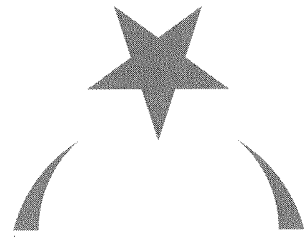


ect, with sporting teams and other...  
ly in other areas of the media (soaps, reality televi-  
ews, advertising), which in turn raises the national

.s.  
most obvious beneficiary of these changes. But his  
pop icon and general cultural commodity rolled  
re evidence of a neat, unmediated or necessary  
r socio-cultural events and forces and the field of  
nt that Beckham's connection with Manchester  
portant to his rise as his good looks, his wife's  
otball ability. Moreover, other factors such as the  
otball within the wider context of British sport,  
if sport vis-à-vis other cultural activities and fields  
usic and film), helped 'make' Beckham, to some  
eckham-as-commodity has emerged, like 'Rudin',  
fields and forces that are arbitrary and motivated,  
the terms (1971). They're arbitrary because any  
ther than Beckham) and sport (tennis or boxing or  
irt, pop music) could theoretically have filled the  
within the wider socio-cultural field. They're moti-  
omes were the result of a particular set of logics,  
ents of power: the ascendancy of the media and  
for reasons such as Beckham's Manchester United  
r wife and the relatively low costs associated with  
the media, Beckham and football were 'chosen' in

connected that what we understand by sport and its



## EPILOGUE ÜRÜMCI'S "HOT SUMMER" OF 2009

As this book was going to print, Ürünci erupted in violence once again. Scholars, officials, activists, and journalists have already begun to debate what happened and how to interpret it. I briefly summarize the events and offer my own, preliminary, interpretation.

As discussed in chapter 4, the frequency of protests fell dramatically in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, Xinjiang remained a contentious place and a political headache for Beijing, even in the absence of overt resistance, as chapter 3 illustrated. China's leaders hoped to avert widespread, sustained protest or violence in the region. And even though Beijing's concerns about the threat of international intervention eased in the wake of September 11, officials still worry about the "internationalization" of affairs in Xinjiang, as we saw in chapter 5. Both these concerns flared again with the outbreak of protests and violence in Ürünci in July 2009.<sup>1</sup>

The complete story of the events of July 5 and after will take some time to emerge. Important aspects of the events remain controversial, such as who organized the initial protests; what the protestors' aims were; whether the

government's heavily armed response provoked or followed the violence; how many people were killed, wounded, and arrested; and why bands of armed Han Chinese took to the streets several days later.

Most observers agree that the protest was touched off by a brawl that took place in late June 2009 in Guangdong Province, some two thousand miles away from Ürümci.<sup>2</sup> On June 25, responding to a rumor that several Uyghur men had raped two Han women at the Xuri Toy Factory in the city of Shaoguan—a story later repudiated by one of the women supposedly involved—Han workers stormed a dormitory where Uyghur workers lived. Armed with crude weapons such as iron bars and long knives, the Han workers attacked the occupants indiscriminately. Two Uyghurs were killed and several hundred were injured, according to official reports, whereas Uyghur expatriates claimed the casualties were much higher.

On the afternoon of July 5, hundreds of Uyghurs took to the streets of Ürümci to protest the government's handling of the episode. Even official Chinese sources acknowledge that for some three hours, the protests were peaceful.<sup>3</sup> Party officials in Beijing and Ürümci responded to the demonstration as they had to previous such protests, mobilizing the police with riot gear and paramilitary forces armed with automatic weapons. The police sought to bring the protest to a halt, and People's Armed Police (PAP) forces roamed the streets, trying to stop the violent attacks. But either they arrived too late, or according to some reports, they waited several hours to take decisive action while awaiting instructions from Beijing. On July 6 the government shut down the Internet and cell phone service and continued to bring PAP forces into Ürümci.

