

The

UYGHURS

Strangers in Their Own Land

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EVERYDAY RESISTANCE
GUERRILLA ACTIONS IN THE BATTLE OVER
PUBLIC OPINION

Xinjiang's main radio station broadcast a curious announcement in mid-January 2002:

At the end of a singing concert at the Xinjiang People's Hall on 1 January, Tu'erxinjiang Aimaiti [Tursunjan Ämät], who was out of work, recited a poem written by him. The poem attacks social reality by innuendo, advocates ideas of ethnic separatism, and shows a strong tendency of opposing the society, the reality, and the government. It is really inflammatory and has produced a very bad influence on the society. The regional Party Committee paid great attention to the incident and immediately held a meeting of its Standing Committee to study the matter. . . . It instructed relevant departments to conduct an investigation . . . and to seriously mete out punishment. It also asked them to use the incident to conduct anti-separatism re-education. (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2002)¹

professed characteristic amazement that "that such [an] incident has occurred in the most favourable situation of ethnic unity and social and political stability across the region."² The report should provoke a number of questions. First, how could a single poem recited at the end of a concert have caused such a stir? Second, what was so threatening about attacking social reality "by innuendo"? Third, even if government officials found the poem disturbing, why leap to the extreme of convening the Standing Committee and contacting other "relevant departments"? Fourth, if Xinjiang was so politically stable and intergroup relations were so "favourable," how could the poem have caused "a very bad influence on society"?

These questions, couched more broadly, animate this chapter. Given the extraordinary range of powers and controls described in the last chapter, why does the regime fear Uyghur dissidence? Does the party-state intend ordinary citizens to conclude that the regime is so weak and brittle that oblique criticism and subversive ideas pose a grave threat, even in the most favorable of circumstances? Do officials really seek to inhibit—and can they possibly hope to stop—the use of innuendo, symbolism, allegory, and other stratagems common to artists and gossips alike? Does this not risk setting the bar for political offenses so low that great numbers of people end up behaving "criminally," seemingly undermining the authority of the party-state?

THE BOUNDARIES OF DISSENT: WHAT IS AT STAKE

In the summer of 2002 Professor Wang, a Han scholar I had known for years, shared his thoughts on why the party-state has put so much effort into ideological battles. He first hewed to the official line that only a small number of extremists pursued independence and that they spared no means. Then he changed his argument significantly:

In fact all *minzu* want independence. But it's not just ordinary people doing this. It's intellectuals. Some of them write history. Now [since the clampdown on historiography] they write novels and poems. And never directly. They always write indirectly, so that if you confront them, they can deny that they meant what you think they did. What they write is nonsense, but people believe it. So it must be corrected.

Revealing his intention to dedicate his scholarship to the task of correction, Wang told me that his target audience was Uyghur cadres. When I asked him whether

scholarly work might reach ordinary people and banish their misconceptions, he threw up his hands and exclaimed, "Ordinary people are beyond our reach."³

The poet Tursunjan's performance clearly troubled officials. Perhaps they worried that he was able to reach ordinary people in a way that Professor Wang never could. In the summer of 2002, Bahargül, a service worker in her thirties employed in downtown Ürümqi, spontaneously brought up Tursunjan's recitation during an interview. She said he had chosen as his theme the expressive music of the very popular *tambur* player Nurmuhämmät Tursun: "Tursunjan decided to write a poem about his playing, about how the mournful quality of his playing expressed the spirit of the Uyghur people. Tursunjan wields a fierce pen (*uning qälimi ötkür!*)! The poem was great. . . . All the Uyghur officials attended the meeting, and plenty of Han officials as well."

Bahargül told me that because her friends privately shared their appreciation of Tursunjan's small triumph, they also exchanged the news that within a week of his performance, officials filed a report saying his poem had "unacceptable content."⁴ She had heard that either the poet or the musician—she wasn't sure which—was confined to his home soon afterward. Foreign sources later announced that the poet had indeed been formally arrested, but released some time later (Amnesty International 2002, 2004).

As I argued in chapter 2, the key purpose of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s system of *minzu* regional autonomy initially was to avoid territorial loss by winning the political acquiescence of large, non-Han groups. It has been neither the aim nor the effect of the system to allow those groups substantial authority over their own affairs, however narrowly construed. From the beginning, aside from matters such as language use, folk custom, and limited religious practice, the political institutions of autonomy left most decisions in the hands of party secretaries, who were almost exclusively Han and answered to Beijing.

As it became clear in the 1950s that this was the design and not a distortion of the center's policies, prominent Uyghur leaders and others in Xinjiang repeatedly raised increasingly vehement complaints. At a 1951 conference in Ghulja, the former seat of government of the Eastern Turkestan Republic, a group of Uyghur leaders proposed the establishment of a "republic of Uyghurstan" with the capacity to regulate all its internal affairs. On instructions from Beijing, Xinjiang's CCP officials hastily convened a meeting to condemn the proposal and ensure that this "incorrect idea" not be spread widely. At the meeting, newly appointed minority *minzu* officials, who had graduated from a political training course that Wang Zhen referred to as a "factory for producing the people's cadres," reportedly "used the Marxist perspective they had just mastered" to oppose the erroneous proposal

and side with the party (Zhu Peimin 2000:335).⁵ But the idea did not disappear. A speech by Zhou Enlai at a 1957 conference in Qingdao, released only in 1980, shows Beijing was aware that many Uyghurs continued to hope for a federal system and self-determination. At different points in his speech, Zhou told the assembled officials that China "could not" establish and "had no need" to establish a federal system on the Soviet model (Zhou Enlai 1980 [1957]). In an attempt to silence such proposals and the people making them, party officials initiated a "campaign against local nationalism," which lasted from December 1957 through April 1958. Newspaper reports at the time announced that Ziya Sämädi, head of the Xinjiang Culture Bureau, and a number of other prominent Uyghurs had formed an "anti-party group."⁶ They stood accused of proposing yet again the establishment of a "Uyghurstan republic" and of "insulting Hans by suggesting they were 'rulers' just like the GMD [Guomindang]." They also were charged with saying that too many Hans had immigrated and should be sent home and with claiming that "we could build our economy even without Hans" ("Gezu renmin fennu shengtao difang minzu zhuyi fenzi zuixing" 1958; Zhong Yu 1958; "Zizhiqu dangwei kuoda huiyi henhen de fandui difang minzu zhuyi; chedi fensui yi Ziya wei shou de dandang jituan" 1958; "Zizhiqu dangwei kuoda huiyi zuochu jueyi—Kaichu youpai fenzi" 1958). The massive campaign slapped "local nationalist" labels on more than 1,600 people and sent many to jail. It also conveyed the powerful message that criticisms of Xinjiang's governance or the importation of Hans from the interior were forms of "incorrect speech" (*cuowu de yanlun*) subject to severe punishment (Dang Yulin and Zhang Yuxi 2003:190–92).⁷

The campaign did not eliminate Uyghur discontent with the way that Xinjiang was being governed but only drove it underground. Since then, organized and public resistance has sporadically reemerged, several times in the 1960s, once in 1975, again beginning in the 1980s and lasting through 2000, and, most recently, beginning in July 2009 (see chapter 4 and appendix). Given the difficulties of organizing opposition under the incursive single-party state and the harsh punishments dealt to open protestors, it makes little sense to argue, as party officials have, that the episodes of public unrest were paroxysms of baseless mob hysteria.

It is simply not plausible to reduce major protests to the work of a "handful of splittists" (and, since the winter of 2001, "terrorists") who, aided by hostile foreign powers, repeatedly lured thousands of gullible people out into the streets to serve their own purposes. Rather, the sporadic protests reflected deep and enduring discontent among Uyghurs. Official pronouncements have insisted that most Uyghurs oppose separatism and also have implied that they reject political protests of any sort and that the party will triumph because it enjoys the firm support of

the people. This depiction has grossly misrepresented the attitudes and actions of a sizable proportion of the population. In fact, while explicitly denying it in public, officials have acknowledged in internal circulation speeches and documents that disaffection for the party and hostility toward Hans have long pervaded the Uyghur community. In 1999, for instance, XUAR Party Secretary Wang Lequan told other party cadres in a secret speech that separatists had “immediate appeal” among Uyghurs in Khotān and admitted that the cadres had “no place in the hearts of the people” (Wang Lequan 1999:11, 17).⁸

We might argue that Beijing had completed its quest to establish unchallenged administrative and military control of Xinjiang by 2004 or so (Becquelin 2004b:374). Yet it has met continual defeat in its attempt to transform all Uyghurs into willing and loyal Chinese citizens. While officials have sought to eliminate not just troublemakers but even troublesome ideas, Uyghurs have refused to give them up. The mere fact of widespread dissent—expressed in acts of “everyday resistance” by ordinary citizens—is important because it gives the lie to the official story. But such resistance also has had political effects. Intellectuals and farmers, musicians and their fans, joke tellers and cooks, have collaborated in constructing and promulgating heterodox visions of Xinjiang’s past, present, and future. They have played an active role in shaping and transmitting Uyghur nationalism, and in that way they have affected the trajectory of politics in Xinjiang.

Uyghurs’ everyday resistance has targeted both ideas and policies. Religious Uyghurs have fought official attempts to fit religious practice and Qur’anic interpretation to party needs, by defying efforts to eliminate religiosity among the young. The vast majority of Uyghurs privately condemn, since they cannot hope to stop, policies governing immigration and resource exploitation. They have derided the system of *minzu* regional autonomy as a sham.⁹ Uyghurs have rejected the party-state’s insistent claims that they are Chinese. As discussed in chapter 1, they have rejected the imposition of a history that denies them a legacy of independent states or a claim to Xinjiang based on indigeneity. Furthermore, a substantial number have spurned the notion that their interests and their future are indissolubly bound with those of China as a whole.

THE MEANING AND FORMS OF EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

James Scott (1985, 1990) introduced the concept of “everyday resistance” to capture the ways individuals privately defy authority when open, organized resistance is too dangerous or too difficult to arrange. He focused on acts of individual noncompliance and the use of private speech to transmit coded subversive messages out of

the hearing of the powerful. Quite a few political scientists accustomed to looking for organized and public resistance have considered private grumbling and secret intransigence unworthy of attention. They have treated these behaviors as merely “prepolitical” or “epiphenomenal,” having no appreciable political effect and implying a resigned acceptance of the order of things (Scott 1986:23–24). But as Scott pointed out, the most oppressive or exploitative states often severely proscribe the kinds of collective action we would expect them to provoke. Because protest is sure to draw punishment, few dare to engage in it. To explain the apparent paradox of highly oppressive social systems that are outwardly placid, Scott posited that many ordinary people bow to authority in public yet mock it in private. He challenged the received notion that autocratic regimes enjoy hegemony by comparing the “public transcript,” consisting of people’s behavior in public settings, with the “hidden transcript,” recording their actions when they think themselves beyond the reach of surveillance (Scott 1985, 1990). Scott’s analytical and research methods are well suited to analyzing Uyghur resistance in Xinjiang, for both practical and intellectual reasons. On the one hand, the extreme limitations placed on all research conducted in Xinjiang have made obligatory a departure from the standard model of structured, official interviews. On the other hand, Scott’s distinction between public and private transcripts demonstrates quite well the jarringly different modes of expression encountered in Xinjiang, as well as the modes of domination and resistance they illustrate.¹⁰

Scott’s method helps us recognize the forms of everyday resistance, but determining the significance of that resistance is more difficult. What do people intend by resisting party stratagems? What are the consequences of acts of peaceful and individual resistance? Although I am a great admirer of Scott’s method, I believe we need to acknowledge and remedy an artificial assumption at its core. He posits a realm of resistance beyond the reach of oppressive or exploitative authority, a realm that may be as big as a coffeehouse or a plantation field, or as small as the inviolable interior space of an individual’s mind. Scott does not give sufficient attention to the ways that power can structure those physical spaces and even mold the mind. “Where there is power, there is resistance,” Michel Foucault once remarked, yet “resistance is never in a relationship of exteriority to power” (Foucault 1990:95).¹¹ As a consequence, resistance takes particular forms under particular structures of domination, to use Scott’s expression, or what Foucault describes as relations of power. The nature of the CCP’s power has influenced both the form and the meaning of resistance. Beijing has, to a substantial degree, been able to structure the realm of dissent and even to influence the conceptual categories with which Uyghurs resist. Pierre Bourdieu observed that “the specifically symbolic power to impose the principles of the construction of reality—in particular, social reality—is

a major dimension of political power" (Bourdieu 1977:165). Because the construction of social reality is such a nebulous concept, political scientists have generally been leery of using it. As I have been at pains to argue, however, Uyghurs, Hans, and the party-state have been vying in precisely this domain, seeking to define and shape social reality to serve political ends. Thus to elaborate on Bourdieu's phrase, successfully altering the construction of social reality may in turn confer power on those resisting the party-state's version of reality—and it is for this reason that CCP officials have cracked down so consistently on "challenges in the ideological sphere" (Adila Baikere [Adalät Bäkri?] 2002; Feng Dazhen 1992; He Fulin 2002; Xiaokaiti Yiming 2002; "Xinjiang shouci pilu minzu fenlie shili zai yishi xingtai lingyu pohuai huodong de liu zhong xingshi" 2002).

The second aspect of Scott's theory that needs further exploration is its discussion of political effects. Scott and others have proposed that by engaging in "everyday resistance," actors can preserve their dignity and sense of personal efficacy by puncturing the narratives justifying their subordination to elites.¹² He also has suggested that they can challenge institutionalized discrimination or exploitation as well as insulate themselves against its harshest consequences. Scott has at least implied that such forms of resistance better serve the needs of the exploited and oppressed than some social revolutions have, but he allows that such strategies of resistance "are unlikely to do more than marginally affect . . . various forms of exploitation" (Scott 1985:29).

These assertions provoke further questions. What is the lower threshold of "everyday resistance"? There is a wide range between absolute noncooperation and happy compliance with the demands of power. If most behavior is a mixture of grumbling and obliging, at what point can it be considered resistance? Is it true, as one skeptic claims, that in their "zeal to uncover seeds of hope and traces of freedom in the mundane business of everyday life," devotees of Scott have focused on a range of "discourses and dispositions that range from expressions of alienated resentment to rueful complicity" (Maddox 1997:275–76)? If "everyday resistance" consists only of "discourses and dispositions," its political significance must surely be negligible. Does it, in fact, amount to nothing more than chatter and attitude? Theoretical debate will continue; here I seek to answer these questions concretely. On one hand, as I described in chapter 2, the Uyghurs' quiet struggles have had little perceptible impact on Beijing's policies in Xinjiang: what many of them regard (in the Scottian mode) as modes of domination and exploitation. On the other hand, these acts of defiance have been efficacious in a subtler but perhaps no less important way. The various forms of everyday resistance have, I believe, strengthened Uyghurs' collective identity and resolve to remain distinct from the "Chinese nation."

KEEPING THE LID ON: THE STATE'S ATTEMPTS TO COMBAT ERRONEOUS THOUGHT

The previous chapter described the various ways party officials in Beijing and Ürümqi have limited Uyghurs' capacity to exercise effective political authority and develop policies to protect their perceived collective interests in Xinjiang. Since 1957, officials also have tried to prevent Uyghurs and others from publicly discussing the absence of these crucial features of autonomy or from organizing to demand them. People's congresses at the provincial level and below remain largely ceremonial bodies and do not question the guidelines handed down by the party.¹³ Never since the 1950s have there been institutions for freely airing, aggregating, and acting on the wishes of ordinary citizens, a fact about which Uyghurs have long been angry; nor are there any signs that party leaders intend to establish them. In the absence of such institutions, therefore, we must turn to the hidden transcript to find out Uyghurs' political views.

