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**Reproducing the Orient: A Critical Examination of Western Media Representations of
China's Uyghur Policies between 2014 and 2021**

by

R. Tiger Li

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York,
2022

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Reproducing the Orient: A Critical Examination of Western Media Representations of China's Uyghur Policies between 2014 and 2021

By

R. Tiger Li

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Susan Woodward

This study examines the convergence of US state media and US-based mass media in news coverage of China's policies in Xinjiang. Analysis of a sample of articles published by *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *CNN* between 2014 and 2021 found that stories citing US state media, Uyghur exile advocacy groups, or non-government organizations receiving US funding were significantly more negative in tone than articles using other sources. Articles citing state media and exile advocacy groups tended to frame China's policies as an ideological challenge while other articles were more likely to frame these policies as a security issue. The effect of US state media on article tone was only observed after the US shifted toward a confrontational stance against China during Donald Trump's presidency. This study contributes to existing scholarship by bridging literature on the interaction of US state media and Orientalist knowledge production and research on news media's function as propaganda. Within examined news publications, Western authors largely presumed that the West possesses an exclusive enunciative capacity to produce knowledge about Xinjiang. This study concludes that, as was the case in previous iterations of Orientalism, the West continues to claim an exclusive right to produce knowledge about China, often without externally validating its own evidence or entertaining contradictory information from the Orient.

Acknowledgements

While I cannot speak to the experience of every graduate student, I feel comfortable saying that most people agree that writing a thesis is a strenuous undertaking. Even the greatest mind to have ever graced the discipline of political science commented on the grueling nature of scholastic inquiry, writing, “there is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits” (Marx 1872). It was only through the gracious support and encouragement of countless people in my life that I have been able to navigate the path leading to the completion of this thesis.

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I owe my parents and each of my siblings my eternal gratitude for the love and support they have given me over the course of my life. From the bottom of my heart, I thank them for everything, and I hope my dad can forgive me for not pursuing an MD.

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Introduction

In the final hours of Trump's presidency, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the State Department had determined that the People's Republic of China's policies toward Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region constituted genocide. Lawyers in the Biden Administration initially wavered, stating there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that China's actions in Xinjiang met the legal definition of genocide (Lynch 2021). The State Department formally dispelled the ambiguity on March 30th, when Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated unequivocally that Chinese "government authorities committed genocide against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and crimes against humanity including imprisonment, torture, enforced sterilization, and persecution against Uyghurs and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups" (Blinken 2021).

The US's formal declaration of genocide came after a decade of growing international attention to the situation in Xinjiang. In 2009, religious and ethnic tensions between the region's Uyghur Muslim and Han Chinese residents erupted into wide scale violence, leaving some 200 dead in the city Urumqi (Rakhima and Satyawati 2019). While ethnic friction had occurred in Xinjiang before 2009, this escalation in violence marked an end to the period of relative stability the region had enjoyed during the early 2000s (Finley 2020). Over the following years, religious extremists carried out attacks on civilians and police with increasing frequency, and Chinese officials began a series of counter-terrorist activities in the region (Rodrigues-Merion 2019).

After a group of Uyghurs armed with knives attacked a crowd of civilians at Kunming Railway Station in 2014, killing 33 and injuring 143, Xi Jinping's administration adopted a "two-pronged" strategy aimed at simultaneously combatting terrorist activity and addressing the material conditions that the Communist Party of China believed to allow extremism to spread

(Wei and Xiaojuan 2014). Committee Secretary Chen Quanguo was appointed to oversee the PRC's "Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorist Activity" plan in Xinjiang. Between 2017 and 2018, Quanguo rapidly expanded police presence in the region, leading to a dramatic increase in arrests (Greitens, Lee, and Yazici 2019). The policy of wide-sweeping detentions played a crucial role in the Party's efforts to use education, including Mandarin language and career classes, to de-radicalize potential extremists (Abdelkader 2020). While internal Party documents refer to detainment facilities as vocational training centers, many Uyghur activists and Western human rights advocates have denounced them as mass internment camps, criticizing unsanitary and crowded conditions, malnutrition, medical neglect, and widespread sexual violence (Finley 2020).

During her opening statement at the 39th Session of the Human Rights Council in 2018, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed her concern about the sweeping scale of re-education facilities in Xinjiang, referring to reports of arbitrary mass detentions (Bachelet 2018). Many of the US's historic allies have also condemned China's practices in Xinjiang. In a July 2019 letter to the President of the Human Rights Council, 25 states formally called on China to respect the rights of Uyghurs and uphold its obligations under international law. During a General Assembly dialogue in 2020, Germany's ambassador delivered a joint statement on behalf of 39 countries, expressing grave concern about reports China had arbitrarily detained over a million Uyghurs. The ambassador insisted that China allow independent observers from the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights into the Xinjiang region, reflecting the group's unified demand for concrete action (Heusgen 2020).

Following President Biden's inauguration in January 2021, the US State Department formalized its determination of genocide. Soon after, several other Western countries made

similar efforts to criticize China's actions in Xinjiang. On February 22nd, Canada's parliament passed a non-binding resolution recognizing China's policies as genocide, though Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government refrained from supporting the motion (Scherer 2021). Three days later, the Dutch parliament passed a similar non-binding resolution. Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government voted against this resolution, noting that no international organization had determined that China's actions met the legal definition of genocide (Sterling and Meijer 2021). On April 23rd, Britain's parliament passed a motion calling on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government to make a formal declaration of genocide, while Johnson stressed that such legal determinations should be left to the courts (Reuters 2021). France's parliament passed a similar non-binding resolution calling China's actions genocide in January of 2022, though members of French President Emmanuel Macron's party have said determinations of genocide should be left to international organizations (Rivet 2022; Leali and Lau 2022). Other Western democracies have taken tangible steps to confront the PRC's policies in Xinjiang. In 2021, for example, the European Union authorized its first significant sanctions against China since a 1989 embargo in response to the events in Tiananmen Square (Emmott 2021).

Multilateral sanctions and governmental declarations such as these demonstrate that the US and its historic allies have established a normative consensus regarding China's actions in Xinjiang. However, not every member of the international community agrees with this evaluation of the PRC's human rights practices. A significant number of states have taken principled stances in support of China's treatment of Uyghurs. At the same time that Canada, France, and Germany delivered the joint letter to the UN Human Rights Commission on behalf of 25 countries condemning arbitrary detention in Xinjiang, representatives from Algeria, Iran, Oman, and 34 other cosignatory states submitted a second letter to the Commission praising

China's efforts to combat terrorism. In stark contrast to the first group's concerns, representatives of the second group contended, "safety and security [had] returned to Xinjiang and the fundamental human rights of people of all ethnic groups there [were] safeguarded" (A/HRC/41/G/17). In March 2021, Cuba appeared before the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to deliver a similar statement, this time on behalf of 64 countries, that reiterated their strong support for China's policies in Xinjiang. The statement accused China's critics of making false allegations and misappropriating the rhetoric of human rights in order to undermine China's economic development (A/HRC/46/52).

Resolutions and joint statements such as those described here-demonstrate that many countries do not subscribe to the US's normative evaluation of China's actions in Xinjiang. While the EU and most other states traditionally aligned with the West have publicly condemned the PRC, China has maintained a substantial base of support at the international level, particularly from countries in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia that have traditionally occupied the Global South.¹ Some western commentators have criticized the Global South's support for China, noting that many Muslim majority states have vocalized support for China's policies in Xinjiang while condemning Israel's treatment of Palestine on the basis of Islamic solidarity (Putz 2020, e.g.).² The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), for example, issued a joint resolution in 2019 commending China for "providing care" to its Muslim minority, a sentiment reaffirmed by several OIC member state ambassadors during Human

¹ While the term "Global South" is contentious, this thesis will adopt the definition provided by Dados and Connell. As they write, the term "refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. [The Global South encompasses] regions outside Europe and North America [which are] mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized" (Dados and Connell 2012).

² As of 2021, 77 states in the Global South had made statements in support of China's policies in Xinjiang at an international forum, while only 9 had voiced condemnation. Only 8 states outside the Global South had voiced support for China, while 43 had condemned it. This figure was reached by evaluating formal statements, declarations, or signatures made by plenipotentiary state representatives at international forums or in foreign ministry press releases between 2016 and 2021. Participation in the UN Office for South-South Cooperation was used to determine a state's status as a member of the Global South.

Rights Council deliberations (OIC 19; A/HRC/46/52). Undeterred by descriptions of cultural or religious genocide, many Muslim-majority states continue to publicly approve of the PRC's actions in the Uyghur heartland.

Considering the severity of the allegations levied against China by the US, the discrepancy in international opinion raises questions about the ways in which Western understandings about Xinjiang are reached. In order to articulate these questions and begin exploring their answers, this study examines how states, news media, experts, and activists collaboratively construct and reproduce knowledge about China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims. As the US was the first state to formally allege genocide after China's implementation of the Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorist Activity plan, this study will confine its evaluation of knowledge production processes to those occurring within the US.³ This thesis does not attempt to reconstruct the truth about China's actions in Xinjiang, if the truth of such matters can be said to exist. Rather, it seeks to examine how various entities within the US interact to arrive at specific, similar interpretations of Xinjiang.

To elucidate contemporary American narratives about China's policies in Xinjiang, this study draws upon the analytical framework developed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism*. Said offers an epistemological toolset for evaluating the ways in which the Oriental Other is actively discursively constructed within the West. In Said's view, the liberal notion of a "true" knowledge that is fundamentally non-political obfuscates the highly political circumstances in which knowledge of the Orient is produced and proliferated. Echoing Foucault, Said argues that the opacity of these political circumstances necessitates a deeper exploration of the contexts in which Western interpretations and representations of the Orient

³ Turkey's Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan denounced China's responses to riots in Urumqi as genocide in 2009, though his administration has since walked back those statements in pursuit of friendly relations with China (Akyol 2022).

arise (Said 2003). Western perceptions of China's actions in Xinjiang do not exist in a vacuum; therefore, an application of Said's method to the processes actively constructing, proliferating, and informing these perceptions may offer insight into the process of knowledge production itself.

This study extends upon Said's analysis by evaluating the ways in which overt modes of propaganda interact with independent mass media to produce knowledge of the Orient.⁴ As this study will demonstrate, independent news media sources, non-governmental organizations, and academics often draw liberally from US state media when producing knowledge about China's Xinjiang policies. According to many Western critics, the Communist Party of China has maintained a high degree of secrecy about the exact nature and scope of the Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorist Activity plan in Xinjiang, leaving ample room for the US government and English-language media to shape Western audiences' perceptions of the matter (Greitens, Lee, and Yazici 2019). It is worth applying a critical lens to Western discourse regarding China's policies in Xinjiang precisely because these discussions take place almost entirely among Western commentators, who often rely heavily upon US state-produced information. This insular discourse represents a reciprocal relationship between the state and Western scholars, through which Western narratives of the Orient are reproduced and reinforced; while Western knowledge of the Orient informs US policy, those policies can influence the very substance of that knowledge.

⁴ For the purpose of this paper, US state media will refer to any information, such as text, audio, video, content or other material created by the US government intended to reach a mass audience. The term "state media" may be used interchangeably with "public diplomacy" (Sager 2015; Grygiel and Sager 2020). This term is used in contradistinction to mass news media. While mass news media is a broad term, here it will be used to refer to any news content produced by commercial enterprises to inform general audiences. This can include magazines, newspapers, online articles, television content, or any information distributed through other mediums. Because it can be difficult to clearly distinguish between news, especially that with heavily opinionated content, and entertainment, this paper only evaluates mass news media that professes as functioning primarily to inform media consumers about current, historical or anticipated events.

According to Said, imperial domination first “unfolds in the mind and the imagination, and it takes body in the multifarious responses of a people’s culture, itself the infinitely subtle mediation of material realities” (Davidson, quoted in Said 1994). The ideological formations that “certain territories and people require and beseech domination,” which are requisite for imperialism, assume that it is possible to identify and define those populations in contradistinction to the West. Knowledge production is utilized by Western powers to reinforce material domination at an ideological level, defining parts of the world as existing beyond the boundaries of the West and rendering them knowable, interpretable and administrable (Said 1994). Said understands this knowledge production as mutually constitutive, writing:

The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience... The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles... Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (Said 2003, p. 23).

Orientalism is thus defined as the discursive production of a dichotomized world split into the Occident, self-conceptualized as the civilized West, and the Orient, the potentially threatening Other that exists beyond the boundaries of the West. This ideological formation essentializes and differentiates the imperial core from the Oriental Other, defining the West as culturally superior and the Orient as inherently uncivilized; communications scholar Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria summarizes, “Orientalism as a discourse does three things: it dichotomizes, essentializes, and creates hierarchies” (Saghaye-Biria 2018). To Said, every nation that has sought global or regional dominance has, in some way, sought to present itself as exceptional, framing its efforts to subjugate “lesser peoples” as benevolent or otherwise necessary and legitimate (1994). Orientalist constructions of the Other consequently motivate and provide a justification for Western powers to exercise domination over distant populations.

With the conclusion of World War II and the decline of overt modes of colonialism, Said argues that a novel convergence of legitimacy and political power motivated subsequent forms of imperial domination. Rather than outwardly justifying hegemonic projects in the Global South through biological or cultural supremacy, America and its allies asserted a benevolent responsibility to inculcate former colonies with democratic values and to oversee their integration into the world economic system (Said 1994). The era of decolonization brought special urgency to this mission. Drawing on Orientalist interpretations of the Other, American policy and intelligence experts feared that Third World populations would devolve into chaos or communism without Western leadership (Xiang 2020). The emergent doctrines of modernization and development during this period imbued Western projects of intervention into the periphery with such authority, made possible by advances in the production of knowledge within the core (Said 1994). Addressing the role Western knowledge production plays in mobilizing American domestic support for interventions in the Orient, Said explains:

A whole information and policymaking apparatus in the United States depends on these illusions and diffuses them widely. Large segments of the intelligentsia allied to the community of geopolitical strategists together deliver themselves of expansive ideas about ... the future of Western civilization, and the fight for democracy against turmoil and terrorism (Said 1981).

