



# A 'Struggle of Life or Death': Han and Uyghur Insecurities on China's Northwest Frontier

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# **A ‘Struggle of Life or Death’: Han and Uyghur Insecurities on China’s Northwest Frontier**

## **Abstract**

In July 2009, nearly 200 people were killed in ethnically targeted mass violence between Turkic-speaking Muslim Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Ürümchi, overshadowing the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC’s founding. How have ethnic relations between Han and Uyghurs deteriorated in to mass violence amongst ordinary people? This paper argues that the party-state exacerbates ethnic tensions between Han and Uyghurs through ethnocentric security narratives. These narratives frame China’s identity under threat from Turkic enemies within, supported by Islamic terrorists and Western ‘enemies of China’ from outside. Discourse analysis of official texts, participant-observation of security practices, and interviews with Han and Uyghurs will reveal the interplay between official identity discourses and everyday security practices before, during, and after the violence. Since July 2009, one official solution to violence has been production of a shared multi-ethnic identity, officially described as a ‘zero-sum political struggle of life or death’. However, Han-centric conceptualisations of ethnic unity promote Han chauvinism and produce the Uyghur as a security threat. The party-state thus produces hierarchical ethnic relations that exacerbate both Han and Uyghur insecurities, contributing to spirals of violence. China’s extra-judicial internment camps in Xinjiang are logical conclusions of the ethnocentric insecurity cycles analysed in this article.

## **Introduction**

Since 2017, China has operated mass extra-judicial internment camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), officially described as “Education and Transformation Centres”

(*jiaoyu peixun zhongxin*, 教育转化培训中心). Scholarly estimates using official sources suggest approximately one million people, 10% of the adult Uyghur population, have been interned.<sup>1</sup> Internment camps form part of regional party-chief Chen Quanguo's increasing controls over the Uyghur population since 2015 under the rubric of "de-extremification" (*qujiduanhua*, 去极端化).<sup>2</sup> These policies are logical conclusions of the ethnocentric insecurity cycles analysed in this article, where the state targets Uyghur identities as causes of violence. While the 2008 Beijing Olympics' slogan ("one-world-one-dream") circulated across official media, riots and inter-ethnic violence exploded in Lhasa, Tibet. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC's founding in 2009 was subsequently overshadowed by ethnically targeted violence between Turkic-speaking Muslim Uyghurs and the Han majority in Ürümchi, Xinjiang. Since 2009, a shared national identity based on ethnic unity (*minzu tuanjie*, 民族团结) has been officially described as a "zero-sum political struggle of life or death" and prerequisite to China's rise.<sup>3</sup> In official policy thinking, nightmarish, mirror-images to the prosperity and power of the Great Revival (*weida fuxing*, 伟大复兴) foretell China's collapse if minorities and Han fail to share this national identity. This paper asks how ethnic relations between Han and Uyghurs deteriorated in to mass violence amongst ordinary people. It analyses the interplay between official Chinese identity discourse and everyday micro-level security practices before, during, and after the July 2009 violence.

The mutually reinforcing nature of China's goals of global power and securing the identity of its internal cultural frontiers is overlooked in Eurocentric IR that builds knowledge through domestic/international dichotomies.<sup>4</sup> However, China specialists have

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<sup>1</sup> Zenz 2018, 1, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Roberts 2018, 246, 250.

<sup>3</sup> MOI 2009, 15.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. See: Mearsheimer 2010; Ikenberry 2014.

shown how domestic and international security are simultaneously framed through sharp distinctions between a domestic, civilised self and the international, barbaric other.<sup>5</sup> For example, China explains violence in Xinjiang as a “zero-sum political struggle of life or death” for a shared, civilised identity *against* the barbaric “inside/outside Three Evils” (*jingneiwai sangushili*, 境内外三股势力) of “terrorism, separatism, and extremism”.<sup>6</sup> The attributive phrase, “inside/outside”, targets Uyghurs inside China who identify as Turkic or Islamic as culturally external threats of “Islamic terrorism” and Western human rights, which aim to “split and contain China’s rise”.<sup>7</sup> Although Uyghurs generally identify through Turkic language and Islam,<sup>8</sup> official texts assert that *only* “the Three Evils” claim Uyghurs are “a Turkic *minzu*”<sup>9</sup> or “an Islamic *minzu*”.<sup>10</sup> Uyghurs are thus included as Chinese but by excluding their identity as a source of insecurity and attributing violence to the absence of their *Zhonghua Minzu* (中华民族) identity. China’s Great Revival and domestic identity narratives of 56 unified *minzu* are mutually constitutive referents of security in which rising, unified China must be secured against alternative, backward Uyghur identities. What Thomas Mullaney<sup>11</sup> termed the odd calculus of “55+1” conflates Han and China by separating and prioritising the Han over 55 minorities, enabling political control over their identities. However, the *minzu* concept also enables resistance from below through double-use as nation and ethnicity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Callahan 2004, 27.

<sup>6</sup> MOI 2009, 15.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see: Bekri 2009; MOI 2009; State Council 2009b.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see: Bovington 2010; Smith Finley 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Following Harrell (1990), *Minzu* (民族) is left untranslated because it does not entail self-identification.

<sup>10</sup> MOI 2009, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Mullaney 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Bovington 2010, 16.

This paper examines relations between Chinese identity and insecurity in official explanations of violence in Xinjiang. How was violence by different ethnic groups narrated into a story of China's identity and insecurity? How did this narrative shape official and unofficial security practices and how did these produce insecurity for the state? These narratives will be shown to produce hierarchical ethnic relations and different insecurities for different ethnic groups. The constitution of danger is considered dependent on those to whom it is a threat and state security practices as performative of identity-boundaries.<sup>13</sup> "Security often produces insecurity"<sup>14</sup> and securitised identity has different implications for differentially essentialised groups.<sup>15</sup> Understanding this security dynamic requires deeper consideration of popular "vernacular" insecurities.<sup>16</sup> In Xinjiang, vernacular resistance is officially conflated with armed organisation. Elite and popular representational politics constitute the identity-security contention itself.<sup>17</sup> Han and Uyghur responses to official security discourses, therefore, are central to understanding Chinese state-security.

The paper links discourse analysis of official texts to ethnographic analysis of protests in Xinjiang to show how official performances of identity-insecurities are re-interpreted by Han and Uyghurs to articulate alternative identity-insecurities. The paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork in Ürümchi (2009-2010), including participant-observations of security practices and over 100 detailed, semi-structured interviews with Han and Uyghurs. It builds on sparse available research on the July 2009 violence<sup>18</sup> but is the first detailed study to use interviews and participant-observations on Han perspectives in Ürümchi,

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<sup>13</sup> Campbell 1998, 1; Weber 1998, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Weber and Lacy 2011, 1021.

<sup>15</sup> Krishna 1999, xxix.

<sup>16</sup> Jarvis and Lister 2013; Stevens and Vaughan-Williams 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Bovington 2010, 7-9, 160.

