

**THESIS APPROVAL FORM**

NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE LAST EURASIAN FRONTIER: SOVIET AND CHINESE EFFORTS AT  
DOMESTICATING XINJIANG, 1916-1962

BY

Andrew Travis Walter

NU Student Number: 202289215

**APPROVED**

BY

Mikhail Akulov, Assistant Professor

ON

The 7 day of May, 2026



---

Signature of Principal Thesis Adviser

In Agreement with Thesis Advisory Committee  
Second Adviser: Di Lu, Assistant Professor  
External Reader: N/A

THE LAST EURASIAN FRONTIER: SOVIET AND CHINESE EFFORTS AT  
DOMESTICATING XINJIANG, 1916-1962

By

Andrew Travis Walter

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Eurasian Studies

at

NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY -  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

2026

## **Abstract**

This thesis chronicles the evolution of the governing structures in the province of Xinjiang in the northwest of China during the period of 1916 to 1962. It is divided into three periods: 1916-1933, 1933-1949 and 1950-1962. Each period details how local provincial authorities exercised control over the province, their interactions with locals, and the involvement of both central Chinese authorities and external Soviet influence. It posits that the Soviet Union and China both desired a stable and secure Xinjiang and thus both contributed to the transition from indirect provincial rule to governing structures that further integrated the province into the centrally-controlled Chinese state, thereby leading to its domestication.

This thesis argues that in effect, both the Soviet Union and China were trying to domesticate a shared Eurasian frontier that had historically been out of reach of both Russian and Chinese central authorities. Though at the beginning of the twentieth century neither Beijing nor Moscow exercised effective control over the region, Xinjiang's local governance model of the negotiated state allowed local leadership to manage the province in the absence of direct central influence. This maintained the territorial integrity of Xinjiang and prevented it from detaching from the Chinese polity.

By the early thirties, unrest in the province led to greater Soviet involvement in order to prevent provincial unrest from spilling over into the USSR. At this time, Moscow helped a local warlord, Sheng Shicai, build up the administrative apparatus in exchange for economic access to the region. This continued until the early forties which saw Soviet advisors removed from the region. Over the next few years, the Soviet Union utilized the crisis from the emergent East

Turkestan Republic to negotiate with central Chinese authorities, who now had administrative reach into the province, to reach a modus vivendi in Xinjiang favorable to both sides.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, Beijing and Moscow were able to work directly with each other to develop and domesticate Xinjiang. In need of further economic and administrative development, Chinese authorities invited Soviet advisors and joint stock companies into Xinjiang and even allowed Soviet passport holders to staff local administrative structures while implementing social and ethnic policies to integrate non-Han locals into the Chinese polity. However, these were only temporary measures: if Xinjiang was to be integrated into the Chinese state, Soviet citizenship and the related issue of extraterritorial legality would have to be solved. The Yi-Ta Crisis of 1962 provided an opportunity to resolve this issue, as the Chinese state later encouraged the emigration of Soviet citizens while simultaneously implementing new laws and regulations to eliminate extraterritoriality. Thus the Eurasian frontier of Xinjiang had been domesticated by 1962.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my thanks first to my parents and my wife, Rawshan, who have continuously supported me in my research endeavors. I would also like to thank my advisors, professors Mikhail Akulov and Di Lu, and Dr. Ujin Kim for guiding me during the research process. I would also like to express thanks to Dr. Peng Hai of the University of Pittsburgh, whose conversations on the sidelines of an August 2025 conference assisted me greatly in situating the role of Sheng Shicai. I would also like to express gratitude to the MAES program director, Dr. Daniel Scarborough, for guiding each and every student through the two years we have spent in the MAES program. Without Dr. Scarborough's support in procuring funding for research trips and providing advice where needed, this research project would not have gone as smoothly as it did. I would also like to thank Dr. Kulgazira Baltabayeva for her assistance in procuring archival documents. Additionally, without the Wilson Center Digital Archive and the Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History Archive and their devoted archivists, this project would have been impossible. Finally, I would like to express gratitude to all of those who have assisted me in this process and that I could not personally list in this section.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Grappling with Imperial Collapse and Reconstitution, 1916-1933	9
Chapter 2: Clones and Puppets?, 1933-1949	41
Chapter 3: Development, Migration and Xinjiang's Integration	73
Conclusion	103
Reference Material	106

## Introduction

This thesis, *The Last Eurasian Frontier: Soviet and Chinese Efforts at Domesticating Xinjiang, 1916-1962*, details the integration of Xinjiang into the polity of modern China over the course of forty-six years. It argues that the integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese polity was a result of a convergence of interests and shared goals between the Soviet Union and China, both as the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. This process of integration was realized as a result of traditional Chinese governing techniques, namely the negotiated state, and Soviet institutional infusion which created a foundation for later expansion of central Chinese control into the province.

Both the Soviet Union and China at a minimum desired a stable and secure Xinjiang, though in addition to these two objectives, the Soviet Union also desired the realization of a third objective - namely, a resource-providing Xinjiang, though this objective would take secondary importance to the previous two objectives of stability and security. From the Chinese point of view, a stable and secure Xinjiang that was integrated into China proper was the desired end state, a goal that both Republican and Communist regimes viewed as best achieved through regional economic development.

The forty-six year time span covered by this work is divided into three periods, each of which experienced different governing strategies and an infusion of different institutions and outside influence. For the two periods of 1916-1933 and 1933 to 1949, a change in personalities

at the level of provincial governor led to different governing and development strategies. Since the period of 1950-1962 was not dominated by a provincial governor, it differs from the two periods in that the exercise of central Chinese control was more common than at any time in the recent past and thus led to concrete differences in the governance structure.

The first period, 1916-1933, was exemplified by the reign of Yang Zengxin, a Qing bureaucratic holdover who faced the imperial collapse of the Russian Empire and utilized the negotiated state model of governance to maintain the province's integrity and prevent mass-scale unrest. This was a governance model whereby central Chinese authorities entrusted local authorities such as Yang Zengxin with leeway in the affairs of daily governance. Viewing central authorities in Beijing as out of touch with the situation on the ground,<sup>1</sup> Yang Zengxin progressively utilized his successes in maintaining Xinjiang's integrity in order to pursue strategies that were progressively independent of the central government although his effectiveness in carrying them out won him acceptance, praise and even protection by Beijing in the face of external pressure from powers such as the British and Russians. In essence, the negotiated state worked properly and ensured the maintenance of Xinjiang's territorial integrity, stability and security. At this time, Yang Zengxin attempted to prevent unrest from spreading throughout the province and to prevent the growth of Soviet influence in Xinjiang.<sup>2</sup> While he achieved the former, the latter remained elusive at the time of Yang's death in 1928 as Soviet economic domination of the province had returned to or even surpassed the levels of Russian influence before 1917.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Justin Jacobs, "Empire Besieged: The Preservation of Chinese Rule in Xinjiang, 1884-1971," *eScholarship, University of California*, 2011, 30, 152, [https://escholarship.org/content/qt2wz654cn/qt2wz654cn\\_noSplash\\_a19c53068c57538f1f39782cde80a76f.pdf](https://escholarship.org/content/qt2wz654cn/qt2wz654cn_noSplash_a19c53068c57538f1f39782cde80a76f.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 174-175, 200, 203.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Share, "The Russian Civil War in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang), 1918-1921: A Little Known and Explored Front," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 3 (May 2010): 416. Michael B. Share, "The Great Game Revisited: Three

By the time of Yang Zengxin's death in 1928, the negotiated state model was already running out of road and necessitated a change in governing strategy. Jin Shuren, the governor from 1928-1933, tried to rejigger the economic model in Xinjiang, but rather than extending a period of stability and security inadvertently instigated a province-wide rebellion that started in the city of Hami.<sup>4</sup> This rebellion eventually led to the ouster of Jin Shuren and his replacement by Sheng Shicai and ushered in the next phase in the integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese state.<sup>5</sup>

The second period of governance covered in this thesis is from 1933 to 1949. This period witnessed the rule of Sheng Shicai until 1944, followed by the formation of the Second East Turkestan Republic and lasted until the People's Liberation Army moved into the region at the end of 1949. It was during this period that a process of Soviet institutional infusion occurred which led to an erosion of the negotiated state that allowed for Nanjing to begin direct interactions with entities such as the ETR and the Soviet Union over Xinjiang. During Sheng's rule the Soviet Union initially intervened militarily at the former's request<sup>6</sup> in order to maintain Sheng's grip on power and achieve their desired goal of a stable and secure Xinjiang. Unable to install a governor of their choice, Nanjing had no option but to accept Sheng's rule, though the Nationalists kept planning for the day when they could promote a provincial ruler of their choice. Receiving strong Soviet support, Sheng developed the governing infrastructure of Xinjiang and welcomed Soviet personnel who proceeded to prospect for natural resources in order to achieve their goal of a resource-providing Xinjiang. Sheng remained close to the Soviets until 1942 when

---

Empires Collide in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang)," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 7, (September 2015): 1115, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09668136.2015.1067075?needAccess=true>.

<sup>4</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 251, 255-257.

<sup>5</sup> The third chapter of Wang Ke's *Dongtujuesitan dili yundong: 1930 niandai zhi 1940 niandai* 东突厥斯坦独立运动: 1930年代至1940年代 [East Turkestan Independence Movement: 1930s to 1940s] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2013) offers a very detailed description of the takeover of Sheng Shicai.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Ke 王柯, *Dongtujuesitan*, 72-73.

he decided that they had become too involved in the governance of Xinjiang and thus decided to expel the Soviets and welcome the Guomindang to take the former's place.<sup>7</sup> Seeing their chance to exert central control over Xinjiang, Nanjing responded positively and sent their own administrators and specialists.<sup>8</sup> Though Sheng would eventually try to pivot back to the Soviets in 1944, he had run out of road and was forced to resign his position.<sup>9</sup> After his resignation, Nanjing appointed Wu Zhongxin, the first centrally-appointed governor in decades, demonstrating that Soviet-infused institutional building under Sheng had facilitated the further integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese polity at the institutional level, meaning that a change in governor would not risk Xinjiang separating from China proper or that massive unrest would occur.

By the time Sheng had left the governorship of Xinjiang, the Second East Turkestan Republic was being formed and would rapidly expand its presence in the northwest of Xinjiang. Though the ETR was not created from thin air by Moscow, the Soviets utilized it to pressure Nanjing and attempt to reach a favorable *modus vivendi* in Xinjiang. By this time Nanjing was governing Xinjiang through its own appointees and dealing directly with local ETR forces and the Soviets in order to reach an outcome whereby Xinjiang was stable and secure. Both Nanjing and the ETR negotiated with each other while the Soviet Union acted as mediator, eventually reaching a fragile state of peace whereby local unrest was kept to a minimum.<sup>10</sup> This was the

---

<sup>7</sup> James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 304, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> David Wang, "The Xinjiang Question of the 1940s: the story behind the Sino-Soviet treaty of August 1945," *Asian Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (1997): 87; Hsiao-ting Lin, "War, Leadership and Ethnopolitics: Chiang Kai-shek and China's Frontiers, 1941-1945," *Journal of Contemporary China Affairs* 18, no. 59 (2009): 207.

<sup>9</sup> Jamil Hasanli, *Soviet Policy in Xinjiang: Stalin and the National Movement in East Turkistan* (Lexington Books, 2021), 107, Kindle.

<sup>10</sup> David Brophy, ed., Leonella Liu, Chris McDowell and Anna Yalan Liu, trans., *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy: The Diaries of Liu Zerong, 1941-1949* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023) as well as Zhang Zhizhong's *Zhang Zhizhong huiyilu* [The Memoirs of Zhang Zhizhong] (Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2014) offer good firsthand accounts of the negotiation process. Hasanli's *Soviet Polity in Xinjiang* provides a comprehensive overview.

state of Xinjiang when the People's Liberation Army moved in and took control from GMD forces at the end of 1949.

