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MOSQUES IN XINJIANG:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF MOSQUES
ON SOCIAL UNREST

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ABSTRACT

Xinjiang Province in Northwestern China has witnessed a sharp spike in violence in the past 30 years. Recently, the increasing unrest even starts to threaten China's authority in Beijing. The government in Beijing tends to portray the strife as a result of the conspiracy that intentionally organized by ethnic separatists, religious extremists and terrorists to destroy national unity. This is markedly different from contemporary western studies and media discourse which place more importance on China's harder than ever cracking-down religious policies. In this regard, this research aims to explain the role played by religious organizations Xinjiang. This paper challenges the argument that Xinjiang riots revealed deep-rooted religious issues in this region of China (Shan, n.d.). It contends that unlike what many people would presume, religious repression may not be a major cause of the unrest, as mosques in Xinjiang do not facilitate the collective action of riots. Instead, mosques may perform as a "collective voice" mechanism, which in the end substantially reduces the level of riots.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Xinjiang

In the past decade, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has experienced rising social unrest, with a large increasing number of incidents and casualties related to riots in Xinjiang. According to incomplete statistics, since 1990 to 2001, there were more than 200 violent terrorist incidents occurred in Xinjiang and more than 160 people dead (Chinese Law and Government, 2012). Not until 2009, Xinjiang terrorist attacks suddenly attracted national and international attentions as a locus of China's internal troubles. On 5 July 2009, a riot by some Uyghurs took place in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In just several hours, more than 3,000 rioters went on the rampage, smashing buses and overturning police barricades, killing at least 197 people and injuring 1,721 others (Macartney, 2009). After that incident, the reports of bloodshed are nonstop. In 2012 alone, there were 190 violent cases reported in Xinjiang (Jiang, 2013). Most recently, on Feb 13th, 2015, a man grabbed a police officer and set off a suicide bomb that trapped to his body, killing as many as eight people in total. Three days later, a father and his son were shot dead in another clash with the police. The following day, in another attack, four police officers were stabbed to death, nine suspects were shot, and four innocent bystanders were killed (Forsythe, 2015).

Facing increasingly intensified situation, a majority of contemporary literatures on the conflict in Xinjiang has attempted to study the turmoil through the lens of terrorism, its connection to Al Qaeda, and deep-rooted ethnic tensions in China, and this has led to an extensive analysis, and criticism, of Beijing's religious policies. They come to their conclusions

based on qualitative studies that Xinjiang, as a whole, experiences religious and ethnic grievances. They do not question that within Xinjiang itself why some counties undergo more violence than other counties. Ethnic minorities¹ in China enjoy many preferential policies in education, family planning, judicial treatment and other areas, but they, especially the Uyghurs as many argue, also face heavy regulations in religious activities. These policies, in combination with increasing economic inequalities between Uyghurs and new Han migrants from Mainland China, have manifested grievances and resentment among the Uyghur population. In that regard, this study seeks to find out if mosques serve as a facilitating factor for unrests in Xinjiang by evaluating how the number of mosques per capita in each county affects the risk of riots in that county as a particular type of collective action situation.

According to my theory, and contemporary literatures, I hypothesize that mosques impose a positive effect on the risk of riots. Were this so, one would expect counties that have more mosques to have more riots. Be that as it may, these expectations are not borne out. The data cast doubts on the influential conventional wisdom concerning Xinjiang riots that contrary to common opinion, mosques are not a factor that enables collective action of riots. In fact, the data show that mosques density has a negative effect on the risk of riots, meaning we can expect lower level of riots at places where mosque density is higher.

China now is facing the daunting task of finding appropriate measures to deal with the aftermath of the bloody ethnic violence in decades in Xinjiang. The struggle to control

¹ Ethnic minorities in China are non-Han Chinese population in the People's Republic of China, where fifty-five ethnic minority groups are officially recognized in addition to Han majority. In Xinjiang, Uyghur composes for 45.84% of the population, which is the largest ethnic group in the region, following by Han Chinese that makes up to 40.48% of the population (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2014).

the situation has forced Beijing to face riskier dilemmas than at any time since the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. If China, or any other country, wants to avoid the ultimate dilemma of once again resorting to 1989-style turmoil or reluctantly balancing power between the state and society, reasons behind social unrest must be carefully navigated. Why do some counties in Xinjiang experience more unrest than other counties? Only by knowing that answer, governments, and international communities, are able to adopt more realistic and sophisticated strategy to manage unrest and strike an effective balance between reform and social control.

Chapter 2

Background

When talking about separatism and cultural and political nationalism in China, it is usually Tibet that comes to mind. Tibetan culture, religion, and its survival have long rightly attracted world-wide attention, and this makes it all more surprising that its neat neighbors to the north, the Turkic-speaking Uyghurs and Xinjiang, has not gained the same sympathy. Despite that, the Xinjiang question is not new. It lays on the northwestern frontier of China on its border with Russia and seven other Central Asian states. Its unique geographical position gives it increasing international strategic and economic importance. With large Uyghur population who are mainly Muslims, there are powerful forces for autonomy and independence.

Xinjiang before 1949

The Xinjiang issue is a complex one, partly because of the geographical position of the region, and partly because of the tortuous history from which present day Xinjiang has emerged. Although this study is primarily concerned with contemporary developments in Xinjiang, it is essential to give some considerations to the history of the region from earlier times.