<sup>18</sup> See: Millward 2009. Cliff 2016, chapter 7.

erroneously assumed to be indistinguishable from the party-state. Following the July 2009 violence, internet access and international communications were blocked for approximately 10 months “to prevent unrest”.<sup>19</sup> To analyse daily reproduction of identity-security discourses on the ground, therefore, it uses local newspapers and *minzu tuanjie* education texts universalised following the violence.

The first section analyses official discourse on events that sparked the July 2009 violence at the Xuri Toy Factory in Guangdong, when Han co-workers killed two Uyghur labourers and injured hundreds.<sup>20</sup> This section will show how boundaries between Han as embodiments of China and Uyghurs as ethnic outsiders were securitised by downplaying organised Han violence against Uyghurs. The absence of security response subsequently produced widespread Uyghur insecurity and sparked popular protests before the July violence. The second section explores how the July violence was conversely narrated as an existential identity-security threat in the classroom and ethnicised, street-level security practices. Uyghur violence against Han on the 5th was framed as existentially threatening, while violence against Uyghurs on the 7th was understood as a rational defence of personal and national security, constituting *Zhonghua Minzu's* hierarchical ethnic boundaries. The final section analyses these security dynamics following a spate of syringe assaults in the aftermath that culminated in mass Han protests for increased security and violence against Uyghurs. This section shows how Han and Uyghurs responded to official articulations of an insecure China under perpetual threat from Uyghur violence. Many Han felt *their* China was under threat while Uyghurs felt they faced the threat *of* China.

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<sup>19</sup> Xinhua 2009a.

<sup>20</sup> See Hess 2009; Millward 2009; Smith Finley 2011.

This paper argues that the party-state's ethnocentric security narratives exacerbate ethnic tensions between Han and Uyghurs. This ethnocentrism is driven by insecurity regarding 'barbarians' on China's imperial frontiers and their post-1949 transformation into ethnic minority subjects. These narratives frame China's identity under threat from Turkic enemies within, supported from outside by Islamic and Western enemies. Official security practices target Uyghur neighbourhoods and identity narratives as a source of insecurity, activating pre-existing stereotypes of Uyghurs as external cultural threats. Official discourse frames violence as ordinary incidents *or* exceptional threats depending upon the ethnicity of *who* is threatened. This bifurcated narration of violence constitutes majority-minority identities as oppositional, making Uyghurs and Han feel under perpetual threat. Han and Uyghurs respond by articulating alternative ethno-national identity-securitisations to counter official narratives of a multi-*minzu* China. China's leaders understand resolution of the insecurity produced through this dynamic in existential terms and the means to, and ends of, its global rise.

### **De-Securitisating Uyghurs: Majority Violence at *Shaoguan* '6-26'**

On June 25<sup>th</sup> 2009, Han workers entered their Uyghur co-workers' dormitory at the Xuri toy factory, attacking them with knives and metal pipes in large skirmishes, which left two Uyghurs dead and hundreds injured.<sup>21</sup> The violence occurred after a local website posted that 'Six Xinjiang boys raped two innocent girls'. *The China Daily* reported the incident as "triggered by a sex assault by a Uyghur worker toward a Han female worker".<sup>22</sup> These allegations turned out to be fabrications by Zhu Gangyuan, a factory worker who failed to

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<sup>21</sup> Hess 2009, 404

<sup>22</sup> Smith Finlay 2011, 90.

be re-employed after quitting his job.<sup>23</sup> A Han Chinese woman had accidentally entered the Uyghur men's dormitory and when the men shouted 'boo', her surprised scream activated ethnic stereotypes and official stories that she had been raped.<sup>24</sup> This section asks how the party-state conceptualised identity and security in explanations of violence by Han against Uyghurs. The violence by Han was officially deemed not to be a security matter and Uyghurs who understood it as such were subsequently framed as the real threat to China.

Chinese internal orientalist discourse represents southwestern ethnic minorities as agricultural, feminine, and backward but as integral components of China, relationally narrating majority Han identity as civilised, modern, and superior.<sup>25</sup> However, internal orientalism in Xinjiang reproduces stereotypes that Uyghur cultural inferiority and backwardness are security threats. Sexualised ethnic stereotypes, emergent in explanations of the Shaoguan incident, are common where Han frequently represent Uyghur men as primal "sexual predators".<sup>26</sup> These sexualised discourses circulate in the post-2012 struggle against "Islamic terrorism". Following unrest in Yecheng, 2012, then Xinjiang party chief, Zhang Chunxian, stated, "Show no mercy to these terrorists...we shall not let them wave knives at our women, our children, and our innocent people".<sup>27</sup> Official representations of primal Uyghur masculinity constitute threats to Chinese identity and official discourse activated popular justifications of *ethnic* hatred following the Shaoguan incident. *The Guardian* interviewed 20 locals, including police, who immediately believed allegations of sexualised violence by Uyghurs and claimed published casualties figures were kept

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<sup>23</sup>Xinhua. 2009. "Rumourmonger Held over South China Toy Factory Brawl," 29 June, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/29/content\\_11616274.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/29/content_11616274.htm). Accessed 14 June 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Millward, 2009; Sheehan 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Gladney 2004, 13-16; Schein 2000, 130.

<sup>26</sup> Smith Finley 2011, 82.

<sup>27</sup>Xinhua. 2012. "No Mercy for Terrorists," 7 March. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/07/c\\_131452573.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/07/c_131452573.htm). Accessed 19 June 2018.

artificially low. One young man said, “I just wanted to beat them. I hate Xinjiang people...we used iron bars to beat them to death”.<sup>28</sup> One local shop-owner told me, “Xinjiang people have a low level of civilisation...they chase and harass girls all the time”.<sup>29</sup> The alleged rape was understood as an attack on China (“our women”) because its violence against a Han person refuted the passive and feminine social position of ethnic minorities.

The political-economic context behind Shaoguan further illustrates how Han are positioned as sources of identity-security, while Uyghurs are expected to imitate their culture to reduce the security threat they represent. Reform-era policy in Xinjiang has engineered Han migration into minority areas through economic incentives, particularly labour opportunities in cotton and extractive industries.<sup>30</sup> Uyghurs, conversely, are sent to inner China to learn “modernisation” to transform “traditionally compact ethnic communities” and encourage “identification with the entire nation”.<sup>31</sup> “Ethnic dispersion” (*minzu fensan* 民族分散), measured by the number of minorities living in “scattered areas”, is officially described as “progress” and “unity” is exemplified by Xinjiang’s majority Han oil-producing cities, particularly Shihezi.<sup>32</sup> The Xuri factory was staffed through labour surplus export programmes from Xinjiang and 96,000 workers were transferred from southern Xinjiang in the first half of 2009.<sup>33</sup> The regional government invested 300-400 million RMB to transfer labour from Xinjiang, the third lowest population density by region in China and a net labour importer, to regions with the highest population density. The purpose of relocation was for Uyghurs to “become more open-minded” and “access modernisation”

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<sup>28</sup> Watts 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümchi, September 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Becquelin 2004, 358.