One of the few state-sponsored surveys of political attitudes in Xinjiang makes clear that social scientists employed by the state felt bound to inculcate proper ideas rather than impartially report opinions.¹⁴ In 1990, researchers at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences canvassed the views of some two hundred Uyghurs on the exploitation of resources, one of the most contentious matters in Xinjiang. Despite the risks of doing so, a handful of respondents admitted that they felt Xinjiang's oil and cotton belonged to "a particular group." The report heaped criticism on these people, contending that their views were mistaken and violated the constitution. When some respondents remarked that too many resources flowed out of Xinjiang and too few into the region, the authors observed that this "did not conform to reality." Finally, confronted with a substantial number of respondents who said that resource exploitation had caused intergroup relations to deteriorate (fully one-third of teachers polled, for instance), the researchers observed that such views were temporary and superficial and would be resolved by the proper execution of existing policies. The text indicates that the researchers closely questioned those offering "incorrect" responses and then remonstrated with them. The researchers thus concluded that "the 'resource psychology' of the vast majority of Uyghurs and other fraternal *minzu* is correct" (Liu Yongqian 1992).¹⁵

For years, peasants and workers in China's interior have sought to influence, by staging public protests, state policies that they opposed and have done so out of a deep conviction they were expressing legitimate objections. Social scientists have begun to give to this quest to register "rightful resistance" the attention it merits. Kevin O'Brien suggests that these groups have successfully articulated criticisms

“couched in the language of loyal intentions” (O’Brien 1996:32). When actual practice has strayed from the state’s explicit commitments, some groups have pressed successfully for redress, a point that I address further in chapter 4.

Uyghurs have long known that it is dangerous both to criticize publicly the party-state’s policies and to speak publicly about the danger of speaking in public. Indeed, when the Han editors of the *Xinjiang Daily*, the party mouthpiece, published articles complaining that speech in Xinjiang was more restricted than in other parts of China and passed other articles along to the more widely read *Wenhui bao* in Shanghai, they were purged for doing so in the 1957 party “rectification” (McMillen 1979:90). A quarter century later, officials reversed the stifling repression of the Cultural Revolution and gave Uyghurs comparative freedom to assemble and speak in public in the 1980s (Rudelson 1997), but restrictions on speech clamped down again in the 1990s. The renewed restrictions both closed a possible outlet for discontent and further alienated many citizens.

Retaining some of the most strident language of the Mao era, the government has continued to speak of drawing a firm line between the people and their enemies in Xinjiang. It has shifted the line so dramatically and, at the same time, left it so ill defined that many peaceful people cannot help finding themselves on the wrong side. The atmosphere has become even more restrictive since September 11. In direct response to the imbroglio over Tursunjan Ämät with which this chapter began, Party Secretary Wang Lequan promulgated a document in February 2002 purporting to expose Uyghur separatists’ “six forms of splittist activities.” In condemning texts or performances that expressed or spread “dissatisfaction,” the document referred to the open expression of discontent as a form of “separatist thought” and linked it to terrorist organizations (Becquelin 2004a: 44; “Xinjiang shouci pilu minzu fenlie shili zai yishi xingtai lingyu pohuai huodong de liu zhong xingshi” 2002).

RESISTANCE THROUGH CRITIQUE

In their quest to eliminate Uyghur separatism and bind Xinjiang fully to China, officials have depended heavily on ideological work (*sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo*), conducted in schools and workplaces and reinforced by regular messages in various media. For decades, teachers and officials have attempted to inculcate in Uyghurs the idea that they are integral members of a culturally plural “Chinese nation.” They have relentlessly pressed the message of “*minzu* solidarity,” arguing that Uyghurs and Hans are bound together by strong ties of mutual affection, class, and patriotism. Building on both ideas, these authorities have insisted that Uyghurs’ highest interests are served by living in a united China and would be harmed by Xinjiang’s separation. Officials

and the media have constantly repeated the claim that most Uyghurs are patriots deeply committed to China, while the separatists number only a tiny handful. Despite decades of official efforts, however, these ideas have not become deeply or widely rooted in the Uyghur community.

Signs that Uyghurs and Hans did not share strong ties of either affect or identity could be found everywhere in the 1990s and 2000s, casting doubt on the slogan of “*minzu* solidarity.”¹⁶ Both Hans and Uyghurs habitually distinguished members of the other group in speech. Hans frequently referred to Uyghurs colloquially—and without further explanation—as *tamen* (them), by cultural category as *minzu* (implying that Hans are not also *minzu*), or by the offensive term *chantou* (head wrapper). Uyghurs used such terms as *mušu häqlär* (these people), the sarcastic phrase *bu akam* (this big brother of mine—mocking the implicit ranking of groups), the slur *Qitay* (Chinese),¹⁷ or the religious expression *kapir* (infidel).

My Uyghur informants regularly emphasized the immutable differences between the groups in daily discourse or action. They often scolded one another for speaking Chinese or adopting the habits of Han, saying, for instance, “Kapir! Xänzu bop kätmä!” (Infidel! Don’t go turning Chinese!).¹⁸ A college teacher from southern Xinjiang reported that because Uyghur children in the south were taught from an early age to look down on Hans and to follow their parents in calling them *Qitay* and *kapir*, whole classes of students in the south simply refused to study Chinese.¹⁹

Uyghurs frequently remarked on the visible physical differences between Hans and Uyghurs. A Uyghur policeman sitting in a Han stylist’s shop observed aloud to me that certain haircuts did not suit Hans because the “infidels had no noses to speak of”; he did not hesitate to say this openly because he knew the stylist understood no Uyghur.²⁰ Pious Uyghurs overlaid cultural differences with religious ones. On one occasion I witnessed a *muäzzin* refusing to enter a dental clinic run by Uyghurs and insisting on remaining outside while his prosthesis was adjusted because there were Hans inside. The dentist who treated him explained to me later that the cleric always refused, regarding sitting with Hans or speaking Chinese as sins.²¹ Some held the difference between the groups to be racial as well as cultural.²² A Uyghur college teacher told me one day, “I think the Han race is an inferior race. I know it’s bad to say, but I think the whole race is a bad people.”²³ People even spoke of Hans and Uyghurs as different species. An older Uyghur man on a crowded minibus told me the fundamental problem in Xinjiang was that “sheep and pigs are forced to live together in one pen” (sheep representing Uyghurs, pigs Hans), a line that elicited uproarious laughter from the other Uyghurs on the bus.²⁴

On numerous occasions I heard Uyghurs insist that the fusion of the two groups was inconceivable, a point concretely reflected in the extremely low rates

of intermarriage. A dissident intellectual living outside Qumul and distributing nationalist manifestos to friends in the 1990s told one of them that Uyghurs would never follow the example of the Hui and assimilate into Han culture because they “are stronger psychologically.”²⁵ In 2002, on the heels of a discussion about Zordun Sabir’s nationalist novel, a Uyghur reporter said to me, “Uyghurs and Hans are totally different. This is this and that is that. They will never come together. Despite all the talk, there’s no way we’re ever going to blend into one. We’re absolutely unwilling to do so. This is impossible. So all this talk about *minzu* solidarity is nonsense.”²⁶

The talk about belonging and difference, whether of the fusion of groups or a distinct Uyghur identity, should not be read as only chatter. It also is performative. Han or Uyghur, peasant or party historian, “invoked” solidary groups in order to “evoke them, summon them, call them into being” (Brubaker 2002:166, italics in original). And by calling some groups into being, they often sought thereby to banish or erase others. For instance, Uyghurs rejected the idea that they belonged to the officially multicultural “Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu*). The term had been promulgated by the victorious integralist Chinese nationalists early in the century to justify the retention of the five large culturally distinct groupings (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim)—and their territories—after the Qing collapse, as discussed in chapter 1 (and see Leibold 2007). After 1949, party propagandists preserved the term but attempted to purge it of Han chauvinist connotations. Scholars produced a small mountain of books on the *zhonghua minzu* beginning in the late 1980s, clearly with the government’s imprimatur, seeking to shore up national cohesiveness in the face of antistate protests in Xinjiang and Tibet and the fissiparous tendencies unleashed by China’s uneven capitalist development (see, for example, Chen Linguo 1994; Chen Yuning 1994; Fei Xiaotong 1989; Li Kangping 1994; Wu Xiongwu 1994).²⁷

The tension between scholars’ and propagandists’ attempts to fill the term with cultural content and their endeavors to avoid alienating any cultural group was not resolved. Without cultural content, the term was unlikely to evoke the slightest loyalty in China’s citizens and thus to provide any cohesive force. If defined solely by attributes of Han culture, it would repel instead of attract the peripheral groups such as Tibetans and Uyghurs, thereby defeating its whole purpose. If propagandists delved too deeply into the cultural symbols and practices of non-Han groups, it would offend Hans, the crucial core constituency. The resultant hodgepodge had little power to attract the Uyghurs that I interviewed.

When asked the meaning of this concept, a high school teacher in Ürümqi answered, “The term *zhonghua minzu* means Han; it has nothing to do with us.”²⁸

On another occasion, a broadcast journalist analyzed the parts of the term: “*Zhong* means *zhongguo*; *hua* refers to *huaxia*.”²⁹ He noted that party propagandists casting about for widely resonant symbols had hit upon Yan Huang *zisun* (the progeny of emperors Yan and Huang) or *long zhi chuan* (descendants of the dragon). “It makes it obvious we’re not included,” he continued; “If that’s China, we’re on the outside.”³⁰ A graduate student explained that the government’s obvious intention in using the term was to assimilate non-Han groups into the Han, like an enormous grinding wheel. He was aware that Beijing had clearly set its sights on Uyghurs, yet he firmly believed they would not be drawn in.³¹

If scoffing at “*minzu* solidarity” and rejecting the idea of the *zhonghua minzu* were hazardous, advocating independence for Xinjiang was clearly much riskier. A number of my informants had spent time in jail either on suspicion of being separatists or for associating with those who were. Even so, they and others found moments while alone with me or among trusted friends to talk about the forbidden topic.³² I was taken by surprise the first time this happened. In December 1995 I met an editor in an Ürümqi press for the first time through a mutual friend. As we looked over some rare historical materials in his possession, he began to speak about the history of the Uyghur independence movement beginning in the 1930s. Minutes later, he mentioned what would happen when China “disintegrated” (*jieti*), using the very term that had been applied to the Soviet breakup. Taking my lack of expression for skepticism, he assured me that China would follow the Soviet example. He went on to say that Xinjiang University, where he knew I was studying, was a hotbed of independence-minded teachers and students, the epicenter of most popular protests in the 1980s.³³ While my later encounters confirmed his description, it was some time before I met anyone else as bold as he had been. A few months later, at a party in another section of Ürümqi, a group of Uyghur intellectuals who were close friends shared their dissatisfaction with the lack of human rights in Xinjiang. One turned to me and observed that while there surely could not be electronic bugs everywhere, phone lines were definitely bugged; he regularly heard odd clicks on the line. “When someone talks about Xinjiang’s independence on the phone,” he said to me, “it’s best just to say ‘oh, hmm, I see.’ To respond is to invite trouble.”³⁴

In October 1996, a student from Kashgar, herself an ardent advocate of independence in private settings, told me about three of her friends from that city, all top students, who had recently suffered for their outspokenness. One stayed in Kashgar for college, and his two friends went to universities in China proper. He wrote them both a letter complaining about the political situation in Xinjiang and imagining that if the region were independent, the three of them would be high

officials. A classmate of one of the other students saw the letter, became alarmed, and turned the student in. Eventually all three were brought back to Ürümci and sentenced to eight years in prison.³⁵

In the spring of 1997, many Uyghurs brought up the wish for independence as Hong Kong's retrocession approached. It seems quaint more than a decade later, but there was a widespread belief, despite the constant barrage of triumphal messages emanating from Beijing and the gigantic clock ticking down the seconds in Tian'anmen Square, that Britain would not relinquish its colony without a fight. Xinjiang was rife with rumors that Uyghur organizations were preparing to take advantage of the ensuing chaos to stage a military uprising. At various points that spring, a baker told me cheerfully as I bought my daily bread that Xinjiang would soon be independent; a hotel guest assured me the cause would receive God's help; a group of taxi drivers predicted to me at curbside that July would bring independence; and a gathering of police spent several hours alternately lamenting Xinjiang's colonization by China instead of the Soviet Union and speaking hopefully about the possibility that the rumors of a planned uprising were true. At the end of April, a student quietly asked me, "How much time do Uyghurs have?" Mistaking this for a question about their eventual assimilation, I began to speak about language preservation and so on when he cut me off impatiently. He was sure that Uyghurs *would* become independent; he simply wanted my judgment of whether it would take ten years or fifty. In May a broadcast reporter told me privately that "all Uyghurs want independence," even if the majority were too afraid to admit it.³⁶

Hong Kong's peaceful retrocession seemed to take many people by surprise. The morning after Hong Kong's return, on July 1, I sat with a group of students utterly sick at heart that nothing had happened the night before. They explained that a significant portion of their university's student body had been herded to a nearby park under the watchful eye of police to prevent them from participating in any potential uprising.³⁷

It also was clear that more practical Uyghurs believed they would need outside help to bring about changes in Xinjiang and that they hoped it would come from the United States.³⁸ At an evening party in January 1997, a Uyghur intellectual stated, "Every time Clinton criticizes the human rights situation in China, human rights improve. The United States really is the policeman of the world, and Uyghurs like that," a sentiment readily confirmed by the other young men at the party.³⁹ In early May of that year a rural cadre said to me at a gathering near Turpan, "We have no freedom. We place a lot of hope in Clinton and America," only to be shushed by his colleagues for discussing politics with a foreigner.⁴⁰ Several years later, NATO's intervention in Kosovo inspired new hope of foreign support. In August 1999 a

group of Uyghurs attacked the Public Security Bureau in Lop County after the sentencing of accused separatists. While attacking the bureau, the protestors are reported to have shouted, "We'll invite the U.S. and NATO to come, and we'll blow up Xinjiang" (J K P Š U A R komiteti täšwiqat bölümi 2000?:49). Such hopes would, of course, be dashed a few years later when Washington listed the obscure Uyghur independence group "Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement" (ETIM) as a terrorist organization (see chapters 5 and 6).