In the late 1990s, mummified bodies found in the dry earth of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang suggested the first people lived in Xinjiang might be the Caucasians who were from the further west (Dillon, 2004). These people were speakers of Tocharian, which is a branch of the Indo-European family. Ever since the 2nd millennium BC, this region has been ruled by many

empires, primarily Han Chinese, Turkic, and Mongolic. The empire of Yuezhi was recorded by the chronicler of the Han dynasty as the first group living in the Basin area. After Yuezhi was defeated by the Xiongnu Empire, a powerful nomadic people based in modern Mongolia, they were forced to migrate to northwestern India where they established the Kushan kingdom. The Han was the first Chinese dynasty to establish a degree of influence over the Western Regions (*Xiyu*, the Chinese name for the Tarim and Dzungaria regions, the nowadays Xinjiang). At the beginning of Han dynasty, in an effort to secure the profitable trade through the Silk Road, the emperor allied with Yuezhi and made preparations for war against the Xiongnu. As a result of the war, Han controlled the strategic region, beginning several decades of struggle between the Xiongnu and Han China over dominance of the region, eventually ending in Chinese success. In 60 BC, Han China established the Protectorate of the Western Regions at Wulei (near modern Luntai) to oversee the entire Western Regions. And this became the first sign of Han Chinese rule in the region. Han's sovereignty finally expanded into Central Asia and it was at that time the nowadays Xinjiang became a part of historical China.

Followed by the Han Dynasty, Sixteen Kingdoms of the Jin Dynasty, Tang Dynasty, Uyghur Khaganate, Kara-Khanid Khanate, Mongol Empire (Yuan Dynasty), Yarkent Khanate, Mongolic Dzungar Khanate, and Manchu Qing Dynasty ruled the Western Regions in order. Under the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty, the Western Regions was renamed Xinjiang, meaning "new frontier", which is still in use today. Xinjiang now is a part of the People's Republic of China, having been so since its founding year of 1949.

Though long-time controlled by Chinese empires, within historical time, the earliest traceable indigenous inhabitants of the Tarim Basin were probably the sedentary, oasis dwelling, Turkic-speaking Muslim farmers migrated from Mongolia from whom the present-day Uyghurs,

as well as their neighbors the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, claim descent. The other part of Xinjiang, however, is Dzungaria and it was inhabited by steppe dwelling, nomadic Tibetan Buddhist Oirat Mongol Dzungar people. Before Qing Dynasty unified Dzungaria and Tarim Basin into Xinjiang province, they were two geographically, historically, and ethnically distinct regions, and they were ruled in separate administrative units at first. And it was the Qing Dynasty who created the very concept of Xinjiang as a whole of both Dzungaria and Tarim Basin as one distinct geographic identity. Since then, under Chinese rule Xinjiang was settled by more Han and Hui migrants and became separated from Central Asia for over a century and a half. Some Uyghur nationalist historians claim that Uyghurs were distinct and independent from Chinese for 6000 years, and that all non-Uyghur people are non-indigenous immigrants to Xinjiang. In retrospect, we see why such statement can be controversial. Ever after Han Dynasty, Han settlement in Xinjiang has lasted for more than 2000 years, as well as Mongol, Kazakh, Uzbek, Manchu, Hui, Xibo indigenes in Xinjiang. They often incorrectly claim that Han only possessed 5% of the population in Xinjiang, while the other 95% were the Uyghurs. This claim erases the presence of other minorities, like the Kazakhs, Xibes, and ignores the fact that Han people were already around one third of Xinjiang's population at 1800s under Qing's sovereignty. The Uyghurs were simply the majority of this multinational region.

People's Republic of China and Xinjiang after 1949

With the collapse of the Qing empire in 1911, Outer Mongolia became independent. In Xinjiang, however, power in the republican period was exercised by a series of Han and Hui warlords until the 1930s. For the next fifteen years, the USSR was the dominant power in the

region. Instead of promoting separation from China, Stalin supported the Han warlord Sheng Shicai, and after that, the second Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR), without engineering a full secession.

Following the “Liberation” in 1949, the victorious Chinese Communist Party entered Xinjiang. The leadership of the Second ETR was persuaded by the Soviet Union to a negotiation with PRC, however the airplane they took crashed en route to the conference in Beijing and the remaining leadership then agreed to join the newly founded People’s Republic of China, followed by the establishment of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the PRC in 1955, replacing Xinjiang Province.

During the radical Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), many injustices were done against ethnic minorities, and their religions and ethnic cultures got suppressed, Uyghurs included. Like other Muslim minorities throughout China, they saw their religious text and mosques destroyed, their religious leaders persecuted, and individual adherents punished. In the late 1970s and the early 1990s, finally Xinjiang witnessed the start of loosen policies, and since then, the Chinese government has relaxed restrictions on religions. This opening resulted in more minorities speaking out against what were seen as discriminatory economic, religious, and political practices (David, 2008). However since 1996, the Chinese authority have conducted a dozen Xinjiang-wide campaigns against “illegal religious activities,” “separatism,” or “terrorist forces.” As stated in a joint report of HRIC and Human Rights Watch, the first “Strike Hard” campaign started in 1996, shortly after the meeting of the Shanghai Five, which later became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in an effort to fight crime and threats to the public order by mobilizing police (David, 2008). This campaign tamped down violence in the short run

but fueled a sense of injustice and mistrust among the Uyghurs in the long run (David, 2008). It was then followed by the shocking Gulja (Yining) uprising² (Becquelin, 2004) in 1997 and 1998.

Security is the fundamental job of any state. And it's particularly important to China today because people demand it as economic development demands it. After decades of socio-political tumult, particularly caused by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people today are tired of unrest and crave security. As a result, a stable domestic society and healthy development can legitimize the state. Riots in Xinjiang threaten the state by demonstrating the state's inability to manage the unrest. Facing the pressure, the government endeavors to hold its territory together by strongly confronting the unrest in Xinjiang (Wayne, 2000). In less than a decade, Xinjiang experienced three "Strike Hard" campaigns, two "High Pressure" campaigns, and many other political movements against separatism, religious extremism and terrorists forces (Becquelin, 2000). Open tolerance of Uyghurs resentments declined significantly after September 11, 2001, as China felt it was now understood and supported internationally to crack down terrorist activities of any kind (David, 2008).

