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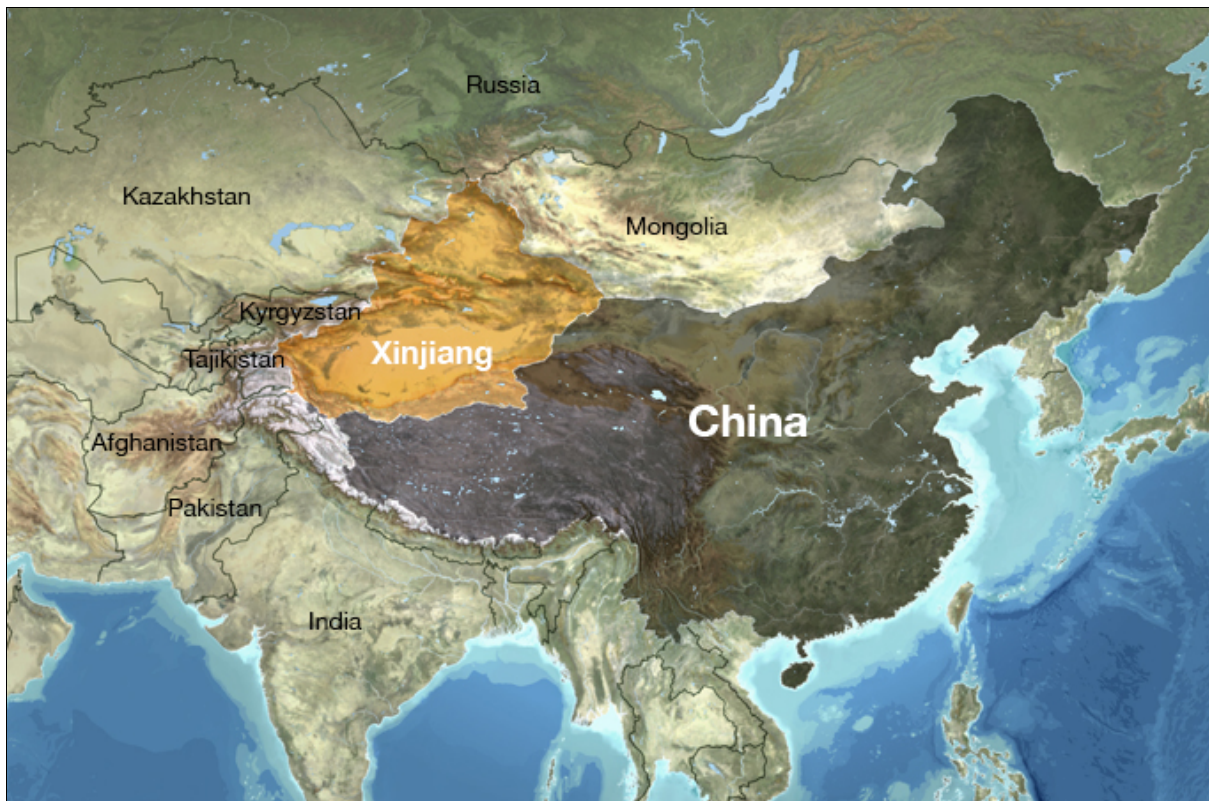
Report

Unrest in Xinjiang, Uyghur Province in China

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9 February 2014





[AlJazeera]

Abstract

Recent unrest in Xinjiang has drawn great attention in the international society. The revealed case indicates that the 'violence' intensifies and the situation is getting worse. This report offers a multifaceted explanation with five interrelated factors, suggesting that the recent Xinjiang unrest reflects the upsurge of social problems of all kind in a fast-changing society with interest conflicts along the ethnic cleavage, while the short-term causes are related to the rise of Islamic activism that clashes with China's powerful security measures. The key to resolving these conflicts depends on how Beijing can significantly improve Uyghur's living standard and find its way to accommodate the rise of Islamic identity.

Introduction

Since 2009, the number of 'violent incidents' have surged in Xinjiang, the Uyghur Province of China. Recently, the situation has become rapidly worse. According to the statistics reported by Xinjiang Public Security Department, there are more than 100 cases of 'violent incidents' happening in Xinjiang each year. Particularly, the amount of cases soared up to nearly 200 in 2012, (1) and observers expect an even larger number for 2013, (2) although official statistics have not been revealed yet.