<sup>31</sup> Feng, Jianyong and Aney, Adil. 2009. “Build a Bridge that Binds Workers of all Hues”, *China Daily*, 3 September.

<sup>32</sup> State Council 2009a, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Hess 2009, 405.

through contact with majority Han.<sup>34</sup> ‘Modernisation’ is thus driven by non-economic logics of identity-security.

Ethnicised development strategies create considerable insecurity amongst Uyghurs and labour transfers raised concerns of ethnically targeted “forcible relocation”.<sup>35</sup> On July 7<sup>th</sup>, *China Labor Watch* tacitly acknowledged forcible relocations, stating that “most workers go willingly”, recommending Uyghurs be allowed to “leave the factory at their discretion”.<sup>36</sup> Officials targeted vulnerable groups for relocation, specifically young women.<sup>37</sup> One elderly Uyghur confided that his daughter was relocated following pressure from a party cadre.<sup>38</sup> A young intellectual from the same village in southern Xinjiang expressed anger that many families had done the same.<sup>39</sup> While labour transfer policies aimed to transform Uyghur identity, its ethnocentrism unintentionally produced cycles of insecurity between Uyghurs and the state.

Official explanations of violence by Han against Uyghurs at Shaoguan reproduced hierarchical relations between ethnic groups and alternative Uyghur explanations were treated as security threats. Official *minzu tuanjie* textbooks and Shaoguan government spokesman, Wang Qinxin, said the factory killings were a “very ordinary public order incident”, exaggerated to foment unrest.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, Uyghur rioters in Ürümchi were labelled “scum of the nation” in the same passages.<sup>41</sup> Violence against Uyghurs was a non-existential criminal matter to be dealt with by standard legal procedures (“ordinary public

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<sup>34</sup> Global Times. 2009. “Xinjiang Migrant Labour-Plan Combats Poverty,” 20 July, <http://china.globaltimes.cn/chinanews/2009-07/448670.html>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Hess 2009, 405-407.

<sup>36</sup> China Labor Watch. 2009. “Labor Violations Exacerbate Ethnic Tensions in South China,” 7 July, <http://www.chinalaborwatch.org/20090706uyghur.htm#>. Accessed 11 June 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Hess 2009; UHRP 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous interview, Xinjiang, December 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümchi, December 2009.

<sup>40</sup> MOI 2009, 106; Watts 2009.

<sup>41</sup> MOI 2009, 106.

order incident"). Xinjiang Regional Chairman, Nur Bekri, and Party chief, Wang Lequan, used televised speeches on July 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> to condemn "distortion of facts" by "the Three Evils".<sup>42</sup> *Minzu tuanjie* textbooks explained that "The Three Evils" have "distorted facts" and collaborated to "harm *minzu tuanjie*" and "split the nation" by representing the violence as a *minzu* problem.<sup>43</sup> The internal logic was that participants were criminals who "cannot represent every member of their *minzu*" and, unlike Uyghur complaints, this did not cause "*minzu* hatred", therefore, it was not a "*minzu* problem".<sup>44</sup> This de-securitisation invisibilised Uyghur insecurity caused by ethnically targeted Han violence. Furthermore, it framed alternative representations of violence as existentially threatening to Chinese identity. Uyghur representations of the violence as a security threat were, therefore, acts of terrorism committed by "the Three Evils". Official explanations securitised the party-state's narrative of Chinese identity as a fixed essence, which can only be represented by the state.

Downplaying Han violence and lack of state response produced insecurity amongst Uyghurs. There was no news coverage until the incident was spread across the blogosphere and it was October 10<sup>th</sup> before two Han men were sentenced.<sup>45</sup> Guilty parties received no punishment at the time and the absence of action sparked protests. The Public Security Bureau (PSB) sent SMS texts to every mobile phone in Xinjiang using the vocabulary of "public order", rather than national security, and without specifying punishments, a sharp contrast to those addressing violence by Uyghurs. The absence of state response to the Shaoguan violence contrasted with rapid online activity of Uyghurs who posted videos of

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<sup>42</sup> Bekri 2009; Wang 2009.

<sup>43</sup> MOI 2009, 8 & 16.

<sup>44</sup> MOI 2009, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Smith Finley 2011, 75-78.

the incident on *YouTube*, *Youku* and *Tudou*, which went viral across Xinjiang<sup>46</sup>. A protest for action against the murders of the Uyghurs in Guangdong was subsequently organised online in the early days of July. It began with a march in the city centre of Ürümqi at 5am on the 5<sup>th</sup> July from the South Gate (*Nanmen*) to People's Square (*Renmin Guangchang*). Almost one thousand Uyghurs protested and those heading the march waved large Chinese flags, chanting for "justice" and "equality".<sup>47</sup> Like Judith Butler's celebration of the American national anthem sung in Spanish, these protests were "articulations of plurality" which *ought* to exist.<sup>48</sup> The peaceful protest performatively enacted aspirations of justice and equality for Uyghurs in a multi-*minzu* China where commentary on organised murder of Uyghurs by Han is not a security matter.

Official Chinese accounts briefly mention the protest to dismiss its representation of events as threatening "lies" from "The Three Evils" to stir up separatism.<sup>49</sup> Unlike other protests in China, it was elevated as an existential threat to China's identity, instead of labelled as illegal interference with public order. It challenged the party-state's narratives on Shaoguan and *Zhonghua Minzu* where minorities are happy with their social position. The narrative of equality at the protest was framed as an external cultural threat, located in "Western discourses" of "democracy and human rights" to "split China".<sup>50</sup> Even claiming that Uyghurs waved Chinese flags on July 5<sup>th</sup> was designated a terrorist act because it was perceived to be aligned with accusations of inequality from "Western enemies". The protest

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<sup>46</sup> Youtube. 2009. "Race Riot in China," 29 June, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUPHVf5yDM4>. Accessed 14 September 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Millward 2009, 351-352. Videos of these events were posted on *Youtube* but have since been removed.

<sup>48</sup> Butler and Spivak 2007,60-61.

<sup>49</sup> MOI 2009, 17.

<sup>50</sup> MOI 2009, 16.

for genuine equality made the state insecure because it challenged China's identity as unified, non-western, and built on boundaries between active Han and passive minorities.