Much more recently, since 2005 China has implemented the newest *Religious Affairs Regulations*, which is the most comprehensive attempt ever to regulate religious practices by the Chinese government and to further increase religious management (Sacred Right Defiled: China's Iron-Fisted Repression of Uyghur Religious Freedom, 2013, and Becquelin, 2000). And many of the new regulations have already existed in Xinjiang. Children and women may not

² Yining uprising (Ghulja incident or Ghulja massacre) was the culmination of the Ghulja protests of 1997, a series of demonstrations in the city of Ghulja (known as Yining in Chinese) in Xinjiang.

enter mosques to engage in religious activities or religious education. Women are banned from wearing headscarves, veils or long dresses. Men are forbidden from wearing beard. All Muslim restaurants are forced to open during the observance of Ramadan. For those want to be clergies or imams of a mosque, they mustn't have any anti-government views. They have to have a clean family history regarding political activities, attend and graduate from Islamic institutions, in order to be permitted to teach Quran (Sacred Right Defiled: China's Iron-Fisted Repression of Uyghur Religious Freedom, 2013).

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Uyghur Muslim violence in Xinjiang has two potential explanations – religious oppression and ethnic separatism. Whether the riots in Xinjiang are caused by religious grievances or ethnic disparity has turned into a hot debate. Though the PRC listed both separatists and religious extremists as causes of riots in Xinjiang, and many believe that it's highly possible that both of them have systematic effect on the riots, scholars often come up with theories that favor one factor over the other.

Unrest in Xinjiang has a long history, and a lot of evidences have suggested that many deadly incidences, especially the ones with larger scales, took place, or organized, in local mosques, where groups of individuals collect and form strong bonds of friendship (Wayne, 2009). The more social ties there are among the members of the groups – same ethnic group, language group, and religion – the easier will it be to gather people and convince them to take risks (Collier, 2006). In this specific situation in Xinjiang, to organize or to participate in any protests requires a connection. And this connection could be the mosques where Uyghurs males of all ages gather and exchange information. In Martin I. Wayne's book, *China's War on Terrorism – Counter-insurgency, politics and internal security*, he specifically urged more attentions paid to mosques which he argues are the key to prevent future deadly terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, as one significant step of counter-insurgency strategy. He notices that Xinjiang's insurgency, especially the ones in the 1990s, erupted from mosques and religious gatherings. Religious ideals were not necessarily the cause of insurgency, alone or in concert with other

factors, but religious institution were being used politically to challenge the state (Wayne, 2009, Starr, 2004, et al). In disguise of worshipping god and searching for greater meaning in life, some groups of people use mosques and other religious gatherings as places to advocate socio-political actions which lead to activities such as boycotts, riots, and even arguably to numerous terrorist attacks.

In other researches, scholars such as Elena Pokalova and Kunal Mukherjee also indicates that many uprising and protests that called for independence started in mosques (Pokalova, 2013, Mukherjee, 2010, et al). While many pro-independence activists in Xinjiang employed direct methods of resistance against the Chinese state, the majority of Uyghurs expressed their opposition through non-violent, symbolic means. The main vehicle for this was returning to the mosques (Finley, 2007). Terrorists used this method to spread militant “Islamist” ideological influences. The majority Uyghurs, however, worshiped and expressed dissatisfaction with oppressive and repressive domestic policies. They also argue that since party cadres are not allowed to participate in religious activities, Uyghur nationalists and separatists can easily use the mosque for converted activities.

Such theories explain government’s sudden harsh measures and regulations on religious activities in 1996. Often times the crackdown on religion by the Chinese government is depicted as the cause of resistance against the state. As in 2005, new *Religious Affairs Regulations* took effects in Xinjiang. These government interferences are seen as stress repression or persecution by the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and further intensify their desire to fight for their “independence.” Tanner in his paper *China Rethink Unrest* criticized these measures and noted that Beijing need to find a new and less repressive approach to ensure social order. Neither coercion nor rapid economic growth will be sufficient to contain unrest (Tanner, 2004).

The bottom line is that while political Islam is a threat to the security and authority of the state and its local representatives, and it's harshly repressed, Islam as a religion is permitted within China, though with many interferences. As wrote in the book, Wayne believes that this distinction is lost upon western media, academic, and government sources who decry Chinese intervention in religion.

Economic incentives, however, may be the largest tool in government's policies toward Xinjiang. Beijing takes the view that economic development can eventually reduce Uyghur's inclination towards independence and solve Xinjiang's ethnic problems. The underlying idea is that once Xinjiang achieves sufficient economic development, Uyghurs will prosper, be less restive, give less support for separatist activities, and be more integrated into the fortunes of China. Believing that most people, Uyghurs included, primarily want a good economic life (rather than religious freedom) for themselves and their children, the Chinese government tried to address Uyghurs' resentments by solely emphasizing on economic development (David, 2008).

Many favorable economic policies, for example tax exemption and reduction for a company's first three years of operation, have been adopted in Xinjiang. From 1950 to 2008, the central government invested 386.23 billion yuan in Xinjiang, and subsidized 357.202 billion yuan from the central budget. As the result, in 1990, the provincial GDP was seven times higher than in 1978. Since 2003, Xinjiang's GDP growth has been higher than that for China as a whole (Becquelin, 2004). With such significant economic growth and the large amounts of financial support from the center, why are so many Uyghurs still not content? As Shan Wei and Chen

Gang point out in an article, the supposedly favorable policies and arrangements, which were designed to promote national integration, have exacerbated the rift between the Han and the Uyghurs. Rapid economic growth has widened income gaps and caused disgruntlement among minorities. The unprecedented violence in the July 5th riots calls into question China's ethnic policies, the first being economic inequality. While the government has spent billions of dollars in Xinjiang on infrastructure and welfare projects, and a huge amount of fiscal subsidies from the Beijing to support those projects, the Uyghurs tend not to perceive them a beneficial. They, on the contrary, believe that those projects only be good to the Han and bring about the influx of more Han people who will take up new job opportunities and become rich (Shan and Chen, n.d., Yee, 2003). During 1990s when large state-owned factories and companies were forced to close down, the less competitive minority ethnic workers were among the first victims of lay off. And many of them blame the new Han migrants for depriving them of job opportunities.

