Legislative Representation, Minority Policies, and Violent Retaliations: The Uyghurs in China 1949-2010

Molly Enright
University of Colorado Boulder

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Molly Enright

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Thesis Advisor
Amy Liu | Political Science

Committee Members
Amy Liu | Political Science
Janet Donavan | Political Science
William Wei | History
Abstract

Uyghur ethnic violence has been a problem in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and other parts of China for the past two and a half decades in particular. The Chinese government has most recently responded with a large amount of restrictive legislation in 2011 but the violence has not ceased. Concurrently, the Uyghur ethnic group has made claims of repression by the Chinese state. I examine Chinese legislation that was determined to be related to the Uyghur ethnic group and find the overall level of conciliation/restriction in the legislation by year in the period 1949-2010. I also examine the levels of Uyghur ethnic violence from the past decade through news articles to determine the relationship between the violence and conciliation/restriction level of legislation. I find Uyghur ethnic violence to primarily be a response to a fall in the conciliation level of legislation. However, as long as there was Uyghur political representation, the overall level of restrictiveness was conciliatory. These findings indicate that Uyghur political representation is integral to Uyghur interests being adhered to in legislation and restrictive legislation to be counterproductive to Chinese interests in the Xinjiang region.
Introduction and Discussion of Hypothesis

Many times, when a regional or ethnic group claims complete autonomy from the state in which it geographically belongs, the group in question asserts the legitimacy of its cause by claiming it is being repressed by that state, which holds power over the group. If the group is perceived as repressed by the international community, its claims to autonomy may elicit sympathy from those in the international community with the power to provide aid to the group. However, with the growing use of terrorist activity by minority groups, the question of minority restriction and repression is complicated. While a group may be visibly repressed by the state, if the group participates in terrorist actions, it has the potential to lose sympathy of those international observers who have suffered from terrorist actions and are the most likely to provide aid to repressed groups such as the United States. The question of aid to these groups is further complicated by the claim that many minority groups seeking autonomy only use terrorism as a strategy when they perceive no other recourse for action. The Uyghur ethnic group in China has had a few of their members participate in acts of terrorism in the name of autonomy for the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Xinjiang-associated terrorists as well as other, unaffiliated Uyghur activists claim that they should have autonomy from the Chinese government and cite oppression under the Chinese state as one of their reasons. There may exist substance to their claim of repression due to the fact that Xinjiang has seen various periods of restrictions through the exertion of power over the Uyghur people by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. Despite clear periods of restrictions and openings since 1949 in Xinjiang highlighted in Figure 1, it
is unclear why the Chinese government exerts its power over the Uyghur peoples and this region at one time and not another. I propose that,

Hypothesis 1: If there is no representation of the Uyghur peoples within the legislature, the central government will have strict language, religious, and minority policies.

Hypothesis 2: If strict language, religious, and minority policies are enacted, there is a greater chance of retaliation through violence by Uyghur people.

Figure 1

As an authoritarian regime, China’s ethnic minority policy has wavered in levels of restriction since the CCP gained power in 1949. These policies have significantly affected many minorities but, specifically for this case study, they have affected China’s “Uyghur” ethnic group. Uyghur ethnicity makes up less than 5% of the Chinese population and is markedly different from the Han ethnic group, which accounts for 91.5% of all Chinese people (China). However, this does not take into account that the Uyghur ethnicity as is defined by the Chinese government is comprised of several different ethnicities. Xinjiang is divided geographically into regions comprised of different ethnicities within the Uyghur ethnicity. Largely due to the fact that the previous literature on the Uyghur people and
Xinjiang almost universally groups the Uyghur into one group, this paper will generally reference the present-day Uyghur as one ethnic group.

Despite being comprised of several different ethnic groups, the Uyghur as a whole have much in common. The Uyghur people are generally Muslim and have Turkic Uyghur as their first language. This signals that central government policies regarding religion and language have significant impact on the Uyghur people. Picking up on this signal is important within the analysis of Uyghur repression through legislation because, even though a piece of legislation may not mention minority ethnic groups, it may mention language or religion. If so, it still has significant effect on the Uyghur people and must be included in the analysis.

The Uyghur ethnic minority has communities throughout China but is concentrated in the Xinjiang region, which borders Kazakhstan. Within the province, each ethnicity that makes up the blanket term “Uyghur ethnic group” is situated within its own geographic area of Xinjiang. Different areas have been shown to have different Uyghur majority opinions on policies towards autonomy with certain areas having more proclivities towards terrorist action than others. Variance between different regions’ majority political opinions is notable because, even though one small geographic region of Xinjiang may be committing a majority of the terrorist acts at one time, all Uyghur in Xinjiang are punished if a law mentions Xinjiang, ethnic minorities, language, or religion as a whole. Also, when any Uyghur person commits a terrorist act, the reporting on the incident primarily (if not always) labels the person as “Uyghur” but does not state what her organizational affiliations may be or what geographic area of Xinjiang she’s from. Framing Uyghur terrorist action as something that all Uyghurs are capable of in news media only reinforces
the notion that all Uyghurs should be punished for a few individuals’ actions. However, this thought pattern is congruous with China’s preoccupation with territorial integrity.

Within at least the past two centuries, China has repeatedly shown a strong will to regain and maintain its territorial integrity be it with Taiwan or outside imperialists. The location of Xinjiang on the border of China adds yet another dimension to China’s quest to maintain territorial integrity because it allows for the geographic possibility of Xinjiang’s complete autonomy. Due to the high ranking in importance of keeping Xinjiang territory as a part of China and the violent reactions some Uyghurs have had to further repression, China has had to utilize varied strategies in keeping the people of Xinjiang complacent with Chinese rule. Claims to autonomy by the Uyghurs are marred by the fact that the Chinese government has used concessions as a strategy to keep Xinjiang under its control including naming Xinjiang the “Uyghur Autonomous Region”. Although Xinjiang is formally known as the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region”, it is ruled almost directly by the central government in Beijing. This takes further political power away from the Uyghur people and gives it to the central, majority-Han government. This government then is able to pass minority ethnic group, linguistic, and religious legislation without any formal resistance within the system of government.

Finding why certain legislation is passed in relation to the Uyghur ethnic minority could explain what political strategies the Uyghurs could effectively utilize in order to achieve political goals. In order to do this, religious, linguistic, and minority policy in China must be examined in relation to how effective these policies are in Xinjiang as well as what the Uyghur people have done to cause either openings in policy or further restriction. Further, the cause of the legislation can be examined in several contexts. Unfortunately,
there is an issue of data censorship in the intricate histories of Xinjiang and China. This has caused the information necessary for deeming what caused certain legislation to be incomplete at best. Thus, causes of legislation are not stated and cannot be inferred in many cases. This is why research into Xinjiang and China must examine the histories of both parties involved in order to truly understand their positions.

**Early Xinjiang and Chinese History (206 BCE – 750 CE)**

Xinjiang has been a prime target for conquerors due to its fertile farmland in the south and the northern deserts, which have been described as perfect for horse breeding (Millward, 260). The Uyghur people are ethnic to the southern farmland, which used to be known as Uyghuristan or the Tarim basin (Millward, 260). Despite its peoples’ claim to the land, the Tarim basin faced an abundance of struggles with China as early as the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). After the Tarim basin people refused to aid the Han in their struggle against the Xiongnu (an ancient civilization of central Asia), the Han began to struggle for power over the Tarim basin with the Xiongnu and native peoples (Starr, 34).

According to Starr, “Han generals massacred local populations, staged coups, set up puppet monarchs, and forcibly relocated one city’s inhabitants” (35). This disregard of the ethnic population was due to the Han’s primary interest in the strategic position of Xinjiang over the economic prosperity that could come from the region (Starr, 35). Despite significant victories of the Hans and their apparent proclivity towards doing whatever was necessary to maintain control over the Tarim basin, the “Han engagement with the region may be characterized as an inconclusive tug-of-war” (Starr, 36). The Hans were never able to consolidate the land due to the Xiongnu presiding over a large portion of the territory
that China was interested in obtaining. “Thus, the often-repeated assertion that all Xinjiang was Chinese during the Han dynasty is an oversimplification” and isn’t inclusive of other groups prominent in the area at the time aside from Han Chinese (Starr, 36).

After the end of what is commonly known as the “Classical Period” in Xinjiang with the fall of the Han dynasty in 221 CE, a long period of conquerors arose in Xinjiang. There is a large blank period in Xinjiang’s history until around the fifth century when the Turks conquered parts of Xinjiang and the Tarim basin. Despite not allowing direct Chinese control over Xinjiang, the Turk power structure was friendly towards the Chinese state, which allowed China larger amounts of access to Xinjiang than they had ever had before even under the Han. Despite the anxiety this may have caused in Xinjiang populations when they recalled the last time Chinese conquerors came to their lands, the Chinese government had changed significantly since the Han strategy of hardened diplomacy and military action in Xinjiang. During this rule of the Turks in Xinjiang, the Tang dynasty came to power in China in 618 CE (Starr).

While the Tang’s advisors initially thought to employ the strategies of the Han towards Xinjiang, the Tang themselves came from a family of Northerners with a tradition of nomadic lifestyle making them similar to many populations of Xinjiang at the time. Thus, their approach towards nomadic peoples and Xinjiang in general was very liberal for their time and has been called “one of imperial China’s most open and cosmopolitan periods” (Starr, 37). Due to the Tang’s relaxation of rules against the Chinese people as well as various nomadic minorities, the Tang dynasty did partially own a small part of Xinjiang during this period. However, similarly to the Han dynasty period, “to say that Xinjiang was ‘Chinese territory’ during the Tang period oversimplifies a politically complex and fluid
situation involving the Turks, Tibet, and the Arabs, as well as the Tang” (Starr, 38). Tibet was a vast imperial power at this time and frequently attempted to extend their influence into Xinjiang. They were able to consistently beat the Chinese out of Xinjiang militarily but came to a standstill with the Turks who controlled the north. Thus, even other ethnic minorities of China were not always under Chinese control and even extended their control over the Chinese themselves.

The end of Chinese presence in Xinjiang for more than a millennium came with the end of the Tang dynasty, which came as the cost of an overzealous campaign. The Tang, under different leadership than the emperors who found camaraderie in the nomadic populations, attempted to consolidate control in Central Asia through a military campaign against the Tarim basin, the Zungharia to the West, and trade routes in the area controlled by Tibet. Gao Xianzhi, a Korean general, was hired by the Tang to command this campaign in which they were eventually able to capture Tashkent (the current-day capital of Uzbekistan) for the Tang. Gao was able to gain several Turk tribes’ assistance in his campaign, which added invaluable numbers to the Tang army. Unfortunately for Gao and the Tang, the Turks who had been fighting with them turned against them during the Battle of Talas in 751 and decisively ended Gao’s campaign (Starr).

