RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION AS DRIVERS OF CONFLICT IN XINJIANG

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critically evaluates the role of Islam and ethnic differences as driving forces of conflict in Xinjiang. As China grows and becomes more vested in the global system, its continued stability is in the interest of the international community. However, ethnic minority-related unrest in China has been identified as a powerful destabilizing force, with market watchers speculating whether minority unrest could escalate and shake the Chinese state's hold on power and legitimacy to govern. These concerns that violent civil strife could potentially spiral out of control are not without merit and the realization of such a scenario would have significant international ramifications, ranging from the dysfunction of large economic demand and supply systems, to the possible contagion effect of ethnic-based unrest aimed at self-determination. The renewed salience of nationalism, the natural tension between the rights of sovereignty and self-determination, and the recent perception of an Islamic threat in the non-Muslim world make this an issue of international concern. In short, managing religious and ethnic differences in China is of utmost importance.

A common assumption of the root cause of the Uyghur-Han Chinese conflict is that the conflict arises from the practice of Islam not being reconcilable with the atheist ideology of communist China. Meanwhile, Chinese authorities have resorted to economic
development as a panacea for wide-ranging grievances of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Key
issues that will be investigated in this thesis include whether religiosity and ethnic
differences are sufficient motivating factors for conflict, or whether other volatile factors,
such as economic marginalization and real or perceived threats to a community's identity,
need to be present before there is an outbreak of violent conflict.

The central argument of this dissertation is that religious and ethnic differences
are not sufficient to bring about armed conflict. The minority-state contention that exists
in Xinjiang is not simply a clash of the Islamic and Confucian civilizations. It is a
complex and multifaceted conflict on multiple levels, and the tendency to stereotype
issues, especially those involving religion, might not provide a logical explanation for
conflicts that also arise from sociological, historical, and political contexts. While
religion is an important aspect of ethno-religious conflicts because of its capability to
mobilize adherents and legitimate actions, religion alone is rarely the sole motivating
force of conflict. Current policies in Xinjiang need to be re-evaluated, because instead of
working to foster accommodation of the Uyghurs in Chinese society, their effect has been
to reinforce the Uyghurs' will to be distinct from the Han Chinese. More work has to be
done in order to halt the damage to inter-ethnic group relations in China, with a moderate
and more inclusive approach to managing minority groups required.
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Ethnic conflict in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the northwestern part of China has continually erupted for decades, with the region commonly referred to as being turbulent or restive. With ethnic minority-related unrest being identified as a powerful destabilizing force in China, market watchers have speculated whether isolated unrest could spread and shake the Chinese state's hold on power and legitimacy to govern. As China grows and becomes more vested in the global system, its continued stability is in the interest of the international community. Yet most recently on July 18, 2011, the Uyghur and Han Chinese ethnic groups clashed violently again. The attacks on a police station in Hotan, Xinjiang, left at least 20 people dead. The on-and-off episodes of ethnic group fighting highlight the depth of the Uyghur-Han contention and the urgent need for the Chinese authorities to better manage religious diversity and ethnic differences in the country.

Minority conflict in China is not only an issue of domestic concern. Increasingly violent armed resistance to Chinese rule would have an international impact. In particular, calls for self-determination could spread to similar ethnic groups living in some of the former Soviet republics bordering Xinjiang. Ted Gurr calls the process of conflicts spreading across national borders contagion and diffusion. Contagion occurs when conflict spreads across borders, and these conflicts can involve ethnic and religious elements. Diffusion, meanwhile, describes how an uprising in one place can inspire similar movements by people living elsewhere.
natural tension between the rights of sovereignty and self-determination, and the recent perception of an Islamic threat in the non-Muslim world make the Uyghur-Han conflict an issue of international concern.  

The causes of the Han-Uyghur conflict are varied and complicated, with scholars utilizing a range of theories from relative deprivation to Islamic radicalization to explain the contention. It is commonly assumed that the conflict arises from unbridgeable differences between two historically strong civilizations, in other words, the irreconcilable differences between the Uyghur Muslims and the atheist communist Chinese order. But to blame the conflict entirely on ethnic differences would be too simplistic. Therefore, this thesis proposes that religious and ethnic differences are not the principal cause of the Uyghur-Han conflict. Religion plays an important part in the contention, but it alone cannot explain the conflicted relationship between the Uyghur and Han. To uncover the particular ways and effects religion has on the Uyghur-Han contention, a framework of ethno-religious hypotheses by ethnic conflict scholar Jonathan Fox will be applied to a case study of Xinjiang. Fox's framework for evaluating the risks of ethnic conflict also looks at the roles of religious legitimacy, religious discrimination, and religious institutions, presenting us with a systematic method of dissecting the conflict in Xinjiang. Consequently, the effects and impacts that religion has on the conflict can be discovered. Additionally, a toolkit of theories from various academic schools including conflict management studies, ethnic conflict studies, international relations, history, and sociology, will be used to explain the Uyghur-Han conflict. Specialists in these respective fields may object to such a comprehensive attempt
at looking at the Han-Uyghur situation, but the need to use a variety of perspectives and theories is justified by the sheer complexity of the issues at stake. A synthesis of several theoretical frameworks would yield a holistic approach to understanding the endogenous and exogenous factors of the Xinjiang conflict. From there, a more instructive and practical way forward may be presented.

A Brief History

The Central Asian border region of Xinjiang, in northwestern China, accounts for one-sixth of the country's land mass and is home to about 20 million people from 13 major ethnic groups. Chinese control over its northwestern region dates back to the eighteenth century and the name Xinjiang was likely used for the first time in 1786. At the time, it was not the Han Chinese but rather the Manchus of the Qing dynasty who ruled China. The sinicized Manchus were expansionist, conquering large amounts of land including the Manchu homeland, Mongolia, Xinjiang or Eastern Turkestan, and Tibet.

Broadly speaking, Xinjiang is divided between Muslims, most of whom speak Turkic languages, and non-Muslim Han Chinese. The Muslims form a majority although they do not constitute a united bloc against the Chinese as there are cultural and linguistic nuances. The ethnic group most frequently involved in unrest in Xinjiang would be the Uyghurs, the people after whom the autonomous region is named. The Uyghurs do not share any cultural or linguistic links with the majority Han Chinese citizens, who make up 92% of China's population. The Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups living in Xinjiang including the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks are of an ethnic heritage that is closer to the peoples of neighboring former Central Asia Soviet states Kazakhstan,
Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. In comparison, another Muslim group in China, the Hui, has become ethnically indistinguishable with the Han Chinese after centuries of intermarriages. The Hui Muslims speak Mandarin and share certain customs with the Han. As a result, they have been more assimilated into mainstream Han practices and norms, and are not deemed a threat to the state.

Uyghur nationalistic desire for independence has always been in existence, with Xinjiang enjoying various degrees of autonomy since the early 1900s. Turkic rebels in Xinjiang declared independence in October 1933 and created the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, also known as the First East Turkestan Republic. The following year, the Republic of China reabsorbed the region. In 1944, factions within Xinjiang again declared independence, this time with the support of the Soviet Union, and created the Second East Turkestan Republic. But in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regained the territory. In October 1955, Xinjiang became classified as an "autonomous region" of the People's Republic of China, with a number of autonomous Mongol, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Hui counties.

Since 1949, Xinjiang had been subject to Communist Party campaigns and policy swings between openness and control. It is probably a fair observation that anti-Han sentiment has been generally prevalent among the Uyghurs due to harsh rule by Han warlords and local officials. The early 1950s were a period of tolerance, as the CCP established links with the local religious and social elites. In these few years, there was minimal interference in business, religious practice, and social norms. However, by the mid-1950s, Mao Zedong urged for many socialist changes throughout the country. The
CCP policy of collectivization and the accompanying attempts to mobilize peasants against local elites drove Uyghurs and others together against the Chinese leaders. In 1956, Mao invited criticisms in his Hundred Flowers Campaign but quickly launched a repressive anti-rightist movement to silence critical feedback after a deluge of criticism shocked the leadership. The Great Leap Forward, which started in 1958, was characterized by calls for rapid cultural homogenization and low tolerance of difference. Even ethnicity became an impediment to progress. More moderate policies came about in the 1960s, with Muslims allowed to celebrate religious festivals. But by the mid-1960s, the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) brought demands for "cultural conformity to a new extreme." Difference was not tolerated and activists destroyed mosques, forced Muslims to shave their beards, and frightened Turkic peoples into shedding their religious clothing and rituals. The hard-line and intolerant policies of the Cultural Revolution were perceived by the Uyghurs as grossly unfair and an assault on their political rights and core religious identities. This brought about intense discontent and therefore instability.

Beijing's strategy to deal with ethnic separatism in Xinjiang since the 1990s has essentially been twofold. While there has been suppression of any unofficial religious activity, there has also been an "ambitious program of economic reform, on the assumption that the principal underlying reason for the disaffection of the Uyghurs is not ethnic nationalism but poverty and underdevelopment," writes Michael Dillon, former Director of the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies at the University of Durham, U.K.
Yet despite the state's efforts, cultural assimilation between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese in Xinjiang has been limited.\textsuperscript{21} This can be attributed to a confluence of reasons, including a lack of trust and Uyghur disaffection arising from the mass immigration of Han Chinese into what Uyghurs consider their indigenous homeland, policies restricting the practice of Islam, and the growing income gap between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese. In particular, state-directed Han migration into Xinjiang has roused unhappiness as it has been viewed as a move to obliterate Uyghur culture. In the 1940s, Xinjiang was inhabited overwhelmingly by Muslim peoples, mainly the Uyghur, Kyrgyz and Kazakh, with the Han Chinese constituting only a very small minority or about 6.7\% of the population.\textsuperscript{22} After the Chinese Communist Party took control of China, large numbers of Han Chinese migrated to Xinjiang, so much so that by 2001, Uyghurs made up 46\% of the population, with Han Chinese accounting for 39\%.\textsuperscript{23}

Meanwhile, because of the precedence of East Turkestan independence, there have been simmering hopes of being free of Chinese rule. This was especially the case in the 1990s, in the wake of the implosion of the communist Soviet Union where several regions with similar ethnic populations gained independence. As a result, nationalistic Uyghur elements have been agitating for independence from China for decades, very often appealing to their brethren in Central Asia and other Islamic countries across the world for support. In this politico-historical context, the Uyghurs' contention with Chinese rule arguably arises from nationalistic inclinations, not militant intentions or religious differences.\textsuperscript{24} Ultimately, this is also a display of the conflict arising from the opposing rights of sovereignty and self-determination, with these urges stemming from
very different sources. As Rupert Emerson said, as cited by Gardner Bovingdon in his book *The Uyghurs, Strangers in Their Own Land*, "The state has an indisputable prerogative and duty to defend its own existence, and the nation comes likewise to be endowed with a right to overthrow the state."\(^2^5\) The rights of self-determination and the rights to state-building are inherently conflicting and may be destabilizing if the circumstances are permissive. This tension will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

**Literature Review**

Following the end of the Cold War, Samuel Huntington argued in his seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* that "principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations." Huntington famously predicted that the "clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."\(^2^6\)

This school of thought focuses on cultural distinctions and primordialism, proposing that since antiquity, humans have been wired by their cultural upbringing, distinct languages, and shaped by their communities. People are thus by nature divided by their inherent proclivities and cultures, and socialized into their respective "ancient" civilizations, and that likely predisposes them to clash with other groups with different value systems and beliefs.