The third and final period of Xinjiang's provincial integration lasted from 1950 to 1962. At this time the Chinese Communist Party was able to directly govern Xinjiang, though it had to deal with the issues of a lack of power to unilaterally police the province, a lack of economic resources to develop the region and a lack of trained administrative personnel to exercise the will of central authorities. The CCP thus invited the Soviets to establish joint stock companies to develop Xinjiang in addition to allowing Soviet nationals enter local administrative organs to carry out the task of governance.<sup>11</sup> It was Beijing's hope that this assistance would lead to a stable and secure Xinjiang that was fully integrated into the Chinese polity, though the CCP still proceeded in a circumspect manner, as they were inexperienced in governing the region and desired to avoid any potential unrest among the non-Han population that could metastasize into a serious obstacle for governance.<sup>12</sup>

Moscow for its part also desired the continued stability and security of the region and thus worked hand-in-glove with Beijing in order to realize Xinjiang's economic and administrative development. However, as the fifties progressed, international issues buffeted the once amicable Sino-Soviet relationship and led to a progressive fracturing of the relationship.<sup>13</sup> These pressures at the international level combined with issues at the local level arising from non-Han discontent towards the Chinese model of autonomy, ethnic policies and hardships from

---

<sup>11</sup> The story of the joint stock companies is best laid out in Charles Kraus's "Creating a Soviet "Semi-Colony"? Sino-Soviet Cooperation and its Demise in Xinjiang, 1949-1955," *The Chinese Historical Review* 17, no. 2 (2010): 129-165. Also see Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 356-366.

<sup>12</sup> Milward comprehensively details the various policies of the CCP in the early fifties. See Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 343-364.

<sup>13</sup> Kraus, ""Semi-Colony"," 155 details how the Korean War changed Mao's perception of the relationship. Both volumes of Shen Zhihua's *ZhongSu guanxi shigang: 1917-1991nian zhongSu guanxi ruogan wenti zai tantao shan* 中苏关系史纲：1917-1991年中苏关系若干问题在探讨 [Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991 ] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016), provide a good comprehensive chronicle of the deterioration of relations Sino-Soviet from a macro-level perspective.

the Great Leap Forward accumulated over the years to bring about the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962 which saw the mass exodus of Xinjiang residents into the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> By this time the Soviets had progressively stopped cooperating in solving the issue of Soviet nationals residing in Xinjiang and as such Beijing began to view the region's ties to Moscow as a liability, with Beijing shortly thereafter moving to swiftly expel Soviet nationals and Soviet organs from Xinjiang and securitized the border.<sup>15</sup> Thus, by 1962, a potentially undesirable and disruptive force in Xinjiang had been removed and the Chinese state had extended its control to the point that it was capable of governing the region unilaterally. The historical processes of traditional Chinese governance and Soviet institutional infusion had brought about the domestication of Xinjiang and a certain degree of integration into the Chinese state by 1962.

## **Methodology**

This research project utilized a combination of primary and secondary sources, with the majority being either in Chinese, English or translated into English from other languages such as Russian. The secondary sources largely consisted of articles by both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars written in both English and Chinese. These sources covered topics such as the provincial military expenditures under Yang Zengxin, Sino-Soviet relations and the general history of Xinjiang.

---

<sup>14</sup> The fifth chapter of Justin M. Jacobs' *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State* (University of Washington Press, 2016) focuses on the local resentment and especially Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 364-377.

<sup>15</sup> Li Danhui's "Xinjiang Sulian qiaomin wenti de lishi kaocha (1945-1965)" 新疆苏联侨民问题的历史考察 (1945-1965) [A Historical Review of the Issue of Soviet Nationals in Xinjiang: 1945-1965], *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 3 (2003): 80-99, 191 provides the best Chinese-language chronicle about deteriorating cooperation and Chinese countermeasures after the incident. Charles Kraus's "Laying Blame for Fight and Flight: Sino-Soviet Relations and the "Yi-Ta" Incident in Xinjiang, 1962," *The China Quarterly*, no. 238 (June 2019): 504-523 also provides a good analysis of the Yi-Ta Incident itself and some of the aftermath.

In terms of published primary sources, memoirs of officials were utilized. These memoirs were largely written by Chinese officials who held mid-level and high positions within the Chinese bureaucracy during both the Republican period and the People's Republic period. Their experience ranged the gamut of special envoys, translators, ambassadors and Russia/Soviet experts.

The unpublished primary sources largely came from two repositories: Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History Archives in Taipei, Taiwan and the Digital Archive of the Wilson Center located in Washington, DC. The researcher spent a total of eight weeks in the summer of 2025, from June to August, sifting through archival materials during the period of 1916-1949. This allowed me to create two separate analytical frameworks for both the period of governance during 1916-1933 and the period lasting from 1934 to 1949. These documents were largely in Chinese, though occasionally an English or a Russian document presented itself, though these were usually copies of Chinese versions of agreements signed between Republican Chinese authorities and the Soviet Union.

The Wilson Center Digital Archive was also utilized to access primary sources from the period 1934 to 1962. Though the sources in this online repository were largely of Soviet origin, most had been translated into English and were uploaded as a translated English transcription paired with the original scanned Russian language document. All sources for the PRC period from 1950 to 1962 originated from this online archive due to the fact that the researcher was unable to travel to Mainland China to analyze archival documents. The Chinese documents in this collection contained an array of documents, most of which were either Chinese-language transcriptions of the original, English translations or the occasional scanned document.

Any and all errors contained herein are my own and as such I take full responsibility for any and all shortcomings, no matter how few or numerous, minor or significant they may be.

## **Chapter 1: Grappling with Imperial Collapse and Reconstitution, 1916-1933<sup>1</sup>**

Historically, Xinjiang as a frontier region formally part of China but adjacent to the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union faced the administrative and integrational constraints typical of many peripheral regions. These shortcomings were most evident from 1916-1933, when Yang Zengxin, a traditional bureaucrat who was thrust into the position when his predecessor resigned in the wake of the Xinhai Revolution, had to deal with the fallout of the 1916 Central Asian Revolt, the Russian Civil War and the constitution of Soviet Power in Central Asia. Through these trials and tribulations, Yang managed to prevent Xinjiang from becoming detached from the larger Chinese polity, a notable feat considering that a large portion of the local population was outside of direct administrative control and central Chinese authorities could not meaningfully assist the province in the event of a crisis. What is most notable is that the Russian Revolution neither spilled over into Xinjiang nor led to a proliferation of ideas that were anathema to traditional Chinese governing structures, bringing about the end of Chinese rule.

This raises the question: how could a traditional bureaucratic holdover from an ancien régime manage to prevent his decentralized province with a large population out of direct

---

<sup>1</sup> Note on Archival Sources: As the archival sources are scanned versions, the page number referenced corresponds to the scanned format available on the Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History's archival portal, not the original document.

administrative control from becoming sucked into and dismembered by the whirlpool that was Russian imperial collapse?

Previous studies of the Yang Zengxin period have noted Yang's traditionalism and collectedness in his dealings with the outside world, positioning himself as the only one who could sail the ship of provincial administration through the choppy wake left by Russian imperial collapse. This study builds on that foundation by linking it to two additional facets: first, it links the problems inherited by Yang Zengxin such as the parallel society phenomena to the late Qing era, creating an important continuity lacking in previous scholarly analyses. Second, this research incorporates the negotiated state model as an explanation as to why Yang Zengxin was able to simultaneously operate autonomously and traditionally, demonstrating the flexibility and enduring nature of the Qing ruling structure. This demonstrates that while China had experienced a revolution in 1911, Xinjiang was simultaneously grappling with the leftover problems of the ancien régime in addition to the later ramifications of the 1916 Revolt and Russian Civil War. This research argues that Yang as a traditionalist aware of both a China and a Eurasia in transition utilized the traditional flexible governing structure of Xinjiang as well as a nonconfrontational, accommodating internal policy to prevent the province from being detached from China. It demonstrates that in an era of revolutionary upheaval and imperial collapse it was in fact a classic imperial structure, the negotiated state, with its flexibility which allowed Yang to effectively manage the situation in Xinjiang, precisely what the system was designed to do though seemingly counter-intuitive to traditional conceptions of sclerotic empires and their structures at the dawn of the twentieth century.

## **The Nature of the Frontier**

When analyzing Xinjiang, it is important to note a few things. First, before being formally declared part of the Qing Empire<sup>2</sup> and after, Xinjiang was a geographical crossroads with many different types of people crossing through it, each influencing the local population ever so slightly and contributing to the development of an unique local culture. Once it officially became a province of Qing China in 1884, administrators still had to contend with travelers due to its porous border, meaning that it was a frontier that was both linear and zonal. Second, due to its geographical remoteness and lack of integration within China proper, the “negotiated state” model of governance was adopted, allowing for flexibility but also prolonging the existence of a parallel society divided between Han and non-Han. Faced with these internal issues in addition to the Russian Empire and later Soviet Union across the border, provincial governors had to find ways to manage people that were geographically within their control but administratively without. This was because even though Xinjiang cartographically was part of China, with its external border connecting to the Russian Empire, the Chinese state had limited administrative control over the region down to the local level. Thus, Xinjiang was a contested frontier zone with an amalgam of different actors exercising different roles in a geographical zone with no clear cultural divides. Conceptually, Perdue posits that the frontier “can designate either a broad zone of multiple cultural interactions or a linear border dividing two states” with the Chinese

---

<sup>2</sup> The Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) was the last ruling dynasty of China before the abolition of the institution of emperor. It was governed by the Manchus, a non-Han group that ruled the country through structures such as the banner system, allowing a small ethnic group to rule a vast multi-cultural polity. Reaching the height of its conquests by the middle of the eighteenth century, this was followed by a period of peace until the mid-nineteenth century, after which the Qing state became involved in a series of conflicts with foreign, largely European, powers, which set off various reform attempts until the Xinhai Revolution in late 1911 which led to the abdication of the Qing emperor in 1912 and the end of the dynasty.

conception, *bianjiang*, denoting both.<sup>3</sup> This accurately describes Xinjiang in both a political-cartographical sense as well as in a functional sense during the late Qing and early Republican periods. Xinjiang due to its geographical location was naturally a crossroads of cultures with powerful local elites that later became a contact zone between the Russian and Chinese empires through which transnational ideas flowed. After becoming a province of China, it experienced Russian economic domination and a porous border through which individuals of various stripes crossed back and forth.<sup>4</sup> For example, individuals such as the Russian Tatar journalist Nurshivan Yavshef would travel to the region, viewing it with a romanticized lens that would later turn to one of negativity and criticism as he became disenchanted with local superstitions, the status of women and inter-marriage between Muslim women and Han men.<sup>5</sup> Records such as this should be judged in the light of what their authors desired them to be: political rallying points for some sort of transnational Turkic identity with primordialist features, with authors such as Yavshef viewing the locals of Xinjiang as purer Turkic peoples.<sup>6</sup> Thus it is not an intellectual stretch to say that the locals of Xinjiang were viewed as an ideal blank slate for ideologies by foreign travellers, though their enthusiasm would usually wane after spending time in the province, much as the Han administrators had lost interest in reform through education as detailed later in this chapter. The travels of these foreign individuals were largely not state-backed, though occasionally there was the rare government-backed attempt to send someone to shape local

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 520.

<sup>4</sup> Michael B. Share, "The Great Game," 1108.; He, Yong-ming, Li Yu-lian and Zhao Shan-shan 何永明, 李玉莲 and 赵姗姗, "Yang Zengxin dui liumin wenti de renshi yu cuoshi" 杨增新对流民问题的认识与措施 [Yang Zengxin's Understanding of the Migrant People], *Xinjiang daxue xuebao (zhexue · renwen shehui kexue ban)* 新疆大学学报(哲学·人文社会科学版) 48, no. 6 (November 2020): 104-105.

<sup>5</sup> David Brophy, "A Tatar Turkist in Chinese Turkistan: Nushirvan Yavshef's travels in Xinjiang, 1914-1917," *Studies in Travel Writing* 18, no.4 (2014): 345-146, 348-351.