While this marked the beginning of the end of Chinese rule in Xinjiang, the Tang would lose power as a result of the An Lushan rebellion in China’s agricultural center from 755-763. This rebellion “forced a full retreat of Tang forces from Xinjiang” due to the devastation they faced against An Lushan (Starr, 39). Due to the need to focus resources on the rebellion at home, the Chinese were not able to spend as many resources on international conflicts. Thus, “for a full thousand years from this date, that is, until the Qing
dynasty, no power based in China would again rule in Xinjiang” (Starr, 39). Although the Tang enjoyed power over several Tarim basin city-states for about a century (interrupted by two periods of Tibetan rule), there were very few Chinese settlers in these city-states. Due to this fact, the Tang’s rule over Xinjiang was soft and allowed for local monarchs to continue their rule unabated. Tang rule is largely characterized as an alliance under the guise of control not only because of the indirect rule but also because military and political relations between local monarchs and the Tang were largely equal (Starr, 39).

“A Drama of Overlords Replacing Overlords” (750 CE – 1644 CE)

At approximately 750 CE the Uyghur Empire first began to exercise control over Xinjiang province. While the Uyghurs of present-day Xinjiang share the name of the Empire, the Empire only served as one of many ancestral ethnicities to the Uyghurs today. The Uyghur Empire stemmed from nomads who would eventually settle in what are now the most populous regions within Xinjiang. These nomads who would not be known as Uyghur until the nineteenth century originally came from the Turko-Mongolian steppe (Starr).

Previously, the Uyghur Empire had been absorbed as a part of the Turkish Empire but in 744 overthrew its rulers and took over what had historically been its land. The center of power in the Empire was located within central Mongolia but its control included land in China, Xinjiang, as well as Zungharia to the West. At times during its rule, the Empire’s power extended as far as the Ferghana valley (located a short distance from the current-day Uzbekistan capital of Tashkent). Due to its strong influence and hold over scarce resources in East Asia, the Uyghur Empire maintained close political, economic, and cultural ties with India and China and “enjoyed good relations with China-based states of
the Tang, the Five Dynasties, Song, Liao, and Jin, with whom they [...] traded pastoral, agricultural, and mineral products” (Starr, 41). Several scarce resources would provide the brunt of the Uyghur Empire’s exports to China. Cotton, which had not yet been developed as an agricultural product in China, served as a primary export of the Uyghur Empire. Other primary exports included grain, fruits, and vegetables as well as wine grown from grapes in the region and known as a local specialty throughout the region (Starr).

Despite this period of rule and prosperity for the Uyghur Empire, it did not last very long; in 840 the Uyghurs suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Kyrgyz people, which caused the Uyghurs to resettle in what is known today as Urumqi and Turpan (the two largest cities in Xinjiang today). After that point, the area known as Uyghuristan was conquered by several powers from the East in succession. However, scholars such as James A. Millward argue that these periods of rule under such powers as the Mongols were under the power of the outside force primarily in name only. Due to their lack of a large, effective army, the decedents of the Uyghur Empire surrendered to new conquerors swiftly and quickly accommodated them. However, it was because of its lack of resistance and its adeptness at making the conquerors feel comfortable in a new land, it was largely left to its own devices and even powerful within its conqueror’s regimes at times. Genghis Khan’s empire was provided with Uyghur literate officials and a Uyghur writing system, which allowed the Uyghur to have a significant influence over Mongol culture (Starr).

Uyghur ancestors served an important purpose to the early Mongol rulers through their influence over early Mongol culture but the Chaghataid Moghuls (which comes from the Persian word for Mongols) would have perhaps the most significant impact on the Uyghur culture of any Xinjiang region conqueror. When these later Mongols came from the
West, they brought their newly adopted religion of Islam with them. After they conquered Xinjiang and the Tarim basin, the native peoples there adopted Muslim as their primary religion. Nomad lifestyles were a key factor in the spread of Islam in Xinjiang as well as Islamic mystics who would travel throughout the region acting as both entertainment and healers. Despite this large influence that the later Mongols had over Uyghur culture, they proved similar to overlords before them in that their rule was often only in name. They did place figurehead rulers in charge within the Xinjiang region but these rulers had virtually no power and allowed the native officials to run most aspects of the state from behind the scenes. Despite these symbolic rulers not having power in the majority of cases, there was one set of princes under the Moghul khan who would eventually monopolize power in the Tarim basin on a secular basis by the end of the seventeenth century. These rulers would eventually be removed by the conquerors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which included Russians, Manchus, and Zunghars but it would be almost a century before the Chinese Qing Dynasty would gain control over Xinjiang (Starr).

The short-lived conquerors that followed the rule of the Moghuls in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have varied means of ruling but would largely concentrate their efforts in name rather than practice like those before them. The Russians at the time did not spend too many of their resources in Xinjiang but did contribute greatly to the history of the area by providing border demarcation and regularizing trade relations between the region, Russia, and the Manchu. These trade regulations also aided in the negotiation of peace within the Xinjiang region. Before the trade regulations were put in place, there was contestation of territory within Xinjiang between the Manchu and the Russians. The Manchu held various small territories within Xinjiang from time to time but
the Russians largely dominated the area for this brief period. Despite the large effect that the Russians had in Xinjiang, they left after only a short time in power in order to expend their resources on what they deemed to be more important: Siberia. Due to their peaceful agreements with the Russians, the Manchu did not invade Xinjiang after the Russians vacated the area. The Zunghar of the West would then arise during this dearth of power in the region and consolidate control over Xinjiang. While the Zunghar were able to create a state in which they enforced taxes and military service, they were found to have even less control over the native population than the Russians and Manchu before them. Instead, they focused their efforts on an intense rivalry with the rising Qing dynasty, which would culminate in the defeat of the Zunghar after the Qing emperor took advantage of a deep political divide between Zunghar princes in 1754 (Starr).

While the people of Xinjiang saw a “drama of overlords displacing overlords”, the Chinese state remained preoccupied with its own internal dramas (Starr, 43). However, these problems did not keep the Chinese state from its efforts to halt the growth of power on its doorstep. Although the Chinese military could not break the well-fortified defenses of Xinjiang after the Tang dynasty until the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), they consistently attempted to block the Uyghur’s access to outside grain and oases needed for survival (Millward, 260). This course of action was necessary especially during the rule of Mongols based in Mongolia, during which tumultuous relations with the Mongol khans kept Xinjiang as a location of significant political and military strategy.

One of the few times of relative peace between the regions was when Xinjiang was unified under the later Mongol Empire, which not only established trade between China on occasion but also fiercely protected its territory from invaders (Millward, 261). Despite this
protection, China continued to economically undermine the geographic area of Uyghuristan, which it would do until it absorbed Xinjiang into its own territory in 1760 (Starr, 27). The one time in which relations between the Chinese state and a Uyghur overlord were not strained was during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when trade between the Moghuls and Ming was common. While the Ming dynasty has attempted to claim Xinjiang as a tributary instead of trade, rulers in Xinjiang were benefited by the fact that the agreed upon system for trade allowed for them to sell caravans of goods to the highest bidder (Starr, 47). This refutes the claims that the Ming dynasty had a significant amount of power over the Xinjiang region to justify their rule of it. The Ming’s claim to power in Xinjiang during this time without in reality having direct power fits into the pattern of conquerors that Xinjiang had seen up until this point. The conquerors would be mostly in name only with very little direct control over the area and its people outside of trade agreements that generally benefited the native populations of Xinjiang. This would change dramatically with the rise of the Qing dynasty in Xinjiang (Starr).

Xinjiang and the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1902)

After the Qing dynasty completed its conquest of Xinjiang, it initially displayed to the Uyghur signs of ruling with kindness and respect instead of force as the Uyghur had experienced under Mongol rule. Because of the position of Xinjiang on a contested border, the Qing dynasty kept thousands of soldiers in the new territory but, due to a lack of physical money in Xinjiang, the Qing had to send the province 895,000 taels (the currency at the time), which contributed to local salaries (Millward, 274). Thus, Qing immigration to Xinjiang caused the quality of life in Xinjiang to increase dramatically within the first sixty
years of rule. The ethnically Han immigration was primarily of soldiers and their families which, as a common occurrence in Xinjiang under various conquerors, was nothing abnormal to the Uyghur and didn’t cause much (if any) resistance.

Even more promising to the Uyghur people was the fact that the Qing dynasty did not impose the same laws on its Uyghur citizens as it expected of its ethnically Han citizens. One of the more infamous examples of this is, during the period when Han Chinese were expected to wear the queue in devotion to the Emperor, Turkic subjects including the Uyghur were not required to wear one. Another example is Qing authorities would allow Uyghur people to practice their religion and have their mosques retain tax-free status (Millward, 274). Despite these initial freedoms granted by the Chinese government, the autonomy the Uyghur people enjoyed was not to last.

While the Uyghur and Han Chinese people lived peacefully a majority of the time following the conquering of the Xinjiang region by the Chinese, this all changed in 1820 with the invasion of Khoqand (a nearby Islamic country that existed from 1709-1876) (Millward, 275). Despite the Qing’s efforts to push back Khoqand, they were unsuccessful and many Uyghur civilians were murdered in the process, which caused the Uyghur to question why they allowed Chinese conquerors when these conquerors did not protect them (Millward, 275). This lead to many protests by the Uyghur people against Chinese rule but these protests did not have a large following until 1865 when the Khoqand invaded again and gained complete control over Northern Xinjiang (Millward, 275). This was due to the weakness of the Qing dynasty at this point in time.

For thousands of years, China was the world leader in technology and weaponry. After millennia of being technologically ahead of the rest of the world, the Qing dynasty
decided to allocate their resources to other important facets of their society such as the economy of material goods rather than focusing on military technology. Around the time the Qing dynasty made this decision, the industrial revolution was beginning in the West. The West was then able to make new ships more apt for battle. These two independent actions would have terrible consequences for the Chinese state including the infamous Opium Wars (Ebrey, 234-240). However, the Opium Wars were not the only consequence for the Chinese state. The Qing's lack of technological progress as well as their need to focus on Western imperialism in Eastern China forced the Qing to forgo protection of Xinjiang in favor of protection of their ports. Thus, Xinjiang was open to attack without recourse but would soon take advantage of the Qing’s inability to govern effectively over its people.