Huntington divides the world into eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African. He defines civilization as a cultural entity, arguing that civilizations are differentiated by history,
language, culture, tradition, and most importantly, religion. Religion is significant as it reinforces the revival of ethnic identities, he points out.27

Because these fundamental differences run deeper than differences among political ideology and political regimes, civilizational differences cannot be easily assimilated into another culture. Meanwhile, modernization and other social processes have weakened the nation state as a source of identity, Huntington argues. A related phenomenon is civilization rallying, or the kin-country syndrome, whereby groups or states that get involved in conflicts with a different civilization would try to rally for support or help from others with whom they share ethnic commonalities.28 In sum, Huntington's argument is that the "unsecularization" of the world and the revival of religion as a basis of identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries mean that conflicts would increasingly be between civilizations.29

To an extent, Huntington's proposition is very compelling, for with the collapse of the Soviet Union and conclusion of the Cold War, many "systematic restrictions" on religious conflict were removed. States with religious factions no longer needed a superpower sponsor "which was likely to restrain their actions and support them in struggles against religious groups within their borders." The conflict in Bosnia is a good example of a conflict that was extremely unlikely to occur during the height of the Cold War.30 Nonetheless, to whittle down the reasons for conflict to ancient hatreds that civilizations have for each other just seems to be oversimplifying and too narrow a perspective. In the case of China, if religion or Islam is the sole divisive force, the Chinese state should face similar levels of unrest and protestations from the Hui Muslims,
a group which apparently has been better assimilated into the dominant Chinese culture. Granted there are significant differences between the circumstances of the Hui and the Uyghurs, for instance, the Hui being more physically dispersed without links to a certain piece of territory to claim as an indigenous homeland. Nonetheless, the clash of the civilizations theory does not account for variances in the effects of religion on conflict in China. It does not explain why conflicts have broken out in some Muslim areas but not others, and it cannot explain why some disputes are more violent and harder to resolve than others. Therefore, in these particular circumstances, the theory is insufficient in explaining the Uyghur-Han conflict.

A scholar on Islam in China, Raphael Israeli, like Huntington, focuses largely on civilization markers, religion and ethnicity. A defining theme in Raphael Israeli's book, Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics, is the resurgence of Islam as a unifying force for Muslims in an increasingly borderless world. Israeli argues that the "current revival of Islam around the world, coupled with the growing interest of the Islamic core in the minorities of the periphery, has raised the probability of Islamic renewal in these remote fringes of the Islamic world." He examines Muslims in China as a "prototype of a vital Muslim minority that may be undergoing significant developments" under the influence of the changing Islamic world. He points out that the incompatibility or unbridgeable gap between two self-confident orders, Islam and the Confucianist Chinese system, could portend more conflicts. Crucially, he argues that Islam goes beyond being a culture but is a total way of life, "inseparably encompassing politics and religion." This approach and way of life strives to realize Islamic political
theory, implying a goal of Muslim statehood. This is because when a Muslim minority lives in a non-Muslim state, it remains outside that polity and "nurture separatistic ideals which can materialize when the opportunity presents itself." In short, there is an inexorable link between Islam and politics, with Muslims required to strive to live in a Muslim state, argues Israeli.  

Israeli’s study suggests some important implications on the identity and conduct of Muslims in general, but whether core Muslim countries’ renewed interest in Muslims of the peripheral Islamic world would actually translate into action is debatable. Taking into consideration factors such as China's growing economic and political influence across the Islamic realm and the realist dimension of state behavior which proposes that Muslim nations prioritize state interests over ideals, there is a lack of empirical evidence that the Uyghur incidents would inspire Muslim countries to support Xinjiang independence from Chinese control. In fact, some scholars observe that China and major Islamic countries in the Middle East have been drawing closer together to jointly counter-balance American supremacy. In short, the Islamic civilization is far from a united, cohesive, and monolithic community, given its many subdivisions including its Arab, Turkic and Malay branches. Muslims everywhere may in theory belong to the universal ecclesia of Islam, the *Umma*, but there are still variances in interpretation of the Quran, the central religious text of Islam, with different manifestations of behavior.

In recent times, the equating of Islam with violent fundamentalism has been dominating security discourse. Yet the new Islamist mainstream, which includes Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisia's Nahda party, has evolved over the years and
recognizes that the new generation of youths growing up with Facebook and Google are not going to unquestioningly submit to the old-school type of imam who used to command near total compliance in the religious order. There are instances of when Islam has shown itself to be adaptable to changing social contexts, and political and economic environments. Mainstream Islamists, the modernizing majority, have said they would uphold women's rights, that they would not ban alcohol, that they would respect ethnic and religious minorities, and that they would not unilaterally impose sharia law. These more pragmatic Islamic leaders argue that they deserve the chance to prove that they are sincere in supporting pluralistic politics. In short, the stereotype that Islam is inflexible, prone to fundamentalism, and incompatible with other social orders may not always hold up to scrutiny.

Another group of scholarship uses an economic lens to examine civil conflict. This approach basically argues that it is the poorest countries that are failing in the world today, implying that it is economic deprivation and depraved living conditions that fuel civil conflict. A lethal cocktail for conflict consists of economic decline, dependence on one or a few primary commodities, low per capita income, and an unequal distribution of income.

In The Bottom Billion, Paul Collier argues that the world's poorest peoples are falling into conflict traps that greatly inhibit, even reversing development. In this economics-centric school of scholarship, bread-and-butter issues trump all other casual factors in conflict. To be sure, Collier is not saying that ethnic differences are not important, only that in the bigger scheme of things, it is economic deprivation that
ultimately fuels desperation, radicalization and mobilization, leading to conflict. Collier coins the term "conflict trap," which refers to an intractable situation involving a vicious cycle of conflict. Once a rebellion is sparked, it gains a momentum of its own. Even if peace is re-established, it is fragile, with the precedent of conflict meaning that reversion to violent clashes is highly probable. Meanwhile, the longer a conflict lasts, the more entrenched the various parties become in their respective positions. Collier argues that economics matters more than ethnic/religious diversity, with high ethnic-religious heterogeneity giving a lower conflict risk but ethnic dominance increasing the risk of conflict by 50%.  

An important thing to note here is that Collier's hypothesis concerns civil wars, a situation that obviously has not taken over China. Nonetheless, his framework for evaluating the causes of civil conflict is a useful tool for understanding the quantitative aspects underpinning the Uyghur-Han conflict. In Xinjiang, unequal economic opportunities are compounded by the overwhelming domination of one ethnic group over the other, polarizing society further. These factors contribute in significant ways to the Uyghur-Han conflict.

At the same time, economic factors alone cannot rigorously explain the genesis of conflict. An economics-centric perspective does not sufficiently account for social factors and human agency. Conflict is brought about by humans and their accompanying values, interests, and cultural inclinations.

In sum, any conflict is not reducible to religious or ethnic differences. Every conflict is complex, with multi-faceted factors at play, both domestic forces and
international influences. The clash of the civilizations and Islamic renewal theories, as compelling as they are due to the exposition of crucial linkages between religion and identity, cannot fully explain the deep-seated Uyghur-Han contention that exists in Xinjiang, nor can they be conclusively used as predictors of conflict. The tendency to stereotype issues especially those involving religion, might not provide a "rational explanation for conflicts that also arise from sociological, historical, and political contexts." More specifically, these approaches are inadequate in explaining ethno-nationalist conflicts or minority conflicts involving a threat to identity, such as the one in Xinjiang in China. Arguably, it is only when the situation is exacerbated by some systematic violations of religious/ethnic rights, in other words a threat or perceived threat to a group's identity and core values, that a potentially explosive situation exists.

Therefore, only by examining the Xinjiang conflict from the various perspectives and frameworks that several theories provide, can policymakers truly begin to get a grip on the dynamics of the Xinjiang conflict and work towards conflict management and resolution. All that notwithstanding, the relative weight and relevance that each of these theories has in the Xinjiang context will vary.

Organization of Thesis

The organization of my thesis is as follows: in Chapter 2, I cover some basic definitions of religion and ethnicity. I then examine the influence of Islam and ethnicity on the Uyghur identity, arguing that while Islam is a core dimension of the Uyghur identity, religion alone cannot explain the Han-Uyghur animosity. To achieve that purpose, I will apply Jonathan Fox's framework for evaluating the specific ways in which
ethnicity and religion can cause or facilitate conflict. Several of Fox's propositions on religion and conflict will be applied in the Xinjiang context, following which the impacts of religious legitimacy, religious discrimination, and religious institutions in Xinjiang will be evaluated. An obvious caveat to the exercise is that these variables are somewhat crude and hard to measure, but nonetheless could help to distillate some of the key issues and drivers of the conflict that are at play in the Uyghur-Han contention. A comparative discussion of the Hui Muslims in China will follow, in order to gain a more complete understanding of Islam in China. One of the main aims of this chapter is to learn about the conflict from the Uyghurs' perspective, and to nail down the specific role that religion has in the conflict in Xinjiang.

In Chapter 3, the efficacy of the Chinese government's strategies in dealing with the conflict will be discussed, specifically the effectiveness of economic development as a tool to ameliorate discontent and the effects of the unintended tension arising from the use of coercive state-building tactics to dilute a community's religious/cultural identity. In essence, the challenge for the Communist Party is not about eradicating Islam from Chinese society but reconciling the clashing group ideals of China's state-building needs and the Uyghurs' desire for more freedoms.

Chapter 4 applies conflict management theory to the Xinjiang context, charting out Chinese and U.S. policy implications with the purpose of alleviating the simmering force of ethnic separatism in China. Essentially, Chinese authorities need to adopt a broader approach beyond economic development in order to more satisfactorily address Uyghur unhappiness due to a lack of religious freedom, poor protection of civil liberties,
the marginalization of culture, and under-represented or sidelined interests. In effect, a revamp in mindsets and approach would have to be a key part of a more comprehensive effort to accommodate the Uyghurs in China.

Chapter 5 sums up various arguments in this thesis. To recapitulate, the main hypothesis is that religious and ethnic differences are not the principal driving force behind the Han-Uyghur conflict in Xinjiang. The minority-state contention that exists in Xinjiang is not simply a manifestation of a clash between the Islamic and Confucian civilizations. It is a complex and multifaceted conflict on multiple levels and the tendency to stereotype issues, especially those involving religion, might not provide a satisfactory explanation for conflicts that have socio-historical and political antecedents. While religion is an important factor in ethno-religious conflicts because of its capability to mobilize adherents and legitimize actions, religion alone is rarely the sole motivating cause of conflict.
CHAPTER 2
UNCOVERING THE UYGHUR PERSPECTIVE

The significance of Islam in the Han-Uyghur conflict has to be evaluated in the context of its crucial role as a basic dimension of the Uyghur identity. Yet the concept of identity is subjective and known to be extremely hard to pin down as identity is shaped by changing political, social, cultural, historical, and psychological factors. Identities are socially constructed and defined along several dimensions, including language, religion, culture, and history. Once formed, identities could be "temporarily fixed" for a certain period of time, until they are "reconstructed" again. In short, the various processes and practices that lead to identity formation usually vary in space and time, through a dynamic process that is constantly in flux. One scholar argued that the Uyghur identity can be broken down into five separate components, with varying degrees of salience for different individuals. Therefore, a Uyghur can simultaneously be a Uyghur, a Muslim, a Turk and speaker of a Turkic language, a resident of a specific oasis town, and a citizen of China.

Dru C. Gladney argued that there are three patterns in the development of the Muslim identity in China, which he calls "ethnicization," "transnationalization," and resistance to integration. The growing sense of ethnic identity—along the official designations of national identity in China—is what Gladney calls ethnicization. Transnationalization refers to increasing Uyghurs' ethno-religious awareness due to unprecedented openness from China and more interactions with Muslims both inside and outside of China due to globalization. The third phenomenon refers to how Uyghur
opposition and efforts to resist Chinese integrative policies shape the Uyghur psyche. Gladney argued that these factors have shaped the "grass root conditions that sustain a 'low level' insurgency and sporadic violence in Xinjiang." Identities of ethnic minorities are also produced by comparing themselves with the dominant identity values of the multinational state. Societies need "others" to remind themselves of what they are not, and conflict can occur when minority groups react violently to dominant group efforts to forcefully assimilate and repress their identity. Repression of cultural expression and key identity values can lead to violent resistance aimed at defending these values.