Curiosity worldwide is growing fast because very little information is available about these incidents. Due to strict media regulation, only a few cases were officially reported and not much detail was disclosed. The criteria by which the Chinese authority allows news media to report is unknown, but a striking fact is that much more coverage on Xinjiang unrest has been appearing in domestic media in 2013 as evident in Table 1. The cases that were revealed involve 'violent attacks' including bomb attacks, hijacking attempts, and hostage crisis. Most attacks were targeted towards policemen, security guards, or local officials, although anyone in the street could also be the target. Whilst these incidents show some similar patterns, for instance, suspects who are mostly ethnic Uyghurs and victims mostly lawmen who were on duty, they did not look like they were organised by a specific militant group but rather independent to each other. All of the above evidence shows that recent political unrest in Xinjiang was indeed aggravated, despite Beijing's scale-up stability measures.

Factors Related to the Recent Attacks

Beijing set the tone that recent 'violent incidents' in Xinjiang were 'terrorist attacks' and ascribed the unrest to secessionist's plot in pursuing Xinjiang Independence. (3) Many foreign media and observers, however, tend to sympathize with Uyghur's protest against Beijing's coercive rule. (4) Unfortunately, both views are oversimplified and we shall consider the following five interrelated factors for a comprehensive understanding.

First, China is a changing society due to its fast modernization process. The exponential growth of social problems has already caused widespread security hazards. 'Violent attacks' and extreme 'terrorist activities' have also largely increased over recent times. Intensification of Xinjiang's 'violent attacks' exemplifies this general trend, despite abundant cases in other provinces as well.

Second, however, the number and scale of recent Xinjiang's 'violent incidents' tops the provincial level nationwide. The acuteness of Xinjiang's attacks is associated with dramatic social disruption under Beijing's strategic policy of China's Western Development, which results in enormous social grievance against the government.

Third, particularly, the inferior socioeconomic condition in the Uyghur areas (Southern Xinjiang) engenders strong social discontent about regional inequality. Feelings of relative deprivation not only strengthens the ethnic Uyghur identity but also generates adversarial orientation that resists Han rule.

Fourth, underground Islamic schools have flourished in recent years and the state authority can no longer effectively control all of the religious groups in terms of organizational networks and religious teaching, which challenges China's party-state system since many religious groups do have mobilizing power for collective actions outside state control.

Lastly, Beijing's scale-up security measures have encountered strong resistance in the majority Uyghur area. The rise of Islamic activism provokes many 'violent incidents' when strict social control is imposed.

Changing Society under Fast Modernisation

Since Deng Xiaoping carried out reform and opening up policy in 1978, China has undergone a fast modernization process. In particular, China has maintained near double-digit economic growth for two decades up until 2011. China's fast modernization also exhibits in its rapid urbanization development. As Figure 1 shows, China doubled its urbanization level from 25.8% in 1989 to 51.8% in 2012, and Xinjiang likewise exhibits a similar trend in strong economic growth and rapid urbanization development in recent years. This indicates that the Chinese society as well as Xinjiang has both gone through dramatic changes that engender many social problems.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (Figure 2), the criminal cases in China have quadrupled from 1.62 million in 1995 to 6.55 million in 2012, suggesting the increase of social problems of all kinds. However, if we consider serious criminal cases (such as homicide, criminal injury, robbery, rape, kidnapping), this upward trend is far less obvious. This raises a doubt about whether the growth of social problems did bring major security hazards as we saw in Xinjiang. Unfortunately, China did not publish provincial-level data about the crime rates, and therefore it is difficult to evaluate whether Xinjiang shows a similar pattern as do nationwide statistics. However, domestic statistics (Table 2) indicate that Xinjiang had a higher homicide rate than other provinces in China, (5) only trailing three northeastern provinces and Guangdong between 2000 and 2009. This evidence provides some support to the explanation that the recent unrest in Xinjiang is associated with burgeoning social problems in the changing society under China's fast modernization.

China's Western Development

Another factor that has contributed to the growth of 'violent incidents' in Xinjiang is the negative impact of China's Western Development. While Beijing's massive investments in

Xinjiang did greatly increase the GDP number, only few people enjoyed the economic prosperity and many suffered from the resultant effects of industrialisation and development. For instance, the growth of industrial and service sectors did not contribute much to reducing the unemployment problem. Pollutions caused serious environmental degradation over the quality of water, soil, and air, which threatened agricultural production. Fast economic growth pushed commodity prices to soar and that lowered farmer's profit. Very little economic return, e.g. taxes or compensation, was redistributed to people for improving their livelihood. Infrastructure development facilitates large enterprises entering the markets and driving local companies out of business. (6) All of the aforementioned problems can be boiling down to people's deteriorating living standard in contrast to deceptive economic booms. Popular discontent and social grievance quickly accumulated.