Xinjiang was officially named as a province of China by the Qing Dynasty in 1902 but, by this time, the Qing Dynasty was already confronting mass disorder which was only growing with time (Iredale 2001, 165). When the Empress Dowager Cixi and the Emperor passed away in 1908 under suspicious circumstances, only a two-year-old was left to tend the throne. By February 1912, the young Emperor abdicated his throne, bringing an end to imperial China and starting a period of unstable central rule by the Kuomintang (KMT). KMT rule, however, was marred by warlords and international attempts at territory including in Xinjiang where rule was inconsistent and incomplete (Ebrey). However, where KMT rule was dominant, there was no question as to who held power.

**Warlord Period (1911 – 1949)**

In 1911, when KMT rule appeared imminent, the party sent Yang Zengxin to be Governor of Urumqi and then Xinjiang. He is largely characterized as an “absolute ruler”
who was both cunning and ruthless (Tyler, 88). His rule marked a significant change in Chinese policy towards Xinjiang where, instead of the soft rule the Uyghur people had grown accustomed to over the centuries, they would be forcibly assimilated into Chinese culture. Thus, being anything but Chinese in Xinjiang was seen as undesirable leading to discrimination against all Xinjiang ethnic minorities and a culture of bigoted ideals amongst the growing population of Chinese immigrants. Orientalist views of Xinjiang began to circle through China with one of the most popular being “poor, Turki girls seducing wealthy Chinese men into marrying them” (Tyler, 89-90).

Despite his influence on Chinese views of Xinjiang and holding power in Xinjiang for over fifteen years, Yang was assassinated during a dinner with a visiting Russian dignitary. He had bankrupted the province by continually printing his own money to pay foreign debts and had not left a viable successor. The man that replaced Yang was Jin Shuren. He continued Yang’s mistakes but attempted to strip the land of its resources in order to pay off Xinjiang’s debts. He also increased surveillance of common citizens and refused passports especially to Mecca. Although Jin’s actions were oppressive to the Uyghur people and others, a few specific instances are chiefly to blame for the revolt against Chinese rule in Xinjiang (Tyler, 94-96).

The first major incident that enraged the Northern Uyghur people of Xinjiang is when Maksud Shah, the ruler of Hami oasis known as “King of the Gobi” and descended from Uyghur Khans, died in March of 1930. As soon as Maksud died, Jin acted and made a short conquest of Hami while abolishing the monarchy and instituting land reform. The remaining members of Maksud’s line were forced to travel to Urumqi and swear fealty to Jin. The land reform promised to the people of Hami was in actuality theft of the Uyghur
lands disguised as law. Once Jin and his people held the land, they distributed it to refugees from warlord-torn Chinese provinces near-by and gave almost none to the original inhabitants (Tyler, 97). The people of Hami did not revolt, however, until the second major incident in which one of Jin’s most prominent tax collectors attempted to forcibly marry a Uyghur Hami girl. There are several versions of the story but the most agreed upon version according to my research is: when the tax collector showed up under the pretense of discussing terms of the marriage with the girl’s father, he was murdered by armed Uyghur. “The murder was a signal […] for a general riot. [… Uyghur] descended on the old city of Hami and began slaughtering the Chinese” (Tyler, 98). The Uyghur took the opportunity to forcibly take back the lands that Jin had robbed them of but were not able to keep their land for long. When it became obvious that the Uyghur rebels did not have the numbers and requisite knowledge of battle tactics, Jin refused to accept their surrender (Tyler, 98).

Desperate, the Uyghur approached a warlord from the Gansu province named Ma Zhongying who had ties to the KMT with concerns of getting “a more sympathetic governor in Urumqi and restoration of the Hami royal family” (Tyler, 99). Ma, as a Chinese Muslim, agreed to help in the name of the Muslim brotherhood but had a reputation for cruelty in his rule. He won a four-month-long siege of Hami for the Uyghur people after dispensing a last-minute army of Russians who had aligned with Jin. Ma’s own council comprised of two Japanese advisors (Tyler, 99-102). The Russians and the Japanese began to express an interest in Xinjiang territory in the early 1930s and, although both Jin and Ma sought outside help, others in their councils kept a steady eye on those outsiders who held power (Tyler, 102). The Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the level of control the Soviet Union possessed over Mongolia allowed both nations considerable access to China’s western
provinces, which caused Uyghur rebels suspicion of any Japanese and Russians who held power (Wang, 49).

They had good reason to be suspicious as, in October 1931, Jin signed an illegal treaty with the Soviet Union for military supplies in return for a Russian monopoly of trade in Xinjiang. Jin’s newly acquired purchases, however, did not deter Ma and the rebellion. By March 1933, Ma’s forces put Urumqi temporarily under siege shortly before Jin’s hired Russians removed him from power for not paying them. After Wu Aizhen (the governor’s appointed advisor) began assisting with the governor’s duties in Jin’s absence, he sent a plea to the Japanese general Sheng Shicai who was stationed nearby. In June of that year, Sheng made a deal with Ma that effectively ended the war. Unfortunately for Ma, Sheng committed a coup that put him in a position to send a delegate to Moscow for help. The Russian soldiers Stalin provided put Ma’s Northern troops on the run while conflicts in the South kept Uyghur and Dongan (another Muslim group in Xinjiang) people at odds (Tyler, 104-114).

The idea of Uyghur independence was forming in Xinjiang at this time as the Uyghur ethnic group was the largest population in Xinjiang. Pan-Turkist ideals had spread across Muslim Uyghur groups in Xinjiang and united them under the common cause of a Turkish state (Wang, 293). Southern Uyghur fighters took over cities with Chinese immigrants and forced them to convert to Islam. A new Turkish-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (known as ETR) was placed as the rightful power in the region and attempted to find support in Britain (Tyler, 114). The leaders of the ETR were known as the Yili Regime for the Ili region in Northern Xinjiang (Wang, 61). Although several general were sympathetic to the Uyghur cause for independence, they did not provide assistance due to potential
conflicts with the Chinese government in Nanjing. The movement failed to gain traction due to the Uyghur independence movement being against all of the other powers in Xinjiang at the time: the Chinese government, the Dongan ethnic group, and the Soviet Union (Tyler, 114-116).

Ma disappeared after his defeat at the hand of the Russians and, in doing so, firmly placed Xinjiang in Sheng’s hands. However, due to Sheng’s deal with Stalin, it would be more accurate to say that the power in Xinjiang now belonged to the Soviet Union. Sheng used his power to elevate Uyghur warlords to positions of governance, eliminate several forms of official racism against Uyghurs, and stop the remnants of Ma’s armies from continuing to harass Southern Uyghur people (Tyler, 117). But this is not to say that Sheng was completely immune from his duties to the Soviet Union which seemed interested in halting Japan’s expansion westward into mainland Asia. “Xinjiang, for so long seen by China as a buffer state against barbarians in the west, was now the USSR’s buffer state against the east, and Japan” (Tyler, 118). However, as soon as Russia was distracted with an invading Germany in World War II, Sheng ordered all Russians to evacuate Xinjiang and, after the Russian victory at Stalingrad, they complied. With the Russians gone, Russian sympathizers including Mao Zedong’s brother were executed (Tyler, 118).

Although the Russians had now left Xinjiang, the territory was not immediately returned to Chinese Nationalist control. Sheng was aware that the Nationalists intended to remove him from power in Xinjiang and he attempted to turn to the CCP for assistance. They refused and Sheng was called back to the central Nationalist government (Tyler, 119).

Another rebellion against Sheng and the provincial government occurred in 1944 as well when Uyghurs and Kazakhs fought for independence under Osman Batur. Although
the force was led primarily by the two largest ethnic groups, Mongols, Russians, Chinese, and smaller ethnic groups were also a part of the rebellion. The fighters were backed by the Kremlin which was asked by KMT forces to halt the rebellion’s advances. It accomplished this by convincing the Uyghur and Kazakh leaders of the rebellion to negotiate with the KMT. Separatists agreed that “they would give up their ambition to secede if Xinjiang was given self-rule within China” (Tyler, 122). Unfortunately, these leaders did not control all of the Uyghur and Kazakh fighters and any hope of a compromise was squashed by additional fighting outside of the leaders’ control (Tyler, 122).

Due to the violent actions of the Uyghur and Kazakh rebellion, Zhang Zhizhong (Sheng’s successor) was forced to grant the two groups conciliatory policies including freedom of religion, publication, assembly, and speech. He created a government so conciliatory to the Muslim people in particular that it was unlike anything else seen in China at this time (Wang, 316). Unfortunately for Zhang, the resulting peace was not to last as Uyghur and Kazakh fighters continued to cause the provincial government grief (Tyler, 122). According to Wang, the turmoil in Xinjiang between the provincial government and the native separatists provided Russia with a stable power over the region even after they retreated due to the Uyghur and Kazakh forces already generally supporting Soviet government beliefs (72). This is partially due to the Nationalist government’s preoccupation with the Communists, which caused a lack of available funds to be sent to Zhang and the Xinjiang provincial government (Wang, 316).

When Zhang retired from office, he nominated Masud Sabri as his successor due to Masud’s history of criticism against the Sheng regime while Sheng was in power. This gave Masud a significant relationship with the Uyghurs and other native Xinjiang peoples (Wang,
293). This relationship did not appear to mean anything to Masud, however, as he undid all of the conciliatory measures that Zhang had given Muslims and Uyghur. In response, the Uyghur and Yili regime rebelled against Masud and caused further violence in Xinjiang but did not see Masud's removal from power until the end of his predetermined term in early 1949. Masud's successor was chosen from within the Nationalist government but his connection to Zhang, pro-Soviet mindset and willingness to grant conciliatory measures to Muslims appeased the Yili regime and Uyghur enough to halt the majority of the fighting. However, the provincial government had been weakened from years of fighting and was not able to respond to every reported event of ethnic or religious violence (Wang, 317-320).


The CCP’s consolidation of power in Xinjiang on September 25, 1949 is largely characterized by the academic community as a “peaceful transition”. The quotes are meant to denote that not all groups were represented in this discussions (such as ethnic groups, viewpoints within represented ethnic groups, regional interests, etc.) as well as the terms that allowed for the peaceful transition were predominantly ignored by the Communist government. The simplified version of the “peaceful transition” is after years of power struggles between the native rebellions, Nationalist government, and Soviet Union, the people of Xinjiang were relieved to have a stable power over the region (Wang, 321).