On a return trip in the summer of 2002, only months before that announcement, I heard from a number of new informants about their hopes for independence, although both they and acquaintances from previous trips with whom I had reconnected were quite pessimistic. Two young professionals in Ürümci, speaking under the cover of crowd noise in a restaurant, used a formula I would hear on many occasions: that all or nearly all Uyghurs hoped for independence but that the government had successfully co-opted members of the elite with jobs and other perks.⁴¹ A short time later, as we spoke in a park, a soft-spoken young teacher brought up the gulf between very religious Uyghurs and others. Some people had responded to the call of proselytes and placed all their hope in religious salvation, giving up any interest in independence, but they were a small minority, he claimed. Asked whether people not drawn to reinvigorated Islam spoke of independence, he replied, "Of course, we all do. All of us Uyghur teachers talk about it privately among ourselves, when we know no one is listening. We all wish for it, but we never say anything publicly."⁴²

These anecdotes are illustrative in that they show that some Uyghurs sharply distinguish themselves from Hans, reject their inclusion in the Chinese nation, and wish for independence. They cannot, of course, tell us how widespread these views are or what their consequences might be. Two important surveys conducted in Xinjiang by Herbert Yee supplement these ethnographic findings, although the researcher himself acknowledged that the results must be regarded with some skepticism. Based on studies carried out in Ürümci in 2000 (with 393 respondents) and in five other Xinjiang cities in 2001 (with 367 respondents), Yee concluded that the relations between Uyghurs and Hans were tense and that Uyghurs identified very strongly with their group and with the territory of the XUAR.⁴³ Yee also found in the first survey that whereas more than 70 percent of Hans strongly believed Xinjiang had been part of China since ancient times, only about 40 percent of Uyghurs said they did, and he speculated that because of the sensitivity of the question, many of the Uyghurs responding affirmatively were not being candid. In the same survey, only 36 percent of Uyghurs strongly agreed that separatist activities harmed everyone (compared with 64 percent of Hans), and fewer than half of the Uyghurs polled agreed *at all* with the government's claim that separatism was the main threat

to Xinjiang's stability, while 80 percent of Hans supported that claim.⁴⁴ While conducting the second survey, Yee and his collaborators met with intransigence from many local cadres. Officials eliminated some questions and changed others to look "like propaganda slogans," prevented the random selection of informants, urged the researchers to abandon the study altogether, and actually withheld all the survey responses from two field sites. Under the circumstances, Yee was not surprised that 40 percent of those polled declined to respond at all, and he assumed that many of the remaining respondents gave "politically correct" responses. Yee therefore began his article with the caveat that the results should be read "with great caution." Again, though, he found that Uyghurs identified more strongly with Xinjiang than did their Han counterparts and that the two groups were mutually hostile and mistrustful. Yee regarded as "inconceivable" the survey's finding that 87 percent of Uyghurs were proud of being Chinese citizens (Yee 2003:35-36, 44, 50; 2005:438-39, 445).

Thus far we have considered individuals' comments on politics in Xinjiang, captured in ethnographic interviews that may not be representative, and broad survey samples that may not be reliable. We can complement those findings by scrutinizing the messages in published music, poems, and novels. Because they require the collaboration of many individuals for their production and dissemination and because they circulate widely, such works offer a particularly valuable window into popular attitudes.

POPULAR CULTURE: CONSUMING AND SPREADING RESISTANCE

Many scholars have studied songs, poems, jokes, and literature in attempting to understand popular politics in Xinjiang.⁴⁵ They have looked at these sources because so many other avenues for political speech or resistance have been closed off. The progressive confinement of public speech and action, combined with the administrative and economic policies described in the previous chapter, has increased popular resentment. By the late 1990s, popular culture was one of the only avenues for the public display of discontent.

Publicly circulating audiotapes are particularly rich resources for studying that discontent. Early in the reform era, several tapes containing veiled or oblique critiques of life and politics in Xinjiang made it through the gauntlet of censors and were published by officially sanctioned media organizations. In addition, street-side duplication stands in both northern and southern Xinjiang enabled the dissemination of songs, poems, and jokes, some recorded in private homes, away from state surveillance (Dautcher 2000; Harris 2001). If individual acts of everyday resistance sent ripples only among a circle of friends, songs and other performances could call

a larger community into being. While listening to and sharing popular songs and poetry, Uyghurs could imagine that those in other neighborhoods and other towns were listening and seething or laughing, just as they were (Anderson 1991).

Furthermore, whereas private conversations remained firmly part of James Scott's "hidden transcript," taped performances provided more concrete, tangible tokens of resistance. Several features of the tapes caused them to occupy an ambiguous space in Scott's schema. First, because officials abandoned policies strongly encouraging Hans to develop proficiency in Uyghur in the 1950s and the number who chose to learn the language thereafter was vanishingly small, performances in Uyghur were incomprehensible to the vast majority of Hans. We might describe them as private Uyghur conversations concealed in Han public space.⁴⁶ Second, as the exasperated Professor Wang indicated, their imagery was allusive and ambiguous rather than direct. He expressed frustration that the authors and performers could always deny any secret meaning in their words. Uyghurs who were found with subversive recorded or printed materials could protect themselves by pointing out the words were not their own. They could also claim not to detect any hidden messages imputed to them.

Uyghur musicians in the 1980s and early 1990s made a specialty of allegorical jeremiads. For instance, in a 1993 recording, the hugely popular male vocalist Abdulla Abdurehim sang, "I stand by the waterside, longing for a drink, but when I lick my lips, they smack my mouth / . . . As I lie on the riverbank, the stones prick me; the unjust ones throw more stones at me." After describing each form of abuse, Abdulla moaned, "I said thanks, I said a thousand thanks." Another popular singer, Mähmud Sulayman, lamented that "I can't go where I want / they've chained my neck and I can't move / . . . these mountains are tall / I want to ascend them / but my wings are bound, so I can't."⁴⁷ In language that was necessarily vague and allegorical, these singers described a life of suffering and confinement. Prevented from slaking thirst, stoned without cause, immobilized in full sight of their goal, they could do nothing but sing of defeat and frustration.⁴⁸ These songs quickly achieved wide currency. Concerts were mobbed. Shop speakers inundated bazaars with their refrains, and groups of college students still sang them with great feeling in the mid-1990s.

But by that time, the period of relative openness ushered in by Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang a decade earlier was already coming to a close. Some of the tapes approved for distribution were later banned or taken out of the market. *Pighan (Rooster's Cry)*, a widely circulated tape of allegorical poems all legally published in the 1980s, includes one that describes the anger of a generous host whose guest occupies the best seat at the table and never leaves. In another poem, a Uyghur narrator speaks caustically to a statue of a Han soldier of how comradely

cooperation had turned into domination and promises of abundant meals had been followed by a Barmecide feast. Another tape collected poems by Rozi Sayit entitled *Dehqan bolmaq tās* (*It's Hard to Be a Peasant*) and described the excruciating labor and grinding poverty of peasants, understood to symbolize Uyghurs. *Pärwayim peläk* (*Destiny Is My Concern*), a tape by the popular musician Ömärjan Alim, contains another song about a guest who never left, but it was banned after its release.⁴⁹

The singers also faced censorship of their public performances. Abdulla Abdurehim was forbidden by 1996 to sing either of the songs just described. Another singer, Küräs Sultan, given to laments about the plight of peasants, had his music banned and his equipment taken away in 1993, and indeed could not perform at all until he left the country in 1996 (Hoh 2004).⁵⁰ Enforcement has not always been consistent, nor have the guidelines been clear.⁵¹ Two writers in Ürümci said in 1997 that they had heard “pro-independence” songs performed at weddings on several occasions, but one also said he had seen a singer led away from a wedding in handcuffs.⁵² In 1996, the popular singer Abdurehim Häyit was not allowed to tour and had difficulty releasing his recordings (Smith 2007). Yet in 1999 he was unsure what the government would do about his political songs, like “Stubborn Guest,” another song about a guest who would not leave, or “Rooster,” which described awakening the people—a classic nationalist trope (Fitzgerald 1996a).⁵³ Abdurehim Häyit told a foreign reporter that officials had not yet said anything about the songs that he acknowledged were political, “so I don’t know if I have a problem” (Strauss 1999). Within three years he had a problem. Censors had forbidden him to record or perform many of his songs. In March 2002 he reported that he “hadn’t performed for months” and was permitted to play only previously approved songs as part of an officially sponsored musical troupe (Forney 2002b).

Evidence from the early 2000s indicates that the government had changed its tactics. Rather than waiting to determine the “social impact” of songs, Ürümci officials required professional singers to submit their lyrics to a censorship committee before performing them in public or recording them. Censors could instruct artists to change gloomy images into more positive ones—for instance, replacing regret at the approach of winter with hopeful anticipation of spring—and song lists for concerts also faced official scrutiny to guard against too negative a performance (Taynen 2004:33).

The censorship of humbler musicians had stepped up as well. The very tunes forbidden by the government remained the ones that people wanted hired musicians to play at weddings. Bahargül, the Ürümci service worker introduced at the beginning of this chapter, told me that by the end of the 1990s when she and her friends

negotiated with wedding musicians, they were given long lists of proscribed songs. She complained that “whenever a good song comes along, they ban it.”⁵⁴

TEXTS: WRITING RESISTANCE

The party’s forbidding the publication or performance of songs was not unexpected. The year 1991 had begun with the public vilification of poet and historian Turghun Almas, who had published a series of articles and books limning a “national” history for Uyghurs completely distinct from those of Hans and China.⁵⁵ In a week-long conference, officials and scholars condemned his work for factual and political errors. As party secretaries led criticisms of Turghun in work units throughout Xinjiang, agents of the News and Publications Bureau cleared his books from shops and later ostentatiously burned them along with other offending texts.⁵⁶

A decade later, officials launched several new rounds of clampdowns on publications. In April 1998, officials in Xinjiang seized the opportunity of the tenth annual national campaign against pornography to round up “illegal publications” with suspect political and religious content (“China: Xinjiang Confiscates Publications Which Undermine Unity” 1998). In March 2002, the government announced a new phase in the “struggle against splittists on the terrain of ideology.”⁵⁷ Officials burned thousands of books in late March, and in April police and other bureaucrats again made the rounds of bookstalls to “clean up the market in printed matter.” The campaign officially aimed at eliminating pornography and illegal reproductions of copyright books. A news story at the time explained the plan to close down 52 of 118 periodicals in Xinjiang because of their low circulation and “poor quality” (Agence France-Presse 2002b). Uyghurs understood the principal targets to be religious texts published outside state supervision and other works that might foment antiparty feelings. Informants reported in 2002 that these included more copies of Turghun Almas’s work, which up until then had apparently evaded the braziers, as well as works of history and fiction by the younger author Abduwäli Äli. Officials reportedly took the trouble to locate and destroy the printer’s plates. Yet as one Kashgar resident remarked with pleasure, “copies remain in private hands.”⁵⁸

The successful posthumous release of Zordun Sabir’s trilogy *Ana yurt* (*Motherland*) might well have been one of the provocations for this new official initiative. As with the highly popular novels of Abdurehim Ötkür, Zordun’s final book was a broadly drawn historical novel, but one about a subject that no previous author had dared touch: the Ghulja Revolution of 1944 that established the independent Eastern Turkestan Republic (1944–1949). The historical setting allowed Zordun to insert critical passages appealing to Uyghurs—and later appalling to state censors, even

though they had gone over it many times. A professional with inside knowledge of the publishing industry claimed that the book had been scrutinized at twenty official meetings, revised at least sixteen times, retracted soon after its first printing, divested of two pages in the third volume, and only then released to the public.⁵⁹ Another informant pointed to the publisher's introduction, which observed that the revolution achieved "glorious victory after accepting the correct leadership of the CCP" and had properly been labeled a part of the Chinese people's revolution by Mao (Zordun Sabir 2000:1).⁶⁰ "They had to put this in to get the thing published," she said.

I was lent a copy of the novel that had fortunately been annotated by one of its previous readers, described by the lender as "really nationalist" (*bäk millätci*). The annotations pointed me to the passages that reader had found most provocative. As expected, the underlined sections exploited the ambiguity of the novel form: in context they addressed matters of the time, but out of context they could have been written about the present, as the reader's marginalia made clear. Next I discuss three of the twelve heavily annotated passages in the nearly six-hundred-page first volume.

Early in the book, the narrator admires the verdant Ili River valley, seat of the Ghulja Revolution, and soliloquizes about Xinjiang's violent history:

Hey Uyghur, you're just a sheep feeding in the pastures. Even when a wolf or bear comes, you think that any animal is a sheep just like you, you just think it, too, should graze in the fields. Its target is not green grass, but you. It plans to make a meal of you, to wipe away your pastures. You don't know this. (Zordun Sabir 2000:99)

A few pages later, the narrator silently curses the driver of the cart he rides:

This guy knows nothing but eating and sleeping. What is a people (*xälq*)? What are their burdens, what are their hopes? What is a *millät*,⁶¹ and how is it faring? These kinds of questions he's never thought about; 99.99 percent of the [people] are just like that. It is for this reason that other *millät* rule this people. (103)

The reader heavily underlined these passages, which clearly lament Uyghurs' being ruled by Hans (though the latter word is never used) and attribute this to naïveté or inattention. A third passage questions official claims of equality between Hans and Uyghurs:

Are there Uyghurs in government positions and among soldiers and police? Even if there are a few here and there, do they have power? None, absolutely none. . . . Immigrants are esteemed, locals despised. The owner of the house starves while the guest is full, the home's proprietor is the servant while the alley cat is master! . . . Whoever bemoans the people's crying dies easily. Whoever sells out the people wins, whoever speaks the truth has his tongue cut out, whoever fixes a glance on dirty dealings has his eyes dug out. (382–83)

The narrator names Sheng Shicai, governor of Xinjiang at the time, as the target of his wrath. But the descriptions of token powerless Uyghur officials, guests who fatten themselves on the host's wealth, truth tellers who are brutally punished, and traitors who are rewarded clearly excited other associations in the reader. He underlined the passage twice and wrote several exclamation points in the margin. The reader gave the same treatment to a passage in the final pages of the first volume. A frustrated Uyghur officer bemoans the lack of strategic knowledge among the populace:

Anger, resentment, and heroism have ripened within us. But military knowledge is lacking. Younger brother, turn your children into soldiers; they should study firing rifles, fighting battles, vanquishing enemies. Unless we do this, we will always and everywhere be bullied. (577)

In sum, the reader found and marked passages in the long novel that explain why Uyghurs are ruled by others, describe the terrible results, and cry out for a military solution to their problems. It is not a surprise, either, that many Uyghurs read the work voraciously⁶² or that the Publications and News Bureau quietly removed the book from the market only a few months after its release.⁶³

NEW TACTIC: JAIL FOR DISSIDENT WRITERS

Since the late 1990s the party-state has punished heterodoxy with increasing rigor, advancing from merely banning or censoring works to actually imprisoning their authors. Three more examples from recent years are particularly striking. In 1998, the historian Tokhti Tunyaz returned from Japan, where he was in a PhD program, to his home region to conduct research. State Security officials immediately took him into custody and, after holding him incommunicado for thirty months, sentenced

him to eleven years in prison on the charge of “revealing state secrets.” All available evidence suggests that the so-called state secrets consisted of a fifty-year old document given to him by a government library employee. A report in a Chinese national security periodical in 2001 further accused Tokhti of “absorbing Western ideas” and engaging in “*minzu* splittism”: the first charge is rather laughable on its face, and the second one, intentionally vague (RFA 2006c). Apparently, Tokhti posed a threat only because he was researching Uyghur history, a subject closely regulated by the party-state, as I discussed in chapter 1. His arrest and lengthy sentence offer eloquent testimony to the importance that Beijing and Ürümcü attribute to historiography.

The second example is that of Tursunjan Ämät, the poet mentioned at the beginning of the chapter who was arrested in January 2002 for reciting a subversive poem at a public event. A party official in Xinjiang later told a foreign reporter that Tursunjan had challenged government policies toward non-Hans. The official charged that the act of reading critical poetry was “terrorism in the spiritual form” (Marquand 2003). Tursunjan was thrown in jail, and the officials who allowed him to perform were reprimanded. As mentioned earlier, Wang Lequan codified the crime less than a month after, and directly because of, Tursunjan’s performance (“Xinjiang shouci pilu minzu fenlie shili zai yishi xingtai lingyu pohuai huodong de liu zhong xingshi” 2002). His offense was airing discontent in public performance. In other words, he was guilty of inviting people to think about their dissatisfaction.

