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Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter: Uyghurs and the Colonial Legacy in Contemporary Xinjiang

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Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter:
Uyghurs and the Colonial Legacy in Contemporary Xinjiang

By
Rachel Hale

To
The Department of History
In partial fulfillments of the requirements for
Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut
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ABSTRACT

After former President George W. Bush declared the “war on terror” in 2001 its repercussions extended further than the Middle East into China’s northwest region of Xinjiang where the Uyghurs, a Muslim Chinese ethnic minority have lived for thousands of years. Uyghurs’ have long declared themselves ethnically separate from the Chinese people and therefore should remain politically and nationally independent from the Chinese nation. Conversely, the CCP’s contesting narrative shows the Uyghurs as always being a part of China, and therefore any independence movements are a threat to Chinese unity and national security.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took advantage of “war on terror” rhetoric employed by the U.S. government to label Uyghurs as terrorists and Uyghur nationalism as terrorism. Efforts to quell separatist ideologies have led to widespread persecution and religious and ethnic discrimination; however, the CCP’s narrative shows their actions merely as counter-terrorism tactics. In an era when the fear of terrorism permeates society, is one man’s terrorist another man’s freedom fighter, or is the threat of terrorism too severe?

By delving deeper into Xinjiang’s contested past, particularly the colonial legacy of the Qing Empire, this study will argue that the ‘Xinjiang Problem’ (新疆问题) as it is often called in China, finds its roots further back than 2001, originating in the 18th century when Qing forces marched west towards Xinjiang and established their power in the region. The era of “new imperialism”, a concept describing the pursuit of territorial expansion by Western powers starting in the eighteenth century, brings a fresh understanding to colonialism as it was understood during that time. The relationship between Xinjiang and the ever-present Chinese entity was gradually shaped by the civilizing mission of Qing colonialism and further influenced by eastern forms of Orientalism that have lasted until today. This has caused Uyghur nationalism
to further develop throughout the twentieth century and quickly intensify since 2001, allowing the CCP to label any unrest or discontent as “Islamic” unrest or discontent and therefore must be quelled as a part of the war on terror.
INTRODUCTION

Four months after al-Qaeda committed the attacks on 9/11, President George W. Bush’s administration established Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp to house those allegedly connected to international terror organizations or those who allegedly committed crimes of terror against the United States. At its height, the Camp housed almost eight hundred inmates, most of who were subject to extreme violations of their human rights. A majority of the prisoners hailed from nations where al-Qaeda was active: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen, and also included nations in the vicinity. Not typically noted, twenty-two men among the prisoners were not from the Middle East nor were they suspected members of al-Qaeda or the Taliban, they were Chinese citizens. These men did not look like what we have been conditioned to see as the stereotypical “terrorist”; these men were Uyghur, a Muslim, Chinese ethnic minority whose population of about twenty million live in northwest China’s “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” (XUAR), more commonly referred to as Xinjiang, a region bordering several Middle Eastern countries to its west.

Xinjiang is located in China’s northwest region.

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When President Bush declared the infamous “war on terror” in response to the attacks on 9/11, the U.S. Military moved into Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan with the end goal of defeating terrorism which, as author Sean Kay states is “a tactic, and thus can never be completely ‘ended’.”

The war on terror continues today and is notorious for its anti-Islam and xenophobic rhetoric that has infiltrated nations around the world. In response to Uyghur independence protests and alleged terror activities in Xinjiang, the current leaders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) picked up on the rhetorical advantages of the war on terror and adopted it to frame their representation of all Uyghurs in Xinjiang as terrorists, splittists, and extremists. This contemporary rhetoric of terrorism built upon a longstanding Chinese historical narrative that the Uyghurs and Xinjiang have always been a part of China, and therefore any independence movements are unfounded and contrary to Chinese national security. When the contemporary and historical narratives combined it proved a lethal weapon to the Uyghurs, challenging not only their ability to control the representation of their identity, but also challenging their human rights due to restrictive religious policies targeting specifically Uyghurs.

When President Bush declared the war on terror, this not only gave the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) the green light for massive arrests of Uyghurs in the name of counterterrorism, but also largely excused it in the eyes of the world. Most of the twenty-two men sent to Guantanamo Bay eventually underwent a Combatant Status Review Tribunal, a hearing aimed at determining an inmate’s status as an enemy combatant. Although upon their release a few detainees were still declared enemy combatants even with their adamant refusal of having connections to terror organizations, all were eventually released by 2013 to nations.

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deemed safe for them, including Switzerland, Palau, and Slovakia.\(^3\) The fact that these men were released to nations other than China speaks to the treatment they would receive there, yet the CCP still alleges they were all associated with an organization at the time called the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement”, a group of Uyghurs fighting for an independent Islamic nation known as East Turkistan, while one was suspected of having ties to al-Qaeda (today this organization is known as the Turkistan Islamic Party).\(^4\) The CCP also used the war on terror to label activists and protestors as terrorists, including leaders from the World Uyghur Congress, a democratic organization speaking out against human rights abuses faced by the Uyghurs. Although the U.S. Department of State eventually removed the East Turkistan Islamic Movement from its list of foreign terror organizations, and has only ever supported the World Uyghur Congress, the PRC continues to implement harsher policies and blindly label Uyghurs as terrorists.

By delving deeper into Xinjiang’s contested past, particularly the colonial legacy of the Qing Empire, this study will argue that the “Xinjiang Problem” (新疆问题) as it is often called in China, finds its roots further back than 2001, originating in the 18\(^{th}\) century when Qing forces marched west towards Xinjiang and established their power in the region. The era of “new imperialism”, a concept describing the pursuit of territorial expansion by Western powers starting in the eighteenth century, brings a fresh understanding to colonialism as it was understood during that time. As we will see, the relationship between Xinjiang and the ever-present Chinese entity was gradually shaped by the civilizing mission of Qing colonialism and further influenced by eastern forms of Orientalism that have lasted until today. Chinese


interpretations conflict with recent western historiographies of Xinjiang’s past and origins as an integral part of the Chinese empire from its inception, instead, historians of Chinese history such as Kirk Larson, Peter Perdue, and Emma Teng, argue it was an acquired colony that was officially integrated into the Qing over two centuries of rule. The acquisition of and rule over many culturally and ethnologically diverse regions demonstrates the imperialist nature of the Qing Empire. However it also shows it is the root of Uyghur discontent with the idea they have “always been Chinese” that has led to Uyghur ethnic and religious persecution since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained control more than half a century ago. It has caused Uyghur nationalism to further develop throughout the twentieth century and quickly intensify since 2001, allowing the CCP to label any unrest or discontent as “Islamic” unrest or discontent and therefore must be quelled as a part of the war on terror.

Considering Xinjiang’s colonial past, it becomes necessary to question the assertion that Uyghurs or Uyghur organizations are inherently connected to Islamic extremism, instead acting as freedom fighters, victims of colonialism fighting for freedom from their colonizers. Ultimately, the Uyghurs offer a new perspective to the question of terrorist versus freedom fighter, where certain organizations straddle the fine line of striving for independence while also simultaneously using an approach that could be deemed as terrorist activity.

**Structure and Organization**

Chapter One will discuss the history of Qing colonial expansion in central Asia and it’s historical implications for the Uyghur population that presently inhabits the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The chapter will consider how the Qing Empire established their rule over the territory historically occupied by this ethnic group, how the borders were established, and how the Qing interacted with the Uyghur population it colonized. I will delve into the Uyghur’s
colonial experience during that time and how the acquisition of Xinjiang changed the Qing Empire and the manner in which it ruled. This chapter will cover four distinct time periods to showcase this: pre-Qing, the Ten Great Campaigns, the Muslim Rebellion, and post-Muslim Rebellion. This timeline, in addition to the historiographical analyses of western historians Perdue, Larson, and Teng will demonstrate the progression of Qing imperialism to Qing colonialism that ultimately allows Xinjiang to be considered a colony of the Qing Empire.

Chapter Two will reconstruct the CCP’s view of Xinjiang, retracing the same history covered in Chapter One but from the perspective of the Chinese Nationalist historians who build a contending narrative of the Qing past, framed by the ubiquitous “Century of Humiliation” trope deployed by China’s contemporary leaders to capture the anti-imperialist vision of China as a victim of imperialism during the period in question. The chapter will also pay particular attention to the ways in which current policies toward Xinjiang echo the “civilizing” impulse of their former Qing overlords. Building on the Qing legacy that established a “Yellow Man’s Burden” orientation toward the Uyghurs, I will explore current Chinese governmental policies implemented exclusively against Uyghurs that derive from this orientalist approach. I will also consider the ways in which Xinjiang is represented by party officials, the media (which is state-sponsored), as well as Han citizens to demonstrate the ways in which this orientalist approach continues to frame discussions and representations of this ethnic minority.

Chapter Three will examine the history of the Uyghur population under Communist rule since 1949 and the ways in which the Uyghurs have faced oppressive policies that specifically target Islam, as well as institutional discrimination that restricts Uyghur social and economic mobility. Internal settler colonialism under Communist rule has increased the Han population density that prevents Uyghurs from obtaining many of the same opportunities afforded to the
Han majority, therefore ethnic tensions continue to rise and cause political instability in the region. As the CCP continues to institute new policies, which alienate Uyghurs from society, it raises the question if Uyghur resistance and violence should be considered terrorism as suggested by the Chinese government, or as a struggle for self-determination in the face of oppression.

The fourth chapter applies the contemporary situation in Xinjiang to both Uyghur violence and protest, asking the question of terrorist or freedom fighter. This chapter will demonstrate that contested official representations of who they are and how they have defined their goals as an ethnic minority. Particular attention will be paid to the development and characteristics of Uyghur nationalism and how this nationalism informs not only every day life in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, but also most importantly the increasing number of Uyghur protest movements that have surfaced in recent decades. This chapter will argue that through protest, both subtle and outright, Uyghurs strive to protect their ethnic and national identity. As I will illustrate through a case study detailing the large 2009 protest, the concern to preserve Uyghur identity has become central to many people’s lives as Uyghurs identify their protest movements with notions of freedom fighting as they seek to challenge the statist framing of their protests as terrorism, a political narrative that grows stronger every day.

Finally, the Conclusion will consider the reassessment of the Qing as a colonial empire, the narrative of Xinjiang’s history adopted by the CCP, and current day implications for the Uyghurs in the framework of “terrorist vs. freedom fighter”. Looking at democratic Uyghur organizations, such as the World Uyghur Congress, the Turkistan Islamic Party, and every day Uyghurs engaging in protest against the CCP, I will determine how this framework applies to each organization’s actions, and if the CCP should reconsider their role in the war on terror. I will also offer prescriptions for the future of how the CCP, the U.S., and the international
community in general should approach the situation in Xinjiang. My hope is that this thesis can be a catalyst to start new dialogue surrounding the treatment of Muslims around the world that can be applied to the decision-making and implementation of policies within Xinjiang by the CCP, as well as to bring awareness to yet another human rights issue with direct connections to the United States that most Americans are unaware of.

Prior to engaging with this thesis, there are a few terms that require further explanation. Although the current day XUAR was not officially recognized as Xinjiang until the latter half Qing rule, to avoid confusion I will use the term “Xinjiang” throughout the thesis to designate those lands where the Uyghurs resided prior to and during Qing rule. Throughout the thesis it is also referred to as the northwest region, which lies north of Tibet and east of modern day Kazakhstan. While there were other Muslims who lived and continue to live in Xinjiang, such as the Hui ethnic minority, this thesis focuses on the Uyghurs during and after the Qing dynasty, therefore in historical events mentioned such as the Muslim Rebellion, the term “Muslim” includes other minorities who lived alongside the Uyghurs but have much smaller populations and live across China, unlike the Uyghurs who have historical roots to the region.

Many around the world today struggle with understanding what constitutes terrorism and constantly live in fear of being the next victim. Moreover, Muslims have become the scapegoat and face xenophobia and discrimination from their own governments and neighbors. The Uyghurs in Xinjiang have fallen victim to this dangerous rhetoric that has allowed the Chinese government to impose oppressive policies against the entire population, while labeling their fight for independence as a national security threat. This thesis is an attempt to shine light on the political situation in Xinjiang in the hopes of bringing a fresh understanding and new dialogue to Uyghur nationalism that is labeled by the Chinese government as terrorism.
CHAPTER ONE
The Uyghur Narrative: Qing Colonialism in Xinjiang

Introduction

Until recently, the experiences of Western empires as perpetrators of imperialism and their African and Asian victims have dominated colonial studies. Studies exploring the rise of the Japanese empire as a perpetrator of imperialism has somewhat corrected this one sided view; scholarship of Japan’s conquest of Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan between the 19th and 20th centuries show the mimetic nature of the Japanese in their style and structure of rule. However, such a view fails to recognize that the expansion of the Qing Empire during the 18th and early 19th centuries can also be interpreted as an imperialist project. Sinologists Peter Perdue, Kirk, Larson, and Emma Teng have demonstrated how the Qing Empire extended its hand to reach into and exert power over other previously established sovereign peoples and lands. They have sought to understand this question by developing and refining three interpretive frames: imperialism, nationalism, and orientalism. They enable us to re-evaluate the Manchu conquest of China and subsequent Qing rule as a clear example of informal imperialism that later developed into the more formal strategy of colonial rule. Examining the Qing Empire in relation to European imperial empires of the time will reveal the ways in which Qing expansionism became a mirror image of these empires in its form, strategies, and goals.

As this thesis will demonstrate, the contested nature of the Qing’s imperial past informs one of the most significant political questions within the PRC today: how best to understand the nature of Uyghur activism in Xinjiang today? Are Uyghur activists in Xinjiang best understood

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5 Topics in colonial studies tend to focus on large, Western empires such as the British in India and China, the United States in Japan, and the French and Dutch empires colonizing throughout Africa. For example, the Sino-British Opium War of 1939-1942 was the result of British expansion into China and resulted in the cession of Hong Kong to the British and a series of unequal treaties opening up cities such as Shanghai to international trade.
as terrorists or freedom fighters? As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the context for understanding this contemporary debate and contestation over Uyghur identity is firmly rooted in the Qing Empire’s colonial past. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, it is possible to reevaluate and resolve the contemporary contending representations of Uyghurs as either ‘terrorist’ or ‘freedom fighter’ when this colonial past is taken into account. For although the PRC government often claims that China enjoys the longest continuous history of any civilization in the world, as this study will demonstrate through the example of Xinjiang, China did not experience an uninterrupted unified progression from the birth of the Qin Empire in 221 BC through the 1911 Revolution. Rather, a dynamic history of revolts, protests, political upheavals, in response to the near constant expansion across the western and southern frontiers define much of Chinese history. The communist regime’s representation of dynastic history as a stable and constant Chinese presence in the geographical territory it presently claims as its national borders rather than a dynamic expansion generates a vastly different representation than that portrayed by Western scholars and historians. For Xinjiang, where the land experienced influxes of invasions and migrations for centuries, from the An Lushan Rebellion in the Tang Dynasty to the movement of Mongol nomads from the east and Russians from the north, a conflicting narrative of Xinjiang and the Uyghur’s history currently complicates the ways in which the region’s history is understood today. While China was certainly a victim of Western and Japanese imperialist intrusions from the mid 19th to mid 20th centuries, taking a more refined look into the structure and motives of the Qing Empire shows a people with similar imperialist desires to those of Western and Japanese powers for geographical and economic expansion, which brought Qing forces westward. As we will see, these analyses challenge the nationalist Chinese narrative of the Qing Empire, where tropes such as ‘unification’ rather than ‘conquest’
describe their relationship with the regions that were acquired during Qing rule. Choosing to focus on particular figures and moments in Qing history paints an entirely different picture than those represented in modern historiographical studies. Understanding the ways in which Qing politics and governance influenced ethnic relations between Muslims and Chinese, and more specifically, Uyghurs and Han Chinese, can bridge the gap between the past and the present. Thus, the Qing’s march westward into regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet can be understood through two conflicting lens: one, the progression of Chinese unification described by nationalist historians; and two, by Western historians re-evaluating the nature of Qing expansion as part of the Empire’s imperial project. Understanding the complex history of Xinjiang in the context of Chinese nationalist and Western historians is crucial to determining the nature of Qing conquest and how it can later be used to explain the current political climate within Xinjiang and the relationship between Uyghurs and the CCP. This chapter proposes a historical periodization for narrating how the Qing Empire extended its hand to reach into and exert power over other previously established sovereign peoples and land through the events and consequences of four distinct time frames that capture the evolution of the Qing Empire into a colonial power: the pre-Qing era (until 1755), the Qianlong Emperor’s Ten Great Campaigns (1755-1759), the Muslim Rebellion (1864-1877), and the post-Muslim Rebellion period (1877-1911). From the Qing’s first interactions with the region’s indigenous population during the Dzungar genocide, to the Muslim rebellion and subsequent establishment of Qing governance in the region, this chapter will underscore the ways in which the Qing Empire resembled other contemporaneous imperialist empires. Understanding the complex nature of what it means to be an imperialist empire and applying those definitions to the Qing-Uyghur relationship ultimately allows this dynasty’s history to be reassessed and reapplied to modern day society in Xinjiang.
Uyghurs Before the Qing (Until 1755)

Prior to the Qing’s march westward in the mid-eighteenth century, Xinjiang was a space marked by constant fusion and friction among various peoples attempting to gain control and establish the land as their own. The region served as a crossroad among the Middle East, Central Asia, Mongolia, and China for thousands of years, witnessing those whom walk across the land culturally, linguistically, and genealogically influence and interact with one another. Its landscape of desert, steppe, and grasslands lies on the northern fringes of Tibet and is as geographically diverse as it was ethnologically. The ethnic group we know today as Uyghurs lived to the south in the Tarim Basin, originating from the Orkhon River Valley in the Mongolian core lands, and are known to have been in the region for at least a thousand years.\(^6\) They are believed to be descendants of Turkic-people, Iranians, the Xiongnu, and perhaps others whom passed through. The Uyghur khaghanate, where khaghanate refers to a political entity, was comprised of mainly nomads who built a collection of cities and engaged to a certain extent in agriculture. Prior to the Islamicisation of Uyghurs between the tenth and seventeenth centuries with the migration of Muslims across the Eurasian continent and Southeast Asia, they opposed Islam and instead embraced Buddhism and Christianity, however the region was eventually introduced and converted to Islam through the invading Turkic Muslims, which also contributed to the Turkicisation of the Uyghurs.\(^7\) The influence of Buddhism and Christianity practiced by the Mongols to the north and east was still present, although eventually much of the Tarim Basin, and the Uyghurs residing in the more northern Turfan Basin, followed the Muslim sheikhs with the original khans remaining merely as figureheads.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Ibid
\(^8\) Ibid
To the north of the Tarim Basin lies steppe and grasslands, known during the time of the Uyghur khaganate as Dzungaria, occupied by the Dzungars, Buddhist nomads ethnically related to the Mongols. Dzungaria was comprised of several Oirat tribes. Although the Dzungars were Buddhist, having Muslims Uyghurs just to the south constructed a multi-layered society of numerous ethnicities and religions. Dzungaria exerted control over the Uyghurs to a certain extent in the centuries leading up to and in the early years of the Qing dynasty; they did not govern the Uyghurs but did extract from them monetarily through cash taxes and in the form of resources, including grain, cotton, and saffron. When Qing was established in the early to mid seventeenth century and began expanding westward, the multiethnic and multi-layered society of Uyghurs and Dzungars was the first challenge facing the consolidation of Qing power. Dzungar tribes that lived north of Xinjiang in modern-day Mongolia were already fighting with Qing forces for control over Mongol cities – and were largely losing. Dzungaria could also be considered a part of the tributary system, a network of trade relations unique to Chinese history where foreign states or governments paid Beijing for the privilege to trade. As a tribute state, Dzungar caravans met “the quotas both on ‘tribute missions’ to Beijing and at the frontier trade fairs in Suzhou, Gansu”, effectively showing Qing ability in establishing hierarchy over this region and the Dzungars. There is no evidence that the Uyghurs engaged in tribute relations with the Qing, though “the merchants in Dzungar caravans…were themselves likely to come from the Tarim Basin [or] Turfan” where Uyghurs resided, creating a link between the Uyghur population and central Qing government in Beijing. However, while the Qing and Dzungars were engaging in trade they were also simultaneously vying for military control over many

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9 Ibid
10 Ibid
11 Ibid
12 Ibid
Mongol cities. There were times of war and tense periods of peace, but as Qing forces continued to push further west to expand Qing territory, Dzungaria constituted an even greater obstacle in the way.