The Uyghur population in China is over 10 million, and 80% of the population live in southern Xinjiang. Most Uyghur people are peasants and have very limited education, and thus, very few job opportunities are offered to them. (7) While many large enterprises come to Xinjiang for investment, most of them recruited their employees from other provinces and only offered local residents a very limited amount of non-technical jobs. (8) The social disruption associated with land expropriation, rural underemployment, corruption in the local government, and the sense of frustration regarding social exclusion, racial prejudice, and cultural misunderstanding all intensify Uyghur's negative perception about China's Western Development. The accrued anger translated into enormous social grievance against the government and became the emotional thrust that explains the motive of many recent incidents.

Regional Inequality

As Table 3 shows, among 31 administrative units in China, Xinjiang ranked 18th in terms of GDP per capita in 2012, slightly lower than the national average by a margin of about \$700 USD. Compared to the four municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing) and south-eastern coastal provinces (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Fujian), Xinjiang's level of economic development has apparently lagged behind.

However, Xinjiang did not perform the worst, either. There were 13 administrative units trailing behind Xinjiang and although some provinces do have a better natural environment, they did not outperform Xinjiang. If we evaluate the problem of regional inequality only based on provincial-level statistics, Xinjiang's socioeconomic condition is rather closer to the average group than to the inferior group. Examining the GDP statistics of 20 prefecture-level administrative units in Xinjiang, we found a great level of

intra-provincial variance. On one hand, the heartland of Uyghur areas such as Hotan, Kizilsu Kirghiz, and Kashgar actually suffer from extreme underdevelopment and have the poorest economic condition even trailing the worst provincial case Guizhou for about \$1000 to \$2000 USD. On the other hand, the wealthiest prefecture Karamay had an even higher level of GDP per capital than the most developed provincial-level municipality Tianjin for \$6639 USD. In fact, regional inequality between northern and southern Xinjiang are drastic: northern Xinjiang has only 1/3 of land area and 54% population but its fixed asset investment accounts to 74.8%, GDP accounts to 76%, and industrial production accounts to 78.8%. (9) All these numbers illustrate an astonishing fact that the majority of Han people reside in northern Xinjiang and enjoy far better living conditions than the majority of their Uyghur counterparts in southern Xinjiang. This explains why most of the recent attacks concentrated in southern Xinjiang, particularly in Kashgar and Hotan.

Flourishing Underground Islamic Schools

Before the communists came into power in 1949, there were more than 20,000 mosques in Xinjiang. The number plummeted to less than 500 during the Cultural Revolution. As Figure 3 shows, there have been two waves of religious tides in 1980s and after 2006, reflecting in the rapid increase of mosques. (10) The second wave is still on-going, and the statistics indicate a startling pace that more than 10000 mosques were built within 5 years. This fact vividly illustrates the recent religious rise among the Uyghur population in Xinjiang, which brought another remarkable phenomenon: the flourish of underground Islamic schools. (11) In China, all of the religious activities are regulated by the state authority, the administration of religious affairs, including establishment of official places for worship (mosque, church, temple, etc.), training of religious clergy, management of religious activities such as membership registration, service organization, and preacher certification. However, the recent religious revival among the Uyghur population develops through unofficial channels to avoid state control. These unofficial religious organisations are very capable to attract followers and build mobilizing power through underground religious preaching. The records of recent 'violent incidents' suggest that many attacks were associated with these underground organizations and networks, and they now become the prime target to crack down for the authority.

The Rise of Islamic Activism

The prevalent religious atmosphere has brought two important political consequences. First, in response to the possible security hazard, Beijing adopts the full-scale security measures to maintain social stability. Many of them are perceived very repressive and

disrespectful to the Muslim population, e.g. banning regular religious activities, forbidding full-face veil, forcing to join the communist party, and abusing coercive power. (12) Second, the rigid security measures provoke strong backlash and lead to the rise of Islamic activism against Beijing' rule. Incidents of spontaneous 'violence' highlight the fiercest reaction against official implementation of the urban grid management system, in which policemen, community workers, as well as local official's team up to implement strict social control and prevent any anti-governmental activities. Many of the recent attacks broke out during the home visit when community workers or local officials reported illegal religious gathering or possession of weapons to the police. Conflicts of this nature recently become more intense because cases of retaliation also happen after the police wipe out the underground organization by military means. Uyghur's strong resistance to Beijing's strict security measures is the pivotal reason accounting for the intensification of recent attacks in Xinjiang.