<sup>6</sup> Brophy, "A Tatar Turkist in Chinese Turkistan," 351.

identity.<sup>7</sup> In most cases, these endeavors seldom bore fruit, with locals firstly seemingly lacking a systematic sense of belonging to a larger transnational community such as the “Turkic world” and secondly, when ideas of identity were conceptualized, they occurred in a localized sense, with local elites being the drivers of identity formation and not as a result of being “implanted” from afar. However, these travellers were viewed by provincial administrators as a dangerous influence on the local population, resulting in stricter policies controlling the movement of both local and foreign individuals. This anxiety on the part of the administrators was no doubt a symptom of the parallel society that existed in the province, with the state desiring control over subjects geographically within its purview but administratively without. This complicated environment thus necessitates the utilization of multiple lenses in order to understand the Xinjiang of the early twentieth century.

Given the complexities of Xinjiang’s society during the late Qing and early Republican periods, the model of the “negotiated state” provides critical insights in understanding its unique administrative structure. Under the negotiated state model, local elites ran day-to-day operations under the guise of the central state which allowed the former implementational leeway.<sup>8</sup> This was different from other empires in the sense that by the turn of the century, Han administrators were not effectively centrally appointed but rather came to power through local events and were accepted by central Chinese authorities, thereby becoming a type of indigenous force. This type of structure did however, allow for stability, especially in peripheral regions. However, the downside of this model was that “when the state was weak or abusive, or local elites held the balance of power, conflict flared up.”<sup>9</sup> Under this model, local elites and bureaucrats, usually educated in Chinese ways, would govern day-to-day activities under the authority delegated to

---

<sup>7</sup> David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 128-130, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 557.

<sup>9</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 557.

them by the center, resulting in “flexible, negotiated local administration” that “revealed itself more openly on the frontier than elsewhere.”<sup>10</sup>

This is evident in the late Qing history of Xinjiang all the way to the early Republican era. Firstly, the central Chinese state never attained full administrative control. After a rebellion in the mid-nineteenth century that saw Zuo Zongtang eventually retake the province, the Xiang Army settled down and began implementing policies counter to what the central government desired.<sup>11</sup> The central government had to acquiesce to this model of local governance, with all of the nepotism and corruption that came with the accompanying personal networks.

Additionally, while the Qing administration initially sponsored educational institutions to transform the locals into ideal subjects, this was later abandoned as officials began to doubt the mouldability of the locals.<sup>12</sup> Former Xiang Army members, now Xinjiang administrative officials, desired to shape the locals according to the Confucian concept of *li*, (“rites” or “ritual”)<sup>13</sup> and hoped that they would slowly conform to Chinese ways and thus gradually integrate into the Qing state. It was initially conceived that this was to be done through education, with Chinese-educated subjects loyal to the central state and understanding Chinese morals being the desired end product. Eventually lackluster results caused regional administrators to abandon their project of transformation through education, deigning it appropriate to let non-Han residents live according to their own ways. As such, a type of parallel society formed in Xinjiang: one part of which was administered by Han and the other being the non-Han and largely Muslim local society which was managed under a sort of *laissez faire* administrative policy. In this situation, the Han dominated bureaucracy utilized cross-cultural intermediaries such as the *aqsaqals*, a

---

<sup>10</sup> Perdue, *China Marches West*, 557-558.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Schluessel, *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2020), 42.

<sup>12</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 74, 76-77.

<sup>13</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 23.

type of trading headman that were adopted from Russian Turkestan that acted as a “commercial and communal representative”<sup>14</sup> and the *tongshi*, a type of interpreter or “intermediary” who were born into Muslim families but educated in the Confucian school system.<sup>15</sup> Han generally served in positions such as *daoyin*, or “circuit attendants,”<sup>16</sup> among others within the administrative apparatus. As can be seen, the society of Xinjiang after 1877 and its administrative structure, while being led by Han required privileged cultural intermediaries from the local population in order to effectively operate and even adopted Russian concepts such as the *aqsaqal*, demonstrating how Xinjiang was a contact zone between two empires. It should be noted however, that the *aqsaqals* and *tongshi* being elites did not represent the greater part of the population which remained largely unintegrated into administrative structures, though they did act as negotiating conduits with the grassroots. This is the type of society which Xinjiang would inherit as it entered the Republican era.

Thus, the negotiated state model in Xinjiang differed from other forms of the negotiated state outside of China. In other negotiated states, central authorities allowed local elites to manage affairs of residents of a similar ethnicity, race or religion, but there was seldom the situation of the parallel society which existed in Xinjiang.<sup>17</sup> In Xinjiang, central Chinese authorities accepted and gave leeway to provincial Han administrators but largely did not engage with non-Han residents. As such, there were two layers to the negotiated state in Xinjiang: the Han administration which was formally granted operational leeway by central authorities, and the second non-Han society which would engage with provincial administrators through their own elites but not the governing apparatus in Beijing, though officials in the capitol were not

---

<sup>14</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 23, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Justin Jacobs, “Empire,” 86.

<sup>17</sup> For more information regarding the parallel society that developed in Xinjiang, Eric Schluessel’s *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2020) is the most comprehensive account focusing on the late nineteenth century.

completely ignorant of frontier circumstances. This gave the provincial administrators more power relative to the center in crises, as central authorities were unable to engage with local actors in ways that effectively undermined the actions of undesirable governors, though it was occasionally attempted.<sup>18</sup> Under such circumstances, local authorities presented themselves as the linchpin linking the hearts and minds of the peoples of Xinjiang to the Chinese state. The governors would frame any potential crises by inflating their importance, positioning themselves as the ones who truly understood the region and could prevent foreign interference and quell separatism.<sup>19</sup> This tactic would be utilized by successive governors to allow themselves operational and even strategic freedom, implementing policies that they saw as prudent, though Beijing was oftentimes engaged in some sort of negotiation akin to acquiescence, rendering decisions of governors “formal”.

Once China entered the Republican period in 1912, the negotiated state model was still in effect in Xinjiang, though processes of centralization were proceeding at different rates and at different levels. Though Xinjiang’s process of integration into the Chinese polity was interrupted by the 1916 Revolt and succeeding Russian Civil War, a process of localized centralization was occurring whereupon Yang Zengxin proceeded to neutralize autonomous Han administrators while simultaneously working to eliminate the mafia-like Elder Brothers Society which periodically caused regional unrest. Gradually, Yang Zengxin monopolized administrative power in his hands in Dihua, uniting the administrative layer of the negotiated state in Xinjiang which

---

<sup>18</sup> Regarding the exercise of the independent authority of Xinjiang’s governors, Justin Jacob’s PhD thesis “Empire Besieged: The Preservation of Chinese Rule in Xinjiang, 1884-1971,” (*eScholarship, University of California*, 2011) offers a comprehensive account of this during the Yang Zengxin era. Wang Ke’s Chinese language *East Turkestan Independence Movement: 1930s to 1940s* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2013) offers a detailed description of the coming to power of Sheng Shicai and how central Chinese authorities attempted to overthrow him.

<sup>19</sup> Justin Jacob’s PhD thesis “Empire Besieged: The Preservation of Chinese Rule in Xinjiang, 1884-1971,” (*eScholarship, University of California*, 2011) is one of the most comprehensive accounts of this respect. It repeatedly emphasizes how Yang Zengxin positioned himself as the only official capable of understanding Xinjiang’s locals and solving the region’s problems.

had frayed in the preceding years. This was positively received by central officials, who over two decades after Yang's ascension would write in a secret report about the regional instability when Yang came to power and his effectiveness in maintaining order and unifying administrative authority.<sup>20</sup> As such, when the Russian imperial collapse occurred, not only was Yang able to rhetorically present himself to central Chinese authorities as the only one able to preserve Xinjiang's integrity, but he was also relaying the reality that he had consolidated power to an extent that he truly was the only official in the entire province with both the will and capability to carry out any coherent province-wide policy.

### **Islam and its Place in Xinjiang**

The Han authorities in Xinjiang had maintained an attitude of unease towards Islam since at least the arrival of the Xiang Army in 1877. Muslims were viewed as “uncivilized” and thus prime candidates for “moral rectification”.<sup>21</sup> Zuo Zongtang, leader of the Xiang Army, believed that while Islam provided a system of rules, it was inferior to Confucianism and thus a major cause of the “uncivilized” nature of Xinjiang's people.<sup>22</sup> Regarding the issue of civilizing, two schools of thought emerged, essentially debating whether Muslims could be “awakened” through education to create national unity.<sup>23</sup> After lackluster results in assimilation through education, some came to believe that locals were irredeemable and thus autocratic methods were needed to exploit the region.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> “Guanyu Xinjiang mimi baogao yice yi Xin sui changtu qiche luxiantu yifen” (Undated), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 04-02-001-04-024, p. 1 (Original).

<sup>21</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 76-77.

It thus appears that the Qing initially viewed Muslims as a threat because of their customs and not because of potential links to the Ottomans.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, as historian David Brophy points out, the ties between the Ottomans and Xinjiang were largely at the individual level, with Qing Muslims' views on the Ottomans authority largely connected to the latter's role in managing the two holy mosques at Mecca and Medina with the additional factor that Ottoman officials did not see inciting revolt in Xinjiang as in their interest.<sup>26</sup> In fact, liberal pan-Islamist Ottoman intellectuals would express anti-imperial solidarity with China regarding its coerced signing of unequal treaties and concessions.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, local Qing administrators reacted to perceived external threats by implementing harsher policies. The "Two-Pans" of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism were prime examples, which caused Yang Zengxin to ban Turks from Turkey from coming to Xinjiang and restricting pilgrimages to Mecca, requiring authorization from the highest authorities for entry or exit.<sup>28</sup> Concurrently, religious schools that were perceived as promoting the "Two-Pans" were prohibited.<sup>29</sup>

Traditional views of Chinese rulers influenced their understanding of these issues. For a long time Chinese intellectuals slighted Islam because it seemed fantastical, ill-conformed to Chinese religious logic and lacked sino-centricity.<sup>30</sup> Considering all the evidence, it seems that preexisting prejudices towards Muslims by Chinese rulers were exacerbated by their awareness of new transnational intellectual currents, demonstrating that paranoia is a powerful driver of

---

<sup>25</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 87, 90-91.

<sup>27</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 88.

<sup>28</sup> Qi Mingming 祁明明, "Yang Zengxin zhuzheng shiqi weihu Xinjiang yishixingtai lingyu anquan yanjiu" 杨增新主政新疆时期维护新疆意识形态领域安全研究 [A study on the maintenance of Xinjiang's ideological Field Security during Yang Zengxin's Administration], (master's thesis, Xinjiang Normal University), 2019, 7-8.; Fu Yang 伏阳, "Yang Zengxin zhixin shiqi diyu "shuangfan" sixiang yanjiu" 杨增新治新时期抵御"双泛"思想研究 [On Yang Zengxin's prevention of the separatist thoughts of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism in his governance of Xinjiang], *Yunnan minzu daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 云南民族大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 33, no. 4 (July 2016): 31.

<sup>29</sup> Fu, "Yang Zengxin zhixin shiqi diyu "shuangfan" sixiang yanjiu," 28.

<sup>30</sup> Johnathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, Studies on Ethnic Groups in China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 78, Kindle.

policy, especially in divided societies, though in the case of Xinjiang the administrators' views were also compounded by the historical memory of previous revolts.

### **A Qing Bureaucrat in Xinjiang**

Looking back, Yang Zengxin's ascension to the post of governor of Xinjiang does not seem preordained but rather an accident. Growing up in Yunnan as the son of a family rich enough to educate their sons, he would eventually gain the rank of *jinshi*, the highest class in imperial examinations, in 1889 and was sent directly to Gansu in the northwest to begin his career as a Qing bureaucrat.<sup>31</sup> By the time he arrived in Dihua, Yang had been an official for around two decades, acquiring reknown through his administration of Hezhou county in Gansu before being transferred to Xinjiang.<sup>32</sup> When the previous governor Yuan Dahua resigned after the abdication of the Qing emperor in February 1912, he initially chose Yuan Hongyou, another provincial official, as his replacement, though the latter and his wife were ambushed and killed on their way to Dihua, which prompted Yuan Dahua to choose Yang Zengxin as his replacement.<sup>33</sup>

During the process of Russian imperial collapse and reconstitution until his death in 1928, Yang governed Xinjiang, viewing himself as participating in a historical mission. When Outer Mongolia gained de facto independence during the collapse of the Qing, Yang began to fear that Xinjiang would become the next "Outer Mongolia" and saw himself as the sole savior who could prevent such an historical tragedy.<sup>34</sup> All of his policies were aimed at preventing such a disaster in the wake of the "civilizational crisis" that started for him in 1911.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 84-85.