Until Qing forces entered Dzungaria and the Uyghur khaganate in the mid-eighteenth century, the region was politically and militarily autonomous, only economically engaging in trade with Beijing. Yet, when Dzungaria entered into tribute relations with the Qing it definitively marked the beginning of an informal imperial relationship, and more importantly, gave the Qing the necessary foundation for future ambitions in establishing political and military control over the region as Qing forces continued to march westward.

Qianlong Emperor’s Ten Great Campaigns (1755-1759)

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Manchus were still very much focused on establishing power in the east, where the Ming still posed a threat to the south and there was much to build in the north in Manchuria. Military conquest served as a way to build a stronger army to continue the military conquests moving westward. The first conquests of tribes in the northeast served as the beginning formations of the Qing banner system, a military and administrative structure that was central to Manchu society. The banner system would eventually become ‘The Eight Banners’, which tied together those who belonged to a given banner in loyalty to their respective commander. To further strengthen the connection between the banners, each banner commander reported to a centralized leadership at the top. By 1755 the Qing Empire established territory over most of the land known today as China and reached into much of modern-day Mongolia using this banner system. It allowed Qing forces to move westward,

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14 Ibid
and out of fear Dzungaria would keep absolute control over its territory, they militarily engaged with the Dzungarian forces to claim the land. This eventually led to Qing subjugation of the Uyghurs and more clearly defined its borders through what is known as the “Ten Great Campaigns”, which perpetrated mass genocide on the Dzungar population. The sixth emperor of the Qing dynasty, the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796) is a significant character in Chinese history known chiefly for his role in expanding the Empire through a succession of military campaigns. He is responsible for integrating the northwest into the Qing Empire; nearly a century before the Qing fell victim to British imperialism on their eastern sea-based coast, he paved the road for their own forms of political and economic conquest on their western land-based coast. The Banner System, a military arrangement unique to the Qing Empire, enabled a strong Qing force to march westward and eventually exert control over what came to be called Xinjiang and those who lived there.

The Ten Great Campaigns as a Colonizing Endeavor

The conquest of the Uyghurs and Dzungars was the result of the successful Qing military strategy to maintain control over the Mongolian frontier.  

Almost forty years before the McCartney Mission when Qianlong emperor declined British requests to establish trade and diplomatic relations with their merchants and travellers, he was responsible for initiating the Ten Great Campaigns, three of which consolidated control over the northwest region through the elimination of the Dzungar people and pacification of the Uyghurs between 1755 and 1759. These campaigns were one part of the Ten Great Campaigns that expanded and consolidated Qing power elsewhere, expanding the size of the Qing empire well beyond borders that

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previously defined the Chinese empire; other campaigns extended into Taiwan, Burma, Vietnam, and Tibet. Campaigns in this region were successful both because Qing forces were militarily stronger than Dzungarian forces, and because the Qing allied itself with Uyghurs who were discontent with the Dzungars taking advantage of the Uyghurs monetarily. The first two campaigns resulted in the genocide of the Dzungars:

Qianlong repeatedly urged his reluctant generals to exterminate all the Dzungars except women, children, and the elderly, who were to be enslaved to Manchu and other Mongol banners. Starvation tactics, smallpox and the suppression of tribal identities of surviving Dzungar slaves led to the disappearance of the Dzungar people and depopulation of the region.\textsuperscript{16}

Eliminating the indigenous Dzungar population was a crucial step in the imperialist mission set forth by the Qianlong Emperor that continued throughout the Qing reign. This is also demonstrated by the third and final campaign that allowed former Uyghur collaborators who supported the Dzungars’ suzerainty over the Uyghurs to be reunited with their community after the genocide. Settler colonialism was used to fill the void left in the Dzungaria Basin from the genocide with Uyghur, Han, Hui Muslim, and Manchu re-settlers, whose relocation was sponsored by the Qing government.\textsuperscript{17} The three campaigns that carried out the Dzungar genocide and pacification of the Uyghurs solidified control over the northwest region and the status of Uyghurs as Qing imperial subjects

Historian Kirk Larsen’s scholarship serves to mediate between the conflicting claims of Chinese nationalist historians who describe the Qing as a victim of Western imperialism and Western historians who challenge the status quo of colonial studies to assert the Qing Empire was also a perpetrator of imperialism. Though he recognizes that the Qing was certainly a victim,


\textsuperscript{17} Starr, S. Frederick. Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004. Pg. 203
his arguments concerning the ways in which Qing imperialism resembled its British and French counterparts is most pertinent to this history. It is argued that the Qing’s “strengthening of its hold on much of its territory in the age of high imperialism” was significant in that the Qing “made a concerted effort to not only stave off challenges to its control in areas including Turkestan [Xinjiang] and Tibet but also bring these areas more closely under control than ever before.”\(^\text{18}\) He offers another important description of this effort, explaining that the Qing marching westward represents a “dramatic expansion of territory under Manchu rule.”\(^\text{19}\) This “dramatic expansion” is most clearly shown through the Qing’s first march westward when the region was home to more than just Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

Before the borders of modern day Xinjiang were created, however, this geographical space was home to two major separate and distinct peoples: the Uyghurs and the Dzungars. And as Larsen argues, “like its counterparts in other places in the world, the Qing used a variety of sophisticated ideologies and practices to manage its large multiethnic empire.”\(^\text{20}\) In the case of Xinjiang, managing the multiethnic empire required the consolidation of its population into essentially one ethnicity that was easier to control. The Qing Empire was not necessarily interested in integrating every ethnicity or group they stumbled upon, but more so in the ability to establish relations through whatever means possible. Because the Dzungars proved to challenge the Qing’s strength, it was necessary to eliminate them. Larsen explains that bringing territories under its control both describes the Qing as an imperial empire and was crucial during its expansion westward.


\(^{20}\) Ibid
Banners and “begs”

The ways in which Qing imposed rule over the Uyghurs also underscores the Qing’s colonizing mission in Xinjiang. The Uyghur-Qing relationship was much more formal than the Dzungar-Qing tributary relationship; after the genocide, Qing banners moved into the region and established a system of government specific to the Uyghurs. The Qing employed administrative institutions of indirect control, where members from elite Muslim families were designated as city or village officials to carry out judicial and administrative duties. These officials, called “begs”, allowed the central structure of the Qing Empire to remain strong in the East, while maintaining their sphere of influence out west. The ability to claim Xinjiang as its own was merely a method of maintaining security within the empire, while also taking advantage of the economic benefits brought by the Silk Road. While Beijing was certainly the center command for the region, it remained largely independent due to the massive distance between the two regions. The Qing style of rule differed greatly from others who attempted to or successfully controlled the region, including Tibet to the south and outer Mongolian regions in China proper’s central region. The Qing strategy required “absorbing, or at least controlling, Mongolia, Dzungaria, Qinghai, and Tibet” where it “ruled it all as a centralized empire through a combination of bureaucratic methods derived from China and the Qing ruling elite’s own linguistic, cultural, historical, and military experience.” This includes the employment of the banner system, a centralized monetary system, and the introduction of Han and Hui (another Muslim ethnic group) into the region to be integrated into society. At this time, the structure of governance allowed consolidation of the region, but did not require direct, complete control from

Beijing, instead, the *begs* comprised the political system, and the banners within the banner system employed forces of those who lived within the region, although they did still contain Manchu and Mongol troops. The entire region employed one military governor who reported to the emperor in Beijing, however the region’s government still retained much economic independence where grain taxes were used at the local level and not sent to the central power.

Focusing on the expansion into this region, historian Peter Perdue draws upon the more refined modern inquiry into imperialism and new imperialism in his analyses of the Qing Empire throughout his many writings, arguing that in many ways the Qing resembled an imperial, and eventually a strictly colonial empire similar to those in Europe during that time. Imperialism, in its most basic sense, is understood as the imposition of one state onto another with the acquisition of territory and exertion of influence and power. However, as Conklin and Fletcher argue, during the eighteenth century a different type of imperialism, “new imperialism”, begins to take shape that characterizes colonial expansion starting in the early eighteenth century where European powers pursued large expansionist projects. In historians Alice Conklin and Ian Fletcher’s analyses, they seek to address the concept of modern European imperialism an important description of new imperialism during the nineteenth century, describing it as a distinct phenomenon during this period in that it “was primarily political and economic in origin” with its principal actors being “capitalists, politicians, diplomats, soldiers, and ideologues.”

Perdue expands on this definition by focusing on the expansionist activities of the Qing rulers, arguing that like their western counterparts, the Qing ruled over a diverse “collection of peoples with separate identities” and thus deserves comparison with other empires. He provides many

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examples of similarities the Qing share with Western Empires and colonial states, showing the
degree of autonomy still left to the Uyghurs, explaining that “the Qing rulers adapted legal and
bureaucratic structures, as well as personal relationship, to native customs in a sophisticated
manner so as to accommodate difference within a unified empire.”

Allowing indigenous
culture to remain a part of the governing structure represents the Qing’s participation in the era
of new imperialism, where they ruled from afar with sophistication but still upheld the integrity
of Muslim and Uyghur society. During this time, the Qing style of rule is very representative of
new imperialism in which other Western empires were engaging. Historian Steven Harrell’s
description of imperial civilizing projects, describes perfectly Uyghur-Qing relations:

Peripheral peoples are concerned with maintaining their own identity, and thus
resisting any implication that all aspects of their culture, religion, or morals are
unequivocally inferior to those of the civilizing center, but nevertheless participate
to some degree in the project of importing some elements from the center into their
own culture and society.

This situation details an intermediate space between a very informal, distant tributary
relationship and the more overt, formal colonial relationship. After Qianlong’s Ten Great
Campaigns, the Uyghurs were undoubtedly incorporated more closely into the Qing’s central
government, even with its geographical distance, but they were still allowed to maintain
somewhat of a connection with Uyghur and Muslim culture. The simultaneous presence of
Uyghur begs and Qing banners represent a kind of hybrid space whereby the structure is
“deliberately designed as imperial” but reflects the multi-ethnicity of a Uyghur-Qing society.

25 Ibid
26 Harrell, Stevan. “Cultural Encounters on Chinas Ethnic Frontiers.” Cultural Encounters on Chinas
27 Crossley, Pamela Kyle. A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology.
The Muslim Rebellion (1864-1877)

The system of rulership established after the Ten Great Campaigns proved useful and successful for accomplishing Qing goals to expand its territory and economic strength. Although the decades after conquest in 1755 enjoyed economic progression and a growth in infrastructure through a taxation system, previous wars and the distant rule was still an expensive endeavor for the government in Beijing. There was not enough money to pay the soldiers and the strong economy of Xinjiang was not able to support the various payments it needed to make. Moreover, preserving power over Xinjiang from such a distance became increasingly difficult; the fragile structure of the system became clear when Uyghurs and others in the region expressed discontent with the introduction of unfair taxes, the use of corvée, and corruption within the governmental structure. Moreover, the Qing soldiers themselves were weakened significantly by the lack of finances available to them, which was coupled with low morale and ineffective leadership. When the two deeply rooted structural issues collided in 1864 it created a domino effect, where one successful rebellion against Qing governance rapidly spread through the villages and oases, entirely abolishing Qing control in just a few months. This started the Muslim Rebellion lasting from 1864 to 1877, and marked the first time the Empire experienced an actual loss of power over a territory. Unsurprisingly, this was not the first time the Qing Empire experienced unrest within the Empire. The Taiping Rebellion in the south seeking to redirect the social and moral order of Qing society, while the Panthay Rebellion in the southwest began with unrest among Hui Muslims who were dissatisfied with the treatment they received from government officials. However, the Muslim Rebellion differed radically from those such as the Panthay and Taiping

because it strove to achieve independence from the Qing Empire. The rebellion lasted for over a decade and showed not only the fragility of Qing rule over the Muslims, but also that although they were recognized as the governing political entity, the Uyghurs identified with their neighbors to the west and with the greater Islamic world, not with the Chinese and Manchus to the east.\(^{30}\) Therefore, the revolutions imposed specifically by Muslims, and most importantly, Uyghurs, were distinct in their desire to create an independent Muslim state.

The rebellion was an important time for Uyghur society to develop on its own course separate from those who subjugated them. The previous aspect of Qing governance that utilized the position of \textit{begs} was maintained during the rebellion but drastically changed the role of religion in government and society to make it more central. During independence, the Muslim state was only ruled by one leader, Ya’qub Beg, who was the top \textit{beg} official at the time. He was not the self-imposed khan of the region, but instead was referred to by various titles, one of which directly translates to “fatherly holy warrior”, allowing him to be considered by the outside Qing Empire as the champion of the holy war, or rebellion, making the independence distinctly connected to Islam.\(^{31}\) The region did not use a central core of power, but instead, Ya’qub Beg controlled a collection of functionaries and made most of the decisions himself. He split the region into separate provinces, each with a governor he personally appointed, with full responsibility and authority over the province.\(^{32}\) Similarly, Ya’qub Beg appointed all of the military officials, for he was threatened by the possibility of a lapse in their loyalty. Another important aspect of his rule was the revival of Islam into society that started to disappear under Qing rule; observation of Sharia law was enforced and the leaders in the city of Urumqi named

\(^{31}\) Ibid
\(^{32}\) Ibid
the government “Kingdom of Islam”, qingzhen guo (清真国).\textsuperscript{33} In terms of the structure of governance, Ya’qub Beg’s style was somewhat reminiscent of rule under the Qing, however it differed in that Ya’qub Beg was geographically much closer and able to yield more direct control over the people. The lower levels still did maintain autonomous for the most part, but the ultimate power and final decision-making did rest in the hands of Ya’qub Beg. Regarding the presence of Islam in society, there was a stark contrast between life under the Qing and the Muslim state; Islam was a celebrated aspect of culture and society. Fasting and public prayers were present, while practices contrary to Muslim traditions, such as drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, or dancing, were prohibited.

This independence, however, did not last. In 1877, Zuo Zongtang’s imperial army marched westward and reclaimed the region in just short of a year. With the Qing’s impending return, Ya’qub Beg did not want to engage the Qing militarily, but instead hoped for a diplomatic resolution that would allow him to retain his authority of the region while recognizing Qing’s indirect control.\textsuperscript{34} However, when Ya’qub Beg passed away in 1877 his armies were left with no direction of how to face the Qing forces, and although their military strength was comparable to the Qing forces, their inability to unite allowed the Qing to come in and re-conquer Xinjiang. Just over a decade after their independence from the Qing, their previous ruler came back in and reclaimed what they believed to be theirs. While it was not the resolution anyone in the Muslim State hoped for, it definitively influenced the way Beijing chose to rule Xinjiang.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid
\textsuperscript{34} Millward, James A. Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Pg.84-85
The rebellion is a crucial piece of Uyghur history for it demonstrates the Uyghurs desired independence from the Qing: they were not interested in Qing governance when they first expanded westward, and even with the impending re-conquest of Xinjiang Ya’qub Beg showed interest in forming a diplomatic resolution but did not seek to once again become a colony of the Qing. The rebellion is also indicative of patterns of resistance against the central power where “the ethnic identity, originally weak, unformed, or nonexistent, once imposed can serve to unify resistance or even rebellion against the center that created the category that unifies.”

It can be implied that the unification of an imperialized or colonized population if at the point of frustration or resentment can use their discontent with a superior power to resist or rebel their rule. Even though the Uyghurs were still allowed some extent of autonomy within the governmental structure through employing Uyghurs as governmental leaders, the rebellion shows they still maintained a collective Uyghur identity that did not want to be a part of Manchu or Han society.

Post-Muslim Rebellion (1877-1911)

After the Muslim Rebellion ended with the Qing re-conquest of Xinjiang in 1877, the Qing completely replaced the banner and beg system with an entirely new and formal structure of governance that completed the transformation of Xinjiang into a colony of the Qing Empire. This system “differed from that of the Han core of the empire” and was instead “divided into prefectures and counties, junxian” showing the Qing’s intent in creating an imperial governance structure specific to Uyghur society able to be centered around the metropole. The junxian (縣) system is mimetic of other “colonial” style systems. The emergence of this governance

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structure came from the desire to tighten control over the Uyghurs because of the brief independence from the centralized Qing government that showed a significant lapse in its ability to rule, especially from that great of distance. The *junxian* system highlights the fact that Uyghurs experienced a strong cultural connection to their Muslim and Turkic neighbors in the west, yet were politically tied to the Chinese and Mongolian powers to the east in Beijing because it created a cultural-political ‘tug-of-war’ that did not allow cultural aspects of Muslim society to integrate with the *junxian* system put in place by the Qing.\(^{37}\) Zuo Zongtang, the military leader who re-captured Xinjiang after the Muslim Rebellion, initiated this system, along with other political reforms after much of the land in Xinjiang was destroyed, banners disbanded, and governmental structure disintegrated.\(^{38}\) Early on he served as a strong proponent to more fully incorporate Xinjiang into the rest of the Empire by turning it into a province to be administered by the central government in order to cut costs and to ensure peace and stability.\(^{39}\) This mirrored the structure utilized in the other provinces, which instituted the *junxian*-style administration. This type of governance, an “imperial” style system, still employed a centralized government but to a much higher degree with little local autonomy. This did not mark the official annexation of Xinjiang, but instead definitively showed Xinjiang’s governance shifted into the hands of the Qing. However, for this system to properly function, Qing bureaucrats agreed Xinjiang must demographically and culturally assimilate to the Chinese ways, where the *junxian* system would work at all levels of society, including the education system, to teach the Confucian way. This process of Sinicization, where non-Chinese peoples or entities are brought under Chinese influence, simultaneously erodes the indigenous culture and identity, and is partly accomplished through bringing large populations of Han Chinese into Xinjiang. The Qing also

\(^{38}\) Ibid
\(^{39}\) Ibid
created many administrative and military arrangements, creating prefectures, counties, and a new capital of Urumqi, and introducing more permanent troops in the Tarim Basin. Moreover, the education system was notably impacted in order to ensure children were taught under the Confucian – not Islamic – education system. Students were taught Mandarin instead of their indigenous language, they attended Confucian schools, and they were given a Chinese name. Following the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, although it was an anti-foreign and anti-colonial uprising, resulted in a series of reforms that introduced a more modern style of schooling which included the study of science, mathematics, physical education, and foreign languages, was also brought to Xinjiang and taught to all of the students. It is important to recognize, however, there was still a presence of Islamic culture within Uyghur and Muslim society. Maktaps were schools established in mosques that acquainted children with their Muslim culture and allowed them to understand and read the Qu’ran. Madrasas, higher-level Islamic education institutions were also allowed and were numerous within the region.