### **Securitising Han-centrism: '7-5' and '7-7'**

This section examines how identity-security narratives that framed violence by Uyghurs on the 5th July as a threat to China but invisibilised Han violence against minorities on the 7th constitute and securitise the hierarchical boundaries of *Zhonghua Minzu*. Xinjiang has witnessed recurrences of Uyghur resistance to the Chinese state since incorporation into the Qing Empire in 1759 and being named Xinjiang ("new frontier") in 1884. Sean Roberts expressed surprise that tensions "had not boiled over into such violence until now", particularly given the explosion of political violence in the 1990s.<sup>51</sup> Just days before the incident, Uyghur journalist, Heyrat Niyaz, warned the regional government that monolingual education policies and labour transfers had angered nationalists and professionals whose jobs were under threat.<sup>52</sup> However, no violence in Xinjiang between 1997 and 2008 can be accurately attributed to terrorism and it represented a "departure from, not a culmination of, past patterns".<sup>53</sup>

Widespread violence was committed by ordinary people against other ordinary people on a scale unseen in contemporary China. This distinguished it from paradigmatic incidents in Baren and Ghulja in the 1990s, which had targeted police stations and official security

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<sup>51</sup> Roberts, Sean. 2009. "Ethnic Clashes in Xinjiang", *Washington Post*, 8 July, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2009/07/07/DI2009070701491.html>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Asia Weekly. 2009. "Weizu NGO Gongzuozhe qian Xinjiang Fazhibao Zongbianbao Zhuren Hailaiteta zai Qiwu Shijian jiu Yujing (Uyghur NGO Worker & former Xinjiang Legal News Editor-in-Chief gave warnings before 7-5)," 2 August, [http://www.yzzk.com/cfm/Content\\_Archive.cfm?Channel=ag&Path=2311577102/30ag3a.cfm](http://www.yzzk.com/cfm/Content_Archive.cfm?Channel=ag&Path=2311577102/30ag3a.cfm). Accessed 11 June 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Millward 2009, 348-349.

institutions. According to official Chinese government figures, the violence resulted in 197 deaths, over 1,721 injuries, “looting and burning” of 131 shops, 633 “damaged houses”, and 1,206 destroyed vehicles.<sup>54</sup> Many targets were symbols of luxury and ethnic inequality, including car dealerships, which tend to be owned by Han.<sup>55</sup> Official articulations of Han people as instruments of “modernisation” and security positions them above Uyghurs in China’s ethno-hierarchy. However, as symbols and minor beneficiaries of China’s strategy in Xinjiang, ordinary Han became victims of violence, trapped between Uyghurs and the party-state. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, hundreds of Han residents responded by organising into vigilante groups, targeting random Uyghurs. Uyghurs, Han, and security services were all perpetrators and victims.<sup>56</sup> The spiralling of events bore hallmarks of Bovingdon’s “snowballing”, where mass discontent during the 1990s led Uyghurs to protest once numbers grew and it became safer.<sup>57</sup> However, unlike the 1990s, this was violent, inter-ethnic snowballing.

Videos of men, women, and children being killed on July 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> circulated on mobile phones across the city. Uyghur, Han, Hui, and foreign eyewitnesses told stories of people being thrown to the ground and stamped to death by crowds.<sup>58</sup> Multiple Uyghur, Han, Mongolian, Kazakh, Hui, and foreign eyewitnesses all explained how the violence was ethnically targeted and how they had to placate different rioting groups by declaring their ethnicity<sup>59</sup>. The mixed Uyghur-Han area of Zhongwan Street, south-east of Yan’an Street saw Uyghur rioters torch Han shops, dragging people from cars and beating them.<sup>60</sup> Uyghur rioters built impromptu roadblocks across Saimachang, the Xinjiang University area, parts of

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<sup>54</sup> MOI 2009, 3-4; Xinhua 2009a.

<sup>55</sup> Smith Finley 2011, 79-80.

<sup>56</sup> RFA 2009; Roberts 2012, 15-16.

<sup>57</sup> Bovingdon 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous interviews: 58 Han residents and 55 Uyghur residents, Ürümqi, September 2009-April 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Drawn from interviews. See: RFA 2009; Millward 2009; Smith Finley 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Millward 2009, 52.

Yan'an Street, and the *Erdaoqiao/Döngköwrük* shopping area. According to official reports,<sup>61</sup> violence initially exploded at the People's Hospital on *Shengli Lu* (Victory Street) adjacent to Xinjiang University. However, official narratives conflated protest and violence by asserting that the "incident" at People's Square and violence at the University were enacted by the same "terrorists" despite being half an hour bus ride apart.

The Chinese state understood the July violence as a pivotal security matter superseding international commitments. President Hu Jintao cut short attendance at G8 meetings and returned to Beijing<sup>62</sup>. By the 9<sup>th</sup>, Hu publicly declared that "7-5" was a "grave, violent incident with a deep political background" and a plot by "the inside/outside Three Evils" to "destroy *minzu tuanjie*, harm prosperity, and split the motherland".<sup>63</sup> "7-5" was unconvincingly described as an internationally funded, synchronised terrorist attack because Uyghurs involved drove buses and trucks stacked with rocks.<sup>64</sup> The related violence against Uyghurs on the 7<sup>th</sup> July was never explicitly acknowledged and no arrests were made. All July casualties were included under the "7-5 incident" as synonymous with the "struggle of life or death" between China and the "inside/outside Three Evils".

The contrasting absence of media coverage or official reference to the violence of "7-7" normatively ordered meanings of materially similar acts of violence. City party secretary, Li Zhi, met Han rioters on the streets of Ürümqi on the 7<sup>th</sup> and chanted "down with terrorists", asking rioters to "unite and build a better Ürümqi" but without condemning their violence.<sup>65</sup> Then regional party chief, Wang Lequan's televised speech on the 7<sup>th</sup> solely

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<sup>61</sup> For example, see MOI 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Xinhua. 2009. "Chinese President Back Home After Italy Visit," 8 July. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/08/content\\_11674664.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/08/content_11674664.htm). Accessed 19 June 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Hu 2009, 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> MOI 2009, 3-5.

<sup>65</sup> Xinhua. 2009. "Fresh Chaos Erupts in Urumqi," 7 July. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/07/content\\_11666941.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/07/content_11666941.htm). Accessed 11 June 2018.

discussed violence against Han as a “strategy” of the “inside/outside Three Evils” to “destroy *minzu tuanjie*”.<sup>66</sup> Wang then addressed Han rioters as “comrades”, explaining that Han “operations” were “not needed” because the security apparatus was now in control.<sup>67</sup> Official calls for “clear heads” represented an increasingly insecure state’s attempt to calm violence by Han but failed to address Uyghur insecurity. Official descriptions of Han violence against Uyghurs as rational security “operations” by “comrades” ethnicised and normatively ordered ethnic identities. Uyghur violence was an irrational identity-security threat to China because it threatened the ethnic majority. Han violence was a non-security matter because they were rational insider “comrades” struggling *for* China. The referent of Chinese security discourses in Xinjiang, therefore, is a Han-centric narrative of China under threat from “the Three Evils”.

The production of “7-5” as a reified and singular event concealed the mass, decentred violence that engulfed Ürümchi and enabled its representation as a life or death struggle between good (Chinese) and evil (Uyghurs). Official conflation of peaceful protest and mass violence generally deny that protest expresses popular sentiment bearing any relation to how ordinary Uyghurs (or Han) identify themselves.<sup>68</sup> The meaning of “7-5” was officially summarised through constant repetition of slogans that it was “not a *minzu* problem, not a religious problem but a political problem of defending the unity of the nation and fundamental interests of the masses”.<sup>69</sup> Uyghur violence and discontent were framed together as evil threats from outside China while Han violence was invisibilised:

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<sup>66</sup> Wang 2009, 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>68</sup> Bovingdon 2010, 121.