Conflict may also arise out of threats to the reproduction of a community. This could occur through the continued application of repressive tactics against the expression of the identity. Therefore, if the agencies for reproducing language, religion, and culture are forbidden to function, identity will not be inherited by the future generations. In essence, threats to an identity can range from the "suppression of its expression" to the interference with its ability to "reproduce itself." Examples of threats to a culture are the forbidding of the use of language, names, and cultural dress, the closure of places for education and worship, even the killing or deportation of members of the society.

In the past, Uyghurs tended to have close loyalties to the specific oasis towns where their family roots could be traced from, rather than a country made up of Uyghurs. But after centuries of Chinese rule and some influence from the Muslims in Central Asia, there has been a growth in general Uyghur identity and nationalism, particularly in the regions bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan, areas furthest from China's core mainland.
The precedence of Xinjiang enjoying independence, not once but twice, once in 1933 and again in 1944, also has an important effect on Uyghur aspirations of being free of Chinese domination. Meanwhile, the dissolution of the Soviet Union along ethnic lines in 1991 and the resultant independence of states with Turkic and other Muslim peoples also fueled nationalist desires among the Uyghurs. Invidious comparisons against these newly independent countries made up of ethnically similar people likely contributed to feelings of resentment and discontent, intensifying Uyghur frustration with Han rule.

Other scholars point out that Uyghur nationalism is a relatively recent construct that needs to be analyzed in the historical context of Soviet influence in the region. For instance, Kazakhstan-based Uyghur historican Ablet Kamalov contends that the Uyghur national identity was started in and shaped by Russian Central Asia. This argument counterbalances the notion that the Uyghur national identity is created and reinforced by the Chinese state. Kamalov argued that Soviet scholarship played a formative role in the construction of a Uyghur national consciousness and nationalistic views of Uyghur history. "Soviet historiography has consistently characterized the Uyghurs as a people of Central Asian origin indigenous to the territory of today's Xinjiang," wrote Kamalov. While it is true that Uyghur history was exploited by the Soviet government in ideological disputes with the Chinese communists, Soviet support for Uyghur scholarship and cultural institutions were crucial in helping to reinforce and propagate a nationalistic Uyghur vision of history and narrative, argued Kamalov.
Evidently, Uyghur nationalism is a strong force to be contended with. Yet with religion being a dominant value in the Uyghur psyche that unites the Uyghur people as a nationality, Islam is an important factor that merits attention in the study of the Han-Uyghur dispute. To attempt to crystallize the particular effects Islam has on the Han-Uyghur conflict, a theoretical framework by ethnic conflict scholar Jonathan Fox will be applied in a case study of Xinjiang.

The Fox Framework

Jonathan Fox, an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, has studied and written extensively on ethnic and religious conflict. In particular, he wrote about the specific ways in which religion can impact conflict, incorporating his theory on ethno-religious conflict into a general theory of conflict. By applying several of Fox's propositions on ethno-religious conflict to the Xinjiang scenario, a systematic investigation of the role that religion plays in the Han-Uyghur conflict would unfold.

Fox's starting point is that religion has four basic functions in politics, society, and conflict. First, religion prescribes a framework of values from which people make sense of the world. Second, it provides guidelines and rules of behavior which relate directly to the framework of values mentioned earlier. Third, religion also links individuals to a greater communal whole or religious institution with the potential capability of organizing adherents. Fourth, religion can legitimize actions, actors, and institutions.

Most scholars agree that religion is an aspect of ethnicity, and that in practice, communal or ethnic groups are "psychological communities," linked by commonalities in
belief systems and a collective identity that matters to them and others in the same group. Fox's stance is that "religion is salient to ethnicity if it is a defining trait that sets a group apart in its own eyes and/or in the eyes of others." In other words, an ethnic group is an ethnic group only if its members believe themselves to constitute an ethnic group. It is the shared perception of defining traits and not the mere presence of such traits that sets a group apart. A conflict between two such groups can then be considered an ethnic conflict. If the two groups in conflict are of different religions, the conflict may be considered an ethno-religious conflict.

An interesting observation Fox makes is that ideology is analogous to religion in that both doctrines serve similar functions in society. In officially atheist communist China, it has been argued that nationalism is gradually replacing Marxism as the ruling Party's ideology, given that communism seems somewhat anachronistic in the face of China's capitalistic ways and strong focus on wealth and economic growth. The key difference between religion and ideology is in the origin of the doctrines. Religions are deemed to come from divine sources while ideology starts from human thinkers. But ultimately, this thesis is more concerned with the particular impacts religion/ideology can have on human behavior.

Fox's six hypotheses on the potential role of religion in ethnic conflict were the result of his efforts to integrate the major ways in which religion can become involved in conflict to general ethnic conflict theory. As such, Fox incorporated his propositions into Ted Gurr's theory on ethnic conflict. In particular, Gurr focused on the way discrimination brought about grievances over social, political, autonomy, and economic
issues, bringing about mobilization against the perceived transgressor.\textsuperscript{20} Fox's attempt at incorporating religion into conflict theory has yielded an empirically testable set of hypotheses on ethno-religious conflict. In this particular thesis, however, a more qualitative approach will be taken in studying the role that religion plays in the Xinjiang conflict.

The six hypotheses are quoted verbatim:

\textit{Hypothesis 1:} Religious discrimination, whatever its causes, is likely to result in the formation of religious grievances within the ethnic group suffering from this religious discrimination.

\textit{Hypothesis 2:} Religious grievances are likely to result in the mobilization for protest and rebellion as well as directly causing protest and rebellion among the ethnic group which has formed these grievances.

\textit{Hypothesis 3:} Provocative actions by a minority religious ethnic group are likely to provoke a negative reaction from the dominant ethnic group. This negative action can include religious, social, political, and/or economic discrimination as well as other forms of oppression.

\textit{Hypothesis 4:} The presence of established religious institutions in some circumstances can facilitate mobilization for protest and rebellion regardless of the more basic causes of that mobilization unless the elites in control of these institutions have an interest in supporting the status quo.

\textit{Hypothesis 5:} The use of religious legitimacy can facilitate the growth of economic, political, and social grievances as well as mobilization, regardless of the basic causes of that mobilization.

\textit{Hypothesis 6:} The presence of religious discrimination and disadvantages is likely to cause an increase in the levels of group identity and cohesion among the group which suffers from these disadvantages and discriminations.\textsuperscript{21}
There are two basic ways in which religion can be a direct cause of conflict. First, conflict is likely when adherents see the need to defend their religious frameworks against real or perceived attacks. The second way religion can directly cause conflict is when "divinely inspired guidelines" are interpreted as calling for a holy war. When interpreted as such, violent action and murder are often justified in the eyes of the believers.  

From Fox's ethno-religious conflict model, discrimination by the majority group is key to the formation of minority grievances. In general, discrimination refers to different standards or the unequal treatment of different groups in society based on race, age, or sex, which could correspondingly bring about differences in social status.

The Chinese state's approach to governing the nominally autonomous territory can be largely described as assimilist. Attempts to preserve Communist Party control
over all of China's territorial parts have involved repressive and discriminative measures that directly impinge on the Uyghurs' religious autonomy. There have been many articles and significant anecdotal evidence that suggest both large and small acts of pressure on Muslims in Xinjiang not to practise their religion or to engage in Uyghur customs that might be considered Islamic. For instance, youth below the age of 18 are not allowed into religious places of worship and are barred from receiving a religious education. These prohibitions effectively facilitate a gradual process of deculturalization of young Uyghurs. Meanwhile, Uyghurs employed by the state may not wear Muslim traditional clothing including head scarves or coverings for women and skullcaps for Uyghur men, while Communist Party members may not attend prayers or religious institutions. Other limits on Uyghur religious and cultural expression include controls on participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca, female students allegedly being expelled for not conforming to school uniforms by covering up their bodies in conservative Muslim garb, and school teachers reportedly not being allowed to grow mustaches, an important sign of manhood for Uyghurs. The university experience is a secularized one, with undergraduates not allowed to adhere to important Islamic practices such as daily praying and the observance of fasting rituals during the Ramadan month. In addition, many Uyghurs believe that government informers attend prayer services in order to keep a close watch on their Islamic activity. Consequently, many day-to-day Islamic practices are subject to state controls that discourage religious expression and cultural reproduction, suggesting that Uyghurs who wish to climb the ranks in Xinjiang society would need to de-emphasize their Islam-ness. By contrast, another Muslim group the Hui, who are more physically
dispersed throughout the country, do not face as high a level of scrutiny and repression by the Chinese authorities, largely due to the fact that they are not deemed a threat to the state. The Hui’s unique situation in China will be addressed later in this chapter. In sum, there is a good deal of evidence suggesting that Chinese authorities have been strictly regulating, even restricting, the freedom to practise Islam, particularly in Xinjiang.

As Hypotheses 1 and 2 propose, religious discrimination leads to religious grievances which can bring about mobilization for conflict. Indeed, Xinjiang has earned a reputation for being restive, with protests and violence breaking out at intervals between the Han and minority groups. What is less clear is whether these cases of civil unrest are organized groups of Uyghur activists fighting a religious war of secession, or spontaneous protests by peoples of various ilk and cultural backgrounds who are disgruntled over a myriad of possible grievances. Yet based on past riots and protests, the "factionalization and opportunism" of the various opposition movements indicate that although Islam plays a role, this is by no means a clear-cut example of Islam going against China along a civilizational fault line. Nor are protesters always exclusively Uyghur.\textsuperscript{30}

In July 2009, riots between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese that left nearly 200 dead were sparked by the alleged killing of two Uyghur workers in Guangdong province.\textsuperscript{31} Beijing said most of the casualties were Han, but Uyghur groups dispute this,\textsuperscript{32} and there are no independently verifiable accounts. Most recently in 2011, tensions are running high again after an attack on a police station in Xinjiang left at least 20 people dead.\textsuperscript{33} The on-and-off incidents of violence between the Han and the Uyghurs
highlight the depth of the contention and the simmering tensions that may escalate at any point. The frequency of mobilization and protestations in Xinjiang indicates the existence of widespread grievances in the population. While it is likely that religious discrimination has led to the rise of religious grievances—which have at times brought about unrest and protests—it is not possible to claim definitively that all forms of civil unrest in Xinjiang are due to religious grievances.

The third proposition, which posits that provocative action by a minority group is likely to provoke negative reactions from the dominant ethnic group, is highly applicable in the Xinjiang context. Reprisal attacks by Han Chinese against Uyghur people are common in the immediate days after an initial violent assault. Other conflictive responses from the Han authorities include harsh clampdowns on any potential separatist activity or large-scale organized gatherings of Uyghurs. As Fox points out, Hypothesis 3 forms a feedback cycle with Hypotheses 1 and 2. Basically, discrimination against a minority leads to the formation of grievances. These grievances are then easily mobilized in the form of protests against the majority group, which perceives these actions as provocative. This in turn likely leads to further repression and more coercive measures by the majority group in an effort to subdue the opposition, increasing the degree of discrimination against the minority. This results in a "vicious spiral" of escalating conflict whereby individuals forget the initial cause of their conflict.

The intractability of the respective positions and deep-running mutual distrust exacerbates inter-group tension and misunderstanding, bringing us to Proposition 6, which proposes that religious discrimination and disadvantages are likely to cause an
increase in the levels of group identity and cohesion among the subjugated group. Indeed, this rings true in the Xinjiang context. As a means of dealing with their unhappiness with Han rule, Uyghurs have drawn together for support and they strive to emphasize their uniqueness and strong qualities vis-à-vis the Han.