Despite this version of a “peaceful transition” being broadly accepted by the academic community, there is noted suspicion around the deaths of several Uyghur leaders. About a month before the Chinese Communists took power in Xinjiang, they asked Uyghur
leaders to join the first plenary session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in Beijing. Their plane disappeared and it wasn’t until three months later that the Communists announced what had happened (Tyler, 123). Conspiracy theories surround the disappearance due to its convenient elimination of the Yili Regime leadership (Millward, 234). The conspiracy theories were believed by an increasing majority over the years to come under the tight Communist control.

The Communists promised the leaders of Xinjiang including several Uyghurs a large number of conciliations if they peacefully joined China. One of these promises was political autonomy from China (Tyler, 131). This was promised within the first constitution, which “stated that all nationalities were equal and regional autonomy applied in areas where a minority nationality lived in a compact community” (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 56). Despite promises in early CCP models to create a Uyghur state with rights similar to those granted Soviet satellites, the CCP had become interested in promoting the idea of “nationality” in ethnic regions to quell separatism and avoid Han superiority (Tyler, 139). Han superiority was addressed in the Common Program (the interim Constitution of the People’s Republic of China for five years after its adoption in 1949) and served as recognition of the cultural superiority of Hans faced by many other ethnic groups (Svanberg, 89).

The Common Program served as a largely conciliatory measure to Uyghur as four of the five articles concerning ethnic groups were conciliatory while only one was restrictive. In addition to the article mentioning Han superiority, the Common Program had articles establishing autonomous organs of government in ethnic areas, guaranteeing equal rights of ethnic minorities including freedom of religion and culture, and developmental aid plans.
that had been promised by the KMT but never delivered (Svanberg, 89). Unfortunately, two factors made these conciliatory measures almost impossible to fully implement from the beginning. “First, no autonomous area and therefore no autonomous government at any level was composed solely of one nationality” (Svanberg, 92). The Communist government in Xinjiang attempted to solve this problem by creating autonomous counties but, as the entirety of Xinjiang became known as the Uyghur autonomous region, ethnic minority opinions were often conflicting and, therefore, ignored by Han Chinese representatives at the provincial level (Svanberg, 92). “The second factor in limiting minority autonomy was the role of the PLA and the CCP in all the minority regions in the first decade of Communist rule. Both powerful institutions were virtually all Han Chinese” (Svanberg, 92). Because there was no significant Uyghur representation in the provincial government and military forces, Uyghur interests of autonomy were virtually ignored in most any significant arena.

The one blatantly restrictive measure in the Common Program related heavily to autonomy. Xinjiang was not granted a right to secession as it had been promised previously. The CCP still attempted a few conciliatory measures and created autonomous ethnic localities for six of the fourteen different ethnic groups in Xinjiang. “Notably absent from this system are any autonomous Uyghur localities, despite the fact that Uyghurs comprise the majority of the population overall and in most urban areas of Xinjiang” (Starr, 91). However, the CCP must have realized its mistake as the Uyghurs were granted the conciliation of Xinjiang being renamed the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955 (Tyler, 139).

Whatever amount of Han superiority (known as “Han chauvinism”) existed prior to the CCP “peaceful liberation” of Xinjiang, the frequency of Han chauvinistic viewpoints was
only exacerbated by the steady amount of migration of Han settlers to Xinjiang. The first Han settlers in Xinjiang were a majority of KMT demobilized soldiers who were sent to work in agriculture, engineering, industry, and mining. In addition to these and other demobilized soldiers, hundreds of thousands of Han migrants were dispatched to Xinjiang in the following decade. Although this initially caused a significant problem during the famine years to come, a large number of the Han migrants were quickly recruited to develop land for agricultural projects. Due to their immediate reaction, millions of acres of land were developed in a short amount of time leading to a slight degree less famine in Xinjiang and Uyghur populations. Unfortunately for these Hans and Xinjiang Uyghurs, much of the food those in rural areas grew was reclaimed by the party for quotas similarly to the rest of China at this time (Millaward, 251-254).

Another primary promise the CCP made to the Uyghur leaders was political representation of the Uyghur ethnic group. Only a handful of months passed after the “peaceful liberation” before the Communists began to keep their promise of Uyghur political representation. The history of conciliation and restriction of Uyghurs by the central Chinese government is then complicated. Starting in 1951 with the “Three Anti-“ campaign, the Communist’s promise of Uyghur political representation was both kept and broken depending on the level of government. At the provincial level of government in Xinjiang, Uyghur representatives initially replaced existing Han leaders but were violently purged during the “Three Anti-“ campaign starting in late 1951. The majority of pre-People’s Republic of China era Uyghur leaders were eliminated in this purge. Nonetheless, a handful of these leaders survived with a few becoming extremely successful officials at the local level of government. Their success is primarily due to the tightly controlled local
elections in Xinjiang allowed by the provincial government. Xinjiang was likely allowed to have these elections due to the CCP having very little knowledge of Uyghur peoples’ needs and values (Millward, 238-240).

Although the central government promised Uyghur involvement in local government, Uyghurs were almost universally shut out of higher government positions after 1952. The Chinese government officials argued at the time that there were too many Uyghurs interested in Xinjiang leadership who had been involved in the ETR (Starr, 82). ETR involvement was a serious offense at the time as there were still several small bands of ETR rebels roaming Xinjiang and invading Han settlements. These “resistance groups” troubled the Communists until the resistance’s last leaders were caught and executed in 1954 (Millward, 238).

In the past Islam had united the different ethnic groups across Xinjiang under a common cause and Islam in Xinjiang was not to be ignored by the CCP. “The new Chinese government at first permitted Islamic education and left Islamic leaders, including mosque personnel, in place under the supervision of the CCP” (Starr, 88). These conciliatory measures were not to last. This is not unsurprising, however, because “Islam poses a challenge to Communism, and vice versa, because both systems compete for influence in social legal, ideological and political spheres, not to mention for control of land” (Millward, 246). The Islamic leaders initially left in power under CCP supervision were purged in the executions of former ETR members as discussed previously. During these purges, Xinjiang tax law was changed so that Uyghur people had to relinquish much of their wealth over to the state, rent for religious institutions increased dramatically, and mosques and Islamic cultural centers received no state assistance. Although Islam was welcome to be practiced
individually or in groups, there were no funds allocated for public meeting spaces. Thus, Islamic groups in some areas began to shift towards neighborhood and familial groups rather than large-scale community organizations (Starr, 88-89).

Language was another significant area of broken promises by the CCP. As part of Mao’s plan to curb Han superiority in ethnic regions, the CCP made “pronouncements about equality and the right of nationalities to use and develop their own languages” (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 56). The Common Program solidified these pronouncements in 1949. “The 1954 constitution went considerably further, stipulating that minority areas could use one or more of the languages commonly used in those areas to transact official business. Courts were to use local languages in judging and sentencing, and minorities were given the right to use their own spoken and written languages in litigation” (Dreyer, 359). Conciliatory measures allowing ethnic minorities including Uyghur the use of their language in schools as long as it had a written form were passed in 1951 (Dreyer, 359).

Following the trend of conciliatory measures, the CCP rapidly tasked itself with translating Chinese texts into Uyghur script as well as allowing a variety of Turkic-Uyghur language publications in Xinjiang. CCP officials drew up several plans at national and provincial levels to better respond to ethnic minority needs. These measures seemed to indicate that the Han government was tolerant of ethnic minorities and their cultures. Despite the conciliatory measures passed during the first six years of Communist rule in Xinjiang, Uyghur language policies did not remain favorable to Uyghur interests. In 1956 due to a desire of the national government to increase cooperation with the Soviet Union, the Uyghur alphabet was changed to a Cyrillic script by the national government. Another
reason why the alphabet was changed was to alienate the Uyghur people further from growing tensions in the Middle East (Dreyer, 359-362).

**Policy under Mao (1956 – 1976)**

In the late 1950’s, the Hundred Flowers Movement came to Xinjiang. The Hundred Flowers Movement was Mao’s call for open criticism that was immediately followed by an anti-Rightist campaign to purge those same critics. The Movement revealed true Uyghur attitudes towards the CCP and Han Chinese rule of power in Xinjiang. Many Uyghur expressed discontent with being barred from positions of true power within the government and military. Other complaints included Han chauvinism and ignorance to Uyghur issues, Han and Communist government damages to the environment, and not having real autonomy. Of the Uyghur who expressed these views, the majority of them with any political power held pro-Soviet viewpoints. Due to the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist government at the time, the Communists believed they were “killing two birds with one stone” by purging these Uyghur individuals in response to the Hundred Flowers Movement (Starr, 92). The anti-rightist campaign focused in Xinjiang on “local nationalists” according to Millward and were able to purge almost all Uyghur who held positions in government (258-259).

Shortly after the Hundred Flowers Movement and anti-Rightist campaign were over, the Great Leap Forward was implemented by Mao and the national Chinese government.

“The year 1958 [when the Great Leap Forward was first implemented] marks a watershed between, on the one hand, the relatively more tolerant, pluralistic approach of the early 1950s, when ‘Great Han chauvinism’ was officially condemned
as often as ‘local nationalism’, and the aggressive assimilationism of the later Maoist years, on the other” (Millward, 261).

Although the Hundred Flowers Movement had been restrictive towards the concerns of the Uyghur ethnic group, it significantly affected the Uyghur elite (which there were few) and the northern regions of Xinjiang rather than all of Xinjiang like the Great Leap Forward would come to do. The Great Leap Forward was more restrictive because its campaign was able to reach further than previous campaigns and provide more aggressive pressure on Uyghur citizens to conform to Communist policy (Millward, 261).

The Great Leap Forward was “undertook to radically accelerate collectivization of China’s agrarian sector, reshape the land with massive public works projects, and decentralize industry, all relying not on material inputs but rather on political exhortation and the mobilized will of the people” (Starr, 93). Farmers and other people were forced onto large farming communes that were purposefully ethnically diverse in order to “[speed] up the fusion of the races and [keep] the natives under tight control” (Tyler, 145). Han immigrants arrived by the hundreds of thousands during this time to aid in the Communist agricultural development of Xinjiang (Tyler, 147). The result of this massive undertaking was widespread famine throughout China and Xinjiang was no exception. Even after the dramatic increase in arable land due to the actions of Han migrants, there was still famine in Xinjiang. However, the Xinjiang famine was not nearly as bad as many other provinces in China.

Xinjiang’s ability to contend with famine better than other provinces was due primarily to a superior irrigation system and the ineffectiveness of the CCP to maintain complete control in Xinjiang (Tyler, 146). Not all tribal governments had been replaced by
the CCP and land reform was not fully implemented in all parts of Xinjiang meaning not all farms were collectivized and many of these farms were able to decide what they would do with their own harvests. Despite Xinjiang’s ability to have these unofficial means of production, these farms were the exception, not the norm, and thousands of Uyghur in Xinjiang died of famine during the Great Leap Forward (Starr, 93).