<sup>69</sup> MOI 2009, 4; Bekri 2009; Wang 2009.

Why did the hatred of a minority of thugs cause so much damage to members of other *minzu*?...they are unable to correctly distinguish truth from lies or friend from enemy...so to overcome narrow-minded *minzu* feelings and consciousness, we must establish correct *minzu* feeling and consciousness...and never waver in intense struggle against “The Three Evils”.<sup>70</sup>

Official education texts, as quoted above, made everyday thinking about identity a security issue by framing acceptance of official binarising narratives as an existential matter for China’s survival. These texts claim “reactionary ideology has been instilled into the minds of youth” “as pretexts by anti-Chinese international forces” to “harm *minzu* relations” and “attack the party and country”.<sup>71</sup> Terrorists’ attempts to use students to “distort Xinjiang history and interfere with *minzu* relations” were broadly defined, including thinking that Uyghurs are a Turkic or Islamic *minzu*, “everyday discussions” of “*minzu* history and the contemporary *minzu* situation”, promoting ideas such as “justice” and “equality”, activities like “making friends, recognising each other’s hometowns, and student parties”, participation in protests, and opposition to monolingual education policies.<sup>72</sup> Universities rounded up Uyghur students involved in the protest, who reported to party representatives before being confined and monitored in dormitories and sent to additional *minzu tuanjie* education classes.<sup>73</sup> The staff responsible for identifying students with “thinking problems” stated that they were guilty of becoming “too excited” and “shouting bad things”, including “justice” and “equality”.<sup>74</sup> The identity and social activities of Uyghur students were judged

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<sup>70</sup> MOI 2009, 67-68.

<sup>71</sup> MOI 2009, 96.

<sup>72</sup> MOI 2009, 96-99.

<sup>73</sup> Anonymous interviews with two university staff, Ürümchi, October 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., December 2009.

and punished outside the legal system and no students were officially charged. Alternative thought that responded to ethnic targeting was framed as an ethnocentric security threat to China's identity. Security discourses gave Uyghurs an impossible identity binary: to be good Chinese *minzu* helping China rise or evil terrorists, collaborating with the West to split China.

The party-state's street-level security response reproduced these hierarchical ethnic boundaries through observably ethnicised practices. Ethnicised targeting by military and neighbourhood patrols reflected an acceleration of the pre-existing 'heightened surveillance' of Uyghurs' daily lives.<sup>75</sup> Martial law came into effect at 9pm on July 7<sup>th</sup> under the rubric of "traffic controls".<sup>76</sup> Two days later, tens of thousands of troops arrived from regional headquarters in Lanzhou, Gansu. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) supplemented the police, People's Armed Police (PAP), and Special Police who already patrolled the city, blocking all major traffic junctions. Security practices designated Uyghur neighbourhoods as a threat through heavily armed military patrols, neighbourhood patrols, and newly installed CCTV. Areas where Uyghur violence had exploded, including Xinjiang University and *Erdaoqiao/Döngköwrük*, were heavily militarised for months with PLA patrols, armed PAP stations on most street corners, security gates, bag-checks, and constant flashing of surveillance cameras. By contrast, Han-populated hotspots of violence against Uyghurs on the 7<sup>th</sup>, such as Xinjiang Normal University and *Qingnian Lu*, were only lightly patrolled by the PAP and left to neighbourhood watch patrols of Han volunteers approved by local work units (*danwei*). Posters advertised for volunteers who wore patrol armbands but openly armed other Han residents. By September's end, I had observed dozens of neighbourhoods in the north with Han men aged from 18 to mid-60s, armed with large clubs and parading

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<sup>75</sup> Anthony 2011, 51-52.

<sup>76</sup> Wang 2009, 10.

without training, in the name of security. Videos online showed the PAP distributing large wooden clubs to random Han Chinese residents during the violence of July.<sup>77</sup> On *Qingnian Lu*, potentially lethal extendable batons were sold for 20 *kuai* in windows of a discount underwear shop and sold out in one day. Ethnically targeted surveillance perpetuated the ethnicised and ever-present threat of violence, while Han children played on busy streets with their new deadly toys, attracting no attention.

Hu Jintao's speech on the 7<sup>th</sup> stated that "7-5 was over"<sup>78</sup> but Han insecurity was evident through observation and conversations with local Han residents even during September.<sup>79</sup> Most Han interviewees warned me never to visit "dangerous", "terrorist" Uyghur areas. Several told me they had not even left their street since July. Within a single day of walking across the city I observed six instances of Han Chinese parents physically dragging their children away from random Uyghurs. Most Han interviewees were eager to tell me the "truth about 7-5" with twelve interviewees expressing pride regarding the events of July 7<sup>th</sup>, saying "we battered the Uyghurs!" or "we proved we *too* are a unified *minzu*". Like popular interpretations of the Shaoguan violence, official discourse activated rather than produced ethnic hatred and people often framed their everyday insecurities using grand geopolitical discourse. Ordinary residents redeployed "the Three Evils" discourse against Uyghurs and designated them as culturally external terrorist threats. 17 local Han informants explained that ethnically targeted violence against Uyghurs was necessary because the government was "too slow" and "too soft" in dealing with "Uyghurs", "terrorists", and "the Three Evils", all used interchangeably. *Ethno-centric* official discourse

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<sup>77</sup> UHRP 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Hu 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Anonymous interviews with 58 Han residents, Ürümqi, September 2009-April 2010.

was deployed to articulate an alternative, *chauvinist* mono-ethnic identity-security where all Uyghurs are culturally external Turkic threats to China.

The subsequent insecurity felt by Uyghurs in fear of state violence and Han vigilantes has remained relatively undiscussed in English and Mandarin sources. One young, politicised intellectual explained the July violence by saying, “If you have a boiling pot of water and keep the lid on too tight, it will eventually boil over”.<sup>80</sup> World Uyghur Congress (WUC) spokesperson, Alim Seytoff, explained that tensions had been rising “because of the Chinese government’s political propaganda, indoctrination of Chinese people...and portraying Uyghurs...as terrorists, separatists, and Islamic radicals”.<sup>81</sup> Uyghur campaign groups reconceptualised the inside/outside of identity-security by viewing these events as an opportunity to invite the ‘outside’ in and hear Uyghur insecurities. Most Uyghur interviewees and several eye-witnesses explained the outbreak of violence as a response to heavy handed policing at the peaceful protest.<sup>82</sup> Several claimed a policeman struck a female Uyghur at the square. Uyghur eyewitness interviews claimed the protestors only moved to *Nanmen*, where reports of violence eventually emerged, *after* the police moved into the square to detain people<sup>83</sup>. All non-Han interviewees expressed insecurity by explaining they were too frightened to leave their homes for days because they could see Han mobs with weapons and hear near-constant screams. Multiple Uyghur interviewees described constant police gunshots in the city centre, *Erdaoqiao/Döngköwrük*, and the university area on the 5<sup>th</sup>. They assumed the continuous gunshots of the security forces targeted Uyghurs, staying inside and in many cases, hiding overnight to escape. For many

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<sup>80</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümqi, February 2010.