Many scholars also argue that Beijing takes a deliberate plan to bind Xinjiang more closely to the rest of the PRC by creating a wide array of incentives to speed up Han migration to the region (Becquelin, 2004). Many empirical regularities suggest that societies which are diverse in terms of both ethnicity and religion seem to be significantly safer than societies which are homogenous (Collier, 2006). The Han population stood at 37.5 per cent in 1990, up from a mere 6 per cent in 1949. Plus the paramilitary Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, which had 2.1 million members, large-scale exploitation of natural resources was developing at a rapid rate³. The strong economic performance, however, masked a real divide between the north

³ Xinjiang is very rich in natural resources, including deposits of coal, iron, zinc, chrome, nickel, copper, and gold, as well as a significant amount of petroleum and natural gas. The exploitation of both petroleum and

and the south Xinjiang. While the north was rapidly developing, Beijing's control over south was much weaker with fewer than 10 per cent of the Han inhabitants. Until 1995, only one decent road was penetrated in the south Xinjiang, linking Ürümqi to Kashgar, and the standard of living was much lower than in the north that numerous districts fell well below the national poverty threshold⁴. Underdevelopment and Beijing's lack of enforcement power have made the south a much problematic region. Southern Uyghurs' increasing dissatisfaction was reflected in a growing number of small-scale, isolated incidents (Becquelin, 2000). Especially right now when Han population is declining due to a much lower birth rates⁵ (Mukherjee, 2010), Beijing concerns the region's stability even more.

Be that as it may, many scholars think that even if the Han people keep coming to Xinjiang, it doesn't necessarily mean there is a policy that contributes to that (Yee, 2003). According to Xinjiang's first "White Paper", since the Western Regions Frontier Command was established in 60 B.C., the inflow of the Han people to Xinjiang had never stopped (White Paper on History and Development of Xinjiang, 2003). Instead of "mixing" ethnic groups together, Yee sees

natural gas has greatly boosted its economic development. West-east pipelines were also built to transport natural gas from Xinjiang to other regions of China (Falkenheim, n.d.).

⁴ Of the 20 counties of Xinjiang where the ethnic Uyghur population comprises 90 per cent or more of the population, 13 have been designated by the central government as key poverty alleviation counties. Zhang Tianlu and Huang Rongqing, *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu renkou diaocha yanjiu (China's Minority Population: Survey and Research)* (Beijing: Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1996).

⁵ According to the "Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Population and Family Planning Regulations" that adopted in Xinjiang in 2003, urban Han couple can have one child; minority couple can have two children; Han nomadic couple can have two children; and minority nomadic couple can have up to three children (China).

Beijing's ethnic policy as "segregation" policy. In his study *Ethnic Relations in Xinjiang: a survey of Uyghur-Han relations in Ürümqi*, Yee asserts that there is an unavoidable tendency to separate the Han from other ethnic groups and it has become a common practice. Han students and Uyghur students are held in different schools and in different housing in many areas of Xinjiang. Living quarters in cities and townships also tend to be divided and grouped along ethnic lines, either to preserve and respect minority cultures, or reduce frictions that could lead to riots. The real effect of such arrangements, as Yee claims, creates ethnocentricity, which further aggravates tensions between both sides.

Chapter 4

Theory

In this paper, I aim to explore and analyze the role mosques play regarding unrests in Xinjiang by evaluating how the mosque density in each county affects the risk of riots in that county as a particular type of collective action situation. No matter it is religious oppression or ethnic disparity that provoke conflicts in Xinjiang, it is important to studying the role played by mosques.

As pertinent literatures discussed, Uyghurs are Muslims and they are allowed to pray and explore their religion as it relates to improving the human psyche. They are not allowed to use the mosque as a source of power with which to challenge the state's control of the territory, as we see that many Islamic militants and separate activists used religious gathering around mosques as their way to communicate, to recruit, and to organize converted activities. In Xinjiang, mosques are historical relics. During the Culture Revolution, all religious activities were banned and all mosques were either closed or destroyed. Since the early 1980s, more than 20,000 mosques have been reopened or rebuilt. And as a result we saw an increasing number of riots. Therefore I hypothesize that a county with more mosques per capita is more likely to experience higher level of anti-government riots.

Collective actions, such as protests or other violent attacks, face huge problems of organizational cohesion and motivation. To have a successful social event, all participants must overcome their individual instincts to avoid danger, and must take risks to help other members.

This is easier among people who have close social ties, carrying same history and culture, speaking the same language, or worshipping the same gods, so that it's easier to distribute effective propaganda regardless of the underlying merits of the cause. Uyghurs in Xinjiang fit in this situation. In Xinjiang, though there are other Muslim ethnic minorities as well, they go to different mosques or temples to hang out within their own ethnic group. For Uyghurs, they go to mosques regularly to pray where they directly experience unfavorable government interferences. Hence, the obvious discourse for the leadership to adopt with its member rioters is that of religious and ethnic grievances. Mosques could serve as the places where Uyghurs can instantly feel some grievances so that anti-government information is easily circulated to inculcate a sense of injustice and convince the Uyghurs that they are victims of injustice. From this follows a hatred of the government, or even of the Han people, and a willingness to protest or even to carry out terrorist attacks. Therefore it's highly possible that mosques are a significant control mechanism of riots.

Methodology

In this analysis, my goal is to explore whether there is any correlation between the number of mosques per capita and riots by logistic regression models. If a significant positive relation of these two variables exists, we can then conclude that mosques are a facilitating mechanism of riots in Xinjiang. To maintain stability and development of Xinjiang and Uyghurs, the Chinese state and local government, as well as international communities, should begin focusing on mosques, and formulate feasible, realistic, and humane religious and ethnic policies.