<sup>32</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 85.

<sup>33</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 86.

<sup>34</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 79.

Yang was a product of the traditional conservative ruling class, prompting some scholars to profile him as “antirevolutionary”.<sup>36</sup> Being a conservative holdover of the Qing bureaucracy who favored stability above all else, the Xinhai Revolution<sup>37</sup> and its bitter fruits of an independent Outer Mongolia were seen by him as a disastrous event for the Chinese polity, with his conservatism undoubtedly compounded by the fact that he was witnessing endless internal and external chaos and from the frightful testaments of Russian refugees fleeing the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, the ideals of the October Revolution did not rub off well onto him, though he came to recognize limited engagement with the Soviet Union as a matter of necessity while simultaneously guarding against their political influence. Though broadly from the Confucian mold, Yang Zengxin should be understood more as a “Daoist sage”.<sup>38</sup> Though philosophically difficult to condense into a brief description, the ancient Chinese philosophy of Daoism places emphasis on following the rules or flow of nature. In such circumstances, the ruler does not need to forcefully exert his will upon the greater environment, rather, they are able to adjust and adapt to changes in the greater environment and use the changes to their advantage in an almost effortless manner. This is bolstered by the fact that he was heavily influenced by Laozi and the *Daodejing* with his policy of “inaction” as a prime example.<sup>39</sup> This was the policy that he utilized to manage the issues stemming from the Russian Civil War. Though many sources refer to his

---

<sup>36</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> The Xinhai Rebellion (October 1911-February 1912) witnessed an armed uprising that later gained political traction and led to the eventual abdication of the last Manchu Qing Emperor. The resulting polity, the Republic of China, was ruled by a coalition government and headed by Yuan Shikai though this new polity did not effectively lead to the consolidation of political power in China and actually saw a further deterioration of central control, especially after the death of Yuan which ushered in a period of regional warlord rule.

<sup>38</sup> Schluessel, *Land of Strangers*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Bai Yunzeng 白运增, “Yang Zengxin yu baie canbing cuanrao Xinjiang” 杨增新与白俄残兵窜扰新疆 [Yang Zengxin and White Russian Remnants’ Intrusion into Xinjiang], (master’s thesis, Minzu University of China, 2011), 11.

policy as that of neutrality or “inactive policy of neutrality”,<sup>40</sup> it is more appropriate to use *wuweierzhi*.<sup>41</sup>

The notion of *wuweierzhi* broadly translates to “governing through inaction”, though it does not mean doing nothing. It can be understood as “following a trend”. “Trend” in this sense abstractly denotes where the world seems to be moving. In implementing *wuweierzhi*, Yang Zengxin was taking advantage of his weak position, following whichever “trend” seemed more advantageous at the moment. Moreover, the strongest evidence that Yang Zengxin followed *wuweierzhi* is the fact that his governing philosophy was heavily influenced by Laozi, the conceptualizer of “inaction”.

Yang also needed to explain to the inhabitants of Xinjiang why Han deserved to rule and why he was the best candidate as such.<sup>42</sup> Due to his earlier experience in Gansu, Yang Zengxin viewed himself as one of the few Han able to truly “understand” Muslims and presented himself as a return to the “politics of difference” of the earlier Qing years.<sup>43</sup> His telegrams to Beijing during his time reveal much about his understanding of his role vis-a-vis the peoples of Xinjiang.

In a telegram dated November 1919, Yang expressed his position that the peoples of Xinjiang were all part of one big family. He used this telegram to express his love for the people of Xinjiang, comparing it to the relationship between a father and son, with Yang being the father.<sup>44</sup> He drew a line between himself and other Han, mentioning that most Han that came from the interior did not love their country and desired to extort Muslims, thereby causing the

---

<sup>40</sup> Xie Chengguo 谢承国, “Lun Yang Zengxin dui Suezhongya zhengce de yanbian” 论杨增新对苏俄中亚政策的演变 [On the Evolution of Yang Zengxin’s Policies towards Russia and Soviet Central Asia], *Xinjiang shifandaxue xuebao (zhe xue shehui kexue ban)* 新疆师范大学社会科学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 23, no. 3 (July 2002): 60.

<sup>41</sup> Qi, “Yang Zengxin zhuzheng shiqi,” 28.

<sup>42</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 42-43.

<sup>44</sup> “Xinjiang junzheng qingxing you” (November 1919), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-04-002, p. 2 (Copy).

Muslims to hate them.<sup>45</sup> By drawing a comparison with other Han, Yang used this telegram to elevate his position and bolster his credentials that he was the right man for the job as well as the logic of Xinjiang's Han being "good Han".

In later messages, he would say that the loyalty of the people was firm, going so far as to say that this was reason enough to decline the assistance of the Allied Powers.<sup>46</sup> In a telegram from December 1919, Yang relayed that he had received information that foreign Muslims were heading to Russian West Turkestan, ostensibly for political purposes. Here Yang simultaneously expressed that the peoples' of Xinjiang were firm in their loyalties, but at the same time said the government must remain alert.<sup>47</sup> This dovetails with a message from that March in which Yang stated that he had received word that Russian Muslims were going to incite Chinese Muslims and that after examining the feelings of the people, he became determined that while he would not be able to prevent outsiders from coming, he was certain that the locals would not be incited by outsiders.<sup>48</sup> What is interesting about this document is that it also drew a line between Muslims with roots in Xinjiang and those that had arrived recently from the interior, stating that the latter were coming to propagate religion and were of a harmful nature.<sup>49</sup>

Against the backdrop of Russian imperial collapse that started in 1916, Yang Zengxin gave himself the goal of maintaining the stability and territorial integrity of Xinjiang.<sup>50</sup> Perceiving Russians as the "only plausible invasion force", this made him more circumspect and prompted him to act semi-independently of Beijing in order to maintain China's imperial

---

<sup>45</sup> "Xinjiang junzheng...", 03-32-108-04-002, p. 2 (Copy).

<sup>46</sup> "Fu qing ding wuxu xieshangguo yuanzhu you" (February 2020), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-06-024 (Copy).

<sup>47</sup> "Afuhan dengchu huizu xuanchu daibiao fu E' shi" (December 1919), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-04-018 (Copy).

<sup>48</sup> "Dongxi Huizu shi" (March 1919), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-01-049 (Copy).

<sup>49</sup> "Dongxi...", 03-32-108-01-049 (Copy).

<sup>50</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 81.

edifice.<sup>51</sup> As a later assessment by central authorities would note, Yang's goal was to separate China from instability and his efforts maintained order, fixed finances (until around 1916) and united minorities.<sup>52</sup> Such action was possible because the administrative structure in Xinjiang was a holdover model of the Qing "negotiated state" compounded by its remoteness, meaning that central authorities had no choice but to delegate tactical authority to Yang, though he would increasingly act strategically, no doubt accepted by central authorities in part due to his positioning himself as a capable administrator as the Russian Civil War dragged on.

### **The Instability of 1916 to 1924**

The crisis of Russian imperial collapse started for Xinjiang in 1916 before the overthrow of the Romanovs as it brought to the fore the issue of unregulated migration over Xinjiang's porous border that would continue throughout the Russian Civil War as well as heightening administrators' concerns about how to manage a large influx of non-Han into a region where governing structures had limited scope and authority. The June 1916 announcement of the intended conscription of Central Asian inhabitants into labor battalions caused a panic which resulted in the flight of at least 250,000 people into Xinjiang after Russian authorities implemented suppressive measures.<sup>53</sup> As the refugees crossed the border, Yang Zengxin implemented his policies to handle the large influx of people, which were largely a continuation of pre-1916 tactics and can be divided into two stages with the October Revolution being the dividing point: in the first phase, prevention of migration and resettlement were the goal while in

---

<sup>51</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 83-84.

<sup>52</sup> "Guanyu Xinjiang...", 04-02-001-04-024, p. 1-2 (Original).

<sup>53</sup> Aminat Chokobaeva, Chloé Drieu and Alexander Morrison, eds., "Editors' introduction," in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916, A collapsing empire in the age of war and revolution*. (Manchester University Press, 2020), 2.

the second, repatriation was the main focus.<sup>54</sup> This was a new issue, as while during the Qing administration there certainly was an “ever-increasing flow of people and goods across its (Xinjiang’s) borders,” it appears that this previous migration saw more Chinese subjects migrating to the Russian side of the border and not the other way around, leading to diaspora communities that would later play a role in nationality debates.<sup>55</sup> In any case, it was historically difficult to manage populations on either side of the border since the opaquely defined lines of “subjecthood” resulted in a situation in which the Qing were unsure about its population, specifically the composition of foreigners.<sup>56</sup>

Besides the potential for Russian retaliation against the refugees, Yang also worried about social stability, for after refugees settled in Ili Valley, a lack of grain forced them to pillage.<sup>57</sup> Through an amalgam of policies, Yang Zengxin and other provincial officials were able to repatriate the vast majority of refugees by the latter part of 1918, demonstrating that while he was a “conservative” holdover, he could skillfully resolve crises.<sup>58</sup> His skills would be repeatedly tested as the Russian Civil War unfolded.

After the outbreak of the Russian Civil War, anti-Bolshevik forces and refugees, in spite of Yang Zengxin’s attempts to bar their entry, flooded into Xinjiang.<sup>59</sup> This was potentially worse than the refugees of 1916 as these individuals were armed, supported by diplomatic staff at the Russian consulates in Xinjiang and fighting with Communist forces across the border, portending major potential disruptions to social order and territorial integrity. Yang must have remembered the Ili uprising of 1912, which saw Russian troops mass along the border when

---

<sup>54</sup> Liu Guojun 刘国俊, “Lun Minguo chunian Yang Zengxin duiyu rujing keerkezi nanmin de yingdui cuoshi” 论民国初年杨增新对于入境克拉克孜难民的应对措施 [On Yang Zengxin’s Countermeasures to the Entry of Kirgiz Refugees in the Early Years of the Republic of China], *Zhongzhou daxue xuebao* 中州大学学报 38, no. 4 (August 2021): 62, 64.

<sup>55</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 120.

<sup>58</sup> Liu, “Lun Minguo chunian,” 65-66.

<sup>59</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 135-136.

Russian consulates proposed military interference in Xinjiang to protect the lives of the business community.<sup>60</sup> Consulates again played a role in the lives of local Russians in 1917.<sup>61</sup> This time the Whites were lobbying for Chinese intervention into Russia, with the offer of “redressing historical grievances” being used as a carrot to incentivise China to intervene.<sup>62</sup> Simultaneously, these White diplomatic missions were using access to food relief to control Russian refugees in Xinjiang.<sup>63</sup> Regardless of whether Chinese troops in Xinjiang intervened, White forces hoped to use the province as a springboard to beat back the Communists.<sup>64</sup> This presented an extremely undesirable situation: the White presence would incite social disruption while simultaneously increasing the potential for Red incursions into Xinjiang. In December 1918 Yang likened the Bolsheviks and the Whites to two brothers fighting. In such a circumstance, said Yang, assisting one brother would incur the ire and alienation of the other.<sup>65</sup> Invoking another metaphor, Yang told central authorities that one should not destroy their own house in the process of helping another.<sup>66</sup>

If Yang wanted to preserve Xinjiang’s integrity, he would have to walk a tightrope of avoiding overt support to either side lest he incur their ire.<sup>67</sup> At this time the Bolsheviks were sending out diplomatic feelers to the Chinese, appointing diplomatic officials in April 1918, but this was in vain as they failed to receive Chinese recognition.<sup>68</sup> Worried about the deployment of Chinese troops into Russia, Yang repeatedly provided reasons to Beijing as to why such a course of action was unwise and unwarranted. Noting how fraught the situation was, the Governor made

---

<sup>60</sup> Duan Jinsheng 段金生, “Lun Yang Zengxin yu Xin, Yi yihe” 论杨增新与新、伊议和 [Study on Yang Zengxin and the Negotiation between Xinjiang and Yili], *Xibei minzu luncong* 西北民族论丛 17, no. 1 (2018): 256.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Share, “The Russian Civil War,” 396-397.