As Perdue points out, the introduction of the junxian system completely restructured the Xinjiang’s government: the education, administration, government, and economy were now completely centralized in Beijing. This not only mirrored the provinces in the rest of China, but also resembled other structures utilized by European empires, such as the British in India, by directly implementing systems that were insensitive to indigenous culture or society. Jurgen Osterhammel’s definition of colonialism is particularly suitable:

Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the

40 Ibid
41 Ibid
42 Ibid
colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule.\footnote{Wills, John E., and Peter Perdue. “China and Other Colonial Empires.” Past and Present in China's Foreign Policy: from "Tribute System" to "Peaceful Rise", MerwinAsia, 2011.}

It captures well the nature of Qing colonial domination (the imported invaders) over the indigenous population of Uyghurs. “Fundamental decisions” describe the different structures of rule employed by the Qing both prior to and after the Muslim Rebellion and implemented by the distant metropolis of Beijing. The next part of his definition describing the rejection of cultural compromises refers specifically to Qing rule post-Rebellion when Xinjiang became an official colony. Osterhammel also writes of an “ordained mandate to rule”, which speaks to the “Mandate of Heaven”, a Confucian concept that asserts there is one ruler who rules “all under heaven”, or tianxia (天下). This means that anything under heaven – the land and people – belongs to the emperor. Tianxia was used extensively throughout Chinese dynasties to create and maintain order among and within societies. The “Mandate of Heaven” directly applies to Xinjiang under the Qing dynasty, where a Confucian version of manifest destiny drove the Qing westward to include Xinjiang in the empire.

An interesting critique of Osterhammel’s definition that is also pertinent to the imperialist nature of the Qing Empire derives from Edward Vickers, a historian of Taiwan, who asserts that this definition is oversimplified and incomplete as it does not account for the “central aim of the colonial project” which is “to reverse the terms of this [minority/majority] population equation.”\footnote{Vickers, Edward. “Original Sin on the Island Paradise? Qing Taiwan’s Colonial History in Comparative Perspective.” Taiwan in Comparative Perspective, vol. 2, Dec. 2008, pp. 65–86.} Vickers gives the example of the United States and Australia, where the failure to acknowledge this aspect of colonialism does not account for “the fact that both clearly have colonial origins, and that these origins have influenced, and continue to influence, their
development in significant ways.” When applied to Xinjiang, this definition implies its modern society is impacted by its colonial experience under the Qing because of the ways Uyghur society continues to interact with a derivative of Chinese society that colonized it. Osterhammel and Vickers point to similar theme of colonialism centering on a minority-majority relationship between the indigenous population and the governing force, and their analyses are prevalent in Perdue’s discussion of the Qing as a colonial empire because this attribute is shared among all colonial empires. Understanding concepts such as tianxia and the junxian system are vital for historians to challenge the Eurocentric notions of imperialism. His analysis, applied to Osterhammel’s definition of colonialism, allows us to conceptualize the political structure of Qing China as imperialist in nature. Moreover, using both Perdue and Larsen’s interpretations of the Qing Empire, it is possible to make the connection between this style of governance and its application to a distinct ethnic group.

“Yellow Man’s Burden”: Orientalism Qing Style

Through her focus on the Qing colonial conquest of Taiwan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Emma Teng describes the creation of a new imagined geography of the expanded Qing Empire drawing on and refining Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism. She asserts the collections of travel writings are integral in shaping Qing conceptions of frontier regions by demonstrating that “frontier travel writing and pictures had an intimate connection with the Qing imperialist project. These works served as vital sources of information about the new regions of the empire, especially during the early years of expansionism.” Her study of Qing imperialism, and particularly its affect beyond the Chinese mainland, offer important

46 Teng, Emma, Taiwan’s Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895. Harvard University Press. 2006. Pg 5-17
insights into the Qing’s imperialistic intentions. Expanding the Qing Empire provided important strategic military benefits to the Qing emperors in their efforts to eliminate potential rivals on all borders, such as the Russians in Central Asia. Yet, aside from the strategic aspect of Qing expansionism, in these travel documents the Qing forces described the indigenous Taiwanese as backward savages to be incorporated and assimilated into Qing culture. She argues their intention in imperializing Taiwan re-conceptualizes the ethnic and geographic boundaries of the Qing Empire. This notion is directly relevant to the Qing westward conquest of Xinjiang, where especially after the mid-nineteenth century there was a stronger push to create one homogenous, unified Qing, or Chinese society. Her specific focus on the assimilation of indigenous societies into the Qing empire speaks to the belief in a “civilizing mission” reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” that was a common theme among the invading powers’ strategies in expansion. While historians tend to focus on the Western powers capable of executing imperialist conquest, they are often blind to the idea that even the victims of imperialism can also simultaneously accomplish it. The idea of a “White Man's Burden” itself excludes Asian powers or empires from Orientalist missions. When Edward Said introduced the notion of Orientalism, the “othering” of non-Western peoples, the civilizing missions against them, and the pompous, elitist egos of Western powers was consolidated into one, neatly defined term to explain much of imperial history. The term is still relevant today, but is especially important in the description of imperial powers, such as the British, French, or Dutch Empires who fostered an imperialism riddled with Orientalist thought to describe other peoples and cultures, and to justify their cruel actions against them. An important aspect of Said’s writings is the Orientalism against the religion of Islam and Muslim peoples. Again, while this concept is relevant to today, including the events unfolding in Xinjiang, it can be traced back to the West’s
first interactions with Muslim cultures and reapplied to Qing-Uyghur interactions. However, Orientalism was first used by Said to describe a West-East relationship, such as the way Western traders interacted with and treated the Chinese throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with unequal treaties and events such as the Opium Wars. What Said’s initial interpretations do not account for, however, is the idea that victims of Orientalism can be perpetrators of it as well.

Just as the Qing can be seen on both sides of imperialism, it also committed Orientalism while simultaneously suffering from it. This concept of “the yellow man’s burden”, can definitively explain the actions of the Qing against those in its empire, whether in Xinjiang, Taiwan, or Tibet, the actions and methods of the Qing are Orientalist in nature. In the early stages of the Manchu state, expansion and consolidation of power, accompanied by economic benefits, were the main motives behind the Qing. Westward movement into Xinjiang did not represent anything more than this, however, with the Muslim Rebellion in 1864, and the subsequent style of rule after it, Qing motivations and intentions within Xinjiang were shifted. After the decade-long independence and brief creation of a Muslim state, after the reconquest religion and identity played a larger role in how the Qing interacted with its subjects. With the integration of Confucianism into Uyghur society and education, the Qing’s actions mirrored the civilizing missions carried out by other European empires of the time, including those who interacted with the Chinese. Qing military leader Zuo Zongtang explained that, “if we wish to change their peculiar customs and assimilate them to our Chinese ways, we must found free schools and make the Muslim children read [Chinese] books, recognize Chinese characters, and understand the spoken language.”48 For the Qing, their “burden” for Xinjiang revolved mainly

around the backward and strange Islamic culture, differing from how Europeans viewed the Chinese where they focused more on the Chinese as a race, yet still mirroring their beliefs and actions. The “yellow man’s burden” serves an important role in understanding the Qing as an imperial force, for it completely mimics not only the behavior of imperial empires during the time, but also the intentions. Orientalism is a core element in imperialism and new imperialism, where it acts as a mode of ruling over a people or state, where in the case of the Qing Empire, it was used to tighten its grip over an ethnically and culturally distinct people it had political and economic control over. Said’s original paradigm is refined by demonstrating that it existed within various segments of Asian society through her analysis of Qing representations of expansion into Taiwan. Demonstrating the ways in which it was comparable to that of European empires, I argue that the same concept can be applied to Qing expeditions into Xinjiang. Her analysis is valuable because it expands Perdue’s thoughts on the style of rule, moving into the cultural implications of Qing expansionism, uncovering how overlords and travellers saw indigenous populations as barbarians, just as Europeans saw the Manchus. Together, Emma Teng and Peter Perdue brings the reader back a few centuries and beautifully paints the picture of what Qing society was like in one of its colonies, ultimately proving that the Qing Empire was indeed a colonial power.

**Conclusion**

When Puyi left the Forbidden City in 1911, marking the conclusion of the almost four-century long Qing rule, the map of China looked starkly different from the beginning formations of the Manchu state. By this time, Xinjiang was not only land acquired by Qing forces, but a part of Republican China. Although it was not an official province (this would not happen until the Communists were the ruling power in forty years to come) Xinjiang was certainly not an
autonomous region. Through the countless uprisings, a brief stint of independence, constant movement of political leaders, and fluctuations in its economy and development, Xinjiang, with its Chinese name, locked in its political ties to the east. This was undeniably accomplished through Qing expansionism that started with westward expeditions and culminated in the Dzungar genocide in order to fully grasp control over the region. The banner system, although an informal style of rule, maintained an imperial Uyghur-Qing relationship with a diplomatic and military presence. The Muslim Rebellion acted as a turning point for Qing forces in Xinjiang when it lost control of the region and gained it back through military force. The transformation into a colony with the introduction of the junxian system solidified the Qing as an imperial empire, showing its determination to establish a position of superiority over the Uyghurs through an Orientalist and unequal power structure. These four distinct time periods, with the help of historians, clearly demonstrates the Qing mirroring imperialism undertaken by European powers of the time, including those who imposed imperialism upon the Qing Empire itself. Through understanding the Qing’s history in Xinjiang with a constant military presence, indirect rule prior to the mid-eighteenth century, and more direct rule post-Muslim Rebellion, Qing status as an imperialist power becomes increasingly clear.
CHAPTER TWO

The Chinese Nationalist Narrative: Xinjiang as an Inseparable Part of China

Introduction

Conflicting versions of Xinjiang’s historical relationship with China exists because, like any story, there are two sides to this very complex narrative. If the CCP agreed with Uyghur nationalists the entire northwest region would not be included on a Chinese map today. Assuming the narrative that Qing China was a colonial power after it was able to incorporate Xinjiang administratively into the central government does not leave room for Chinese nationalist historians’ and CCP’s view that the expansion of its empire into Xinjiang and other regions was not an imposition of imperialism on foreign peoples, but a pre-destined, further consolidation of China.49 Re-considering the Qing Empire to be an imperialist project aimed at expanding Qing territory and absorbing the Uyghurs into Chinese society described in the previous chapter challenges the official Chinese view of Qing, Uyghur, and Xinjiang history. It is imperative to not only understand this issue from the Uyghur perspective, but also from the Chinese perspective that claims Uyghur nationalism and separatism is a threat to national security. Chinese nationalist historians reject the claims of the New Qing historians that Qing emperors and overlords were perpetrators of colonialism. Instead they hold that the dynasty was reclaiming lost territory that was always an integral part of the Chinese empire, and therefore even if Uyghurs are ethnically distinct from Han Chinese they have long been subjects of the Chinese empire, sharing a connected history with Han Chinese.

49 Chinese nationalist historians are the official voice of the CCP. All historical writings are first censored and adjusted by government officials before being distributed to the public. They differ from new Qing historians such as Perdue, Larson, and Teng in that they are not able to alter the CCP narrative of history to analyze Xinjiang in different ways.
Chinese nationalist historians, in contrast to those who would claim that the Qing dynasty was a colonial government, also maintain that the Qing dynasty, and later Republican China, were victims of imperialism by Western and Japanese forces, much of which occurred parallel to Qing westward expansion. In fact, Chinese nationalist historians have developed a rich narrative about the Qing and Republican China as being victims of imperialism by Western and Japanese forces during the time frame discussed in the previous chapter. To capture the notion that China was a victim of foreign aggression and their imperializing projects from the mid 19th to mid 20th century, they have developed an important and ubiquitous trope: the “Century of Humiliation” (COH), a 110-year long period of self-described Chinese national disgrace of being too weak to prevent outside powers from imperializing China. Starting with the First Opium War (1839-1842), which led to the cession of Hong Kong into British hands and opened up many other cities, such as Shanghai, to international trade through the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the COH shows the manipulation of China’s map due to the expansionist or imperial project of other nations through the creation of treaty ports.

This map depicts land controlled by foreign powers in the year 1900.

The COH resonates heavily with the CCP, and Chinese citizens because upon this claim the CCP has built the foundational anti-imperialist rhetoric that legitimized the revolutionary program throughout the Maoist period. Moreover, it supports their current international and domestic policies to ensure China’s claim across the continent from Taiwan to Xinjiang. This trope also accounts for the CCP’s staunch position on maintaining ‘one China’, leaving no room for independence regarding any of the regions or ethnicities that currently comprise China. Moreover, emphasis on Chinese suffering under the imperialist powers completely distracts from the contemporaneous activities of the Qing military in Xinjiang. The Chinese government deploys the COH to motivate and unite all of China’s citizens to become a strong, collective people that can prevent another foreign power from coming in and weakening the nation.

“Nationalist” Point of View

To understand this side of the Xinjiang narrative, it is important to identify the various components of the ‘nationalist’ point of view. The core of Chinese nationalism rests on the claim that the Han majority and the 55 ethnic minorities identified as such by the Chinese Communist leadership after founding the Peoples Republic of China, are culturally and nationally united as one people under one government. This belief often serves as the backbone of scholarly articles, newspaper articles, and government publications. White Papers (government documents or reports) produced by the CCP articulate the official stance on China’s history and politics, while scholarly journals and media sources typically echo these viewpoints. They play a vital role in showcasing the CCP’s precise stance on the current situation in Xinjiang. Notably, they also support freedom of religion for all Chinese citizens and reiterate a commitment to assuring the rights of all citizens.
In addition to the Uyghurs, the Hui minority, a Mandarin-speaking Muslim ethnic minority that resides in Xinjiang and throughout the nation, plays an important role in legitimizing Chinese nationalism. The CCP widely support the Hui because of their willingness to assimilate into Han culture and society. Hui can be viewed as a “model minority” because of how successfully they integrated into a Han-dominated society. Though from viewpoints of minorities it appears as though the Hui have succumbed to the civilizing project set forth by Qing, Republican, and Communist governments, Hui assimilation into Han culture merely shows the willingness of Han society to accept and welcome cultures and traditions from all minorities. They speak the same language and practice religion in a very reform manner, which allows them to face little, if any, discrimination by the CCP or fellow citizens. Because the Hui are willing to adapt their Islamic ways to Confucian culture, the CCP also takes advantage of this to show they are a friend to Islam and not merely trying to rid Chinese society of any or all religion.

Using the same time frame described in the previous chapter that presents Qing China in an imperial light, this chapter outlines the ways in which the Chinese nationalist historians present the same event in a different light to support their central concern to represent the Qing as a victim of imperialism that simultaneously seeks to recover territory lost in previous centuries. In contrast to the Uyghur perspective, the Chinese government maintains that the pre-Qing period is an especially relevant time frame because it supports their claim that Xinjiang has, and always will be, an integral part of China. The Qianlong Emperor’s “Ten Great Campaigns”, the Muslim Rebellion, and the post-rebellion period that includes the Republican era, together all show the transformation of Xinjiang into the ‘new border’ of China; although the region often left the hands of the Chinese it has always been indisputably connected. The COH is especially important to the Chinese narrative because it not only describes a period of foreign infiltration,
but also covers the Russian domination of Xinjiang in the latter 19th century, reinforcing the necessity of regaining control over lost territory. Lastly, this chapter analyzes the concept of minzu tuanjie as it acts as the core to Chinese historians’ and the CCP’s narrative of how Xinjiang and the Uyghurs came to be a part of China. Ultimately, this official point of view will demonstrate why the question of “terrorist vs. freedom fighter” exists, and aims to set the stage for how Xinjiang has been governed since the CCP took control in 1949.

Xinjiang Before the Qing (Until 1755)

The CCP and nationalist historians use Xinjiang’s pre-Qing history to demonstrate how historically interconnected the region has been to the rest of China. This assertion is central to the social structure of Chinese society comprised of 55 ethnic minorities that span across the country, because it openly identifies Uyghurs and other minorities as being distinctly different than the majority Han population, yet they are still considered to be wholly Chinese. Historians and the CCP use a combination of historical rhetoric and archaeology to show that Uyghurs and the Chinese have had relations for thousands of years, a concept referred to as “The Protectorate of the Western Regions”, an imperial Han institution that ruled over what is known today as Xinjiang, Tibet, as well as other Central Asian regions in 60 BC.51,52

The Protectorate of the Western Regions

Western historians do not typically discuss “The Protectorate of the Western Regions”. Both Chinese and Western historians often refer to the Xinjiang area as the ‘western regions’, but the term ‘protectorate’ typically appears exclusively in Chinese accounts. Chinese newspapers, white papers, and journal articles discussing the topic commonly refer to “The Protectorate of the Western Regions”, xiyu du hu fu, (西域都护府), directly translated as “western region protective

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51 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201712/14/WS5a328feba3108bc8c6734be4.html
52 Millward 22
government”, when discussing the governing and security structure in place during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). Known as tuntian (屯田), the Han established military agricultural colonies, “an institution that Chinese regimes right up to the present PRC government would use, with minor variations, to resolve logistical problems and enhance further security, especially in Xinjiang.” 53 Similar to Xinjiang’s bingtuan (兵团) system in place today, the Chinese government insists that the presence of military outposts in the region as early as the Han dynasty provides reliable evidence to support their claim that the Chinese government has long provided a form of protection over this region, spanning as far back as 60 BC. More recently, Chinese historians and archaeologists have turned to science to further support this claim. A recent article published in The China Daily, celebrates a study that proves “an ancient city in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region has been basically confirmed as the former seat of the Protectorate of the Western Regions about 2,000 years ago.” 54 The article places emphasis on the scientific evidence offered by the study to underscore the authenticity of this historical claim, not only proving the Han were undeniably present in Xinjiang during the time in question, but also highlighting the importance of supplying definitive evidence which cannot dispute the presence of the Han-Uyghur relationship. For the Chinese, it does not leave room for further interpretation, which is used for the basis of a continuous Chinese presence in the region since the Han dynasty. This excerpt from a White Paper shows both the historical claim and how it is important to Chinese nationalism:

Located in China’s northwest, Xinjiang was documented as forming part of China’s territories as early as 60 BC, and went on to become an integral part of the unified and multiethnic country. In light of the actual local conditions, the central

governments in successive dynastic periods adopted various different forms of governance in this region. During the process of creating and developing a unified and multiethnic country, all the ethnic peoples of Xinjiang developed close ties and became integrated as one.\(^{55}\)

Here, the White Paper deploys the phrase “successive dynastic periods” to suggest the continuous nature of Chinese rule in Xinjiang. Furthermore, it describes the transformation of China into a multiethnic state that included the Uyghurs who “developed close ties” presumably with the Han that ultimately created one unified China. The following map shows the territory covered by Han forces in 50 BCE.

The yellow-shaded area depicts land controlled by Han forces in the year 50 BCE.

In an earlier White Paper titled “History and Development of Xinjiang”, also produced by the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, these particular administrators construct the history of Xinjiang to introduce an optimistic outlook on the development of Xinjiang’s economy and development. The document begins by asserting that China’s relationship with the region goes as far back as the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC-476 BC), a previous historical time frame of development and progression, that claims even more ancient connections than those claimed in the White Papers:


During the Warring States Period, the Qiangs moved west along the Hexi Corridor along the Qilian Mountains and the Kunlun Mountains, leaving a footprint in Xinjiang. Huns were mainly in Xinjiang in about 176 BC, while Han, one of the ethnic groups, entered Xinjiang earlier. In 101 BC, the Han troops began to implement the tuntian system. Later they had expanded to all parts of Xinjiang and their stations became the initial distribution areas after the Han people entered Xinjiang. After the establishment of the Protectorate of the Western Regions in 60 BC, military and administrative officials began entering Xinjiang.57,58

This excerpt links current development and success in Xinjiang to China’s previous interactions with the region that date back thousands of years, proving not only there is a definitive historical relationship between the two, but also that the region has developed while connected to Chinese regimes, showing the effects of what Uyghurs would call a civilizing project and the Chinese would call development projects. It shows their dedication to proving that Xinjiang has very real and strong historical connections to past Chinese dynasties. The publication of this document also highlights the importance of making this information known to the Chinese public so there is no dispute that Xinjiang and other contested regions are ultimately an integral part to the Chinese nation. The CCP not only reiterates this narrative but Chinese newspapers, mainly the China Daily, also act as an official mouthpiece of the CCP. In an article describing the methods employed to preserve history throughout Xinjiang’s ancient cities titled “Preserving Kashgar’s Past” author Liu Jing first begins the article with a brief overview of Kashgar’s history, writes “Zhang Qian, an envoy sent by the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24) to explore China's western expanses, arrived in the city in about 128 BC and was amazed by its stores and well-maintained roads, as well as the various commodities imported from Rome and Central Asia.” This article serves two functions; first, it celebrates achievements in modernity accomplished by the Uyghurs. It shows China’s admiration of the region currently and early on, while

58 This document was originally written in Chinese and translated for the purpose of this thesis.
simultaneously demonstrating that the Han dynasty and the Uyghurs maintained strong historical connections.