In late 2004, the writer Nurmuhämmät Yasin published a story in *Qäsqär ädäbiyati* (*Kashgar Literature*) entitled “The Wild Pigeon.” The protagonist in the story is a young wild pigeon who inadvertently flies into a region inhabited by tame pigeons living among humans who fed, captured, and sometimes ate them. The undomesticated bird quizzes his tame counterparts about their souls, only to find to his amazement that they don’t know the word. Fed and watered by their keepers, the birds neither know nor seek freedom. Puzzled and frightened by the things the locals tell him and his father’s prior warnings against straying into the region, he tries to fly home, only to find himself trapped by the keepers; he clearly was betrayed by one of the local pigeons. Tortured and broken while in captivity, he decides in the end to eat a poisoned strawberry provided by a thoughtful friend and thus escape his condition by dying (Nurmuhämmät Yasin 2004).

Caught flat-footed again, the censors must have realized in retrospect that the allegory was stuffed full of political barbs.⁶⁴ The wild pigeon could represent a rebellious Uyghur youth born locally and unbowed by local pressures, although it seems likelier that he stood for an activist from Central Asia who had succeeded in, or blundered into, crossing the border. The tame pigeons with no concept of the soul

clearly represented the majority of Xinjiang’s Uyghurs, lulled by state jobs or material comforts into an illusory sense of contentment. Their lack of understanding of the soul might be a reference to the consequences of atheism education and the crackdown on religious practice. No longer allowed to study the Qur’an or receive private religious instruction and subjected to years of education in atheism, ordinary Uyghurs might be seen as having been stripped of appreciation for spiritual life and thus divested of spirit. The soul might also have represented the inclination to live independently rather than under the keepers’ control. The pigeon keepers clearly were Hans, and this had two implications. First, it made Uyghurs and Hans different species. Second, it cast Hans as their jailers and exploiters, and Uyghurs as beasts living eternally separate lives, literally fattened to feed Hans. In a particularly sharp exchange, an old pigeon explains to the young pigeon that “it is a necessity for mankind to be able to catch us and eat us. . . . No pigeon among us is permitted to object to this arrangement.” The poisoned strawberry might be one of several things: it could represent open political activity, alluring and satisfying but deadly. It might symbolize a drug, such as alcohol or heroin, which provides a temporary thrill but eventually kills its users. One important feature of the story is the pessimistic conclusion that the protagonist can escape from this intolerable condition only by dying.

In November 2004, when the critical content of the story came to the officials’ attention, Nurmuhämmät Yasin was jailed and was sentenced to ten years for split-tism in a February 2005 trial (RFA 2005b). In November 2005 it was revealed that the journal’s editor, Küräş Husäyin, himself had received a three-year sentence for agreeing to publish the story (RFA 2005a).

TALKING BACK TO THE STATE MEDIA

Uyghurs share their displeasure with the political order in Xinjiang through private talk; they listen to subversive songs and read heterodox literature and share them with their friends. They also find ways to resist by refusing to respond to the official media in the expected way. In 1997, Hans viewed the televised Hong Kong retrocession ceremony with great enthusiasm, while Uyghurs, resenting the outpouring of Han nationalism, waited for a political opportunity that failed to appear (Bovington 2002a:67).⁶⁵ Five years later, it was the Uyghurs who celebrated while Hans groaned at the results of the 2002 World Cup competition. An otherwise politically circumspect informant described to me watching the Turkish–Chinese match in a room of both Uyghurs and Hans. Uyghurs showed their delight each time Turkey surged ahead, and the Hans became increasingly angry. My informant recalled with

amusement that one Han had chastised the Uyghurs in the room, saying, "Since you're Chinese citizens, you should cheer for China. Aren't you loyal to China?"⁶⁶ Another participant in the conversation asked, grinning, whether I had appreciated the blue flag of the Uyghur independence movement that someone had contrived to drape behind the Chinese goal and that therefore appeared on the television screen during the Turks' offensive attacks.⁶⁷ On another occasion, several teachers reported the disturbing (and, it should be said, suspicious) news that officials at schools in Ürümcü had disciplined students for cheering the Turkish team, claiming that three students at the Normal University had even been expelled and arrested.⁶⁸

Uyghurs even defied the regime by selecting radio stations. Immediately following the 1949 revolution, Beijing imposed strict party control of the media in the name of guarding against ideological attack from lingering counterrevolutionary elements. Although the reform era produced an explosion of new popular magazines and presses and some observers have speculated that Beijing is gradually losing (if not willingly relinquishing) its overall control of the media (BBC Monitoring 2006; Lynch 1999), it also is quite clear that party officials have kept a close watch on their political content. Hu Jintao's administration has stepped up pressure on various media, appointing tens of thousands of "Internet cops," closing maverick newspapers, and jailing outspoken journalists (French 2006; Goldman 2006; Hong Yan 2006; RFA 2006b).⁶⁹ The job of maintaining a monopoly on the media has always been more difficult on the periphery, whether in the southeast, where residents in coastal Fujian or Guangdong could receive signals from Taiwan and Hong Kong, or in Xinjiang. Radio stations in Central Asia had been beaming programs in Uyghur and Qazaq into Xinjiang since the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s and stopped doing so only during the rapprochement in the 1980s. In the 1980s and beyond, broadcasts from the BBC and the Voice of America continued to provide outside news. The top secret Document no. 7 promulgated by the Politburo in 1996 proposed that the government greatly expand the construction of broadcast and relays stations in order to extend coverage to the remotest parts of the region. The aim was to "firmly occupy the ideological and cultural stronghold" (Human Rights Watch 1999:11).

Nonetheless, by listening to those foreign radio reports, many Uyghurs have continued to reject the party's attempt to impose a single interpretation of Xinjiang's politics. There is strong evidence that even though the government invested heavily in jamming equipment, many people in Xinjiang not only could receive radio from abroad but went to some lengths to do so. One foreign journalist found in interviews that people tired of propaganda relished news from the outside world, even though some felt the broadcasts raised false hopes. Many were saving up for

the best shortwave radios they could buy in order to pull in signals through the jamming (Ingram 2001). A secret XUAR party report revealed officials' concern that citizens were listening to foreign stations. It observed that in southern Xinjiang, cadres and masses "listen one after another to the radio programs, and in Aqto, [Khotän], [Qaraqash], Lop, and other counties and cities, stores have sold out of small radios" (J K P Š U A R komiteti täšwiqat bölümi 2000?:52). Another report from the same year claimed that throughout the 1990s, separatists inside Xinjiang had been listening to broadcasts from "enemy stations" nearby and then distributing the contents in handbills (Yang Faren 2000:243). Citizens have also taken advantage of foreign media outlets to report on local events themselves, making frequent use of the toll-free call-in numbers broadcast by Radio Free Asia. On a 2003 trip to Xinjiang, a foreign reporter agreed to allow a local to use his cellular phone to place a call and then later learned it had been to the Radio Free Asia number (Reuters 2003).⁷⁰ Subsequent reports indicate the government has attempted to paralyze the call-in line by attacking it with robot callers (Southerland 2005). The government also reportedly spent \$40 million in 2004 to purchase more powerful jamming antennas from France (Agence France-Presse 2004a; Southerland 2005).⁷¹

There is little doubt that people have kept track of the doings of émigrés through the international media. A young translator from southern Xinjiang told me proudly that his former teacher, now on the faculty of a university in Japan, announced soon after moving there that he opposed the Chinese government.⁷² Some Uyghurs have even visited dissident Web sites abroad and disseminated their contents, despite China's blocking system. Enterprising computer users inside Xinjiang were able to work around the Internet police and post pictures and a story about Rābiya Qadir's reunion with her husband, the well-known Uyghur dissident Sidiq Rozi. Her children in Xinjiang later told her that they had seen the pictures (Southerland 2005).⁷³

CONCLUSION

What have Uyghurs achieved by engaging in everyday resistance? Have they managed to influence official policy or governance in Xinjiang? Have they marginally improved life in Xinjiang, as James Scott might have predicted? Or have the singing, joking, and chatter in fact had "no practical effect," as a pessimistic dissident official put it to me privately in 1997? The evidence suggests that in the face of Uyghur intransigence, Beijing's regulation of religious and cultural life in Xinjiang has grown tighter over time. Restrictions on religious practice have increased; arrests for suspicious behavior or ideas have gone up; and the government recently

EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

all but eliminated the use of Uyghur as a language of instruction in college while simultaneously mandating that Uyghur children begin studying Chinese in kindergarten (Dwyer 2005). It would be hard to say the resistance had slowed, let alone reversed, the tightening rigor of laws and regulations. The CCP has had little incentive to grant greater freedom.

In sum, everyday resistance has availed Uyghurs little in moderating Chinese policies, and there is scant evidence that it has improved the material lot of individual Uyghurs. What the various forms of resistance have done is strengthen and keep in circulation the ideas that Uyghurs are fundamentally distinct from Hans, that they are not part of the Chinese nation but constitute a nation unto themselves, and that they would be best suited by another political order. It is safe to predict that party-state will not eliminate everyday resistance even if it succeeds in blanketing the airwaves of Xinjiang with its own messages, blocking unwanted messages from outside with jammers, arresting writers, burning books, silencing singers, and confiscating tapes. Uyghurs have engaged in everyday resistance even when they had no opportunity or did not dare to take part in open and organized resistance, and they have continued to resist even after state security organs have virtually eliminated acts of organized public defiance anywhere in Xinjiang. Under conditions of extreme repression, it may be the only index of the depth and breadth of Uyghur discontent.



COLLECTIVE ACTION AND VIOLENCE

OPEN RESISTANCE IN XINJIANG

The last chapter focused on “everyday resistance,” on the premise that most Uyghurs usually have been deterred from resisting openly by the threat of harsh punishments. Newspaper reports in the 1990s revealed to the outside world for the first time since the 1940s that Xinjiang was occasionally rocked by serious political violence or mass protests. These reports, coming on the heels of demonstrations in Tibet in the late 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, fed speculation that China faced a looming crisis and might disintegrate along the lines of its former neighbor. Not until the end of the decade did new information emanating from China make it apparent that unrest in Xinjiang had occurred with some regularity over the previous fifty years.

This chapter turns to the evidence of open and organized resistance in the region and to the representation of that resistance. Rather than describing every reported major organized uprising or violent antistate attack (for that, see Dillon

2004), I focus on the frequency of protests and political violence and on the aims and strategies of the participants. There is no doubt that the events took place, with very few possible exceptions, but to stop at a straightforward accounting of the events and to ignore the ways they have been depicted by the Chinese government, Uyghur organizations, and other entities would be to miss a crucial dimension of the contention in Xinjiang.

The thousands of arrests each year since 2001 suggest that organizations have persisted and new ones are springing up, despite the state's repressive efforts. But they also show that repression has deterred all but the most violent and fearless. Whereas large-scale protests had been largely peaceful from 1979 through the 1980s (which is not to say there were no violent events), by the 1990s small-scale riots or violent attacks had become more common. This shift began long before the "strike hard" campaigns, mentioned in chapter 2, officially emerged in Xinjiang in 1996.¹ Forceful suppression of protests beginning in the late 1980s, the political atmosphere in China following the June 4 massacre in 1989, and the enactment of stricter regulations for demonstrations in 1990 combined to keep off the streets many people who might have joined protests in the more open climate of the 1980s. Repression increased even more dramatically after 2001, and episodes of protest fell further.

Curiously, official Chinese commentary depicted not a fall but an alarming rise in protest in the new millennium. In 2001, the chairman of the XUAR government, Ablät Abdurišit, announced that "the situation of Xinjiang is better than ever in history. . . . [T]here has been no room for national separatists and religious extremists. By no means is Xinjiang a place where violence and terrorist accidents take place very often" (quoted in Bao Lisheng 2001). Nonetheless, in 2005 the XUAR party secretary, Wang Lequan, warned ominously that "in Xinjiang the separatists, religious extremists and violent terrorists are all around us—they're very active" (quoted in Sommerville 2005). Chinese academics suggested, too, that separatist threats and activity had exploded in that four-year period.² In other words, there is no obvious relationship between official descriptions of the threat and the actual trends revealed by the independently compiled record of public protests. The depictions answer the exigencies of representational politics, rather than revealing the party-state's perception of the threats.

This chapter makes four points. First, the sheer number of protests in Xinjiang since 1980 reinforces the contention of chapters 2 and 3 that the Uyghurs' dissatisfaction with the region's governance is deep and broad. The quantity of documented protest events also casts doubt on the Chinese government's argument that major demonstrations were the work of a tiny minority of separatists and that the majority

of participants took part out of naïveté or simple excitement. In addition, the political content of the demonstrations, as expressed in banners and shouted slogans, leaders' programmatic statements, and handbills circulated secretly, strengthen the case that the specific criticisms raised by informants and artists were representative of widespread complaints and not the unhappiness of an isolated minority. At the same time, the evidence demonstrates that everyday resistance and the comparatively rare episodes of organized protest are part of a continuous political field.

Second, since protests have increased steadily throughout China proper since the 1990s, the dramatic decline in protests in Xinjiang (and Tibet) since 2001 is an anomaly. Whereas Xinjiang was once regarded as the wildest and most violent part of China, it appears to have ceded that reputation to the contentious factories and farmlands of China proper. Third, even though Uyghurs have expressed deep dissatisfaction with governance in Xinjiang and pointedly called for policy changes, Beijing and Ürümcü have almost never responded by accommodating those demands or entertaining public discussions of the concerns. Instead, officials have strengthened unpopular policies and cracked down on both political speech and spaces for assembly outside party control. In other words, they have sought to limit as far as possible the further public articulation of discontent with those policies. Such unyielding responses have not resolved Uyghurs' complaints and instead have often exacerbated them. Thus the anomalous drop in unrest in this famously contentious region cannot plausibly be attributed to the Uyghurs' increased political contentment.

Nor is it easy to argue that rising material wealth has eased Uyghurs' concerns with politics, given their high unemployment rate and the dire poverty of the Uyghur countryside in the south. Rather, the fall in protests reflects substantially increased political repression. Central Asian governments' harsher suppression of Uyghur groups beginning in the late 1990s under strong pressure from Beijing also removed external sources of support for antistate activity in Xinjiang.