<sup>62</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 151.

<sup>63</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 151-152.

<sup>64</sup> Xie, “Lun Yang Zengxin,” 59.

<sup>65</sup> “E’jiudang bing jiadao Yi-Ta shij” (December 1918), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-107-05-034, p. 1 (Copy).

<sup>66</sup> “E’jiudang bing...,” 03-32-107-05-034, p. 1 (Copy).

<sup>67</sup> Bai, “Yang Zengxin,” 19-20.

<sup>68</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 150

the case that even if troops were sent to Russia in order to protect traders, the Bolsheviks could misinterpret this.<sup>69</sup> In any case, action could have resulted in the Reds or the Whites becoming an enemy of China and as such, the most important priority was to “protect the border and get along with our neighbors”.<sup>70</sup> He further expanded upon this in a later telegram by emphasizing what he saw as Bolshevik goals and realities on the ground: there were Bolshevik troops already on the Russian side of the border with Ili and they only desired victory over the Whites, not to conquer the whole of China.<sup>71</sup> He stipulated that the Bolsheviks as such did not want war because they had not officially cut off diplomatic relations and as such peaceful diplomatic means should be utilized to handle the ascendant Bolsheviks, thereby preventing that Xinjiang be sucked into a whirlpool of conflict.<sup>72</sup> Thus, if action was to be taken, it should have been implemented through solely nonmilitary means.

Yang also dealt with incessant badgering by foreign missions in Beijing, particularly the British and the Russians, regarding the best course of action to take in the civil war in addition to periodic intelligence updates, some of which were likely being phrased in a way to provide an excuse for the deployment of foreign troops in Xinjiang. Yang had to respond in a way that threw off British and Russian diplomats and prevented them from taking action. One of the most interesting telegrams was one responding to British and Russian reports that Muslims were coming to incite an incident within Xinjiang. In response, Yang drew a line between “our Muslims” and “their Muslims”, saying that while the coming of outsiders and their incitement could not be prevented, “our Muslims” would surely not fall prey to such machinations.<sup>73</sup> Yang

---

<sup>69</sup> “E’shi” (May 1918), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-107-02-026, p. 2 (Copy).

<sup>70</sup> “Baowei Tacheng...”, 03-32-107-02-026, p. 2 (Copy).

<sup>71</sup> “Dui E’shi” (June 1918), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-107-02-045 (Copy).

<sup>72</sup> “Dui E’shi,” 03-32-107-02-045 (Copy).

<sup>73</sup> “E’jidang shanhuo shi” (January 1919), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-01-016 (Copy).

reasoned that this was due to the fact that they were not incited during the internal chaos in Russia and would still not fall victim to incitement when said chaos ceased.<sup>74</sup> In fact, Yang said, the Chinese should get the British and the Russians to commit to controlling their subjects (i.e. Muslims) in order to prevent them from falling prey to Bolshevik incitement.<sup>75</sup> We can see here how Yang instrumentalized the “Muslim question” in order to deflect unwanted overtures from foreign powers.

Though the historian Justin Jacobs presents Yang Zengxin as acting completely independently of the central Chinese government, there is more nuance to the situation. Due to the negotiated state model in Xinjiang that allowed local administrators discretion in daily matters, Yang was able to gradually increase his freedom of movement at the policy level. This however does not mean that Yang completely turned his back on central authorities, as he contacted the Chinese foreign ministry to lodge protests against the Soviets throughout the 1920s. What it meant was that through his presentation of himself as a capable administrator and his later success in maintaining the integrity of Xinjiang, when he did act against central Chinese authorities, he had enough legitimacy to do so. In examining the communications between Yang Zengxin and Beijing, it becomes clear that Yang’s performance led central authorities to gradually place more trust and confidence in him, thus increasing his freedom for maneuver.

If one analyzes Yang Zengxin’s communications with China’s central authorities, one will find some interesting patterns in his expression. There are two dimensions to this: the first being the mode and the second being the target of expression. Regarding the mode of expression, Yang Zengxin oftentimes utilized the language of international law in order relay his various positions. It seems that his immediate target was the Chinese foreign ministry with the

---

<sup>74</sup> “E’jidang...,” 03-32-108-01-016 (Copy).

<sup>75</sup> “E’jidang...,” 03-32-108-01-016 (Copy).

diplomatic staff of foreign missions being a secondary target, specifically the British and the Russians who were pressing China to act to the Whites' benefit. It appears that Yang utilized the "new" argumentation of international law in order to relay his message to the widest array of targets in the most efficient manner and simultaneously bolstered his position as a qualified administrator. This demonstrates that even though Yang was a holdover from the imperial period, he was not unaware of the intricacies of geopolitics. Indeed, being the governor of a province on the border of the Russian empire with a small British presence in Kashgar and the occasional Japanese intelligence forays disguised as research missions necessitated that he be aware of the international situation and its relevance to Xinjiang. As he witnessed the Russian Civil War unfold with refugees and soldiers pouring across the border in addition to local Russian consulates trying to intervene in the war effort, Yang realized that in order to prevent the situation from spiraling out of control he would have to go over the heads of the local consular officials in a way that would present him as competent not just to his superiors in Beijing but also in a way that would make his actions seem legitimate to the foreign overlords of his local interlocutors. He would do this by employing the language of international law.

Yang in his telegrams spoke the language of international law in a consistent and systematic manner, using the concepts of neutrality and noninterference as his most frequent reference points. For instance a July 1918 message relayed that the Russian civil war was an internal matter unrelated to China, where sending even a single soldier across the border would provide a pretext to retaliation.<sup>76</sup> Though it seems clearer that foreign countries such as Japan would have taken the chance to deploy troops if given the opportunity, it is less clear if Beijing was contemplating serious intervention. Nevertheless, this fear was real in Yang's mind as he

---

<sup>76</sup> "E'shi [Russian Affairs]" (July 1918), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-107-03-010, p. 1 ( Copy).

viewed the officials in Beijing as out of touch and ignorant of the situation in Xinjiang. Such an action would open a Pandora's box and lead to "international war" and thus, while the Reds and Whites fight, China should adopt noninterference in accordance with international law.<sup>77</sup> Yang observed that if noninterference was maintained, the Bolsheviks would also conform to international law, an assumption he felt was proven by the fact that after their victories in neighboring regions they did not enter China to capture defeated Whites.<sup>78</sup> Later in the same month he repeated the same position, stipulating that as Russia was engulfed in a civil war, according to international law it was necessary for China not to interfere.<sup>79</sup>

It appears that these messages did indeed have the effect of maintaining and even bolstering the trust and confidence of central authorities, as Beijing protected Yang and vouched for him in the face of foreign pressure, not just once, but multiple times. In an August 1918 conversation with foreign counterparts in Beijing, the Chinese diplomatic representative Chen Lu relayed the Chinese government's position: Xinjiang, with its long border with Russia, was very far from the center and its governor had been "very cautious" in relation to the Russian civil war.<sup>80</sup> As such, the Chinese government was "extremely satisfied" with Yang's goal of maintaining order in Xinjiang.<sup>81</sup> After listening to his counterparts' urges to do more to help the Whites, Chen ended the meeting by stating that the government was of the opinion that there is a reason for Yang's logic.<sup>82</sup> Later in January of 1920 when the Russian representative protested that Yang had interfered with encrypted telegram traffic, Chen again rebuffed him by saying that Yang's actions were geared towards maintaining order, repeating Yang's position that there were

---

<sup>77</sup> "E'shi," 03-32-107-03-010, p. 2 (Copy).

<sup>78</sup> "E'shi," 03-32-107-03-010, p. 3 (Copy).

<sup>79</sup> "Fu jian dian E'gesake jun dao Weitangzi shi"(July 1918), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-107-03-016, p. 1 (Copy).

<sup>80</sup> "Xinjiang E'judang jixie chujing shi" (August 1918), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-107-04-024, p. 1 (Copy).

<sup>81</sup> "Xinjiang E'judang...", 03-32-107-04-024, p. 1 (Copy).

<sup>82</sup> "Xinjiang E'judang...", 03-32-107-04-024, p. 2 (Copy).

difficulties due to the border with Russia and that if an incident occurred, all areas could be affected, to which he concluded by telling the Russian representative that regarding the local situation, the central government was beholden to Yang Zengxin.<sup>83</sup>

How then, should the circle be squared when taking into consideration Jacobs' account that Yang Zengxin lost faith in central Chinese authorities?<sup>84</sup> It seems that Yang was dissatisfied with material support. Over the years he had requested all types of equipment, from arms and ammunition to uniforms, repeatedly messaging Beijing with the goal of moving the bureaucratic wheels in his favor, though it appears that the requested assistance never materialized. It seems unlikely that Yang would have been completely oblivious to the foreign ministry's usage of his arguments with foreign counterparts, however. Indeed, this appears to have been exactly what his couching of arguments in international law was designed to do - to instill confidence in his abilities and also to relay his position to foreign interlocutors. The absence of both Chinese and foreign troops in Xinjiang, one of Yang's bottom lines, should have demonstrated at least some degree of confidence of Chinese officials in his ability to handle the situation on the northwestern periphery.

Eventually the White forces, especially under the Cassock commander Annenkov, had become a great liability, with Beijing unwilling to give the order to disarm them due to fear of English and Japanese reactions.<sup>85</sup> This was due to China's membership among the Allied Powers and created the delicate situation whereby Beijing would eventually have to engage with the Soviet Union if the Bolsheviks came out on top while simultaneously trying to avoid being accused of being the first country to "defect" from the anti-Bolshevik alliance. When

---

<sup>83</sup> "Sheng qing zhunxu E'guan yu zhu Xinjiang E'ling tong dian you" (January 1920), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-05-006, p. 1-2 (Copy).

<sup>84</sup> Jacobs, "Empire Besieged," 152.

<sup>85</sup> Zhao Dawang 赵大旺, "Bai'e Aliankuofu canbu anzhi Dunhuang shimo" 白俄阿连阔夫残部安置敦煌始末 [The Whole Story of White Russian Annenkov's Defeated Troops' Settlement in Dunhuang], *Silu wenming* 丝路文明 6, no. 1 (November 2021): 232.

Annenkov's forces were eventually disarmed and transported to Buddhist caves in Dunhuang in June 1921, they destroyed local relics and caused great offense to the Chinese before being ultimately repatriated in 1922.<sup>86</sup> This was the last straw for Yang Zengxin, who reached an agreement whereby Soviet forces would enter Xinjiang and attack the Whites, albeit without Chinese help.<sup>87</sup> The first attack was at Tacheng on May 21, 1921, with some Whites escaping and prompting a chase.<sup>88</sup> With the remaining whites dealt with, Red forces immediately departed.

At this time in Xinjiang, there was no single USSR organ in control of policy and assessments of policy coherence are “greatly overstated” according to historian David Brophy.<sup>89</sup> This presents an interesting juxtaposition, as it demonstrates that Chinese officials in both the center and periphery generally maintained better communications and were able to effectively reach consensus on certain issues, while the actors in the Soviet periphery were initially acting of their own accord unbeknownst to Moscow. The former was the preserved negotiated state model in action while the latter was the result of imperial collapse and chaos, though the situation would evolve as the Soviet Union constituted its power over Central Asia which led to the sacrifice of the interests of local parties to the all-union interests of stability and economic development.