Chinese officials quickly claimed to have evidence that Rabiya Qadir and the World Uyghur Congress had organized and triggered the protest through a series of phone calls to relatives in Ürümci. Official media later repeated the charges that Rabiya was a terrorist and in league with ETIM, referring to "East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) organizations, including the W[orld] U[yghur] C[ongress]."<sup>4</sup> News stories asserted that the simultaneous eruption of violence in fifty different sites in the city proved it had been premeditated. They also announced that women in "long Islamic robes and head coverings" had directed the rioters, and that one even distributed clubs (Demick 2009). Initial figures counted 156 dead, 123 of them Han Chinese and 33 Uyghurs, and more than 1,000 wounded. More than 200 shops and 250 vehicles were destroyed (Watts 2009). The breakdowns by *minzu* disappeared soon after, and the final official tally was 197 killed and 1,721 injured, "most of them Han" (Wong 2009).

In a departure from previous practice, Beijing invited a group of foreign reporters to Ürümci to investigate and report on events there firsthand. They all were housed in the Hoi Tak Hotel, which reportedly had the only working Internet connection in the XUAR at the time. At one point, a group of journalists walking down a street were accosted by around two hundred women demanding that the government release their male relatives detained after the protests (Mackey 2009). Other journalists encountered a Han mob attacking a Uyghur man, who then turned on the journalists themselves, shouting that they were biased against China and trying to block their cameras (Lloyd 2009). International journalists wrote numerous stories from Ürümci investigating the extent of the violence and trying to clarify the causes. Although these reports praised the government for being more open to journalists, they also produced graphic evidence of the police handling unarmed protestors very roughly. Furthermore, the police prevented journalists from conducting some interviews, and some were detained (Choi Chi-yuk 2009).

On July 7, bands of Han Chinese roaming the streets with homemade weapons carried out revenge killings. No casualty figures were made available. The Han vigilantes drew considerable attention, with the international media reporting that they did not trust Beijing or local police forces to protect Han residents. The violence and tension were serious enough that on July 8, President Hu Jintao returned early from Italy, where he had been scheduled to take part in the G-8 summit. By Friday, July 10, the violence had reportedly stopped, but in order to avoid further conflict, the government posted placards announcing that all Ürümci mosques would be closed for Friday prayers and ordering men to pray at home. Groups of Uyghurs gathered angrily before a number of mosques, and the government relented, allowing several to open. On the same day, a smaller group of Uyghur protestors took to the streets to demand the release of those who had been detained. Even though the protestors were marching peacefully, riot police set upon them with truncheons and fists, an episode captured memorably by BBC video cameras.<sup>5</sup>

With the heavy police presence, the city reportedly quieted by July 11 but remained extremely tense. Officials referred to more than 1,400 people detained in connection with the events, and a month later the government announced it would try some 200 suspects, noting further that there would be a "drastic increase in security" in preparation for the trials (Cai Ke 2009).

August in Xinjiang was comparatively quiet, but by early September there were rumors of a rash of "syringe attacks" in various locales. When the Public Security Bureau sent a text message to Ürümci residents' cell phones, it set in motion an episode of mass hysteria (Reuters 2009). Of the 513 people claiming to be stabbing

victims, only 103 proved to have “signs of jabs, bumps or rashes.”<sup>6</sup> The rumors and panic spread quickly to other cities in Xinjiang. Of nine reported attacks in Khotän, BBC News reported that three were actually targeted, while four of five reported attacks in Altay and three of five in Kashgar were judged to be false alarms.

Medical researchers in Beijing dispatched to Ürümcı found no evidence of chemical toxins or infections in any cases, leaving open to question whether the remainder had no signs of punctures that had actually occurred or whether they had simply imagined them. On September 3, tens of thousands of people (reportedly mostly Han) marched in the streets of Ürümcı protesting the general feeling of insecurity and demanding that the government offer better protection. Li Zhi, Ürümcı’s party secretary, mounted a truck and addressed a large crowd of protestors with a loudspeaker, urging them to calm down and disperse. When the crowds did not leave, riot police then advanced on them with batons and tear gas. Several days later the government announced a ban on “illegal protests.” On September 3 Wang Lequan, the XUAR’s party secretary, addressed a large crowd that had gathered to protest the government’s handling of the reported syringe attacks. By the afternoon, some three thousand had gathered in Ürümcı’s People’s Square, and according to Xinhua reports, “tens of thousands” protested across the city. The crowd was strikingly disrespectful of Wang, shouting “Resign Wang Lequan, the government is useless!” and tossing plastic bottles in his direction (Hornby 2009). Although Wang kept his job, Li Zhi was relieved of his post. The hard-line police chief, by contrast, was promoted.