Placing emphasis on the Han Dynasty being the first to employ direct control within Xinjiang is the most common assertion seen throughout all of these publications. They tend to mention other dynasties far less often, especially the Tang, which also had some sort of foot in the door. The Han having the most control over the Uyghurs and coming the earliest is significant and important to the Chinese narrative. It establishes the Chinese in Xinjiang very early on that strengthens the argument Xinjiang has always been a part of China. Using archaeological evidence confidently supports this assertion and gives support to all future attempts at re-entering and re-gaining control over the region. If they were there before, there is no question they have the right to enter again in the future.

**The Qianlong Emperor’s Ten Great Campaigns (1755-1759)**

If the pre-Qing period is important because it demonstrates that the Chinese have always been tied to the region, then Qianlong Emperor’s Ten Great Campaigns are equally significant because they reclaimed territory that was lost during other dynasties. To Chinese historians, this time period is especially important because it represents the beginning formations of the modern-day map of China that includes territories gained during these campaigns. As Perdue points out, “They place Qianlong’s campaigns in a lineage reaching back to the Han dynasty relations with the Xiongnu, claiming that he successfully resolved the nearly two-millennia-long issue of securing the northwest frontier.”

Therefore, it has never been a question of whether or not this territory is Chinese territory; the issue has always lied in how to best gain control of the land. Additionally, he adds that the people, although ethnically different, have always been a part of the package as well. To Chinese historians, they see “Qianlong’s victory as a natural process of

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59 Perdue, P. *China marches West: The Qing conquest of Central Eurasia*. Pg. 497.
incorporation of “our Mongols” into a Chinese state, and they regard Xinjiang a having always been Chinese territory.”60 Although they differentiate the “Mongols” from being Chinese, they still refer to them as having a Chinese identity. Moreover, the incorporation of certain “Mongols” over others in the pursuit of unification is important because it shows the protective nature of the Qing over this region. Chinese historian Ma Ruheng demonstrates the affinity for unification in his analysis of the Amursana’s revolt, a Dzungar prince who wanted to become a khan despite the Qing’s refusal:

Qianlong’s suppression of Amursana’s revolt continued the tasks of…protecting the unity of the nation and waged a righteous war to resist Russian aggression. This battle not only strengthened and developed the unity of the multinational state but also coincided with the demands for unity of each of the nationalities.61

In his writing, Ma Ruheng attributes these historical events to the unification of nationalities, even though this particular revolt eventually led to the genocide of the Dzungars. Ruheng also mentions anti-Russian sentiments that are a common element of Chinese historical writings. In Chinese history, as the COH would suggest, it is as important to emphasize the unification of China as it is to show how outsiders powers caused the weakening of China. A Chinese nationalist account of expansion during the Qing Empire emphasizes both the affect of outside powers on the loss of territory and the importance of protecting their territory from these powers at whatever cost it takes.

The previous chapter discussed this time frame as the beginning formations of Qing imperialism where an entirely new governance structure was established to rule over the Uyghurs, placing them at a different level of society from the Manchus. However, while Uyghurs or Western historians may view their imposition as resembling a civilizing project to some degree, for the Qing it was regaining this territory and bringing the Uyghurs closer to their

60 Perdue, P. China marches West: The Qing conquest of Central Eurasia. Pg. 508-511
61 Ibid
cultural society to form a more unified nation. Harrell, in his discussion of the Qing’s Confucian civilizing project explains that “people whom we today might consider members of minority nationalities or ethnic groups…were not excluded from participation in the bureaucracy or even in the examination system if they had acquired the requisite literary knowledge.”

Therefore, while to Western historians this is viewed as an extension of imperialism, this can be argued by the Chinese as one step in bringing more unity to the Chinese people because it is their duty to move the Uyghurs along the scale of civilization.

In a different vein, Qianlong Emperor’s Ten Great Campaigns functioned not only as a way to culturally unify the empire, but also as a definitive measure in solidifying the map of China to include all of its territories. In an official publication from the National Library, the following excerpt explains that a map created after Qianlong’s westward expedition incorporates the western regions of Xinjiang and Tibet that reflects a map more similar to ancient times, referring to the previous dynasties that had footholds in the regions:

During the time of the Jiaqiang Emperor [r.1796-1820], an anonymous author added the Xinjiang and Tibet regions to the Map of the Qianlong Emperor to reflect the vast and expanse territory of ancient times.

The use of the phrase “ancient times” is significant in that it relates the creation of a Qing map to resembling what was believed to be the map during ancient times, which undoubtedly included the Xinjiang region. Emphasizing the map in this situation also holds importance because a map clearly demonstrates continuity and unification of one nation. Unifying the empire on a map shows the legitimacy of the empire’s borders as containing Xinjiang.

**The Muslim Rebellion (1864-1877)**

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63 與图姐, and 白鸿叶. "西域遗珍"清代新疆舆图概述." 中国国家图书馆 Pg. 41.
To the Uyghurs, the Muslim Rebellion represents a time when they were successful in regaining independence from their Qing imperializers. However, rhetoric employed by the Chinese today regarding the Muslim Rebellion is a narrative that describes a loss of territory due to foreign aggression during the Century of Humiliation. The rebellion served as stepping-stones for the Russians, and later the Soviets during China’s Republican Period, to impose their own power over Xinjiang and contribute to the COH. The Russian Empire played an integral role in loss of territory and control over Xinjiang. The relationship between Russia and Xinjiang centered on interactions with various khaghanates, tribes, and people within Central Asia that started centuries prior to the Qing expanding westward. Relations between Russians and those residing in what was to become Xinjiang were often rooted in trade, which was especially true during the Dzungars reign of the northern steppe. In the mid-nineteenth century, the decade leading up the Muslim Rebellion, Russian forces conquered a large area of Xinjiang, including modern day Kazakhstan, and named it Turkestan, meaning the land of the Turks. Although it was aptly named for the people residing there, it has never referred to an official nation. In Xinjiang’s northwest territory extending into Kazakhstan is the Yili Valley, where a treaty was signed to establish trade relations between the Russians and Chinese, and was later able to establish the boundaries that still stand as Chinese-Kazakh borders. During the Muslim Rebellion the Uyghurs lost control of this region and it fell to the Russians for the duration of their independence.

Although interactions with the Russians in this region date back to the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, their role in Xinjiang during this time is especially pertinent because it is used to show it is the fault of Western imperialism that disintegrated what was supposed to be a unified

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China. However, in Dai Yi’s “A Concise History of the Qing Dynasty”, a four-volume publication that discusses all aspects of China throughout the Qing, which includes an entire chapter on Russian aggression, the Muslim Rebellion is omitted. This time period experienced both the Russians and British entering the region and establishing trade relations, as outlined by both the 1872 Treaty between Russia and Kashgar and the 1874 Treaty between England and Kashgar. As the COH would suggest, the CCP is normally very open about foreign powers coming in and taking advantage or taking territory from the Chinese; however, perhaps because the Muslim Rebellion most clearly represents a coherent sense of Uyghur nationalism, it is one of the more detrimental historical events to the Chinese narrative of continuous unity and ‘one China’. Extensive research did not produce any publications by the China Daily or even a White Paper that discusses this time period to any extent, nor do any Western historians mention the CCP’s view of this particular time frame. Instead, the focus of during this time tends to rest on Chinese experiences of imperialism along its eastern coast after the Second Opium War that ended in 1860.

Post-Muslim Rebellion (1877-1911)

Despite the lapse in historical writings of the Muslim Rebellion, the post-rebellion period is an important signifier for how strongly connected the Chinese feel towards Xinjiang and the importance placed on regaining control of lost territory. For nationalist historians, Russian and Soviet influences during the Muslim Rebellion, and the COH more generally, are an especially difficult subject to touch upon regarding Uyghur history because it reminds the Chinese of outside influences that impacted China during this period. It also disrupts the idea of unification that is central to the progressive nature of Chinese history. As analyses from historians such as Peter Purdue suggests, Chinese nationalist narratives refuse to recognize actions by Qing leaders
as conquest or as motives of expansion, instead choosing only to focus on this progressive nature of Chinese history that led to an eventual reunification of the Chinese people and state.

*Junxian as a “Unifier”*

Discussed in the previous chapter, after the rebellion the Qing government imposed a starkly different system of governance in Xinjiang. Uyghurs suddenly held less power and were abruptly forced to disengage from many aspects of their Islamic culture, instead incorporating more Han and Confucian elements into everyday life. Implementing the *junxian* system is a crucial step in the assimilation of Uyghurs in Han society. To the Chinese, the introduction of Han-style governance and education is viewed as an attempt to bring all peoples of China more closely together under the same system. As Harrell points out, what were regarded as civilizing missions by Western historians, were projects by the Qing to accelerate Uygur society along the path of becoming a unified Chinese society. According to one White Paper, “after the First Opium War (1840-1842), China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, and the ethnic peoples of Xinjiang suffered oppression under the foreign aggressors, feudal forces and exploiting classes, falling to the bottom of society.”

Therefore it was the duty of Qing overlords and leaders to ensure all ethnic peoples, including the Uyghurs, were given a chance to reach the same level as those who ruled over them.

The *junxian* system also served as a way to better consolidate and control the vast expanse of the empire, as well as to improve its economy, infrastructure, and other elements of development. In a description written by James Millward, a Western historian, he describes the advancements made in Xinjiang through the *junxian* system:

Thus under the rubric of reconstruction the Qing army began establishing for the first time the rudiments of a Chinese civil administration in South Xinjiang, from Hami to Kashgar.

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There were specialized Reconstruction Agencies to collect taxes, promote production of grain, mulberry and silkworms, and institute a collective responsibility and security system (boajia) at the village level. More general tasks included reconstruction of city defenses, government offices and barracks, bridges, roads and canals…and opening schools.\textsuperscript{66}

The institution of this system was undeniably a crucial tool in the development of Xinjiang to bring Uyghur society closer to the majority Han society that lived across the nation. To Chinese historians, this is the narrative that can be used when discussing a period that others view as an imperialist or civilizing project.

\textit{The Creation of East Turkestan}

During the reconquest of Xinjiang by the Qing, it was a priority to get this region back, which was successfully achieved with the Treat of St. Petersburg in 1881. This was one of the final steps necessary in creating the area that is known as Xinjiang today. Even so, the latter portion of the Qing dynasty was largely influenced by the Russian presence across Xinjiang. Their naming of the region of “Chinese Turkestan” soon led to the development of a more individualized name of “East Turkestan”, which referred to the Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang where the Uyghurs mainly resided, allowing the Uyghur people a path towards forming a stronger collective identity.\textsuperscript{67} The current Chinese government openly rejects this name, not only because it symbolizes a Western influence over China, but also because it implies that region has not always been an integral part of China.\textsuperscript{68} Opposite from the Chinese name of Xinjiang, and even the Russian name of Chinese Turkestan, East Turkestan emphasizes the Turkic, Islamic, and Central Asian characteristics of the people, culture, and history, and is therefore more favored by those who have occupied the land for centuries.\textsuperscript{69} Later, Soviet influence would continue to show its power over Xinjiang, where Soviet ethnic policy encouraged nationalism.

\textsuperscript{66} Millward, James A. \textit{Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864}. Pg. 133
\textsuperscript{67} Bellér-Hann, Ildikó (2007). \textit{Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia}. pg. 4–5
\textsuperscript{68} Barfield, Thomas. “China Review International.” Pg. 286.
\textsuperscript{69} Bellér-Hann, Ildikó (2007). \textit{Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia}. Pg. 35
and had nurtured the creation of the “East Turkestan Republic” a decade after the fall of the Qing Empire.\textsuperscript{70} In fact, it was part of the Soviet agenda to include East Turkestan Republic in their nation-building policy in opposition to the Chinese.\textsuperscript{71} Since this time, the Uyghur’s have used the name “East Turkestan” to represent the region they believe to be their land that has always been their home; additionally, independence movements and organizations use East Turkestan, as well as its flag, to show what they hope to achieve by gaining sovereignty from China.

**Republican Era (1911-1949)**

Transitioning from the Qing into a Republican China governed by the Kuomintang (GMD), although not discussed in the previous chapter, is integral in the Chinese narrative because the incorporation of Uyghurs into Chinese society continued alongside the latter half of the COH. With the Soviet presence in the region during GMD control, the Uyghurs were given greater ethnic distinction and “were recognized as a nationality in the 1930s in Xinjiang under a Soviet-influenced policy of nationality recognition.”\textsuperscript{72} As China itself entertained its own nationalist agenda to reunify China and began turning their focus on inner China, expansion of modern communication brought “new ideologies of nationalism, modernization” to the region of Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{73} It was perhaps during this time when China recognized its own nationalist desires that Uyghurs were drawn even closer into the Chinese identity. But more importantly, the Soviet presence was yet another event during the COH used by the CCP and Chinese historians to show the affect of foreign aggressors on the ability to unify the nation, and Xinjiang in particular.

\textsuperscript{70} Barfield, Thomas. “China Review International.” Pg. 289

\textsuperscript{71} Bellér-Hann, Ildikó (2007). *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*. Pg. 36

\textsuperscript{72} Gladney, Dru C. *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects*. Pg. 195.

\textsuperscript{73} Millward, James A. *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*. Pg. 179
In addition to the Soviet presence in Xinjiang, Japanese forces had entered China during WWII to which the Chinese resisted through the “Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression” (1937-1945). In a White Paper produced by the CCP, this time period is described to show both China as a victim of outside powers infiltrating the nation, in addition to the important role played by Uyghurs and the entirety of Xinjiang in contributing to Chinese nationalism:

During the Chinese people’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang lent their support to the cause of resistance through various means under the leadership of the CPC. A number of revolutionary youth, influenced by progressive ideas, actively mobilized the peoples of Xinjiang to fight against reactionary and backward forces. This White Paper shows both the importance of unity within the homeland, as well as how specifically the Uyghurs are an integral piece of the Chinese identity for their role in uniting against a foreign aggressor. Although previously it was the Uyghurs seen as backwards during the Qing Dynasty, they have now begun to move along the scale towards the Chinese and assisted in the “fight against reactionary and backward forces” employed by the Japanese. For the CCP, the Uyghurs during this time show that even ethnic minority citizens can join with their Han brethren to strengthen the homeland, and most importantly, the collective Chinese identity.

**Minzu Tuanjie**

The term minzu, or shaoshu minzu (少数民族), meaning “minority”, first appears in a 1924 speech at the First Conference of the Kuomintang. The concept of minzu tuanjie becomes the most prevalent after the CCP took over, but it nevertheless holds importance during the

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75 Jin, Binggao. "When Does The Word 'Minority Nationality' [Shaoshu Minzu] [First] Appear in Our Country?" Pg. 198.
Republican Era. Minzu tuanjie (民族团结), or ethnic unity, is the government’s counter-narrative to Uyghur nationalism; with this narrative the party hopes to provide a counter veiling force to unite a nation comprised of 55 ethnic minorities into one, homogenous society of Chinese people.

The term minzu tuanjie is most pertinent to the “Xinjiang Problem”, because the Chinese government claims the Uyghurs, a group vying for independence, to be an “inseparable” part of the Chinese state though China “consists of a mosaic of many territorial nationalities whose historic homelands have been incorporated into the modern Chinese state,” and Xinjiang is only one of the few regions of contested land in China.\textsuperscript{76} It also represents a people that “have been made an integral part of a unitary Chinese nation and granted limited powers of regional autonomy.”\textsuperscript{77} Moreover, the government deploys the claim that there has always been a connection to Chinese rule in some form in the region as justification to promote ethnic unification or minzu tuanjie. They see “‘the complete blending of all nationalities’” as “necessary for the continuing development of Xinjiang”, and as we have seen since the Qing Dynasty, have forcibly integrated Uyghurs and Han into the same communities of which they have little cultural practices in common.\textsuperscript{78}

Conclusion

After the Communist Party defeated the Kuomintang in 1949, signaling a new era in Chinese governance, Xinjiang’s fate had been sealed. The COH was over and China had stood up, unified its people, and regained control over its destiny. China could not stand up without all of its citizens, both Han and the minorities, that comprised one, unified China. However, it was centuries earlier that westward Qing colonial expansion instigated significant historical implications for the Uyghur population and the region they named Xinjiang. The disintegration

\textsuperscript{76} Bulag, Uradyn E. The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity. Pg. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid
\textsuperscript{78} Holdstock, Nick. China's Forgotten People: Xinjiang, Repression and the Chinese State. Pg. 27.
of the region’s population consisting of Dzungars, Uyghurs, and other Muslim minorities, to have essentially only Uyghurs remaining created somewhat of a blank slate for the Qing. The genocide of the Dzungars ensured the Qing would have no competition for power and allowed them to move in their own Manchu and Han citizens to build a unified society faithful to the Empire. The Dzungar genocide also leads to an important question of to what extent the Qing Empire aimed to expand its territory. To the Qing, and now the CCP, Uyghurs have always been a part of an inseparable China with each dynasty having its foot in the door of what was to become Xinjiang. If the Dzungars had subscribed the Qing Empire would they, too, have become an inseparable part of China like the Uyghurs have? Asking these questions are crucial when interrogating the nationalist perspective of establishing Uyghurs as a Chinese ethnic minority.

The characteristics of how the Qing interacted with the people it colonized and the sophisticated systems it employed to do so shaped the future of the region to be initially more autonomous, but ultimately completely dependent to the Qing government. The Muslim Rebellion illustrated that while the Empire had certainly established power over the Uyghurs it was fragile, and aggression from outsides powers meant the Qing had to exert more control to maintain its territorial integrity. The reconquest showed the Qing’s ability to exert tighter control, bringing Xinjiang back into the empire through an influx in Chinese settlers and a less autonomous government. Looking this closely at how the Qing expanded into Xinjiang, however, reminds us they have not always been understood as an imperialist power comparable to Britain or France, and they have the power of history to tell the narrative through their own perspective. This interrogation of Qing-Xinjiang history grants access to further inquiries into the nation’s present. Historiography serves as a powerful tool in appreciating four hundred years of Chinese history as different than it has been previously understood. Allowing the past to explain
the present through recognizing a shift in the explanations of the Qing’s past, we can transform the way certain events and circumstances in Xinjiang are currently being viewed, which is especially evident in Xinjiang’s name itself. The direct translation of Xinjiang is new (新) border (疆), and was created during the Qing Empire. The name is a contradictory reminder of the region’s integration into China proper; if it has always been apart of the Chinese nation, why would its name describe itself as new? The name provides evidence that during this time the Qing were celebrating this territorial addition to their empire, but instead, Chinese historians tend to focus solely on unity while ignoring the expansion of territory. While nationalists historians do not deny the fact that the Chinese Empire was created through the inclusion of more and different people, their choice of words in describing the acquisition of territories and people creates an entirely different image than if the word “conquest” or “imperialism” was used.