<sup>81</sup>PBS. 2009. “Tensions Remain High in China Following Deadly Riots,” 7 July, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec09/china2\\_07-07.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec09/china2_07-07.html). Accessed 24 January 18.

<sup>82</sup> Anonymous interviews with 55 Uyghur residents, Ürümqi, September 2009-April 2010.

<sup>83</sup> RFA 2009.

Uyghurs, state violence was understood in tandem with that of ordinary Han residents as a violent threat.

Official explanations of the July 2009 violence securitised boundaries within *Zhonghua Minzu* by narrating Uyghur violence as a threat to China's unified identity and by downplaying Han violence. The party-state framed alternative interpretations to its identity-security narrative as terrorism from outside China's cultural boundaries. The greatest threats to China were not invading states or armed separatist groups but alternative minority conceptualisations of identity and security that challenge notions that they are happy with their inferior social position in *Zhonghua Minzu*. The referent of official identity-security in Xinjiang, therefore, is not the living, breathing Han people themselves but an ethnicised identity-security narrative that constitutes hierarchical relations between majority and minorities.

### **After '7-5': Insecuritisation and the Ethnic Threat**

The aftermath of the July violence saw a spate of small-scale assaults and robberies by Uyghurs using syringes against Han across Ürümqi. These continued for several months and culminated in mass Han Chinese protests for increased security measures. This section uses participant-observations to explore how security practices produce different insecurities for Han and Uyghurs because they essentialise these groups in different ways. On September 5th, *Xinhua* reported the syringes contained drugs, despite China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences' announcement that 6 months of close observation was required to make this determination.<sup>84</sup> Xinjiang residents received SMS messages on September 13<sup>th</sup> from the

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<sup>84</sup> Xinhua, 2009c; 2009d.

PSB stating, “syringe attacks are a continuation of 7-5” committed by terrorists and all citizens have responsibilities to “resolutely struggle” for *minzu tuanjie*. The PSB explained that “no matter what tool is being used”, these attacks “create an atmosphere of terror and interfere with social order” and would meet a prison sentence between 5-15 years.<sup>85</sup> By September 16<sup>th</sup>, the PSB announced 75 arrests for related incidents. By contrast, a copycat spate of syringe stabbings, committed by Han perpetrators in Xi’an, was treated as an “ordinary criminal investigation”.<sup>86</sup> AIDS and drug use are frequently stereotyped as Uyghur problems across China and these stereotypes are activated in periodic regional health scares. In late 2007, the Ürümchi City Health Department sent public SMS messages stating that “Uyghurs” had strategically infected kebabs with HIV across the region. In November 2011, the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Health in Beijing had to publicly deny rumours that 20,000 HIV infected terrorists had again laced food with blood.<sup>87</sup> Syringe assaults in Xinjiang were narrated through these stereotypes into framings of violence by minorities as biological threats to China’s organic cultural integrity, what Sean Roberts termed the “biopolitics of exclusion”.<sup>88</sup> These narratives heightened different insecurities for Han and Uyghurs as the PSB and Regional Government publicised new regulations demanding residents, “the frontline” in fighting “terrorism”, remain “on guard” to report neighbours and family for everyday “abnormal behaviour”.<sup>89</sup>

The party-state continued to securitise its *Zhonghua Minzu* narrative by elevating what later transpired to be minor assaults to the level of national security threats, further

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<sup>85</sup> Quanjian Zhuahuo 75 ming ‘Zhenci’ Zuifan (Seizing 7-5 Syringe Criminals Across Xinjiang), *Chenbao*, 16 September 2009; XUAR Gonganting 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Xi’an Fasheng Yisi Zhenci Shanghai (Outbreak of Syringe Assaults in Xi’an), *Chenbao*, 17 September 2009.

<sup>87</sup> People’s Daily, 2011.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts 2018, 236.

<sup>89</sup> XUAR, 2010, articles 2, 5, 9, and 16.

exacerbating street-level insecurity. This insecurity was exemplified in huge gaps between genuine attacks and erroneous claims. The Regional Government originally announced that between August 20<sup>th</sup> and September 2<sup>nd</sup> there were 476 incidents at hospitals in which 531 people were injured.<sup>90</sup> However, by September 4<sup>th</sup>, only 89 of 476 officially reported incidents were confirmed as cases of syringe attacks.<sup>91</sup> On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, a PSB SMS text told the city that only 15 people had been genuinely injured in syringe attacks. By mid-September 2009, *Xinhua* explained that bodily harm committed by the syringe assaults was minimal and no victims contracted any diseases.<sup>92</sup> Jackie Sheehan reported that many such incidents even turned out to be mosquito bites.<sup>93</sup> Many syringe incidents were openly explained as muggings but listed as terrorist incidents and added to the casualty figures of “7-5”, compounding perceived levels of security threat.<sup>94</sup> Local newspapers reported numerous cases where victims chased and apprehended alleged attackers but public reports ignored the security threat this posed to Uyghurs. Several non-Uyghur eye witnesses described one incident on September 3<sup>rd</sup> at *Nanhu Lu* where three Uyghurs were dragged from a public bus and battered to death by Han residents. The victims were accused of syringe attacks and the mob prevented the PLA and ambulances from entering the scene until they were dead. The state was unable to prevent and unwilling to prosecute Han for killing Uyghurs. It had heightened Han insecurities by positioning them as the “frontline” in fighting terrorism and framing majority violence as “operations” to secure China.

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<sup>90</sup> Zizhiq Tongbao Wushi Zhenci Shanghai Anjian Qingkuang (Regional Government Announces Situation regarding Syringe Assault Incidents), *Chenbao*, 3 September 2009.

<sup>91</sup> *Xinhua* 2009b.

<sup>92</sup> Zui Ming Xiangtong Weihe Zhongxing bu tong (How accusations are not equivalent to charges), *Chenbao*, 18 September 2009.

<sup>93</sup> Sheehan 2009.

<sup>94</sup> *Xinhua*. 2009. “4 prosecuted for endangering public security in Urumqi syringe attacks,” 5 September, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/05/content\\_12001771.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/05/content_12001771.htm). Accessed 21 June 2018.

The heightened and ethnicised insecurity drawn from official narratives culminated in a mass rally on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, which the party-state struggled to control. Tens of thousands of residents, almost entirely Han Chinese, assembled across Ürümchi at the North gate (*Beimen*), *Nanmen*, and People's Square.<sup>95</sup> State-media described the rally as “protests against syringe attacks” and “for security”, informing readers how protestors waved Chinese flags and shouted “severely punish the mob”.<sup>96</sup> Chinese media overlooked the vast numbers involved and subsequent violence against Uyghurs in revenge for syringe attacks. Han protests were never linked to this associated violence, sharply contrasting against official discourse that wrote Uyghur protests and waving of Chinese flags out of the public record. Protests by minorities were existentially threatening to Chinese identity but Han protests were officially framed as *for* security and aligned with the party-state against the “inside/outside Three Evils”.