Orientalist representations of the Other remain a persistent component of the formulation and execution of Western foreign policy and they are an essential element of projects of domination and imperialism. While experts on the Orient once merely sought to make the Other knowable to the Occident, “now the Orient must be made to perform, its power must be enlisted on the side of ‘our’ values, civilization, interests, goals. Knowledge of the Orient is directly translated into activity” (Said 2003). Such activity is rendered possible through the proliferation of what Said refers to as an “amazing conceptual arsenal” – including “theories of economic phases, social types, traditional societies, systems transfers, pacification, [and] social mobilization” – that

Western news media, experts, and non-governmental organizations can invoke to justify Western domination over the Orient (Said 1994).

Said notes that Orientalism is not merely some “nefarious ‘Western’ imperialist plot to hold down the ‘Oriental’ world,” but rather the continual production and proliferation of Orientalist knowledge through which the Orient is defined and maintained (Said 2003). As these processes can result both from intentional efforts to subjugate the Orient and the inadvertent expressions of cultural assumptions, Said differentiates between latent and manifest forms of Orientalism. Said defines latent Orientalism as the unconscious forms of positivity that are diffused through scholarly attempts to make the Orient knowable to the Occident, supplying Western commentators with the “enunciative capacity” to engage in discourse about the Orient, while manifest Orientalism consists of explicitly stated views about the Orient. While manifest Orientalist narratives about a given society or culture can be easily amended to accommodate new information about the Orient, latent Orientalism represents the totality of essentialist interpretations about the Orient, “distilling”, as Said states, “its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence” (Said 2003). Latent Orientalism is pervasive and deeply rooted within the culture of the West and can withstand the emergence of new interpretations of the Orient.

Because Orientalism encompasses both the totality of cultural assumptions and particular details about the Other, this study is divided into two sections. In the first, the historical background of Orientalism in the US will be discussed at length. By highlighting this pertinent cultural context, this thesis will contribute to the large body of research detailing how Western knowledge of the Orient enables independent news media to function as propaganda. An overview of relevant literature will demonstrate that while many scholars, including Said, have

identified the ways in which mass news media proliferates and informs Western representations of the Orient, significantly less research has specifically evaluated the role US state media apparatuses play in this process. The first section will attempt to bridge this gap in the existing literature, demonstrating that Orientalism, independent news media, and US propaganda are inextricably linked. In the second section, a systematic analysis of news coverage of Xinjiang will be conducted. News articles will be quantitatively examined to demonstrate that independent media coverage of Xinjiang adopts the tone and framing devices used by political elites and state broadcasters. The results of this analysis will be used to demonstrate that much of Said's argument remains true today: the assumption that the West possesses the exclusive capacity to produce the "truth" about China remains deeply engrained in the insular environment in which Western knowledge of the Orient is produced.

US Propaganda in the Orient: History and Scholarship

This literature review will first examine the historical relationship between American Orientalists and US foreign policy apparatuses, beginning in the Cold War period. Prior to the 20th century, America's experience with the Orient was not nearly as direct as that of the colonial powers of Europe, who had substantial interactions with the Middle East and Asia. American scholars thus made comparatively less effort to make the Orient knowable than did those in England and France. It was only after World War II rendered the US the predominant global power that a surge in American specialists and developments in private-sector journalism systematized knowledge production of the Orient (Said 1981). While the American public has long held particular beliefs about the Orient, the manner in which such knowledge came to be and how that knowledge was deployed shifted significantly with America's emergence as a world power. Furthermore, American representations of China are deeply colored by the experience of the

Cold War, as the Communist Party of China's ascension to power was concurrent with the US's hegemonic expansion (Turner 2014).

Special attention will be given to the role US state media has played in reflecting and reproducing Orientalist narratives. While many scholars, including Said, have identified the ways in which independent mass media proliferates and informs Western representations of the Orient, significantly less research has specifically evaluated how state media apparatuses have done so. Said refers to the Orientalist narratives proliferated by Western news media as a "sustained propaganda effort," through which popular support for interventions in the Orient is fostered. The first section of this literature review will examine the degree to which US propaganda apparatuses have informed and proliferated Western narratives of the Orient (Said 2003). The convergence of state media and Orientalism is of particular importance to this study, as US state media significantly informs much of the contemporary production of Western knowledge of Xinjiang.

Research on the interplay of Western knowledge production and the state's use of Orientalist knowledge often relies on declassified State Department records from the Cold War. Efforts to identify how this network contributes to American interpretations of China's Xinjiang policies are often hampered by lack of governmental transparency.⁵ However, the historical record of US government efforts to develop and utilize an "amazing conceptual arsenal," as Said refers to it, reveals distinct patterns in the ways knowledge of the Orient is produced and deployed to advance American interests both abroad and at home (Said 2003). This study

⁵ For example, a FOIA release on a 2019 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor memorandum detailing how officials should respond to press inquiries regarding steps the Trump administration had undertaken to protect the rights of Uyghurs was redacted under FOIA exemption b(5) (FOIA 2021). As Singhal (2016) notes, b(5) exemptions are prone to abuse. He writes, "agencies invoke Exemption 5 to shield essentially any document generated in the course of agency decision making," leading to "absurd" justifications for the non-disclosure of records.

provides evidence that similar patterns may be at play in contemporary American narratives of Xinjiang.

The second section of this literature review will address the role independent mass media plays in shaping and reproducing Western knowledge of the Orient. Much of the post-Cold War literature related to the idea of Orientalism focuses on American representations of the Middle East in mass media, particularly after the inauguration of the Global War on Terror shifted popular attention to the Islamic world. While some government documents have elucidated the degree to which the government facilitated and benefited from Orientalist narratives of Islam, governmental secrecy has hampered efforts to thoroughly delineate the interaction between Western experts, news media, and state propaganda apparatuses. This thesis evaluates independent news media in order to reconstruct such interactions within the context of China's Xinjiang policies, so a review of literature discussing Orientalism during the Global War on Terror is necessary. After a discussion of this research, attention will be shifted to recent studies that examine the framing of China in mass news media. While numerous scholars have discussed the ways Western news media frame China, less of this research draws explicitly from Said's scholarship on Orientalism and few researchers have sought to examine the interplay between state media outlets, mass news media, and independent experts in the context of China. The novel research presented in this thesis attempts to fill lacuna in the overlap between existing literatures on these subjects.

Orientalism and State Media

Western Orientalists in academia have long contributed to the formulation and execution of US foreign policy goals, supervising State Department officials and taking on positions within the national intelligence community (Engerman 2007). At the end of World War II, US Orientalist

scholars helped train military officers to lead the US occupation of the Pacific. During the Cold War, Orientalists directly helped Washington formulate its foreign policy stance toward the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (Kemper and Kalinovsky 2015). Essentializing Orientalist notions about distant populations served as the foundation for George Kennan's doctrine of containment. His 1946 Long Telegram described the USSR's "neurotic" worldview as stemming from "instinctive Russian sense of insecurity," and contended that geopolitical confrontation was necessary because Russians were "unamenable to argument or reason" (Kennan 1946; Kennan 1947; Belemonte 2013). Following the PRC's entrance to the Korean War, the US's policy of containment similarly appealed to deeply embedded Occidental narratives of a threatening China. Scholar Oliver Turner describes these policies as "the inscription of American discourses which separated Threatening China from the true American population. [US China policy reproduced and] reaffirmed China's foreignness from the United States and its location beyond an imagined civilized world" (Turner 2014). During the Cold War, Orientalist notions of Asian psychological traits mobilized US propaganda activities directed at the Third World, as demonstrated in a 1949 National Security Council report which, in stating that "Asiatic peoples . . . are traditionally submissive to power," effectively justified the production and dissemination of Western knowledge as a necessary effort to protect Orientals from communist influence (Xiang 2020).

The US displaced Great Britain as the predominant global power at a time when Third World countries were increasingly revolting against colonial domination, necessitating the construction of a US national self-identity as a non-imperial actor still capable of intervening in the periphery (Klein 2003). As Said notes, cultural narratives play a significant role in the construction of collective national identities and the mobilization of imperial projects on behalf

of those communities. The West can identify and define itself in contradistinction to representations of the Orient, and thereby justify its actions in Othered parts of the world (Said 1993). As scholar Jodi Kim writes, Kennan's doctrine of containment "appears as a trope of American exceptionalism, a nationalist narrative of American self-identity" (Kim 2010). US state information producers, in conjuncture with Orientalist scholars, have historically contributed to the creation and proliferation of the narratives of national self-identity necessary to define and advance security interests, including in relation to China. During the early Cold War, the interpretation of China as a threat occupied a prominent position in American political imaginations, both for policy makers and the broader public. As Turner writes,

As a projection of American identity, [Western narratives of Threatening China] served to affirm the United States as a global promoter of democracy and capitalism and legitimized China's containment at the margins of the imagined free world. That world was deemed to consist of inherently civilized nations such as the United States and Taiwan... Cold War China was threatening in part because it was uncivilized... American images such as that of Uncivilized China have long endured because, to a significant extent, they are constitutive of the most intrinsic understandings of American identity [and its] commitment to democracy (Turner 2014).

Said largely conceptualized Orientalism as a "citational" discourse in which Western writers draw heavily from other Westerners to produce accounts of the Orient. As historian Melani McAlister argues, "in this oddly self-enclosed network of authorities, citing other Western writers or an earlier generation of images is the primary proof of 'authenticity' and accuracy" (McAlister 2005). However, by the mid-1950s, American Orientalists in intelligence communities began deriving and promoting knowledge from select representatives of traditionally Othered groups. Curated accounts from members of the Other served a strategic value: by promoting "authentic" Asian voices, the US could advance useful narratives from individuals not linked to the government, narratives which appeared more "truthful" than information from obvious propaganda sources. By carefully selecting friendly individuals, the

government blurred the distinction between state propaganda efforts and the legitimate self-representation of minorities (Xiang 2020).

Throughout the Cold War, US propaganda agencies heavily promoted accounts from American-born and émigré Asians. These accounts reinforced the US public's self-perception as a benevolent actor in the post-colonial world and provided domestic audiences with justifications for interventions abroad (Klein 2003). US state broadcasters such as the US Information Agency (USIA), alongside national intelligence agencies, heavily funded anti-communist émigré groups and “governments-in-exile” in order to further the domestic and international belief that the US advanced legitimate interests of oppressed people against tyrannical governments (Osgood 2002). As this study demonstrates, US state broadcasters and independent media outlets continue to promote such voices, thereby reinforcing the narrative that the US genuinely represents the interests of oppressed people in its confrontations with China.

Western knowledge of Oriental populations has also historically informed and legitimized the production and dissemination of US state propaganda. During the Cold War, the CIA and state media agencies called attention to the plight of Muslims in the communist world, including Muslims in Xinjiang, in hopes of fostering religious and nationalist ardor against communist states (Guerrero 2017). Former intelligence official Paul Henze was successful in bringing niche scholarship on the lives of Central Asian Muslims to the attention of President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. Henze promoted the idea that the domestic dissatisfaction of Muslims in the Caucasus could be instrumentalized to destabilize the USSR. Aspects of Henze's operational program, such as increased spending on radio broadcasting aimed at Soviet Muslim audiences, were enacted by the Carter administration and broadened during Reagan's presidency (Kalinovsky 2015). Brzezinski led the expansion of the

USIA, which oversaw Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty, and worked to convince Soviet Muslims that communism posed a foreign, existential threat to Islam. The CIA also helped coordinate and finance ostensibly grassroots Muslim protests in front of Soviet embassies, and ensured that these demonstrations were widely reported on by state broadcasters (Guerrero 2017).

The efforts of USIA broadcasters operationalized George Kennan's position that US state media should serve as a form of covert political warfare, a stance originating in his conceptualization of containment as an ideological struggle rather than overt conflict (Xiang 2020). State media apparatuses such as VOA were designed to internationally broadcast state-produced media via radio in order to globally advance an anti-communist ideology and create an international climate of opinion favorable to the US (Grygiel and Sager 2020). While the broadcasters operating under the USIA presented themselves as independent media sources delivering objective reporting, they received most of their funding from the CIA for the duration of the Cold War (Juwayeyi 2021). Without referring specifically to the language used by Said, communications scholar Monroe Price explains how such an approach reflects Orientalist understandings of cultural hierarchy:

[State media] surrogates purport to provide the "objective" and informative local station that citizens theoretically deserve as a human right but lack for a variety of reasons ... The conceit is that the United States, given these conditions, is privileged to target a state's citizens and furnish them the information sustenance that – in a proper world – would be an attribute of democratic participation. As with the "right to protect," intervention is formulated as gift of a human right as opposed to a penetration of space in violation of rules against the unauthorized use of force (Price 2021).

State media advances the Orientalist notion that populations in the periphery are incapable of realizing the rights and values the West views as universal without the paternalistic, guiding hand of the benevolent Occident. US state media's refusal to be labeled as propaganda further demonstrates Orientalist presuppositions of difference; as historian Kenneth Osgood writes, by

contesting accusations of propaganda, state sources instill and reinforce the notion that “the enemy disseminates propaganda; the United States conveys information. While ‘they’ tell lies, ‘we’ tell the truth” (Osgood 2006).

The interaction between Western academic knowledge about the Orient and US foreign policy throughout the Cold War extended beyond overt propaganda efforts to weaken communist states. The majority of the US’s propaganda was directed outside of the Soviet Union; by the end of the 1950s, the USIA maintained some 50 posts in Western Europe, with the largest programs focusing on Germany, Austria, Japan, and India (Osgood 2002). State Department agencies sought to promote American values both domestically and abroad through cultural programs intended to demonstrate the desirability of liberal democracy. As historian Laura Belmonte writes, “American officials fused the material and immaterial into a discourse justifying American predominance in international affairs. Through radio shows, films, and publications, U.S. policymakers propagated a carefully constructed narrative of progress, freedom, and happiness” (Belmonte 2013). With these programs, US officials sought to shape ideological views of intellectuals, academics, policy makers, journalists, and other influential individuals abroad (Osgood 2006). Private news organizations and state propaganda agencies often collaborated in the construction of a “Cold War consensus” by promoting stories favorable to the US, marginalizing alternative perspectives, and normalizing bellicose anti-communism as an American “orthodoxy” (Osgood 2002).