I examine Xinjiang question by estimating variants of the following logistic regression equation:

$$\text{Riots} = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{mosque density}) + \beta_2(\% \text{ of Uyghur population}) + \beta_4(\text{prefectural seat}) + \beta_5(\text{State-owned mosques}) + \beta_6(\text{small mosques}) + \beta_7(\text{large mosques}) + \beta_8(\text{GDP per capita}) + \beta_9(\text{population density}) + \beta_{10}(\text{government expenditure per capita}) + e$$

As reflected above, I predict that there is a positive relation between riots and the number of mosques per capita, controlling the percentage of Uyghur population, local GDP per capita, population density, and government expenditure.

According to my theory outlined above, in conjunction with the pertinent literature, serves as an adequate framework to analyze mosques in Xinjiang as a mechanism of collective action of riots. In the base model, the risk of having riots will be studied with mosque density being the only independent variable to address the original relationship. In model 2, the analysis will focus on the same relationship but with controlling for the Uyghur population. In model 3, I will further control for prefectural seats and mosque ownership. In model 4, the scale of mosques will be controlled to discuss if big or small mosques have any impacts on riots. Model 5 will focus on economic factors and provide further insight into whether these economic changes necessarily induce riots. Since my dataset is a panel data with county-year being my units of analysis, all models employ cluster standard errors (clustered on counties).

Data

Dependent Variables:

In this research the dependent variable is a variable of riots in Xinjiang organized by counties, indicating whether there was anti-government violence at each county in a year. Using sources such as government archives and police records in China, geo-coded incidents of violence in Xinjiang for the 1993-2005 period were coded by a research team based at the Penn State University (Cao et al. 2015).

This dataset is gathered according to the definition of ethnic conflict that includes both violent incidents (e.g., terrorist attacks) and nonviolent incidents (e.g., protest, demonstrations, etc). In order to avoid double counting as many violence incidents last for several days and spread across counties, the dependent variable is coded as binary. Another reason my data analysis stops at 2005 is because the harsh religious policies implemented in the region since 2005 after the new *Religious Affairs Regulations* took effects in Xinjiang. All religious activities are under total control of the local governments. Therefore mosques are very likely to lose its organizational influences of collective action.

Independent Variables:

To explore the correlation of mosques and unrest incidents, I set the number of mosques at county level as my independent variable, indicating the number of mosques in each county in

Xinjiang. To measure this variable, I rely on a geo-coded dataset extracted from the Spatial Explorer of Religion provided by China Data Center of the University of Michigan (UMCDC), the Center for Religion and Chinese Society of Purdue University (CRCS), and the State Key Laboratory for Information Engineering in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing (LIESMARS) of Wuhan University. This dataset provides rich and reliable geographic information of mosques, including their specific location at county-level, starting year and ownership type (whether it's state-owned or private-founded). With this information then I'm able to see the distribution of mosques in Xinjiang, and study its connections with violent incidents, as well as other predictors of violence. I include the independent variable of interest counts the number of mosques per capita of each county in Xinjiang: *mosques density per 1,000 people*. To further disaggregate these mosques, I divide the variable by ownership into *State-owned, domestic-funded/private, and others* organizations, to test if type of ownership influences the function of mosques in collective action. In addition, I also categorize the mosques by their scales (number of employees) into 0-19 (small), 20-1000 (large), two different categories to fully examine the data.

Control Variables:

To estimate the impact of mosques on the risk of riots, it is necessary to control for a set of potentially confounding variables. In the baseline model, I include several variables that are likely to affect the chances of riots. First, many studies have suggested that separatism is strongest in the rural area, both in the county towns and the villages away from the garrison cities, where are dominated by Han Chinese and much developed in terms of GDP. I agree that

density of Han population and economic developments are strong predictors. Hence, we include indicators the *percentage of both Uyghur population and Han population and total population density (person/km²)* at county level, which derived from data provided by the *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* and *Xinjiang 50 years*, and *local GDP per capita (10,000 Yuan/person)*, which are obtained from *Prefecture and County Finance Statistics Yearbooks* by dividing the overall GDP over the county's population. It's highly possible for the percentage of Uyghur population and Han population to be collinear. After a correlation test, the correlation coefficient between the two variables is up to -0.76, which means they are highly correlated. Therefore I dropped the percentage of Han population for the rest of my research.

Moreover, another strong indicator could relate to government expenditures on local public goods as such spending may influence Uyghur's attitude towards Han Chinese and state and local government. To measure the county-level public goods spending in Xinjiang, I also employ the widely used *Prefecture and County Finance Statistics Yearbooks*, which provides a detailed coverage of government expenditures at the county-level jurisdiction from 1993 to 2005. From this well-known source, I'm able to collect *the overall government spending (10,000 Yuan/person)*, which is the sum of education investments, health care and social welfare spending, etc.

Finally, I look at the counties and group them into prefectural seat counties and regular counties and make it a dummy variable (prefectural seat counties being 1 while others being 0). From the data we see that no riots or any protest alike have ever took place in XPCC counties. For prefectural seat counties, however, I think it could be a significant barometer that they possess more political power as well as riots may be more likely to occur in big cities for propaganda reasons.

Descriptive Statistics:

I identified 102 counties from the dataset of which 45 had conflict incidents from 1993 to 2005. This makes for 94 conflict onsets in a sample of 1,326 county years. A rate of 7 **per cent**. The period witnessed dramatic economic development of Xinjiang and strict religious regulations. In absolute terms, the largest number of conflict incidents took place in 1997 (20), followed by 1995, 1998 and 1999 (12, 12, and 12 respectively).

Based on the data, the percentage of Han population is very significantly positively correlated with GDP per capita and government spending. If the percentage of Han population increases by one percentage point, GDP per capita will increase 62.13 Yuan and government spending per person will increase 0.86 Yuan respectively per year.

