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**THE COMPLEX INTERPLAY BETWEEN CHINA'S ETHNIC CONFLICTS,
NATIONAL SECURITY AND GRAND STRATEGY**

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between internal conflicts and national strategic decision-making remains complex and often unclear. This article examines the case of Xinjiang to explore the intricate connections between ethnic conflicts, national security, and China's Grand Strategy—factors that have significantly shaped the global order. Through an extensive literature review, the study highlights ethnic conflicts particularly in Xinjiang, serve as a primary driver for China's Grand Strategy, emphasizing national security and strategic interests. Moreover, the findings suggest that military and economic imperatives play a crucial role in designing this strategy, particularly through the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which intends to promote regional development and stability in the state. The study demonstrates that ethnic conflicts intensify the state's focus on national security, influencing key policy-making decisions. Ultimately, it argues that China's Grand Strategy is designed to ensure both national survival and sustained prosperity.

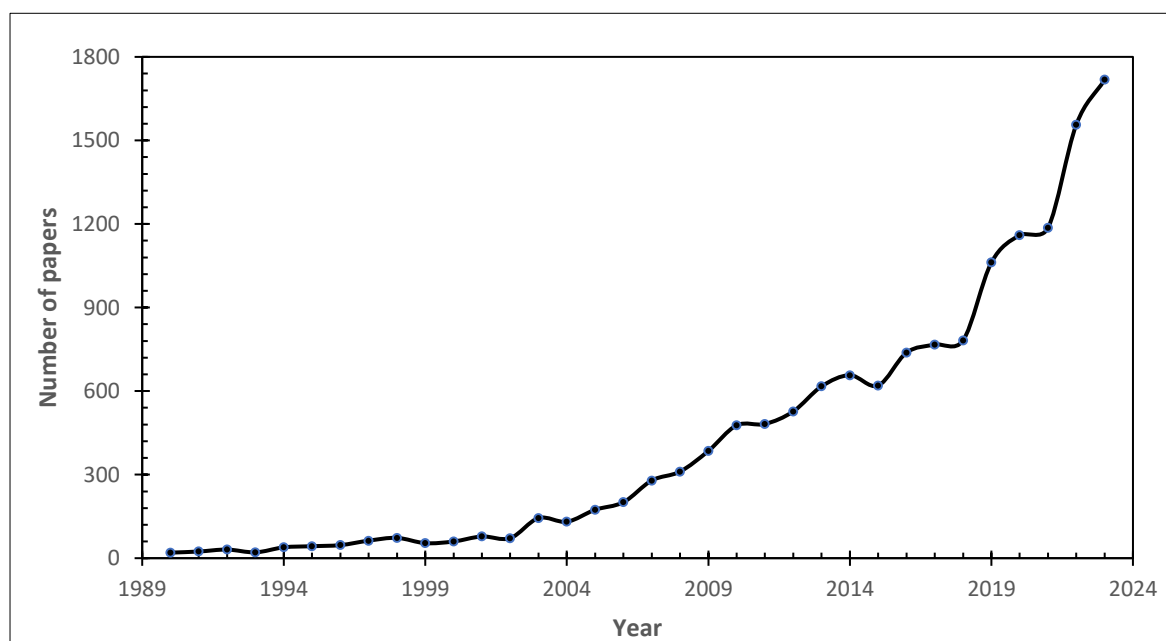
Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, China's Grand Strategy, ethnic conflict, military security, national security.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts within and between countries are common and complex occurrences, affecting state stability, international relations, and the global balance of power (Elise, 2021). According to Gannon (2022), conflicts can extend beyond national borders, emerging in diaspora communities and involve multiple actors in various forms. Additionally, Masoudi (2021) highlighted that crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic can substantially impact international collaboration and conflict, resulting in different short-term patterns while fostering long-term collaborative initiatives. From a philosophical perspective, Nietzsche regarded conflict as a necessary element of human progress (Pearson, 2022). In the context of China, Han (2010) pointed out that Xinjiang, a region in Western China, has long been afflicted by conflicts, particularly between the Uyghur community and the central government. Research on China's conflicts has grown significantly in recent years, as illustrated in Figure 1, reflecting the rapid expansion of this research domain. National security is a multifaceted and evolving concept that includes economic prosperity, military strength, social stability, and ideological resilience (Ghimire & Lamichhane, 2024). Over time, China has shifted its attention from emphasizing large-scale confrontations with major powers to tackling global challenges and ensuring domestic stability (Shih & Huang, 2015). Economic prosperity has become a cornerstone of China's national security, playing a significant role in the country's survival, continuous development and influence on the global stage. Mastro (2022) emphasized that China's Grand Strategy is of utmost importance in determining its national security objectives and responses to regional crises. This strategy reflects China's aspirations for global influence and its quest for supremacy across various domains. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has pursued a coordinated effort to establish itself as a significant global power through initiatives such as the BRI and the Digital Silk Road Initiative (Subrata, 2010). As delineated in numerous scholarly articles, China's Grand Strategy significantly influences diplomatic relations, shaping the global order and geopolitical strategies.