While little academic attention has been given to the indirect influence of US state media on perceptions of the Orient, there is ample literature examining the collaboration of American university administrators and national intelligence agencies to establish intellectual conformity during the Red Scare of the 1950s (Lowen 1997, for example). Historical evidence indicates that

such efforts continued long after the era of McCarthyism; throughout the remainder of the Cold War, the State Department sponsored academics such as Columbia University's Edward Allworth to produce research supporting US propaganda campaigns (Guerrero 2017). The CIA-sponsored Congress for Cultural Freedom, which operated for nearly 30 years and had offices in 35 countries, sought to erode lingering interest in communism among Europe's intelligentsia and establish an academic landscape more favorable to American values (Zollman 2021).

Since the end of the Cold War, several quasi-official organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Freedom House, and the US Agency for International Development have also engaged in state propaganda activities (Zollman 2021). While the NED professes to be a private, non-profit organization, it is primarily funded by Congress and has the explicit mandate to "strengthen democratic values" around the world (22 U.S.C. § 4111). By selectively allocating grants to friendly non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups, the NED has helped instrumentalize civil society and the media to promote US foreign policy objectives (Zollman 2021). According to political scientist Robert Pee, the US government heavily invested in the state-private network to obfuscate official involvement with knowledge production in civil society, bolstering the credibility and non-ideological appearance of information created in this network. Through selectively funding NGOs, the state can aid projects that conform with and advance US strategic objectives (Pee 2018).

Scholar Nicolas Guilhot similarly identifies the professionalized network of democratization advocates as forming what he calls, "a seamless web of 'global governance', where they interact with and sometimes overlap with government agencies, international organizations, and corporations" (Guilhot 2005). By funding and exporting democratization expertise, the US government helps maintain the West's monopoly on the production of

knowledge about the Orient (Said 1985; Guilhot 2005). As Said writes of this trend, “so pervasive has the professionalization of intellectual life become that [policy-oriented] intellectuals have internalized the norms of the state, which when it understandably calls them to the capital, in effect becomes their patron” (Said 1994). The scope of US propaganda activities suggests they may exert a significant degree of influence on academic and non-governmental knowledge production within the US. However, this study was unable to identify any prior research evaluating the extent to which US state propaganda has informed independent and production of knowledge about the Orient.

The Role of Mass Media

Said devotes particular attention to popular forms of mass media, arguing that they play a crucial role in the construction of Orientalist narratives of the perceived Other. The media exercises a great deal of influence on the shaping of such perceptions, which, as he notes, are, “effective in representing strange and threatening foreign cultures for the home audience [and] creating an appetite for hostility and violence against these cultural ‘Others’” (Said 1978). As Said writes, the media is implicated in the dissemination of information about the Oriental Other:

For most Americans ... the branch of the cultural apparatus that has been delivering [the Orient] to them for the most part includes the television and radio networks, the daily newspapers, and the mass-circulation news magazines... this powerful concentration of mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture [and] reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media. Along with this picture, which is not merely a picture but also a communicable set of feelings about the picture, [goes the over-all context], the picture's setting, its place in reality, the values implicit in it, and, not least, the kind of attitude it promotes in the beholder (Said 1981).

Drawing on the Gramscian notion of the superstructure, Said argues that while Western states generally support a high degree of freedom of opinion, there are quantitative and qualitative tendencies that favor certain, limited representations of reality in mainstream media. In this view, mass media content necessarily reflects dominant ideologies because it is created within

historically contingent social and institutional contexts. Journalists, news agencies, editorial boards, and network executives must actively determine which events are worth reporting on and how those events will be framed, a determination that inherently reflects deeply internalized values and implicit understandings of the world, understandings that can reflect latent Orientalist conceptions of the Other (Said 1981).

In his discussion of mass media's crucial role in the proliferation of Orientalist narratives about the Other, Said draws from the work of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their influential 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent* (Said 1994). Like Said, Herman and Chomsky contend that the economic context in which Western mass media is created and distributed necessarily prevents media from voicing any critique of capitalist structures that could threaten or even destabilize existing power structure. Because new media content is constrained by and made to reinforce the economic, political, and social positions of privileged groups, it functions as propaganda. As they argue, "the media serve this purpose in many ways: through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises" (Herman and Chomsky 2010).

Subsequent studies of framing devices used by US mass media have often drawn from the theoretical frameworks presented by Said (1994) and Herman and Chomsky (1988). This research understands framing to be an inherent aspect of mass media's presentation of stories and events, and framing analysis is widely regarded as a legitimate approach to media studies (Alshahrani 2021). Communications scholar Robert Entman offers perhaps the most frequently cited definition of framing within the topic literature:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described... Texts can make bits of information more salient by placement or repetition,

or by associating them with culturally familiar symbols. However, even a single un-illustrated appearance of a notion in an obscure part of the text can be highly salient, if it comports with the existing schemata in a receiver's belief systems (Entman 1993).

News framing invokes culturally familiar symbols and schemes in the mind of the media consumer, thereby reinforcing preconceived, hegemonic forms of knowledge. As communications scholar Paul D'angelo writes, news frames "create semantic associations within an individual's schemata. Textual propositions that encode frames are ... 'let in' by the individual into their prior knowledge, providing the basis by which schemata are updated and modified" (D'angelo 2002). To Said, latent cultural knowledge about the distant Other gains salience through news framing. Orientalist frames in news media proliferate essentialist, dichotomous understandings of the Other in the general public, fostering an environment in which domestic support for foreign policy action against the Other can easily be consolidated (Said 1994).

More recent research in the field of media studies generally reaches similar conclusions regarding the prominent role mass news media plays in forming public opinion and government policy. In a review of topic literature, Yang and Liu (2012) outline three commonly identified mechanisms through which mass media coverage is able to exercise its influence. First, mass news media plays a significant role in the determination of the relative salience of specific foreign policy issues. It fulfills this function because the volume of coverage on a specific topic must often reach a certain threshold before the topic can hold public attention and enter popular discourse (Yang and Liu 2012). In addition to informing the general public, news media determine which aspects of a subject will receive coverage and the manner in which those aspects are presented. By doing so, news media influences the degree of importance audiences place on that subject (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Consequently, the intensity of media coverage on a particular topic significantly influences the depth of attention given to that issue by the general public and policy makers alike. Intensity of coverage itself can reflect latent dominant

ideologies and the subconscious biases of reporters. Studies have found that Western news reporting on human rights issues focuses primarily on violations of political rights, while allocating little coverage to abuses of socio-economic rights (Powers 2016). Such coverage draws on dominant Western understandings of rights, particularly those enumerated by the US, thereby reproducing existing interpretations of the content and quality of those rights. For example, while violations of freedom of speech make headlines, a paucity of coverage on socio-economic rights crises caused by structural factors like extreme poverty renders such issues invisible to Western audiences.⁶ Western news media also tend to allocate significantly less attention to human rights violations in poor countries than to those in rich ones (Ramos et al. 2007). As the world's poorest states often occupy the imaginaries of the structural Orient, lack of media coverage can reinforce latent understandings of populations residing beyond the imperial core as alien, irrelevant and ultimately expendable.

Second, by selecting the manner in which certain topics are framed, news media can shape the manner in which both policy makers and the general public conceptualize and respond to that topic (Yang and Liu 2012). Scholars of Orientalism often call attention to this second mechanism when evaluating framing techniques used by ostensibly independent news media outlets during the US's 2003 invasion of Iraq. During the lead-up to US military involvement, popular news sources overwhelmingly uncritically adopted the framing techniques employed by President George W. Bush, contributing to a sweeping public consensus that armed intervention was morally obligatory (Bahador, Moses, and Youmans 2018; Sa'di 2021). Members of the Bush administration presented the war as an ethically imperative mission to spread democracy and liberate Iraqi women; this frame was especially prevalent after the invasion, as narratives of

⁶ See, for example, The New York *Time*'s coverage of the arrest of dissident Ilham Tohti in 'Ilham Tohti, Uighur Scholar in Chinese Prison, Is Given Human Rights Award' (Cumming-Bruce 2016).

Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction lost credibility (Bahador, Moses, and Youmans 2018). President Bush frequently appealed to narratives of national self-identity, constituted in juxtaposition to a despotic Oriental nation, while framing military invasion as a benevolent act. In a 2003 speech, he stated, "we have an unmatched advantage, a power that cannot be resisted, and that is the appeal of freedom to all mankind.... we foster prosperity and the habits of liberty" (Bush cited in Sa'di 2021). Similarly, Senator Hillary Clinton insisted that the US had a duty to establish Western women's rights regimes during the US occupation of Afghanistan. Such statements implicitly appeal to the Orientalist assumption that the West alone possesses the capability to interpret the objective content of universally applicable human rights and also capable of effectively establishing those rights (Steuter and Wills 2009).

Third, media coverage can prompt the creation of government policies that address issues in a manner consistent with the media's framing of said issues (Yang and Liu 2012). Empirical studies on policy agenda setting largely find that government attention to a given policy issue corresponds with media attention to that particular issue (Liu 2016). For example, Peksen, Peterson, and Drury (2014) found that between 1976 and 2000, coverage of human rights abuses in popular US-based newspapers increased the likelihood of humanitarian sanctions, though critical press coverage had a smaller effect for states allied with the US, despite those allies receiving a greater volume of press coverage than non-allies (Peksen, Peterson, and Drury 2014). Studies also find that the media's dehumanizing and Otherizing framing of distant populations produces higher domestic support for military action, particularly when that action is portrayed as morally just (Gray 2018). Media can thus lead to the creation and implementation of policies informed by the framing devices used within that coverage.

This thesis does not understand mass media to simply be an independent actor that delivers Orientalist narratives of the Other from elites to media consumers, be it consciously or unconsciously; news media outlets communicate dominant ideologies to the general public, but also play a role in shaping and reproducing those ideologies among other actors within the wider network of non-governmental organizations, activists, academics, and experts.⁷ The need to capture the attentions of lay audiences can also lead news producers to sensationalize and oversimplify reports made by NGOs (Powers 2016). This effect can lead NGOs to exaggerate claims or promote unverified or inaccurate information in order to gain media traction, public attention, and donor support (Cohen and Green 2012).

Other scholars have examined mass media's ability to function as state propaganda while also influencing knowledge production and the proliferation of Orientalist narratives. Historically, US news organizations and national security agencies have exchanged personnel freely, and American media creators have a long history of directly carrying out governmental assignments. A declassified internal CIA report in 1991 noted that the CIA had "relationships with reporters from every major wire service, newspaper, news weekly, and television network in the nation" (Zollman 2021). As Said notes of media coverage of the 1991 Gulf War, "the images and the prints [in news] were controlled by the government, and the major American media copied one another, and were in turn copied or shown (like CNN) all over the world" (Said 1994). Through this self-referential, citational discourse, Western knowledge of the conflict assumed a self-reinforcing character; a news article could be authenticated with its

⁷ A quick evaluation of several NGO reports and articles frequently mentioned in Western news stories suggests that this is the case for knowledge production about Xinjiang. Human Rights Watch's 2021 report "Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots" cites Western mass media in 94 instances of the 245 footnotes. Australian Strategic Policy Institute's 2021 report "Uyghurs For Sale" cited Western news media sources in 28 instances of the total 285 citations. New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy's 2021 "The Uyghur Genocide" made 70 citations to Western news sources within 317 footnotes. Adrian Zenz's widely cited 2019 journal article "Thoroughly Reforming Them Towards a Healthy Heart Attitude" contained 63 references in the works cited section, 13 of which were Western media sources.

conformity to other Western narratives, while information from Other sources could be rejected as naïve, untrustworthy, or irrelevant (Said 1994).

US Media Coverage of China

Though Said primarily focused on Western representations of the Arab world in his corpus, numerous scholars have since drawn upon his conception of Orientalism to evaluate the ways Western mass media appeal to and proliferate Orientalist narratives when covering China. In recent decades, China's rapid economic growth has strengthened its ability to challenge a US-dominated international system. US officials and news media have consequently framed China's growth as a disturbing deviation from a desirable status quo, a construction that is, as Turner writes, "underpinned by the constructed truth that a desirable and well-functioning system exists, and that China must learn from its (Western) gatekeepers to become one of the community" (Turner 2014). Western media and political discourse often present China as a dangerous state that cannot be trusted to abide by the norms of the civilized international system. American lawmakers and media outlets subsequently appeal to Orientalist representations of an uncivilized China to justify an increasingly hardline stance toward the perceived rival (Ooi and D'Arcangelis 2017).

Scholar Daniel Vukovich builds upon Said's understanding of Orientalism, contending that the recent rise of China has led to propagation of "Sinological-Orientalism." This iteration of Orientalism interprets China's recent growth as proof that it is becoming more like the West, whereas historical forms of Orientalism emphasized fundamental, often racial, differences between the Occident and Orient. As Vukovich writes, from the Sinological-Orientalist perspective, "China is still not 'normal' (and has been tragically different), but is engaged in a 'universal' process such that it will, and must, become the same as 'us'" (Vukovich 2013).

Sinological-Orientalism interprets China's rejection of liberal political values despite its economic growth as a preventable aberration from the path of "normal" development. To Vukovich, the "logic of sameness also dovetails with missionary discourse and the older French universalist logic of the civilizing mission: all 'natives' can become the same as 'us'" (Vukovich 2013). As in earlier forms of Orientalism, the Occident maintains a positional superiority over the Orient through discursive production, as abnormality is defined in comparison to models of development pursued by "advanced" Western democracies (Vukovich 2019; Wirman 2016).