After the disposal of White forces, Xinjiang had to contend with the succeeding imperial reconstitution and entered into discussions with the USSR regarding trade, with Yang Zengxin willing to reach a deal if the principle of equality was upheld.<sup>90</sup> In return for normalized relations, Yang Zengxin wanted to establish five consulates in the Soviet Union that were staffed by his

---

<sup>86</sup> Zhao, “Baie Aliankuofu canbu,” 240-242.

<sup>87</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 165.

<sup>88</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 166.

<sup>89</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 166, 171.

<sup>90</sup> Hao Jianying and Yan Zhonglin 郝建英, 闫忠林, “Yang Zengxin yu Su'e (lian) de tongshang jiaoshe ji tedian” 杨增新与苏俄（联）的通商交涉及特点 [Yang Zengxin's Trade Negotiations with Russia (the Soviet Union) and Their Characteristics], *Lantai shijie* 兰台世界, no. 6 (2024): 141.

handpicked bureaucrats, allowing him to preemptively monitor potential ideological threats, most notably nationalist sentiment arising from or influenced by Soviet national policies in Central Asia. Though provincial governors traditionally did not have such authority, Yang Zengxin had garnered enough legitimacy during the Russian Civil War that Chinese central authorities were willing to acquiesce to such a request. Eventually the USSR granted the request for consulates in October 1924,<sup>91</sup> just months after the signing of the agreement between the two countries' central governments. It should be noted that while a Chinese province was operating consulates independently, Yang would repeatedly appeal to the Chinese foreign ministry for help to resolve crises for the remaining duration of his reign.

### **Confronting Imperial Reconstitution, 1924-1928**

After the Russian Civil War, Yang Zengxin continued to cordon off Xinjiang from instability, including China proper, waiting to see who would come out on top.<sup>92</sup> Simultaneously, he had no choice but to deal with the USSR. Fortunately for Yang, the Soviet Union needed Xinjiang's agricultural products while Xinjiang needed Soviet goods, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.<sup>93</sup> In Xinjiang, the Soviet objective was to use agriculture to relieve famine, flood the market with goods to "catch up with foreign competitors" and use the province as a "base of resources", desiring better trade with Xinjiang in order to get materials in case of a war with other great powers.<sup>94</sup> Later reports imply that that under Yang, while there was a protocol to trade in Ili, in effect there was unlimited trade because there was no treaty, a situation made worse under Jin due to the latter's desire for military assistance from the Soviet Union,<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 206.

<sup>92</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 174-175.

<sup>93</sup> Hao and Yan, "Yang Zengxin yu Su'e," 140.

<sup>94</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 18, 236.

<sup>95</sup> "Guanyu Xinjiang...", 04-02-001-04-024, p. 31 (Original).

thus demonstrating that Yang's desired strategy of containing Soviet actions was flawed. This was primarily due to the limited tools of governance inherent in the provincial administrative structure.

In spite of embryonic trade relations, Yang Zengxin did not welcome the Soviet Union's political policies.<sup>96</sup> Considering the fact that Yang was an ancien régime holdover in addition to the fact that he had read reports of Russian refugees saying that they would rather die than return to Bolshevik-controlled Russia, it is not surprising that he was extremely suspicious of Soviet intentions. However, this did not prevent his from engaging with the Soviets since they were a reality that had to be faced and their control of Central Asia had in effect brought stability to the region.

During the Russian Civil War and into the twenties, Uyghur national identity had been gestating, aided by the vacuum of chaos.<sup>97</sup> This identity emerged from a combination of Jadidist tradition and the rediscovery of a Turkic past as well as attempts to use the Russian Revolution to capitalize on political change.<sup>98</sup> The groups that would come to form the Uyghurs however, historically lacked unity.<sup>99</sup> Essentially, leaders among Taranchis and Kashgaris were competing to define "Uyghurness", hoping to empower themselves in the process. Even the term itself, "Uyghur", was only given political meaning as late as February 1918,<sup>100</sup> and in Xinjiang the term was not really used by inhabitants until the 1930s.<sup>101</sup> As mentioned before, Soviet policies in the region at the time lacked coherence and there was no single Soviet organ controlling Xinjiang

---

<sup>96</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 200.

<sup>97</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 4-5.

<sup>98</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Petr Kokaisl, "State-building in the Soviet Union and the idea of the Uyghurs in Central Asia," *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 4 (2020): 714-715, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/10357823.2020.1738337?needAccess=true>.

<sup>100</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 155.

<sup>101</sup> Wang, *Dongtujuesitan*, 1.

policy. Actually, the Soviet Union worried that instability would benefit warlords and sought to maintain the status quo in the province.<sup>102</sup>

However, what is significant is not that local actors were taking advantage of a vacuum to determine their fate as they had always done, but that these events were perceived by Yang Zengxin and Chinese authorities as being deliberately directed by Soviet authorities. Though the evidence is murky Chinese officials they began to view Uyghur nationalism as a transnationally controlled threat to stability. This fear and paranoia that stemmed from the nature of the divided society of Xinjiang led Yang Zengxin to enact a policy of internal elite accommodation paired with external provincial isolation. To do this, Yang needed to conditionally endorse the traditional authority of non-Han elites as well as prevent the influx of more outsiders into the province. Because of the parallel society which placed Han and non-Han into separate spheres, the state was naturally suspicious as there was a group of people geographically under its control but administratively outside of it. It is telling that when the Ili consul was secretly attempting to amass Muslim troops to counterattack the Bolsheviks without informing the Chinese, Yang was in a state of disbelief that the Russian had not learned the lessons of 1916 and stipulated that a repeat of such an event in Xinjiang would be disastrous.<sup>103</sup> The lesson was clear: the old politics of difference should be respected. Thus, Yang realized that he had to provide special privileges for non-Han in Xinjiang but at the same time as an official of the state he was uncomfortable with the lack of control over his subjects.

First, Yang Zengxin accommodated high-level Turkic Muslim elites by promising to not interfere with religious schools as long as they adhered to specific guidelines.<sup>104</sup> This was not the

---

<sup>102</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 212, 217.

<sup>103</sup> "Zibao E'guo zai Yili zhengbing yian banli qingxing you" (October 1919), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-108-03-052, p. 2-3 (Copy).

<sup>104</sup> Cao Peng and Tan Jing-xia 曹鹏, 谭婧霞, "Lun Yang Zengxin zhi zhijiang linian" 论杨增新之治疆理念 [On Yang Zengxin's Idea of Ruling Xinjiang], *Shihezi daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 石河子大学学报 (哲学社会科学

first time that Muslims had played a role in the administration of the province, but it is important that it was only a limited number of elites who were accommodated and not the broader population, as the negotiated state model of governance did not allow governors to directly engage with non-Han subjects. However, this version of accommodation was different from previous ones, as Yang simultaneously removed traditional intermediary roles such as the *aqsaqals*, which he abolished in 1924,<sup>105</sup> removing what he saw as untrustworthy intermediaries that complicated the tasks of governance in a further step towards regional consolidation of power. Second, a political academy was opened in Dihua to begin producing future provincial administrators, with an emphasis on their local origins.<sup>106</sup> This was a way of preempting potential ethnic tensions by emphasizing that local Han were trustworthy administrators of a Turkic periphery as they “understood” Muslims, an extension of how Yang had originally presented himself. Third, all inhabitants were required to go to school, whether religious or secular, in order to properly educate them and prevent the infiltration of external ideas, a tweaked continuation of the Qing strategy of transformation through education.<sup>107</sup> Finally, it should be noted that while Yang did effectively quarantine the province, the growth of Soviet power and the control that it exercised was a more likely reason for the lack of unsanctioned cross-border traffic.

An incident in the mid-1920s involving propaganda at the Soviet consulate in Kashgar demonstrates Yang’s anxiety towards his subjects and their vulnerability to foreign manipulation.

---

版) 33, no. 5 (October 2019): 102, 104.

<sup>105</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 79.

<sup>106</sup> He Yong-ming 何永明, “Yang Zengxin shiqi Xinjiang zhengzhi yanjiusuo gouchen” 杨增新时期新疆政治研究所钩沉 [The Xinjiang Institute of Politics during the Period of Yang Zengxin’s Governance], *Xinjiang daxue xuebao* (*zhexue · renwen shehui kexue ban*) 新疆大学学报(哲学·人文社会科学版) 47, no. 4 (July 2019): 68.

<sup>107</sup> Ling Xingzhen 凌兴珍, “‘Yumin’ yihuo ‘kaiminzhi’ - Minguo shouren xinjiangshengzhang jian dujun Yangzengxin jiaoyusixiang yu shijian pingshu” “愚民”抑或“开民智”? — 民国首任新疆省长兼督军杨增新教育思想与实践述评 [“Keeping the People Ignorant” or “Enlightening the People”? - A Critical Review of the Educational Thoughts and Practices of Yang Zengxin, the First Governor-General of Xinjiang in the Republic of China] *Sichuan shifandaxue xuebao* (*shehui kexue ban*) 四川师范大学学报(社会科学版) 51, no. 6 (November 2024): 183.

In 1926, Chinese officials in Kashgar burst into a house to discover that three Muslims residents were in possession of flags with Chinese characters and “Turban language”, a situation interpreted as advocating for revolution.<sup>108</sup> Yang Zengxin quickly contacted the foreign ministry and argued that foreign missions could not be in opposition to their host nation and that actions such as these would disturb the peace.<sup>109</sup> Pointing out that such actions went against the Sino-Soviet agreement, Yang requested that a protest be lodged with the Soviet ambassador, especially considering the ethnic diversity of the border regions.<sup>110</sup> This message was followed by another that detailed the appearance of the flags which were inscribed with slogans saying that the Soviet Union was a friend to the poor peoples of the world.<sup>111</sup> After suggesting that the Soviet consul in Kashgar be removed, Yang pointed out that there were many poor people in Kashgar who had nothing to do and could be incited easily.<sup>112</sup> Yang attested that though such incidents had happened multiple times, Soviet officials still did not admit their culpability and retorted that the flags were not in the hands of their own people.<sup>113</sup> This went against the testimony of the local *daoyin* (Han circuit attendant) who stated that he had seen a *tongshi* (interpreter of local Muslim descent) and former Russian subject personally hand over seven flags.<sup>114</sup> The foreign ministry cabled back that the Soviet ambassador had already been notified and the consul disciplined with instructions to monitor the consul and if such actions continued, to remove him.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> “Qing jiaoshe chehuan lingshi” (July 1926), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-104-02-001, p. 2-4 (Original).

<sup>109</sup> “Qing jiaoshe...,” 03-32-104-02-001, p. 6 (Original).

<sup>110</sup> “Qing jiaoshe...,” 03-32-104-02-001, p. 6-7 (Original).

<sup>111</sup> “Guanyu zhu Xinjiang Kashi Sulian lingshi zai Kashi youqi Han E’ Chanwen ge xiang qizhi chuanbo shehuizhuyi jiqi pinmin geming - an qing chahe you” (July 1926), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-104-02-005, p. 6 (Original and Copy).

<sup>112</sup> “Guanyu zhu Kashi...,” 03-32-104-02-005, p. 7, 10 (Original and Copy).

<sup>113</sup> “Guanyu zhu Kashi...,” 03-32-104-02-005, p. 15 (Original and Copy).

<sup>114</sup> “Guanyu zhu Kashi...,” 03-32-104-02-005, p. 20 (Original and Copy).

<sup>115</sup> “Sulian lingshi zhizao qizhi xuanchuan guoji shi” (July 1926), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-104-02-006, p. 2-3 (Original and Copy).

The USSR for its part relayed that the flags were for a May Day celebration and were to be flown inside of the consulate and not for spreading revolution; as such, these actions had not gone against the article six of the Sino-Soviet agreement (activities disturbing the peace).<sup>116</sup> Yang again contacted the foreign ministry, stating that according to the local daoyin on July 15, an examination of the flags revealed that they were in fact for disturbing the peace and propagating revolution, which violated regulations that foreign missions could not fly flags other than national ones.<sup>117</sup> “Each flag was quite clearly propagating Communism, so how can one not rigorously suppress it?”<sup>118</sup> This incident demonstrates that Yang viewed the local population as vulnerable to foreign manipulation and that a learned man such as himself had the responsibility to prevent them from being taken advantage of by undesirable forces such as the Soviets. Failure to do so would result in unrest and potentially lead to Xinjiang becoming detached from the Chinese polity.