UNREST AND THE SOVIET EXAMPLE OF STATE DISINTEGRATION

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and Moscow and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, many observers wondered whether China would follow suit. One motivation of various studies comparing the Soviet Union and China was surely a desire to avoid being caught flat-footed by sudden cataclysmic political changes, such as had shocked Sovietologists in 1991. Yet as the Chinese Communist Party continued to maintain its firm grip on power and the Chinese state seemed to remain strong year after year, talk of

China's being bound to follow the Soviet example grew progressively quieter. Then the heightened attention to conflict in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang after September 11, and the publication in early 2006 of startling statistics on surging unrest in the Chinese heartland, seemed to make talk of Soviet-style regime and state disintegration plausible again.³ The figures on the rise and magnitude of protest events throughout China invited renewed comparisons with the revolutions of 1989 to 1991 that ended the reign of communist parties throughout the Soviet bloc. Discussion of violent unrest in Xinjiang again recalled the specter of the Soviet Union's collapse, which began with protest and bloodshed in the Baltics, as well as the bloody departure of Bosnia from Yugoslavia. Reports of possible "Muslim terrorism" in Xinjiang, many of them hastily assembled by intelligence bureaus around the world, called to mind the brutal struggle in Chechnya as well as intrastate conflicts farther afield in Aceh and Mindanao.⁴

Chinese scholars have continued to think and publish about this topic. Academies of social science in Beijing and Ürümci sponsored research on the Soviet Union and Central Asia beginning in the late 1980s and with greater vigor after 1991. Numerous studies compared the Soviet Union and China on the dimensions of demography, *minzu* policies, governance, and economics. As recently as 2005 a book entitled *China's Borders and Minzu Problems* began with a chapter on the "minzu problems and the lessons of the Soviet breakup" (Zhang Zhirong 2005:1-7). The second wave of political transitions in Georgia, Ukraine, and the Kyrgyz Republic similarly rattled the Beijing leadership, and now scholars all over China are researching the etiology of the "color revolutions" in hopes of helping the party stave them off. The sheer number of conferences and published articles focusing on the topic and Beijing's decision to place severe legal restrictions on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in China belie officials' public confidence that China will avert such an outcome (Xinhua 2006).⁵

Although there is wide agreement that the Chinese state is strong and maintains powerful authority over society, few honest observers deny that social groups have become much more restive in recent years.⁶ The transition from a socialist to a quasi-market economy has brought China one of the highest rates of growth ever sustained over two decades. It also has dislodged vast numbers of people from their jobs and farmlands. It has made many individuals rich and displaced an even greater number from the relative security of the socialist work unit into the stormy sea of market competition. Soon after Deng Xiaoping announced that class struggle was officially over in December 1978, real class struggle commenced in earnest. It is not idle to speak of the "unmaking" of the Chinese working class (Hurst 2004) or to conclude pessimistically that today's Chinese laborers have lost everything

that Marx promised the world's proletarians had to gain from socialism (Blecher 2002, 2004). This process has provoked increasing waves of protest throughout the country (Tanner 2005).

Most demonstrations in China proper can loosely be called "economic protests." Workers strike because of layoffs or unpaid wages. Farmers surround government offices to complain of land expropriation and exorbitant taxes. Both groups rise up against corruption by the cadres. In a pathbreaking article, William Hurst demonstrated that collective action by laid-off workers in China has varied dramatically by region. The precipitating factors, demands of protestors, and state responses differ among the northern "Stalinist rust belt," booming central coast, and central inland regions, which he called "tentative[ly] transitional" because they have neither been crippled by layoffs by state-owned enterprises, as in the rust belt, nor enjoyed the same market-driven prosperity as the coast (Hurst 2004). Hurst's analysis demonstrates the importance of multisited research in China, illustrating how regional differences in political economy crucially affect the aims and fates of workers' protests. His study was spatially limited in significant ways, however. All three macroregions in his analysis belong to "China proper." We should broaden the study of protest to embrace China's western periphery, and Xinjiang in particular, where we seem to encounter another realm entirely, if not several other realms.⁷

In the thirty years since reform began, only two demonstrations over purely economic issues in Xinjiang have been documented, one urban and one rural. In 2001 in the southern city of Khotān, around a hundred recently laid-off textile workers, mostly Uyghurs, demonstrated out of concern that their employer would not pay their severance. In that case, local government officials promised to make good any debts that the cash-strapped factory could not pay, and the protestors dispersed without any arrests (Dow Jones International News 2001). In 2004 Uyghur farmers and Qazaq pastoralists in Xinjiang's northwestern Ili region protested what they saw as an unfair relocation package. They were angry about the construction of a hydropower plant requiring 18,000 people to relocate and about the gap between the promised compensation for the loss of land and an actual disbursement of only about 5 percent of the stated amount (RFA 2004).

In China's peripheral regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet, most major protest episodes have not concerned economic matters (the pattern of protest in Inner Mongolia, with a more heterogeneous economy and an overwhelmingly Han population, more closely resembles that in China proper), and the political climate facing protestors is decidedly chillier. In fact, however, the two features are directly related. It is precisely because some protests in the peripheral regions do not target industrial firms or local officials but the very state itself

that central and regional governments have been so much less tolerant of them. Mongols have protested Chinese attempts to thoroughly domesticate Chinggis Khan or officials' suddenly canceling a performance by a popular band from Mongolia. Since the harsh crackdown in 1989, Tibetan monks have sporadically demonstrated against religious restrictions or the requirement that they openly condemn the Dalai Lama, and individuals have occasionally used bold gestures such as hoisting the Tibetan flag or crying out for Tibetan independence in the public square. Uyghurs have demonstrated against Xinjiang's governors and policies and, in some cases, challenged the very incorporation of Xinjiang into China. What Uyghurs have not been able to do since Hu Yaobang's fall from power is find high officials sympathetic to their claim that particular leaders have "failed to live up to some professed ideal or . . . not implemented some beneficial measure" (O'Brien 2003:53). Officials in Xinjiang and Beijing have taken the position that separatist aims lurked behind *every* protest—concerned, perhaps, that tolerating one kind of protest would be perceived as an opening for separatist agitation—and therefore have forbidden all.

Party officials in Beijing and Ürümcı have worried that a large unchecked protest in one part of Xinjiang might mushroom into a broader anti-Chinese mobilization. If many Uyghurs are deeply dissatisfied (Bovingdon 2002a; Smith 2000, 2007; Yee 2003, 2005), and most of them refrain from expressing anger only because they fear retaliation, then it is quite plausible that protest would spread quickly were the party-state to stay its hand. The snowballing demonstrations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union showed that previously timid citizens could abandon a lifetime of quiescence in a very short time. Time and again in 1989, 1990, and 1991 as people flowed into the streets, more and more of their fellow citizens stripped off their public facade of support for the regimes until it became clear that the majority had joined the opposition and the leaders had no choice but to step down (Beissinger 1998; Kuran 1992). In March 1997, Rozi, a well-paid Uyghur professional with a steady job, told me that if conditions in Xinjiang continued to deteriorate, he might join the organized opposition. "I might decide that living is not worth more than dying," he told me quite seriously.⁸ Without broad survey results, we naturally cannot say how broadly such a view was or is shared.⁹ But we should note the hedging in Rozi's comment. If citizens living under repressive states remain in doubt about their neighbors' true political views until moments of crisis, they surely also are uncertain of their own "tipping points": that is, how far the situation must deteriorate before they act and what they might be willing to sacrifice for a collective goal in the heat of the moment.

PROTEST TRENDS: CHINA AND XINJIANG HEADED IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS

In his article on workers' protests, Hurst calculated that China faced "at least hundreds, and probably thousands," of contentious events each year (Hurst 2004:95). This must have seemed quite a sensible estimate when the article was written, likely in late 2002. Hurst pointed out that the Chinese government had never publicized any figures on the quantity, frequency, or nature of mass protests. Many observers were consequently stunned when, beginning in early 2004, the State Security Ministry released a series of statistics indicating that Hurst's estimate had been low by an order of magnitude.¹⁰ The statistics recorded 58,000 contentious episodes involving more than one hundred people in 2003, 74,000 in 2004, and 87,000 in 2005.¹¹ The ministry also revealed at the time that there had been an almost monotonic increase in protests since 1997 (Tanner 2005).¹² Because Chinese official statistics are notoriously unreliable, it is quite possible that even these large figures underestimate the number of disturbances. The numbers seem astonishing because of the party's historical intolerance for organized protest and habit of repressing it harshly and because most Chinese citizens have consequently been loath to incur the wrath of the state by demonstrating. The government's willingness to publish the figures was similarly startling.

Some scholars have leaped on these figures as the strongest indication yet that China may be on the verge of a new social revolution (Jiang 2006). But it is possible to read the publication of the figures differently.¹³ Beijing may have strategically released this information about unrest with both domestic and international audiences in mind. Domestically, it might have intended to convince the monied and middle classes to support the continued repression and oppose "premature" democratization, by implying that only the party and the thin line of security forces lay between the comfortable lives those people now enjoyed and a political-economic abyss that would make the Cultural Revolution look like a Mardi Gras celebration. The conventional wisdom has long predicted that a burgeoning middle class would press for political reforms in China as it has elsewhere in the world. But ironically, the increasing prosperity in China may have made economically successful citizens more skeptical of reforms and more sympathetic to hard-line party leaders (An Chen 2003; Tsai 2005). Some have argued that Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials publicized the numbers to wring more money for domestic security out of the national budget.¹⁴

Beijing also might have released the figures to gain sympathy from the international community. Such a move would not have been plausible ten years ago,

since many international observers shared the opinion that popular unrest in China expressed deep and justified dissatisfaction with a brutal and unresponsive regime. Yet September 11 dramatically changed the international climate, giving many states the opportunity to recast domestic opposition as “terrorism” and their own efforts to quell that opposition as contributions to the “global war on terror” (Dwyer 2001; Li Qi 2002; Millward 2004:10–11). Under these conditions, Beijing might well have considered it safe to acknowledge the sharp rise in protests to an international society increasingly intolerant of antistate violence.¹⁵ This has had especially poignant implications for Xinjiang and Uyghurs.

There is an irony to the role that Xinjiang has played in the story of post-1949 politics in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Bloody clashes and bombings in China proper were frequently compared with those in the XUAR, the “really violent” part of the country, and many bombings were initially attributed to Uyghur separatists, only later to be revealed as the work of spurned lovers or laid-off workers.¹⁶ Transnational Uyghur organizations have asserted for years that Xinjiang was on the verge of a crisis and consequently broadcast news of every violent episode in the region. In some cases, they may have claimed responsibility for damage that actually was the result of natural disasters or industrial accidents. Possibly influenced by those claims, many foreign journalists and researchers have speculated that violence and unrest have increased in the region since the late 1990s.¹⁷

A careful and critical review of the evidence reveals that Xinjiang has been far quieter since 2001 than has any part of China proper. Despite the region’s reputation, no scholar has ever attempted to quantify the amount and frequency of violence there. Some have cited official Chinese statistics promulgated since 2001, but there are several problems with these statistics. Officials quickly and dramatically changed their strategy of representing unrest in Xinjiang. In the 1990s they generally suppressed evidence of protests or violence, sometimes even denying foreign reports of unrest (Agence France-Presse 1995, 1997). The rare revelations of episodic violence attributed it to “*minzu* splittists.” But the trend was not entirely systematic, and official numbers and attributions varied widely before being fixed by the State Council in 2002 (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2002). For instance, the XUAR government chairman, Ablät Abdurišit, claimed in a 1999 interview with reporters that “since the start of the 1990s, if you count explosions, assassinations, and other terrorist activities, it comes to a few thousand incidents” (Becquelin 2000:87).

Since September 11 the Xinjiang and national governments have had conflicting incentives in representing the scope and nature of unrest in Xinjiang. On one hand, officials at the regional and central levels seeking investment have habitually underplayed reports of unrest to avoid scaring away capital. On the other hand,

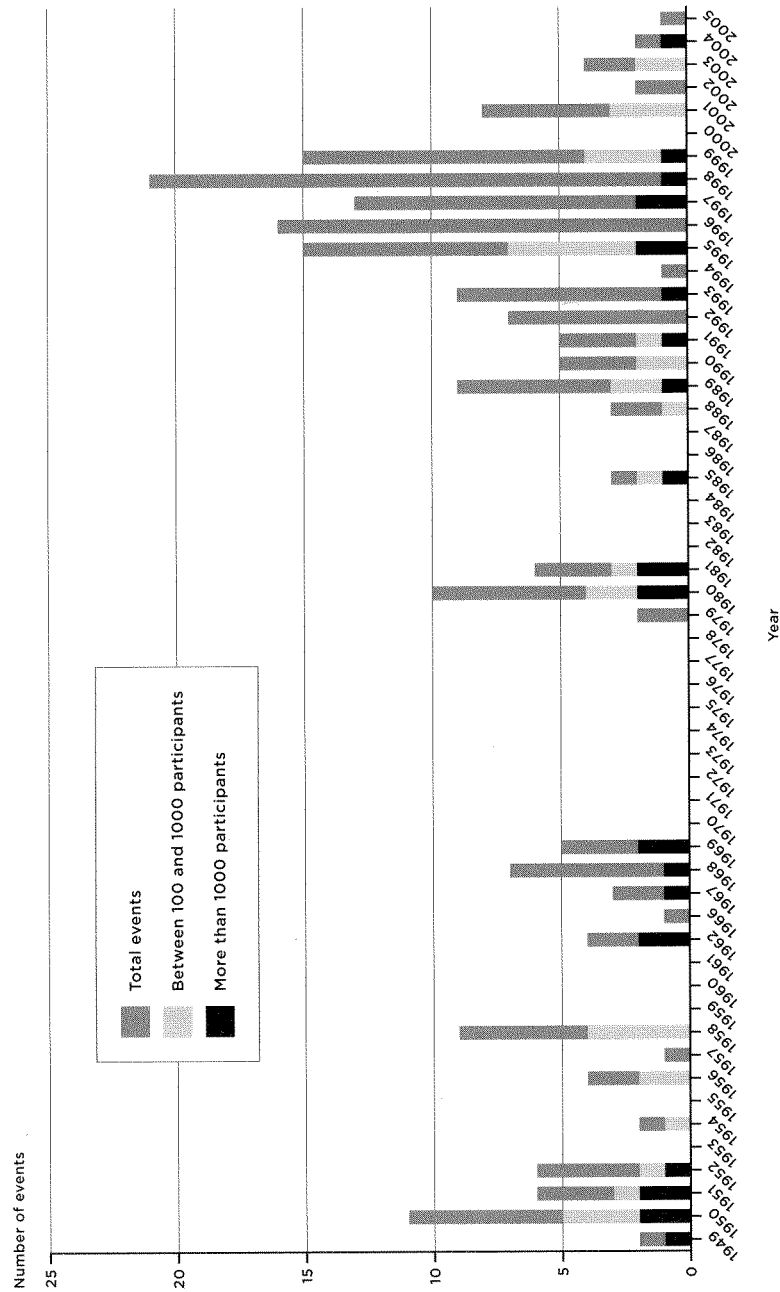
regional governors seeking central grants for economic growth and policing, and officials in Beijing seeking global sympathy for China’s “plight,” have chosen to maximize the threat of separatists or “terrorists.”¹⁸ Most Chinese journalists and authors subscribe to the second strategy, touting large numbers of protests even in what had previously been depicted as placid periods and transforming splittists into terrorists and religious extremists. In other words, they first underrepresented and then exaggerated the number of episodes of political violence. I have attempted to replace speculations and distortions with systematic data collection, paying careful attention to content and sources. I have been able to document violent or organized protests or resistance in Xinjiang since 1949, including armed uprisings, peaceful demonstrations, and riots, as well as clearly political violence such as assassinations and bombings.

Figure 4.1 shows that between 1949 and 2005, there were at least 158 episodes of antistate violence or organized protest documented in printed sources, and of these, 142 had clear ethnonational content. The largest events involved 50,000 to 100,000 people, while most had only a few dozen participants. Only the armed resistance raised by various groups in the 1950s seriously challenged the party’s political-military control of the region. The period of greatest antistate or ethnonational protest since then was the mid-1990s, with a high point of twenty events in 1998.¹⁹ In addition, an event involving one thousand or more people took place in four of the five years from 1995 to 1999. Figure 4.2 plots events in the autonomous region against those throughout China from 1993 to 2005, showing that episodes in Xinjiang fell off just as they were increasing rapidly in China as a whole.²⁰

WHAT COUNTS AS RESISTANCE?