There have been cases of pro-independence activists in Xinjiang organizing violent assaults and direct attacks on the Chinese state, including sabotage and assassinations of police, military personnel, and indigenous officials. But in the wake of September 11 and the Chinese state's clampdown on dissent, protestations and marches were no longer easily organized. Even so, many Uyghurs express their opposition through non-violent, symbolic means. James Scott wrote about the concept of "everyday resistance," a reference to the ways and means individuals use to resist authority when open resistance is too difficult or dangerous.36

Scott posited that people could submit to authority in public but deride it in private conversations amongst themselves.37 While political and social scientists consider "private grumbling and secret intransigence" as largely inconsequential, these smaller acts of resistance are important on another level: they help to consolidate Uyghur disaffection against the Han and reinforce their will to be distinct from the Chinese.38 Private speech can be used to spread subversive ideas contrary to the rhetoric of the ruling party and serves as an outlet for pent-up frustrations. But peaceful resistance can be demonstrated in several other ways besides private conversations and constant reiteration of alternative/negative stereotypes of the Han. Two other vehicles for non-violent opposition are the physical or symbolic segregation from the Han, and the
creation and dispersion of alternative representations of the Han-Uyghur relationship through folk song and poetry, wrote Joanne Smith Finley.\textsuperscript{39}

There are obvious signs of "everyday resistance," with some Uyghurs galvanizing together to highlight their distinctness against the Han, such as becoming more pious adherents of Islam or reviving customary practices unique to their ethnicity.\textsuperscript{40} While it is difficult to gauge the precise role of Islam in fueling the nationalistic movement among the Uyghurs due to Beijing's controls on field research in Xinjiang, few Uyghurs openly reject the role of Islam in defining and strengthening their national identity. Mosque attendance on Fridays, for instance, is "consciously recognized as a means of reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Uyghur community from the dominant Han population and the Chinese state."\textsuperscript{41} With Islam a dominant aspect of the Uyghur identity that distinguishes the Uyghur from the Han majority, many of whom are traditionally Buddhist, increased religiosity and stricter Islamic observances amongst the Uyghurs could be interpreted as a direct reaction to the repression of their identity. Yet this attendant need to highlight their "Islam-ness" is only exacerbating the Han-Uyghur divide, fueling the conflict between the two ethnic groups and the Uyghur nationalistic desire for self-determination.

Interestingly, a lot of current literature has focused on the growing Uyghur disconnect and insurgency against the Han Chinese government, neglecting the growing sense of antipathy the Han have for the Uyghurs. The intensifying antagonism felt between the two ethnic groups is most certainly exacerbating the Han-Uyghur conflict. It is important to study the evolution and sources of Han aversion to the Uyghur because
conflicts involving ethnicity and religion do so much more damage to society than one-off radical terrorist attacks.\textsuperscript{42}

Propositions 4 and 5 bring into the equation the influence of religious institutions and the power of religious legitimacy. They demonstrate how religion can facilitate conflict. Religious institutions have the inherent capability of organizing large numbers of people for collective action, whether over religious, political, or secular matters. Religion can be used to "bolster the legitimacy of just about any political activity, institution, or movement."\textsuperscript{43} In other words, religious legitimacy can be used as a vehicle to bundle together a wide range of grievances that may be secular in nature. Religious legitimacy is a powerful tool that can facilitate the vocalization of social, political, and economic grievances, although when the religion itself is perceived to be threatened, it is more important to defend the foundations of the religion.\textsuperscript{44}

The CCP has recognized the potential involvement of religious leaders and institutions in political causes and has taken many pre-emptive steps to prevent such occurrences. Therefore, religious institutions are not truly independent. A government-sanctioned \textit{madrassah} trains religious personnel in all of Xinjiang and only graduates of that seminary can become official \textit{imams} in the region. Religious curricula at the \textit{madrassah} are also established by the Islamic Association of China, a government-backed national religious association headquartered in Beijing.\textsuperscript{45} Yet it is precisely because of this process of state-empowerment that religious leaders are delegitimized in the eyes of some Islamic followers in China. The importance of religious institutions and religious legitimacy is clear in the Han-Uyghur dispute, with both parties recognizing that
the control of religious institutions helps provide religious legitimacy and therefore, a grasp on individual loyalties.

The six Hypotheses have provided a framework to analyze the Han-Uyghur conflict with a particular focus on how religion can directly cause or facilitate conflict. Fox theorized that religion can be a direct cause of conflict in two ways: when adherents see the need to defend their religious frameworks against real or perceived attacks, and when "divinely inspired guidelines" are interpreted as calling for a holy war. He also argued that religion can be a facilitator of conflict through the religious legitimacy of religious institutions and the agency of religious leaders. In the Xinjiang context, the Fox framework points to the likelihood that Islam can bring about direct conflict with the Han in Xinjiang. Yet a deeper study into Uyghur responses to state efforts at ethnic integration shows that resistance is not always manifested violently. And when it is realized in a violent fashion, the conflict is not solely about defending religious frameworks although that aspect plays an important part. Notably, organized violent resistance is also difficult in the face of tight state control over religious activity that is not officially approved.

While some overseas Islamic terrorist groups have called for a holy war against the Chinese state, there is no irrefutable evidence that such a homegrown threat exists, given the tenuous affiliations those terrorists groups have with Uyghur nationalist groups in Xinjiang. Meanwhile, Islam is so deeply intertwined with the Uyghur cultural identity and sense of nationalism that it is impossible to absolutely separate the effects that religion or cultural differences have on the conflict. In short, the Fox model is useful as a lens with which to understand state-society relations in Xinjiang, but it does not
sufficiently portray or account for Uyghur nationalistic sentiment as a key driver of the Han-Uyghur conflict.

Nonetheless, the framework is useful as the Hypotheses present a process model, demonstrating the potency of religion as a factor in conflict and how it can contribute to a vicious cycle of conflict. What the exercise has ultimately shown, however, is that while religion plays an important role in the conflict between two ethnic groups in Xinjiang, religion certainly is not the sole cause of the Han-Uyghur contention. The causes of mobilization in Hypothesis 2, the many ways in which discrimination and repression are manifested across social, political, economic, and religious spaces in Hypothesis 3, and the political motives for controlling religious institutions and thus religious legitimacy demonstrate the multifarious sources of Uyghur grievances, which are not only religious in nature. To conclude this section, it can be surmised that Islam is often used as a vehicle to unite and mobilize individuals who have grievances, which may very well be secular. The proposition that religious differences are the principal driver of the Han-Uyghur conflict is not supported compellingly. To further bolster this point, a look at the Hui, China's largest Muslim group, is necessary.

The Hui: The Meeting Point of Muslim, Chinese Cultures or the "Milieu of Radicalization"?

The Hui Muslims first settled in parts of China over a thousand years ago. Generations of inter-ethnic marriages, and Chinese children bought by the Hui and brought up as Muslims have resulted in "demographic proximity" and "cultural accommodation" with the Han Chinese. The Hui have incorporated parts of the
dominant Chinese culture into their lives and are physically indistinguishable from the Han today. The Chinese-speaking Hui—essentially the descendents of Arab, Persian, and Central Asian migrants from centuries ago—are quite distinct from the Turkic-speaking Uyghur, although both are Muslim groups in China.

Besides the fact that the Hui have been better incorporated into Chinese society, they are also more physically dispersed throughout China—albeit with particular concentrations to the east of Xinjiang in Gansu, Qinghai and Ningxia—unlike the Uyghur, who are largely concentrated in Xinjiang. Ethnic differences are thus more easily exploited in Xinjiang, where nationalistic Uyghur elements can claim rights to a well-defined geographical area. While both the Hui and the Uyghur are Muslim, the latter have been subject to harsher control and state scrutiny due to the fact that they are deemed to have subversive desires for national self-determination. Meanwhile, the Chinese government has indicated it will not tolerate any breakaway scenario, not from the Uyghurs, Tibetans, nor Taiwanese.

Despite the fact that the Hui are the most culturally assimilated Muslims in China, this does not preclude the possibility of the radicalization of Hui grievances into a direct challenge to Chinese rule. Scholars have argued that several factors could underlie the possibility of Islamic radicalization among the Hui. This includes the increasing numbers of Hui who travel out to other Muslim countries and may be influenced by individuals there with more fundamentalist inclinations. At the same time, the flow of visitors from the Muslim world to China has also risen significantly, with Islamic non-government organizations coming in to help with anti-poverty programs, the building of mosques and
schools, and contributing to the welfare of Muslim groups in China in general. Meanwhile, modern information technologies and the Internet are highly effective tools at the disposal of Islamic extremists and *jihadists* seeking to broadcast their ideology. In short, the Hui are not immune to the tide of Islamic fundamentalism and possibility of radicalization.\(^{53}\)

Nonetheless, at the end of the day, if the Clash of Civilizations theory is correct in the context of Xinjiang, the Han Chinese should be seeing conflict with all Muslim groups across the country. Yet the dynamic of the Han-Hui relationship is substantially different from the Han-Uyghur relationship. Clearly, while religion is an important dimension to be considered in Han-Uyghur contention, religious differences alone cannot account for the conflict.

**Conclusion**

Islam in Xinjiang should not be considered as a source of unrest but rather as a means for the expression of increased social and political frustrations.\(^{54}\) Increased religiosity could also be demonstrated in Uyghurs who feel their identity is being threatened by the dominant order and therefore need to highlight elements of their identity that are unique to Uyghur culture.

More critically, the resurgence or revitalization of Islam could be perceived as a unifying force or rallying point for opposition to challenge the existing political and social orders.\(^{55}\) In many Muslim countries, Islam is today an important vehicle for the mass political expression of opposition. This is especially apparent where Islam is conflated with national liberation movements of Muslim peoples against non-Muslim rule.
Examples include Palestinians against Israeli Jewish rule, Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims against Serbian Orthodox rule, Chechens against Russian Orthodox, or Communist, rule, Kashmiris against Hindu rule, and Moros in the Philippines against Christian rule. Islam has the power to reinforce those nationalist movements by "investing essentially secular nationalism with religious overtones and emotional content of more universal character." The key question now is not whether religious differences are driving the Han-Uyghur conflict, but whether Chinese minority and economic development policies are mitigating problems in the region or exacerbating them. The efficacy and rationale of Chinese policies will be evaluated in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
THE CHINESE STATE’S DILEMMA

The previous chapter argued that Islam is often conflated with national liberation movements or harnessed as a vehicle for political expression of opposition. In this chapter, the Chinese minority policy in Xinjiang is examined. Specifically, I argue that from the perspective of the Chinese, attempts at cultural assimilation and social control stem from state-building goals and not a desire to eradicate Islam from Chinese society.

To begin, it is often a mistaken perception that decades of Mao-ist radical policies have destroyed China's religious culture. It is also commonly assumed that the officially atheist stance of communism has yielded a society bereft of religious culture and incapable of religious accommodation. Indeed, the anti-traditionalist policies from an earlier era, especially during the Cultural Revolution period of the 1960s, wiped out a huge amount of religious culture and practices. At the time, religious leaders were callously stripped of their socio-economic and religious powers. Still, it should be noted that the most unforgiving period of anti-traditionalist policies and the most intense crackdown on religion lasted less than ten years. Sufficient material survived, such that "memories of rituals" and "organizational know-how" served as the "seeds for revitalization in the reform era." ¹

The revival of religious practices quickly came to the fore when Deng Xiaoping and other Communist party leaders initiated the process of opening up China in the late 1970s and instituted reforms, many of which were economic. At the time, the Communist Party responded to the enthusiasm for religious revival with a much more relaxed stance
on religious policies, accepting that religion has a far-reaching mass basis and a "social reality better to be dealt with than to ignore or forcibly suppress."\(^2\) A couple of initiatives were rolled out to regulate the five officially sanctioned religions in China: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam.\(^3\) Specifically, there were more detailed pronouncements on state religious policies and greater attention paid to the actual implementation of policies, including the need for officially approved religious organizations to work with the state. More tolerance was also observed towards harmless religious activities that were strictly speaking illegal, such as the renovation of small unregistered places of worship or festivals celebrating local deities.\(^4\)

China today arguably possesses a rich and diverse religious culture, with religion very much a part of the fabric of society and life. There is a rich array of religious practices from "spirit mediumism to ritual music, from lay Buddhist preachers to wandering Daoist monastics, from rural Catholic pilgrimage to urban qigong networks."\(^5\) In short, the Chinese state has been "regulatory and managerial" toward religion rather than "suppressive and hostile," with the exception of Falungong, some sects,\(^6\) and ethno-nationalist movements that have religious undertones.