Perhaps one of the most restrictive spectra of the Great Leap Forward in regards to Uyghur in Xinjiang is that of language. Towards the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, the central Han Chinese government implemented a campaign for all ethnic minorities to learn Han Chinese language. While there was resistance, not learning was not an option especially because the minority languages were being re-written for the Chinese script. This was especially problematic for the Uyghurs due to their alphabet having only been changed to Cyrillic two years prior. While the changing of the writing system was an enormously restrictive factor in Uyghur life, minority languages were tolerated by the CCP to the extent that migrant Han workers in Xinjiang were encouraged to learn the local language (Dreyer, 362-366).

Anti-Soviet attitudes prevalent in the anti-Rightist campaign following the Hundred Flowers Movement continued to alienate the Uyghur and other northern Xinjiang ethnic groups through the Great Leap Forward. These viewpoints contributed heavily to the 1962 mass emigration of Uyghurs and Kazaks from Xinjiang into the Soviet Union (Starr, 94). According to Millward, the “cross-border exodus left several counties all but depopulated” with the majority of these counties retaining fewer numbers than was necessary to survive (264). The mass emigration (blamed on the Soviet Union by the Chinese government) and famine in Xinjiang during the Great Leap Forward awoke Chinese politicians to the
necessity to back away from such rapid communisation. In 1962, the Xinjiang provincial government began to re-implement portions of economic policy from before the Great Leap Forward (Millward, 265).

In the years between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, there was a slight relaxation of laws regarding Uyghur interests but the iron fist of Mao still maintained power. Muslim culture was once again accepted as a public form of expression in Xinjiang and Muslim festivals were held with heavy attendance. Agricultural development also increased slightly because of the loosening of agriculture commune service requirements after the Great Leap Forward. Unfortunately for Uyghur agricultural workers in Xinjiang, the gains were overwhelmingly attributed to the influx of Han migrants and the Uyghurs saw little of the profits (Svanberg, 104-105).

The Cultural Revolution saw its start in 1966 as radical youth groups known as the Red Guards heeded Mao's call to action against counter-revolutionaries. Two results of the Cultural Revolution were primarily experienced in Xinjiang: civil unrest due to competing factions for power and severe economic damage. Different factions of Red Guards led by youths from the East, Xinjiang provincial government members, factory leaders, and others clashed frequently. These clashes were especially prevalent in factory settings and contributed to the economic damage in Xinjiang at this time. Although similar clashes did not last long elsewhere in China, each source reviewed indicated that Xinjiang's fighting lasted much longer than almost all other regions. Grain and other agricultural production barely increased during the decade of the Cultural Revolution but the population in Xinjiang grew by over forty percent in that time. Thus, even though agricultural production in Xinjiang had only barely reached levels required to feed the remaining population after
the Great Leap Forward famine, more individuals were continually introduced into the area causing food shortages and further famine (Starr, 95-96).

The Uyghur people were heavily restricted by the Communist government during the Cultural Revolution in several of their major interests. Non-Han representatives were almost entirely absent from any level of government within Xinjiang and Uyghur only retained a small handful of representatives throughout China. Uyghur began to be thought of culturally as “outlandish” and “appalling”. In response, traditional dress was prohibited and Uyghur youth’s hair was forcibly cut. Islamic texts including the Quran were burned, religious sites were destroyed, and mosques were utilized as pigpens. These restrictions by the CCP government and Han Chinese throughout the Cultural Revolution were so horrendous that many Uyghur continue to harbor feelings of anger and distrust towards Han Chinese because of the Cultural Revolution. What makes their anger worse is that, after the confessions of the Gang of Four, neither the central government nor any visible Han individual have recognized what the Uyghur faced at this time (Starr, 97). Mao’s death in 1976 marked the end of this period of hyper-restriction for Uyghur groups in Xinjiang and the beginning of a short conciliatory phase.


The next leader of China was Deng Xiaoping who was elevated to the head of government in 1978 following a short period of power struggle in 1977. Deng’s period of rule saw conciliatory measures towards the Uyghur and an “opening up” towards Uyghur, Xinjiang, and western China. A theory on why there was such a significant period of conciliatory policies towards Xinjiang Uyghur under Deng is, after Mao’s death, the central
party members realized how much contempt for Chinese Communists and Han people the Xinjiang Uyghur held due to the Cultural Revolution. Conciliatory measures attempting to right some of the wrongs committed during the Maoist years such as the central party’s punishment of Han Cultural Revolution cadres in Xinjiang were frequent in the early 1980’s (Millward, 277). Perhaps the most famous conciliatory measure given to the Uyghur people during Deng’s tenure was exemption from the one-child policy. This exemption was introduced along with other conciliatory (and a few restrictive) measures in the Law on Regional National Autonomy on October 1, 1984 (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 60).

Though there would be a long decade of generally conciliatory policies to come, there were several spectrums that were most important to Xinjiang and Uyghur development at this time.

One of the immediate conciliatory measures granted to the Uyghurs in 1978 was the protection of their own written and spoken language (Dreyer, 372). Uyghurs were no longer forced to use the Chinese script for their language and Arabic script became popular once more (Svanberg, 109). Education of Uyghur children was allowed to be accomplished in their native language and, in 1984, education of ethnic minorities became part of local government. Although this allowed the Uyghurs greater autonomy in educating their children, it also took a majority of state funds for ethnic minority education (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 60). According to Dreyer, 70 percent of all elementary-aged minority children in China were attending school and Turkic Uyghur textbooks were available (373). However, they were also keen to mention the lack of funds provided minority education in China. The lack of funds prohibited repairs to the schools and the training of teachers who often taught misinformation to classes, causing their students to
fail national examinations. In response, a large number of ethnic minority students enrolled at religious institutions where they were not taught science, math, or the updated version of their script (Dreyer, 375-377). Religious institutions, on the other hand, were in some cases being funded by the central government.

In addition to policies on minority language and culture, Uyghur religious interests saw new policies. Religious institutions in Xinjiang that had been defaced during the Cultural Revolution were given more resources than ever by the state for restoration and religious practices were once again permitted (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 59). Religious holidays were widely observed in Xinjiang and local Han Chinese leaders even sent gifts of good will on these occasions. Muslim workers were allowed days off for major religious holidays and religiously specific foods and other goods were once more stocked in state-owned stores (Svanberg, 109). Religious expression was only one of the large conciliations Xinjiang Uyghur received during Deng’s rule.

Perhaps one of the most important areas of conciliation in the 1980s was in political representation. Communist leaders displayed renewed concern over the absence of minority cadre and CCP members. The Cultural Revolution had seen a purge of these minority leaders and only 26 percent of all cadre in Xinjiang were of any ethnic minority, much less Uyghur. However, by the end of the 1980s that number had grown to almost fifty percent of all cadres, which was only slightly less than Uyghur representation in the population at that time (Svanberg, 109). While this increase in Uyghur political representation did aid the Uyghur people in obtaining conciliatory policies, the spectrum of reform that most affected Xinjiang was the economy.
On a macroeconomic level, the economic reforms that began after Deng Xiaoping came to power were highly successful in Xinjiang. Millward explains the most likely cause of Xinjiang’s success was it was starting from such a low level that there was almost nowhere to go but up (278). Unfortunately for the Uyghurs, they rarely saw any of the profits from the boom. Economic reforms were not spread evenly through China and tended to favor East China over Western provinces such as Xinjiang. The national government explained their favoritism as an investment strategy to court international business as such businesses were more likely to invest in locations with developed infrastructure, a population with a higher education, and a population with a greater degree of global awareness (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 59). Uyghur peasants, in an attempt to alleviate their low economic status, immigrated in large numbers to cities and towns both seasonally at permanently (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo, 125). The low economic status of the majority of Uyghur in Xinjiang was only emphasized by the growing inequality between Uyghur and Han migrants. These inequalities fueled subsequent resistance by Xinjiang Uyghur.

Despite the large amounts of conciliatory reforms for the Xinjiang Uyghurs, not all were swayed and many participated in demonstrations as early as 1979. These demonstrations were made by several different people for several different causes and cannot be generally called Uyghur separatist at least in their early days. In fact, the first protests were led by Han youth who had been forced to move to Xinjiang during the Cultural Revolution. The youth appealed to Uyghur in their language over Uyghur radio and ended up finding a significant amount of allies. These Han protests in the late 1970s opened the way for Uyghur protests in the 1980s. While Uyghur protests did begin to erupt
after minor incidents such as police brutality, the majority of Uyghur protests were by Uyghur college students. These students protested structural inequalities between ethnic groups and, although the protests took on a “nationalistic” fervor in Xinjiang, they are not described as separatist (Millward, 279-282). However, these protests would evolve into the separatist movement towards the end of the decade.

As the 1980s drew to a close, Uyghur protests began to differentiate themselves from other ethnic protests by pointing to Islam as their defining trait. This is especially intriguing because the last major Islamic power in Xinjiang was destroyed by the mid-1950s. The prevailing theory on why Islam would make a sudden resurgence in Uyghur culture and ideology is, due to the Cultural Revolution and Han migration to Xinjiang, Uyghur people needed a common culture to define themselves by. After Islam was once again allowed to be practiced in public, there was an enormous resurgence as state funds were allocated to the preservation of minority religious and cultural centers (Millward, 282). Not all Uyghur protests in the late 1980’s were Islamic based but, whether their protests were Islamic or not, Uyghur political action was about to become violent.


Shortly before Jiang Zemin was elevated to leader of the People’s Republic of China, the majority of visible Uyghur political action became separatist in nature. January 1990 saw the closing of all Quranic schools (almost exclusively attended by Uyghur and Kazakh students) by the Chinese government in a handful of Xinjiang cities. While protests erupted afterwards, they were not as concerning to the Chinese government as the Baren incident of April 1990 when a group planning a serious of attacks against government buildings in
southern Xinjiang was stopped. As their plan was widely known throughout Islamic circles, hundreds of protestors appeared outside of the government buildings on the day the attack was supposed to take place. Following the event, many Uyghurs and Kazakhs were killed by Chinese forces and Amnesty International claims even more were killed in custody (Millward, 325-327).

Following the violence in the second half of 1990, there were a rash of bombings in southern Xinjiang throughout 1991 and 1992 but it’s unclear exactly how many Uyghur were involved. According to Millward, “from 1990 to 1995 security forces reportedly rounded up over one hundred ‘separatist counter-revolutionary organizations, illegal organizations and reactionary gangs’, arresting 1,831 people” (328). Despite the large amount of arrests, the largest number of protests by Uyghur people during this period was in 1995 (Millward, 328). The largest protests, however, were yet to come.