Scholar Gavin Gray contends that deeply entrenched Western assumptions of the Orient enable media sources to evoke stereotypes when reporting on China. Whether deliberately or not, stories focusing on the barbarity or irrationality of Oriental cultures perpetuate the perception that such countries only understand the language of force. Additionally, "two-dimensional" presentations of Oriental countries lead Western audiences "to view such states as monolithic, impersonal structures headed by a caricature of a dictator, rather than complex collections of living, breathing citizens" (Gray 2018). Gray remains uncertain whether these shallow presentations are the result of unconscious bias within the media or of targeted attempts to elicit reactions among Western audiences. However, the findings of this thesis indicate that the media's role in propaganda dissemination is a consequence of both state efforts to propagandize the public and latent prejudices harbored by media creators.

Recent research commonly identifies the presence of Orientalist themes and tropes in contemporary Western media representations of China. US-based newspapers tend to represent China's broad economic engagement in Africa as exploitative and "ruthless" in contrast to a benevolent West, drawing on Orientalist assumptions of cultural hierarchies (Ali and Bahar 2019). Western media coverage of China's Belt Road Initiative primarily portray the initiative as

a crude ploy to advance Chinese interests and an insidious attempt to subjugate smaller states, while minimizing the potential benefits of Chinese investment (Yang and van Gorp 2021). Coverage of China's currency valuation, cyber intrusions, and maritime disputes also appeals to Orientalist tropes of China as a lawless bully, proliferating the assumption that America occupies a position of moral or legal authority (Ooi and D'arcangelis 2017). The frames employed by such coverage reinforce and propagate a growing negative perception of China among media consumers, and the media's tone toward China strongly predicts US public opinion the following year (Huang et al. 2021).

While individual studies differ in the language used to refer to their respective frames of interest, scholars consistently identify the presence of certain Orientalist frames in Western media. Most prominent among these are international cooperation and competition frames, in which China is presented as either beneficial or harmful to the US, and ideological frames, which call attention to China's adherence to Western normative standards.⁸ Scholars call attention to various ideological frames used by Western media, such as human rights frames or Cold War-reminiscent liberalism versus communist authoritarianism frames. Ideological frames highlight perceived differences between Chinese and Western systems of governance, pointing to the repressive nature of communism and the backwardness of China or otherwise imagining a Western model of political development as a standard China has failed to meet.

Though there is little literature discussing US media framing of China's policies in Xinjiang, extant research is generally consistent with the broader scholarship on China in media in its identification of framing devices. At the time of writing, Zhu (2017) offers the most

⁸ Niu and Relly (2021), Golan and Lukito (2017), Lee (2002), Nguyen and Hekman (2002), Xie (2020), Yuan and Fu (2020), Arif and Hayat (2017), Lams (2016), and Stone and Xiao (2007) all find that US-based media tends to evaluate China through its relationship with the West. Gray (2018), Wirman (2016), Yoo (2021), Yuan and Fu (2020), Lams (2016), and Moyo (2010) find that US-based media tends to evaluate China's actions through Western normative standards.

rigorous study of Western media coverage of Xinjiang, examining *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* coverage of Xinjiang between March 4 and September 21, 2014, a period during which the region experienced heightened levels of separatist violence. In the majority of these stories, the blame for violence was partially or fully placed on the repressive policies of the Communist Party and nearly no coverage was given to the scale of extremist violence. To do so, media tended to downplay the legitimacy of statements made by Chinese officials in favor of Uyghur exiles and Western experts. Articles also used the frame of resentment to highlight friction between China's Uyghur minority and Han majority, ignoring instances of cooperation and amicable relationships between ethnic groups. Zhu suggests that these framing devices reinforce Orientalist narratives of difference between the West and China by presenting China's policies as a form of authoritarian repression subject to the "moral scrutiny" of the US's standards (Zhu 2017). While this study presents a comprehensive analysis of Western media frames of Xinjiang, the study covered a limited timeframe and did not evaluate changes in prominent frames over time, particularly after the PRC increased its efforts to quell violence in the region.

Several other authors have analyzed Western media framing of China's policies toward Uyghurs, though these studies are narrower in scope than Zhu's 2017 query. Du and Li (2017) compared *CNN* and *CCTV* coverage of the 2014 Kunming Railway Station Attack and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, finding that *CNN* tended to primarily frame the instance of Uyghur separatist violence as a territorial conflict and avoided labeling the extremist attack in China as terrorism in order to appear more objective, despite calling significant attention to the victims of the Boston Marathon and condemning the bombing. While this study provides insight into differences in reporting by China and the US, its focus on events predating the PRC's "Strike

Hard Against Violent Terrorist Activity” limits its applicability to current framing of China’s Xinjiang policies. Kurniawan et al. (2020) qualitatively analyze the frames used in a small sample of *Global Times* and *The New York Times* articles covering China’s policies in Xinjiang, finding that Chinese media tend to frame those policies as an effective political approach to upholding humanitarian principles, while US media largely condemned the Chinese government as responsible for Uyghur suffering. This study, however, severely lacks methodological rigor, as authors failed to explain the selection of the four news stories sampled and did not operationally define the frames they identified. Lastly, Hadjab (2021) conducts an analysis of *The New York Times* coverage of Xinjiang between May 5, 2019, and March 30, 2021. This study finds that references to the potential of terrorist activity and past violence were scarce and Western journalists promoted the idea that China’s efforts to combat violent extremism in Xinjiang were unreasonable rather than a legitimate effort to curb political violence (Hadjab 2021). While this work provides insight about Western media coverage of China’s policies after the initiation of the “Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorist Activity” plan, its applicability is limited, as it only evaluates coverage in a single publication during a period of heightened US-China tensions.

While scholars such as Said (1981) and Herman and Chomsky (1988) point to the importance of journalistic reliance on official sources in solidifying the media’s function as propaganda, little research has examined how the use of US state media sources may influence how stories are framed in independent Western news publications. Du and Li (2017) note that Chinese state media reinforced the Chinese government’s position by opportunely framing the 2014 attacks in Kunming, but few, if any, prominent articles have substantially addressed how US state-produced media may lead ostensibly-independent publications to use frames more favorable to the US foreign policy objectives. Zhu’s analysis of *The New York Times* and *The*

Washington Post coverage found American news media to uniformly place Chinese accounts of attacks in quotation marks or referred to as “government-run media,” while US-based Uyghur groups and Western reports were presented as factual. Articles frequently failed to identify state media sources like Radio Free Asia as government broadcasters (Zhu 2017). However, Zhu’s study did not provide a quantitative evaluation of the potential effect these practices may have had on the content of articles.

While scholars such as Yang and Liu (2012) argue that dominant Western media frames of China fluctuated dramatically between 1992 and 2010, others point to the persistence of Orientalist and anti-communist interpretations of China (Jaworsky and Qiaoan 2021). Considering the long relationship between Orientalism and news media, a deeper analysis of US media framing of Xinjiang is both timely and necessary. A longitudinal evaluation of the frames used in coverage of Xinjiang may reveal how changes in US elite foreign policy positions over that same time period, which saw the State Department shift from rhetoric of “severe official repression of the freedoms of speech, religion, association, and assembly of Uighurs” in 2014 to “Genocide and crimes against humanity” by 2020, interact with independent news media.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: Does news media coverage of Xinjiang reflect the dominant perspectives of US policy elites?

According to Said, content in news media largely reflects the views of “powerful interests in the society” (1981). If this is true, US media coverage of China’s Xinjiang policies should also reflect the dominant ideologies of domestic elites. For the purpose of this study, presidential administration is used to indicate dominant ideology. In topic literature, analysts generally agree that the Trump administration oversaw a significant reorientation of US relations with China,

pivoting from the cautious partnership maintained under Obama, Bush, and Clinton toward an explicitly competitive rivalry (Kubo 2019). Prior to Trump's election, Washington largely approached China as what they called a responsible stakeholder in the post-Cold War international system. Rhetorically, President Obama, for example, presented US-China relations as "the most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century" and welcomed China's growing role in international affairs (Obama quoted in Li 2016; Mastanduno 2020). While competition was a prominent feature of US-Sino relations, the US often sought to cooperate on matters of mutual concern, such as terrorism in Central and South Asia.

After Trump's election, the US took a more isolationist approach to security cooperation and pursued protectionist trade policies (Kubo 2019). President Trump actively rejected Obama's cautiously optimistic view of China, and the US moved to contain China's growing economic and strategic influence. In 2017, the National Security Strategy explicitly named China as a competitor, stating that its aspirations were "antithetical to US values and interests" (Trump 2017; Kubo 2019). Members of Trump's cabinet frequently justified the US's confrontational approach by appealing to fundamental ideological differences between the two countries. Secretary Pompeo, for example, stated, "Xi Jinping is a true believer in a bankrupt totalitarian ideology...that informs his decades-long desire for global hegemony of Chinese communism" (Yang 2021). Trump generally eschewed the US's traditional involvement in international human rights discourse, withdrawing from the UN Human Rights Council in 2018. However, his administration often appealed to a professed concern over China's rights practices to justify sanctions and tariffs necessary for Trump's trade war (Dwyer 2018; Yang 2021).

President Biden signaled continuity with the Trump administration's position on China, stating that competition with China is fundamentally "a battle between the utility of democracies

in the 21st century and autocracies” (Biden 2021). Under Secretary Blinken, the State Department has maintained that China’s policies toward Uyghurs constitute genocide (Blinken 2021). Like Trump, Biden has referred to China’s human rights record to justify adversarial policy positions. By framing China as an ideological threat, his administration can justify expenditures on the military, infrastructure, and technology research and development to the general public as necessary for maintaining American primacy over China (Nathan 2021).

News articles published before the US’s pivot toward competition are expected to frame events in Xinjiang as a security issue and call attention to potential opportunities for US-Sino cooperation over shared concerns about Islamic extremism. As Obama’s administration expressed cautious optimism toward China, news media are expected to evaluate China somewhat positively. Conversely, media after the US’s shift toward competition are expected to focus on China’s human rights practices and ideological differences between China and the US. As Trump and Biden used predominantly negative tones to discuss China, articles published during either presidency are expected to be significantly more critical of China.

H1: US media coverage of China’s Xinjiang policies will reflect stated positions of US political elites toward China

H1a: Emphasis on competition rather than cooperation with China by US political elites corresponds to negative tones toward China’s Xinjiang policies in media.

H1b: Emphasis on competition rather than cooperation with China by US political elites corresponds to different frames in media coverage of China’s Xinjiang policies.

RQ2: Does US news media use anti-communist framing devices when discussing China’s policies in Xinjiang?

As the US’s Cold War propaganda activities demonstrate, private news organizations have historically helped state media apparatuses establish anti-communism as orthodoxy in American culture. Said argues that this news content is informed by the internalized beliefs of Western commenters, who predominately assume that the US has a duty to exorcise backward Oriental

populations of the specter of communism (Said 1994). As he writes, “once it was decided that [a] country was to be saved from communism, [Western knowledge production] acquired an almost unquestioned social, and certainly cultural, authority in the United States” (Said 1981).

Consequently, “caricatural essentializations” of communism have imbued Western knowledge with an enunciative capacity denied to communist states like the PRC (Said 1994).⁹ Vukovich similarly finds that with the Soviet Union’s collapse, “China [became] the last place left where one can take up the enunciative position of he-who-speaks-the-truth against an Orwellian regime” (Vukovich 2013). If this argument is true, news media coverage of China should reflect

Orientalist, anti-communist assumptions about the Orient. Such assumptions are expected to remain prevalent in Western news coverage regardless of the US’s stance toward China, as latent Orientalist beliefs are deeply ingrained in the American conscious (Said 1994).

H2: Anti-communism will remain a consistent framing device in media coverage across the period of the study.

RQ3: Does US state media influence news media?

⁹It is more accurate to say knowledge produced by Chinese actors linked to the Communist Party of China, but even this qualification is hardly sufficient. Because Western imaginaries of the Orient interpret Othered populations as a cohesive totality constituted by shared essential characteristics, no particular individual can ever completely extricate oneself from this construction. As a recent example, MIT professor and US citizen Gang Chen was arrested in 2021 for alleged ties to the Chinese government, under the China Initiative, a Justice Department program created by the Trump Administration. This initiative sought to counter Chinese espionage and systematic efforts to steal US technology. Chen’s charges were dropped after a year of legal proceedings, but represented one of many cases in which the China Initiative disproportionately targeted scholars with Chinese heritage (Barry 2022). Some 88% of defendants were ethnically Chinese and most were accused of being a “nexus to China,” maintaining familial or academic ties to China. An acute minority faced actual allegations of espionage (German 2022). Biden formally ended the program, though Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew Olsen stated that its operations furthered legitimate security concerns and indicated that the program would continue with slight revisions. Announcing successor programs, Olsen did not apologize for the program’s anti-Chinese biases, but stated new initiatives were necessary because China was “more brazen and threatening than ever before” (Mervis 2022). As this case demonstrates, Orientalism places the onus on individual Asians to prove they exist outside the Oriental totality imagined by the West. Meeting this burden of proof is a Sisyphean task because any Chinese scholar can be assumed a potential spy. Policy references to the “crime” of being a “nexus with China” reveal that to the American Orientalist, even Chinese individuals working for “us” reveal their duplicitous nature by being Oriental. Beyond excluding bright minds and novel perspectives from non-Western scholars, programs such as the China Initiative conceal scientific findings, thereby reinforcing the US’s privileged position as the center of knowledge production.