Conclusion

The recent unrest in Xinjiang is a complex phenomenon involved with multifaceted factors. Careful attention has to be made for a comprehensive understanding, and any one-dimensional explanation could lead to a biased conclusion that neglects other related factors. From a long-term point of view, the recent Xinjiang unrest reflects the upsurge of social problems of all kind in a fast-changing society with interest conflicts along the ethnic cleavage. The short-term causes, however, are more related to the rise of Islamic activism that clashes with China's powerful security measures. The key to resolving these conflicts depends on how Beijing can significantly improve Uyghur's living standards and find its way to accommodate the rise of Islamic identity.

Table 1 Summary of Xinjiang's Violent Incident, 2008-2013

Violent Incident	Time & Place	Description
Shache Violent Attack ⁽¹³⁾	2013.12.30, Kashgar	Shache public security bureau was attacked by nine ethnic minority Uyghurs. Eight suspects were shot dead by the Police, and one was arrested.
Shufu Violent Attack ⁽¹⁴⁾	2013.12.15, Kashgar	The police were under attack by an explosive device and a machete when arresting suspects. Two policemen were killed. Fourteen suspects were shot dead and eight were arrested.
Bachu Violent Attack ⁽¹⁵⁾	2013.11.16, Kashgar	The mob assaulted a police station by wielding knives and axes. Two policemen were killed and two were injured. All nine suspects were all shot dead.
Tiananmen Square Car Blaze ⁽¹⁶⁾	2013.10.2, Beijing	A car crashed and exploded in the Tiananmen Square. Chinese police said they found knives, iron rods, canisters of gasoline, and a flag

		covered in religious slogans inside the car. Three suspects and two tourists were killed and 38 bystanders were injured.
Kashgar Violent Attack ⁽¹⁷⁾	2013.08.20, Kashgar	Deadly conflicts happened between local police and the Uyghurs who were accused as bomb makers and terror suspects. One policeman was killed, 22 suspects were shot dead, and four were arrested.
Hotan Violent Attack ⁽¹⁸⁾	2013.06.28 Hotan	Crowds of rowdy mobs gathered and made disturbance. Local police stopped the riot. There is no casualty in this case.
Shanshan Violent Attack ⁽¹⁹⁾	2013.06.26, Turpan	A group of people attacked a police station and a local government building. There were 24 people killed, including two policemen, 21 people injured. Eleven suspects were shot dead and four were arrested.
Bachu Violent Attack ⁽²⁰⁾	2013.04.23, Kashgar	Three local officials were attacked while visiting homes and reporting "suspicious persons and knives". There were 15 local officers killed, including ten Uyghurs, three Han people, and two Mongols. Six suspects were shot dead and eight were arrested.
Korla Violent Attack ⁽²¹⁾	2013.03.07, Bayingolin	Two violent attacks happened in the Korla city. All suspects are Uyghurs. Five people were killed and ten injured.
National Day Attack ⁽²²⁾	2012.10.01 Kashgar	A Uyghur young man launch a suicide bomb attack to the frontier forces in the Yecheng county. This incident caused about 20 casualties. The Chinese authority did not confirm this incident.
Hotan Plane Hijacking ⁽²³⁾	2012.06.29, Hotan	Tianjin Airlines Flight 7554, a scheduled flight from Hotan to Urumqi, was hijacked by six ethnic Uyghur men on 29 June 2012. Passengers and crew successfully stopped the hijackers' attempt. Six suspects were arrested.
Yecheng Violent Attack ⁽²⁴⁾	2012.02.28, Kashgar	Eight Uyghur men led by Abudukeremu Mamuti attacked pedestrians with axes and knives. There were fifteen people killed and fourteen injured. Eight suspects were shot dead and one arrested. One policeman was killed and four injured.
<i>Pishan Hostage Crisis</i> ⁽²⁵⁾	2011.12.28, Hotan	Fifteen Uyghur young men kidnapped two people for directions. One policeman was killed and one injured. Seven suspects were shot dead, four injured, and four arrested.
Kashgar Violent Attack ⁽²⁶⁾	2011.07.30 & 2011.07.31, Kashgar	Two violent attacks happened in Kashgar. Turkistan Islamic Party claimed they were responsible for the attacks. There were 12 people killed and 40 injured.
Hotan Violent Attack ⁽²⁷⁾	2011.07.18, Hotan	Eighteen Uyghur young men burst in a police station and assaulted security guards with knives and bombs. They took eight hostages and yelled slogans of Jihadism. There were 18 people killed and 6 injured.
Aksu Bomb Attack ⁽²⁸⁾	2010.08.19, Aksu	A Uyghur drove an electric three-wheeled vehicle and ignited an explosive device targeting one police officer and fifteen security members. There were 7 people killed and 14 injured.