The year 1996 was characterized by a number of attempted assassinations of Uyghur political figures. These attempted assassinations only fueled the popular unrest growing in Xinjiang. The unrest accumulated into the second largest protest of modern Xinjiang in 1997. While the PRC characterizes the protest as a massive riot, Uyghur describe the events differently. They point to restrictive policies being passed by the central government that caused a rash of arrests early in the year. After several hundred arrests had been committed by February, Uyghur students protested in the streets but were attacked by police. When families of the students joined the protests, they were attacked as well causing a violent reaction by remaining Uyghur against Han Chinese in the area. Only several days after the protests, bombs went off in Urumqi killing 28 (Millward, 330-334). In 2002, a report on terrorism released by the PRC State Council claimed that
162 people were killed and 440 injured by terrorist acts committed primarily by Uyghur in the 1990’s (Millward, 324). However, they don’t mention how many demonstrators in protests were killed or injured.

The degree of ethnic violence in Xinjiang only harmed language conciliations for the Uyghurs. Due to the protests in 1990 and the beginning of violence in 1991, three Uyghur-language books were banned due to allegedly promoting separatist ideals. Uyghurs were expected to learn the national language as they were in the eighties but pressure on migrant Han to learn local, minority language was relaxed. Secondary education became primarily concerned with the national language over minority language until minority language was either entirely or almost entirely phased out by a student’s first year at university (Dreyer, 378-379). Aside from such Uyghur-specific interests, Xinjiang Uyghurs also had to contend with larger problems such as the economy.

Economic development continued to be a problem for Xinjiang Uyghur. Although Xinjiang had a better than average wage, the number was primarily influenced by wealthy Han and other immigrants who traded internationally in the area. Economic development in Xinjiang wasn’t entirely one-sided, however, and Uyghur benefited from the developed infrastructure Han investment brought to Xinjiang. Still, the lack of economic development in Xinjiang significantly hindered the ability for autonomy, which only allowed for the expansion of the new Chinese ideal of collective nationalism and pride in Chinese national accomplishments (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 62-64). The restriction under these revitalized PRC ideals was only intensified by the high levels of migration to Xinjiang in the 1990s. The majority of these migrants come to Xinjiang for employment, which means the newly created jobs in Xinjiang these predominantly Han Chinese are gaining are being kept...
from Uyghur workers (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo, 96). Uyghur workers not gaining access to newly created industry in Xinjiang is a theme of the Great Leap West.

The Great Leap West was implemented by the PRC in the late 1990s as a means for developing Xinjiang and other Western Chinese provinces. Han Chinese immigrated en masse at this time to Xinjiang in order to further develop the region and get rich on what was known as a land of secret treasures (Tyler, 199-206). The result was a slight increase in wages for Uyghurs and an exponential increase in wages for Han Chinese in Xinjiang. As discussed previously, Uyghur workers were not given access to the same financial positions as Han immigrants. Thus, they were predominantly forced into lower socio-economic statuses (Peters). Tyler argues, however, that this matches the aim of the PRC in promoting the Great Leap West. According to Tyler, China implemented the Great Leap West not only to economically develop western regions but to also stabilize the region by injecting it with a large Han population (207). Not only did this plan quell rebellion but it also firmly placed the wealth of Xinjiang in China’s hands (Tyler, 209).

**Xinjiang Uyghur Today (2000 – 2010)**

Since the turn of the century, China has focused on celebrating the differences of ethnic minorities without actually facing policy questions regarding those differences, equitable resource allocation, and other pressing matters. Little information about the minority nationalities is available to the general public and publication of ethnic material (especially Xinjiang Uyghur publications) is still heavily censored. However, there are a small number of privileges afforded to ethnic minorities in China including educational subsidies (Iredale, Robyn, Naran Bilik, et al., 67). However, as was the case in the 1990s, the
subsidies in question were severely limited as ethnic violence continued to be a problem for Beijing.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York, the PRC began to label Xinjiang Uyghur ethnic violence as terrorism. The United Nations recognized the large Xinjiang Uyghur separatist group The East Turkistan Islamic Movement as “an international terrorist organization responsible for domestic and international terrorist attacks” (Heijmans, Annelies, Nicola Simmonds, and Hans van de Veen, 263). Although China provided no evidence for terrorist activities in Xinjiang, the United States was able to produce a document detailing plans of known terrorist organizations to work in Xinjiang. Many Uyghur, even those heavily involved in the movement, had not even heard of the group in question. In most incidences of Uyghur separatist violence, no specific group can be determined as the cause. Further groups were targeted by the PRC at the end of 2003, which had been operating legally both in the PRC and abroad for years. The fact that almost all of these groups had no connection to recent violent activity has caused human rights groups to accuse China of using counterterrorism as an excuse to punish peacefully dissenting Uyghur (Heijmans, Annelies, Nicola Simmonds, and Hans van de Veen, 263-265).

Despite what human rights groups may espouse, the attacks by Uyghur separatists have continued through the early 2000s. In 2008, there was a rash of bombings throughout China justified in a video released by Uyghur separatists as retribution for China’s mistreatment of Muslims. In the same year there were many murders of Chinese border guards in Xinjiang believed to be the work of Uyghur separatists either leaving from or on their way to Pakistan or Afghanistan. The PRC central government released reports to international agencies on terrorism stating Uyghur separatists often found training with
terrorists in Middle Eastern countries. The attacks and protests only grew worse in 2009 with bombings and self-immolations. The central government under Hu Jintao since 2002 was consistently pressured to act (Davis, 183-188). While they have attempted a few solutions, nothing has completely halted Uyghur ethnic violence in Xinjiang.

**Previous Research and Review of Current Literature**

Research papers on the Xinjiang region and the Uyghur ethnic minority are sparse and generally concern themselves with the economic transformation currently being witnessed through the Great Leap West. According to Blank (2011), however, the reason for an economic emphasis in Xinjiang is due to the communist ideology that all ethnic struggles find their origins in economic differences. This corroborates the conclusions found by Peters (2012) that, although the average income of Uyghur peoples in Xinjiang has increased since the Great Leap West, Uyghur Chinese are still paid considerably less than Han Chinese due to language use in the work place being heavily in favor of Chinese rather than Turkic Uyghur. Thus, economic disparity is created in Xinjiang province on the basis of language.

There are a few articles that examine the Uyghur ethnic identity specifically and how the central Chinese government impacts them. Most of the articles on the Uyghur ethnic group pertaining to this thesis are about the ethnic violence recently associated with this population. Generally, China is described in these articles as repressive to the Uyghur ethnic minority. According to Demirtepe and Bozbey, China takes an assimilationist policy toward Xinjiang meaning that China does not want Xinjiang to maintain any autonomy and is ruled almost directly by Beijing instead of by Xinjiang’s people. As is highlighted by
Hastings amongst others, such Beijing policies from the 1990s directly result in Uyghur ethnic violence. However, Hastings also concludes that the geographical location of Xinjiang may also contribute to Uyghur ethnic violence due to Xinjiang’s border position. Enze Han (not to be confused with the Han ethnic group) notes several specifically Uyghur reasons why there may be more ethnic conflict there than other ethnic regions in China including the sequestration of Uyghur language classes to special Uyghur schools, which do not receive the same amount of funding or employ the same quality of education as Chinese state-sponsored schools.

Language is a very important spectrum of analysis into the repression of the Uyghur ethnic group. According to Dreyer, the Chinese government “recognizes language as one […] determinant of ethnic identification” (369). Thus, the central government is aware of how important linguistic autonomy can be to ethnic minorities making the question of why they implement repressive policies at one point and not another even more intriguing due to the governments apparent ability to knowingly repress the Uyghur peoples linguistically. Dreyer makes this point especially salient when she examines how the CCP originally pledged to allow minority ethnic groups to autonomously develop based on their own historical and cultural characteristics. As is corroborated in several other articles including the previously mentioned Hastings paper, China’s main purpose in using repression of the Uyghur peoples is to maintain territorial integrity. As Xinjiang is on the border of China next to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the Uyghur territory has the potential to secede from the People’s Republic of China.

Minority language policy as a field of study has been researched extensively and has provided my topic with many different theories as to how to conduct my own research.
However, the most influential piece to my research is the paper by Liu, Bell, and Gandhi, which finds that minority languages are much more likely to receive recognition by a dictatorial regime if there are nominal democratic institutions such as an effective legislature present within the system. State strength is another important factor in how repressive the regime is in relation to minority language recognition. They also conclude that minority languages are more likely to be recognized if there is a member of that minority group within the legislature. Because there has never been an active, substantive Uyghur representative (although there have been descriptive representatives), this may account for some of the language policies of the Chinese government. However, in several other papers including the analysis of dictatorship by Gandhi and Przeworski, various researchers corroborate the state strength theory of linguistic repression making state strength one of the most important indicators of linguistic repression in China.

Despite such a wealth of knowledge on minority language policy, there is a surprising dearth of information on religious policy as it affects ethnic minorities. Most of the articles pertaining to religious policy are about minority religions in the United States. The majority of articles that do address this topic outside of the United States focus heavily on terrorist organizations and activities involving ethnic violence. Although the Uyghur separatists have been named terrorists by the central Chinese government, not all Uyghur separatists have been active in acts of terrorism making the research focused on terrorist activities incomplete for my analysis.

The vast majority of research I have come across is either on broad subjects such as minority linguistic and religious policies on a global scale or very specific research on terrorism, ethnic violence, and language policy in Xinjiang or amongst Uyghur peoples.
specifically. Although there exists some research into other facets of Uyghur life, they are mostly concerned with historical extrapolations of culture such as in the Bellér-Hann book, which do not always relate historical items to how they affect the burgeoning political climate between Xinjiang and Beijing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. When this relationship is examined, it is generally simplified to geographical or immediate reactions from either side rather than devising a thorough knowledge of inherent political conflicts between the Hans and Uyghurs. The lack of research into the complex relationship extends the opportunity to fill this gap. Although this gap in knowledge may not seem particularly important at first, the knowledge gathered in my thesis has the potential to not only increase Uyghur and Han cross-ethnic understanding but also the understanding of Chinese policy by the United States. If the United States can understand the policies China takes towards ethnic minorities, we will develop a more concrete knowledge of how China itself operates. Thus, the US can more easily and thoroughly navigate foreign policy towards China as well as predict future actions taken by China in regards to terrorism, minority language, and minority religion.