According to Said, news media outlets often uncritically reproduce state-produced media, thereby mutating ostensibly independent commercial news sources into vessels for propaganda (1994). Subsequent studies have found support for Said’s argument, indicating that news media often adopts the frames employed by state media when discussing the US’s geopolitical rivals. As scholar Florian Zollman notes, by reproducing state media, news media effectively assist US state agencies efforts to conduct information wars; when proliferating state media narratives, news media contribute to the demonization of the Other and heightened international tensions (2021). Because state media agencies possess mandates other than impartially conveying information to the public, material produced by state broadcasters may differ in content from commercial news that is not expressly created to achieve political objectives.¹⁰

Historical evidence detailing the longstanding relationship between news media and state media presents a distinct challenge to the media-as-a-watchdog perspective, which optimistically views the press as a facilitator of public discourse (Hampton 2009). This paradigm understands the so-called “fourth estate” to function with a high degree of autonomy, serving the interests of the general populace by providing accurate information and acting as a check on the government within the US system of “checks and balances” (Donohue 1995). Norms of journalistic objectivity and impartiality are considered by many liberal theorists to be a necessary feature in democratic forms of government. As scholar Richard Kaplan writes, “objectivity supposedly secures a space for neutral, factual information and public deliberation,” free from the interference of political officials and elites who may seek to influence public discourse for

¹⁰ For example, the Voice of America was explicitly created with the mandate to advance “the long-range interests of the United States” (U.S.C. 3168). The Global Engagement Center was established in 2016 with a mandate to “support the development and dissemination of fact-based narratives and analysis to counter propaganda and disinformation directed at the United States” (NDAA 2017). The US Agency for Global Media, which currently oversees VOA, RFA, and RFE/RL has the stated mission “to inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy” (Grygiel and Sager 2020). USAGM broadcasters are also mandated to “counter state-sponsored propaganda which undermines the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States” (22 U.S.C. 6209).

personal interests (Kaplan 2009). Because US state media actively seeks to influence public discourse in pursuit of policy goals, its content will not always contain exclusively neutral information. Consequently, news media that relies heavily on state media information may differ from news media based exclusively on non-governmental sources or novel journalism.

H3: Articles citing US state-produced media will differ in content from articles not citing US state-produced media

H3a: Articles citing US state-produced media will take a more negative stance toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US-state produced media.

H3b: Articles citing US state-produced media use different frames toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US-state produced media.

RQ4: Does news media reporting based on US-funded research differ from news media produced without US-funded research?

According to Said, large portions of the Westerns intelligentsia have historically maintained a close relationship with state policymakers and geopolitical strategists (Said 1981). This relationship persists into the present, and Zollman (2021) and Guilhot (2005) both point to the significant role that information produced through state-funded networks continues to play in reinforcing dominant ideologies. These authors suggest that quasi-official institutions such as the NED, USAID, and Freedom House seek to influence public discourse by heavily funding research that promotes neoliberal ideology and advances US interests. If state-funded information significantly differs from independently or privately financed information, news media that draws heavily on state-funded information may differ in content from media that does not.

H4: Articles citing US state-funded research will differ in content from articles not citing US state-produced media

H4a: Articles citing US state-funded research will take a more negative stance toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US-state produced media.

H4b: Articles citing US state-funded research will use different frames toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US state-funded research.

RQ5: Does the use of exile or dissident sources influence news media coverage?

According to Herman and Chomsky, Western news media often rely heavily on the accounts of defectors and persons living in exile to demonstrate the horrors of communism. Journalists often fail to scrutinize unverifiable narratives in cases where those narratives are consistent with pre-existing representations of communist states (Herman and Chomsky 1988). Historically, US state media and national intelligence agencies have funded anti-communist émigré groups and “governments-in-exile,” in order to frame certain foreign policy agendas as advancing the interests of oppressed people (Osgood 2002; Klein 2003). Previous studies have found Western news sources to allocate more coverage to the perspectives of dissidents than to Chinese leadership (Lams 2016). Western journalists often seek out easily accessible dissidents and activists for commentary on China, particularly when those individuals are already established as a regular media source (Richter and Gebauer 2011, in Lams 2016). Zhu (2017) finds that Western news coverage of Xinjiang often placed greater emphasis on the accounts of Uyghur exile groups than officials, reflecting the assumption that Chinese officials could not be trusted. This literature indicates that US media accords dissident and exile perspectives a great deal of authority, thereby elevating narratives favorable to dominant interests. If information about China's policies in Xinjiang provided by exiles or Uyghur advocacy groups differs from the accounts provided by other sources, new reporting based on exile sources may differ in content from media that does not.

H5: News media citing Uyghur exiles or exile advocacy groups will differ in content from articles that do not rely on the accounts of exiles.

H5a: Articles from exiles or exile advocacy groups will take a more negative stance toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not.

H5b: Articles citing exiles or exile advocacy groups will use different frames toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not.

Methodology

At the time of writing, a FOIA request filed by the author in April 2021 for State Department records detailing efforts to fund the creation and promotion of information about Xinjiang remains unfilled. Without access to internal State Department documents, content analysis of independent news media provides an alternative method to evaluate representations of China's policies in Xinjiang. In order to explore the interaction among US state media, independent news media, and Western experts, this study employs qualitative analysis of news media coverage on China's policies in Xinjiang.

Sources and Sampling

Four prominent news publications commonly evaluated within media studies were selected to sample. Topic literature frequently refers to *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* as leading newspapers of record, each playing a significant role in shaping and informing public opinion at the national level. These publications reflect consensus within mainstream journalism, and by targeting elite and educated readers, "remain an important conduit for communicating dominant ideologies in international politics" (Douai and Lauricella 2014). In these publications, opinion editorials represent "the concentrate of the elite discourse of salient issues of the time and most clearly manifest 'the dominant interpretative frameworks'," and as such, are expected to influence public opinion and government policy (Yoo 2017). Benkler, Faris, and Roberts find that these prevalent news sources facilitate and reproduce dominant perspectives by creating an insular environment for elite discourse. Their quantitative analysis determined that US media producers primarily allocate "attention and authority to professional media outlets, several with quite long institutional histories" (2018). Among the

most frequently cited sources they identify were *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *Politico*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The Wall Street Journal* (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018).

The Washington Post, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CNN* were selected for this study, considering the large role these sources play in reflecting and shaping elite consensus on China and influencing sentiments within the general public. Though not a traditional newspaper, *CNN* was included in this study as *CNN.com* was the most widely visited news website in 2021 (Watson 2022). *Foxnews.com* was also initially included in this study due to its popularity and significance as a leading conservative online media source, but discarded due to the absence of reliable and accessible archives of online articles.

Articles were gathered through a Boolean search on Factiva for “Uyghur” OR “Uighur” OR “Uyghurs” OR “Uighurs”, with the selected sources for dates 1/1/2014 and ending with 12/31/2021. These dates were selected as violent tensions involving Uyghur extremists peaked in early 2014, triggering the Strike-Hard policies and subsequent Western media coverage. The end date of December 31, 2021, was selected in order to limit the scope of the study within restraints of practicality and limited resources.

Articles meeting search criteria were indexed and manually skimmed for topical relevance. Criteria for determining topical relevance were adapted from Douai and Lauricella (2014), who looked to “headlines, abstracts, or lead paragraphs” in their study of Orientalist framings devices in Western media coverage. During the initial data gathering process, the lead paragraph was found to be an inconsistent marker because digital articles often did not observe standard paragraph lengths. Criteria were adjusted to include articles that met Boolean criteria within the first 8 sentences. Articles that met search criteria but redirected to external media like

podcasts or videos were excluded, as were articles that did not primarily focus on China's policies or international responses to China's policies, such as reviews of US-based Uyghur restaurants. To exclude extraneous articles, only articles containing at least 2 non-consecutive sentences discussing China's policies in Xinjiang were included. Articles were also excluded that primarily functioned as a brief or summary of other recent reporting conducted by the same organization to reduce potential issues of multicollinearity. The initial census yielded 545 articles in *The New York Times*, 305 articles in *The Wall Street Journal*, 401 articles in *The Washington Post*, and 353 articles in *CNN* meeting search criteria.

Coding and Measurement

After establishing data gathering protocol, sampled articles were evaluated with two-stage inductive and deductive procedure (Altheide 1996; Van Gorp 2010).¹¹ During the inductive phase, qualitative textual analysis was utilized to identify prominent frames through which articles portrayed China's policies in Xinjiang. As communications scholar Baldwin Van Gorp explains, inductive framing analysis allows researchers to systematically reconstruct all relevant frames for a topic. Doing so "makes it possible to instruct independent coders to identify the presence of the frame in a subsequent deductive phase, thus limiting ... subjectivity from the framing analysis" (2010). By first broadly qualitatively evaluating a survey of relevant documents, prevalent themes and frames can be identified, allowing for the creation of protocols for systematic analysis. Doing so allows meaningful quantitative comparisons to be made during the subsequent deductive phases of a study (Altheide 1996; 2000).

During the inductive phase of this study, qualitative textual analysis was informed by prior literature on the framing of China in Western media, though no particular frames identified

¹¹ The use of this methodological approach was adopted from Yoo (2021) and Lams (2016), who both employ a two-stage approach to evaluate Western news media framing of China.

within existing were specifically searched for in advance. An initial perusal of the articles meeting search criteria uncovered several prominent, though not necessarily distinct, frames through which China's Xinjiang policies were presented: the Human Rights Frame, the Terrorism/Domestic Security Frame, the Economic Frame, the Cultural Frame, the Communist Authoritarianism Frame, and the Geopolitical Cooperation/Competition Frame.¹²

Preliminary coding guidelines were then constructed to establish consistent criteria for detecting frames, using individual binary indicator variables to signify the presence or absence of each frame in a given article. In addition, coders were instructed to identify the Dominant Frame used in each article by evaluating which particular frame was featured most prominently. To conduct a test for the intercoder reliability of the initial coding guidelines, 8 articles from each source ($n = 32$) were selected using simple random sampling to meet a requisite $n = 30$ (Lombard et al. 2002). The author and a trained test coder each independently coded the sample of articles before comparing results, and Cohen's kappa was calculated for each pair of corresponding variables (Cohen 1960; Yoo 2021).

Several variables yielded Cohen's kappa values below the lower boundary of $\kappa = .61$ representing substantial observer agreement for categorical data (Landis and Koch 1977). In order to increase the reliability of coding guidelines, each discrepancy between corresponding variable pairs was evaluated to determine sources of coder deviation. The author and test coder collaboratively re-examined each article where their responses differed and identified instances where lack of coding guideline precision led to divergent responses. With input from the test coder, coding guidelines were revised and two subsequent rounds of testing were conducted with new samples of articles ($n = 32$). During this process, coding guidelines were amended to separate the Communist Authoritarianism Frame into a distinct Authoritarianism Frame and

¹² See Appendix: Coding Guidelines for the operational definition of each frame.

Communism Frame to better reflect frames identified in sampled articles. The Cultural Frame was also removed from the study, as it primarily captured articles mentioning the minority status of Uyghurs in passing and generated coder confusion.

After the third iteration of guidelines revisions, the author and test coder independently coded a new sample of articles ($n = 31$) and Cohen's kappa was calculated for each pair of corresponding variables. The resulting kappa values for the Human Rights Frame ($\kappa = .86$), Communism Frame ($\kappa = .87$), Economic Frame ($\kappa = .71$), Security/Terrorism Frame ($\kappa = .76$), Geopolitical Cooperation/Competition Frame ($\kappa = 1.00$) all exceeded the minimum appropriate measure of intercoder reliability of $\kappa = .61$, indicating substantial levels of coder agreement (Landis and Koch 1977). Cohen's kappa values for the Authoritarianism Frame ($\kappa = .47$) and Dominant Frame ($\kappa = .53$) initially fell below established standards of intercoder reliability. However, when both coders independently reevaluated their responses and corrected for false negatives, measures for intercoder reliability for the Authoritarian Frame increased to significant levels ($\kappa = .84$). Two instances of data entry error were identified in responses to Dominant Frame, as one coder recorded the Dominant Frame incorrectly, despite guidelines specifying that articles framing authoritarian repression as a human rights issue were to be recorded as predominantly employing Human Rights Frame. When correcting for these two errors, the resulting Cohen's kappa of $\kappa = .61$ met the lower cutoff of .61 for substantial agreement (Landis and Koch 1977).¹³

¹³ The kappa value for Dominant Frame after correction was found to be $\kappa = .608$, falling within the substantial agreement range when rounding to the decimal point employed by Landis and Koch (1977). During the third round of guideline testing, coders were also asked to report what they identified as the second most dominant frame in a given article, if multiple frames were present. These responses were then recoded into two new variables for each coder (Frame Dominant/Secondary) to evaluate if either coder's first or secondary response matched the other coder's first response. The Cohen's kappa for the resulting variable pair indicated high levels of agreement between coders ($\kappa = .95$). This large increase in kappa values indicates that coders largely agreed on the dominant frame of a given article when only one frame was clearly dominant, but had difficulty evaluating the dominant frame when two frames were equally used throughout an article. For example, coders were unsure whether the dominant frame

Drawing from previous research on Western media coverage, coding guidelines were also constructed to record the overall tone an article used when discussing China and the dominant source of that article (Niu and Relly 2021; Peng 2004; Douai and Lauricella 2014). An article's dominant source was determined by the frequency of attributed citations. Descriptions of China were evaluated as very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative or negative, and recorded as a continuous interval variable. After conducting successive revisions to coding guidelines for these variables using the iterative procedure discussed previously, the author and a trained test coder independently coded a random sample of $n = 31$ articles. A comparison of results yielded Cohen's kappa values indicating substantial observer agreement for all variables, with responses for Dominant Source ($\kappa = .63$) and Tone ($\kappa = .65$) exceeding the lower boundary of $\kappa = .61$ for substantial coder agreement (Landis and Koch 1977).