Analysis of the protests, however, reveals more complex identity-security politics than suggested by binary divisions between pro-CCP Han and separatist Uyghurs. The party-state struggled to contain the Han protest and restored martial law as state insecurity grew. Chinese media failed to mention the PAP's use of tear gas to disperse the Han crowd.<sup>97</sup> Nor did it mention that thousands of PLA troops and PAP were posted to block their passage on all major thoroughfares running south towards Uyghur neighbourhoods on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Groups of Han protestors attempted but failed to break past military cordons to reach the

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<sup>95</sup> Verified by foreign eye-witnesses, several Uyghurs, and most Han interviewees.

<sup>96</sup> Xinhua 2009b.

<sup>97</sup> Reporting was tightly controlled and Associated Press reporters had cameras and tapes confiscated by paramilitary forces, reporting two separate instances of serious physical violence against reporters. See: Foreign Correspondent's Club of China (FCCC). 2009. “Urumqi Police Seize Cameras During Protest,” 4 September, <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/09/04/urumqi-police-seize-cameras-during-protest/>. Accessed 19 June 2018; FCCC. 2009. “Urumqi Armed Police Beat Journalists, Confiscate Tapes,” 4 September, <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/09/04/urumqi-armed-police-beat-journalists-confiscate-tapes/>. Accessed 19 June 2018.

Uyghur district. *Jiefang Lu* (Liberation Street), which runs from the symbolic centre of the city, *Nanmen*, all the way through the Uyghur district was fenced off and guarded with tanks, armoured cars, and approximately 1,000 troops armed with machine guns and riot shields, facing north to block potential Han Chinese rioters. Large-scale military roadblocks stayed in full force for weeks, controlling flows of people from Han-populated areas to Uyghur areas and vice versa.

All Han protestors interviewed confirmed their participation stemmed from feelings of insecurity after the syringe assaults and most expressed disappointment at the lack of executions of “Uyghurs” following July 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>98</sup> Participants interviewed were all *getihu*<sup>99</sup> or working class. All framed it as a Han protest, using vocabulary such as “we Han” and “our *minzu*” to describe participants. A late-30s female small business owner, grinned and raised her fist as she told me there were “big protests” against Uyghurs and the government on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>100</sup> The *New York Times* quoted a retired Han Chinese woman, saying “the government hasn’t done anything...they haven’t kept order. We’re all so angry”.<sup>101</sup> When a mid-20s male taxi driver said, “we fought back”, we referred to Han who attacked Uyghurs.<sup>102</sup> Violence by Uyghurs was understood as threatening to Han cultural superiority, which the government failed to secure. At the street-level, the ethnocentric grammar of official nationalism was ironically mobilised in Han Chinese resistance to the party-state’s multi-*minzu* China, who articulated alternative, ethno-nationalist identity-insecurity. Since large-scale security sweeps in Saimachang and *Erdaoqiao/Döngköwrük* on July 6<sup>th</sup>, Uyghur

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<sup>98</sup> Approximately half of 58 Han interviewed confirmed participation or attendance.

<sup>99</sup> *Getihu* refers to small-scale, self-employed entrepreneurs.

<sup>100</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümqi, October 2009.

<sup>101</sup> Wong, Edward. 2009. “New Protests Reported in Restive Chinese Region”, 3 September, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/world/asia/04china.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/world/asia/04china.html?_r=1), *New York Times*. Accessed 22 June 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümqi, November 2009.

exile groups claimed that more than 10,000 Uyghurs have been reported missing<sup>103</sup>. Hundreds of disappearances and arbitrary detentions were insufficient to calm Han protestors who sought to restore Han superiority through violent ethnic revenge for “7-5”.

The protests were against Uyghurs but directed to the state. Protesters called for then regional party chief, Wang Lequan, to be sacked.<sup>104</sup> A PAP poster display of “7-5” identified Rebiya Kadeer, the Uyghur campaigner based in Washington DC, alongside the Dalai Lama, as the “life or death enemy”. However, more vandalism was visible on the image of Wang Lequan, now seen as an ethnic traitor, than any other when Han Chinese protestors scratched and drew over his face (see figure 1). Chants at the protest to “kill the Uyghurs” were heard alongside chants of “kill Wang Lequan”.<sup>105</sup> Seven different participants raised their fist to me, shouting “kill Wang Lequan, kill the Uyghurs”, as if synonymous, expressing anger that they were stopped from reaching *Döngköwrük/Erdaoqiao* to “kill the Uyghurs”.<sup>106</sup> Although racist framings did predominate, they were not adopted by all participants. One male, self-employed, middle-aged Han Chinese resident explained that people took to the streets because “Han are angry” with the “lack of security”, particularly due to the syringe attacks, but also with “unemployment” and “inequality between Xinjiang and the rest of China”.<sup>107</sup> One late-40s *getihu*, from Ürümqi, explained, “It’s a political problem. Nothing to do with ordinary people...Wang Lequan kill kill kill (raises fist)! There was no response. They did nothing. Wang Lequan is useless. He only looks out for himself, so Xinjiang is still poor compared to the rest of China. He does nothing...things are not

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<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW). 2009. “We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them,” 1 October, <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/xinjiang1009webwcover.pdf>. Accessed 16 June 2018; RFA, 2012. “Party Member Among Missing,” 14 June. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/member-06142012174311.html>. Accessed 16 June 2018; UHRP, 2011.

<sup>104</sup> Millward 2009.

<sup>105</sup> Many Han interviewees proudly discussed this slogan.

<sup>106</sup> From interviews with 58 Han residents, Ürümqi, September 2009-April 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümqi, September 2009.

finished”.<sup>108</sup> Like many working-class Han, he resisted official narratives that he was the centre of China and instead felt exclusion from politics. He understood his own identity-insecurity through internal boundaries between state and society and between prospering inner China and underdeveloped Xinjiang. Like Uyghur protests, Han protests were for identity-insecurity but snowballed due to a broad range of insecurities, blamed on both the party-state and Uyghurs.



Figure 1: “Regional Party Secretary Wang Lequan gives important speech on the ‘7-5’ incident.”

Official narratives attempted to co-opt the violence and complex identity-insecurities that emerged in conflict between Han residents and an insecure security apparatus. Late on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, the city government and PSB pasted posters around Ürümchi stating that

<sup>108</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümchi, November 2009.

protests were “illegal” and participants should allow “unity to be maintained by party and government”. By the 5<sup>th</sup>, Meng Jianzhu, Minister of Public Security, visited Ürümchi, celebrating that the protest’s goals to “severely punish criminals” had been met.<sup>109</sup> The state response represented insecure attempts to co-opt Han resistance to *minzu tuanjie* by claiming political leaders had met their goals. However, this attempted co-option concealed violent Han chauvinism, which resisted the party-state’s model of a multi-*minzu* China and created insecurity for Uyghurs.