Figure 1

Number of Papers Published Each Year with “China’s conflict” in Their Titles, Keywords, or Abstract in the Field of Social Science and Humanities in Scopus



This article focuses on ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang and the role of regional economic prosperity in relation to China's national security and grand strategy. Due to concerns over secession, China has employed various strategies to safeguard its sovereignty and stability. This study examines key factors identified in previous literature that contribute to these conflicts, including ethnicity, religion, economic disparities, and government policies. Additionally, it analyses the influence of ethnic conflicts on Xinjiang's local population and the international community's response to human rights issues.

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the interplay between China's ethnic conflicts, national security concerns, and its grand strategy. It delves into the reasons behind China's continuous adaptation of its grand strategy in response to internal disputes, highlighting how historical contexts, stability imperatives, and national security considerations shape China's strategic policy decisions. A particular focus is placed on the complexities of the Xinjiang conflict, exploring its causes, consequences, and its pivotal role in shaping China's broader strategic agenda.

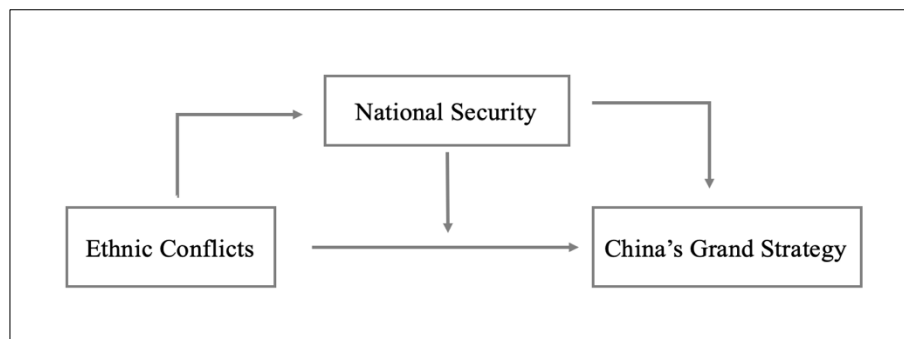
This article is organized as follows: First, we introduce the conceptual framework. Second, we discuss the history, current situation, causes, and consequences of ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang. Third, we examine China's national security from both civilian and military perspectives. Fourth, we analyze the design and objectives of China's Grand Strategy. Finally, we integrate these themes based on a literature review and draw conclusions with practical implications for policymakers and practitioners.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between China's ethnic conflicts and its grand strategy remains complex and not fully understood. This article explores how ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang influence the design and implementation of China's Grand Strategy based on a literature review. To analyze this dynamic, the study considers Xinjiang's ethnic conflicts as the independent variable, China's national security as an intervening variable, and China's Grand Strategy as the dependent variable.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework of the Article



As illustrated in Figure 2, ethnic conflicts affect China's Grand Strategy both directly and indirectly. National security serves as both a moderating and mediating variable-it helps explain the link between ethnic conflicts and China's Grand Strategy while also influencing the strength of this relationship.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN XINJIANG, CHINA

Xinjiang has experienced numerous ethnic conflicts with the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the years (Ryono & Galway, 2015). Ahamat et. al (2023) noted that historical rights play a significant role in these conflicts. Becquelin (2002) examined the history of the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR), which was established in Xinjiang in 1944 and later integrated into the PRC in 1949. The study highlighted both the domestic and international political dynamics surrounding the ETR and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) involvement in Xinjiang's peaceful takeover in 1949. It also pointed out that separatist movements in Xinjiang originated in Yili under the ETR. Shichor (1994) observed that, throughout history, both before and after the communist takeover in 1949, armed conflicts frequently broke out between Han Chinese and Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, particularly the Uyghurs. De Pedro and Alternatives (2008) emphasized that Xinjiang experienced violent and chaotic cycles, especially during the 1990s. Despite the PRC's control over the region, periods of unrest and violence have persisted.

Maya et al. (2019) argued that Chinese government policies have led to the repression and exclusion of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang. Their study described the ongoing human rights crisis characterized by declining civil and religious liberty, even as infrastructure development accelerates in the Xinjiang region and key locations such as Gwadar and El Pireo ports. De Pedro and Alternatives (2008) further discussed how unrest and alienation of the Uyghur population have intensified due to government policies. The study highlighted both the deliberate suppression of Uyghur activities and the forced assimilation policies that accompany development initiatives. The ongoing struggle between Han Chinese and Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, particularly the Uyghurs, was also noted in Shichor's (1994) study. It investigates Beijing's response to the conflict and its underlying causes, concluding that Beijing would never relinquish its sovereignty over Xinjiang. The study also suggested that if China were to collapse, the "Eastern Turkestan Republic" could re-emerge.

Research has investigated the underlying causes and influential factors contributing to conflicts in Xinjiang. Glen (2015) examined the historical background, current state, and potential future developments of the Uyghur conflict emphasizing nationalism, ethnicity, identity, and religion. The study argued that the conflict stems primarily from power dynamics that benefit the Chinese government while undermining Uyghur aspirations for an independent nation-state. Glen (2015) also noted that religious violence and terrorism are not the sole causes of the conflict in Xinjiang; rather, the structural power imbalance perpetuates hostilities. Han (2010) analyzed ethnic tensions in Xinjiang and how rigid ethnic boundaries between Han Chinese and Uyghurs has exacerbated hostilities. The study highlighted that strict social divisions between ethnic groups foster mistrust and discrimination, with violence intensifying due to a lack of understanding and communication between groups. Similarly, Cao et al. (2018) examined the broader impact of ethnic violence in Xinjiang on China's internal and overall security and its strategic position in Central Asia. Using the Ethnic Violence in China (EVC) Database, which documents cases of ethnic violence in Xinjiang from 1990 to 2005, Cao et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between interethnic inequality and ethnic violence. However, the study concluded that ethnic violence in Xinjiang is unrelated to resource competition, such as cotton and oil. Research by Mun and Lim (2011) explored the role of religion, ethnicity, and economic marginalization in fueling unrest in Xinjiang. The study illustrated that tensions related to ethnic minorities contribute significantly to instability and emphasized the importance of managing ethnic and religious disparities.