Three additional binary indicator variables were constructed to capture the presence, though not necessarily predominance, of certain sources of interest: 1. Cites US state media sources such as Radio Free Asia or the National Endowment for Democracy, 2. Cites any non-governmental organization, research, or think tank reporting to receive funding from the US government, and 3. Cites dissidents in Uyghur exiles or exile advocacy groups. The author and a trained test coder independently coded a sample of random articles ($n = 31$) after three iterative revisions to coding guidelines, a comparison of results indicated substantial levels of intercoder reliability for these variables (Cites US State Media, $\kappa = 1.00$, Cites US-funded information, $\kappa = .86$, Cites Exiles, $\kappa = .78$).

of a 2020 *Washington Post* Op-ed titled "Western companies must stop profiting from China's crimes against humanity" that framed China's human rights practices as an issue to be confronted by Western states was the geopolitical frame or human rights frame. However, coders were able to consistently identify that this article predominantly used the geopolitical and humans rights frames, though were unsure which frame was dominant. Due to resource limitations of the study preventing further guideline revisions and the inherently conservative nature of Cohen's kappa, the observed kappa value for Dominant Frame was considered sufficient for further quantitative analysis (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002).

Coders also recorded the publication, headline, date, primary author as indicated by order of attribution, and word-count of each article. A binary indicator variable was also constructed to record whether an article self-identified as an opinion, commentary, and editorial piece. In the third round of coding guideline testing, Cohen's kappa coder responses for these variables met established standards of reliability, with publication ($\kappa = 1.00$), date ($\kappa = .97$), word count ($\kappa = 1.00$), and opinion/editorial ($\kappa = 1.00$) all exceeding established measures of substantial intercoder reliability (Landis and Koch 1977).

After establishing the reliability of coding guidelines, articles were indexed by date and simple random sampling was used to select approximately 100 articles from each source in order to reach the degree of theoretical saturation necessary for quantitative analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Ooi and D'Arcangelis 2018).¹⁴ Using amended guidelines, a total of $N = 404$ articles were manually coded by the author. Appropriate statistical procedures were conducted to test each hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

H1: US media coverage of China's Xinjiang policies will reflect stated policy positions of elites toward China

H1a: Emphasis on competition rather than cooperation with China by US political elites corresponds to negative tones toward China's Xinjiang policies in media.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the mean tone between articles published before and after the US's shift toward competition with China. Of 404 articles, 123 were published during Obama's presidency while the remaining 281 were published during Trump or Biden's presidency. Articles published after the US's shift ($M = -1.46$, $SD = 0.79$) were significantly more negative in their coverage of China on average than articles published

¹⁴ To Strauss and Corbin, theoretical saturation is reached after a sufficient amount of data has been collected, such that "during analysis, no new properties and dimensions emerge from the data, and the analysis has accounted for much of the possible variability" (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

during his tenure ($M = -0.38$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(402) = -11.15$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis that article tone would remain the same regardless of US political elites was thus rejected. When US political elites emphasized competition rather than cooperation with China, media coverage of China's Xinjiang policies became a full point more negative, representing a decrease from between neutral and somewhat negative to somewhat negative and very negative, 95% CI [-1.26, -0.88].

H1b: Emphasis on competition rather than cooperation with China by US political leaders corresponds to different frames in media coverage of China's Xinjiang policies.

A Pearson Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine if the US's stance toward China was associated with Dominant Frames used by news media coverage of Xinjiang. This test was considered the optimal statistical procedure to evaluate this hypothesis, as frequency data existed for both dominant frame and presidential administration. The results of this test found a statistically significant association between the dominant frames used in articles before and after the US's pivot toward competition, $X^2(1, N = 404) = 117.88$, $p < .001$. The effect size for these findings, Cramer's V, was large, .54 (Cohen 1988). In order to determine which dominant frames were disproportionately represented in each period, pairwise z-test post hoc analyses were conducted for each frame. Articles published after the US's pivot toward competition were significantly more likely to use the Dominant Frame of Human Rights when addressing China's actions in Xinjiang compared to those published prior to the shift, $p < .05$.

Whereas around 8% of articles published during the first period predominantly used the Human Rights Frame, 18% of articles published in the second period did so. Articles published during the second period were significantly more likely to use the Geopolitical Cooperation/Competition Frame compared to articles published during Obama's presidency, $p < .05$. About 57% of articles published after America's pivot framed China's actions as a matter

of geopolitical concern, while only 27% of articles before this shift did so. Conversely, articles published before the US's pivot were significantly more like to frame China's policies in Xinjiang as predominantly a matter of China's security, $p < .05$; 41% of articles published during this period predominantly framed China's actions as a security issue, while a mere 2% of articles published during Trump or Biden's presidency did so. There was no evidence of a significant difference in the predominant use of either the Authoritarianism Frame or Communism Frame between articles published in either period, and no statistical comparison could be made about the use of the economic frame, because none of the sampled articles published during Trump's administration predominantly framed China's policies in Xinjiang as an economic issue.

To further analyze the shift in dominant framing devices following the US's pivot toward confrontation with China, articles predominantly using the Geopolitical Frame were recoded into separate variables on the basis of article perspective. Articles primarily highlighting the ideological aspects of China's policies in Xinjiang in the context of geopolitical contention or cooperation were coded into one sub-category of the Geopolitical Frame, while articles primarily focusing on security cooperation or competition were coded in a second sub-category. Articles published after the US's shift toward competition with China were significantly more likely to focus on the ideological aspects of geopolitical confrontation. Conversely, articles published before the US's pivot on China focused on the security elements of geopolitical engagement with China, $p < .05$.

During Obama's tenure as president, articles were slightly negative in their assessment of China's policies in Xinjiang on average, though many authors expressed hope that China's concerns over Uyghur extremists would lead to stronger bilateral security cooperation. Many authors, particularly those who predominantly framed Xinjiang as a security issue, saw China as

a potential ally for the US. This framing technique reflected aspects of the dominant opinion of the Obama administration; as an unnamed official expressed to *The Washington Post* in 2014, “we are interested in exploring what the opportunities [with China] are in ways that are consistent with American interests and values” (Denyer 2014). The significant difference in tone and framing following the US’s shift is evidence in favor of hypotheses *H1a* and *H1b*, which predicted that US media coverage of China’s Xinjiang policies will reflect the stated policy positions of US political elites toward China.

H2: Anti-communism will remain a consistent framing device in media coverage across the period of the study.

After conducting the Pearson’s Chi-Square Test of Independence to identify association between Dominant Frame and elite perspective, a pairwise z-test post-hoc analysis found no evidence of a significant change in the proportion of articles employing anti-communism as the Dominant Frame used in media coverage of China’s policies in Xinjiang following the US’s shift toward competition. This aspect of the findings is consistent with the hypothesis that anti-communism is a persistent ideological constraint on representations of China in US media. However, when evaluating the use of the Communism Frame in general, rather than only those instances in which it was used as the Dominant Frame, the end of Obama’s presidency corresponded with a significant influx of anti-communist framing of China within news media, $p < .05$. Whereas 22.76% of articles published in the first period used the communism frame when discussing China’s policies in Xinjiang, a full 44.84% of articles published in the second period did so.

While the use of anti-communist frames did not remain a consistent framing device across the study, as the hypothesis had predicted, it was nevertheless a prominent feature in news media coverage of China. While *H2* suggests that the use of the anti-communism frame would remain consistent in media representations of China, the observed increase may indicate that,

prior to Trump's election, anti-communism had fallen out of favor among dominant Western representations of China. Trump's election and the US's pivot toward geopolitical competition with China may have energized Cold War understandings of the US-Sino relations as a fundamental conflict of ideologies.

A qualitative analysis of the anti-communist frames in Western news media after the US's pivot toward confrontation found that many journalists appealed and contributed to Orientalist modes of discourse. Said and Vukovich both contend that Western representations of the Orient have long presumed the gullibility and subservience of the Asian masses and the despotic, irrational, and totalitarian nature of Oriental governments (Said 2003; Vukovich 2013). Many of the articles examined implicitly or explicitly assumed the validity of these Orientalist representations. References to despotic brainwashing tactics and despotic quality of communism were commonly identified in articles throughout the timeframe. A 2019 *New York Times* article claimed that "former detainees have said that they were subjected to indoctrination programs meant to replace Islamic piety with devotion to the Chinese Communist Party," and a 2019 piece by the editorial board of the same publication stated, "Communist leaders engage in modern-day totalitarian brainwashing, bizarre lies and industrial-level indoctrination," thereby invoking Western narratives of Oriental despotism (Ramzy 2019; Editorial Board 2019).

After the US's shift toward competition, news media was observed to increasingly assume the validity that "bipolar ideological divisions" distinguished China from the West. The perspective that "China hopes to position itself as the main challenger to an international order, led by the United States, that is generally guided by principles of democracy, respect for human rights and adherence to rule of law," as a 2021 *New York Times* article claimed, became more frequent (Lee Myers 2021). A 2021 *Washington Post* op-ed referred to President Xi Jinping as

“cunning and ruthless,” with a “messianic streak that could prove destabilizing for the world,” blaming China’s rise on its “disturbing Maoist turn” (Ignatius 2021). Said (2003) specifically notes that within the Western imaginary, Orientals are “cunning” (p.38), “ruthless” (p.36), “disturbing” (p. 187), and “bizarre” (p. 87).

The Washington Post also often echoed or simply published Orientalist framing techniques used by US officials when discussing China. A 2019 op-ed penned by US Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback stated, “the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang province is drawing condemnation from civilized nations,” thereby discursively positioning China beyond the boundaries of the civilized world (Sales and Brownback 2019). Similarly, *The Washington Post* uncritically quoted House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who referred to China’s actions in Xinjiang as “barbarous” and “an outrage to the collective conscience of the world” (Shih 2019). Notably, while these statements demonstrate the assumption that American officials possess the enunciative capacity to represent the collective views of the “civilized world,” there exists little international consensus on Xinjiang. This dissonance can be observed in the contrasts between two statements delivered to the UN, one by Cuba on behalf of 64 countries supporting China and the other by Germany on behalf of 39 countries.

H3: Articles citing US state-produced media will differ in content from articles not citing US state-produced media

H3a: Articles citing US state-produced media will take a more negative stance toward China’s Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US-state produced media.

A two-sample t-test was performed to determine whether articles citing US state media (N = 59) exhibited a different mean tone from articles not referencing US state-produced media (N = 345). On average, articles citing US state-produced media ($M = -1.51$, $SD = 0.70$) were significantly more tonally negative in their coverage of China than articles not citing state media ($M = -1.06$,

$SD = 1.05$), $t(402) = 3.14$, $p = .002$. The effect of US state media was significant, as news articles citing US state media were approximately a full point more negative on average, representing a decrease from between neutral and somewhat negative to somewhat negative and very negative, 95% CI [-1.26, -0.88].

Two additional two-sample t-tests were then conducted to determine if US state-produced media's effect on article tone was significant before and after the US's pivot toward a competition with China. During Obama's administration, articles citing US state media ($M = -0.75$, $SD = .96$) were not found to be significantly more negative in their tone of China's policies in Xinjiang than articles not citing US state media ($M = -0.34$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(121) = 1.24$, $p = .217$. For articles published during Obama's administration, there was insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that article tone would remain constant regardless if it cited US state media. However, during the administrations of Trump and Biden, articles citing US state media ($M = -1.70$, $SD = .46$) were significantly more negative in their coverage of China's Xinjiang policies than articles not citing state media ($M = -1.40$, $SD = .83$), $t(279) = 2.358$, $p = .019$. Additionally, there was much less variance in the tone of articles citing US state-produced media during this period, indicating greater consistency in the negativity with which those articles discussed China's policies in Xinjiang.

H3b: Articles citing US state-produced media use different frames toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US-state produced media.

A Pearson's Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine whether the citation of US-state media corresponded to the dominant frame used in media coverage of Xinjiang. This procedure failed to find evidence of a significant difference between the Dominant Frames used in articles citing US state media and those not citing US state media, $X^2(1, N = 404) = 9.78$, $p = .081$. Pairwise z-test post hoc analysis was also conducted for each corresponding frame,

finding that articles citing state media were significantly more likely to predominantly frame China's Xinjiang policies as a human rights issue and significantly less likely to predominantly frame those policies using the Geopolitical Frame, though this effect was minimal, $p < .05$. There was insufficient evidence to reject the null hypotheses of no effect for corresponding pairs of the Authoritarian Frame, Communism Frame, Economic Frame, or Security Frame, $p > .05$.

Extant literature indicates that news media companies tend to rely heavily on official or quasi-official sources out of the economic need for consistent, novel stories, as using state-produced information reduces the costs of obtaining materials needed to create media (Herman and Chomsky 1981; Said 1994). Within the study, official Chinese sources were found to be the most frequently cited dominant source for articles published during Obama's presidency, which appears to contradict Herman and Chomsky's argument that domestic government and corporate sources are over-represented in the media. However, their hypothesis could also explain news media's heavy reliance on official Chinese sources during Obama's presidency, as publications that sought to cover China may have simply lacked the necessary resources to report from Xinjiang directly. Furthermore, if it were the case that a consensus on Xinjiang had not yet been reached by US elites, the US state apparatuses could have lacked a compelling incentive to invest in the costly production and dissemination of information that might otherwise influence mass media. While Herman and Chomsky do not identify alternative sources that media corporations may turn to in the absence of official messaging, the results of this study could indicate that the high costs of sourcing stories, a filter they suggest fashions otherwise-independent mass media into propaganda, may shape media in other ways, particularly when dominant elites have not established certain consensus.

H4: US state-funded research

H4a: Articles citing US state-funded research will take a more negative stance toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US-funded media.

Of the 404 articles evaluated, 94 articles were identified as citing US state-funded think tanks or organizations, while the remaining 310 articles did not directly cite such groups. A two-sample t-test found articles citing US state-funded research ($M = -1.48$, $SD = .70$) to be substantially more negative than those not citing these groups ($M = -1.02$, $SD = 1.07$), $p < .001$. The resulting Cohen's d of .51 indicates this effect is moderate (Cohen 1988). Articles citing US state-funded research were around half a point more negative in their coverage of China than articles not citing US state-funded research on average, 95% CI = [0.22, 0.69].