Needle Attack ⁽²⁹⁾	2009.08.17, Urumqi	Three Uyghurs randomly assaulted people by syringe stabbings or needle attacks and triggered public scare in Urumqi. Official statistics showed more than 100 people were attacked.
2009 Urumqi Riots ⁽³⁰⁾	2009.07.15, Urumqi	A large-scale violence that involves with a series of violent attacks targeted ethnic Han people. There were 198 people killed and 1700 injured.
2008 Kashgar Attack ⁽³¹⁾	2008.08.04, Kashgar	A terrorist attack initiated by two men who drove a truck and killed jogging police officers with grenades and machetes. There were 16 officers killed and 16 injured. Two suspects were arrested.

Table 2 Top 10 Provincial Homicide Rate

1. Heilongjiang
2. Jilin
3. Guangdong
4. Liaoning
5. Xinjiang
6. Hainan
7. Henan
8. Chongqing
9. Guangxi
10. Hebei

Source: Edited by the author

Figure 1 China's Fast Modernization

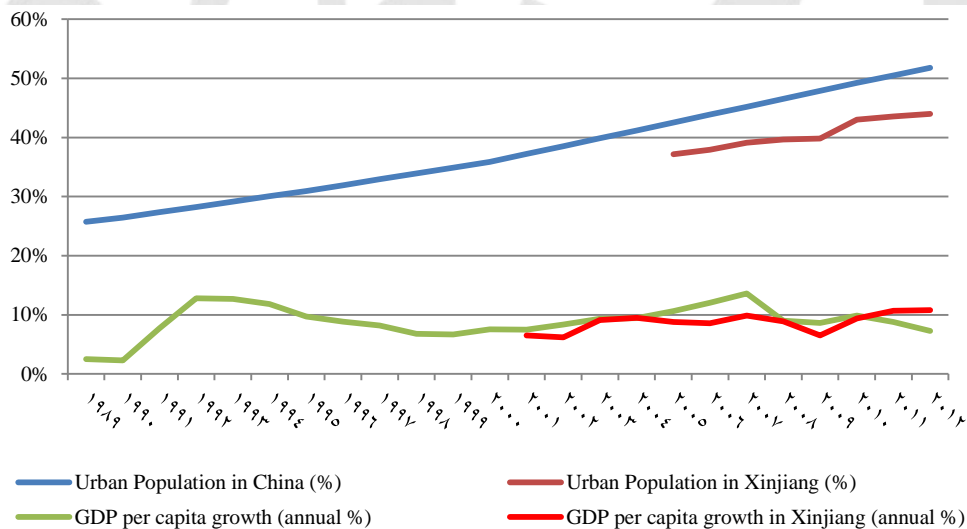


Figure 2 Increasing Number of Social Problems in China

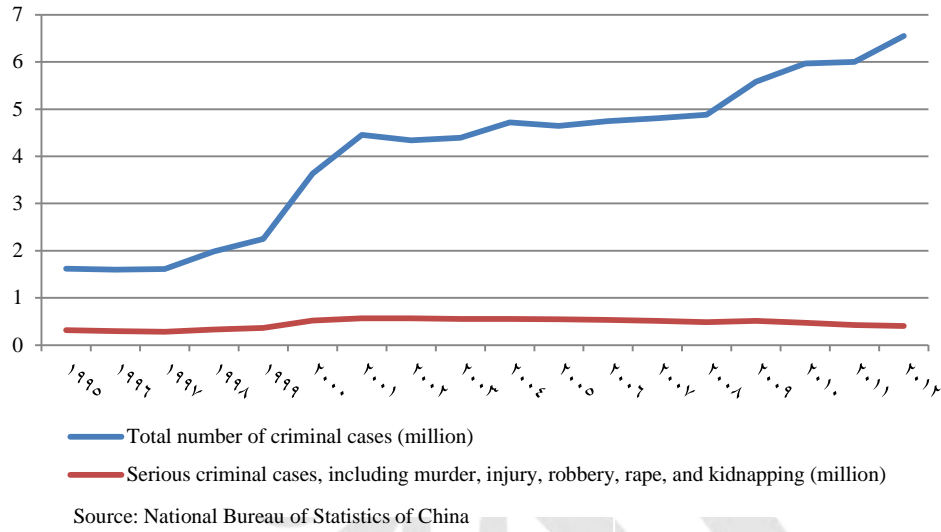


Figure 3 Number of Mosques in Xinjiang Since 1949

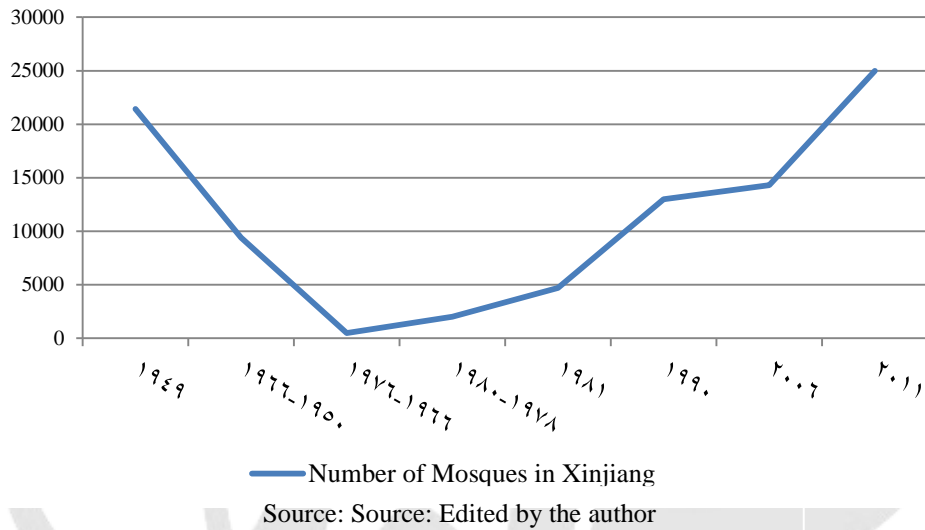


Table 3 China's Provincial-Level & Xinjiang's Prefecture-Level Nominal GDP Per Capita

Provincia I Ranking	Province or Xinjiang's Prefectures	GDP per capita (US\$)	Provincia I Ranking	Province or Xinjiang's Prefectures	GDP per capita (US\$)
	Hotan (Southern Xinjiang)	1111		Bortala (North Xinjiang)	6042
	Kizilsu Kirghiz (Southern Xinjiang)	1725		China (Overall)	6091