In the case of the Falungong, a discipline that combines meditation with qigong exercises and moral philosophy, it is the group's organization and concerted action of members that the Chinese authorities find threatening, not the group's beliefs. In a similar vein, the Communist Party is concerned about Uyghur Islamic beliefs and practices because of potential political aspirations and the political uses of religion.\(^7\)
Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution ensures freedom of religious belief and "normal religious activity" for Muslims in China. Therefore nominally, there is nothing inherent in Islam that is deemed unacceptable or incompatible with the Chinese political order. However, particularly since the September 11 attacks in the U.S., the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism to the non-Muslim world has dominated security discourses and this has had an immediate impact on religious freedoms of Muslims in China, especially those in Xinjiang. According to some reports, Chinese officials censor the sermons given by imams, limit the ability of Muslim communities to build mosques, and discourage Muslims from wearing religious attire. Chinese policy also prohibits teaching Islam to those under 18 years of age. As a result, human rights observers have criticized the Chinese authorities as using the fight against terrorism as a cover for repression and a justification for a crackdown on all forms of dissent in Xinjiang.

All that notwithstanding, as argued in the previous chapter, there is a lack of irrefutable evidence that Islam is inherently incompatible with the Chinese order. To recapitulate, the Hui, the largest Muslim group in China, are instructive in demonstrating that the religious practice of Islam is thriving and tolerated in China. Meanwhile, most moderate Muslims will probably agree that the fundamental tenets of Islam are peaceful, although certain interpretations of the Quran could be seen as calling for a religious war to bring about an Islamist state ruled by Islamic law or Sharia. Yet there is a crucial distinction between religiosity and religious fundamentalism, with the latter usually involving the radicalization of a religion and the carrying out of indiscriminate violence against civilians or an oppressor for a supposedly religious cause. In most cases, there are
usually political, economic, and other grievances underlying the outwardly religious cause. To the Chinese authorities, it is radicalized Islam or any brand of Islam that is a threat to the state that needs to be rooted out in Xinjiang. Therefore, it is not that Islam is irreconcilable with the Chinese order but the political threat of religion to the Chinese state that has led to a clampdown on Islamic practices and activities in Xinjiang.

In a nutshell, from the perspective of the Chinese leaders, a key goal at this point in time is simply to attain and preserve internal stability, and for a vast country such as China, with its large and diverse population, this is not an easy task. China, despite conventional assumptions, is not devoid and intolerant of religion, with religious practices commonplace and accommodated within state-prescribed limits. It is when religious organizations are deemed to have over-stepped their boundaries with what is considered subversive or anti-state inclinations that suppression and repression is quick and harsh. Crackdowns on religion and other organized movements are mostly attributable to concerns about the potential mobilization of masses of people for political purposes that are deemed a threat to stability and the ruling Communist Party. In short, Islam per se, is not the driving force behind the Han-Uyghur contention. However, religious repression and discrimination—which fuels inter-ethnic group animosity—is apparent when Islam is perceived to be a threat to the state.

Nationalism, National Identity, and State-Building

The quest for a national identity has become more important as China becomes an increasingly influential regional power. Coupled with the fading relevance of communist ideology in the day-to-day lives of the Chinese, the Communist Party has had
to pursue new ways to justify regime legitimacy. Building upon a sense of nationalistic pride among Chinese citizens and perpetuating myths of the Communist Party's central role in the nation's success is one such strategy.

Nationalist feelings are also reinforced when sentimental nationalism is invoked with reminders of how China was subject to injustices and insults by Western countries in much of the 19th century. China's humiliating defeat in the Opium Wars of the 1840s, which was followed by numerous trade concessions to, and extraterritoriality deals with Western colonial masters are reminders of how weak China was in the past. Those experiences tore down the self-indulged myth of the middle kingdom's superior civilization and achievements, shaking its sense of invulnerability. Following that low point in Chinese history, nationalism, state-building, and national identity were introduced into Chinese intellectual discourses, urging generations of Chinese to rebuild China as a "sovereign, strong, and independent state in the community of nations." Whether China was under the leadership of Sun Yet-sen, Chiang Kai-shek or Mao Zedong, arguably their goals were similar: to build a strong, sovereign, and united country that was respected and recognized by the world. In some respects, their efforts have worked, for Chinese nationalism is always proudly on display whenever China makes a major accomplishment, such as hosting the Olympic Games or sending astronauts into space.

Expressions of Chinese nationalism would include populist-based but state-tolerated or even state-encouraged nationalism like "nativism and anti-West literature," to state-led efforts like "patriotic education and promotion of Chinese culture and
civilizational achievements." State-led nationalism, and patriotic education in particular, identifies the Chinese nation with the communist state, with the CCP becoming the "embodiment and expression of the nation's will as well as its central role as the defender of national interests—national unity, sovereignty, and economic prosperity." Patriotic campaigns impart legitimacy to the CCP, instilling the perception of the centrality of the CCP to China's success. Nationalism, or patriotism sometimes in Chinese terminology, has therefore been tapped upon and encouraged for state-building purposes and legitimacy-enhancing reasons by the ruling elites of the Communist Party.

What is more striking and relevant to our discussion on China's ethnic minority policy, however, is the concern that Chinese nationalism is being seen as Han chauvinism. The transition of the Chinese Communist Party from an opposition party to the establishment power presented a dilemma, which up to today has not been attenuated. While struggling for power against the nationalist Kuomintang before 1949, the communists could afford the Leninist view that national minorities should have the right of secession and could therefore proffer "ideological niceties" to minority groups. However, once in the government, the CCP had to deal with reality and the practical issues of national interest. The CCP quickly realized that the major minority groups dwelled in the border regions of China and posed a serious challenge to territorial integrity if separatist or nationalistic movements were allowed to voice their opposition and organize against Beijing. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government was even more cautious, for there was empirical evidence that a federal system of autonomous regions could be a cause of conflict, rather than resolve it.
Scholars have argued that in the Soviet case, the freedom bestowed on individual republics precipitated the emergence of secessionist movements.\(^{18}\)

The problem here then is the inherent contradiction between the state-building ideals of the Chinese state and the aspirations for national self-determination of the Uyghurs. There is tension between the rights of sovereignty and self-determination, which originate from very different sources. Yet, in and by themselves, the goals are reasonable from the respective points of view.\(^{19}\)

The state is defined as an entity which possesses a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within its defined territorial parameters. Other actors may challenge that arrangement with their own organized use of force against the state, but those leading the state will not accept such assertions as legitimate. Herein lies the role of laws, which proscribe and discourage the use of force by players acting on their own will and not the state's behalf.\(^{20}\)

Modern China only came into being in 1949 after the communists won a long-standing civil war against the nationalists and, therefore, is considered a relatively new state. It is generally agreed that among the core state-building imperatives are sovereignty and the prerogative to maintain territorial integrity. To achieve those ends, the Chinese Communist Party, as the center and core of the political system, aspires to exert control over the country's periphery. The CCP is often willing to employ force to keep power centralized, and is ready to use harsh action to prevent secession and unrest in order to keep itself in control.
The periphery emerges as the space where the political center's power is demonstrated even though it is physically removed from the immediate environment. In this sense, the periphery becomes essential to the existence of the center as the wielder of this power. The center's definition and viability is derived in part from its relationship with and the ability to exercise influence on its periphery.\textsuperscript{21}

The manifestations of the Chinese state's efforts at "locking in" peripheral actors and resources, and the erecting of structures to rein in oppositional forces using hierarchy and privileges are aplenty. China's state-building efforts include the stationing of state-backed entities throughout the region, and attempts at creating homogeneity via cultural assimilation efforts, for instance through the designation of Mandarin as the national language.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, the Uyghurs react to and resist authority via "countercultures" and other means of undermining China's state-building machinery. In effect, the ways in which conflicting group ideals are played out only serve to reinforce inter-group differences.\textsuperscript{23}

To sum up, the process of state-building involves a political center projecting power on its territorial periphery with the ultimate aim of integration and control,\textsuperscript{24} and that process in itself can bring about conflict. In a multi-ethnic state such as China, the prerogatives of sovereignty and minority self-determination are perceived by the respective parties as being diametrically opposed and incompatible.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, the Han-Uyghur contention is not so much about the incompatibility of Islam and the Chinese order, but owing to the clashing state-building aspirations of the Chinese authorities and the Uyghur hopes for more economic equity and cultural and political freedoms.
Specific Chinese Policies and State-Building Strategies

The Chinese government's approach to minority management can be divided into military and non-military measures. Military and paramilitary forces at the state's disposal include the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF), and the People's Police. The PLA has a presence of an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 troops in Xinjiang, which oversee border defense and internal security. The PAPF is a component of China's armed forces and is equipped to handle political unrest like rioting with tear gas and high pressure hoses, and terrorist attacks. The People's Police constitute China's public security force. It counts maintaining social security and order among key responsibilities. While there was arguably a more liberal use of military force when dealing with potential separatist elements and insurgencies in the past, these days local policing and the PAPF have taken on a more primary role in the Chinese state's efforts at countering Uyghur separatist violence and resistance.

Nonetheless, even today, there is little doubt that the Chinese authorities would use force to quell uprisings if necessary. Unfortunately, coercive military and paramilitary law enforcement tactics have often aggravated grievances among the affected communities. Terrorists and other radicalized nationalists can then tap on this negative sentiment to validate their actions and recruit supporters for their agenda. In short, brute military might alone is not a robust antidote to social unrest in minority dominated regions. The Chinese government is aware of this and has also pursued non-military means of addressing the Han-Uyghur divide.
Economic Development

Economic development is a cornerstone in China's effort in combating minority dissatisfaction in Xinjiang. There are compelling arguments for this approach, as poverty and underdevelopment are known to breed dissatisfaction and desperation that lead to the emergence of radical groups that target the state. In other words, Beijing believes that providing some sort of basic livelihood is essential in keeping a lid on political opposition. Economic development and jobs would help to reduce support for "independence, separatist, and politicized Islamic movements," which are strongest in rural areas where poverty is widespread.\(^{30}\)

The Chinese government's development strategies have a main focus on the extraction of natural resources and minerals such as petroleum, oil, coal, minerals and non-ferrous metals.\(^{31}\) Xinjiang represents part of China's solution to its ever-growing need for oil, natural gas, and raw materials. The autonomous region is also a commercial hub for regional commercial exchanges as it is centrally located at the borders of Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Meanwhile, Xinjiang has large reserves of another commodity--space, which is in short supply in China's overpopulated east although much of its terrain is unforgiving and made up of mountains, steppes, and desert land.\(^{32}\) In short, Xinjiang is resource-rich and a gateway to Central and South Asia, therefore being of great strategic interest to the Chinese leadership.

There has been massive investment by the government towards the development of infrastructure in the region since the 1990s. Parts of Xinjiang, especially the
administrative capital of Urumqi, have been modernized and characterized by new buildings, expressways, and heavy traffic. While standards of living have risen, Xinjiang has remained generally poor, with rising Han-Uyghur inequalities. A common Uyghur complaint is that the Han Chinese monopolize the most well-paying jobs in Xinjiang and that there are employment disparities between Han and Uyghur in the oil industry and the private sector.

Language Policy

In another indication of the Chinese state's attempts at influencing the periphery, processes aimed toward "cultural standardization" within the polity are put in place. This includes a national language imposed throughout the country. Mandarin has replaced indigenous Uyghur lingua franca as the language of instruction in higher education, with Xinjiang University ceasing to offer courses taught in Uyghur since 2002. Uyghur is still offered in primary and secondary education, but Mandarin is introduced to Uyghur students from about the third grade and is clearly the language of economic upward mobility. With the focus on learning Mandarin in schools, the Chinese authorities can boost the employability of national minorities and at the same time facilitate a process of acculturation.