Two additional two-sample t-tests were then conducted to determine if US state-funded research's negative effect on article tone was significant before and after the US's pivot toward competition with China. Prior to the shift, articles citing US state-funded research ($M = -0.87$, $SD = 0.81$) were found to be significantly more negative in their tone of China's policies in Xinjiang than articles not citing US state-funded research ($M = -0.27$, $SD = 1.01$), $t(121) = 2.442$, $p = .016$. This also held true during the following period, as articles citing US state-funded research ($M = -1.67$, $SD = .53$) were significantly more negative in their coverage of China's Xinjiang policies than articles not citing state funded research ($M = -1.38$, $SD = .85$), $t(279) = 2.74$, $p = .006$. Additionally, there was much less variance in the tone of articles citing US-state funded research during this period, indicating greater consistency in negativity with which they discuss China.

H4b: Articles citing US state-funded research will use different frames toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not cite US state-funded research.

A Pearson's Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine whether the citation of US state-funded research corresponded to different dominant frames in media coverage of Xinjiang when compared to articles not citing US state-funded research. This procedure failed to find evidence of a significant association between dominant frame and the citation of US state-funded

research, $X^2(1, N = 404) = 9.72, p = .084$. The resulting Cramer's V of .16 indicates a small effect size of the citation of US state-funded research on Dominant Frame. Pairwise z-test post hoc analysis were then conducted for each corresponding frame, finding that articles citing state funded research were significantly more likely to predominantly frame China's Xinjiang policies as authoritarian and significantly less likely to predominantly frame those issues as a matter of China's security, $p < .05$, though this effect size was negligible. This analysis found no evidence of a significant difference between corresponding pairs of the Human Rights Frame, Communism Frame, Economic Frame, or Geopolitical Frame, $p > .05$.

H5: News media citing exiles or exile advocacy groups will differ in content from articles that do not rely on the accounts of exiles.

H5a: Articles citing exiles or exile advocacy groups will take a more negative stance toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not.

Of the 404 articles evaluated, 116 were identified as citing Uyghur dissidents in exile or exile advocacy groups, while the remaining 288 articles did not directly cite such individuals or groups. A two-sample t-test comparing the mean tone of articles citing exiles ($M = -1.50, SD = .77$) and articles not citing exiles ($M = -.98, SD = 1.06$) found that articles citing exiles or exile advocacy groups were significantly more negative in their coverage of China's Xinjiang policies than those not citing exiles, $t(402) = 4.77, p < .001$. The corresponding Cohen's d of .56 represents a moderate effect size (Cohen 1988). Articles citing exiles or exile advocacy groups were around half a point more negative in their coverage of China than articles not citing US state-funded research on average, 95% CI [0.31, 0.73]

H5b: Articles citing exiles or exile advocacy groups will use different frames toward China's Xinjiang policies than articles that do not.

A Pearson's Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine whether the citation of exiles or exile advocacy groups corresponded to different dominant frames in media coverage of

Xinjiang from those not citing exiles. The citation of exiles also had a significant effect on the dominant frame used in a given article, $X^2(1, N = 404) = 15.09, p = .009$. The resulting Cramer's V indicates that this effect is relatively small, .19 (Cohen 1988). A pairwise z-test post hoc analysis found articles citing exiles to be significantly more likely to predominantly frame China's policies in Xinjiang with the Authoritarianism Frame and significantly less likely to use the Security Frame when compared to articles not citing exiles, $p < .05$. This test provided insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that articles citing exiles were just as likely to use predominant frames of human rights, communism, economic, and geopolitical cooperation or conflict as articles not citing exiles, $p > .05$. Articles published after the US's pivot toward competition with China were also significantly more likely to cite exiles or exile advocacy groups than articles published before the shift, $X^2(1, N = 404) = 4.957, p = .026$. While approximately 21% of the articles examined before the Trump-era shift toward rivalry cited exiles or exile advocacy groups, 32% articles after this shift did so, $p < .05$.

Subsequent qualitative analysis found that articles citing exiles and exile advocacy groups, particularly those articles published by *CNN*, frequently presented Uyghurs as having no other option than to resist the authoritarian government and downplayed the context of China's policies. A 2021 *CNN* article, for example, addressed the plight of two Uyghurs who claimed to have been forced to flee China in order to circumvent the country's family planning policies. When leaving the country, the couple left four of their children in Xinjiang. The children were placed in a state-sponsored orphanage after consulate officials declined to authorize the unaccompanied minors for a visa. The article presented this as a potential violation of the UN Genocide Convention, and framed the parents' decision to leave their children as a

“heartbreaking choice” rather than criminal neglect or abandonment (Wright, Culver, and Westcott 2021).

Stories often presented unverified accounts from Uyghurs in exile, and while journalists often generally disclosed when they could not confirm certain narratives, they frequently discursively legitimized such stories by stating they were consistent with pre-existing Western interpretations about detention camps in Xinjiang. A *CNN* article from 2020, for example, stated, “CNN has no way of verifying [Xinjiang native Qelbinur] Sidik's account inside the detention centers. However, former Xinjiang detainees have told CNN they were subjected to political indoctrination and abuse, and Uyghurs who now live abroad have described relatives disappearing into detention” (Watson and Wright 2020). Similarly, a 2021 *CNN* article covering the disappearance of Uyghur student Ekpar Asat acknowledged it was unable to verify its content but did not attempt to balance the sensational claims of its primary source. Asat’s sister claimed that someone had seen recent videos of Ekpar, with *CNN* reporting, “she has not seen them herself and CNN has not verified the video, but Ekpar was described to her as ‘absolutely unrecognizable,’ ... ‘It was just absolutely shocking’” (Hansler and Atwood 2021). The article continued to cite a State Department official, who stated that it was unable to verify Asat’s current status due to the PRC’s restrictions on information.

Stories such as those published in *CNN* exemplify Said’s understanding of latent Orientalism, the often-unconscious set of assumptions about the Orient transmitted through media that supplies the West with the enunciative capacity to produce knowledge about the Other (Said 2003). These stories both draw on and contribute to Western Orientalist understandings of China, first by appealing to assumptions about the despotic nature of an Oriental China to legitimize the unverified claims made by exiles, then propagating and

reinforcing existing dominant representations of the Orient within Western mass media and its consumers. As the 2021 *CNN* article indicates, Western officials and news media are often unable to verify the accounts of exiles because of the apparent impenetrability of the Chinese government yet nevertheless draw upon existing Orientalist assumptions to assert the superiority of Occidental knowledge. Because of this assumed enunciative capacity, the West can claim an exclusive right to knowledge production about China's actions in Xinjiang without confirming its own evidence or entertaining contradictory information from China.

Articles that featured accounts from Uyghurs praising re-education centers in Xinjiang hedged those narratives by stating that they were given under duress or brainwashing, even when unable to demonstrate such claims. A 2021 *CNN* article incredulously stated that Chinese officials “introduced a man at a news conference they said was a former detainee, who denied there was torture in the camps, calling such allegations ‘utter lies.’ It was unclear if he was speaking under duress” (Wright et al. 2021). As these stories demonstrate, the narratives of Uyghurs, in the words of Said, “must be made to perform,” in ways that further existing conceptions of the Orient; such stories either demonstrate the despotic nature of China or, should they not be verifiable, demonstrate the secretive, untrustworthy, and despotic nature of China (Said 2003).

Of particular note is the observed relation between US state media and exiles within news media. Even before the US's pivot toward competition, articles citing US state media were significantly more likely to cite Uyghur exiles or exile advocacy groups, $\chi^2(1, N = 123) = 11.036, p < .001$ than . . .? News articles frequently failed to discuss the governmental affiliations of certain Uyghurs living in the US, even when those individuals served as the primary source for that article. A 2019 *Washington Post* article heavily quoted Rushan Abbas, who was

identified only as “a Uighur exile in the United States” (Tharoor 2019). A 2018 *New York Times* article also heavily citing Abbas referred to her as a “business consultant,” though Abbas was a reporter for Radio Free Asia for several years, worked for the US State Department at Guantanamo Bay, and serves as the executive director of the Campaign for Uyghurs, a National Endowment for Democracy-funded organization (Wong 2018; Respinti 2019).¹⁵ A 2021 *Washington Post* article discussed the activism of Virginia-based Uyghur Kalbinur Gheni. The article stated, “her brother reached out himself —probably under duress, Kalbinur said — pleading with her to stop her activism” (Flynn 2021). The article mentions that she first entered the public eye at a 2019 event hosted by the Uyghur Human Rights Project, but did not mention that the Uyghur Human Rights Project received over \$1.5 million from the NED between 2016 and 2020. The article did not mention that Gheni is currently a member of the Uyghur American Association, which has also received substantial funding from the NED (WUC 2021; Clarke 2010).

In 2020, the NED boasted that the some 8 million dollars it had allocated to Uyghur advocacy groups since 2004, including Abbas’s Campaign for Uyghurs, allowed such groups to play “critical roles in introducing the Uyghur cause in various international, regional, and national settings against China’s false narratives, bringing the Uyghur voice to the highest international levels,” and stated that the US’s Uyghur Human Rights Policy of 2020 was built upon the work of these grantees (NED 2020). Historically, US propaganda agencies have heavily promoted anti-communist narratives from émigré Asians (Klein 2003). US state broadcasters,

¹⁵ The National Endowment for Democracy provided a \$170,000 grant to Campaign for Uyghurs in 2020 according to NED archives. A 2019 grant on the NED’s archives did not list any organization as a recipient, but allocated \$120,000 to “empower women and youth from the Uyghur diaspora to participate in advocacy to protect human rights,” which is the exact description used for the 2020 Campaign for Uyghurs grant. As the NED only reports the grants from the previous three years, no additional records were available. While the Campaign for Uyghurs is a 501(c) tax-exempt organization, no 990 forms detailing sources of income were available on the IRS website.

alongside national intelligence agencies, heavily funded anti-communist émigré groups and “governments-in-exile,” to further the self-image and international perception that the US advances the legitimate interests of oppressed people against tyrannical governments (Osgood 2002). The same processes appear to be at work today, facilitated by the ostensibly independent news media.

Conclusion

As US officials began presenting China as an ideological competitor rather than a potential ally during Donald Trump’s presidency, mass news media acquired a markedly more negative tone when describing and evaluating China's policies in Xinjiang. Following the US’s reorientation of relations with China, news media increasingly framed China’s policies as a human rights issue and an international concern, while downplaying the history of extremist violence in Xinjiang. News media also began calling greater attention to China’s communist system of government and framing policies in Xinjiang as evidence of the ideology’s shortcomings.

Compared to articles not citing state media, those drawing information from or containing references to US state media were significantly more negative in tone when evaluating China's policies in Xinjiang. This effect was only observed in articles published after the US’s pivot toward confrontation, which may indicate that the American government has utilized US state media to proliferate narratives supporting its adversarial stance throughout independent media. Articles citing US state media were also significantly more likely to cite Uyghur exiles or advocacy groups. The tone of articles citing Uyghur exiles or advocacy groups was substantially more negative toward China's Xinjiang policies. These articles also tended to disproportionately emphasize the authoritarian aspects of China’s policies in Xinjiang, while minimizing China’s security concerns about terrorism. Articles citing US state-funded research

were found to be significantly more negative than articles not citing US state-funded research, though this effect was identified regardless if US leaders emphasized competition or cooperation with China.

This study contributes to existing scholarship on Orientalism by integrating ideas from literature on the interaction of US state media and Orientalist knowledge of the Other and existing research on news media's function as propaganda. This study provides a systematic evaluation of Western news coverage of Xinjiang and offers support for the argument presented in Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism*. Within the examined news publications, Western authors largely presumed that the West possesses an enunciative capacity to produce knowledge about Xinjiang. Journalists often stated that China is despotic and untrustworthy, and unverified narratives were routinely given greater authority than accounts from Chinese officials or Muslims supportive of the PRC's actions in Xinjiang. This study concludes that, as was the case in previous iterations of Orientalism, the West continues to claim an exclusive right to produce knowledge about China's actions in Xinjiang, without having to externally validate its own evidence or entertaining contradictory information from Other.

While this study provides a comprehensive study of Western news coverage of Xinjiang, it only evaluates content produced by four elite American-based media outlets. The conclusions of this study may not be applicable to content produced by less mainstream news outlets. Due to resource constraints, this study did not evaluate content produced by Fox News, the most widely viewed television news network in the US. Consequently, care should be used when applying the results to other contexts.

This study also did not examine the content of US state media directly. While the author attempted to obtain State Department records of its efforts to disseminate information about

China, the State Department has yet to provide those records. Without a further examination of state media, it remains possible that the observed relation between the citation of state media and negativity toward China is caused by something other than the content of state media. Because this relationship was only observed after the US took a confrontational stance against China, the findings of this study leave little theoretical room for alternatives. Historically, the US has spent billions of dollars to shape news media to support foreign policy objectives. Over the past two decades, the National Endowment for Democracy has awarded almost \$9 million to Uyghur groups. According to the NED, these groups “played critical roles in introducing the Uyghur cause in various international, regional, and national settings against China” and were instrumental to the passage of the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020 (NED 2020). While the author of this study has many criticisms of the federal government, he is optimistic enough to believe that Washington would not have spent exorbitant sums of taxpayer money to promote narratives against China if it did not expect those expenditures to advance US foreign policy objectives.

Appendix

Coding Guidelines

Variable 1: publication

Record the publication of each article according to the following scheme: 1=New York Times, 2=Wall Street Journal, 3=Washington Post, 4=CNN

Variable 2: article_headline

Record the title of each article. Remove any punctuation.

Variable 3: article_date

Record the date of each article. Observe MM/DD/YYYY format.

Variable 4: author1

Record the primary author as indicated by order of attribution. Remove any punctuation, but include any listed hyphens

Variable 5: author2

Record the secondary author as indicated by order of attribution. Remove any punctuation but include any listed hyphens

Variable 6: length

Record article length in words as listed. Report only as whole integers and do not include units.