Xinjiang’s name relates directly to the aspect of an expanded geography, but choosing to look at the name in this light directly disputes the fact that Xinjiang was at any point independent prior to the Qing, during the Muslim Rebellion, or was largely influenced by Russians during the Qing and Republican period. Therefore, although territory may have been newly acquired during the Qing Empire, the term “new” is problematic for nationalist historians. Peter Perdue offers insight into this dilemma by explaining “the idea that Qing expansion incorporated new territories violates nationalist myth. Nationalists must claim the Qing boundaries as eternally fixed, endowed by Heaven or by the course of history with natural legitimacy.”

Perdue’s argument is central to the Chinese side of Xinjiang’s narrative and is one that, when applied to the “Xinjiang Problem” may shed some light on the government’s response to Uyghur unrest or the perception of terrorism in the region.

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79 Perdue, P. China marches West: The Qing conquest of Central Eurasia. Pg. 509.
China has undeniably been a victim of imperialism from outside forces. However, for the CCP it serves only as a reminder that China must continue to collectively rise and strengthen to avoid ideas of separatism and splittism to arise in the future. After the CCP took over in 1949, they began to look inward with the ‘liberation’ of these lost territories. While focusing on this aspect of the COH is certainly valid and an important part of China’s history, it also leaves out parts of its history that populations, such as the Uyghurs, still remember and hold on to, especially because these populations do not see 1949 as the ‘unification’ of China but as the conquering of their land. These contested narratives are now given a new voice because historians are challenging the notion of ‘unification’; it is now possible to look at Uyghur history in a different way through New Qing historians such as Teng, Perdue, and Larson. First understanding the Qing as an imperial empire and then comparing that alongside the Chinese version - focusing particularly on dialogue regarding the COH - reinvigorates Qing history, and more importantly, Uyghur history.

If the “terrorist vs. freedom fighter” framework assumes the person, group, or organization in question is fighting in the name of independence, then seeing Qing’s past not as an imperial and colonial past, but as a legitimate reclamation of territory starts the discussion of how to accurately evaluate terrorism in Xinjiang. In the next chapter, the concept of Qing China being an imperial empire will be applied to the post-1949 era, and how this idea is central to Uyghur self-determination and identity through protest and formation of Uyghur organizations. It aims to show the concern to preserve Uyghur identity has become central to many people’s lives as Uyghurs identify their protest movements with notions of freedom fighting as they seek to challenge the statist framing of their protests as terrorism, a political narrative that grows stronger every day.
CHAPTER THREE
Xinjiang’s Colonial Legacy in Communist China

Introduction

By 1949, Xinjiang, a province which GMD leaders had previously considered letting go from their reigns, was liberated by the CCP’s People’s Liberation Army.\(^{80}\) Just as the Qianlong Emperor’s army had done two centuries prior, the PLA marched westward and liberated Xinjiang from Republican control, bringing it into the People’s Republic of China. Although Uyghurs had experienced brief moments of independence and sovereignty, the Republican era ultimately ended with Xinjiang under Communist control. Imperial intentions transformed into colonial accession during the Qing Dynasty, which ultimately culminated into the Communist’s full-scale integration. By this time, Xinjiang was objectively not a colony because by Chinese and international standards Xinjiang had been incorporated into Chinese jurisdiction, officially bringing Xinjiang into the Chinese State. However, aspects and nuances of Qing colonialism that continued throughout the 20th century up through the present still bear the memory of Xinjiang’s colonial past. Uyghurs, once subjects of the Chinese Empire, were suddenly assigned a new identity of Chinese by the CCP.

Along with liberating previously foreign-occupied territory, the CCP identified 55 ethnic minorities, or \textit{minzu} (民族), that simultaneously recognizes minorities such as the Uyghurs as ethnically separate from the Han majority but still a part of the same people and heritage.\(^{82}\) Delineated by the State Ethnic Affairs commission, the concept of establishing an administrative branch dealing directly with ethnic relations has colonial Mongol and Manchu roots dating back

\[^{80}\text{Bovingdon, Gardner. } \textit{The Uyghurs: Strangers In Their Own Land}. \text{Pg. 37.}\]

\[^{81}\text{Although Xinjiang was liberated in 1949, the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” was not officially created until 1955.}\]

\[^{82}\text{A person’s status as } \textit{minzu} \text{ is officially recognized by the government and is identified on each citizen’s ID card.}\]
to the Qing. This somewhat paradoxical recognition was one of the first ways in which the CCP was able to begin extending its power into Xinjiang and over the Uyghurs through the implementation of various policies, campaigns, and institutions that paved the way for contemporary political unrest in Xinjiang.

This chapter will demonstrate Communist strategies of integration juxtaposed with recognizing Uyghurs as ethnically distinct from Han Chinese shows the hypocritical nature of Chinese rule in Xinjiang since 1949. Colonial-era methods of control implemented directly and indirectly against Uyghurs offers crucial answers for the terrorist vs. freedom fighter question: continued elements of colonialism through administrative and political means that originated from the Qing Dynasty could hold the answer as to if Uyghur nationalism, protest, and alleged acts of violence are all qualities of justified self-determination, or if they are a part of the larger terrorism issue currently plaguing the world today.

While pre-1949 Xinjiang offers supporting evidence, how the CCP initially began its relationship with the Uyghurs and continues to regard their culture, religion, and status as that of a Chinese citizen, holds the answer to this notoriously difficult question. If the Qing and Republican government successfully colonized Xinjiang, is it the colonial-style Chinese policies and interactions with the Uyghurs after 1949 that influence Uyghur nationalism and unrest? The ways in which the Chinese government rules Xinjiang today ultimately complicates its own legitimacy in claiming sovereignty over the region, and brings a fresh perspective of how to approach this question. This chapter will cover four time periods: rulership under Chairman Mao, the post-Mao period until the 1990s, the 1990s, and 2001-present. These four periods will show how Qing and Republican colonial features continue to be present in Uyghur society and is the cause for Uyghur unrest labeled as terrorism by the CCP but not internationally recognized by

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83 Starr, S. Frederick. Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland. Pg. 104.
the international community as a whole. Most importantly, this chapter will also most importantly emphasize the aspect of Islam because of its current relevance with present-day terrorism in the Middle East that Uyghurs have been associated with by the CCP. The strategies in which the CCP engaged through the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century ultimately sets the stage for understanding the present day political climate of Xinjiang.

Xinjiang under Mao Zedong

Understanding Mao’s strategies and intentions in ‘liberating’ Xinjiang provides important evidence demonstrating continued colonization of Xinjiang, which paved the new and complicated way that created the region’s modern day political environment. The CCP was able to establish many reforms and institute numerous policies aimed exclusively at Xinjiang that attempted to simultaneously grant Uyghurs a sense of political autonomy, while officially incorporating the Uyghurs homeland into the PRC through a self-proclaimed “peaceful liberation.” Unlike Tibet, where Mao was initially a strong advocate for easing China’s way into the administrative and government sphere, in Xinjiang Mao acted swiftly and decisively. Because many leaders from previously established East Turkestan still remained in northern Xinjiang, supporting the Soviets who had just retreated to Russia as well as former GMD leaders, it was crucial for the CCP to ensure these influences did not remain in Xinjiang if the region was to unconditionally support the Communist agenda. Under the guise of Mao’s “Three-anti” campaign (late 1951-1952), aimed at eradicating corruption, waste, and bureaucracy among political leaders, a new string of policies were used to “purge Turkic leaders linked to the ETR”, while also ensuring that Uyghurs deemed supportive of the CCP were raised to higher positions
of local authority. The “Three-anti” campaign; however, was merely a precursor for decades of reform that would change the landscape of Communist governance in Xinjiang.

“Production and Construction Corps”: Bingtuan State Farms

Before Xinjiang was officially recognized as an autonomous region 1955, a move by the CCP that would supposedly increase Uyghurs political sovereignty, in 1954 the CCP created the “Production and Construction Corps”, more commonly referred to as bingtuan (兵团), a “network of self-supporting military-style agricultural colonies charged with defending the border and opening ‘wasteland’ for agriculture.” The CCP thought of this organization as the nucleus of stability in Xinjiang, being a direct descendent of Qing-era state farms that laid the foundation for economic and political control over the Uyghurs in prior. Bingtuan still exists today in Xinjiang, evidence of the rigidity and effectiveness of CCP control. The bingtuan are comprised of almost exclusively Han Chinese, and was therefore seen by the CCP as another way to occupy Xinjiang with an increased Han population, showing that even as the CCP recognized Xinjiang as having a majority Uyghur population with the creation of the XUAR, it was always intending to steadily increase Xinjiang’s Han population. Not only does bingtuan severely complicate the notion of Uyghur autonomy, but also and more importantly, degrades much of the autonomy they have through an increased military presence that directly disputes any idea of increased freedom within the public or governmental sphere. It is also another signifier of colonialism in the post-Qing era, using strategies of internal settler colonialism to slowly displace the native Uyghur population with those from the majority Han civilizing center.

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84 Spence, Jonathan D. The Search for Modern China. Pg 536
85 Starr, S. Frederick. Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland. Pg. 87
86 Cliff, Thomas. Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang. Pg. 83.
87 Ibid
88 Starr, S. Frederick. Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland. Pg. 90
As the Uyghur population density decreases, it further promotes forming a more distinct identity and the desire for sovereignty.

*Bingtuan* was one of the greatest turning points for Xinjiang politically speaking since the beginning of Communist rule. It completely usurped previous political, cultural, economic, and nationalist norms that had been established in the centuries before, and built upon them in an even more ‘Chinese’ and extreme manner. The Century of Humiliation defined the ways in which Mao exerted control after declaring, “China stood up” to the world that once took advantage of them.\textsuperscript{89} *Bingtuan* served as just one way for Xinjiang to experience an overarching military control; however, the military was also integrated into the region’s governing body. Military power that directly influenced Xinjiang’s elections, which allowed non-Han officials to hold seats in lower levels of government, but reserved the top positions many for Han politicians as to wield stricter control over the inner-workings of Xinjiang’s government to ensure it continued on the Chinese Communist path.\textsuperscript{90} For the most part, the region followed suit in terms of how other provinces were governed, especially in terms of land redistribution. The most noticeable differences between Xinjiang and provinces further east were the ethnic differences that held the potential to cause issues of China standing up to the world, especially because of the Soviet presence Xinjiang experiences in the decades prior. Therefore, uniting and ‘sinicizing’ Xinjiang appeared to be a major goal during this period. While Mao exercised more caution in Tibet regarding ethnic assimilation, Xinjiang was much less fortunate in the implementation of political ideologies, particularly during his many campaigns. In terms of land reform and instituting agricultural collectivization, the PLA was able to introduce “new forms of local-level

\textsuperscript{89} In his famous speech made at the front gate of the Forbidden City after defeat of the GMD, Mao declared that China had stood up to the world as the official end to the Century of Humiliation.  
\textsuperscript{90} Millward, James A. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. Pg. 239
organization and allowed the party to recruit and install its own operatives to govern local society”; even if those officials were Uyghurs, they were party-approved to promote the Communist agenda.\(^91\) Therefore, although at this point Xinjiang was no longer a colony of China, resembling more a structure of internal settler colonialism, the strategy for Beijing to send its own leaders or selectively choose its own local leaders was an extension of previous colonial methods that ensured Xinjiang would continue under Chinese control.

The Communist government’s structure within Xinjiang during the Mao era signified how important it was for the CCP to maintain close and strict political control within the region. It also enabled the CCP to control the Uyghur population in many other ways, strategies of control that continue to this day. Even more significant, Mao utilized numerous other methods to extend his hand into the region including his infamous campaigns that were carried out within Xinjiang and had a profound affect on how the Uyghur population lived under his rule.

Mao’s Campaigns: The Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution

The Mao era was well known for its prolific use of campaigns to advance the CCP’s political goals. While many smaller or less reputable campaigns existed and affected the political development of Xinjiang, the two that will be discussed here, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, are the most notable and had the greatest impact on Xinjiang under Mao’s rule. The Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) was a utopian scheme attempting to accelerate the “collectivization of China’s agrarian sector, reshape the land with massive public works projects, and decentralize industry” that required “political exhortation and the mobilized will of the people.”\(^92\) During this campaign not only did land reform result in an economic crisis and

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\(^91\) Starr, S. Frederick. Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland. Pg. 88-93.
\(^92\) Ibid
extreme famine, but also intensified cultural intolerance and can be considered the origin of CCP policies aimed at practicing Islam. In Xinjiang the Great Leap Forward purged Xinjiang’s government of non-Han political elites, mainly Islamic figures and “local nationalists.” Also during this campaign was the “Religious Reform movement” with overt anti-Islamic nuances; this movement made it more difficult for Uyghurs to practice Islam and demanded Uyghur assimilation into Han society. This was further supported by mass Han-migration into Xinjiang during the Great Leap Forward that also set the stage for future ethnic inequalities faced by Uyghurs throughout the latter portion of the 20th century and still today.

After the Great Leap Forward’s immense failure, Mao implemented various movements such as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) to preserve China’s Communist values and purge the nation of capitalists and elements of traditional China. This campaign is most known for its destruction of ancient city walls and important historical sites, but in Xinjiang was a way for the CCP to further attack Islam for its non-Maoist ways. However, Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, was known for holding even more extreme xenophobic sentiments, and reportedly “considered minority nationalities ‘foreign invaders and aliens’ with ‘outlandish’ songs and dances”, and particularly despised Xinjiang. The Cultural Revolution reiterated Jiang Qing’s beliefs by setting forth an intensified civilizing project where Qur’ans and other religious texts were burned, Islamic sites were closed and destroyed, pigs were penned in mosques, girls’ long hair was forcibly cut, and traditional clothes were prohibited.

Mao’s campaigns during his 27-year long rule undoubtedly had immense and direct affects on the Uyghurs. Beijing further perpetuated its role as the civilizing center and places

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93 Ibid
94 Ibid
95 Ibid
Xinjiang on the periphery as it attempted to reign in Islam as a culture, religion, and identity. By purging the government and society from Islamic influences Mao believed he could further consolidate Beijing’s power over the region, though it only fueled Uyghur discontent. His campaigns acted as a precursor to the ways in which the CCP interacted with Uyghurs after his death and especially after 2001. It not only continued internal colonialism against the Uyghurs, but also legitimized its persecution of them by implementing the policies in the name of security and development.

**Xinjiang and the Post-Mao Reforms**

After Mao’s death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping, who was denounced during the Mao era as a revolutionary, became the new paramount leader of the PRC. Economically and socially, Deng ushered in a period of radical change in the PRC, marked by reform and an opening to the world. During this time, we see fluctuations in the CCP’s attitude towards Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, though overall policy within the region did not change substantially, as the party retained a sense of intense control over the Uyghurs and the XUAR government. The post-Socialist era, though it infers a change in structure of Chinese politics, maintained the title “Chinese Communist Party” and continued to exercise control in the same manner as during Mao. Economically, China entered a new stage of development and in 1978 the CCP began to take more seriously the economic devastation that occurred in China’s west; further land reform and debt forgiveness was aimed at easing economic burdens many experienced under Mao.96 However, Uyghur politicians who were able to return to Xinjiang after Mao’s death “reported widespread unemployment and poverty among Uighurs: some people were still going barefoot in

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96 Tyler, Christian. *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang*. Pg 152
midwinter.” Moreover, it was apparent that Han Chinese still received much more opportunity and economic benefit compared to that of the Uyghurs, and continued Han migration into the region laid the foundation for social and economic inequality that progressed in the post-Mao era.

*Ethnicization, Integration, and Transnationalization of the Uyghurs*

Dru Gladney, a scholar and historian of Xinjiang, proposes three patterns of post-Mao control that defined the future of Xinjiang throughout the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century. They illustrate both the intent of increasing power over Xinjiang and the contradictory nature of these colonial-style methods that have contributed to creating a collective Uyghur identity, discouraging Uyghur nationalism, and fueling the struggle for self-determination. These patterns, identified as ethnicization, integration, and transnationalization together describe the Chinese nationalist element of CCP control, how this control is exercised, and the extent of its success.

The origins of Uyghur identity date back thousands of years, although it was not until the civilizing projects of the Qing emperors that definitively labeled Uyghurs as the peripheral other, consequently identifying them as different from the Han majority. Harrell’s contributions on civilizing projects prove particularly useful in showing how the othering of Uyghurs became normalized over the course of Qing and Republican history, demonstrating how Uyghurs gradually formed a strong collective identity culminating in brief periods of independence based on Uyghur community and governance. The first pattern Gladney recognizes as being one of the strongest indicators as to why the political situation in Xinjiang escalated into how it is understood today lies in ethnic policies that began in the post-Mao era. Gladney suggests, “the tendency of fault lines in Turkic and Muslim Central Asia, including Xinjiang, to follow

97 Ibid
officially designated identities might be called ‘ethnicization’. Ethnicization has meant that the current cultural fault lines of China and Central Asia increasingly follow official designations of national identity. Therefore, instead of a Turkic or pan-Islamic collective identity forming after the CCP assumed power, ethnic minorities have retreated inwards towards their own communities, which also contributed to a strengthening Uyghur identity.

China has always been notorious for its fervent use of propaganda, especially posters or banners displayed on streets, within schools, or local businesses. This period was no exception; along with a new era in leadership came the pressure to garner the support from local populations, especially minorities of whom many felt they had been mistreated under Mao’s rule. Published in 1978, the poster below shows how the CCP targeted such strategies directly towards minorities, in this case the Uyghurs. It was printed and distributed specifically in Xinjiang and reads “heartily support the wise leader Chairman Hua” to commemorate the rise of Mao’s handpicked leader, Hua Guofeng, to succeed him after his death, although he quickly fell from power with competition from Deng Xiaoping’s faction that subsequently rose to top leadership. Nevertheless, posters such as these show the ways Uyghurs were delineated by the CCP as a distinct ethnic group, but used this to its advantage as it attempted to reign in minority support from the border regions. Similar posters infiltrated communities within Tibet, showing awareness by the CCP of the need to appeal directly to each minority.

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98 Starr, S. Frederick. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Pg 102
Integration was one of the CCP’s most powerful tool and arguably most influential pattern of control during the post-Mao period of which its implications are still present in the region today. As we have seen, the concept of needing to integrate Xinjiang – or at least the Uyghurs – into some sort of Chinese identity or power was utilized in the Qing period, especially through the desire to assimilate, or civilize, Uyghurs into Han society. For the post-Mao period, integration took on new forms to coincide with China’s political climate of the 1980s. As with the Mao era, integrating Xinjiang into the rest of China relied heavily on concepts of nation building and solidifying their control over every aspect of national life.

Transnationalization refers to the limits of Chinese control, where the Uyghur diaspora played a large role in solidifying the Uyghur identity and Uyghur nationalism. The effects of globalization proved stronger in some circumstances than even the Chinese government’s

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policies and control. While this is an idea that will be explored to a much greater extent in the concluding chapter, this pattern still holds relevance in how Chinese control progressed in the immediate post-Mao era. The late 1970s and throughout the 1980s was a different time for Chinese international relations, and as China began to open up to, interact with, and face pressures from the international community, Uyghurs, too enjoyed the benefits from which this brought. This period marks the beginning of Uyghurs inside and outside of China finding their voice that had long been quelled by CCP policies and campaigns, in addition to introducing ideas and philosophies from the outside.100

Religious Reforms: The Case of Islam

Initially, the post-Socialist era in Xinjiang allowed many mosques and madrasas to re-open that had previously been closed under Mao. In fact, there is little literature or evidence of any intense crackdown on practicing Islam in Xinjiang during the 1980s. Instead, this era saw the proliferation of more institutionalized forms of discrimination aimed directly at the religion. For example, the “one child policy” was adopted in 1979 that restricted Chinese families to only having one child. This rule did not apply to minorities, and Uyghurs were therefore exempt. However, in 1988 the policy was revised to exclude Muslims from the ability to have more than one child – keeping in mind that birth control goes directly against Islamic values. In addition, increased Han migration prevented the Uyghur population to grow in relation to the Han, decreasing the Uyghur population density. So while policies were initially relaxed in the early years of Deng, towards the late 1980s and especially during the 1990s, more pressure began to be placed on the Uyghur community as a whole.