Nevertheless, Rahman (2020) argued that the Chinese government's severe treatment of the Uyghur community, combined with their lack of autonomy and rights, are the main causes of conflict in Xinjiang. The Uyghur population, perceived as a security threat, is subjected to "re-education" policies aimed at assimilation. Côté (2015) further noted that the conflict is fueled by Han Chinese dominance in economic and political spheres. Hasmath (2019) illustrated that tensions are aggravated by labor market segmentation, leading to competition for opportunities and resources between ethnic groups. The study concluded that violent outbursts and prolonged tensions between the Uyghur population and the central government of China stem from the Chinese government's longstanding crackdown on separatist movements and its efforts to integrate ethnic minorities.

Scholars have investigated the consequences of ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang, although research on this topic remains limited. Maya et al. (2019) argued that these conflicts have led to increased repression and exclusion of the Uyghur population, resulting in a significant decline in civil and religious freedoms. Huang (2018) examined the impact of the Xinjiang conflict, focusing on the relationship between gendered employment and migration patterns shaped by the implementation of the Economic Development Strategy (EDS). The study found that rather than mitigating tensions, the EDS has intensified disputes between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. Specifically, Uyghur-Han conflicts have been exacerbated by employment disparities and migration trends influenced by gender roles. Dwyer (2005) examined the impact of Xinjiang's language regulations on Uyghur identity, highlighting the crucial role of language policy in ethnic conflict. The study argued that assimilation-focused policies, rather than cultural adaptation, have had detrimental effects on Uyghur identity. Additionally, it noted how the US "war on terror" has reinforced perceptions that Uyghur nationalism is linked to terrorism. Bianchi (2016) analyzed the impact of the 2009 Ürümqi riots, arguing that the conflict strained China's relations with the Islamic world and projected an image of China as a nation struggling with internal strife. The study suggested that Chinese authorities face continuous pressure to demonstrate their ability to safeguard national security, which has further complicated China's diplomatic relations with Muslim-majority countries.

Based on the literature review, ethnic conflicts between the PRC and the Uyghur population in Xinjiang have persisted over time. Table 1 summarizes key themes based on the literature, including the historical context, causes, and consequences of these conflicts in Xinjiang. Many studies highlight the complex interplay of ethnic, economic, and political issues rooted in the region's history, dating back to the founding of the ETR and its subsequent incorporation into the PRC in 1949. Notably, scholars such as Becquelin, Shichor, and De Pedro emphasize recurring periods of turmoil, driven by policies perceived as repressive toward ethnic minorities, particularly the Uyghurs. These policies include coerced assimilation, economic marginalization, and restrictions on religious and civil liberties. Prior research consistently indicates the ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang have been aggravated by the PRC's strict governance measures designed to suppress separatist groups and uphold state sovereignty. The ongoing conflict has far-reaching ramifications for China's internal security and geopolitical standing, particularly in its relation with the Islamic world and global perceptions of its governance. This complex reality suggests that meaningful changes in policy and governance that uphold ethnic diversity and human rights are crucial for long-term stability and prosperity in Xinjiang. Addressing conflicts in Xinjiang requires both regional stability and harmonious international relations.

Table 1

Main Arguments from Literature on Xinjiang's Ethnic Conflict by Themes

Theme	Main Argument	Key Source
History Context (Before 1949)	The Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) was founded in 1944 and conflicts emerged between the Han majority and the Muslim minority.	Shichor, 1994 Becquelin, 2002
History Context (After 1949)	The Uyghur community has experienced repression and exclusion due to Chinese policies, particularly in the 1990s. Beijing has firmly maintained its sovereignty over Xinjiang.	de Pedro & Alternativas, 2008 Maya et al. 2019
Causes	The conflict stems from nationalism, ethnicity, identity, and religion. Key factors include power imbalances, lack of understanding and communication, interethnic inequality, limited autonomy and rights for the Uyghur community, limited opportunities and resources, and the Chinese government's crackdown on separatist groups while promoting ethnic integration.	Glen, 2015 Cao et al. 2018 Han, 2010 Rahman, 2020 Hasmath, 2019 Côté, 2015
Consequences	The conflict has led to increasing repression and exclusion of the Uyghur population, a decline in civil and religious freedoms, the implementation of the Economic Development Strategy (EDS), and shifts in gendered employment and migration patterns. Additionally, Xinjiang's language regulations have affected Uyghur identity, and China's handling of the conflict has contributed to perceptions of internal strife.	Maya et al. 2019 Dwyer, 2005 Bianchi, 2016

CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

National security encompasses a comprehensive strategy to safeguard a country's interests, including military power, economic prosperity, social cohesion, and ideological stability (Ghimire & Lamichhane, 2024). According to Xia (2009) and Kenneth (2009), the concept of "The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation - Chinese Dream" serves as the foundation of China's national security system, playing a crucial role in ensuring national stability. This framework incorporates participation in economic globalization, responses to non-conventional threats such as terrorism and environmental degradation, military capabilities and deterrence strategies, and competition for soft power in international affairs. Cheng (2022) argued that China's national security strategy has undergone significant transformations over the years. The focus has shifted from primarily addressing conflicts with major powers to prioritizing the consequences of globalization and non-conventional security threats, particularly economic development under the current world order. Similarly, Zhang and Feng (2022) highlighted China's efforts to establish diverse national security evaluation systems for foreign investments, aiming to construct a standardized and coherent framework. Ma (2022) further pointed out that these processes have evolved from a case-by-case review to a systematic approach, prioritizing projects that may pose national security risks. According to Xia (2009), China's national security strategy is shaped by cross-border dynamics and global engagements. Xiao and Men (2021) emphasized that China's increasing strategic interests worldwide have heightened its focus on national security and economic prosperity,

making them key priorities. China emphasizes the importance of international collaboration to address these issues effectively.

Traditionally, China's national security strategy has been multifaceted and inward-focused approach, prioritizing domestic stability and order (Kudaiarov, 2022). Nevertheless, Hough and Malik (2015) noted that during the Cold War, China's security strategy was more aligned with those of other major global powers. Chau and Kane (2014) argued that China's Grand Strategy aims to establish itself as an equal power, while ensuring recognition from existing hegemonic states. For instance, China's response to US arms sales to Taiwan demonstrates its strategy of leveraging sociological role expectations through bilateral agreements rather than relying on universal regulations. Finally, Yuan (2013) described, China's Grand Strategy as a significant theoretical and strategic roadmap guiding its path toward peaceful development.

Zang (2015a), pointed out that in the contemporary age, China's national security objectives and strategies have evolved to incorporate multiple factors. China's security strategy is comprehensive, addressing various aspects, with a strong emphasis on maintaining internal stability and managing domestic challenges, including threats posed by armed militants wielding rudimentary weapons (Hough & Malik, 2015). As Xia (2009) noted, China has increasingly prioritized non-traditional security concerns, such as energy, agriculture, environmental protection, financial stability, and information security, alongside military security. To address public security crises—including natural catastrophes, industrial accidents, public health emergencies, and social security threats—the Chinese government has implemented a public security mechanism. Nevertheless, scholars such as Fu and Cullen (1996) have argued that enforcing national security rules and regulations in China has encountered difficulties, mostly due to a lack of clear guidelines and mechanisms for accountability.

In 2013, China made a notable advancement in its national security decision-making framework by establishing the Central National Security Commission (CNSC) (Wuthnow, 2017). The CNSC represents China's aspiration for a centralized and long-term platform for national security discussions, aiming to address the distinct challenges the country faces in the 21st century (Xiao, 2016). While contemporary analyses suggest that the CNSC is likely to have a significant impact on both internal and external security matters (Cabestan, 2009), other scholars such as Xiao and Men (2021b), have noted that efforts to establish a fully functional National Security Council have been thwarted by the rigidity of China's existing institutional framework. Furthermore, the increasing demand for better coordination among Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and state entities engaged in foreign and security policy has increased, resulting in the escalating significance of CCP-led small groups in decision-making processes.

China's national security strategy places significant emphasis on military capabilities and deterrent principles. Śliwa (2016) stated that China's primary focus is on strengthening its military capabilities and refining its deterrence strategies to safeguard territorial integrity and national security. Notable advancements in China's military development include the creation of hypersonic glide vehicles and intercontinental ballistic missile silos (Saalman, 2022). Additionally, Heath et al. (2016) argued that China's military modernization is driven by its broader strategic objectives, particularly its approach to managing warfare and escalation. Chase and Chan (2016) further noted that China is adapting its strategic deterrence framework in response to evolving assessments of the international security landscape, with a specific focus on safeguarding its interests in space and cyberspace.

Scholars such as Rezki (2015) and Bitzinger and Lin (1994) have highlighted that China's increasing defense expenditures contribute to security concerns in the Asia-Pacific region, reflecting its strategic apprehensions towards neighboring countries like Japan. Dawson (2011) noted that China's defense budget serves as an indicator of its national security priorities, military strategies and capabilities. Nevertheless, Bitzinger (2003) argued that examining China's defense budget remains challenging due to lack of reliable data, forcing analysts to rely on extrapolation and inference. Meanwhile, China's robust economic growth has raised concerns about financial stability and its potential ramifications for United States (US) national security.