	Kashgar (Southern Xinjiang)	2030	14	Shaanxi	6108
31	Guizhou	3100	13	Hubei	6111
	Ili (Northern Xinjiang)	3356		Turpan (Southern Xinjiang)	6189
30	Gansu	3482	12	Chongqing	6191
29	Yunnan	3516		Tiemenguan (Xinjiang PCCs)	6322
28	Tibet	3633	11	Jilin	6877
	Aksu (Southern Xinjiang)	3841		Hami (Southern Xinjiang)	7226
	Tumushuke (Xinjiang PCCs)	4370		Wujiaqu (Xinjiang PCCs)	7619
27	Guangxi	4427		Changji (Northern Xinjiang)	8113
26	Anhui	4561	10	Shandong	8201
25	Jiangxi	4562	9	Fujian	8359
24	Sichuan	4686	8	Guangdong	8570
	Altay (Northern Xinjiang)	4848		Aral (Xinjiang PCCs)	8593
23	Henan	5025	7	Liaoning	8958
22	Hainan	5129		Urumqi (Northern Xinjiang)	9438
21	Qinghai	5231	6	Zhejiang	10022
20	Hunan	5304	5	Inner Mongolia	10189
19	Shanxi	5327		Shihezi (Xinjiang PCCs)	10193
18	Xinjiang (Overall)	5372		Bayingholin (Southern Xinjiang)	10359
17	Heilongjiang	5657	4	Jiangsu	10827
16	Ningxia	5729	3	Shanghai	13471
	Tacheng (Northern Xinjiang)	5790	2	Beijing	13797
15	Hebei	5796	1	Tianjin	14750
	Beitun (Xinjiang PCCs)	5823		Karamay (Northern Xinjiang)	21389

Note: PCCS represents "Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps", which is an economic and military government organization that rules several administrative units in Xinjiang. Source: Compiled data from wikipedia.com ⁽³²⁾

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*Raymond Lee is a specialist in Chinese affairs..

Endnotes

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