Local populations have mixed feelings about this shift towards a Chinese education. On one hand, Uyghur parents recognize that learning and speaking Mandarin will boost employment opportunities and raise the chances of their children receiving a better education. On the other hand, many are resentful about the marginalization of the
Uyghur language and interpret the language policy as just another ploy by the Chinese government to encroach on their cultural identity and dilute their heritage.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Migration of Han}

Even from the time of the Qing dynasty, the strategy of settling large numbers of Han Chinese was used to integrate the region with the mainland. After the Communist Party took control in 1949, the practice continued, with incentives offered to Han to relocate to Xinjiang to help with the development of the region and also to "reinforce national unity."\textsuperscript{39} Specifically, a large number of Han Chinese were recruited to join the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), known as the \textit{bingtuan} in Chinese, a paramilitary organization created in 1954, charged with building farms and spearheading economic development. The XPCC today consists of retired soldiers and military personnel and plays an important part in maintaining social order in Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{40}

Following the fallout with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, there was renewed fervor to move Han Chinese to frontier provinces such as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Heilongjiang to guard against the potential Soviet military threat.

The huge influx of Han Chinese to Xinjiang has dramatically changed the demographics of the area. Statistics show that the local Han population has risen from about five percent in the 1940s to approximately 40 percent today.\textsuperscript{41} The great surge in Han Chinese numbers to a predominantly Muslim region created ethnic enclaves which only heightened tensions between the earlier settlers and the newer immigrants, worsening ethnic divides. Uyghurs have repeatedly identified the influx of Han migrants
as the greatest challenge to their community, with Uyghurs nearly now a minority in Xinjiang when they used to constitute a strong majority.\textsuperscript{42}

However, migration patterns to Xinjiang might be changing. A recent study on migrants to Xinjiang shows that Han population movements to Xinjiang nowadays are mostly self-initiated, versus the state-directed movements of the past. In addition, Han migrants to Xinjiang these days are not highly skilled—a likely reason why they chose Xinjiang instead of the highly competitive eastern coastal provinces. These Han migrants are therefore not necessarily in a more advantageous position when compared with Uyghur migrants from the south of Xinjiang, who are younger, tend to be better educated, and often have higher incomes than the newer Han settlers.\textsuperscript{43}

At the end of the day, the Chinese authorities should take heed of the local minority community's perception of the huge influx of Han to Xinjiang. Uyghurs have asserted that the strategy was a design to dilute ethnic populations and obliterate their culture in order to strengthen Beijing's stronghold on the region.\textsuperscript{44} As the Han are not Muslims, the Uyghurs perceive the overwhelming numbers of Han amidst them as a threat to their ethno-religious identity.\textsuperscript{45} There is also the concern that young Uyghurs would be drawn into the Han's secular world of materialism and would not practise Islam in what Uyghurs consider the traditional way.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Co-optation of Uyghur Elites}

Dean Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim argue in \textit{Social Conflict} that rulers basically use three techniques to interfere with the mobilization of groups that wish to challenge their authority, namely the disruption of group communication, getting rid of potential leaders
and co-opting these leaders. Chinese leaders have utilized all of these tactics. Positions of power and economic incentives have been offered to Uyghur elites, some of whom have joined various organs of the state in Xinjiang. Meanwhile, the most intransigent of Uyghur intelligentsia have allegedly been incarcerated to prevent them from communicating their "renegade" thoughts and ideas to others. In other words, the Chinese state has made a strong effort to woo Uyghur elites to join the Party ranks, but if that does not work, more coercive methods of censoring opposition voices will be brought in. The government wields a heavy-hand on media censorship, and also deals quickly with individuals with the potential to lead and organize dissent.

All in all, Beijing's strategy to deal with ethnic divisions in Xinjiang has been twofold: to spearhead economic development in the region and alleviate poverty, while at the same time stamping out unofficial religious or political activity that could foment unrest or is considered separatist. The Chinese state has also taken ownership of the natural resources in the northwestern peripheral region of Xinjiang and the unilateral decision to appropriate resources for uses that the government deems fit is an expression of state power. Other efforts at state-building include policies that facilitate the standardization of culture and language. Yet these state-building tactics imposed from the political center have unintentionally led to an aggravation of Uyghur disaffection and a deep sense of grievance, deepening the Han-Uyghur cleavage. The Develop the West investment plan, which is positive in theory, does not take sufficient consideration of ethnic diversity and cultural identity, and could be counterproductive if the economic development program ultimately benefits one ethnic group, the Han.
Conclusion

The primary purpose of Chinese leaders at this point is to attain and preserve internal stability, and for a vast country such as China, with its large and diverse population, this is not an easy task.\textsuperscript{50} To achieve the primary goal of maintaining social stability, territorial integrity, and sovereignty over the entire country, Beijing has employed both "carrot and stick" policies of control in Xinjiang. "Soft" policies include "social engineering" or the state-directed migration of Han Chinese to the region, and cultural assimilation policies such as designating Mandarin as a primary language of instruction in schools. In addition, the Chinese authorities do not hesitate in mobilizing the "hard" powers of the state in the form of military and paramilitary forces to subdue unrest in minority dominated areas. All these actions are manifestations of the political center asserting power and influence on its periphery, rather than the expression of a desire to eradicate Islam in Chinese society.

To say that distrust runs deep in the Han-Uyghur relationship is an understatement. For whatever the Chinese government has done thus far, there are critics who have always managed to frame the measures as manipulative ploys by the Chinese authorities to subjugate minorities deemed culturally inferior to the Han. Reconstruction of the old cities of Xinjiang can either be interpreted as modernization efforts to boost the standards of living or the purposeful elimination of Uyghur culture; the implementation of higher education in Mandarin can be perceived either as efforts to improve the upward mobility of minorities or the marginalization of indigenous Turkic languages. It all invariably depends on one's perspective. For sure, there are shortcomings in the Chinese approach to
minority affairs management in Xinjiang, and policies could definitely be more sensitive towards the sentiments and cultural identity of local communities.

Yet from the Chinese perspective, the dilemma at hand is quite insurmountable. The Chinese authorities have to reconcile the opposing forces of Chinese state-building ideals and Uyghur desires for more freedoms. Yet more autonomy and political rights in Xinjiang could very well lead to further consolidation of Uyghur nationalist sentiment and the realization of the very breakaway scenario the Chinese are trying to avoid. At the same time, the continuation of harsh policies of control and repression are likely fueling the Uyghurs’ indignation and will to be distinct from the Han Chinese. But ultimately, the most important take-away point here is that the Han-Uyghur conflict is multi-dimensional and complex, with religion playing a role in the conflict but not necessarily the primary driver of the conflict. The next chapter gives a prognosis of Xinjiang’s future, and also addresses policy implications for China and the U.S.
CHAPTER 4

CHINA, U.S. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The previous chapter argued that Chinese curbs on Uyghur freedoms are mainly due to a perceived threat to the state and not a systematic agenda to eradicate Islam from Chinese society. This chapter, meanwhile, uses conflict management theory in the Xinjiang context to chart out Chinese and U.S. policy implications, with the purpose of alleviating the simmering force of ethnic separatism in China.

What does the future hold for Xinjiang? Scholars generally agree that China is not vulnerable to the forces that led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.¹ At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the damage that prolonged ethnic confrontation can bring to a society. Uyghur responses to Chinese rule may well become more radicalized and violent as periodic roundups and detention of people suspected of terrorism and separatism have forced the movement underground, increasing the possibility of alienating Uyghurs even further from mainstream Chinese society.²

Indeed, the Han-Uyghur conflict is a conflict on multiple levels, involving incompatible positions and goals, parties trying to coerce each other, and even the use of deadly violence.³ The situation is not helped by the fact that the Han Chinese are the overwhelming ethnic majority in China, asserting dominance in the government and society. Meanwhile, as the conflict persists over time, the respective attitudes and preconceived notions become entrenched. Ethnicity and religion, issues that have inevitably entered the equation, convolute the situation as they elicit highly emotional responses and can be deemed as issues that cannot be compromised upon.
Yet independence for Xinjiang seems a very unlikely scenario given China's strong economic growth and increasing influence on matters of global interest. Separately, there is the argument that Xinjiang may not be economically viable even if it became independent. Xinjiang's economy is very closely integrated with mainland China's, and with the Uyghur population primarily located in the south, where there is less industry and natural resources but oil, the extractive industry is unlikely to flourish without significant investment. Moreover, the history of poor relations among the three Muslim groups in Xinjiang—Uyghurs, Kazaks, and Hui—likely means that conflicts among Muslims would be as great as the one between the Han Chinese and the Uyghurs. Clashes along ethnic, religious, urban-rural, and territorial lines could easily emerge.4

Conflict resolution theory offers some broad perspectives on alleviating high tension scenarios and also advances our understanding of the Xinjiang conflict. It is worthy to note, however, that "conflict management" may be a more appropriate term to use,5 given that only time will tell if the underlying causes of the conflict can be resolved for good.

Harvard Negotiation Project Director Roger Fisher's framework for "principled negotiation" calls for a focus on "basic interests, mutually satisfying options, and fair standards," and the separation of the people from the problem in order to yield "integrative solutions."6 The basic interests of the Communist Party would be to maintain territorial control of and access to resources in Xinjiang. For most Uyghurs, their basic interests would be to have genuine cultural and religious freedom, and access to economic opportunities. But what has happened is that the Chinese government's
paranoia has led it to react hastily and harshly to even small expressions of Islamic culture and individualism—usually construed as separatist sentiment. On the part of the Uyghurs, they are also quick to dismiss China's nation-building strategy and overall concerns for social stability as attempts to marginalize their culture. Therefore, in the interaction between the Chinese authorities and the Uyghur minority, Fisher's framework of seeking out and empathizing with the other's bottom-line/core concerns has been largely sidelined, with both sides solidifying their diametrical stances and falling into a trap of positional arguing. With all this in mind, all parties directly or indirectly involved in the Xinjiang conflict should refrain from incendiary actions that could be seen as directly infringing on a party's core concerns.

To put it simply, the Han and Uyghurs urgently need an overhaul in mindsets and their deep-seated competitive orientation. Morton Deutshe argued in *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution* that participant disposition is decisive in determining the outcome of conflict management strategies. Chances for a positive outcome are higher when participants in a conflict have a cooperative orientation, rather than a competitive one. Deutshe also noted the importance of reframing the issue as a mutual problem that can only be resolved via cooperative input from both parties. Yet in practical terms, changing a social context, or a dominant group's long-standing perception of another group, is much easier said than done. This is where Eric Marcus's theory of social change could be helpful.

Marcus's social system theory highlights the three phases of change: unfreezing of the status quo, movement of the social system to a new level, and refreezing of new
behaviors that support the changed system.\textsuperscript{10} He pointed out that a critical driver of change is motivation, with the overcoming of resistance and commitment to the change process as key components of a process that can lead to lasting constructive change.\textsuperscript{11} While change can originate either from top down or bottom up, it would seem more plausible for a centralized approach given China's current political arrangement.

China's fifth generation of leaders will come into power in 2012 and there is room for hope that the incoming leaders will have the initiative and mandate to take decisive steps to begin to change mindsets and attitudes in the citizenry. While widespread violent mobilization against the Han Chinese is not an imminent threat, the need to bridge the gulf that has emerged between the Han and the Uyghurs is urgent and real. Motivation for change could come from the long-term ideal—albeit a lofty one—of building a great country through an inclusive society where different people can accommodate one another and identify China as home, and where race, creed or religion does not matter. An accompanying challenge would be to persuade the Uyghurs to buy into this nationalistic vision.