It seems that Yang’s fears were overblown, as can be seen with the situation faced by Uyghur elites. Though they were not propagating communism but rather a new Uyghur identity, these elites were a “tiny minority”, with most locals associating “Uyghur” with “communist.”<sup>119</sup> This point and the preceding episodes demonstrate two things: first, Yang need not have worried that the Soviets were going to instigate a local rebellion as potential mediators with the local population would have been viewed by locals in a negative light. Second, as an official of the negotiated state with limited insight into his non-elite subjects, Yang was predisposed to fear foreign instigation. Given that Yang was an elite himself and the fact that elites play a key role in

---

<sup>116</sup> “Zhu Kashi zonglingshi dingzhi qizhi xi yubei wuyue yiri jinian shiyong juewu guhuo pinmin xuanchuan geming judong you” (August 1926), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-104-02-012, p. 3-4 (Original and Copy).

<sup>117</sup> “Ju Kashi daoyin chenglai yuan kou Sulian lingshi hongqi qianlai zisong chahe yibian jiaoshe you” (July 1926), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 03-32-104-02-016, p. 4 (Original and Copy).

<sup>118</sup> “Ju Kashi...,” 03-32-104-02-016, p. 4 (Original and Copy).

<sup>119</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 18.

nation-building movements, he had a heightened sense of what nationalism would do. Indeed, he had just witnessed the collapse of the Qing and the rise of a Chinese republic. However, his elite perception blinded him to the fact that locals were not as receptive to foreign imposed identities as he imagined, at least from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union, however, was not helping to counter Yang's suspicions. When an uprising occurred in Ili, it had not been planned by the Soviets, though contacts had been made because they previously believed that unrest was likely to occur.<sup>120</sup> Actually, the 1927 war scare with Britain resulted in increased border control by the Soviets, who then implemented a harsh crackdown of cross-border activity.<sup>121</sup> There are two possible reasons for this. The first is that there was still no unified Soviet policy for the region, though this seems unlikely given the fact that Soviet power was approaching a stable apogee, with the centralization of policymaking that dovetailed from such. The more plausible explanation is that in keeping with the Soviets' preference for the status quo in Xinjiang lest instability benefit Dungan warlords,<sup>122</sup> they desired to have at least some form of contact, direct or indirect, with all parties in the region. This was preferable since the Soviets believed China's administration to be unstable and as would be seen after 1933, were willing to support different parties in order to maintain a stable bulwark against geopolitical threats, mainly Japan.

As such, how should one view Yang Zengxin's position towards his subjects given the aforementioned telegrams? First, it appears that Yang Zengxin used the messages to highlight a danger while simultaneously elevating himself as the only administrator capable of handling the problem. By communicating with the center in such a way as to highlight the potential for unrest or even full-blown rebellion, Yang constantly reminded officials that a repeat of Yakub Beg

---

<sup>120</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 167.

<sup>121</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 217.

<sup>122</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 212, 217.

could occur and played to the fears of central Chinese officials, though most officials including Yang probably did genuinely worry about such an occurrence, if ever unlikely.

Simultaneously, there was an economic crisis brewing, with the provincial government unable to exploit local resources coupled with severe inflation.<sup>123</sup> Though the people were largely placated by being kept ignorant of outside news through the banning of newspapers and other print materials coming from outside the province, this was only a temporary measure, with Yang's relationship to Beijing best described as *renmiao bu renshen*, "recognizing the temple but not recognizing the god".<sup>124</sup> This meant that all policies were temporary stopgap measures designed to keep the forces stemming from Soviet imperial reconstitution at bay until the day that competent central Chinese authorities would come to the rescue. He would inactively follow the "trend of the times" in a twofold manner: first he would accept and follow the trend that central authorities were unable to effectively offer assistance to him and as such utilized the tools as his disposal through the negotiated state model in order to control and manage actual and potential disturbances. Second, if the trend was moving towards an eventual furthering of integration with China proper, then all he had to do was mitigate potential disturbances until the "day of unification" arrived. This was the hope that Yang Zengxin maintained until he was felled by an assassin's bullet on July 7, 1928. His successor, Jin Shuren, would go against Yang's policy of inaction and decided that a massive arms buildup and a restructuring of the provincial tax structure would help him to combat the perceived Soviet threat. In reality, it would lead to an increase in Soviet influence in Xinjiang.

---

<sup>123</sup> Bai, "Yang Zengxin," 44-45.

<sup>124</sup> Bai, "Yang Zengxin," 45.

## Jin Shuren, 1928-1933

After Yang Zengxin's assassination in July of 1928, Jin Shuren was thrust into the position of the highest ranking provincial official, though he needed official recognition from Nanjing, China's new capital. He secured his position through local military support, touting his skill in calming the situation in Xinjiang and warning that the Soviet Union would take advantage of local chaos if he was not appointed.<sup>125</sup> In spite of Nanjing's misgivings, the Nationalists' last choice for governor was ordered to create a provincial government on October 28, 1928.<sup>126</sup> Jin was such an undesirable choice for Nanjing, who wanted to its own person to the position, that some officials proposed to send forces into the region to overthrow him and install someone more desirable, but these plans fell through in November due to transportation issues.<sup>127</sup> Their plans temporarily thwarted, Nanjing would get a second chance to rid themselves of Jin within a few years.

After securing his position, Jin Shuren imagined he could pre-emptively raise a large local army as a deterrent without incurring negative repercussions,<sup>128</sup> though evidence for his exact motivations is murky considering the lack of archival sources for the period. This was a reversal from Yang's long-standing strategy of inaction suitable for a weaker opponent. It would first necessitate a rejiggering of the local tax structure.<sup>129</sup> What followed was the classic trigger of conflict in the negotiated state: the state was weak and viewed as abusive, and elites held the balance of power.

---

<sup>125</sup> Wu Fuhuan 吴福环, "Jin Shuren jiezhang Xinjiang junzheng quanli de quzhe guocheng" 金树仁接掌新疆军政权力的曲折过程 [The Tortuous Process of Jin Shuren Taking Control over Xinjiang's Military and Political Affairs], *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究, no. 4 (2022): 45-47.

<sup>126</sup> Wu, "Jin Shuren," 48, 52.

<sup>127</sup> Wu, "Jin Shuren," 49.

<sup>128</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 248.

<sup>129</sup> Chen Ziyu 陈子煜, "'Kuojun' yu 'ruobing': Yang Zengxin zai Xinjiang de zhengjun cuoshi zhi kaocha" "扩军"与"弱兵": 杨增新在新疆的整军措施之考察 ["Expanding Army" and "Weakening Army": An Investigation of Yang Zengxin's Army Consolidation Measures in Xinjiang], *Wenshan xueyuan xuebao* 文山学院学报 36, no. 3 (June 2023): 31.; Jacobs, "Empire," 51.

Hami was in rebellion by April 1931 and expropriated leaders took revenge on the unwitting governor.<sup>130</sup> Nanjing would back Gansu warlords against Jin Shuren, seeing it as their chance to correct their mistake of years before of not being able to install their choice of governor, and while Stalin would provide the latter with support in the form of a secret trade agreement in October of 1931,<sup>131</sup> it was not enough, as Jin fled and was arrested in Nanjing on October 30, 1933, becoming a scapegoat that the Nationalists hoped to use to win back local sentiment.<sup>132</sup> Newspapers at the time harshly criticized the personal shortcomings of both Yang and Jin,<sup>133</sup> with even internal governmental reports positioning him as a stubborn understudy of Yang that was ignorant of the world.<sup>134</sup> However, while personal mismanagement was definitely a contributing factor, there were structural issues at play such as the negotiated state model beginning to break down. As a later government report would note, dissatisfaction had been growing and as such the later unrest could have been predicted.<sup>135</sup> As one historian concluded, any individual hypothetically undertaking the mantle of governance at the time that Jin did would have been faced with a “lose-lose proposition.”<sup>136</sup>

It should be noted that while the Soviets were initially against intervening, three factors contributed to their involvement: the Japanese invasion of Manchuria changed their eastern security environment, the chaos in Xinjiang needed to be controlled lest foreign powers take advantage of it and finally, the Soviets assisted only when local officials actively offered trade and resource concessions. Some central authorities initially viewed the occasion as an opportunity to finally extend their direct control to the wayward province, with one report

---

<sup>130</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 255-257, 261-262.

<sup>131</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 236.

<sup>132</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 69, 279, 282, 283-285.

<sup>133</sup> “Xinjiang zhengbian zhi jingguo” (June 14, 1933), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 04-02-001-02-034 (Original).

<sup>134</sup> “Guanyu Xinjiang...,” 04-02-001-04-024, p. 2 (Original).

<sup>135</sup> “Guanyu Xinjiang...,” 04-02-001-04-024, p. 2 (Original).

<sup>136</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 240.

suggesting that Sheng Shicai should be assisted in order to prevent Xinjiang from falling prey to Russo-English machinations.<sup>137</sup> Other reports suggested that better governance, trade and propaganda teams for minorities be utilized in order to stabilize the situation.<sup>138</sup> The chaos and confusion eventually resulted in Sheng Shicai ensconcing himself as governor, ushering in an era where the USSR exercised influence not only within the economic but also the political, military and educational spheres.<sup>139</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

We can thus see that Xinjiang under the rule of Yang Zengxin and Jin Shuren was a holdover of the “negotiated state” model of the Late Qing. Yang inherited this model when he came to power and slowly worked to consolidate his position, eliminating destabilizing forces such as the Elder Brothers Society.<sup>140</sup> This however, did not resolve the Gordian knot of what to do with the non-Han population. Previous attempts at integration through education had been unevenly pursued, thus leading to a type of parallel society of non-Han residents and religious authorities. In order to maintain stability, Yang utilized this model and emphasized his *laissez-faire* approach in pitching it to local elites while simultaneously engaging with the Soviets in a limited manner as he bought time for eventual increased integration with China proper.

For Xinjiang to be completely incorporated into the Chinese polity, it would require the incorporation of local non-Han groups and the erosion of parallel systems of authority. This could have been the result of Jin Shuren’s policies, but they were firstly implemented tactlessly

---

<sup>137</sup> “Guanyu Xinjiang...,” 04-02-001-04-024, p. 32 (Original).

<sup>138</sup> “Han baixu...,” 04-02-001-03-18, p. 9-10 (Original).

<sup>139</sup> Tian Qingfeng 田庆锋, “Xinjiang diqu de Zhongsu guanxi yu Xinjiang de jindaihua (1917-1949)” 新疆地区的中苏关系与新疆的近代化 (1917-1949) [The Sino-Soviet Relationship in the Xinjiang Region and Xinjiang’s Modernization (1917-1949)], *Kashi shifanxueyuan xuebao* 喀什师范学院学报 23, no. 2 (March 2002): 36.

<sup>140</sup> Andrew D.W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A political history of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12-13.

and more critically there was no centralized authority to backstop the governor in the event of unrest. The resulting rebellion led to Jin's ouster and the installation of Sheng Shicai who pivoted towards the Soviets. Ironically enough, under Sheng's rule Xinjiang would receive the type of assistance that Yang had envisioned central Chinese authorities would provide, but it would come from the Soviet Union. It would result in a more comprehensive state and security apparatus that would lay the future groundwork for incoming Nationalist rule in 1944 while also meeting the Soviet requirements of stability, security and resource-provision.

## Chapter 2: Clones and Puppets?, 1933-1949<sup>1</sup>

This chapter covers the period of 1933 to 1949 in Xinjiang and describes the institutional changes to the traditional form of governance, the negotiated state. This period can be divided into two periods: the first lasting from 1933 to 1944 was a period of institutional infusion facilitated by the Soviet Union and welcomed by Sheng Shicai, the provincial governor of Xinjiang during these eleven years. The second period from 1944 to 1949 witnessed the expansion of central Chinese power into the province and its interactions with the Second East Turkestan Republic and the Soviet Union, an arrangement that led to the further erosion of the negotiated state and the eventual displacement of negotiations with local authorities by direct negotiations between Moscow and Nanjing to resolve provincial issues. This period critically changed the governing model in Xinjiang and paved the way for later rule by the Chinese Communist Party by the end of the forties.