The framework of this book offers more insight into the summer’s events than any attempt simply to reconstruct those events and seek “concrete” causes could do. I offer three observations. First, the scope and violence of the protest on July 5 demonstrate that there is, in fact, extensive Uyghur discontent and that many Uyghurs are willing to brave government reprisals in order to express it publicly. Those reprisals were quick in coming, demonstrating similarly that party officials in Beijing and Ürümcı remain intolerant of public Uyghur protest. Second, there has been enormous disagreement about “what actually happened” in July and after, with both sides focusing on representing the events to an international audience. That disagreement has demonstrated the importance of representational politics in contemporary Xinjiang. Uyghur organizations and the Chinese party-state have devoted much energy to promulgating versions of the events useful to their political aims.

Third, Beijing has insisted that the July protests were orchestrated by a small number of splittists inside Xinjiang, in league with international agitators, most

prominently Rabiya Qadir, and that most participants in the riots were members of the masses who “did not know the real situation.” Officials have once again insisted the protests were orchestrated in order to vitiate the claim that they were spontaneous, and hence authentic, expressions of popular discontent. In addition, officials have described them as “splittist” and “terrorist” in order to justify the harsh crackdown, as splittist and terrorist activities are unacceptable by law. By continuing to invoke such old chestnuts as “black hands” behind the scenes, “hostile foreign powers,” the naïve masses, and “splittist” forces operating locally, officials have shown themselves unwilling, or unable, to move beyond its historical framing of Uyghur protest or to allow others to do so. These officials’ refusal to use or permit an alternative vocabulary and explanatory framework indicate the brittleness, and even the obsolescence, of Beijing’s vision.

Fourth, in an effort to make its version of events authoritative and to deny Uyghurs or others a space (or details) to propose a counterversion, the party-state has shut down international cell phone service from Xinjiang and has kept Web sites in Xinjiang off-line for more than three months (at this writing). The choice to invite foreign journalists to Ürümcı within a day of July 5 contrasts favorably with Beijing’s exclusion of journalists from Tibet after the protests there in the spring of 2008. Conversely, the gesture of apparent openness had clear limits: reporters were presented with audiovisual materials on the events and invited to government presentations, but they also were closely tailed when they ventured into the streets of Ürümcı and sometimes even were denied access to locals. Furthermore, when Beijing chose to install all the journalists in the Hoi Tak Hotel and provide them with the only working Internet connections in Xinjiang, it was reminiscent of the careful management of information at the time of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when hotels catering to foreigners had temporarily unfiltered access to the Web while the rest of China did not.

The Chinese government’s attempt to pin blame for the July 5 events on Rabiya and to label her as a terrorist with ties to ETIM and al Qaeda have proved fruitless and, in some cases, counterproductive. When Beijing pressured the Melbourne International Film Festival to exclude a film about Rabiya’s life, the festival organizers refused to do so. The subsequent publicity turned Australian public opinion sharply against Beijing and probably increased sympathy for Rabiya. She has only gained publicity and wider popular sympathy as a consequence.

From these facts we can infer, sadly, that hard-liners remain dominant at the regional and national levels. Although one prominent party official, Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang, suggested a few days later that the violence showed the

## EPILOGUE

need for Beijing to change its policies toward minorities, he did not offer specifics of either the policies' defects or his own proposals. Unfortunately, the outbursts of violence between early July and early September 2009 indicated, and surely exacerbated, mutual misunderstanding and hostility between Uyghurs and Hans in Xinjiang.