As a start, respected Han and Uyghur leaders who can spearhead a reconciliation effort should be identified. These individuals should sincerely believe in change and genuinely desire a multi-ethnic China that accommodates all people. They will be the leaders in seeking mutually beneficial solutions and correcting ethnic prejudices in Chinese society. This group of leaders would be what Marcus termed as a critical mass of "connectors" who will foster commitment and help to inspire change in the social system.\textsuperscript{12}
On a related note, Marc H. Ross's study on the structural features of low-conflict societies has found that the presence of cross-cutting ties or multilayered relationships between parties in conflict strengthens the overall relationship. Strong identification with the larger community and the resulting inter-linking between individual and community interests would encourage cooperation in working to resolve differences.\(^{13}\) Settings for interactions between the Uyghur and Han have, indeed, been limited and should be expanded. In addition, it seems that the growing Han aversion to the Uyghurs is helping to perpetuate the conflict. More studies are needed to shed light on the perceptions of the non-Muslim majority in China in order to understand the "evolution and causes" of anti-Muslim sentiment and to keep mutual prejudices from spreading across society.\(^{14}\)

A possible means of lessening mistrust could be the implementation of confidence-building measures to repair societal cohesiveness, as Gary T. Furlong argued. Furlong, in his Dynamics of Trust Model of Conflict, highlighted the central role of trust and mistrust in conflict situations, arguing that blame attribution is something that warring parties regularly slip into, despite the fact that the exercise is really pointless. Furlong suggested rebuilding trust through confidence-building measures, legal protections like procedural trust and justice, and attributional retraining.\(^{15}\) At the micro level, more team-spirit building exercises involving mixed groups can be conducted in school and workplace settings, and this can range from sports and a variety of classroom activities to crisis-solving simulations to allow individuals to interact and work as equals in a team. This would be a concrete demonstration to individuals of how "the other" is not as bad as made out to be and it is possible to co-exist. Ethnic ratios in schools, offices,
village associations, and community settings can be put in place, so that the venues where the Han and Uyghurs can interact are increased. This raises the chances of forming cross-cutting ties and multilayered relations, which will help to attenuate inter-group tension when it arises. These are small ways to start to tackle a huge problem, but small consistent steps are necessary and all change must start from somewhere.

All that said, a key obstacle remains: whether the Chinese leadership will have the motivation to take the initiative and level the playing field for the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. This form of change in attitudes and worldviews does not come about easily. But perhaps as new generations of highly educated Chinese leaders come to the fore, they will be imbued with a greater sense of justice, equity, and altruism, even if not in the near future, hopefully in the longer term.

The above section applied several conflict management theories to Xinjiang. What follows is a discussion of specific policy implications for the Chinese and U.S. authorities.

**China Policy Implications**

With a new generation of leaders taking charge from 2012, it is an opportune time for Chinese authorities to take steps toward a reconciliation effort with the Uyghurs in Xinjiang in order to secure a longer-lasting peace.

_Ease Religious and Cultural Restrictions_

The Chinese authorities are cognizant about international scrutiny of the treatment of minority peoples, with the Turkish authorities and other foreign Muslim groups
expressing concern in the past. Meanwhile, the U.S. and other Western governments regularly put pressure on China over its human rights record, criticizing the Chinese authorities for not honoring commitments to international agreements on human rights. Indeed, China has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Article 1 of the covenant says, "All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development." The second point reads, "All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudices to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence." In short, the covenant proposes that human rights encompass the freedom to express oneself culturally, religiously, and politically, with all people entitled to economic opportunities and a basic income.

But it is important to note that China is a society largely informed by Confucian values emphasizing obedience to authority and the prioritization of collective interests over individual desires. China quite clearly possesses a different worldview from Western societies, and therefore does not necessarily adopt the same standards for human rights and other freedoms. At this moment in time, some Uyghur freedoms have been relegated to the back burner as societal stability and the country's economic growth take precedence. Ironically, by thwarting a community's means of cultural expression and ability to reproduce itself, intense resentment is generated and the desire to fight the
authority is strengthened. In so far as precipitating radicalization and violence, the violation of human freedoms plays a role.

Therefore, the removal of the most repressive measures on the Uyghurs will take away the most important weapon that radical Uyghur elements have to justify violent mobilization against the Chinese government.\textsuperscript{18} Muslim Uighurs should be allowed to openly practise their faith, with the regime fully respecting Muslim customs and allowing the operation of mosques and religious schools. University students and government employees who wish to pray in the day should be accommodated, especially since these religious observances need not be disruptive to the classroom or work setting. Basically, the state should only interfere if there is clear evidence of militant teachings and the harboring of terrorists.\textsuperscript{19}

Chinese authorities need to be forthcoming and sincere in extending reconciliatory gestures to Uyghurs. There is a strong need to allow for legitimate channels for cultural, religious, also political and economic grievances, with the acknowledgment of these dissatisfactions and provision of redress when justified.

In short, the Chinese authorities need to recognize that religion can be a force of peace, and differentiate between terrorism, separatism, and mere expressions of political, economic, and cultural grievances.\textsuperscript{20} China's coercive approach to managing ethnic relations in Xinjiang is perceived as an attack on the Uyghur identity, and this is fanning the simmering conflict in Xinjiang. Moderating the controls on Uyghur society would help to ease Uyghur dissonance arising from the need to fight for cultural survival.
Tweak Education, Language Policies

The Chinese authorities have used national education and the designation of Mandarin as the language of instruction in tertiary educational institutes to help integrate the Uyghurs into Chinese society. At the same time, an aspect of education that has not been addressed is the need to correct increasingly negative Han attitudes towards the Uyghurs. The growing antagonism between these two groups likely underpinned the violent Urumqi riots between the Han and the Uyghurs in 2009. As such, an institutionalized program in schools to help Han Chinese engage and develop positive interactions with minority groups should be put in place. All Han Chinese, in particular migrants to ethnically mixed areas, should learn about minority customs and traditions and respect the ways of others.

In addition, a three-language policy for the region should be explored, similar to what is being done in India. Resources should support the national language, Mandarin, as well as English, and Standard Uyghur, because each language serves a specific purpose. Mandarin facilitates communication across ethnic lines; English would bring international economic advantages, while Standard Uyghur is useful for interactions and trade with the Central Asian states and would help "foster pride in ethnic heritage.

Ensure Equity in Economic Opportunities

After the deadly riots in Xinjiang in 2009, Chinese authorities unveiled a new policy package which planned to pump hundreds of billions of yuan to boost the economy and livelihoods in the region. The development plan has put the spotlight on the southern part of Xinjiang. Most industries and investment are concentrated in the
northern part, where most of the Han live, whereas most Uyghurs live in the south, such as Kashgar and Hotan. Regional inequality has widened income gaps between the ethnic groups and the government has said it will fix the problem with financial investment. How exactly, it is not clear, but this is a general move in the right direction. Uyghurs have constantly complained of being marginalized economically, claiming the better jobs all seem to go to the Han Chinese. Combined with a reinvigorated education and language policy, Uyghurs would become better educated in the long run and from then should have better job prospects.

Separately, crucial questions remain about the long-term sustainability of this breakneck developmental approach. A strong focus on extractive industries combined with pollution from industrial development, and a surge in urbanization are likely causing irreversible damage to the environment and compromising the livability of the land. According to one report, only about 4.3% of Xinjiang land is fit for human habitation, and population density is already high at 249 per square kilometer. Meanwhile, there has been a noted rise in desertification and the shrinking or drying up of parts of the Tarim River and the Ebonur Lake. The Chinese government needs to display a greater awareness and sensitivity towards the environmental impact of its developmental strategy.

Implement Trust-building Measures

Grievances inevitably arise when people fear for their future. The Chinese government must reassure the Uyghur minority of their physical and cultural integrity, and give them hope for a decent future in China. In particular, major trust-building mechanisms for helping ethnic minorities deal with perceived insecurity and a sense of
losing out to the majority should include the demonstration of respect and power-sharing.28

Demonstration of respect involves reciprocity of respect, with each side viewing the opponent as honorable and having legitimate interests. If there is no sense of respect, minority groups are likely to fear being relegated to second-class citizens, and this continued fear increases the "social distance" between groups. Also, repeated overtures without expectations of an immediate "tit-for-tat" response could stimulate momentum for the rebuilding of relations.29 Sometimes, even a simple apology for hurt feelings can go a long way. Accordingly, important gestures of trust and respect would include "less gerrymandering in favor of Han Chinese among Xinjiang's administrative units," and more proportionate inclusion of ethnic peoples to government structures to represent Uyghur interests.30

Trust-building measures are creative ways by which states can reassure ethnic minorities. By showing respect for differences and by the sharing of power and resources with the more vulnerable groups in society, the perceived risks of inter-group association are reduced and the prospect of cooperation with other groups becomes more desirable.31

In totality, the management of the Xinjiang conflict requires a more constructive strategy of de-escalation. Neither coercion nor concessions alone can solve the problem, but more persuasive and moderate measures to win the hearts and minds of Uyghurs are necessary. The Chinese authorities need to publicly acknowledge the sources of Uyghur dissatisfaction and take concrete steps to address the situation and end the vicious cycle of violence between the Uyghurs and Han. Specific measures include ensuring that
economic benefits also accrue to the Uyghurs, and the broadening of religious and cultural rights. Taking away oppressive measures would remove the most powerful weapon radical separatist movements have. Only by some give-and-take and consistent compromise can there be progress towards a more enduring peace.\textsuperscript{32}

**U.S. Policy Implications**

Broadly speaking, the U.S. should demonstrate sensitivity to and accommodation for China's core concerns of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and state-building. Discretion should be exercised, especially when it is clear that China subscribes to a wholly different political philosophy, with very different conceptualizations of human rights and freedom. In essence, any U.S. action should first consider the emerging power's "historically inherited vulnerabilities," grievances, and sensibilities. China was in the past rocked by ethnic separatism and territorial fragmentation, so instead of dismissing these insecurities, the U.S. should continue to engage China, in a patient and positive manner.\textsuperscript{33}

*Do Not Support Separatist Elements*

China is particularly sensitive when foreign powers are seen as interfering in what it deems as its domestic affairs. Therefore, the U.S. should not be seen as supporting separatist movements. Even meeting with leaders of minority groups, some in exile, can be seen as interfering in China's domestic matters, and so the pros and cons of such meetings should be weighed carefully in the context of the geopolitical environment of
the day. The best option is to continue to encourage justice in the Chinese state's dealings with all citizens, and the use of rule of law.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Help to Reframe the Dominant Security Discourse}

For a long time, particularly since the start of the U.S. War on Terror, Islam has been cast as prone to nurturing terrorists with anti-state intentions. The global media has largely picked up on this oversimplified idea and reinforced stereotypes of Islamists. But any serious scholar knows that extremism can happen to any religion, and even religious radicalization often has secular grievances underpinning the reasons for mobilization.

Contrary to popular assumptions, Islam—while an important factor—is not the primary cause of many conflicts afflicting Muslim people in countries around the world. Each conflict has its own unique drivers, and can never be simplified to ancient hatreds that different civilizations have for one another. Religious radicalization is usually the result of religion being used as a vehicle for mobilization over political purposes.

Meanwhile, the positive effects of religious and ethnic diversity have been dwarfed by the overwhelming dominance of security rhetoric dealing with the Islamic threat to the non-Muslim world. This does not dismiss the gravity of religious militancy, but rather points out that it is often forgotten that religion is potentially a force of peace and facilitator for the development of cross-country ethnic relations.

Most Uyghurs are not the sort of religious extremists who commit indiscriminate violence.\textsuperscript{35} Most are merely concerned with their livelihoods and future. Yet their potential contributions to China and Central Asian relations have not been fully realized. They could have the capacity to play a greater role in the economic development and the
stability of Central Asia for they have the linguistic and historical links, also trade networks and even family ties. Xinjiang, which stands at the heart of the Euroasian land mass, also has the potential to serve as a two-way conduit linking China and Europe, and even the Middle East. Development of transit trade routes through Central Asia would not only give Xinjiang better access to European markets but would also enable it to provide trade services for the movement of goods between Europe and all of China.