Variable 7: frame_rights

Indicate the presence of a Human Rights frame [0=not present, 1=present]

According to Jack Donnelly, human rights are rights one has simply because they are a human being. Such rights are universal, meaning they apply to all persons at all times, equal in that such rights apply to all on the basis of their humanity, and inherent and inalienable, meaning they cannot be granted or taken away, only respected or violated. In this frame, China's policies toward Uyghur Muslims are presented in terms of human rights, such as freedom of religion, freedom to practice one's own cultural practices, or any judicial-political right such as freedom of speech or right to a fair trial that is specifically presented as universal, intrinsic, inherent, or otherwise a human right. The article must specifically appeal to "freedom" or "right", and not simply label policies "repressive" or otherwise restrictive to certain practices, even if such restrictions could constitute a violation of human rights under international standards. However, references to "crimes against humanity" or "genocide" appeal to universal standards of conduct, and thus fall under the human rights frame. If an article refers to human rights organizations when specifically discussing China's Xinjiang policies or treatment of religious or ethnic minorities, indicate the presence of a human rights frame. However, if an article only refers to human rights groups in contexts other than China's Xinjiang policies, the article may not necessarily invoke the human rights frame.

Variable 8: frame_authoritarianism

Indicate the presence of an authoritarianism frame [0=not present, 1=present]

According to Marlies Glasius, “in comparative politics, [authoritarianism generally] refers to a regime that does not organize periodic free and fair elections,” and suggests that “an active practice of disrupting or sabotaging accountability [of leadership], rather than absence of free and fair elections, [is] the core feature of authoritarianism.” In this frame, China’s policies toward Uyghur Muslims are primarily framed as authoritarian, totalitarian, oppression, or repression. Attention is called to restrictions, restraints, regulations, or controls, in a manner that highlights the repression of Uyghurs or by the Chinese government in general. Articles may compare China to Nazi Germany or use language such as “Orwellian” or “dystopian” that comments on the repressive and authoritarian nature of China’s policies. This is primarily differentiated from the human rights frame in that while the human rights frame may similarly call attention to an authoritarian lack of freedom as a human rights violation, this frame does not necessarily present similar lack of freedoms as violation of rights specifically inherent to individuals. However, an article may use both human rights and authoritarianism frames. For example, a hypothetical article may state, “International organizations have condemned China’s treatment of Uyghurs as a gross human rights violation,” thereby framing China’s policies as a human rights issue but not necessarily authoritarianism. However, a similar article that states, “Rights activists have condemned China’s sweeping repressions against Uyghur Muslims as a gross violation of human rights,” calls attention to both repression and human rights, and thus meets both criteria. Finally, an article that states, “Activists have condemned China’s sweeping repressions against Uyghur Muslims,” does not appeal to universal rights norms, and thus only meets criteria for the authoritarianism frame.

Variable 9: frame_communist

Indicate the presence of a communist frame [0 = not present, 1 = present]

In this frame, China’s Uyghur policies are presented as a result of China’s communist system or party form of governance. According to Xie (2020), western media tends to refer to China as Communist China rather than the People’s Republic of China, thereby emphasizing an ideological distinction between China and the US. Gray (2018) finds a tendency to present communist China as a cohesive whole that is reflective of the entire population, and in western media, “Beijing” is often presented as a unified actor in manner that “obscures particular actions, structures, processes, and relations” within the government (Lams 2016). Xie (2020) and Arif and Hayat (2018) both find that anti-communist frames in Western reporting tend to call attention to the instability, failure, weakness, or backwardness of the government or one party system. Within this frame, attention is called to China’s one party model of governance. Authors may use rhetoric like “regime” or “Party” to in a manner that emphasizes ideological differences between Chinese and liberal governments. China’s policies toward Uyghurs may be presented as the result of Marxist, Maoist, Stalinist, or communist thought, or framed as the result of inner-party workings or political maneuvering in a manner inherent to communist states. Alternatively, China’s Xinjiang policies may be framed as the result of or driven by China’s economic policies, if those policies are specifically presented as communist.

Variable 10: frame_economic

Indicate the presence of a domestic economic frame [0 = not present, 1 = present]

In this frame, China's Uyghur policies are presented as a domestic economic issue. An article employing this frame may call attention to economic factors driving unrest in the region such as economic disparities or inequalities between Hans and Uyghurs, or lack of economic growth in the region. Alternatively, an article using this frame may present China's Uyghur policies as economically motivated or otherwise call attention to economic incentives underlying the government's actions in the region. For example, articles that focus on Xinjiang's importance to the Belt Road Initiative fall under this category. However, if such economic policies are specifically presented as communist, then that article may include both economic frames and communist frames. Articles that primarily address bilateral or multilateral trade agreements, disputes, or sanctions or otherwise focus on international economic responses to China's policies in the region do not fall under this category.

Variable 11: frame_security

Indicate the presence of a terrorism/security frame [0=not present, 1=present]

In this frame, China's policies are presented as an issue of domestic security. Drawing from Baldwin (1997), security is operationally defined as a policy objective to ensure the maintenance of the core interests of the nation-state. Articles employing this frame may refer to stability, safety, protection, defense, safeguard, etc., or highlight the lack of security in terms of instability, violence, unrest, turmoil, conflict, etc. Articles that analyze China's Uyghur policies as a form of counter-terrorism or a response to violent extremism fall under this category.

Variable 12: frame_geopolitical

Indicate the presence of a Geopolitical Cooperation/Competition frame [0=not present, 1 present]

According to Colin Flint, "geopolitics can be defined as the struggle over the control of geographical entities with an international and global dimension, and the use of such geographical entities for political advantage" (Flint 2013). In this frame, attention is called to the impact of China's Xinjiang policies on China's position within the international system. Shared concern regarding Uyghur policy may be framed as an opportunity for geopolitical cooperation either for or against China. This can include articles discussing China's cooperation with other countries that agree with its policies toward Uyghurs or articles that present shared concern about the treatment of Uyghurs as an issue around which international consensus can coalesce against China. Authors may use language like "competition", "partner", "rival", "leadership", "ally", "cooperation", "tensions", "clash", "conflict", or otherwise call attention to the international standing of China in relation to other countries or multinational organizations. Articles may point to the strategic importance of China in terms of engagement or containment, call attention to China's ambitions, rise, or growing power, or otherwise frame China's Xinjiang policies in terms of geopolitical strategy. Articles that call attention to international responses to China's Xinjiang policies fall under this category. This frame can include articles that primarily call attention to economic responses to China's policies toward Uyghurs, such as trade or commerce restrictions or sanctions, or normative responses, such as condemning or supporting China's Xinjiang policies at an international level.

Variable 13: frame_other

Indicate the presence of any other frame not previously mentioned [0 = not present, 1 = present]

Variable 14: frame_dominant

Indicate which frame is most prominently used in the article. [1 = Human Rights, 2 = Authoritarianism, 3 = Communism, 4 = Economic, 5 = Security, 6 = Geopolitical Cooperation/Competition, 7 = Other]

Identify the dominant frame used in each paragraph of an article. The frame that is used in the most number of paragraphs is considered the dominant frame of the article. If two or more frames feature equally prominently throughout an article, code the first frame to be used as the dominant frame. If an article primarily frames authoritarianism as a human rights issue, code that article's dominant frame as a use of the human rights frame.

Variable 15: source_dominant

Indicate an article's dominant source by the frequency of citations.

The source cited most often when discussing China's Xinjiang policies is considered to be the dominant source, even if the author clearly disagrees or disparages that source. When multiple sources were cited an equal number of times, record the first source to be cited as the dominant source. 1 = US officials: Article primarily relies on statements made by US officials, politicians, or agencies. 2 = Chinese officials or Chinese state media: Article primarily relies on statements made by Chinese officials, politicians, or agencies. Topic literature generally agrees that Chinese media must adhere to official party positions, so publications in state media outlets like Xinhua or CCTV are treated as officials for the purpose of this study. 3 = International officials: Article primarily relies on statements made by officials from any international organization such as the UN or plenipotentiary representatives of any state other than China or the US. 4 = Western-based independent news media: Articles primarily cites other news articles or other forms of independent news media. Code an article's dominant source as 4 if it primarily cites other reporting, even if the cited reporting has a clear dominant source. 5 = US state-produced media: Article primarily relies on reporting or statements made by representatives of US state-produced media outlets. These outlets include Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Open Technology Fund, or other subsidiary of the United States Agency of Global Media (USAGM) or Global Engagement Center (GEC), Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, or National Endowment for Democracy. 6 = Independent non-governmental organizations, non-profits, or think tanks: Article primarily cites research, publications, or statements of members of NGOs or think tanks that do not receive US state funding. This includes groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. 7 = Non-governmental organizations or think tanks receiving US state funding: Article primarily cites research, publications, or statements of members of NGOs or think tanks that receive US state funding. This includes organizations like the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Xinjiang Data Project, World Uyghur Congress, and the Uyghur Human Rights Project. 8 = Unofficial or anonymous sources: This includes statements made by individuals outside of an organizational capacity, such as exiles, dissidents, lawyers, academics, experts, citizens, etc. 9 = No clear citation made: Article does not clearly

reference the origin of claims regarding China's Uyghur policies. This may include articles that contain citations for other information, but offer no citations when discussing China's Uyghur policies. 10 = other: Article primarily references any source not mentioned above.

Variable 16-20

For each of the following variables, indicate the presence of given citation. Indicate the presence of each source, but do not record articles that mention, but do not cite, one of the following sources. [0 = not present, 1 = present]

source_statemedia: Cites any US state-produced media or a representative or employee of a US state media agency.

source_usfunded: Cites any non-governmental organization, non-profit, or think tank receiving funding from the US government, or a representative or employ of such an organization. If you do not recognize the organization, please check the organization's annual funding reports. US-based non-profits are required to submit annual IRS Form 990 filings, which disclose government grants. The National Endowment for Democracy also reports grant allocations for the past 3 years. Check unfamiliar organizations for NED funding here.

source_exile: Cites any exile advocacy organization or dissidents in exile, such as World Uyghur Congress, Uyghur Human Rights Project, or individuals such as Rushan Abbas or Nury Turkel. Note: many Uyghur exile groups receive US state funding. If an exile group receives US state funding, please record it as US funded and as an exile group.

Variable 21:tone

Record descriptions of China as very positive, positive, neutral, negative, or very negative.

2 = Very Positive: Prevalent elements in an article portray China's Uyghur policies in a primarily favorable light. Textual content indicates agreement, enthusiasm, support, or belief in China. Stories focus on China's efforts to foster economic development, social or political stability, improve lives, etc., or contain rhetoric that evokes optimism. Author's own rhetoric clearly favors little effort is made to balance positive coverage of China with criticism. 1 = Somewhat Positive: Author presents facts in a somewhat balanced manner without substantially commentary, but does not substantially balance positive coverage of China's Uyghur policies or only minimally engages with critical viewpoints. OR, the author's rhetoric indicates they clearly favor China, but the article generally attempts to balance positive feelings toward China by allocating equal coverage to positions critical of China. 0 = Neutral: Prevalent elements in an article do not obviously favor or disfavor China's policies. Textual content is primarily factual, presented in a balanced manner, or given without commentary. Neutral articles may also equally feature agreement and disagreement, enthusiasm and criticism, support and condemnation, or belief and skepticism in China's Uyghur policies, and rhetoric is used in a way that evokes minimal emotion. -1 = Somewhat Negative: Author presents facts in a somewhat balanced manner without obvious commentary, but does not substantially balance negative coverage of China with opposing viewpoints or only minimally engages with supporters of China as to create an unfavorable impression of China. OR, the author's rhetorical choices indicate that they clearly disfavor China, but the article

generally attempts to balance negative feelings toward China by allocating equal coverage to positions supportive of China. -2 = Very Negative: Prevalent elements in an article portray China's Uyghur policies in a primarily unfavorable light. Textual content indicates disagreement, skepticism, criticism, or condemnation of China. Stories place blame on China for political instability, focus on rights abuses, or rebut or otherwise discredit the position of Chinese officials. The author employs rhetoric such as "authoritarian", "brutal", "oppressive", or "ineffective" to portray China as immoral, threatening, or irrational, or otherwise takes a clear stance against China. For articles addressing China or international responses to China's Uyghur policies throughout the text of the article, record the tone of the entire article. For articles with discrete sections (e.g., an article with various sections discussing President Biden's policies), only record the tone for the section concerning China. Evaluate both the tone of the author and the tone of quotes when doing so. Please record the tone of each sentence in an article then tabulate the total count of each tone in order to determine the dominant tone of the article. If an article contains an equal ratio (100%+- 25%) of positive and negative sentences and the author does not take a clear position with their own rhetoric, please code the article as neutral. For example, an article with 9 sentences in favor of China's policies and 10 sentences against China's policies would have a positive to negative ratio of 9:10, or 90%, which falls within the cutoff, and is thus considered neutral. If the article contains an equal ratio (100%+- 25%) of positive and negative sentences, but the author takes a clear position for or against China's Uyghur policies in their own rhetoric in more than 15% of total sentences, please code the article as somewhat positive/negative. If the author does not use charged rhetoric or otherwise make a clear judgment of China in more than 15% of sentences, but the ratio of sentence tones exceeds the +- 25% cutoff, code the article as somewhat positive/negative. For example, an article with 10 negative sentences and 6 positive sentences would have a negative to positive ratio of 10:6, (166.67%), which exceeds the cutoff, and should be coded as somewhat negative. If ratio of sentence tones exceeds the +- 25% cutoff and the author takes a clear stance on China in more than 15% of sentences, code the article as very positive/negative. If the ratio of positive to negative sentences exceeds 100%+-75%, code the article as very positive/negative regardless of the author's own stated position. For example, if an article contains 2 sentences or quotations in support of China's Uyghur policies and 10 sentences or quotations condemning China's Uyghur policies, that article would be 80% against China, and should thus be coded very negative.

Variable 22:oped

Opinion, commentary, and editorial articles were distinguished from reporting as self-identified by each publication with a binary indicator variable [Op-ed yes = 1, no = 0].

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