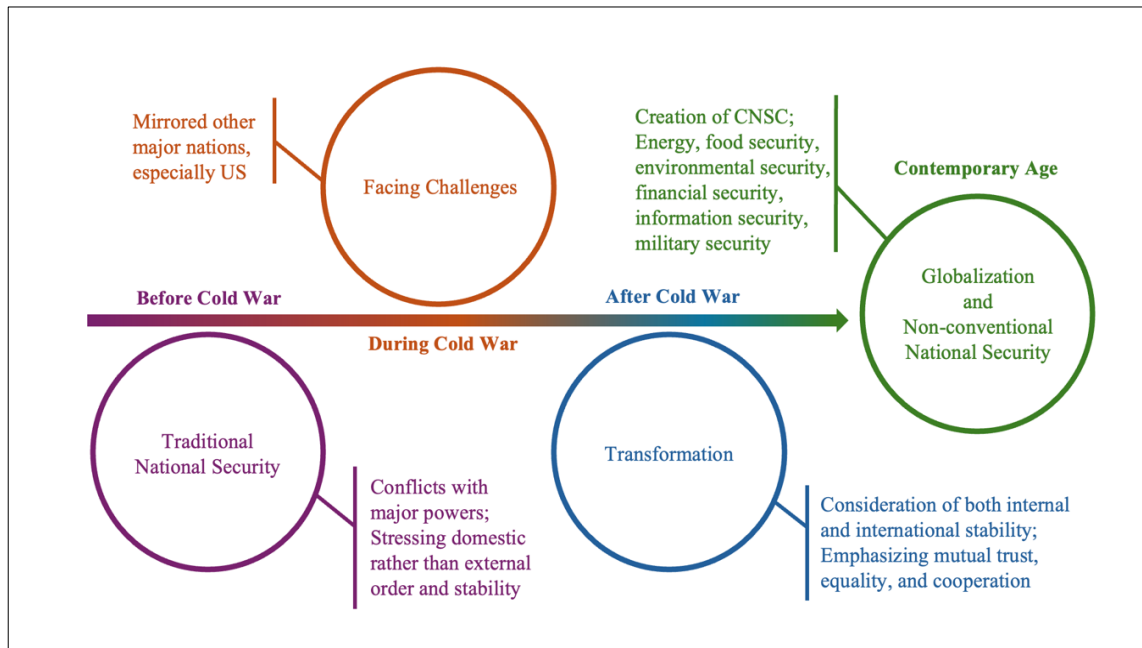
China's national security also extends to population-related issues. One significant challenge is the gender imbalance, with a disproportionately high number of males than females, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the 'bachelor army' (Zhang, 2015). Furthermore, Zang (2015b) and Kaz (2010) noted that China's rapid economic advancement and population expansion have exerted pressure on its domestic energy supply infrastructure, making energy security a crucial national security priority. In response to these issues, China has implemented policies such as population management initiatives and the development of a comprehensive energy governance framework.

Meng (2012) stated that China's strategic objectives and interests are deeply shaped by its strategic culture, which is influenced by philosophy, history, and domestic considerations. Tan and Ma (2014) observed that traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism, emphasizes the significance of valuing life and ensuring the well-being of individuals and society. Moreover, Ou (2011) argued that, China's national security is influenced by several domestic factors—including geography, culture, and ideology—as well as external influences. Throughout history, China has undergone significant transformations in its national security approach, particularly in 1840 and 1949. Safeguarding cultural security is crucial in tackling challenges associated with the expansion and influence of cultural soft power.

In conclusion, China's national security strategy is multifaceted, consisting of both civilian and military dimensions to ensure internal and international stability. It adopts a global perspective rather than being restricted to a particular region. The strategy seeks to achieve strategic equality and dominance across multiple domains, as illustrated in Figure 3. However, the specific timelines for achieving the strategy's objectives remains unclear. Moreover, China's national security is shaped by various factors, including its strategic positioning, decision-making processes, historical developments, contemporary goals, demographic challenges, cultural policies, military capabilities, and global influence.

Figure 3

Evolution and Transition of China's National Security (Adapted from the Review of Literature)



CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY

China's Grand Strategy has been widely debated among scholars. While some contend that there is insufficient proof of a cogent, long-term grand strategy, others contend that China intentionally employs soft power in its foreign policy to influence other nations to seek similar goals (Brundenius, 2007; Mastro, 2022). Saha (2010) pointed out that China's Grand Strategy is shaped by its historical awareness of its enlarging periphery, the importance of internal stability, a shift in the country's stance against strategic overreach, and its aspiration to reclaim its status as a great power. To guide its future trajectory, China's report on its peaceful development serves as a theoretical and strategic road map (Yuan, 2013). Mastro (2022) noted that China's Grand Strategy has evolved over time, with Xi Jinping's leadership being particularly proactive in strengthening the country's military, economic, and political influence to enhance its standing in Asia and globally. He emphasized that understanding China's Grand Strategy requires considering both internal and external factors.

According to Mastro (2022), China's Grand Strategy has shifted throughout history—from a focus on mere survival under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping to a renewed emphasis on reclaiming global prominence under the leadership of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and currently, Xi Jinping. Li K and Li J (2023) found that China's ascent has been driven by investments in advanced education, fostering innovation, and enhancing both domestic strength and global competitiveness. Nevertheless, Subrata (2010) argued that China's Grand Strategy is acutely attuned to its expanding periphery, where it seeks dominance, and that internal stability significantly influences its strategic decisions. China's long-term vision for global order in the 21st century is one in which emerging powers play a central role. Shi and Langjia (2020) stated that China prioritizes its relationships with key partners and formulates foreign policies based on historical experiences, national interests, strategic requirements, and the broader international climate.