FIGURE 1. Number of Counties Had Violent Incidents by Year from 1993 to 2005

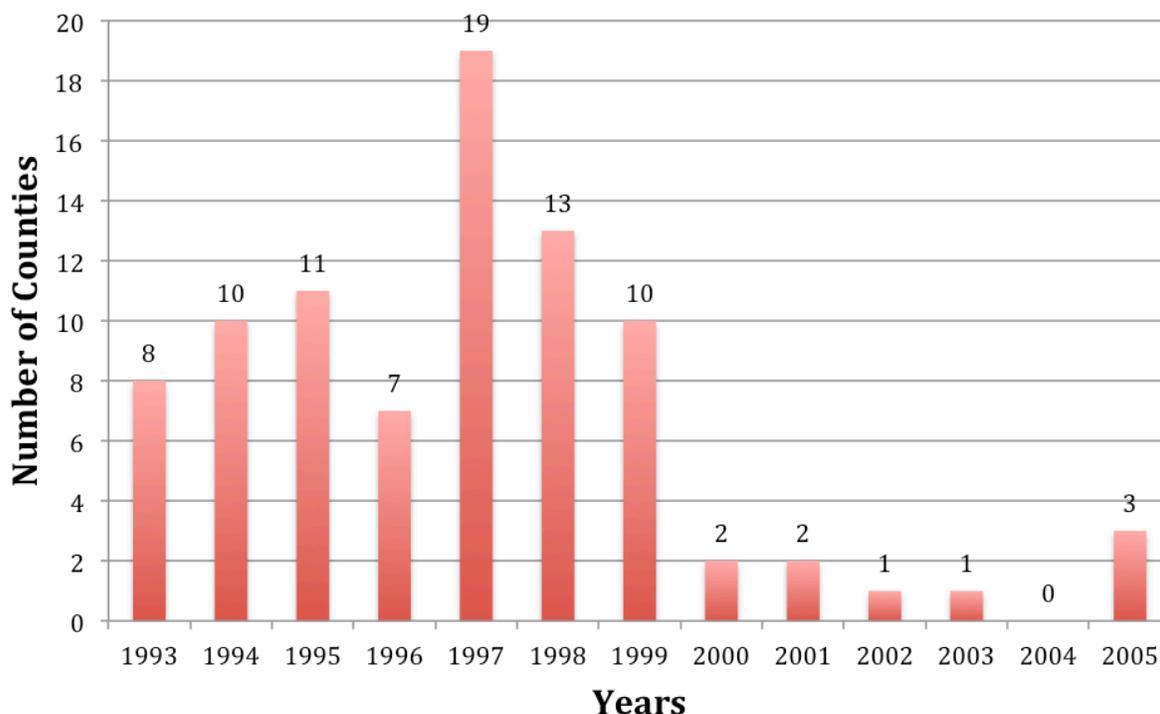


Figure 1. Number of Counties Had Violent Incidents by Year from 1993 to 2005⁶

One might conjecture that the outbreaks of riots from 1993 to 1996 were low when policies in Xinjiang were relatively relaxed and an increase of violent incidents after 1996 when “Strike Hard” campaigns were launched and religious policies were tightened. In Figure 1, I present the number of counties had violent incidents each year from year 1993 to year 2005, and it confirms that right after the first “Strike Hard” campaign in 1996, the number of counties that rioted exploded, from 7 counties in 1996 to 19 counties in 1997. Yet the prevalence of riots didn’t last very long. Most counties quitted rioting as the “Strike Hard” campaign proceeded. In

⁶ Data acquired from ethnic violence data.

2000, only 2 counties encountered riots, which hit the historic low point. Following this, the number of counties had violent incidents continued to decrease. Finally in 2004, there were no riots of any kind. There might be two explanations of this phenomenon. The first one is that conflicts associated with the “Strike Hard” campaigns were only partly responsible for the sharp increase in the late 1990s, as a marked decline has followed even if the “Strike Hard” campaigns continuously become more rigorous on the Uyghurs. Or it suggests that the harder than ever crackdown in Xinjiang finally worked and gave the Uyghurs no chance to stand.

Chapter 5

Empirical Analysis

My central hypotheses concern the relationship between mosque density, on the one hand, and the susceptibility of a county to riots, on the other. A multivariate analysis of the country-year data is presented below.

Table 1. Influence of Mosque Density on Risk of Riots										
Ind. Variable	Dependent Variable: Violent Incidents									
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5					
Mosque Density	-0.632	-0.858	-0.929	-1.276	0.695					
	0.024 ***	0.003 ***	0.003 ***	0.007 ***	0.148 ***					
Control Variable										
Percentage of Uyghur Population	--	0.018	0.021	0.020	0.011					
		0.000 ***	0.000 ***	0.000 ***	0.017 ***					
Prefectural Seat	--	--	1.170	1.119	0.646					
			0.000 ***	0.001 ***	0.124					
State-owned Mosques	--	--	-0.023	-0.020	0.117					
			0.370 ***	0.379	0.096 *					
Small Mosques	--	--	--	0.002	-0.004					
				0.118	0.127					
Large Mosques	--	--	--	-0.061	-0.064					
				0.050 ***	0.046 **					
Population Density	--	--	--	--	0.000					
					0.092 *					
GDP per capita	--	--	--	--	-0.056					
					0.483					
Government Expenditure per capita	--	--	--	--	-120.78					
					0.000 ***					
<u>N</u>	819	819	804	792	649					
<u>R-squared</u>	0.0116	0.0770								

Table 1. Influence of Mosque Density on Risk of Riots

Our data show that measures of mosque density can successfully predict riots, however in a different direction, contrary to common knowledge.

For all models, we coded a variable as “1” for all county-years in which a riot took place and “0” for no violent incidents in the county for that year. Model 1 in Table 1 shows the results of a logit analysis that indicates significant, however, *negative* relation between mosque density and risk of riots. This is the opposite of what people commonly presume. Instead of being more likely to provoke anti-government demonstrations and attacks, mosques seem to play a calming factor to the local Uyghur population.