Education

Education reform persisted under Deng Xiaoping and continued the legacy of Mao’s hardline position that ensures a standardized and centralized education system present across China, especially in the harder to reach and “restive” border regions. Education is one of the powerful and institutional ways to exert power over the people, especially the children who are easily influenced and less likely to resist. In the 1980s there was a large push to decrease and eliminate illiteracy across the nation, especially in the rural areas. This increased the amount of Uyghur students able to attend school and dramatically increased the literacy rate in Xinjiang; however, the students attending school were subject to state-designed education plan that decided what they should and should not be taught. One reform that was welcomed by minorities in Xinjiang was the return of native languages to the school systems. Although students were also taught Mandarin, most were essentially bilingual during this time. Yet the content of subjects taught in schools did not experience reform and Xinjiang was still taught to be an integral part of China for thousands of years.

Xinjiang in the 90s

The 1990s deserves recognition separate from the other eras because of the quickly changing political climate – both domestic and international – and rapid increase in Uyghur nationalism, as well as a changing attitude towards Islam seen around the world. The 90s were not only an important phase of Uyghur nationalism that offers important insight into how the Xinjiang problem became the modern political problem it currently is, but was also a time of significant progression of the Chinese government. The Tiananmen Square Protest of 1989, a student-led pro-democracy demonstration preceded the decade and sparked a new wave of Chinese nationalism by the CCP in an attempt to ensure China remained a strong socialist nation.
The government soon after began producing white papers as updates on China’s economic and political development. The first ever White Paper produced by the CCP was released in 1991 on the topic of “Human Rights in China”, the beginning of many reports for the government to distribute in an attempt to show the world its openness to progress and change. However, it was not until 2003 when the CCP produced its first White Paper exclusively on the Xinjiang problem, which at that point three had already been produced on the topic of Tibet. This decade set the stage for China’s quickly evolving policy towards Xinjiang in response to the international climate, and as to how the looming attacks on 9/11 would completely change the course of governance in Xinjiang and Sino-Uyghur relations.

The 1990s also witnessed increased tension among Uyghurs and Han Chinese who continued to migrate into Xinjiang. Though ethnic tensions act as an integral piece of Uyghur discontent in terms of the large Han presence, to some Uyghurs, “it was not social and cultural disjuncture that most deeply provoked anger and bitterness in Xinjiang in the 1990s, but Uyghur perceptions of Han invasion and exploitation.” General tension within the region and increased Uyghur unrest in the 1990s came alongside the increased use of “hard and soft policies”. Similar to the “good cop, bad cop” strategy, during this decade the Chinese government more frequently using “soft” and “hard” measures to both win Uyghurs’ favor while simultaneously cracking down on Uyghur nationalism and anything deemed terrorist in nature. The immediate years after Mao’s death saw an increase in soft policies being used in Xinjiang, as seen with increasing numbers of mosques and madrasas. However, this led to greater power among Uyghur leaders at the local level, so in the following decade many of the mosques and

101 Finley, Joanne Smith. “‘No Rights without Duties’: Minzu Pingdeng [Nationality Equality] in Xinjiang since the 1997 Ghulja Disturbances.” Pg. 127
102 Starr, S. Frederick. Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland. Pg. 301
madrasas were shut down in an attempt to suppress ideas of Uyghur self-determination.\textsuperscript{103}

Another usage of hard and soft policies that has been present since the Qing Dynasty is the presence of local Uyghur leaders within the CCP. One prominent example of this, which will also be explored more in the following chapter on protest in Xinjiang, is of Rebiya Kadeer. Kadeer, a now exiled Uyghur and human rights activist, was once the richest woman in China. During the 1990s she was appointed to multiple high-level government positions. For the CCP, allowing Uyghurs into such positions was one way they could show the loyalty and success of some leaders, which would hopefully influence others Uyghurs to support the government.

However, in the late 1990s Kadeer was accused of sending confidential reports to human rights activists in the United States and was immediately jailed. Initially, Kadeer was celebrated and placed on a pedestal by the Chinese government, but at the first sign of resistance or disloyalty aimed to show the Uyghur population what could happen to them if they engage in such thoughts or activities. Kadeer was eventually released on humanitarian grounds, showing a switch to soft policy, which shows the many fluctuations in Chinese governance over the region and people.

\textit{Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure Campaign}

As witnessed with Mao’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, campaigns continued under Deng Xiaoping and his successors. The ‘Strike Hard Campaign’ started in the 1990s is notable for its similarity and resemblance to policies present in modern-day Xinjiang and can be viewed as the beginning to current strategies of control.

Previously, the CCP was very vocal about the need to strengthen Chinese unity and suppress dissent of any form; however, the Strike Hard Campaign is the first time a campaign was created and aimed directly at quelling Uyghur nationalism, separatism, and alleged terrorism. It ushered in a new era of policies directed towards Islam, making some of the first connections between

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid
the religion and separatism. The government claimed it required closing mosques and madrasas, stricter laws on practicing Islam, and monitoring religious professionals to ensure they practice Islam in the ways deemed acceptable to the CCP.\textsuperscript{104} The Strike Hard Campaign is a clearly shows an increase in hard policies within Xinjiang, especially in regards to Islam, which the government began to see as the center to the Xinjiang problem during this decade. Moreover, it demonstrates continued colonial-style policies, where the government has the ability to dictate how Uyghurs are able to live their lives and the extent to which they can “be Uyghur”, further reminiscent of civilizing projects first witnessed during the Qing.

**A Chinese War on Terror (2001- Present)**

Despite the increasingly hardline policies implemented across Xinjiang in the 1990s, the end of the decade actually experienced some hope among the Uyghur community that independence could be coming soon. NATO’s intervention in Kosovo led Uyghurs to believe that they might receive foreign assistance because they could not achieve independence on their own.\textsuperscript{105} Instead, the attacks on 9/11 changed the course of Uyghur independence for the foreseeable future when the word “Islam” and “terrorism” became unanimous with one another as a direct result of former President George W. Bush’s declaration of the war on terror. Although “unrelated to Xinjiang, the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 on the United States was to have direct and immediate implications for this region”, an immediate effect of which is directly tied to Beijing and its motives.\textsuperscript{106} After 2001, anything deemed counter to the unity of China was labeled as terrorism and a threat to Chinese national security. Many attacks “were initially attributed to Uyghur separatists, only later to be revealed as the work of spurned lovers

\textsuperscript{104} Starr, S. Frederick. *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*. Pg. 324-325
\textsuperscript{105} Bovingdon, Gardner. *The Uyghurs: Strangers In Their Own Land*. Pg. 3
\textsuperscript{106} Starr, S. Frederick. *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*. Pg. 120
or laid-off workers.” 107 Rhetoric depicting Uyghurs in the same light as militants in al-Qaeda or the Taliban became normalized, “where formally the Party had blamed separatist disguised as religious demagogues, now it blamed Islamic fundamentalists seeking to overthrow the state”; Islam was now center stage to how the CCP addressed Uyghur nationalism. 108 Because so many around the world were rattled by the attacks on 9/11, it became much easier for nations such as the US to sympathize with any other government who feels they are “under attack” by Islam. Most importantly, in the United States in 2002, “the Bush Administration, hoping to engage China’s support for its war against Iraq, finally agreed to classify the Uyghur militants as terrorists.” 109 In a mutually beneficial move, the U.S. government agreed to support the notion of Uyghurs as terrorists to push their own agenda. As a CCP official explained, we “hope that our fight against the East Turkistan forces will become a part of the international effort against terrorism, and as such it should win support and understanding.” 110 Consequently, the CCP’s planned and well-calculated anti-terror campaign by the CCP has led to harsher restrictions and crackdowns in the XUAR than experienced previously. Today, actions considered persecution by much of the international community has continued to quickly intensify even in the past two to three years. Most notably, Xinjiang’s provincial leader, Chen Quanguo (称全国), who took office in August of 2016 after his notoriously strict leadership in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, has been a strong figurehead in the crackdown of Uyghur nationalism and unrest. Recent actions include closing more mosques, madrasas, and other religiously affiliated organizations; banning the observance of Islamic holidays and traditions; criminalizing the wearing of burkas

107 Cunningham, Christopher P. “Counterterrorism in Xinjiang: The ETIM, China, And the Uyghurs.” Pg. 112
108 Tyler, Christian. Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang. Pg. 177
110 Starr, Frederick. Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland. “The Great Wall of Steel: Military and Strategy in Xinjiang” Pg.121
and the growing of beards; and requiring Uyghurs to forfeit their passports and submit DNA to the government; etc.\textsuperscript{111}

Though in the United States residual effects of the war on terror take shape in discrimination against Muslims, or anyone who “looks Muslim”, such as the 2012 attack on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, the Chinese war on terror is a domestic, systematic, and institutionalized discrimination aimed directly at Uyghurs and the religion of Islam. This is seen most clearly when comparing treatment Hui and Uyghur citizens receive, especially in regards to the CCP’s response to activism. Often times, Hui’s who protest against the government for any reason, such as demolition of Hui-populated areas, are met with understanding from the CCP in their attempt to please its model minority. On the other hand, Uyghur protest is labeled as Islamic extremism and is therefore deemed a terror attack.

\textit{Three Evil Forces}

Central to China’s war on terror are what the CCP calls the three evil forces of terrorism, extremism, and splittism. The three evil forces are not a part of any campaign, though the CCP’s attitude towards them closely resembles Mao’s early “Three-anti” campaign in that it views these three forces as detriments to society and thus must be eradicated. The CCP does not offer any direct definition for each evil force, yet it can be inferred terrorism refers to any act of terror against the Chinese nation or people; extremism is most directly associated with Islamic extremism; and splittism refers to ideas of separatism from the Chinese state. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a political body plays a key role in the promotion of the three evil forces, not only actively promoting campaigns aimed at addressing the three evil

forces, but also grants it international support and recognition.\textsuperscript{112} The CCP ultimately uses the SCO to legitimize any actions employed against the three evil forces, and because splittism is one of the three, it authorizes any law or policy aimed at quelling Uyghur nationalism and voices of discontent with the Chinese government, making any form of protest virtually illegal and therefore impossible. Refraining from defining the evil forces on any official document can also be viewed as a strategy to avoid condemnation from the international community; overtly defining a struggle for independence as associated with terrorism would not be supported from major foreign powers and could initiate unwanted international involvement. Moreover, using the SCO and other political and economic partners as a support system in this effort grants the CCP more legitimacy on the world stage. In a UN forum on minority issues in November, 2016, Uyghur activists speaking out against Chinese persecution were not only interrupted by the Chinese mission who claimed the Uyghurs have no legitimacy and should not be welcomed in the UN, but also received similar comments from nations such as Pakistan and Venezuela who supported China’s statements.\textsuperscript{113} The Chinese mission used examples stemming from the three evil forces to delegitimize Uyghur nationalism and discontent with the Chinese government, showing its unwillingness to even conduct diplomatic relations with the Uyghur community.

\textit{Xinjiang: A Virtual Prison}

Since 2001, labeling Uyghurs as a danger to society has become increasingly common and detrimental to Uyghur families across Xinjiang. Using the three evil forces as justification, the CCP is essentially turning the region into a prison where Uyghurs are not allowed to leave and their movements are closely monitored. Preventing communication with those outside

\textsuperscript{112} The SCO is comprised of 8 members: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, India, and Pakistan. It is a political, economic, and security organization.

\textsuperscript{113} “World Uyghur Congress Interrupted At Un Forum on Minority Issues”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfX5jGoYXvY&t=265s
Xinjiang or China in general makes it much more difficult to understand the extent of the persecution they face. Moreover, those who are able to attend schools outside of Xinjiang will most likely not mention any of the strict laws implemented in the region. Talking to Uyghur students at Beijing’s Minzu University (the college for Chinese minorities), none would reveal any sort of harsh crackdown on the freedom of religion in Xinjiang.\footnote{114 Though it is possible other Uyghurs students would have revealed the reality of the situation, it is most likely that the students I was able to talk with were of a higher class and either did not experience these laws firsthand, or would not speak out of fear of the CCP.}

This is further complicated by the fact that the CCP controls the media, there is little insight into the happenings of domestic China; however, investigative journalism and the loopholes through which communication channels remain open, it has become increasingly clear the extreme measures being taken within the region. Laws and policies continue to be enacted that has quickly and detrimentally impacted basic liberties of Uyghurs within Xinjiang. Together, these measures have pushed Xinjiang past the level of being a police state into territory of being able to call it a prison, for even leaving the province and especially the country is becoming increasingly difficult for Uyghurs as time moves on.

\textit{One Belt, One Road}

One aspect of the Xinjiang Problem that cannot be ignored is the economic element, which can be argued forms the foundation of most Chinese policies; the nation’s continuing economic rise on the world stage drives most CCP decision-making. Both politically and geographically speaking, Xinjiang lies at the heart of one of China’s largest economic development projects aptly named “One Belt, One Road”. The CCP hopes to create one continuous flow of trade with the help of increased roads and infrastructure that run through
Central Asia and Europe. The party even anticipates reaching as far as the tip of Africa. Historically speaking, Xinjiang has been at the crossroads of international trade and globalization for centuries, as it was the major intermediary hub of Silk Road trade routes between China and Europe. Today, China still views the region as an integral component of their quest for world economic domination. In 2013 the CCP initiated the “One Belt, One Road” economic campaign, sometimes referred to as the ‘New Silk Road Project’. Xinjiang stands at the center of this new trade system being the edge of China and Central Asia, making it a crucial piece of land for the Chinese to hold. The image below shows the various routes that comprise the One Belt, One Road campaign. The Xinjiang route continues both through Eastern Europe and the Middle East, showing the strategic importance of maintaining economic success and control within Xinjiang.

![Map of One Belt, One Road](image)

The colored lines represent proposed routes of the One Belt, One Road campaign

Another defining feature of economic development is the presence of oil and minerals in Xinjiang - a trait resembling previously U.S. occupied or currently occupied Middle Eastern

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115 The supposed end goal of One Belt, One Road was discussed at a forum I attended on Chinese-African relations at Jilin University in June 2017.
nations. As such, oil in Xinjiang raises an interesting comparison to U.S.-Middle Eastern relations in terms of the terrorist vs. freedom fighter question: can Xinjiang be described as a microcosm of the Middle East, where a continuous foreign presence led to instability, tensions, and eventually, extremism?

In the countryside “Xinjiang farmers report losing land and opportunities to Han farmers who are subsidized.” The government is also taking advantage of the Uyghurs and their land and in turn not allowing them the benefits it produces. Xinjiang province “has 122 kinds of minerals existing in more than 4000 mineral sites” which “constitutes 78 percent of minerals available in entire China”; yet, “the Chinese authorities have been encouraging the Han Chinese from other parts to settle there”, effectively taking away potential opportunity from the Uyghurs. Consequently, Uyghurs are left incapable of escaping the poverty they are forced into.

In addition to the region’s oil and minerals, the cotton industry has served as a way to economically control many Uyghur farmer’s economic opportunities and quality of life overall. For centuries, the resource has been central to the region’s economy, and “as during the Qing dynasty, state-requisitioned cotton is the lynchpin of today’s land reclamation and settlement policies in Xinjiang, and serves political as well as economic purposes.” In a recent report produced by qihuo ribao (期货日报), Xinjiang’s cotton industry is described as being at its peak level of performance and spoke to all the economic benefits to both the farmers an Xinjiang’s economy overall. However, it is commonly understood within the Uyghur community, as

120棉花期货为新疆产业企业穿上‘小棉袄’”。期货日报。
well as Uyghur human rights organizations, that they often do not benefit from the success of the cotton industry. Subsidies necessary to earn a profit continue to be cut by the CCP, making it difficult for Uyghur cotton farmers to earn enough necessary to survive. Additionally, much of the profit ultimately ends up in the hands of Han workers who were sent to the region by the government through forced migration.

*Other Forms of Institutionalized Repression*

One of the major goals for the CCP has been to increase the literacy rate, especially among minorities. They have been very successful in this, though it has come at a cost. They have been big proponents of making literacy and language more standardized, which has meant many Uyghur students learn Chinese in school instead of Uyghur, which does not allow them to gain the cultural benefits of learning their native language in school. They also require Uyghur students to learn their version of Xinjiang’s history in China, which continues to raise many issues among those who do not believe in it. They have also required elementary education and expanded access to middle and high school education, in addition to making it easier for nomadic families to have access to this education. Many families have to decide between choosing a school where their children gain the cultural benefit of learning the Uyghur language and the potential benefits of future employment and more opportunities when learning Mandarin.

Public health is another considerable form of institutionalized repression. Although access to healthcare and the general quality of healthcare within Xinjiang as increased dramatically over the past half-century, evidence of inequality in terms of the quality of healthcare Uyghurs have access to it is generally lower than that of Han Chinese. Because

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121 The report claims a profit margin of 2,000-3,000 RMB (approx. $315-$475) per ton of cotton. Uyghur farmers often dispute these claims saying that most of the profit often goes to Han workers or managers and they see little profit.

Uyghurs are already generally less wealthy than Han, many are often unable to visit the hospital or afford certain procedures, often meaning the difference between life and death.\textsuperscript{123} Epidemics of HIV/AIDS, alcoholism, and prolific drug use is also common among the Uyghur population, showing both the treatment they receive in Chinese society, as well as the lack of treatment they receive in the healthcare system. These problems are exacerbated “by the legacy of preferentially allocating resources to the more affluent and socially less threatening Han groups in the region.”\textsuperscript{124} It constitutes a vicious cycle of institutionalized repression that cast Uyghurs in a negative light and prevent them the access to necessary healthcare, which then continues crises such as high rates of alcoholism and drug use, which then further promotes discrimination against Uyghurs. And similar to economic and ethnic inequality, there is little, if anything being done by the CCP to combat these pressing social issues that continue to affect Uyghur society.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The previous three chapters have demonstrated the importance of Xinjiang’s history during the Qing and Republican periods for understanding Xinjiang’s political progression since the founding of the PRC in 1949 in regards to synthesizing the origins of Uyghur nationalism as a response to Chinese governance and policies. While the political climate in Xinjiang certainly changed as China’s overall governmental structure transformed into the People’s Republic of China ruled by the Chinese Communist Party, history tells us that these changes were rooted in policies, strategies, and philosophies that have their origins in Qing and Republican China, showing the evolution of imperialism and colonialism within Xinjiang. Though knowledge of this history does not answer the larger question whether Uyghurs engaged in recent protests are best understood as terrorists or freedom fighters, it does lay the foundation understanding

\textsuperscript{123} Starr, S. Frederick. \textit{Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland}. Pg. 278-279
\textsuperscript{124} Starr, S. Frederick. \textit{Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland}. Pg. 294.
theoretical framework that has spawned these two conflicting narratives. The Mao and post-Mao periods through the 1990s, inaugurated a contentious relationship between Uyghurs and the CCP that prohibits an entire population of people from the right to their own history and culture in the name of Chinese political and economic advancement. Thus, although Xinjiang was not technically a colony of China after 1949, residual strategies of colonial control have persisted. A strong military presence in the region has transformed Xinjiang into a police state and essentially a prison while decades of Han settlement has created a Han majority in the area where Uyghurs once dominated the ethnic landscape. Consequently, Uyghurs are not afforded basic human rights, such as privacy, and face religious persecution in many overt and systematic forms. Additionally, the One Belt, One Road project is the most recent example of how the government aims to extend economic control over Xinjiang, while also demonstrating its unwillingness to ever let Uyghurs be independent from China and create their own state of East Turkestan. The region’s economic importance is perhaps one of the most significant, but less obvious reasons why the Xinjiang problem currently exists and will continue to persist. So as long as these trade routes continue to thrive, not only will the Uyghurs be an integral part of Chinese unity, but also Xinjiang will always be politically and economically bound to China. Additionally, public health and education policies continue to affect the daily lives of Uyghurs and their ability to thrive as a community. All of these policies, laws, and institutionalized forms of repression only encourage feelings of discontent with the Chinese government.