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China's Grand Strategy, known as "The Chinese Dream" seeks to establish China as a leading global power and a dominant force in Asia. Xi has actively advanced China's economic, military, and political influence to position the country as a key player in global affairs (Ma, 2020). According to Mastro (2022), Xi Jinping's vision includes restoring China's former greatness, expanding its global influence through the BRI, and aligning international standards and principles with its strategic interests. Jun (2022) highlighted the "Digital Silk Road Initiative," which aims to enhance China's global influence over information networks, challenging the US' dominance in this domain. Additionally, China is actively pursuing technological domination through initiatives such as "Made in China 2025," employing cyber tactics to extract knowledge from developed countries and strengthen its capabilities in digital and space technologies.

Kudaiarov (2022) described China's Grand Strategy as a multifaceted effort to reform the international order. While China aims to strengthen its position within the current global framework, it also seeks reforms in international governance institutions. Vinodan (2020) argued that China's expanding strategic presence in regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America has the potential to influence the strategic objectives of other global powers. Xiao (2020) characterized China as both a revisionist state—challenging the established order—and an active participant in the current system. Augusto and Peterson (2020) observed that China has played a key role in financing and establishing new global organizations and initiatives, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRI. Rahman (2022) noted that the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) has established new and promising relationships with Southeast Asian countries. Nevertheless, Pang (2018) argued that the evolving power dynamics between China and the USA—given the latter's firm commitment to maintain its dominant position—will significantly impact the success of China's efforts to alter the global system. Moreover, Goldstein (2020) emphasized that China's military modernization is a crucial component of its grand strategy, despite the potential for increased conflicts with regional and global military powers. Overall, China's strategy in reshaping the global order entails consolidating existing structures, implementing targeted reforms, and actively establishing alternative institutions and initiatives.

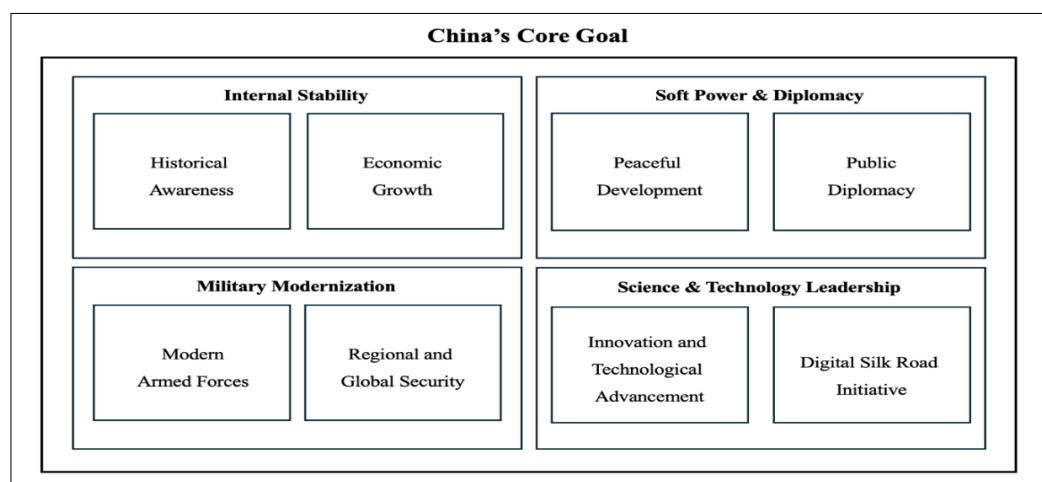
A group of scholars has argued that China's Grand Strategy emphasizes the defense of its core interests, shaped by multiple factors, including the significance of maintaining a stable relationship with the US and the mutual expectations between the two nations (Lee, 2022; Shih & Huang, 2015). According to Wang (2011), China seeks to establish itself as a recognized global power on par with the existing dominant power, while simultaneously reassuring the latter of its willingness to play a cooperative role. As Shih and Huang (2015) pointed out, China's Grand Strategy embraces a social perspective, emphasizing harmony and the symbolic fulfillment of its objectives. The imperative to sustain stable relations with the US may, at times, override China's core national interests, including unification. For instance, China considers certain matters, such as US arms sales to Taiwan, as bilateral matters and invokes social role expectations through diplomatic agreements. Ultimately, China's approach in defending its core interests is influenced by the dynamics of its relationship with the US and its broader role in international affairs (Shih & Huang, 2015). Xiao and Men (2021a) argued that under Xi's leadership, China has exerted substantial influence on the international community and has established guiding principles for attaining new strategic objectives. Although Xi's Grand Strategy is unique, it remains largely consistent with China's policy trajectory since the 1990s, which seeks to maximize China's economic and military potential. As Kellogg (2023) observed, Xi Jinping's Grand Strategy is aimed at positioning China as a global leader in technology, a leading exporter of innovation, and a nation striving to attain national revitalization.

According to Mendez and Alden (2021), China's Grand Strategy encompasses diplomacy, economic policy, science and technology, and military affairs. China's diplomatic approach includes expanding its development strategies, providing international public goods, and formulating a comprehensive foreign policy framework. Public diplomacy has emerged as a key pillar of China's large-power strategy, reflecting a shift towards providing international public goods and fostering diplomatic engagement. Takagi (2022) noted that the policymaking process in the Philippines provides insights into the politics of grand strategy in a developing country, where multiple state actors influence foreign policy directions. Similarly, Scobell et al. (2020) highlighted that China's diplomatic grand strategy integrates various national policies across economic, scientific, technological, and military domains. Overall, China's diplomatic strategy employs diverse methods and goals to promote its national interests on the global stage. Figure 4 illustrates China's core goal based on the literature of China's Grand Strategy.