**Research Design and Methodology**

Partially due to its long history, many of the Chinese government’s arguments as to why Xinjiang should be considered Chinese territory are historically based. In order to further research their claims as to a historic right over Xinjiang territory, I found it imperative to compile a comprehensive understanding of Xinjiang history and Chinese history as it relates to Xinjiang. As China was first united under the Han dynasty in 206 BCE, I found it pertinent to begin my analysis at this point and slowly work my way
through 2010 CE. 2010 was used as the end date for various reasons including the transition of power as well as a rash of heavily restrictive laws passed in relation to the Uyghur in 2011.

Chinese history, however, is complex and highly detailed. Thus, I focused primarily on the Xinjiang region’s history and only discussed Chinese history when it related to Xinjiang and its claims over Xinjiang until 1949 when the CCP consolidated power over Xinjiang and most of mainland China. After this point, I began to study the pieces of legislation and other forms of law passed by the CCP in order to thoroughly determine the lawful effect of Chinese rule over Xinjiang and the Uyghur population.

In order to realize the extent of Chinese governmental restrictions on and concessions to the Uyghur ethnic minority, every piece of legislation relating to the Uyghur population in Xinjiang was examined. The pieces of legislation utilized were found through the English language Chinese law database service Law Info China. Because the database was in English, there may have been problems with the translations offered. In order to combat this, I translated the corresponding Chinese language version through Google Translate. The translations offered by the database were overwhelmingly accurate according to my software and, thus, did not provide any unforeseen problems in my research.

Legislation was determined to be potentially of note to the Uyghur ethnic group if it fit into several key search terms including Uyghur (also seen as Uighur, Uigur, and Uygur), Xinjiang, religion, language, culture, terrorism, ethnic, autonomy, harmony, and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Each piece of legislation or decree was placed into a data set in Microsoft Excel where I examined its relevance to the Uyghur ethnic minority, if the
The legislation was coded into two categories: conciliatory and restrictive. Conciliatory legislation was given a value of 1 and restrictive legislation was given a value of -1. A piece of legislation was determined to be conciliatory if it aided Xinjiang Uyghur interests and restrictive if it actively worked against Xinjiang Uyghur interests. These interests were defined to be related to religion, language and education, agriculture and the agricultural industry, autonomy, secession, and ethnicity. Because there are hardly any pieces of legislation that have been passed directly in relation to Xinjiang Uyghur, coding of legislation couldn't be determined based on specific mentioning of the Xinjiang Uyghur. Instead, each piece of legislation was analyzed thoroughly in relation to its historical context in Xinjiang and greater China. While there are pieces of legislation that are neither conciliatory nor restrictive, they are largely irrelevant to the hypotheses in question and were not included in this study.

It was important to code the legislation into these categories for several purposes including analyzing if there was a pattern of restrictive or conciliatory policy during specific periods of rule in the Chinese Communist Party. There are four periods of rule in China from 1949 to 2010 all marked by the general secretaries during this time. The general secretaries in order during this period were Mao Zedong (in power 1949-1976), Deng Xiaoping (1978-1989), Jiang Zemin (1989-2002), and Hu Jintao (2002-2010). After separating all pieces of legislation by year, I then put them in order from earliest to most recent. Then, I analyzed the patterns of conciliatory and restrictive legislation. I did this by dividing the total of restrictive and conciliatory values (-1 for each restrictive, 1 for each
conciliatory) by the total number of laws relating to Xinjiang Uyghur in effect in that year. Generally, after Mao’s tenure, the patterns of legislation matched the periods of rule in China.

Despite this clear delineation of periods of legislation, there are two major periods of legislative history that cause the delineation to be slightly complicated. As was discussed in the section on the legislative history of China, the first nominal legislature of China was not introduced until 1982, which occurred in the middle of Deng Xiaoping’s tenure. This places a heavier emphasis on the history of China prior to 1982 than the legislation due to there being a dearth in legislation prior to the nominal legislature. Thus, the history of mass campaigns was especially of note prior to this time as mass campaigns were the rule of law especially during Mao’s tenure.

For data from mass campaigns, I compiled a list of the mass campaigns undertaken between 1949 and 1982. I then examined the different aspects of the mass campaigns and analyzed if the campaigns were restrictive or conciliatory to the Uyghur. Many times these mass campaigns would be generally restrictive to all Chinese people but would also mention religion or ethnic culture meaning they would be considered especially restrictive to the Uyghur peoples. Defining the difference between whether policy was generally restrictive or especially restrictive was accomplished through the examination of specific key words and phrases in mass campaigns. These key words and phrases were the same ones utilized in searching for pieces of legislation in the Chinese law database. After compiling this data, I added it to the legislation data set and analyzed it within Mao’s style of rule.
After analyzing the restrictive and conciliatory tendencies of law and legislation within each period of rule in CCP history, I then analyzed how the pattern of restriction and conciliation paired with the history of Uyghur representation within the CCP governmental structure. Uyghur representation was defined in two ways: substantive and descriptive. Descriptive representation is when a representative matches the descriptive traits of the group being represented. This means that, for this case study, descriptive representation was noted when someone of Uyghur ethnicity was represented in law-creating branches of government. Substantive representation is when a representative fights for the interests of the group in question. For this case study, that means substantive representation was witnessed whenever a representative fought for Uyghur interests. After the levels of various representations were determined, they were then analyzed in relation to the conciliatory and restrictive policy patterns.

Once the portion of analysis on representation was completed, I then analyzed the pattern of restriction and conciliation in relation to the patterns of Uyghur ethnic violence based in Xinjiang. These acts of violence ("terrorist attacks" according to the Chinese government) did not always occur within the borders of Xinjiang but were often related to Uyghur ethnic groups within Xinjiang. In order to determine if the violence was related to the Uyghur, news articles were examined. Articles were found from several sources including BBC News, Uyghur United (an American Uyghur group), and Chinese government news sources. It was important to attempt to find news sources from various points of view due to the controversial nature of the incidents. Thus, I utilized an outside perspective through BBC News which generally offers unbiased reporting in international affairs, a Uyghur-affiliated news source that is overwhelmingly in favor of Xinjiang autonomy, and a
Chinese government source that describes the violence from the view of the Chinese Communist Party.

After compiling a timeline of Uyghur ethnic violence related to Xinjiang through news sources, I then analyzed the timeline in relation to the legislation patterns analyzed previously. I was then able to determine if there was a pattern between conciliatory and restrictive legislation and Uyghur ethnic violence against Han Chinese and other Chinese nationals. My findings were able to determine if there has been a pattern in Uyghur ethnic violence that can be examined in order to refute Chinese arguments against Uyghur autonomy so that the discussion can move forward and to discover how best to reach peaceful interactions between Uyghur separatists and the Chinese government.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The level of conciliation/restrictiveness in the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 2010 varies widely according to the acting General Secretary of the PRC at the time. According to Figure 2, there was an extremely low level of conciliation/high level of restrictiveness during Mao’s term in office until Deng’s takeover in 1976 indicated by the exponential leap in conciliation in 1977-1978. Also as evidenced by Figure 2, Jiang then lowered the level of conciliation throughout the 1990’s until a relative equilibrium was found under Hu Jintao.
An important aspect of legislative history in China is the fact that there were few observed, formal laws before the 1980s. Before that time, much of the law was either localized or handed down through Party decree. This is due to the fact that there was no nominal legislature in China before this time. Because there was no nominal legislative body and most laws were handed down through Chinese Communist Party decree, there was no representation of Uyghur peoples within the legislature.

Law under Mao Zedong was introduced and approved through the standing committee. The law was then implemented in several different ways with the most popular being the mass campaign strategy described in the section of this paper on Modern Chinese History. This method of implementing law allowed for the common people to take an active role within the rule of law in China. Despite whatever good intentions may have been behind common people actively involving themselves in law, it often turned disastrous for the Uyghurs as ethnic conflict between them and Han Chinese intensified over the course of
Mao’s reign. This conflict was the most severe during the Cultural Revolution, which coincides with the most restrictive period of law according to Figure 3 below. As a common way to describe Modern Chinese History is through these mass campaigns, it’s unsurprising that the level of restrictiveness of Xinjiang Uyghur under Mao is similar to the historical understanding of restrictiveness under Mao.

![Restrictiveness of Law Under Mao Zedong](chart)

**Figure 3**

While law under Mao was generally restrictive across China, it was especially restrictive towards the Uyghur ethnic group. In every national campaign, there was an element of the campaign that affected Uyghur interests specifically. The effects on the Uyghurs due to the national campaigns were generally restrictive starting in 1951 with the Chinese renegotiation of Uyghur conciliatory policy in Xinjiang. The primary source of restriction from 1951 until the Great Leap Forward began was Uyghur political representation, which was steadily lost between 1951 and 1960. The Great Leap Forward
saw a period of restriction in Xinjiang not previously witnessed under Chinese Communist rule that was only alleviated slightly by its end in 1962 when economic policies changed to allow for smaller farms predominantly staffed by people of the same ethnic groups. However, the restriction of Uyghur interests under Mao only worsened beginning in 1966 with the Cultural Revolution and a rise in racist attitude prevalence against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Compared to the data collected on Mao's rule, Deng's policies towards the Uyghurs are much more conciliatory. Deng Xiaoping rose to the highest office in the Chinese government in 1978. It was in the first Plenary of Deng Xiaoping's tenure that policy towards Xinjiang and the Uyghurs who resided there changed dramatically in favor of the Uyghurs' goals. One of the primary ways in which Deng did this was abolishing the majority of restrictive policies implemented under Mao. This was why, according to Figure 4, there was a dramatic increase in conciliation at the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's tenure; there was a dramatic decrease in the number of total laws affecting Xinjiang Uyghurs.

With the rise of Deng Xiaoping there came a shift to a more Western style of legislative process. This shift also saw more conciliatory policies towards the Uyghur ethnic group including the Plan for the Allocation of the Numbers of Deputies to the Sixth National People's Congress Among the Minority Nationalities. In this piece of legislation introduced in 1983, quotas were set for ethnic minorities in the People's Congress. There were 22 seats set aside for Uyghur peoples from Xinjiang and 36 seats set aside for total minority peoples from Xinjiang. While this allows for the symbolic representation (when a group's representation is historically relevant) and descriptive representation (when a group has a representative who is part of the group such as a Uyghur representative being
representative of all Uyghurs) of Uyghur peoples, symbolic and descriptive representation do not always equate to substantive representation (when a representative’s policies represent what a group wants). In other words, the central government could easily nominate a Uyghur representative who did not hold Uyghur political views. Still, this was the first instance in which a Uyghur representative could hold national political power in China and the quota of 22 Xinjiang Uyghur has not been changed since.