In sum, there should be a greater focus on the potential benefits that a multi-ethnic population brings to a country. The U.S., home to some of the world's best academic institutions, can help by de-emphasizing the "Islamic threat" to the world, and by the encouraging of a more thorough investigation into the exogenous and endogenous causes of conflicts.

Conclusion

This chapter started by attempting to bridge conflict resolution theory with practice, to conceive ways and means to alleviate a complex and challenging situation in Xinjiang. Essentially, Chinese authorities need to adopt a broader approach beyond economic development in order to more satisfactorily address Uyghur unhappiness due to a lack of religious freedom, poor protection of civil liberties, the marginalization of culture, and under-represented or sidelined interests. In effect, a revamp in mindsets and approach would have to be a key part of a more comprehensive effort to accommodate the Uyghurs in China.

This is important because of the extremely harmful consequences of a vicious cycle between violent radicalization and non-Muslim revenge in a Muslim-minority
society. Conflicts involving ethnicity and religion can cause much greater damage to a society than one-way radical violence, and the Chinese government needs to make every effort to bridge the growing divide between the Han and the Uyghurs and put a stop to spreading hatred, provocations, revenge, and the splitting of society in order to work toward a more desirable state of affairs in Xinjiang. More attention has to be paid to encourage the Han to engage and develop positive interactions with Muslims. Sincerity, respect, and a moderate approach should be key elements of China's conflict management process.

On the part of the U.S., heightened sensitivity towards the insecurities of China is needed. Constant haranguing on the need for democratic changes is unlikely to have any constructive effect, although the subtle encouraging of the use of the rule of law, combined with the promotion of justice in the economic, political, and legal realms is probably the best plan of action.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that religious and ethnic differences are not the principal driving force behind the Han-Uyghur conflict in Xinjiang. The minority-state contention that exists in Xinjiang is not simply a manifestation of a clash between the Islamic and Confucian civilizations. It is a complex and multifaceted conflict on multiple levels and the tendency to stereotype issues, especially those involving religion, might not provide a logical explanation for conflicts that also arise from sociological, historical, and political contexts. Ironically, Chinese policies aimed at integrating the Uyghurs have instead worked to reinforce the latter's will to remain distinct from the Han. In addition, the widening income gap and perceived disparity in economic benefits are also fueling the disaffection between the two ethnic groups. In this light, current policies in Xinjiang should be re-evaluated, as much more work has to be done in order to halt the damage to inter-ethnic group relations in China. While religion is an important factor in ethno-religious conflicts because of its capability to mobilize adherents and legitimize actions, religion alone is rarely the sole motivating cause of conflict.

To briefly summarize, Chapter 1 enumerated common assumptions about the Han-Uyghur conflict, including how religious differences underpin the conflict. Yet the history of Han-Uyghur relations and the Soviet Union's influence on the Uyghur national consciousness demonstrate that the problem is not about Islam being incompatible with the Chinese order. The opening chapter also reviewed major literature written on the topic to provide a broad perspective on the situation, arguing that these theories when
considered separately do not sufficiently explain ethno-nationalist conflicts or minority conflicts involving a threat to identity, such as the one in Xinjiang, in China.

Chapter 2 applied a set of ethno-religious hypotheses on conflict to a case study of Xinjiang, in order to systematically understand the particular effects that Islam has on the conflict. Yet, while the exercise was useful as a lens with which to understand state-society relations in Xinjiang, it did not sufficiently portray or account for Uyghur nationalistic sentiment as a key dimension of the Han-Uyghur conflict. This observation is bolstered by the case of the Hui Muslims, who are more assimilated into Chinese society and therefore have significantly fewer confrontations with the state. This shows that it is not Islam that the Chinese authorities are clamping down on, but rather a brand of political Islam that could threaten the state. In sum, the resurgence or revitalization of Islam could be perceived as a unifying force or rallying point for opposition which can challenge the existing political and social orders.¹ As seen in many countries, Islam is an important vehicle for the mass political expression of opposition. This is especially apparent where Islam is conflated with national liberation movements of Muslim peoples against non-Muslim rule.

Chapter 3 addressed the Communist Party's worldview, seeking to comprehend the conflict from the perspective of the Chinese authorities. The tension arising from China's state-building goals and the Uyghurs' nation-building desires was examined. To achieve the basic goal of maintaining internal stability, the Chinese authorities have used both carrots and sticks—coercive and persuasive tactics—in Xinjiang. Suppression of dissenting voices and general protestations is a manifestation of the political center
consolidating influence on its periphery, rather than symptomatic of a systematic effort to eradicate Islam from Xinjiang society.

Chapter 4 used conflict management theory to put forth suggestions for action to be taken by China and the U.S. in order to better manage the conflict. Moderation, justice, and accommodation should be the broad values that guide domestic and foreign interactions and initiatives.

This thesis has aimed for a synthesis of various theories to yield a holistic overview of the situation in Xinjiang, as a single framework does not satisfactorily explain the Han-Uyghur conflict. By studying the interplay of both endogenous drivers—domestic politics and policies, trends, and incidents—and exogenous factors including influence from foreign players, a more complete approach to addressing the problem may be undertaken.

The Uyghurs are differentiated from the Han in many ways, including religion, language, and culture. Their identity has been shaped through different historical experiences and frames of reference due to the region's proximity and cultural ties with Central Asia. Thus, it is not Islam alone but a set of "identity components," of which Islam is one, which feeds into the Uyghurs' sense of being different and their hopes for self-determination. However, precisely because identity is usually composed of several elements with certain aspects more dominant than others at any time, the potential of nurturing the aspects of Uyghur identification with broader Chinese society should be explored. As mentioned in Chapter 4, a feature of low-conflict societies is the presence of cross-cutting ties between different groups of people. Such multi-layered relationships
could be cultivated through wide-ranging confidence-building measures and the emphasis on establishing a variety of interactions in various settings. Broadening and deepening of social ties and interactions would likely help to attenuate the intensity of conflicts as and when they arise.

Meanwhile, it is important to remember that China's counter-separatist stance is consistent with its basic goal of territorial integrity. This defensive posture has been shaped by historical experiences, but even more by the practical concern of political survival. National education has also stressed the prioritization of China's overall unity as a fundamental goal in order to achieve a strong and prosperous state. Past successes at regaining territories like Hong Kong and Macau have helped to boost the Communist Party's legitimacy and popularity, while a breakaway scenario of "renegade" regions or provinces would greatly weaken the CCP's legitimacy to govern and credibility to deliver on its promises. More importantly, there is the fear of a "domino effect," that a breakaway scenario for one region would lead to demands for independence from other minority dominated areas, leading to instability and jeopardizing the Chinese authorities' control of periphery territories. In short, a breakaway scenario is not something the Communist Party would consider given that it represents a "great loss of territory," but also an "unaffordable challenge to the legitimacy of the central government."

All that notwithstanding, smothering inter-ethnic group tension is a problem in itself and more could be done to alleviate the situation. A more inclusive policy is needed in Xinjiang, with the Uyghurs reassured of their future in China. This can come about through more justice and equity in terms of personal freedoms and access to economic
opportunities. At the same time, the Chinese authorities should be more conscientious in differentiating between terrorists, separatists, nationalists, and mere civil rights activists. There should be some independent basis of evidence when individuals are charged with crimes against the state.\textsuperscript{6}

Meanwhile, based on the assumption that China will continue to grow in economic and political might, the Uyghurs on their part should make the best of their situation. Uyghur intellectuals can help to de-escalate the conflict by denouncing acts of violence and terrorism, couching their arguments objectively in terms of Chinese and international laws.\textsuperscript{7} This would be a demonstration of respect for Beijing's core concern of national stability and also presents the Communist Party with a stance that is consistent with Chinese ideals. On a related note, conflict management can be further facilitated by making concessions seem like deference to religion, thereby reducing the vulnerability of leaders to accusations of being puppets of the state.\textsuperscript{8}

Ultimately, a moderate and more inclusive approach to managing minority groups in Xinjiang is needed, with significant investments required to enhance "social, economic, and political security of the local communities."\textsuperscript{9}
NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. For details on the frequency of organized protests and violent events in Xinjiang over 1949-2005, please see Gardner Bovingdon, The Uyghurs: Strangers in their Own Land (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 174-90.


10. Ibid., 23.


16. Dillon, Muslim Far Northwest, 35.


19. Ibid.


21. Eric Hyer, "China's Policy towards Uighur Nationalism," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 1 (April 2006): 75-86. During the many demonstrations over the years in Xinjiang, slogans calling for the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army to get out of Xinjiang and calls to establish "Xinjiangstan" or "Uyghuristan" are common. The common cause is Pan-Turkic nationalism, Hyer argued.


27. Ibid., 33.


29. Ibid., 26.


33. Ibid., 43, 242.


36. Ibid.

37. Dr. Joseph P. Smaldone, "Civil Wars" (class lecture, Georgetown University, Washington DC, Fall 2010).


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 10-18.

CHAPTER 2


2. Ibid., 14.


9. Ibid.


11. Dean G. Pruitt, Sung Hee Kim, and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 23-24. Invidious comparisons occur when the party develops awareness that "the other" is of no greater merit than itself, yet "the other" is afforded greater wealth or privilege. Thereafter, aspirations or expectations rise for either realistic reasons or idealistic reasons. When these aspirations or expectations are not met, conflict is likely to ensue.


16. Ibid., 445.

17. Ibid., 444.


19. Ibid., 4-5.
20. Ibid., 9.
21. Ibid., 455-58.
23. Ibid., 9.
25. Ibid., 335.
26. Ibid., 341.
27. Ibid., 324.
34. Tong Zhao, "Social Cohesion and Islamic Radicalization: Implications from the Uighur Insurgency," Journal of Strategic Security 3, no. 3 (2010): 46. Provocative incidents have led to increasing Han antagonism towards the Uyghurs. The Han no longer feel as restrained by the government's conciliatory minority and preferential policies as before, and have begun to act on their own and retaliate against aggressive acts by the Uyghurs.
37. Ibid.
38. Bovingdon, The Uyghurs, 86.

40. Ibid.


42. Zhao, "Social Cohesion," 41.


48. The term "milieu of radicalization" was used in Chapter 4 of Gunaratna, Acharya, and Wang, *Ethnic Identity and National Conflict*, 89-107.


57. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3


2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.


6. Ibid.


8. Ibid., 14.


11. Ibid., 64.

12. Ibid., 64-65.


16. Ibid., 70.


23 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 86.


29. Ibid.


31. Ibid., 39.


35. Ibid.


38. Ibid., 376.


40. Howell and Fan, "Migration and Inequality," 120.

41. Bhattacharji, "China's Xinjiang Region."


43. Howell and Fan, "Migration and Inequality," 136.


CHAPTER 4


2. Ibid., 393.


5. Dr. Elizabeth M. Duke, "Conflict Resolution" (class lecture, Georgetown University, Washington DC, Spring 2011).


10. Ibid., 437-41.

11. Ibid., 442-50.

12. Ibid., 451.


25. Ibid.


27. Ibid.


29. Ibid., 114.

30. Chung, "China's 'War on Terror'."


35. Finley, "Chinese Oppression in Xinjiang," 627-28. Finley argued that the majority of Uyghurs express their opposition through non-violent "symbolic resistance," which includes the repetition of negative stereotypes of the Han Chinese, spatial and social segregation from the Han, and the "dissemination of alternative representations" of the Han-Uyghur relationship through popular Uyghur song.
Other Uyghurs demonstrate "symbolic opposition" to the state through Islam itself, and this includes actions like returning to the mosque and more orthodox religious practice.


CHAPTER 5

1. Clarke, "'Glocality', 'Silk Roads,'" 176.


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