In model 2, I control for the percentage of Uyghur population to exclude alternative explanation that it's the Uyghurs who are organizing riots with or without the mosques and that the mosque density is significant to risk of riots just because there is a strong correlation between percentage of Uyghurs and mosque density (as Uyghurs go to mosques frequently to worship). As expected, percentage of Uyghur population shows a significant positive relationship with riots. Mosque density continues to have a negative effect (-0.858) on risk of riots in Model 2. . The original model shows a negative relationship between the density of mosques and riots. After controlling for Uyghur population, this relationship becomes increasingly negative. Since the Uyghur population is Muslim and positively associated with riots, this shows that the density of mosques becomes increasingly negative, suggesting that the number of mosques is not related to increased riots, unlike the Uyghur population. The grievances of the Uyghurs are neither stoked nor facilitated through mosques. Instead, mosques seem to extenuate the overall fierce tension in the region.

In Model 3, I include another two variables to control on the governing power of the county and ownership of the mosques. For prefectural seat variable, I code “1” if the county is the prefectural seat and “0” for all the rest. For state variable, I code “1” if the mosque is state-owned and “0” if it’s collective owned or privately owned. According to the results, state-owned mosques have no influence on possibility of riots, while that is expected to be much higher in prefectural seat counties. This finding may due to the higher-level political power and multiple city functions they possess. In Model 4, I also consider the scale of the mosques to test if the mosque size has any effect on riots. These two models provide us some more insights on how mosque density relates to riots. After I control for mosque ownership and size, and compare the results to the base model, I find the coefficients of mosque density in Model 3 and Model 4 are still negative and continue to decrease (from -0.632 to -0.929 to -1.276). Since the coefficients of mosque density are all very significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.01$), it suggests that mosque density has an influence on the possibility of riots, and that this relationship is negative. Controlling for other variables in Model 3 and Model 4 enable us to make a better estimate of the effect of mosques on the breakout of riots.

This observation raises the question of why mosque density has *negative* influence on the possibility of riots. Instead of leading to more violent incidents, mosques seem to play a very calming role in regards to riots, as my analysis finds that at places where mosque density is high, riots are unlikely to take place. Hirschman’s “exit, voice, and loyalty” framework may enlighten us in this case. The “exit, voice, and loyalty” theory draws attention to both economic and political behavior as instruments for collective action (Keeley, 1991). As we all know that political grievances lead to resentment, and resentments aggregate and turn into protest and violent anti-government conflicts. Hirschman notes that other than carrying out anti-government

conflicts, people can also “exit” or “voice” to express their dissatisfaction as alternative reactions to organizational ineffectiveness (Keeley, 1991), with “exit” meaning moving out of the country and “voice” meaning bargaining with the authority. According to this framework, in an authoritarian country like China, where “exit” is extremely hard, “voice” can still serve as a feedback mechanism, which is a classic way for members in a political system to bring grievances to authorities’ attention and attempt to get them resolved.

Mosques in Xinjiang could be this mechanism of collective voice to bargain with Chinese government in avoiding direct conflicts. There are many ways of petition in China to report and solve social problems. The government, however, will never learn the extent of the problems by only looking at individual petitions. It needs specific signals to know what the problems are and what to do to deal with them. Mosques, on the other hand, have the capability to gather Uyghurs’ feelings and present them in front of the government, to negotiate or even work alongside with the government to settle religious issues. Resentment among Uyghurs will be alleviated. As a result, places have more mosques are tend to be more stable in terms of riots. We have evidence from my data analysis to support this explanation as well. As we can see from Model 4 and Model 5, large mosques are always significant and negatively influence the breakouts of riot, as they are more influential and are able to present larger Uyghur population in front of governments. The significant and negative government spending coefficient can also be explained by the “voice” theory.

For the last model, I further expand on the previous models and add population density, GDP per capita and government expenditure per capita as control variables. This time the significant negative result disappears. Instead, the coefficient of mosque density in Model 5 is neither significant nor negative. Once we control for the other variables in the model

(population density, GDP per capita and government expenditure), the p-value of mosque density dramatically increases from 0.0235 from the base model to 0.1475 in Model 5. We no longer have evidence that mosque density is negatively related to breakouts of riots once we control for the other variables in the model. This change possibly means that these three new control variables may serve as mediator variable and have mediating effect on the density of mosques. Rather than a direct relationship between mosque density and the risk of riot, mosque density influences the three mediator variables, which in turn influence the risk of riot. In another word, population density, GDP per capita, and government expenditure per capita play a much important role in government the relationship of the other two variables. Therefore the results of Model 5 only reflect the much stronger relationship, which is between the mediating variables and the dependent variable, rather than the weaker relationship between the number of mosques and riots.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Discussion

While a majority of social scientists attempt to study the turmoil through the lens of terrorism and Chinese religious policies in Xinjiang, I'm more interest in the issues within Xinjiang and try to explain why some counties have higher risk of riots than other counties. Based on my research and data analysis, I realize there is a profound gap between popular perceptions of the control mechanism of Xinjiang riots and the results from my analysis. Similar to my hypothesis, popular perceptions see mosques in Xinjiang as a control mechanism of collective action of riots, looking for higher risk of rebellion at where mosque density is the highest. According to my analysis, however, my hypothesis is showed to be incorrect. Mosque density has negative relation with the level of riots. Instead of a mechanism of collective action of riots, mosques in Xinjiang may serve as a mechanism of collective voice. They gather Uyghurs' feelings and present them in front of the government in order to solving religious and social issues. In addition, percentage of Uyghur population, prefectural seats, and large mosques all have significant positive impact on the possibility of riots. These results are all consistent to the "voice" theory which I use to explain my regression results.

However when I control for population density, GDP per capita, and government expenditure per capita, the significant result of mosques' negative effect on the possibility of riots goes away. Therefore mosques' negative impact on Xinjiang riots may exist, however the result is not conclusive. The topic is certainly interesting and thus deserves future research.