Although he attempted to pass conciliatory policies towards ethnic minorities in general, Deng was heavily concerned with the economy at the time and was more interested in novel ideas to grow Chinese enterprise in order to help all Chinese people than the problems of a few ethnic minorities. The number of conciliatory and restrictive laws witnessed under Deng’s tenure is low (n=26) probably due to the economy taking precedence over other areas of legislation. In addition to Deng’s attention being focused elsewhere, the Uyghur delegates to the Sixth National People’s Congress did not have the power in numbers required to bring new, controversial topics for legislation to the floor with any success. While the number of Uyghur seats accounted for 11% of the allotted seats for the 55 separate ethnic minorities, their number made up little more than one percent of the entire legislature. This small portion of the legislative body is less than the Uyghur representation in the Chinese population but still greater than the original representation granted Uyghur peoples under Mao. Thus, the law was determined to be conciliatory even though what it achieved wasn’t exactly what Uyghur interests may prescribe. The specificity seen in this law was a rarity for Deng’s tenure as his legislature focused primarily on passing comprehensive laws that covered large fields such as “criminal law” and “education law”.
Despite these varied interests of the state, Deng addressed problems facing ethnic minorities very early in his tenure. According to Figure 4, the level of conciliatory policy towards the Xinjiang Uyghurs during this period grew exponentially over the first few years and then tapered off at a high conciliation level. This is due to a high volume of conciliatory legislation being passed in the first few years of Deng’s rule, which remained active through the end of this time period. Conciliatory legislation towards Xinjiang Uyghur was passed primarily between 1978 and 1984. After this time, ethnic minorities were not as prioritized by the central government as they believed the problem to be generally up to the minorities themselves to solve after the amount of conciliatory legislation early in the decade. Thus, the level of conciliation in the second half of the 1980’s is hardly affected.
In contrast to Deng's period of rule, policies under Jiang Zemin took a different approach. Most likely due to a steady increase in violence perpetrated by Uyghur separatists, more restrictive social policies towards Xinjiang Uyghurs were put into effect. However, the CCP was simultaneously beginning its economic development of Xinjiang and other Western regions through the “Great Leap West”. The central government passed a plethora of conciliatory economic policies towards Xinjiang Uyghur in order to facilitate this development. This is why, when looking at Figure 5, there is not a definitively “restrictive” time period. In fact, all values determining restrictiveness are positive meaning that Jiang Zemin’s legislature is, at the very least, slightly conciliatory to the Xinjiang Uyghur at all times.

![Restrictiveness of Law under Jiang Zemin](chart)

**Figure 5**

The level of conciliation under Jiang Zemin according to Figure 5 begins high and descends until 1997 where an export tax favoring small agricultural producers in Xinjiang
was implemented along with a plan for additional Uyghur representation. After this time however, restrictive social policies were generally the norm during the latter part of Jiang Zemin’s term as General Secretary. Some conciliatory policies at this time also never went into effect in reality. This highlights a general problem I came upon on whether legislation necessarily meant implementation. I decided to focus primarily on the legislation itself because there was not always data to discern whether the policies were implemented or not.

Although Xinjiang Uyghur had committed several small demonstrations described as riots by the central government towards the end of Deng’s period in office, the 1990s were when Uyghur separatists began to consistently commit attacks against Han peoples and their interests. The primary years of Uyghur separatist attacks during this period were 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, and 1997 with fewer attacks throughout the remainder of the 1990’s. This would suggest that, if the level of conciliation seen in Figure 5 is related to the level of Uyghur separatist violence, the level of conciliation under Jiang Zemin is in response to the violence. The level of conciliation under Jiang Zemin is above the level of conciliation during entirety of Mao’s rule until 1999, but the decrease as seen in Figure 5 would suggest a restrictive response to the growing level in attacks as the 1990’s progressed. However, as discussed previously, there continued to be conciliatory economic policies that counter-balanced the restrictive social policies being passed.

The period of conciliation under Hu Jintao saw a dramatic increase in the number of laws from previous years (n=78) that suggests his government was much more invested in the affairs of ethnic minorities than the previous General Secretaries. Almost all areas in which the Xinjiang Uyghur could be specifically affected by legislation were affected by
legislation during Hu’s term. One example is education, which in some pieces of legislation was funded specifically for Xinjiang rural areas and low-income families in Xinjiang urban areas. However, restrictive pieces of legislation in terms of language in education were passed within the same years.

While there are no major decreases in conciliation during Hu’s term in office according to Figure 6, the decrease observed in 2010 may be indicative of a future pattern. The decrease observed between 2009 and 2010 occurs right after the 2009 violent Uyghur protests in Xinjiang. In 2011, a large amount of restrictive policies were enacted in order to curb these violent protests in which Han civilians were killed meaning that the level of conciliation would be lower than it was in 2010 according to Figure 6.

![Restrictiveness of Law under Hu Jintao](image)

**Figure 6**

The high number of relevant pieces of legislation is a primary influence on the lack of variation in conciliation level as seen in Figure 6. Thus, a large number of conciliatory or
restrictive pieces of legislation could be passed within a year without the average level of conciliation changing substantially. The largest number of related pieces of legislation passed in a single year was 17 in the 2008. However, the change in conciliation was only +2 according to Figure 7. While this led to incremental changes through Hu’s term, each change was significant. As is evidenced by Figure 7, there were many years such as 2008 where a large amount of legislation was passed but, as seen in Figure 6, there were not very many large changes.

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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

Figure 7

The largest increase in conciliation during Hu’s tenure was in 2006 with a large amount of conciliatory policies in relation to education and cultural preservation and funding. While this is the largest increase, the largest amount of conciliatory laws passed at this time was in 2009 with n=10. However, this was the same year that the BBC printed the most articles on Uyghur separatist attacks according to Figure 8 below.
The large number of articles printed by the BBC in 2009 was largely due to the spike in ethnic violence in Xinjiang during 2009 but the difference between the amount of articles in 2009 versus the amount of articles in the late 1990s or early 2000s when there were more bombings can be explained by the BBC’s awareness of the Uyghur ethnic group over time. 2008 saw the first dramatic increase in BBC reporting on Uyghur ethnic violence at the same time the Olympics were being held in China and terrorism at the Olympics was a concern for Western travelers. Due to the Uyghur ethnic violence that had taken place earlier that year, journalists became aware of the group’s importance to Western travel concerns. Since that time, there have been at least 16 articles published per year on Uyghur ethnic violence with the most numerous being 42 in 2013. However, there have already been 20 of these articles in 2014.

Figure 8
Due to this increase in reporting, we can infer that reporting on Uyghur ethnic violence has become more representative of instances in Uyghur ethnic violence within the past six years. If this is truly the case, then the fact that 2014 has already had as many articles on Uyghur ethnic violence as were written during the entirety of 2012 is indicative of Uyghur ethnic violence remaining a significant issue in Xinjiang for the foreseeable future. This combined with the drop in conciliation level starting in 2010 and the large amount of restrictive legislation passed in 2011 indicates that the reaction of violence to the legislation being passed is growing closer to when the legislation is passed.

According to Millward and others, the Uyghur ethnic violence in the early 1990s was in reaction to Mao’s restrictive policies. If policies remain a primary cause of Uyghur ethnic violence, then the ethnic violence in the early 2000s are in reaction to the lowering level of conciliation in legislation beginning in 1991 according to Figure 5. Also, the ethnic violence in 2008 and 2009 is in reaction to the lowest level of legislative conciliation since Mao beginning in 2001 according to Figure 5. If the pattern continues, Uyghur violence will continue to respond to overall levels of restriction rather than how many laws in a particular year are conciliatory as is evidenced in Figure 7 by the year 2009.

Conclusions

The story of law and legislation of the People’s Republic of China in relation to the Uyghur ethnic group in Xinjiang can be divided into four sections based on who was the General Secretary of the People’s Republic of China between 1949 and 2010. Under Mao when there was no nominal legislature and no representation of the Uyghur people at the national level, there were relatively enormous levels of restriction. In fact, Mao’s tenure
saw the only truly restrictive period of legislation towards the Xinjiang Uyghur where the overall conciliatory value per year was negative. This drastically changed as soon as Deng became the General Secretary and Xinjiang Uyghur representation at the national level became mandatory. During this time, Xinjiang Uyghur enjoyed the most conciliatory period under PRC rule. However, after pro-secession protests towards the end of the 1980’s and a rise in ethnic violence, restrictive social policies towards Xinjiang Uyghur became common until the level of conciliation hovered between +.1 and +.17 during Hu’s term. The level of conciliation generally matched popular understanding of Chinese history and provided an interesting reaction with Uyghur separatist actions.

In general, legislation appears to react to Uyghur separatist violence quickly whereas Uyghur separatist violence reacts to law and legislation slowly. The decreases in conciliation level seen in the 1990s and late 2000s are possibly reactions to Uyghur separatist violence. However, the decreases do not generally happen within the same year as the instances of violence. Instead, the decrease happens within a year to five years later. This is markedly different from Uyghur separatists who initially waited almost a decade after the offending policies were no longer in effect (Uyghur separatist violence in the early 1990s was characterized in the previous literature as a reaction to policy under Mao).

While there is no general consensus on the cause of more recent attacks, two possible answers are in the restrictiveness of social policy at the end of the 1990s and the rise in prevalence of “Han chauvinism” due to the Great Leap West. Regardless, strong conciliatory policies haven’t been shown to stop the attacks due to the rise in violence after Deng’s term and strong restrictive policies haven’t been shown to stop the attack due to the rise in
violence towards the end of Hu’s term. Thus, neither plan fully addresses the problem of Uyghur separatist violence.

Despite not fully addressing Uyghur separatist violence through either conciliatory policy or restrictive policy exclusively, the central government of the People’s Republic of China may still be able to accomplish their goals of retaining Xinjiang without ethnic violence. However, in order to do this, it must eventually allow Xinjiang Uyghurs more responsibility, and thus more “autonomy” (or direct control over local proceedings) over the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This will become possible through greater representation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang local government and conciliatory Chinese policy towards Xinjiang Uyghurs through education, language, and economic policy. With more autonomy, Xinjiang Uyghurs have historically been able to effectively control their territories while economically serving a larger state structure. The mutual trust required for this arrangement, however, is not insignificant and would take years to build between the central government in Beijing and the Xinjiang Uyghur.
**Works Reviewed**


**Appendix**

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*two conciliatory laws were retired*