As a contemporary problem Xinjiang represents both issues of Chinese human rights and the country’s political strategy to control its large and complex nation. The following chapter will demonstrate how the Uyghurs’ reaction to this situation has created the question of terrorist vs. freedom fighter since the turn of the century. The desire to be independent from China
continues in the form of protest and violence in the face of intensified political and economic policies aimed at dismantling Uyghur nationalism.
CHAPTER FOUR

Is One Man’s Terrorist Another Man’s Freedom Fighter?

Introduction

Colonial rule that began during the Qing dynasty and continued indirectly under Communist rule into the 21st century has laid the foundation for addressing the looming question of how Uyghur resistance, nationalism, and violence in Xinjiang - a direct response to this colonialism - is connected to terrorism as claimed by the CCP. Sino-Uyghur relationships during the Qing and Republican eras have contributed in significant ways to the rise of Uyghur nationalism and the desire for independence. As we have seen, an analysis of Maoist and post-Mao policies suggests that colonial strategies of control initiated in earlier eras continue to dictate Uyghur society. In the 21st century, moreover, the CCP has sought to identify activist Uyghurs with Islamic extremism. Demonstrating Xinjiang ultimately transformed into a Chinese colony that was then integrated into the PRC creates a clear connection between the past and present. By rejecting the narrative set forth by the CCP, Uyghurs activists and recent Qing scholars have further challenged the Chinese government’s narrative of terrorism by using history to justify the Uyghurs’ struggle for self-determination; furthermore, they have used history to show Uyghur nationalism and self-determination is a direct response to the Chinese narrative.

Since the attacks on 9/11, the Chinese government’s narrative has sought to identify Uyghur activists with terrorists groups from al-Qaeda and ISIS to the Taliban. Yet Chinese policies, laws, and institutionalized discrimination that have ensured that the quality of life for Uyghurs living in Xinjiang is substantially worse than Han who have migrated into the region, demonstrating the need to challenge the government to gain back the rights they deserve both as
citizens of China, and as humans. Labeling Uyghurs discontent as terrorism constitutes another strategy of Chinese control, which determines how Uyghurs are able to live in Xinjiang. More importantly, it shapes how they are viewed as a people and a society by the rest of China and the world.

In response to the persecution they face, Uyghurs all over the world have formed organizations advocating for human rights and the right to self-determination. Although this is nearly impossible to accomplish in Xinjiang itself, Uyghurs there are nonetheless active in voicing their struggles through active protest and cyber protest. Nonviolent Uyghur protest is further complicated by the unfortunate presence of established terror organizations responding to the very same struggle for independence. Though they constitute a minority in the region, their presence overshadows and obscures the activities of the nonviolent majority of Uyghurs motivated by nationalism to pursue self-determination. This chapter will analyze the contested narratives of Uyghur activists as terrorists on the one hand and freedom fighters on the other. Examining Uyghur activism through the three windows provided by Uyghur transnational organizations, alleged Uyghur terrorist organizations, and local protest movements in Xinjiang will reveal the complexity of the issue and the historical framework that has generated these conflicting representations. The inability for governments to agree upon a single definition of terrorism is complicated by the fact that each nation has its own political agenda that dictates how they perceive violence against the Chinese government. This factor, in addition to extensive discrimination against Muslims has neglected the historical importance of Qing colonialism that brings a fresh understanding to the terrorist or freedom fighter framework.
Defining Terrorism and Freedom Fighting

Establishing a proper definition of terrorism upon which the international community can unanimously agree upon is one of the greatest challenges facing scholars of security studies and governments across the world. The lack of a definition complicates not only what comprises acts of terrorism, but also how to differentiate between terrorism and freedom fighting. Moreover, debate over whether freedom fighting itself is a legitimate term leads to further discrepancies in determining if motivations behind acts of violence, protest, or extremism can be given a name other than terrorism. Yet most importantly, the lack of consensus concerning a definition of terrorism leaves room for the CCP and other governments to create their own definition that fits the mold of whatever “terrorism” they are trying to eradicate. In China, essentially any person or organization deemed as a threat to Chinese national security is subsumed under the umbrella term of terrorism and consequently can become subject to any anti-terror laws.

The previous chapter demonstrated how harsh policies in towards Uyghurs are most likely strong contributing factors fostering Uyghur protest and violence within the region, as opposed to collaboration with international terror organizations in the Middle East such as the Taliban, ISIS, or al-Qaeda. Although “the government considers these activists part of a network of international Islamic terror”, no definitive links have been established and there is no history of an international terror organization infiltrating the borders to commit any attacks or organize with those whom the CCP label as Uyghur terrorists.125 Since China’s internal policies may be contributing to its domestic “terrorism”, a similar assumption may be applied to the international sphere. The difficulty in finding a universally understood definition for terrorism has been the cause for much dispute among nations and may be hindering the ability to decrease the amount

125 Chung, Chien-peng. "China's "War on Terror": September 11 and Uighur Separatism.” Pg. 8.
of violence seen throughout the world. It is first important to note there is no official definition that is recognized by every nation. Second, there is no international agreement that there needs to be a definition in the first place. Those who believe an international definition is unnecessary claim it is widely understood what constitutes terrorism and what doesn’t, and the acts that comprise terrorist attacks themselves are illegal so the perpetrators will be held accountable regardless. In addition, it is claimed that because terrorism is perpetrated by individual organizations, there is no need to establish a political definition. On the other side, those who promote the creation of a universally understood definition believe that it is both possible to do so and necessary in the fight against terrorism. The lack of a definition may also allow governments to claim they “do not support terrorism – they support the “national liberation” of oppressed peoples”, as Syria and Iran previously have done.\textsuperscript{126} However, if “the goal underlying terrorism is always a political goal” then it is difficult to distinguish terrorism from freedom fighting.\textsuperscript{127} It is further complicated by views that “terrorism is a form of violent struggle in which violence is deliberately used against civilians in order to achieve political goals (nationalistic, socioeconomic, ideological, religious, etc.)”.\textsuperscript{128} Therefore, understanding the origins of the concept of freedom fighting can be useful in providing its intended context and proper applications. Following WWII, a handful of countries from across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa became independent through “nationalist political movements that employed terrorism against colonial powers”; the term freedom fighting was subsequently created as a tool of political legitimacy for the international community that supported these “struggles for national liberation and self-determination.\textsuperscript{129} Using the term “freedom fighter” identified

\textsuperscript{126} Ganor, Boaz. \textit{The Counter-terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers}. 8-17
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid
\textsuperscript{129} Hoffman, Bruce. \textit{Inside Terrorism}. Pg.16.
politically sanctioned activities— as opposed to “terrorist” – to describe these movements justified by foreign powers; violence that were previously labeled as terrorism was deemed as “wars of liberation” as opposed to violent acts of terrorism.\textsuperscript{130} Many politicians of terrorist-supporting governments claim, “when the goals of these acts are justified…the actions shall not be considered terrorism” and “jihad will never be considered terrorism because it is aimed at rooting out the expression of terrorism from the world”\textsuperscript{131} Consequently, the idea that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter came to fruition when foreign powers found it politically advantageous to sanction violence against other governments to advance their own agendas. However, on the other hand, senator Henry Jackson once stated “freedom fighters or revolutionaries don’t blow up buses containing non-combatants; terrorist murderers do”, further complicates how to define freedom fighting, or if freedom fighting can exist at all.\textsuperscript{132} Jackson’s statement raises serious questions as to the legitimacy of any violence, further shaping the idea that certain governments under certain circumstances may assume one side or the other.

Furthermore, after the attacks on 9/11 former President Bush’s war on terror expanded and redefined terrorism to include the concept of a modern, international terrorism.\textsuperscript{133} This legitimized claims by the CCP that violence and protest within Xinjiang was not merely caused by Uyghur nationalism but supported by a terrorist network of international terror organizations such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Suggesting Uyghur organizations were collaborating with these unanimously hated groups allowed China to garner support from nations such as the United States, Russia, and the UK – all powers on the UN Security Council – in their own war on terror.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid
\textsuperscript{133} Hoffman, Bruce. \textit{Inside Terrorism}. Pg. 19.
Because both frameworks of terrorism and freedom fighting are describing the exact same action but are different only in the justification of such actions, their definitions further supports both the Uyghurs’ and the CCP’s conflicting narrative. Neither offers a definitive answer to this complicated problem of determining whether or not violence and protest perpetrated by Uyghurs is terrorism or freedom fighting. By taking a closer look into the actions of Uyghur transnational organizations and Uyghurs associated with legitimate terror organizations, the question of terrorist vs. freedom fighter becomes clearer when understood in the context of Xinjiang’s colonial past and present.

**Uyghur Transnational Organizations**

Uyghur organizations have been a part of their society most clearly since the Nationalist era when the first East Turkestan Republic (ETR) was created. However, in response to the religious oppression Uyghurs continue to face, organizations have proliferated since the 1990s and have become more prominent in the 21st century. Those who left Xinjiang as a part of the Uyghur diaspora formed the many Uyghur communities across Europe, Central Asia, and the US. This led to the creation of many activism-based organizations that eventually became members of the overarching World Uyghur Congress (WUC).

The age of digitalization and cyber-activism allowed more communication not only with Uyghurs in Xinjiang, but also among Uyghur communities around the world and help tell the world of persecution they face at the hands of the Chinese government. These smaller organizations and WUC play an integral role in the terrorist vs. freedom fighter question in that they, too, have been labeled as terrorist organizations by the CCP. Their leaders are therefore also labeled as terrorists and are barred from ever entering China. These organizations often have diplomatic relations with the nation’s governments in which they reside, as well as with
international governmental bodies such as the UN; yet, the Chinese government still refuses to have diplomatic ties with transnational Uyghur organizations, which contributes to the international community’s overall lack of an understanding of the Uyghur struggle.

**World Uyghur Congress**

The most notable and internationally recognized organization is the World Uyghur Congress (WUC). The WUC is a democratic and peaceful organization that advocates for dialogue between the Uyghurs and Chinese. The WUC does not recognize the XUAR but instead refers to the region only as East Turkestan. This organization’s ultimate goal is to create an independent state for the Uyghurs, but in recent years the work of the WUC has been focused on religious freedom and civil liberties. Their mission statement clearly defines their goals as follows:

> The main objective of the WUC is to promote democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people and use peaceful, nonviolent, and democratic means to determine their political future. By representing as the sole legitimate organization of the Uyghur people both in East Turkestan and abroad, WUC endeavors to set out a course for the peaceful settlement of the East Turkestan Question through dialogue and negotiation.¹³⁴

The “leader and ‘Spiritual Mother of the Uyghur nation’, Rebiya Kadeer, acts as a figurehead for the WUC and all of its affiliate organizations.¹³⁵ She is the woman “whom the Uyghur people have put their hopes for the future” after being jailed by the Chinese government for “stealing state secrets”, and eventually released through diplomatic discussions between the CCP and U.S. government.¹³⁶ After her release, Kadeer was made a member of the George W. Bush Institute’s Freedom Collection, whose mission statement declares: “With the Freedom Collection, the Bush Institute will send a message to dissidents and underground preachers and political prisoners

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¹³⁴ “Who We Are”. http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?page_id=33467
¹³⁵ Ibid
¹³⁶ Ibid
around the world: we hear your voice, and as you stand for your freedom, free people will stand
with you.”137 She was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for seven consecutive years and
is recognized around the world for her passion in defending Uyghurs’ human rights.

_Uyghur Human Rights Project_

A faction of the American Uyghur Association (the WUC’s American branch), the
Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) is a research-based organization partially funded by the
National Endowment for Democracy (NED).138 The UHRP is also based in Washington, D.C.
just a mile from the White House, U.S. Senate, and congressional buildings.139 As a research-
based organization, the small office of just three employees produces reports and blogs, as well
as engages in other forms of cyber-activity to disseminate information regarding recent news
events occurring within China and other developments within the region that is not often
reported across other news sites. Moreover, it attends many of the academic forums and events
related to China, religious freedom, or human rights to engage in conversations regarding
Uyghur nationalism or Chinese oppression with those whom may not know about this pressing
issue, but might be able to play a key role in their struggle for freedom. The other major function
of the UHRP is its relationship with Washington’s political sphere. Most notably, the UHRP has
close ties with George W. Bush’s administration not because of the role he played in catalyzing
the Chinese war on terror, but the damage control he engaged in after the fact that freed Rebiya
Kadeer from prison and had her exiled to the United States. Surprisingly, the UHRP has not had
contact with the White House since he left office in early 2009. Barack Obama’s office was not
very active in voicing concern of Chinese persecution against Uyghurs, and the Trump

137 “Freedom Collection”. http://www.freedomcollection.org
138 “About Us”. https://uhrp.org/about
139 In the summer of 2017, I interned for the UHRP for six weeks where I was able to gain important insight into
how exactly Uyghur transnational organizations coordinate with other NGO’s, governmental offices, and the
academic community.
administration has thus far been silent on the issue. Even more troubling is the fact that many positions in the State Department have yet to be appointed by the President, making it more difficult for the UHRP to form strong diplomatic relations with politicians who could play a large role in advocating for the Uyghurs. One necessary caveat that must be added about the UHRP is the method in which they and other similar organizations gain information. It is unclear exactly how some of the sources are obtained and many of the sources are through word of mouth, therefore there is the possibility of bias, embellishment, or misunderstood information.

The UHRP also did not exclusively report on Uyghur issues, which is a part of its overall strategy. Last summer Liu Xiaobo, a prominent Chinese human rights activist who had been jailed for years, was released only to die weeks later of cancer and was widely reported on by the UHRP and other Uyghur organizations. The goal was to show that the Chinese government does not only persecute Uyghurs, but is a government that does not support human rights on many fronts. Their report showed the CCP is willing to go to any length at quieting all form of protest or resistance, even peaceful ones. In addition to releasing reports on diverse Chinese human rights issues, UHRP employees also attend a wide array of academic seminars and conferences to gain insight on the status of Chinese politics. Its employees often attend discussions on Chinese-Taiwan relations, the South China Sea, a Congressional roundtable on the Chinese economy, and a Chinese religious freedom conference that had representatives from many different religious groups living in China. This demonstrates the UHRP’s desire to gain a well-rounded understanding of the CCP as to further understand how it may ultimately affect Xinjiang or to determine the ability in establishing a more diplomatic relationship with the CCP. At previous meetings with both Uyghur and CCP representatives, the Chinese government has not

140 There were a few times throughout my personal experience as an intern where I questioned whether or not the stories being reported were precise and accurate. Much of the information was obtained via word of mouth.
been willing to engage with Uyghur activists, instead interrupting and claiming them to be part of a terror network.\footnote{One notable example is during a UN meeting where Uyghur activists took the stand to describe Chinese abuses of human rights, only to be interrupted by the Chinese delegate who claimed these organizations were illegitimate and part of terrorist organizations.}

Organizations such as the UHRP and WUC continue to play a large role in the Uyghur struggle and aim to do so in a diplomatic manner through continued efforts to communicate with government officials around the world. They face harassment from the CCP, preventing them from making any real progress in ending persecution in Xinjiang. The lack of CCP support not only fuels unrest in Xinjiang, but also deters foreign governments from showing any palpable support to Uyghur transnational organizations that goes beyond listening to their stories and then suggesting to the Chinese government that they respect freedom of religion for everyone in China. Understanding China’s role on the international stage demonstrates the role of international relations in terms of Uyghur activism and unfortunately shows no signs of significantly changing in the coming years as China continues to become a dominant force economically, politically, and militarily.

**Protest in Xinjiang**

“The most dangerous creation of any society is that man who has nothing to lose”\footnote{Baldwin, James. ""Letter from a Region in My Mind". " The New Yorker. November 17, 1962.}

-James A. Baldwin

James A. Baldwin perfectly encompasses Uyghur discontent when he claims that the most dangerous man in society is one who has nothing to lose. The previous chapter provides context for this idea in that the CCP effectively suppresses Uyghurs in terms of religious freedom, economic opportunity and cultural acceptance. In the face of persecution to the point of extreme depravation, revolution is often the outcome. As of now, the situation in Xinjiang has
not reached the point of revolution but instead takes the shape of protest and violence. Therefore, it is necessary to understand protest and violence in the context of both peaceful organizations and terror organizations to show that although both are responding to the same government, the affect of Chinese policies in Xinjiang can have dire consequences for political stability in the region.

*Everyday Forms of Uyghur Resistance*

James C. Scott coined the term “everyday resistance” to conceptualize the ways in which people indirectly protest and defy extremely repressive political regimes. He explains the importance of everyday resistance in that it represents how “resistance takes particular forms under particular structures of domination.”\(^{143}\) It is the very way in which the CCP controls Xinjiang and the Uyghurs that further propels them to take action, especially in the form of everyday resistance. With this method, “they can challenge institutionalized discrimination or exploitation as well as insulate themselves against it harshest consequences.”\(^{144}\) Through discrete protest, the Uyghurs form an alternate channel in which they can maneuver around the CCP’s authority and take a stand against their repressive regime. And because of the strict policies implemented in Xinjiang throughout its past, this is a crucial way in which Uyghurs are able to interact with external actors, including organizations such as the WUC. Everyday resistance has allowed Uyghur nationalism to endure and has prevented the CCP from silencing their action.

*Active Protest*

The Uyghurs have continuously deployed acts of everyday resistance to protest for their independence and against inequality, as well as against religious oppression which “has targeted

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\(^{143}\) Bovingdon, Gardner. *The Uyghurs Strangers in Their Own Land*. Pg. 85.

\(^{144}\) Ibid
both ideas and policies” of the CCP. Through poetry, art, literature, underground campaigns, the Internet, and communications with international organizations, and more, they have managed to sustain a kind of silent protest, where they tend to be safer from the CCP’s control. However, the Uyghurs also use their voice to speak to the Chinese government and the international community of the injustices they face. This has shown no sign of slowing throughout their history, and only increases when they are faced with greater oppression and violence. It is apparent the CCP does not understand that “a dependence on the stick at the expense of the carrot will only result in unrest as popular violence reacts to state violence.” An example of resistance as a direct threat to their religion in September 1990 was a protest that “took place during Ramadan” and was “response to the local authorities blocking construction of a mosque and madrasa.” In another instance, “complaints were voiced about birth control, nuclear testing and the export of Xinjiang’s natural resources to “inland” China. A mass protest followed, at which calls were made for jihad, or holy war, for the expulsion of the Han, and for an independent East Turkestan.” These occasional, more intensified protests are symbolic of both the desperation and determination the Uyghurs feel every day. The government fails to recognize the clear pattern of their oppression continuously being fought with resistance, which has only increased over the years. If the most dangerous man in the world is a man who has nothing to lose, it is imperative for Chinese forces to understand they are backing themselves into a corner of which they cannot escape. In an interview with a man named Rozi, a well-paid Uyghur professional with a steady job, he explained, “that if conditions in Xinjiang continued to deteriorate, he might join the organized opposition” because he “might decide that living is not

145 Bovingdon, Gardner. The Uyghurs Strangers in Their Own Land. Pg. 84.
147 Holdstock, Nick. China’s Forgotten People: Xinjiang, Repression and the Chinese State. Pg. 34
148 Tyler, Christian. Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang. Pg. 165
worth more than dying.”