The care with which it was assembled notwithstanding, my database of unrest in Xinjiang is unquestionably incomplete. One might infer its incompleteness from a comparison with the aggregate numbers cited in Chinese sources, even though the comparison would be misleading. For instance, Ma Dazheng, who presumably had access to internally circulated government statistics, cited “authoritative sources” to support the claim that there were 253 “violent terrorist episodes” in just the ten years between 1990 and 2000. Elsewhere he tallied 116 terrorist acts for 1998 alone, but these proved to include, in addition to bombings, assassinations, and arson, also live-stock poisonings, kidnappings, and robberies (Ma Dazheng 2003:126–27, 153). These figures are an order of magnitude smaller than the “few thousand” invoked by the XUAR government chairman Ablät Abdurišit in 1999 but are equally out of step with Abdurišit’s 2001 comment that Xinjiang was “by no means . . . a place where

FIGURE 4.1 Organized or violent events in Xinjiang, 1949–2005.



COLLECTIVE ACTION AND VIOLENCE

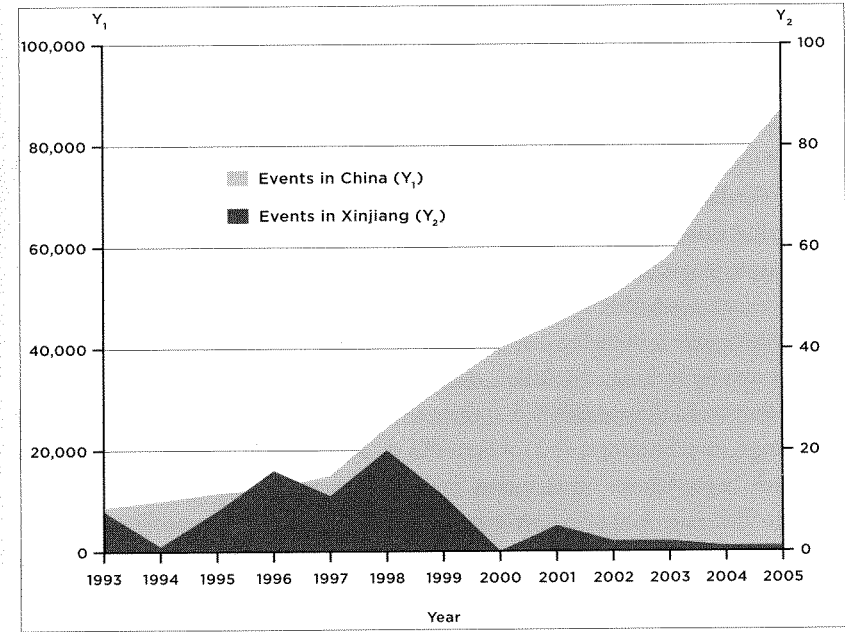


FIGURE 4.2 Protest events in China and Xinjiang, 1993–2005.

violence and terrorist accidents take place very often” (Agence France-Pressé 1999c; Bao Lisheng 2001).

The elasticity of official numbers became obvious as the statistics promulgated in the State Council’s January 21, 2002, press release on “Eastern Turkestan terrorists” were applied without the slightest modifications to very different periods (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi, 2002). That document asserted that more than two hundred “terrorist events” left 162 dead and 440 wounded between 1992 and 2001. Less than two years later, officials assigned precisely the same figures to the period from 1990 to 2001, implying no one had died in violent attacks between 1990 and 1992, which hard to square with the well-attested evidence of casualties in Baren in 1990 and the bus bombings in Ürümcı in 1992, among others. In 2005 the deputy director of Xinjiang’s Antiterrorism Bureau used the same figures for the “previous decade,” and officials continued to use the exact same numbers in 2006. Yitzhak Shichor put the case rather mildly when he observed that this use of an identical set of figures for very different time periods “casts a shadow over the rest of Beijing’s arguments” (Shichor 2006b:102).²¹

The numbers I use here are lower because my criteria are more restrictive than those adopted by officially sanctioned Chinese sources. I have not followed their examples in treating attacks on livestock or large robberies as instances of terrorism, or even as political violence, without supporting evidence, although I grant the possibility that some were perpetrated by individuals or organizations with political aims.²² Furthermore, my graphs and appendix include only those events described in narrative form in some source. Except in rare instances, I have insisted on at least two sources to confirm an event.

By contrast, whether in the State Council's January 2002 document, in subsequent white papers, in the several graphic reports on "Eastern Turkestan terrorism," or in reports for internal circulation, the numbers of violent events cited in statistics always far exceed those described in the narratives. The authors' explicit mention of poisonings, crop burnings, and robberies in those narratives strongly suggests that the much larger figures on terrorism have been padded with figures from police blotters. Officially employed writers and spokespersons instructed to highlight "violent terrorism" in Xinjiang in order to garner international support seem to have elected only to count, and not to describe, episodes whose categorization as terrorist events might provoke skepticism abroad (Millward 2004:12). Since many individual cases claimed to underlie the aggregate numbers cannot be scrutinized, officials need not worry about drawing undue attention to the extraordinary breadth of the government's definitions of terrorism and crimes threatening state security.²³

Looking beyond the derogatory labels to the individual protest episodes themselves reveals much that is obscured by Chinese statistics. The events that triggered them, the organizations that spurred them, and the issues they raised are far indeed from the themes of global Islamism or transnational terror organizations. Not surprisingly, they are much more closely related to matters of governance and policy shifts in Xinjiang itself.

FRAMING AND SENDING A MESSAGE: REPRESENTATION OF POLITICS IN A COMMAND POLITY

Careful scrutiny of the messages of public protests in Xinjiang reveals substantial overlap with the critiques discussed in the previous chapter. The willingness of large numbers of Uyghurs to march under particular banners or shout specific slogans strengthens our confidence that the criticisms raised by "everyday resisters" reflect broader views in Uyghur society.

In chapter 3 I argued that the myriad forms of everyday resistance in Xinjiang not only expressed dissent but carried out a kind of political work as well. That

is, they communicated that dissent widely despite the powerful bans on public expression and organizing. Jokes traveled the breadth of the region in private conversations and via social gatherings of trusted friends. Writers and musicians made strategic use of the Xinhua distribution system itself, one of the party's key tools for spreading propaganda, to broadcast well-hidden but subversive messages in tapes and books across the entire Uyghur-speaking community. Individual books passed through many people's hands, and tapes could be duplicated at roadside stands (Dautcher 2000; Harris 2001). Turghun Almas's historical writings gained a wide readership and an even wider "rumorship" (Bovingdon and Nebijan Tursun 2004). Letters and handwritten manuscripts circulated widely by hand, concealed in bags or clothes. Some textual and audiovisual materials from dissident groups in Central Asia and Turkey were smuggled into Xinjiang by traders or travelers and were passed around through social networks.²⁴

Chinese sources provide some information about the Uyghurs' spreading ideas through networks, although in their dogged emphasis on quantifying pieces of paper and documenting smashed organizations, such reports betray a studied uninterest in the messages being passed—or, perhaps more likely, a choice not to risk disseminating their contents any further. The aim has been to vilify separatists without attempting to understand them or make their objectives comprehensible to others.

An internal-circulation report in 1993 suggested that in the latter half of 1988 in the four districts of southern Xinjiang, officials laid hands on 113 "reactionary posters," handbills, or anonymous letters. All the 127 people they caught with these materials were under the age of twenty-five, and the youngest ones were only twelve; the vast majority were elementary and middle school students (Zhang Yuxi 1993:348). Ma Dazheng claims that between 1990 and 2000, the state destroyed 503 splittist or violent terrorist organizations or gangs. He includes under the subheading "violent terrorist incidents," 953 cases of subversive propaganda or incitement, and of these, 458 cases involved "reactionary posters," 107 cases leaflets, 157 letters, and 231 other types. Curiously, another highly placed author cited "incomplete" statistics showing that over the same period, the number of "reactionary" handbills and posters advocating *minzu* splittism averaged 5,000 a year, and reactionary audiotapes, another 1,000 cassettes. There was a marked uptick in 1996, with more than 8,000 handbills and more than 10,000 audiotapes (Yang Faren 2000:243).

This corpus of words and artifacts shaped and disseminated a critique of the political order in the autonomous region. Sociolinguists would recognize in this a kind of "framing": the purposive selection of particular ways to represent social phenomena (Goffman 1974; G. Lakoff 1987; G. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; R. Lakoff

2001). Scholars of contentious politics use “framing” to denote two factors critical to social mobilization: the strategic representation of a sociopolitical situation as objectionable, and the proposal of action to remedy it (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986). Only if activists compose and propagate a frame with wide appeal will large numbers of people decide to join the movement, often a risky choice even in democratic political systems.²⁵ In authoritarian polities, activists often rely on “mass frames,” which cannot be spread openly and are harder to shape, so they may rely much more heavily on already circulating ideas (Hurst 2004:102–5). It is not clear, however, that activists in democratic systems have all the advantages. Popular media are widely read and trusted, as in many liberal polities, whereas movements have only a limited capacity to reframe perceptions already shaped by those media (Tarrow 1994:23). Under authoritarian regimes, the official media—often the only kind—are treated with skepticism, and their influence on popular opinion is correspondingly weaker. Widely disseminated “hidden transcripts” may be more powerful, particularly when suddenly made public during demonstrations. And if suspicion of official media gives dissidents an advantage in China proper, the Uyghurs’ far stronger dubiety toward the Chinese media may give even greater power to the dissenters in Xinjiang.

The critiques and other forms of “everyday resistance” described in the previous chapter seldom called people to action. They were broad normative statements, not practical proposals: wealth needs to be distributed more fairly; Uyghurs need truly representative leaders; the government must not impose family-planning policies on non-Hans. As I suggested, in the spring of 1997, large numbers of Uyghurs seemed to trust, or at least hope, that others were taking care of organizing a resistance movement, since they themselves feared to do so.

The comparatively rare episodes of open political resistance in Xinjiang provoke fresh questions about framing. When the demonstrations were spontaneous, why did people join so quickly, and what did they hope to accomplish by doing so? When public protests or actions seemed to have been planned in advance, what messages did the planners propagate, and by what means? How did potential participants decide to take part, even after reflecting on the risks and the low chances of success? We also should ask what purposes or messages can be divined from acts of violence perpetrated by small groups. Were the targets of assassinations or bombings clear? Were the aims easy to understand? These questions are easy to ask but very hard to answer. The available sources of evidence pose particular difficulties for the study of framing in Xinjiang. These problems bear on the amount of information we are able to squeeze out of the available record, and thus on the soundness of interpretations.

For years, those interested in individual episodes of open resistance in Xinjiang—whether collective or violent or both—had no choice but to sift through scattered and sketchy foreign newspaper articles, accounts by human rights groups or transnational Uyghur organizations, and the very occasional Chinese news report. Because Xinjiang has been closed to foreign reporters for long periods, outside media reports have sometimes been hampered by relying on foreign travelers with little local knowledge. An Agence France-Presse report on the June 1988 protest in Ürümqi, for instance, relied on the testimony of Western tourists who told the journalist that “the banner carried a lengthy inscription in Arabic script which they could not read” and admitted they had no idea of the point of the protest (Lescot 1988). Reports by human rights organizations frequently relied on the personal testimony of former prisoners (who would have had an incentive to play up their suffering for sympathy or to gain political asylum) or Uyghur organizations. Those groups, in turn, had every reason to maximize, even to embellish, the frequency and gravity of conflicts. As I discuss more fully in chapter 5, many leaders of organizations in Central Asia devoted most of their energies to media presentations as a strategy for keeping their movement alive. Few offered clear sources for their information, and some were serial fabulists. Uyghur news organizations in the diaspora such as the ETIC, the Uyghur Information Agency, and the Uyghur-language section of Radio Free Asia (RFA) have produced more plausible reports, but given their close association with political organizations, these cannot be considered disinterested or absolutely reliable.

After jealously guarding information about individual episodes of unrest (as with the protest numbers) in Xinjiang for decades, Chinese authorities began to release descriptions of that unrest in the late 1990s. Remember that these reports were compiled by officials whose job it is to present the party-state in the best possible light and, at the same time, to depict the protests as unsympathetically as possible. Like Uyghur news agents abroad, they have re-presented those episodes to suit their own purposes.²⁶ Particular protests explicitly raised such matters as the dismissal of a Uyghur official without popular consultation, continued nuclear testing, perceived disrespect for Islam and Muslims, and the imposition of family planning. Yet in almost every case, the official representations of those events insisted that they openly challenged party rule, proposed the establishment of an Islamic republic, or aimed at secession. In other words, the state’s versions of events tarred them all with aspirations ruled unacceptable from the beginning. Next I describe a single example (briefly discussed in chapter 2) of a demonstration in Ürümqi by two thousand students on December 12, 1985. An eyewitness reported that the students had protested the government’s plan to enforce birth limits on Uyghurs, announced

only a short time before, and the continued shipment of criminals from China proper into Xinjiang (Li Yuanqing 1990:71). In a book on the party-state's struggle against Uyghur separatism published nine years later, the "naïve and excitable students" prove to have been manipulated by splittists and so recede into the background. The reader learns only of splittists shouting "Hans get the hell out of Xinjiang" (*Hanren gun chu Xinjiang*), "Xinjiang must be independent, must be free, must have sovereignty," and "Long live independent Xinjiang" (Xu Yuqi 1999:110).²⁷

Chinese writers' narratives are full of devious plotters, servants of foreign imperialism, and religious extremists, as well as innocent masses hoodwinked into marching or shouting along with these dangerous people. Reports in the early 1990s made elliptical references to protests by dates: "May 19" for violent protests in Ürümci in 1989, "April 5" for the 1990 Baren uprising, and so on. In offering only cryptic references, the writers intended to convey meaning to those in the know and remain mysterious to others. They had reason to fear that providing more information about major episodes of unrest or violence would backfire. Rather than making Uyghurs more supportive of the party-state and its policies, it would make them more hopeful about the possibility of widespread resistance.²⁸ The concern was doubtless to avoid disseminating too widely the news of a considerable number of open protests since the mid-1980s. By the end of the 1990s, the events were given short descriptions and years, but finally they were chronicled in great detail.²⁹ The stories of events have sometimes been subject to several revisions to suit changing political aims. For instance, the 1990 Baren uprising, the 1995 protest in Khotän, and the demonstration in Ghulja in 1997, all blamed for years on "splittists," were transformed in a 2004 article into the work of "terrorists" (Zhu Jun 2004).

Two questions of particular interest in regard to protests in Xinjiang, whether they were organized and whether they had religious content, are also the two matters about which we must be most circumspect when reading the official accounts. Playing up the role of organization and religiosity in particular events, and possibly inventing those attributes where they do not exist, serves particular political aims. Official scholars describe episodes of unrest as planned and organized in order to challenge the idea that they were "natural" and "spontaneous" and expressed popular dissatisfaction. The same writers also may impute religious content (and attribute religious slogans) to uprisings to make them seem irrational, even radical, and the participants backward.

Ma Dazheng's study of protests of the previous decade from the vantage point of 1997 identified growing Islamic belief and practice as critical elements in recent events. Not a single protest lacked some religious content, the author found. Officials noted with alarm that more and more citizens were practicing Muslims,

including students and party members. They blamed the influence of missionaries from Central Asia. Islamic missionary groups carrying out *tabligh*,³⁰ or propagation of faith, reportedly operated throughout Xinjiang, using religious instruction as a cloak for spreading subversive political messages about independence and establishing an Islamic state in Xinjiang. In the first ten months of 1999, *tabligh* groups had reportedly spread from Ghulja in the north to the southern towns of Kashgar, Pāyziwat, and Khotän, and officials had rooted out 91 sites and 1,600 practitioners.