One limitation of my analysis concerns data quality. Since the Chinese government is highly sensitive to Xinjiang's issue, they attempt to block out all the information from the public eye,

and this is especially true in regards to violent incidents. Such action substantially hindered my ability to access reliable information and data on the topic. This is one of the major reasons that most scholars study Xinjiang riots by adopting qualitative methods. It's likely that despite best efforts, the violent event data sets used by this research does not pick up all events that happened during 1993 and 2005. Cao et al 2015 acknowledge such limitations in data.

Another data quality concern is the geo-coded map of mosques in Xinjiang where I extracted my mosques data from. There are a number of missing counties in that dataset; however, this is also the most inclusive and reliable dataset I'm able to have access to.

I'm certain that I did not include all the relevant variables in my models. There are other important variables I leave out of my analysis that are unmeasured or not available in the existing data collection; such omissions might lead to biased results. For example, income inequality data among Han Chinese, Uyghur and other minorities would be necessary to study how ethnic disparities impact riots in Xinjiang. Moreover, data on county level natural resource output could be an relevant predictor for riots, as well. Other spatial and temporal variables, such as counties' distance to Ürümqi, or their travel time to Ürümqi, are keys to further understand Xinjiang problem.

Xinjiang's problem's root causes are a complex mix of history, ethnicity, and religion, fueled by poverty, unemployment, social disparities, and political grievances (Davis). The frequency of violent incidents, the number of Uyghurs involved, Xinjiang's natural resources and its strategic geographic position draws the world's attention and becomes even more crucial as the Chinese government keeps carrying out "Strike Hard" campaigns. In the future, it will be an exceptional next step to further explore how natural resources output in each county affect

Xinjiang riots. And based on that we are then able to discuss how religious and economic policies can assist the local governments to appease Uyghurs' grievances.

Appendix

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics					
Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Riots	1131	0.0831123	0.276174	0	1
Mosque Density	829	0.4476701	0.5597961	0	2.096436
Percentage of Uyghur Population	1125	41.89458	38.60432	0.1473429	99.52434
Prefectural Seat	1326	0.1372549	0.3442461	0	1
State	912	0.7401316	1.979425	0	12
Small Mosques	888	60.36261	87.889	0	454
Large Mosques	888	0.4808559	3.652874	0	33
GDP per capita	847	0.3089521	0.4250307	0.0517046	5.780225
Population Density	1102	591395.6	2235718	1339.145	25900000
Government Spending Per Capita	1125	0.0390772	0.0387619	0.0073847	0.5552222

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: The Correlation Matrix										
	Riots	Mosque Density	Percentage of Uyghur Population	Prefectural Seat	State-owned	Small Mosques	Large Mosques	GDP per capita	Population Density	Government Expenditure per capita
Riots	1.00									
Mosque Density	0.01	1.00								
Percentage of Uyghur Population	0.16	0.31	1.00							
Prefectural Seat	0.09	0.25	0.00	1.00						
State-owned	-0.01	-0.06	-0.11	-0.02	1.00					
Small Mosques	0.01	1.00	0.31	0.24	-0.06	1.00				
Large Mosques	-0.02	0.27	-0.05	0.28	0.01	0.23	1.00			
GDP per capita	-0.09	0.01	-0.26	0.16	0.29	0.01	0.01	1.00		
Population Density	0.17	-0.12	0.13	0.37	-0.03	-0.12	-0.02	-0.05	1.00	
Government Expenditure per capita	-0.17	-0.09	-0.10	-0.01	0.08	-0.09	-0.07	0.56	-0.10	1.00

Table 3. The Correlation Matrix

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ACADEMIC VITA

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University

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Relevant Courses: International Relations; International Political Economy; Decision Making and Strategy in Economics; International Finance and Open Economy Macroeconomics; Econometrics; Advanced International Trade Theory and Policy; Poverty of Developing World

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EXPERIENCE

Penn State Schreyer Honors College Career Development Office May 2014-present

Career Development Student Coordinator & Project Management Assistant

- Generated career topics for discussion, initiated the SHC international career development program, documented and planned all related events
- Wrote reports and created surveys after events for record; analyzed 2013-2014 international scholars' region and major distribution for the first time
- Accessed survey responses for honors college mentoring program and suggested improvement for mentoring relation

The Brookings Institution

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Communication Intern

- Attended Brookings events and assisted to produce the Brookings Now Blog, contributed to more than 60 Brookings blogs; helped arrange and prepare interviews for Brookings Cafeteria Podcast; proofread the Brookings Essay; tracked news and data sources on specific areas as requested
- Developed and strengthened my knowledge on International Relations and Economics by closely engaging in discussions with Brookings scholars

City Bank (China) Co., Ltd.

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Finance Office Assistant

- Exposed to all departments and services within City Bank China branch, and gained basic knowledge of how Commercial Bank function.
- Entered data on financial accounts into database system and analyzed monthly report; and worked closely with the manager from finance department to provide support on evaluating credits.

RESEARCH

Penn State PL SC Department "China Addresses Climate Change: A Political and Economic Analysis"

Research Assistant

Summer 2013 – Nov 2013

- Assisted a statistical analysis of China's climate change; practiced data search, collection and regression analysis using STATA and R
- Participated in deep discussions and deepened my understanding of Political Science; greatly improved problem solving skills

ACTIVITIES

CSSA (Chinese students and scholar association)

2011- 2012

President of PR and THON (Penn State Dance Marathon) Chair

Maintained close relationship with other organizations, institutions and various department of Penn State; led weekly meetings and organized different events for local Chinese community; produced promotional films for events; Coordinated fundraising efforts and raised \$2000 through canning events for THON

ISC (International Student Council)

Program director

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Served on leadership team for this student-run community in support of Penn State international students; generated community service ideas, planned events, screened members and organized meetings for membership, including organizing the school-wide soccer tournament.

SKILLS Basic C++, STATA, R, Google products and Prezi; Fluent in Chinese, conversational Japanese, proficient in writing/reading French

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Volunteer of Penn State Urban Experience in Chicago

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Beijing Olympics city volunteer, served as a translator

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