Kudaiarov (2022) discussed that China's economic grand strategy centers around several critical components. One of its primary objectives is to drive economic development and sustain long-term growth. Wahid et. al (2023) highlighted the increasing importance of political economy in analyzing global events, particularly through the lens of international relation theories. Scobell et al. (2020) observed that China seeks to enhance its global presence through economic diplomacy, encompassing trade, investments, and internationalization of its currency. Guan and Shi (2020) emphasized the significance of two major Chinese initiatives, Made in China 2025 and the BRI in shaping China's economic strategy. While Made in China 2025 primarily targets domestic technological advancement and industrial upgrading, the BRI has broader global implications. The overarching goal of these initiatives is to drive technological progress, enhance China's global standing, and strengthen its role in the international economy. Nevertheless, scholars like Bencivelli and Tonelli (2020) argued that China's capacity to execute these ambitious strategies could be hindered by macroeconomic vulnerabilities and external pressures, such as the COVID-19 epidemic.

Figure 4

Adaptive China's Core Goal Framework (Adapted from Mendez and Alden 2021)



According to Yiming (2023), China's Grand Strategy in science and technology is centered on attaining global dominance in these domains. China's ambition to become an economic, military, scientific, and technological superpower underpins this strategy. Binh Giang (2020) noted that China acknowledges the significant role of scientific and technology innovation in driving its economic growth and societal advancement. Isabel (Isabel, 2022) pointed out that China has consistently invested in science,

technology, and innovation, resulting in notable advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology. Researchers such as Salitskii and Salitskaya (2022) argued that China aims to narrow the disparity with advanced economies and position itself as a key player in the global market for emerging technologies. Additionally, Devasthali (2020) noted that China's plan involves the advancement of disruptive technologies and innovations aligned with its geopolitical ambitions and expansionist objectives. Ultimately, China's comprehensive approach in science and technology extends across economic, military, and geopolitical domains, reinforcing its broader strategic goals.

Scobell et al.(2020) noted that China's military strategy focuses on the modernization and reform of its armed forces, aiming to establish a formidable military capable of safeguarding its interests and achieve its strategic objectives. Wagemann (2014) and Fravel (2015) asserted that the military component is a crucial pillar in China's Grand Strategy. Over time, China's military policy has evolved to prioritize victory in "informationized" local conflicts. China's military policy encompasses a multifaceted approach, incorporating various forms of power to accomplish broader geopolitical goals. The US perceives China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy as a potential threat but lacks a comprehensive understanding of its significance within China's broader strategic framework. Ultimately, China's Grand Strategy comprises a holistic approach that integrates military affairs with diplomacy, economics, science and technology to shape its global influence.

In conclusion, China's Grand Strategy is a complex and evolving framework designed to position the country as a dominant global force. This strategy not only aims to protect national interests but also to extend China's influence across various domains, from regional affairs to global leadership. By combining elements of cooperation and coercion, China navigates its dual role as both a challenger to and participant in the current international order. As the geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, China's strategies will likely adapt accordingly, further influencing international politics and economic landscapes.

DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed in this article reveals the complex and diverse nature of China's approach to addressing internal ethnic conflicts and formulating its grand strategy. The intersection of regional ethnic conflicts, particularly in Xinjiang, and China's national security strategy reflects a complex tapestry of China's strategic considerations in its domestic and diplomatic policy.

Xinjiang, a province located on the border of Northwestern China, is a geographically and ethnically diverse region that shares borders with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and India. Xinjiang is home to a heterogeneous population comprising various ethnic and cultural groups with distinct historical backgrounds.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has a long-standing history of ethnic tensions with the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang. These disputes stem from a multitude of cultural, identity-based, historical, and linguistic differences. The resulting ethnic unrest extends beyond regional concerns, posing significant national security challenges for China. The socio-political instability in Xinjiang has substantially impacted China's national security policies, which are not confined to the region alone but are closely connected to the wider national security frameworks at the national level.

Considering the historical ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang, China's national security strategy places significant emphasis on military capabilities and deterrence. As a result, the modernization of its military remains a top priority to ensure regional and global security. The establishment of the Central National Security Commission (CNSC) and the increasing focus on non-traditional security issues, underscores the evolving nature of China's strategic thinking. This comprehensive strategy integrates military modernization, energy security, and the management of unconventional threats to safeguard addressing both immediate security concerns and long-term strategic objectives.

Nonetheless, resolving ethnic conflicts in disputed regions cannot be adequately achieved solely through military intervention or coercion. Economic development plays a crucial role in ensuring the internal security and stability. A rapidly growing economy creates employment opportunities and mitigates factors contributing to instability in conflict-prone regions. China's Grand Strategy places strong emphasis on sustained economic growth with the BRI serving as a key pillar. The BRI not only fosters economic expansion and global connectivity, but also serves as a strategic tool for promoting political stability and reducing regional inequalities within China. By investing in infrastructure development and fostering economic integration, the Chinese government aims to address the underlying root causes of conflict and promote a more peaceful and prosperous society.