Descriptions of protests in Chinese sources imply that if religious slogans were found in many protests in the 1980s, they were ubiquitous in the 1990s (Ma Dazheng 2003:92–105, 118). While some protests were clearly planned in religious settings and raised religious issues, they were not reducible to religious protests; much less can they be regarded as evidence of "Muslim extremism." Uyghurs have often used religion as a vehicle to express wider grievances or have made the state's repression of religiosity examples of broader repressions (Becquelin 2000; Dautcher 1999). Viewed from a distance, the Xinjiang government's multipronged attack on religiosity was clearly intended to eliminate both an alternative source of meaning and a space for organization.

ORGANIZATIONS, VIOLENCE, AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

Students of contentious politics are not surprised to find organizations behind mass protests, even seemingly spontaneous ones. Indeed, Rogers Brubaker argues that the key actors in many ethnonational conflicts are "not ethnic groups as such but various kinds of organizations" (Brubaker 2002:172). If we want to find out whether and which organizations orchestrated protests in Xinjiang, we will face the challenge of extracting usable information from carefully constructed official or dissident narratives of those protests. Officials and academics describing many demonstrations or riots report in scandalized tones that they were planned and organized in advance, assertions sometimes seemingly strengthened when transnational Uyghur groups claim responsibility, though of course both have incentives to see efficacious organizations at work.³¹ One finds outraged accusations of "black hands" and "separatist organizations" behind mass events in both academic studies and reportage potboilers (Liu Hantai and Du Xingfu 2003; Ma Dazheng 1990; Xu Yuqi 1999).³² Such accusations are clearly intended to deny that particular protest episodes were authentic expressions of mass sentiment. For decades, officials broadcast to the citizenry the message that the party alone was allowed to organize people and orchestrate mass demonstrations and that the only legitimate way the masses might express grievances publicly was through purely spontaneous gatherings—

which then had to be dispersed by officials and police in order not to disturb public order.³³

In China proper, while demonstrations without prior official permission remain illegal and permission is nearly never granted,³⁴ government officials have become somewhat more indulgent of local protests about economic matters. Peasants and workers have had some luck finding sympathetic officials who recognize their claims as “rightful,” thus reducing the chances of harsh repression of demonstrations (O’Brien 1996, 2003). Official treatment of such episodes, however, has varied dramatically by issue and region, as discussed earlier (Hurst 2004; Perry 2001).

By 1997, officials in Xinjiang were alarmed to find organizers drawing participants from across district and even county boundaries and to see demonstrations shifting from remote rural settings to Xinjiang’s major cities: Ghulja in early February 1997 and Ürümci at the end of the month.³⁵ Observers also were disturbed to note that planned actions had grown in scope. Whereas they had previously seen only brief paroxysms of violence, they now faced “armed rebellions.” More and more police actions to round up suspects culminated in gun battles with well-armed holdouts. Politically motivated assassins now combined indiscriminate killing of Hans, intended to cause them to flee, with targeted killings of Uyghur officials loyal to the party-state, dubbed “bridge burning” (*chaiqiao*). The expression was a pointed barb directed at the official story that Uyghur, Qazaq, and other non-Han officials would serve as bridges between the party and the population. The most hardened partisans had received military training, at first in camps in rural southern Xinjiang and then, after the PSB closed those camps, in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Armed and battle trained, they now spoke openly of armed secession from China.³⁶

The profile of individuals arrested in 1997 challenged a centerpiece of propagandists’ brief against separatists. Instead of the uneducated, unemployed, religious *lumpen* described in antiseparatist propaganda, the organization members turned out to be young and well educated—and growing more so over time. Suspects apprehended in connection with a spate of arson attacks in late May 1998, reportedly aimed at turning Ürümci into a “sea of fire” and causing Hans to flee, were found to include female students from two of Xinjiang’s top universities, Xinjiang University and the Medical College. Sweeps of suspected members of separatist organizations netted more than three hundred college students from ten postsecondary institutions, hailing from ten different districts.

The earliest reform-era protests appeared to be (even if they were not completely) spontaneous responses to inflammatory events, in much the way that the 1992 Los Angeles riots were touched off by the verdict in the Rodney King trial. Thus when a police officer killed a Uyghur man in PSB custody in April 1990,

Uyghurs who caught wind of this stormed the jail, spirited his body away, and within hours staged a demonstration in which three thousand people marched through the streets demanding that Hans leave Xinjiang (Ma Dazheng 2003:47–48; McMillen 1984:575). Similarly, in October 1981 when a Han youth fatally shot a young Uyghur in Kashgar in a dispute over ditch digging, Uyghurs again marched the body through the streets until the crowd of protestors numbered more than six thousand. This time, the protestors reportedly shouted that they would kill Hans and called for a free “Uyghurstan.”³⁷ In these and other cases, while a proximal cause can be identified, the speed, violence, and scope of the popular response point to pent-up anger that had grown over a long period. Widespread popular grievances at the nature of Chinese rule in Xinjiang and the myriad individual complaints of Uyghurs provided the background conditions. The sparking events seemed at once to capture features of the intolerable system in microcosm and to give the final push to tempers at their limits. In sum, while the precipitating events account for the timing of the protests, they cannot by themselves explain those protests.

In the latter half of the 1980s, students and other citizens in Ürümci organized three major demonstrations, each seizing on a recent happening that offended Uyghurs’ sensibilities—the replacement of a popular Uyghur leader, a slur found in a lavatory stall, or the publication of a salacious book—but all raising slogans that responded to matters far beyond the incidents’ provocations. Marchers protested the system of autonomy, nuclear weapons testing, Han migration, family-planning policies, and discrimination against Uyghurs or Muslims, among other matters. Officials worried that in each case, the protests lasted several days, and in the latter two instances they spread to (or had spread from) other cities in Xinjiang or elsewhere in China. There was evidence of coordination of both the content and the timing of demonstrations (for more information, see the appendix).

It was two major protests in the 1990s, however, that caused the most alarm in officialdom. Neither was among the largest protests in the reform era. But the two events’ organization, violence, and ideological challenge to the regime were without precedent in post-1949 Xinjiang. These were the Baren uprising in 1990 and the Ghulja uprising in 1997.

PROTESTS

Before daylight on the morning of April 5, 1990, in the month of Ramadan, a group of several hundred men set out angrily from a mosque in southern Xinjiang where they had attended services and spoken publicly of their outrage at the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s policies on nuclear tests, the extension

of family planning to Uyghurs, and the exploitation of Xinjiang's resources for use in the interior.³⁸ They marched on and surrounded the government offices in Baren, a rural township in Akto County, thirty miles southwest of Kashgar.³⁹ They chanted the *shabada* in unison and some called for a *jihad*.⁴⁰ Later in the day, a larger group of some three hundred returned to mount an armed assault on Baren party and PSB offices. When several carloads of police came to relieve the officials under siege, the insurgents stripped them of their weapons and killed a number of them, taking others hostage. The attack continued into the night, with the insurgents lobbing homemade bombs and firing on the government offices. The next day, much larger troop reinforcements entered the area and chased the remaining insurgents to the marshlands and mountains where they had fled, killing or capturing all of them by the third day. The official death toll was quite low, listing six police, one cadre, and fifteen or sixteen demonstrators or insurgents killed. International sources proposed a much higher figure of more than sixty killed.

Within days, the government displayed on television the weapons and documents seized from the insurgents, including a booklet laying out the purposes and duties of *jihad*, among them killing "infidels," and vaunting the imminent independence of "East Turkestan" ("Rebellion' Quelling Detailed" 1990). Official sources later announced that years earlier, the leader, Zäydin Yusup, had begun recruiting forces for the uprising. He and his co-conspirators had traveled to several mosques stirring up a religious frenzy and secretly building an "Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party." In each place they had broadcast the message that Islam would soon conquer socialism, that they would drive Hans out of Xinjiang, and that they would found an Eastern Turkestan republic. They also denounced the "colonial" exploitation of the region. Zäydin and others had made extensive preparations, including acquiring weapons and holding four planning meetings, but they were not completely ready to launch the resistance when they learned that the plot had been partially exposed in March 1990, at which point they chose to act in early April.

As soon as security forces had put down the Baren uprising, hard-liners in the government began to crack down on religion much more harshly. This included the questioning of imams, the dismissal of some and the training of the remainder; the closing of new mosques under construction and the halting of repair work on existing mosques; an official policy to find and destroy all private religious schools; and a much broader search for underground political and religious organizations. If the 1980s had provided a brief thaw after decades of anti-*minzu* policies, Baren ushered in a new era of repression and harsh policies.

A month after the Baren uprising, officials quietly promulgated new regulations governing protest in Xinjiang, superseding temporary ones from 1988. In May 1990 the XUAR People's Congress passed the new administrative rule, officially termed a "method for implementing" the national law on protest. It stipulated that all marches or demonstrations must be cleared with the government in advance and must not "threaten the unification of the state, harm *minzu* solidarity, or compromise the interests of state, society, or collective." The application for official approval must contain "the purpose, method, slogans or catchphrases, participant numbers, vehicles, and sound equipment of the assembly, march, or demonstration" and must identify a person responsible. Participants were forbidden to raise banners or shout slogans "incompatible with the aims" of the event. The rules even stated that security organs could set up security cordons protecting party and military offices, courts, jails, PCC offices, and broadcast stations—in other words, precisely those sites that the protests were likely to target (Xinjiang weiwu'er zizhiqu renda changwei 1990). The new rules would prove advantageous to the handling of several episodes of unrest nearly six hundred miles northeast of Baren, in Xinjiang's northern city of Ghulja.

Most journalists' accounts of the 1997 Ghulja protest begin only days before the event, with the sudden arrest of dozens of Uyghur youths in January or the police breaking up a circle of women praying in a private home on what proved to be the eve of the uprising. Chinese versions of the events begin a year earlier with a splittist organization, the "Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah." The Ghulja uprising was clearly the product of a chain of events that began much earlier and was symptomatic of both the government's repressive methods and the Uyghurs' exasperated responses. As revealed only later in the work of foreign scholars and Amnesty International, this event was distantly connected with government efforts several years earlier to eliminate a popular form of Uyghur social organization (Dautcher 1999:328–29; 2000; Millward 2004:17; Roberts 1998a:686–87).

In 1994 a number of Uyghurs in Ghulja decided to revive a traditional social organization, the *mäsrap*, in order to combat endemic alcoholism and drug abuse in the region. The *mäsrap* met regularly, with memberships of several dozen, to share music and dance, learn more about Islam, and hold one another to account for their public behaviors. Leaders of the gatherings had both ritual and religious authority to punish participants in front of their peers for violating the group code. The groups were quite successful at reducing alcohol and drug use and also at giving Uyghurs a sense of collective capacity to help themselves. They multiplied quickly.⁴¹ In spring of 1995 the heads of all the *mäsrap* in Ili gathered and elected as the leader of all the groups one of the founders of the movement, Abdulhelil. He was

detained for questioning soon after, and following this the government banned *māšrāp*, although the organizations continued to operate underground. An anthropologist living in Ghulja during spring 1995 concluded that what the party most feared about the groups was that they were organizations that “it did not initiate, supervise, [or] control” (Dautcher 1999:326).⁴²

In July and August, Abdulhelil and other leaders organized a youth soccer league in Ghulja, and many youngsters joined. On August 12, several days before the tournament was to begin, military officials occupied the playing field, parked several tanks there, and announced that it would henceforth be needed for military exercises. Officials also reportedly removed the goalposts from the fields at all schools in the area to ensure that the tournament could not take place. On August 13 Abdulhelil was again taken in for questioning. The following day, hundreds of men marched peacefully through the streets and then dispersed, an event that officials later referred to as the “August 14 illegal march.” Remarkably, though there was no hint of violent intent in the march, by noon that day snipers stood conspicuously on the roofs of buildings in the center of town, and the People’s Armed Police (PAP) controlled the main intersections with barbed-wire barriers (Amnesty International 1999; Dautcher 1999:325–27; 2004:285–87; Roberts 1998a:686). Abdulhelil and others, angry at the government’s heavy-handed action to squelch a very successful social organization, went on to plan and lead the protest in 1997. Chinese sources claim that Abdulhelil and others joined the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah (ETIPA) and that its leader, Pāyzulla, had begun infiltrating Ghulja in early 1996, planning for the demonstration in January 1997 (Xu Yuqi 1999:177–78).⁴³ No Chinese source I have seen explains the “August 14 illegal march,” and not one connects the Ghulja demonstration with the crackdown on *māšrāp*.

There were more proximal causes. A Uyghur organization in the United States asserted that demonstrators, mostly students, were marching to protest the arrests of thirty youths praying in a mosque on January 27, during the month of Ramadan. Yusupbäk (Yusupbek) Mukhlisi, the long-serving head of the Eastern Turkestan United National Revolutionary Front (in Kazakhstan) and, unfortunately, often not a reliable reporter, claimed that the thirty had been not only arrested but also executed (Hutzler 1997).⁴⁴ Many sources agree that a series of raids on the night of February 4, picking up some two hundred worshippers at mosques and in private religious study groups, immediately preceded the peaceful demonstration beginning at around nine in the morning on February 5. There is little doubt that many marchers had religious motivations for taking part. An official Chinese account of the events has students carrying banners saying “It has begun” and “Use the Qur’an as a weapon” (Xu Yuqi 1999:178). A video shot by the Ghulja police shows the

students marching under a white banner with the *basmala* and *shahada* handwritten in very large script.⁴⁵ They marched speedily to the center of town, shouting “religious slogans” and picking up participants along the way until they numbered at least five hundred.⁴⁶ Some sources suggest that demonstrators symbolized their rejection of the Chinese state’s authority by burning official documents such as identity cards and residency permits and even report implausibly that they “stripped off their ‘Han’ clothing” (another version has them removing all their clothing) as they marched, so as to disavow any connection with Hans (Becker 2001; Jiekai Xinjiang ‘Dong Tu’ fenzi de kongbu miansha 2001).⁴⁷ About two hours into the demonstration, the police set upon the protestors in full riot gear and with dogs. Official reports asserted that many protestors were armed with bricks and knives and had begun to attack public security personnel and Han citizens as well as property. The police eventually fired live rounds into the crowd to put down the demonstration (Dillon 2004:96–97).