Popular Han insecurity was exacerbated and translated into threats to identity by the party-state’s identity-securitisations and narration of syringe assaults as terrorist threats. Its ethno-centric grammar was mobilised as resources of Han chauvinist resistance against the party-state’s multi-*minzu* model of China. Security forces prevented Han nationalists from attacking the Uyghur ‘enemy’, exacerbating their insecurity as they felt violence was required to secure China and maintain superiority over Uyghurs. Dynamics between state and Han heightened state-insecurity because loyalty from Han, its source of identity-security in Xinjiang, was now under threat. The Han felt *their* China was under threat while Uyghurs felt they faced the threat *of* China. Han and Uyghurs redeployed official boundaries to articulate alternative ethno-national identities, making the state insecure because both ethnic majority and minorities challenged its multi-ethnic narrative of *Zhonghua Minzu*.

## Conclusions

The interplay between China’s international security discourses and micro-level security practices in Xinjiang illustrate how China’s ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ insecurities are

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<sup>109</sup> Meng Jianzhu lai Wu Jiancha Zhidao Weiwen Gongzuo (Meng Jianzhu Inspects Urumqi, Leads Stability Work), *Chenbao*, 5 September 2009.

mutually reinforcing. This paper explored how the party-state performs hierarchical ethnic boundaries, which were redeployed in everyday politics following incidents of mass ethnicised violence in Xinjiang during 2009. The analysis showed how the “inside/outside Three Evils” discourse performed theoretically indivisible boundaries between China and the outside and between majority Han and minority Uyghurs. Discourses of danger superimposed external boundaries between China and international ‘enemies’ upon domestic cultural boundaries between Han and Uyghurs. Uyghur identity is being linked to ‘outside’ dangers of Turkic culture, international terrorism, and Western democracy, framed as threats to China’s territorial and cultural boundaries. Violence by Uyghurs was framed as existentially threatening to China’s rise and officially explained through an absence of Chinese identity. This configuration of identity and security shaped ethnically targeted security practices on the ground, producing insecurity between unequal ethnic groups and, subsequently, for the state. Official hierarchical identity-security narratives produced different insecurities amongst differentially essentialised groups who both redeployed official securitisations through speech, protest, and violence to articulate alternative identity-insecurities.

The paper’s first section showed how the Shaoguan violence against Uyghurs was officially designated as an ‘ordinary public order incident’ and unrelated to identity-security. However, failure to punish the perpetrators produced Uyghur insecurity. Uyghurs protested for action, mobilising the Chinese national flag to perform their desired position of equality but this was written out of public record. The second section showed how subsequent violence by Uyghurs in July 2009 was framed as an existential identity-security threat to China. Violent ‘revenge’ by Han was conversely framed as “operations” by “comrades” for national security. These complementary narratives produce a binarised identity-security.

Uyghur self-identification inside China, through language and religion, is allegedly supported by “Western enemies” seeking to prevent China’s rise, and framed as a culturally external existential threat which *causes* violence and insecurity in Xinjiang. The binarised meaning attributed to violence by different groups ethnicises daily security practices of surveillance and patrols that target Uyghurs and produce insecurity. The final section showed how syringe attacks in July’s aftermath were officially represented as continuing threats to China’s existence. This narrative heightened Han insecurity, sparking protests for increased security and violence against Uyghurs. Slogans at the protest and interviews with participants showed how Han nationalists redeployed official identity-security discourse to reject the party-state’s model of a multi-*minzu* China and violently target Uyghurs as ever-present threats to their mono-*minzu* China. The party-state’s attempts to secure China from the “inside/outside Three Evils” created insecurity for Uyghurs, and ironically, for itself. The securitisation of *Zhonghua Minzu* gave Han nationalists a discursive framework to articulate Uyghurs as a threat and demand violence as a response. The Chinese party-state, as arbiter between Han and Uyghurs, produces insecurity between the two groups by venerating and securitising ethnocentric narratives of Han identity, while targeting Uyghurs as threats to China’s rise. Such discourses of danger exacerbate security problems in the region as Uyghurs resist the re-organisation of their identities and frame China as the outside threat to their identity-security.

On the first anniversary of “7-5”, insecurity remained across Ürümqi. Public transport and streets were largely empty of residents. By July 5<sup>th</sup> 2012, the city was observably more bustling. However, ethnically targeted patterns of armed PAP patrols, bag-checks, constant flashing of surveillance cameras, and temporary security gates had intensified in Uyghur areas. 18,000 arrests were made under suspicion of terrorism in 2005 alone and since 2009,

a sharp rise in smaller violent incidents saw security services in Kashgar, Khotan, and Yecheng targeted in a “self-fulfilling prophecy” of insecurity.<sup>110</sup> These spiralling cycles of insecurity show how identity categories continue to be violently contested from below. Since 2009, most outbreaks of violence, for example, in Bachu, Shanshan, and Pishan, have seen more focused clashes between Uyghurs and security services akin to political violence of the 1990s. Many incidents have been sparked during cadre patrols of Uyghur neighbourhoods under the policy of “maintaining-stability work” (维稳工作) and President Xi Jinping’s strategy to build a “great wall of iron” to protect national unity.<sup>111</sup> Policies perpetuating this self-fulfilling prophecy have now culminated in internment camps that arbitrarily target individuals as extremists due to their ethnicity. Uyghur identity is the background of potential instability that justifies this state of exception and its special policies.<sup>112</sup> In 2015, a late-40s, male Han *getihu* pointed me to the buildings and military posts armed with machine guns across the Uyghur district, explaining, “it’s so backward, like going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but things are safe now”.<sup>113</sup> The securitisation of *Zhonghua Minzu* produces hierarchical ethnic relations that shape everyday Han and Uyghur insecurities, limiting the possibility of social trust and understanding of the others’ identity.

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<sup>110</sup> Roberts 2012, 15-17.

<sup>111</sup> RFA. 2010. “Police Raid Quran Group”, 8 June, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/raid-06082010112725.html>). Last Accessed 24/05/2018; RFA. 2013. “Two Uyghurs Believed Killed in Hotan Violence”, 28 June, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/raid-06082010112725.html>). Accessed 24 May 2017; RFA. 2017. “Uyghur Village Cadre Dismissed for Holding Islamic Wedding Vows at Home, 18 April, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/weddings-04182017171857.html>. Accessed 24 May 2017; Xinhua. 2017. “Xi Calls for Building ‘Great Wall of Iron’ for Xinjiang’s Stability”, 10 March, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/10/c\\_136119256.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/10/c_136119256.htm)). Accessed 24 May 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Cliff 2016, 15-16, 216.

<sup>113</sup> Anonymous interview, Ürümchi 2015.

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