in the long term will not resolve the problem. The Xinjiang issue is a political problem and a political solution is necessary. This could be based on reform of the existing Autonomous Region system: such reforms were discussed within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Hu Yaobang. However, in order to discuss reform and a reduction in conflict, the central and regional authorities will need to find some way of negotiating with unofficial groups in Xinjiang. Currently they are not prepared to do this and designate such people as 'terrorists'. Equally, Uyghurs who disagree with Chinese policies dare not identify themselves openly as they have a justifiable fear of being arrested, imprisoned or even executed. Because of this it is virtually impossible for the two sides to negotiate.

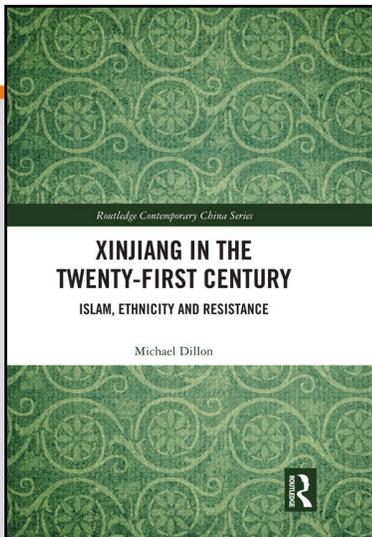
Confidence-building measures designed to bring together disparate groups have had some success elsewhere in permitting political development without large-scale violence. While this could also be possible in Xinjiang, it would require a reversal in the attitude of the CCP and a re-evaluation of the policies of the 1980s. As the dogmatic and narrow policies of the administration of Xi Jinping become increasingly entrenched, such an about-turn seems less and less likely.



CHAPTER

7

# REEDUCATION CAMPS



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by Michael Dillon

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# Postscript: Re-education Camps

After the transfer of Chen Quanguo from Tibet to Xinjiang as Communist Party Secretary in August 2016, the level of repression in the region increased dramatically. By the summer of 2017 a network of permanent re-education camps was under construction, designed to house thousands of Uyghurs detained by the authorities on suspicion of sympathising with separatist ideas. The existence of this undisclosed plan became known when notices were published, inviting bids for new construction projects.<sup>1</sup>

Credible evidence that large numbers of Uyghurs (and members of other Muslim minorities) were being detained has been available for years but bespoke 're-education camps', designed to deradicalise Muslims and turn them into patriotic citizens, were an innovation. Some official Chinese sources have denied that these institutions exist but 'information from 73 government procurement and construction bids valued at around RMB 680 million (approximately USD 108 million) along with public recruitment notices for camp staff and other documents' provides contrary evidence from other official sources, albeit indirectly. Given the scope of these bids, there is no doubt that the network of camps is on a colossal scale and that the numbers to be detained are likely to increase.<sup>2</sup>

There are no reliable estimates for the number of people interned under this system, but human rights observers suggest that it runs into the hundreds of thousands and may grow to one million. One former inmate has estimated that his camp alone held almost 6,000 detainees. The Communist Party secretary of the village of Aqsaray in the Karakash region near Khotan was ordered to target 40% of the population of the village as potential unreliable elements in need of re-education. In another village in Karakash, Yengisheher, it was reported that almost half the adult male population in the 1,700 or more households that constitute the village had been placed in camps. How long they were held was not clear, but their detention was having a deleterious effect on agriculture, on which local people rely, as only women, children and the elderly were available for work in the fields. Reports also claimed that the children of detainees had been removed from their villages and placed in orphanages.

On one level this network of camps reproduces the system of 're-education through labour' (*laojiao*), an extra-judicial process for detaining minor offenders or dissidents that was heavily criticised by Chinese lawyers and formally abolished in 2013. Detention camps in Xinjiang to wean Uyghurs away from actual or potential

‘extremism’ appeared in 2014, possibly using the facilities of the old *laojiao* system. The new network evolved from these early models in response to Chen Quanguo’s insistence that detainees undergo ‘transformation through education’ (*jiaoyu zhuanhua*). Information in the bids indicates that existing facilities are to be reinforced and security strengthened. They resemble prisons but, unlike regular prisoners, the intended detainees have not been tried and sentenced for any criminal activity.<sup>3</sup>

Anecdotal evidence of life in these new detention camps (and no other evidence is currently available) indicates harsh conditions, brutality by staff, solitary confinement, food deprivation and physical assault for those who do not consent to be remoulded. Friends and relatives are frequently denied information about where individuals are detained and there have been several reports of unexpected and unexplained deaths in the camps. The thinking behind the programme, according to the Associated Press news agency, is ‘to rewire the political thinking of detainees, erase their Islamic beliefs and reshape their very identities . . . with almost no judicial process or legal paperwork’. This is grimly reminiscent of the ‘thought reform’ or ‘brainwashing’ programmes of the early years of the PRC.<sup>4</sup>

Not all ‘re-education camps’ are closed prisons. In the Kashgar area, and probably elsewhere, ‘open’ camps hold those deemed to be minor offenders or less of a threat to the state. Detainees in these camps are required to attend during the day but can return home in the evenings. Periods of ‘study’ at these camps can last for months. Uyghurs under the age of 40 are particularly targeted and anyone born in the 1980s and 1990s is regarded as a member of an ‘unreliable and untrustworthy generation’. Although most of those detained are from farming families, writers and teachers have also been held, as have local officials deemed insufficiently enthusiastic about the re-education programmed.<sup>5</sup>

Human rights organisations have been concerned about abuses in Xinjiang for many years. The escalation in 2017 brought the problem to the attention of the United Nations and the European Union, prompted by approaches from scholars in Europe, North America and Asia with specialist knowledge of the Xinjiang conflict.

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