Moreover, China's core objective in its grand strategy is in line with the imperative of safeguarding national security. This strategy prioritizes internal stability, soft power and diplomacy, military advancement, and leadership in research and technology. China's national security framework encompasses various dimensions, including military, financial, informational, environmental, and energy security, all of which contribute to both domestic and international stability. The implementation of stringent security measures and the promotion of socio-economic development programs demonstrates China's commitment to facilitate closer integration of Xinjiang with the rest of the country and ensuring long-term stability.

The Chinese government's approach to designing and implementing China's Grand Strategy concerning Xinjiang's ethnic conflicts underscores a deliberate focus on maintaining domestic stability and national security. Under by Xi Jinping's leadership, China's aspiration to regain its historical significance on the global stage is apparent in its pursuit of the "Chinese Dream," with a strong emphasis on technological leadership and innovation. Strategic initiatives such as the Digital Silk Road and Made in China 2025 reflect a forward-looking vision aimed at enhancing global competitiveness and strengthening China's position as a dominant force in the 21st century.

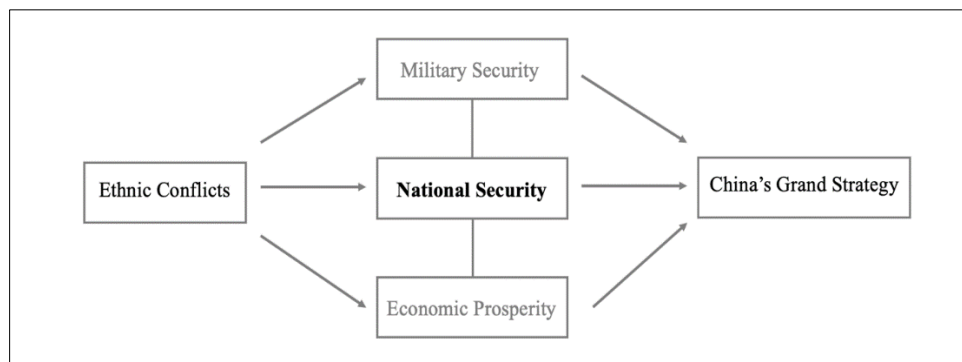
The literature highlights the critical role of China in fostering stable relationships with the US and other major powers. China's Grand Strategy seeks to balance its growing influence with the need to manage potential conflicts, both domestically and internationally. By leveraging soft power, together with economic and diplomatic tools, China's aims to restructure the global order in a way that accommodates its growing geopolitical presence.

A review of the three themes highlight that regional ethnic conflicts have raised significant concerns for the state regarding national security. The necessity of maintaining national stability has driven China to design policies and strategies to address these challenges. On the one hand, ethnic conflicts can negatively impact local populations and economic development. On the other hand, they reinforce the state's imperative to preserve stability and prosperity, motivating the implementation of additional measures and policies. China's Grand Strategy is designed to maintain both domestic and international stability, particularly as ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang pose a substantial threat to national security,

including military safety. A key component of this strategy is the BRI, which aims to promote economic growth in Xinjiang. By promoting regional economic prosperity, the BRI seeks to mitigate ethnic conflicts and enhance long-term stability in the region. Figure 5 illustrates the interconnectedness of ethnic disputes, national security, and China's Grand Strategy. The framework of China's Grand Strategy is based on four key pillars: internal stability, soft power and diplomacy, military modernization, and leadership in science and technology. This strategic approach integrates both civilian and military aspects of national security, ensuring stability at domestic and global levels. The ongoing ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang, coupled with the country's broader development goals, provide a valuable perspective from which to better understand the multifaceted nature of China's Grand Strategy.

Figure 5

Relationship of Xinjiang's Ethnic Conflicts, National Security, and China's Grand Strategy



CONCLUSION

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between China's Grand Strategy, national security, ethnic conflicts and economic prosperity based on previous research. The literature review highlights three key research themes: (1) conflicts in Xinjiang; (2) national security; and (3) China's Grand Strategy. From these discussions, several key conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, China's emergence as a global power and the development of its grand strategy are shaped by internal ethnic conflicts, particularly in Xinjiang. In response, the Chinese government has implemented stringent measures to preserve national stability, addressing not only military security concerns but also promoting economic growth and integration as long-term solutions to the root causes of conflict.

Secondly, both economic prosperity and military security play significant roles in shaping China's Grand Strategy, which is designed to ensure the survival and continuous development of the state. The BRI exemplifies this dual approach—fostering economic expansion through infrastructure development while simultaneously serving strategic objectives.

Thirdly, China's Grand Strategy is poised to have far reaching consequences for the global geopolitical and socioeconomic landscape. Strategic initiatives under Xi Jinping's leadership, such as the Digital Silk Road and China Manufacturing 2025, demonstrate China's pursuit of technological supremacy and economic dominance, further influencing international relations and global power dynamics.

Fourthly, further research is necessary in the fields of international relations and security studies, to better understand the evolving nature of China's Grand Strategy. Continuous scholarly attention is essential to gaining deeper insights into China's strategic priorities and their implications for global peace and security.

Finally, prioritizing human rights, effective governance, and sustainable development could enhance trust and contribute to long-term stability. Policymakers could benefit from using strategic communication, cultural exchanges, and robust crisis management frameworks to bolster resilience and foster a more positive global image.

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