Rozi is certainly not alone in the feeling of hopelessness, and the desire to go to any length for justice. More importantly, the CCP’s repressive tactics have not only promoted the intertwining of nationalist, religious, and ethnic issues, but in this political climate, they have also made it much more difficult to come to any resolution other than giving the Uyghurs the freedom for which they are fighting for.

The 2009 Urumqi Protest

In July of 2009, hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Urumqi to protest the killing of Uyghur factory workers in Shaoguan; they had been accused of raping Han coworkers and an attack took place against the Uyghurs at the factory where two were reported killed and many others injured. On the fifth of July, what many officials admit started out as peaceful protests, turned into a riot when “party officials in Beijing and Urumqi responded to the demonstration as they had” to previous protests and began “mobilizing the police with riot gear and paramilitary forces armed with automatic weapons.”

The following day Urumqi’s Internet and cellphone service were disconnected as military forces continued to flood the city. Almost instantly the protest was blamed on the previously mentioned democratic and peaceful organization, the WUC, and more specifically, on Rebiya Kadeer. This is one of the examples often used by the CCP to label Kadeer, the WUC, and other Uyghur organizations of having affiliations with terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda.

Tensions ran high for months, when in September there were a series of reported syringe attacks where people were stabbed or jabbed with what appeared to be syringes. Later, “medical researchers in Beijing dispatched to Urumqi found no evidence of chemical toxins or infections in any cases, leaving open to question whether the remainder had no signs of punctures that had actually occurred or whether they had simply

149 Cunningham, Christopher P. “Counterterrorism in Xinjiang: The ETIM, China, And the Uyghurs.” Pg. 111.
150 Bovingdon, Gardner. The Uyghurs Strangers in Their Own Land. Pg. 168.
151 I learned of this information during a discussion with my boss at the UHRP.
imagined them.”

This theme of questionable attacks and blaming Uyghurs for incidents that occurred throughout the country without any real evidence continue until today. It has become a vicious cycle: Uyghurs are portrayed as violent criminals and fight back against this incorrect overgeneralization, which then brings more violence against them and the cycle continues. The 2009 Urumqi protest is the largest to date, and represents the Uyghurs’ desperate plight to achieve justice.

The 2014 Protest

More recently, the 2014 protest was a significant protest occurring as a direct response to unfair treatment and discrimination by the CCP. Radio Free Asia reported that “Chinese police in northwestern China’s troubled Xinjiang region have shot dead dozens of knife and axe-wielding ethnic minority Uyghur Muslims who went on a rampage, apparently angry over restrictions during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and the cold-blooded killing of a family of five.” It was also reported that many Uyghurs then responded to the initial violent police response with more riots and protest, demonstrating how vicious these cycles can become in the region. The 2014 protests is another indicator that it is not a question of if, but when the next wave of Uyghur protest will occur and what will be its size and impact, for CCP policies ensure that the well of Uyghur discontent will not run dry in the near future, giving rise to numerous Uyghurs who feel as though they have nothing to lose.

The Turkestan Islamic Party

In addressing the terrorist vs. freedom fighter question, concerns over legitimate and established terror organizations operating out of Xinjiang cannot be ignored. Of the 22 Uyghur

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152 Bovingdon, Gardner. The Uyghurs Strangers in Their Own Land. Pg. 170.
153 “Dozens Of Uyghurs Shot Dead in Riots in Xinjiang’s Yarkand County” RFA Staff - https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/reports-07292014102851.html
inmates detained in Guantanamo Bay, some were accused of being associated with the organization formally known as “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” (ETIM), which is now known as the “Turkistan Islamic Party” (TIP). Immediately after the war on terror began, many world leaders, including the U.S., Russia, and the European Union declared ETIM a terror organization and supported China’s war on terror almost unconditionally. As many began to understand the effects of doing so, powers such as the United States and European Union removed ETIM from its list of international terror organizations, but still remains on lists of Russia’s and other prominent Chinese allies. TIP has apparent ties with al-Qaeda and the Taliban, as well as multiple factions in areas including Xinjiang, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria. Additionally, there has been an influx of Uyghur fighters joining ISIS in Syria, which the Chinese government has only recently addressed by sending troops to the nation in late 2017. However, the validity of Chinese claims that the Taliban and al-Qaeda have been supporting and training Uyghur militant groups has come into question even after 9/11 with U.S. officials claiming their involvement had been overestimated. TIP and a presence of Uyghur militants throughout the Middle East is verified and should be taken very seriously; however, it cannot be viewed exclusively in the light of Islamic extremism. These fighters, too, are somehow connected to the region’s long history of colonialism and should be understood in the same way. Significant attacks or terror attacks in China are most commonly associated with TIP, even when they do not claim responsibility for the attack. Because of China’s state-sponsored

154-155 TIP is, however, on the United State’s “Terror Exclusion List” which designates terror organizations for immigration purposes.
157 "Foreign and International Terror Organizations” http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm
158 "Foreign Terrorist Organizations”. https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rs/other/des/123085.htm
159 "Foreign Terrorist Organizations” https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65479.pdf
media it is difficult to distinguish between attacks legitimately committed by terror organizations or lone wolfs. However, even if the claims are substantiated, when addressing how to end this violence the counter-terrorism equation proves extremely valuable. The counterterrorism equation explains that “motivation + capability = terrorism”. Terrorists or terror organizations will commit acts of terror when they have reason (motivation) and capability (the means to do so). If alleged Uyghur terror organizations had desire to commit terrorism against the CCP but no weapons, they would not be successful. On the other hand, they could have weapons, but if they had equal access to education, jobs, religion, and diplomatic relations with the CCP, they would have no motivation. Therefore, the question must be asked why TIP exists in the first place and why Uyghurs believe they have no other choice than to join violent organizations perpetrating terrorism. Using ISIS as an example, research has found that many militants in ISIS joined not because they believe in its ideology, but because it is the only way they have access to food and other resources. If the most dangerous man in society is the one who has nothing to lose, TIP represents the extreme end of this spectrum. Terrorism is inherently politically motivated, and in the case of TIP, Uyghurs are motivated by Chinese politics that misrepresent, persecute, and alienate Uyghurs in their own home.

This organization and other Uyghurs legitimately connected to terror networks should be found guilty of their crimes and receive an appropriate punishment, but the CCP must understand that by labeling all Uyghurs as terrorists and continuing their misguided counterterrorism strategy, they are failing to either understand and take responsibility for their role in violence inside and outside of Xinjiang.
Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter

Thus far, I have introduced both the Uyghur and Chinese narrative of Xinjiang’s history, demonstrating how the region’s colonial legacy has contributed to shaping contemporary political instability in the region. Many Uyghurs believe they have been subject to Manchu and Chinese geographic and economic expansionism since the Qing dynasty. To the Chinese, the Uyghurs have undoubtedly always been a part of the Chinese nation, and any challenge to this historical claim is a threat to Chinese unity and national security, and is deemed terrorism. Although the attacks on 9/11 and subsequent war on terror intensified religious persecution in Xinjiang, nonetheless, the pieces to this puzzle nonetheless originated in the centuries prior; the Uyghurs current situation is a convergence between the past and the present. Therefore, current definitions and theories of political science can be used to determine the question of terrorism vs. freedom fighting using the aforementioned history and analyses presented thus far.

It has been determined there is no one definition of terrorism or freedom fighting that is universally agreed upon; however, using common elements from multiple definitions is sufficient to provide some sort of an answer. In the case of Xinjiang, anti-colonial sentiments can distinguish freedom fighting from terrorism. Terrorism almost always implies a political aim, but freedom fighting specifies that political aim as the struggle for self-determination and national liberation from colonial oppressors. Terrorists, such as those fighting alongside ISIS or using funds from al-Qaeda, justify violence against civilians using radical Islamic ideologies. The assertion that Qing forces colonized Xinjiang towards the end of the dynasty and continued aspects of colonialism through the Republican and Communist periods represents the freedom fighting protestors or transnational organizations engage in. Therefore, any person or organization collaborating with established international terror organizations are definitively
terrorists. Yet, the fact that Uyghur-led organizations previously labeled as terrorist organizations have since been de-classified as such speaks volumes to the legitimacy of China’s claims. Because China’s tightly-controlled state media is led only by the government, it is impossible to know how accurate their claims are of attacks such as the Kunming Railway Station as being committed by the TIP. If attacks are perpetrated directly and exclusively at civilian populations, this is also terrorism, for in my view it detracts from its political aims. Yet, one must not forget the counterterrorism equation when understanding these actions as terrorism. The act itself cannot be understood in isolation of its motivation; therefore, even legitimate terrorism cannot be simply written off as pure extremism, but must be looked at further to discern why it occurred in the first place, which is a major lapse in most government’s responses to terrorism.

It is hard to justify the use of violence, which is why the international community struggles with applying the term freedom fighting in any context, especially since 9/11 when terrorism itself took on an entirely new meaning. Furthermore, because of state-controlled media it can be difficult to discern which violence is unprovoked and which is instigated by extreme police measures. As the 2009 and 2014 protests have demonstrated, peaceful protests often turn violent in the face of police brutality. However, looking at attacks aimed at government or state buildings through the lens of the anti-colonial, post-WWII era, applying freedom fighting to Uyghur-perpetrated violence is much more rationalized. Xenophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric fueled by society today has made it much more difficult to see their actions, even innocent protest, in this light. It is imperative to consider whether or not Uyghurs would be seen as violent terrorists if they were Christian or Buddhist, which is possibly answered by the way the international community views Tibetans. For this reason, I propose to view violence in Xinjiang (not supported by legitimate terror organizations) that is aimed exclusively at the Chinese
government to be acts of freedom fighting. They represent a struggle for self-determination after centuries of Chinese colonialism that ultimately created a society that has persecuted and severely disadvantaged Uyghurs in comparison to the Han majority and other Muslim Chinese minorities.

**Conclusion**

Uyghur activism – in any form – is a response to residual effects of Qing colonialism that takes shape in CCP religious, economic, and political policies specific to Xinjiang since the 90’s and specifically after 2001. In the eyes of the Chinese government, Uyghur activism is another form of violent terrorism that undermines national security. To the Uyghurs it is a way to voice their discontent with ethnic inequality and religious persecution, as well as the struggle for self-determination. Because of the international community’s inability to unanimously agree upon one definition of terrorism, the ambiguous nature of freedom fighting, and geopolitical factors have led to very few governments coming out to defend China’s treatment of the Uyghur population. Their protest, even when violent, is mislabeled as terrorism as a way for the CCP to gradually diminish Uyghurs’ voices, presence in Xinjiang, and desire for independence. The “Xinjiang problem” is emblematic of the idea that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter; however, it is also evidence that history provides more answers than the present political context. Uyghur activists are not terrorists, and although they may be separatists they are not a threat to national security because of their colonial experiences that extends back to the Qing dynasty.

The very real presence of radical terrorist organizations using Islam to justify violence across the Middle East has overshadowed not only Uyghur activists’ legitimate protest, but also
Muslims around the world. Orientalism and xenophobia misrepresents the world’s entire Muslim population of over a billion people as having connections to terrorists, when in reality those terrorist constitute an essentially negligible percentage of the religion’s population. This prevents governments, politicians, and scholars from understanding the real problems that have faced the Uyghurs since the 18th century. With each subsequent period in Chinese history since Qing forces exerted control over Xinjiang, Chinese actions did not allow Uyghurs access to self-determination and therefore the international community should justify and support legitimate Uyghur resistance. Yet, even with the support from strong figureheads such as former U.S. presidents, the Dalai Lama, and other notable international leaders, China’s rise combined with persistent orientalism that continues to the plague the world allows misrepresentations of Uyghurs to thrive, and their access to help diminish.
CONCLUSION

The world has been struggling to come to terms with what and who constitutes terrorism or a terrorist for centuries. This study assesses terrorism in a different light, asking if it can instead be labeled as freedom fighting in the right historical context. This was accomplished through understanding the Uyghurs history as a colonial history under Qing rule and determining that Uyghur protest and certain circumstances of violent reactions to government and police brutality should instead be understood as freedom fighting. Chapter one laid the foundation for this assertion by bringing forth new studies of the Qing Empire that demonstrates Xinjiang was a colony during this era. A brief period of independence shows the Uyghurs formed a collective identity under colonial rule and aimed for independence from China. The second chapter then presented Xinjiang’s history from a Chinese nationalist perspective that asserts historical evidence proves Xinjiang has always been an integral part of China. This set the stage for the terrorist or freedom fighter framework by demonstrating how the CCP and Uyghurs’ conflicting narratives may either sanction or condemn violence and protest in Xinjiang. The third chapter brought these narratives together in the modern context of Communist China that implements policies aimed directly at Islam and Uyghurs’ position in a Han-dominated society. Chapter four then showed that protest and violence against these repressive policies is labeled as terrorism by the CCP, though understanding Xinjiang’s history during the Qing Dynasty brings in the concept of freedom fighting. Ultimately, it was concluded that peaceful protest and reactions to the government or police by protestors is freedom fighting, while anyone who acts on behalf of a terror organization still remains to be a terrorist; yet, the Chinese government has failed to make the connection between extreme oppression and actions they deem to be violent terrorism, splittism, and separatism.
With each major terror attack, the UN often convenes to discuss appropriate measures to be taken and for member nations to engage in necessary dialogue. After the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre in which eleven Israeli athletes were killed, the question was raised as to what constitutes a terror attack, for those who sympathized with the victims without question saw the violence as terrorism, and those who sympathized with the perpetrator did not. Many took the UN condemning terrorism as “endorsing the power of the strong over the weak and of the established entity over its nonestablished challenger – in effect, acting as the defender of the status quo.”

Moreover, according to Chen Chu, the deputy representative of the People’s Republic of China, “the UN thus was proposing to deprive ‘oppressed nations and peoples’ of the only effective weapon they had with which to oppose ‘imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, and Israeli Zionism.’”

The Munich Olympics attack is one of the earlier circumstances in which the question of terrorist vs. freedom fighter was addressed on such an international stage to determine when and under what circumstances governments sanction or condemn the use of violence. In this instance, the Chinese representative appeared to speak in favor of freedom fighting.

Moving forward to the attacks on 9/11, the CCP took advantage of the United States’ rhetoric of the war on terror that effectively declared war on Islamic extremism – and by extension, the religion of Islam as a whole. However, the United States did not expect the war on terror to reach such lengths, and eight years after the attack and before all Uyghur Guantanamo detainees were released the U.S. government explored whether it would condemn or sanction violence in Xinjiang in an attempt to determine if violence labeled as terrorism was that or freedom fighting. The House of Representative’s “Subcommittee on International Organizations,

161 Hoffman, Bruce. Inside Terrorism. Pg. 34.
162 Ibid.
Human Rights and Oversight of Committee on Foreign Affairs” held a hearing to discuss this issue; they had clearly realized this situation was not exactly black and white.\(^\text{163}\) The hearing did touch upon factors in the immediate years leading up to and after the attacks on 9/11; however, it failed to consider history beyond that. The Qing Dynasty was mentioned only once in passing, but was not connected to the violence in Xinjiang. Although Congressmen were able to gain a more well rounded understanding of the current political situation, whether or not Uyghurs were terrorists or freedom was not answered: the answer did not lie in the current century.

In 1974, Yasir Arafat, chairman at the time of the Palestine Liberation Organization, addressed the United Nations Assembly stating “the difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and the colonialists, cannot possibly be called a terrorist.”\(^\text{164}\) Though the Palestine Liberation Organization is itself seen by multiple governments as a violent, anti-Israel organization, his statement voiced before the UN can nonetheless be understood in the context of Xinjiang, for it creates the framework necessary to discuss Xinjiang in terms of its colonial past and colonial-style present. Arafat’s statement; however, must be taken with a grain of salt. This quote in particular must be considered in the context of the larger debate of how to frame Israel’s history as colonial ambitions or reclaiming Jewish lands. Moreover, statements such as his can be used to justify any form of violence or terrorism, even that committed by groups such as ISIS or al-Qaeda. Therefore, his statement can only be applied after a careful and in-depth analysis of the colonial aspect. Xinjiang was undeniably a colony of China under the Qing and through the Republican era, and should be


\(^{164}\) Hoffman, Bruce. Inside Terrorism. Pg. 38.
viewed as such still even after the CCP absorbed Xinjiang into its territory. Arafat’s statement is also important because it demonstrates the necessary dialogue that must take place on the world stage today, where organizations, activists, and leaders from around the world can address governing bodies such as the UN and raise awareness to issues few around the world are aware of. Therefore, while a potential answer to the “terrorist or freedom fighter” question certainly has roots in history, Arafat’s statement ultimately concludes that each nation, government, and individual holds their opinion based on their own historical narrative.

Yet, the Chinese government has not always viewed violence in Xinjiang as terrorism; this label has emerged alongside similar accusations around the world. Therefore, orientalism is another aspect of this question that cannot be ignored. The fact that Uyghurs are a Muslim minority in China is a significant factor in this analysis. Racism and xenophobia against Muslims and Middle Easterners fuels rhetoric of the war on terror and policies implemented by the CCP; to many around the world, Islam and terrorism is synonymous. More importantly, this contributes to the reason why so many governments around the world are unwilling to support Uyghurs in Xinjiang, which is then the reason very few know of the situation in Xinjiang. There is too much stigma associated with Islam for anyone to come to the aid of Muslims facing persecution not just in Xinjiang but also around the world. Centuries of colonialism and orientalism have pushed these populations into the periphery by the civilizing center that continues to dictate their place in society. Perhaps if there was less discrimination of Islam around the world, more would be vocal in defending the violence.

The assertion that Uyghurs as a whole are terrorists, splittists, or extremists, is more than a vast overgeneralization made by the CCP to promote their vision of a single, strong and united nation that will soon become the world power. International relations have also proven to play a
significant role in preventing foreign powers from condemning China’s actions in Xinjiang. Often times, foreign governments offer statements calling for China to allow freedom of religion for all of its citizens, but fall short of specifically addressing the many repressive policies aimed directly at Uyghurs.

The CCP’s response to unrest in Xinjiang has been a major contributor to violence and protest that the government has labeled as terrorism in the past few decades. The government has entered a vicious cycle of articulating responses that will only fuel motives to commit more violence or engage in more protest. Therefore, the prognosis for Xinjiang is discouraging. The Chinese government will most likely continue its “war on terror”, putting further emphasis on the ethnic, religious, and economic divide between the Uyghurs and Han. If other nations are able to restrict the support given to TIP by other terrorist organizations there may be hope for a decrease in the violence, but as the terrorism equation explains, when there is motivation there will also be capability. And because of the complex relationship China has with many other world powers, it is also unlikely that countries such as the United States will be outspoken about the injustices occurring in Xinjiang. It may take a 9/11-scale attack on China by TIP to force the government to realize it is not Islam that causes violence against the government, but rather deeply rooted social and economic grievances caused by their own decisions and agendas. It is imperative China understands the necessity in engaging with Uyghurs within Xinjiang and Uyghur transnational organizations in a diplomatic manner. Xinjiang will certainly not gain independence – at least in the near future – but dialogue and discussion can go a long way. If the Uyghurs really are an integral part of the Chinese nation as the CCP claims, then they should be active in ensuring they have the quality of life every Chinese citizen and every human deserves.
Based on the continuously evolving nature of Xinjiang evident since its time as the crossroads of the Silk Road, it is clear that in the coming years the region will continue to transform politically and economically. Calls for protest against CCP policies in Xinjiang by Uyghur transnational organizations have already begun in 2018. Whether or not they will have the impact of the 2009 and 2014 protest remains to be seen, but the Chinese government must understand its inability to address their looming “Xinjiang problem”. It will not go away on its own or through the destructive measures the Chinese government has chosen to deploy since the Qing army first marched westward 300 years ago.
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