Chinese officials initially denied there were any casualties from the police action. In fact, a police spokesman in Ghulja refused to acknowledge that the protest and crackdown had even occurred, saying, “Nothing happened here last week.”⁴⁸ This fit poorly with the autonomous regional government’s announcement on the same day that 10 had died and 130 had been arrested.⁴⁹ Non-Chinese sources reported up to 130 killed that day and up to 500 arrested. Later reports by human rights organizations indicated that the protestors had been hosed down with cold water and then held outdoors in subzero temperatures for hours, with the result that many developed frostbite and had to have their feet or hands amputated. Some protestors returned to the streets on the following two days, again facing riot police and the PAP. There were further arrests, and some Uyghurs reportedly assaulted Hans they found in the street and destroyed cars. The government enacted a curfew and closed the city to outsiders for two weeks. Unconfirmed reports state that independence activists, some of them from as far away as Kashgar, had planned a major demonstration for February 9, the final day of Ramadan. They were betrayed to the police and arrested, and according to one source, they were among the first group to be executed after the demonstrations. Abdulhelil was reportedly tortured and executed secretly months later (Amnesty International 1999; Campion 1997; Hutzler 1997; Tyler 1997).⁵⁰

Although they were very different events, the Baren and Ghulja uprisings shared certain important features. Both apparently had been planned in advance. In the case of Baren, Zāyidin Yusuf, head of the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP), is supposed to have spent the three years from 1987 to 1990 building his organization by inducting members in trips to various mosques. The uprising took

place in Baren, but the ETIP reportedly had members in Ürümci, Kashgar, Turpan, and at least ten other major cities in Xinjiang (Zhang Yuxi 1993:349). Investigators reportedly found that the Ghulja uprising had been plotted by the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah, an organization founded three years earlier in October 1993.⁵¹ Like Zäyidin's ETIP, it had branches and members throughout Xinjiang. Its leaders decided to set the protest in motion at a "Xinjiang-wide congress" of that party on November 27, 1996 (Ma Dazheng 2003:95). Both the Baren and Ghulja uprisings were religiously motivated, and both emphasized public repudiation of the official policy on religion and the party's claim to be the highest authority. The biggest difference is that the Ghulja protest began peacefully, and according to most reports, it became violent only when police began to crack down.

A number of gun battles might be interpreted as armed rebellions that did not come off; this is how Chinese sources generally represent them. Many started when police tried to apprehend individuals suspected of seeking independence through violent means. According to one source, between 1990 and 2000 Chinese forces reportedly fought 57 gun battles, with 26 police or soldiers killed and 74 wounded, with 140 civilians dying and 371 injured. All told, security personnel fatally shot 106 "rebels." Much of the bloodletting took place in the latter half of the decade. In a two-month period in 1996, PSB officials engaged in gunfights six times, with one officer killed, while eighteen suspects were killed and another thirteen injured. In the first half of 1999, the PSB had seven more gun battles. In that period, PSB forces lost one, with sixteen injured. Seven "terrorists" were shot dead and eight injured (Ma Dazheng 2003:73, 126–27, 153).

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Between 1980 and 1997, the governments in Beijing and Ürümci made concessions in only four instances to matters raised during demonstrations. After a series of protests by Han former "educated youths" desiring to return to their home cities in the interior in the late 1970s and early 1980s, officials granted them the right to periodic home visits, agreed to resettle some individuals, and allowed for all the individuals who remained in Xinjiang to send one child back to China proper. In response to the Muslims' protests in spring 1989, Beijing halted the publication of the book *Sexual Customs*, which contained offensive (and wildly inaccurate) descriptions of Muslims' sexual behavior, and punished both the authors and publisher of the book. In this case, the government responded before the protests spread to Xinjiang, and although the authorities treated demonstrators in China proper quite

leniently, they were much less generous with their counterparts in Ürümci (Gladney 1991:3–4; 1992). When 130 uranium mine workers,⁵² whose radiation sickness had been ignored by authorities for years, traveled to Ürümci and staged a sit-in on May 13, 1989, officials agreed to address their concerns but then scolded them for the form of their protest, saying that a sit-in was "inappropriate" (Zhang Liang, Nathan, and Link 2001:170). It seems evident that had they not protested, their problems would have continued to be ignored. Finally, in 1996 Beijing ended the testing of nuclear weapons at Lop Nur, although this surely was prompted by the hope of wringing arms control concessions from other countries rather than the many Uyghur protests against the practice (Johnston 1996).

In all other documented cases, the government responded to protestors' demands with either stony silence or even more restrictive policies. When protestors called for greater religious freedom, Ürümci stepped up the repression of religious belief among students and officials, zero tolerance for private religious instruction, and arrests of religious pupils deemed underage or unsuitable (as, for instance, with all children and youths in high school or college or technical schools at equivalent levels). When demonstrators called for increased representation by Uyghur, Qazaq, and other non-Han officials, officials and their advisers pushed for more Han cadres to preserve stability. When Uyghurs repeatedly insisted that Han immigration stop, the government reinstated the PCC and then enacted a series of policies that dramatically increased the inflow of Hans. Officials expressly targeted those regions of Xinjiang where Hans were the scarcest, lavishing great state largesse on the completion of the Kashgar rail link with this aim in mind.⁵³ When students asked for greater respect for Uyghur culture, the government chose to phase out bilingual education and has made a bid to eliminate the use of Uyghur (and Qazaq) as a high-prestige language (Dwyer 2005). And when Uyghurs sought local indigenous remedies to social ills such as alcoholism and drug abuse, the government cracked down on these autonomous social organizations (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009; Daucher 1999, 2004:286–92).

The party-state has relied heavily on a particular strategy for breaking up existing organizations and thwarting the emergence of new ones. Security officials make a point of targeting the leaders of protests for prosecution and heavy sentences as a cautionary example to others. This practice broadcasts the message that potential movement leaders have nothing more to gain than do rank-and-file participants and they also have more to lose (Cai 2002:333; see also Tanner 1999:11). Deterring would-be leaders from taking the initiative has so far been widely effective. One researcher found in interviews with disgruntled workers that many were waiting for someone else to organize a protest, with the excuse that

once that happened, "I would definitely participate" (Cai 2002:333). This echoes the comments of the many Uyghurs expecting others to take the initiative in 1997, as described in chapter 3.

Officials in China's inland regions have admitted that they are seeking to convey a "strong signal" to the wider population that "there is nothing to be gained from causing trouble" (Hurst 2004:108). In Xinjiang as in the interior, PSB and other officials have similarly gone after the leaders of movements, ostentatiously singling them out for arrest and harsh punishment while treating most participants in demonstrations leniently. Unlike in the interior, movement leaders in Xinjiang have, on numerous occasions, been publicly executed for the crime of "splittism."

Chinese scholars have attempted to carry out in their descriptions of protest events what police have done on the ground: isolate the leaders from the putatively guileless and therefore blameless masses. The strategy on paper has been to condemn "a few bad people" (Chen Chao 1990:234; XUAR Local Gazetteer Editorial Committee 1997:77) or people with "ulterior motives" (J K P Š U A R komiteti täšwiqat bölümi, 2000?:49; Xu Yuqi 1999:110–12) for fomenting uprisings. In the case of the October 1981 riot after the shooting of a Uyghur youth, official sources identified the "Central Asian Uyghurstan Youth Sparks Party," formed only the month before, as the instigator. Three members of the organization supposedly rushed to the scene within half an hour of the shooting and whipped bystanders into a riotous fury (Zhu Peimin, Chen Hong, and Yang Hong 2004:209). The sources' authors do not try to explain, but instead explain away, the participation of large numbers, asserting that the masses "did not know the true situation" or noting that college students, because of their "ignorance and susceptibility to incitement," could be induced to march in the streets and shout anti-Han and pro-independence slogans (Xu Yuqi 1999:110–12). In other words, they worked hard to find an explanation for large protests safely distant from the far simpler and more straightforward political diagnosis that only because substantial numbers of Uyghurs are deeply disgruntled are they therefore available for, and willing to participate in, protests at the drop of a piece of fruit, the display of an offending slur, or the description of a scurrilous book. But the study of social movements around the world makes it clear that people participate in them for a great variety of reasons, and that variety does not vitiate their participation or the significance of the movement. Quite clearly, this rhetorical gesture by officials and scholars is a panicked attempt to avoid acknowledging the obvious and pervasive problem of Uyghurs' anger at the government.⁵⁴ In fact, if we discount the argument that Uyghurs are somehow more excitable and therefore prone to participate in "troublemaking" without inquiring into its purpose or likely outcome, we are led more strongly to the conclusion that

ordinary Uyghurs' availability for impromptu protests and organized ones alike is a clear index of that anger.

Government officials in Beijing and Ürümcü have, with very few exceptions, shown no tolerance for open protests by Uyghurs, whatever the motivation (Hastings 2005). In other words, no matter what the issue, Uyghurs do not have a right to express their discontent openly. A document promulgated by the XUAR party secretary in February 2002, shortly after the arrest of the poet Tursunjan Ämät, showed that officials in Xinjiang "equate any expression of dissatisfaction . . . even metaphorical or ironical, with separatist thought" (Becquelin 2004a:44).⁵⁵ In July 2002 Liu Yaohua, vice director of the Xinjiang PSB, told a foreign reporter that "any Uighur who advocated independence for Xinjiang was probably a terrorist" (Pan 2002). In December 2008, administrators squelching a planned protest against the sale of alcohol and cigarettes in shops told the Ürümcü college students involved that their demonstration would have been "an act of beating, smashing, and looting . . . forbidden by our country's laws." The event, they said, would have broadcast "reactionary speech" and undermined "stability and unity" (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2009).

Government regulations and governors' comments demonstrate how much more restrictive the political climate is in Xinjiang than in China's interior. The atmosphere in the XUAR has always been more tense precisely because so many Uyghurs resent both the fact and the nature of Chinese control. Despite denials by Ürümcü and Beijing, restrictions actually increased over the last decade.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF REPRESSION

The government has emphasized the message that protest is unacceptable and that any form of public dissent will be regarded as "splittism" and punished severely. There was at least one major political campaign in Xinjiang each year between 1996 and 2004, and every campaign "involved the arrest of hundreds," often followed by expedited convictions under drastically reduced evidentiary standards. The governing principle of the courtroom proceedings, underscored by Wang Lequan in a 2001 speech, has been the so-called two basics: "As long as the basic truth is clear and . . . basic evidence is verified," the legal apparatus is obligated to approve arrest, carry out speedy prosecution, and deliver a sentence (Becquelin 2004a:41; Human Rights Watch 2005:57).

The "strike hard" campaigns begun in Xinjiang in 1996 and repeated every year since have substantially raised the level of repression. At the outset, officials in Beijing worried that this move might trigger international disapproval, but they later

found that this was not so. Ma Dazheng noted with pleasure that between 1996 and 1998, the “forcefulness of our ‘strike hard’ [campaign] was massively increased [and yet] there was not a peep from the United States government” and that Western media paid little attention to the matter. Then in 1998, articles “sympathetic to split-tact activities” began to appear in the *International Herald Tribune*.⁵⁶ Worse, the U.S. State Department began to cover police action in Xinjiang in its annual report on human rights, and Western countries began to use this as a pretext to make trouble for China (Ma Dazheng 2003:208). In the end, Beijing was able not only to repeat the campaigns every year but even to increase their intensity. September 11 provided an excellent opportunity to ratchet up the force of repression yet again. Shielded by international concern about global terrorism, Beijing launched a “high-pressure strike hard” in 2002, a special “100 days’ strike hard” in 2003, and a “high-pressure strike hard” in 2004 with no time limit (Human Rights Watch 2005:67). In interviews with a reporter in 2002, Uyghurs admitted that they feared the police much more than they did terrorists (Pan 2002).⁵⁷

There is abundant evidence of continuing Uyghur discontent, or the party-state’s fear of it, since 2001. Han Zhubin, once the top prosecutor in China, revealed in mid-2003 that between 1998 and the end of 2002, the government had arrested 3,400 individuals throughout the country for threatening “state security.” Han indicated that there had been a sharp increase in prosecutions since September 11, with 1,600 of those individuals prosecuted after that date. One knowledgeable source calculated that roughly one-quarter of individuals known to have been prosecuted were non-Hans, even though Hans then made up 92 percent of the national population (“A Grim Reminder for the Central Government’s Opponents” 2003). Depending on how comprehensive the former prosecutor’s figures were, the proportion might have been much higher. A paper released by the Ministry of Justice reflected that 9.2 percent of all Uyghurs convicted in 2001 had received sentences for “state security crimes” (Human Rights Watch 2005:72). Statistics culled from various editions of the *Xinjiang Yearbook* reflect that 2,353 individuals were arrested in Xinjiang alone during the period that Han Zhubin cited, 1998 to 2002 (*Xinjiang yilnamisi*, 1998 through 2002). In the first eight months of 2004, the government had, according to its own reports, exposed and destroyed twenty-two groups carrying out “separatist and terrorist activities” and handed down fifty death sentences to people convicted of separatist activities (Ruwitch 2004). In August 2004, according to Agence France-Presse, “ethnic and religious tensions [were] flaring up again,” and an official in Khotān told AFP that eight people had been indicted in the last week of July for “endangering state security.” A Uyghur dissident organization reported that seventy-five

people, twenty-seven of them children, had been taken into custody in Khotān for “illegal religious activities” (Agence France-Presse 2004a). More recent official statistics count 1,300 people arrested for threatening state security in Xinjiang in the first eleven months of 2008, as against 742 in all of China in 2007, of which roughly half were in Xinjiang. It seems clear that Beijing greatly broadened the definition of a crime threatening state security in the months before the 2008 Summer Olympics. At the same time, the numbers can be read as an index of continuing concern in Beijing and Ürümcü about Uyghur discontent.

Officials’ deep fears of unrest can be read as well from moves to shore up the region’s political stability. In March 2005 the *Ürümcü Evening News* reported that police in the region’s capital city had been issued heavier weaponry, including sub-machine guns, and given training in counterterrorism (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2005b). A month later, officials announced that of seven hundred new government jobs opening in southern Xinjiang, where Uyghurs are the overwhelming majority of the population, five hundred would be open only to Han Chinese (U.S. Department of State 2006). The government-run *Xinjiang Daily* newspaper reported in September 2005 that 947 Hans had been dispatched from China proper to take up various government posts (“947 ming yuan jiang ganbu fen fu Tianshan nan bei” 2005). And in November 2008, the Central Military Commission in Beijing promoted the Xinjiang contingent of the People’s Armed Police from deputy to full corps command in order to “safeguard national security and social stability” (Xinhua 2008).

The relative rarity of protest on the periphery since 2001 should not be mistaken for evidence of increasing satisfaction among Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other non-Hans; not even resignation.⁵⁸ If the hegemony of market and state partly account for the relative quiescence of labor in China proper (Blecher 2002, 2004), we cannot attribute the rarity of protest by Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Mongols to hegemony of the “Chinese nation,” or the state.⁵⁹ There is too much evidence of everyday resistance, even in periods with little open protest. Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan’s bitter comment in a private meeting that “our cadres have no place in the hearts of the people” makes this point eloquently (Wang Lequan 1999:17).⁶⁰ The small and decreasing number of public protests and acts of violent resistance in Xinjiang since 2001 should not be interpreted as a sign that steady economic growth has made Uyghurs as a whole more materially contented and less concerned with politics and thus less inclined to engage in public resistance. Instead, viewed against the backdrop of increasing protests and violence in China proper and evidence of a pervasive wealth gap between Hans and Uyghurs in Xinjiang,

the falling protest numbers indicate the success of the party-state's actions to root out organizations and deter would-be protestors into quiescence—in short, not to resolve Uyghurs' grievances but to deprive them of the resources and opportunities to articulate them publicly. In fact, instead of addressing Uyghurs' dissatisfactions, many of the policy instruments used to quell protests actually exacerbated them.

■

But it would be a mistake to stop with the consideration of domestic effects. Paralleling the domestic crackdown was a regional clampdown on Uyghur individuals and organizations in Central Asia. This reduced or eradicated organizations, sources of weapons, the spread of propaganda, and other sources of support for activities in Xinjiang. More influential still was the dramatic reversal of an international trend toward more frequent humanitarian intervention, indeed, of a seeming revision in the status of state sovereignty, developing in the 1980s and 1990s. Antistate actors who might have won international sympathy and even logistical support, only a year or two earlier now found themselves recast as terrorists. States of all stripes from the most democratic to the brutally authoritarian could now repackage their efforts to squelch challengers as part of the "global war on terror."

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