From 1933 to 1944, Sheng Shicai ruled Xinjiang, during which time Chinese central authorities, while formally recognizing Sheng as the highest authority in the province, in effect did not exercise control over him. After assuming power, Sheng became alienated from authorities in Nanjing due to his suspicions that they desired to overturn his authority and thus decided that in order to preserve his rule and stability in Xinjiang, he would have to pivot

---

<sup>1</sup> Note on archival sources: All Soviet documents are based upon English translations provided by the Wilson Center Digital Archive.

towards the Soviets. He adopted *korenizatsiia*-type<sup>2</sup> policies to manage Xinjiang's delicate ethnic situation and instituted educational policies that involved native-language schools and study abroad programs. This was a period of institutional infusion facilitated by the Soviet Union that resulted in the development of Xinjiang's administrative capabilities. However, when Sheng later felt that the Soviet Union was encroaching upon his autonomy, he pivoted back to the Nationalists. His regime was neither a puppet nor clone of the Soviet structure in Central Asia, but rather an attempt to resolve historical problems of Xinjiang's administration that could only be achieved through intense support from a larger polity such as the Soviet Union.

The first part of this chapter covers 1933 to 1944 and argues that Sheng was utilizing support from a more powerful polity in order to consolidate provincial rule and eliminate some of the maneuvering room that the traditional negotiated state model allowed. Since this could not be provided by Nanjing, Sheng turned to Moscow to achieve these goals. As he was facing the same historical problem of managing a diverse population governed by a Han minority, his regime implemented Soviet-inspired policies. These policies, combined with an administrative terror machine, effectively extended the reach of provincial authorities and temporarily drove Turkic-Muslim separatists underground. The result was a stable and secure Xinjiang that provided resources to the USSR, thereby fulfilling Moscow's interests. The enhanced administrative control combined with the Nationalists' extended reach into the western realms of China due to the Second Sino-Japanese War eroded Xinjiang's negotiated state and allowed central Chinese authorities to appoint their desired governor for the first time in decades. This was due to the fact that the period of Soviet-facilitated institutional infusion under Sheng simultaneously eroded the negotiated state and left behind an administrative structure that was

---

<sup>2</sup> *Korenizatsiia* was a series of Soviet policies that are sometimes referred to as "affirmative action" measures that aimed to place members of non-Russian ethnic groups into more prominent positions within the Soviet bureaucracy.

finally receptive to the extension of central Chinese power, thus allowing Nanjing to finally appoint its desired official as governor of Xinjiang for the first time in decades.

The second part of this chapter covers 1944 to 1949 and details the Ili Rebellion, the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic, its negotiations with the Nationalists as well as the trials and travails of Xinjiang's coalition government, culminating with the extension of Chinese Communist Party rule into the province. First, the Ili Rebellion was utilized by the Soviet Union in order to provide an opportunity to make itself available as a mediator between Nanjing and the East Turkestan Republic and thus exercise influence on the process of renegotiating governing arrangements in Xinjiang. After mediating between Nanjing and Ghulja, the Soviet Union gradually became the accepted interlocutor for the management of Xinjiang's issues, as evinced by the decrease in Nanjing's interactions with the ETR and its increased interactions with Moscow after 1946, with Moscow almost completely supplanting the ETR in Chinese thinking by 1947. By this time, Moscow was able to work directly with central Chinese authorities to reach a modus vivendi in the contact zone that was Xinjiang, even directly beginning negotiations with the CCP and excluding the ETR when it appeared that the Nationalists would lose control of China. Thus, the negotiated state was no more, central Chinese control could be exercised in China's northwest and the stage was set for direct negotiations between Mao Zedong and Stalin when the two met in the winter of 1949/1950.

### **The Question of a Governor's Agency**

Given the influence of the Soviet Union and its direct involvement in Xinjiang during the 1930s and 1940s, the question of the agency of the governor Sheng Shicai frequently arises in scholarly analyses. Regarding Sheng Shicai and his policies, scholarly debates have historically

centered around the issue of his agency and independence from Soviet manipulation. Scholars can normally be divided into two camps: the “satellite” camp, exemplified by Lars-Erik Nyman, or the “geopolitical manipulator” camp, exemplified by Alan Whiting. Those in the former category generally see Sheng Shicai as all-powerful due to his connections to the Soviets, going so far as to say that he was “immune from local pressure groups.”<sup>3</sup> This camp usually goes on to say that Xinjiang under Sheng was a “puppet”,<sup>4</sup> “Soviet satellite”<sup>5</sup> or even that Sheng was a “Central Eurasian version of Pu-yi of Manchukuo.”<sup>6</sup> While seemingly contradictory as this camp emphasizes both Sheng’s lack of agency and his unassailable domestic position, they follow a logic that due to his close ties with Moscow he became untouchable but was ultimately beholden to the Soviets. These analyses are problematic given that they do not give agency to Sheng.

Within the “geopolitical manipulator” camp, scholars base their analyses upon two reference points: first, that Sheng sought to preserve his position as governor of the province and second, that he was adept at leveraging the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union to achieve the former. These scholars emphasize the paramount importance to Sheng of preserving his personal rule.<sup>7</sup> They posit that he used his critical geopolitical position and his alignment of interests with various actors to maintain what one scholar calls “political independence”<sup>8</sup> as demonstrated by his expulsion of GMD officials early in his reign and his later pivot away from the Soviets. This analysis is more complex than the “satellite” one, but it solely focuses on Sheng and undervalues Soviet agency.

---

<sup>3</sup> Lars-Erik Nyman, “Sinkiang 1934-1944: Dark decade for a pivotal puppet,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 32, no. 1 (1991): 99.

<sup>4</sup> Nyman, “Sinkiang,” 99.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Clarke, “The Problematic Progress of ‘Integration’ in the Chinese State’s Approach to Xinjiang, 1959-2005,” *Asian Ethnicity* 8, no. 3 (2007): 270.

<sup>6</sup> Nyman, “Sinkiang,” 99.

<sup>7</sup> Alan S. Whiting and General Sheng Shih-ts’ai, *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot?* (Michigan State University Press, 1958), 137.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Ke, *Dongtujuesitan*, 87.

Additionally, most scholarship in both camps is of the position that Sheng essentially copied Soviet nationality policies.<sup>9</sup> This is most likely due to the fact that most Xinjiang scholars are Sinophones who are unfamiliar with Russian documents on the issue. However, this can now be mitigated due to the fact that organizations such as the Wilson Center now provide Soviet documents in addition to the fact that new cohorts of Xinjiang experts are increasingly bridging the Russophone-Sinophone divide. As such, scholars now have the opportunity to revisit their assessments of Sheng and his policies.

### **The Rise of a Pro-Soviet Governor**

Sheng Shicai (r. 1933-1944) came to power because of an uprising in Xinjiang in the early 1930s caused by the policies of the previous governor Jin Shuren (r. 1928-1933). When Jin abolished the Hami Khanate, which had historically enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, in 1930, he set the stage for a revolt that erupted in 1931.<sup>10</sup> The rebellion spread throughout the province over the following two years and eventually led to the overthrow and flight of Jin on April 12, 1933. Sheng was then brought into the provincial government by local factions that tried to utilize him as an administrative balancer, and though he asked Nanjing<sup>11</sup> for aid, he was ultimately rebuffed and forced to engage with the Soviets.<sup>12</sup>

The Soviets had an interest in helping Sheng for three reasons: first, they needed a stable and secure Xinjiang. Second, they needed Xinjiang to be the “rear” of a China fighting against the Japanese Empire. Third, the Soviets needed resources from Xinjiang, as they desired to get

---

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 302. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 299.

<sup>10</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur*, 238.

<sup>11</sup> At this time, the Republic of China was under exclusive GMD (Nationalist) rule and headed by Chiang Kai-shek, with the national capitol in Nanjing.

<sup>12</sup> Wang, *Dongtjujesitan*, 87.

materials from Xinjiang in case of a war with other great powers.<sup>13</sup> The first two points are explicitly supported by a Soviet report from 1944.<sup>14</sup> The report mentions the uprising of the early thirties, posits that “these disorders occurred in Xinjiang soon after Japan invaded Manchuria, and that the thrust of the Japanese campaign was to expand ... bringing it to the Soviet border in Russian Turkestan. Firmly resolved to prevent Japanese penetration... the Soviet Union continued to give him economic and technical aid.”<sup>15</sup> In short, Sheng needed the Soviets, but the Soviets also needed Sheng.

### **A Place at the Table: Nationality Policies**

When Sheng Shicai assumed power, ethnic tensions were the most pressing issue. This was clear to both central and provincial officials, as can be seen in a Chinese governmental report that linked the unrest with the ethnic problem in the province.<sup>16</sup> There were also geopolitical considerations for such a move: the non-Han of China’s borderlands were most likely to work with the Japanese or Soviets in order to further their own interests,<sup>17</sup> a result of the fact that in China no “positive steps toward a national minority policy” had been taken after 1911.<sup>18</sup> Sheng was acutely aware that he needed to resolve this problem, but he required outside help in order to manage it.<sup>19</sup> Due to his anti-Japanese sentiment, Sheng ultimately turned to the

---

<sup>13</sup> Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 236.

<sup>14</sup> “The Truth about the Events in Xinjiang”, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F.17, Op.128, D. 824, I. 404-410. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/truth-about-events-xinjiang>.

<sup>15</sup> “The Truth about the Events in Xinjiang”, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F.17, Op.128, D. 824, I. 404-410. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/truth-about-events-xinjiang>.

<sup>16</sup> “Hansong Mu Fengqi Tiao Chen jiangshi” (03 November, 1933), Taipei, Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 04-02-001-04-002, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Kelly A. Hammond, *China’s Muslims & Japan’s Empire: Centering Islam in World War II* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949* (M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Wang, *Dongtujuesitan*, 70.

Soviets, who worried that nationalist movements in Xinjiang would affect Soviet Muslims.<sup>20</sup> To resolve the ethnic issue, a provincial administrator named Yu Xiusong advocated for the adoption of the *korenizatsiia* model.<sup>21</sup> A Politburo excerpt from May 4, 1943 assesses Sheng's policy as having incorporated minorities into the government "in order to draw the nationalist movement of non-Chinese ethnic minorities... to his side."<sup>22</sup> However, Sheng did not just clone Soviet policies, but rather utilized them in his quest for personal power and desire to prevent Japanese penetration of the region. Thus, Sheng recognized fourteen ethnic categories in Xinjiang.<sup>23</sup> In recognizing these fourteen groups, Sheng was able to incorporate them into the government and take back local authority by giving key leaders important positions.<sup>24</sup> This was different from the Soviet model, because even though non-Han were later educated and employed in the bureaucracy, they were not directly thrust into visible leadership positions such as in the USSR.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the traditional non-Han elites were given special positions within the government. Realistically, Sheng did not have much of a choice of whether to eliminate non-Han leaders as they were loved by the locals and had already or were in the process of creating ties with the Soviets.<sup>26</sup>

While Sheng maintained his nationalities policies for a time, he would later come to believe that he had overly empowered Turkic elites, and thus launched periodic purges. In analyzing these events, an excerpt of Soviet politburo minutes claimed that the ethnic awareness awakened by these policies conflicted with Sheng's desire to attain unlimited power and as such

---

<sup>20</sup> Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 302.

<sup>22</sup> "Excerpt on Xinjiang from Minutes No. 40 of the VKP(b) CC Politburo Meetings", May 4, 1934, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 162, D. 37, II. 76-79. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/excerpt-xinjiang-minutes-no-40-vkpb-cc-politburo-meetings>.

<sup>23</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 300.

<sup>24</sup> Wang, *Dongtujuesitan*, 88.

<sup>25</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 385.

<sup>26</sup> Wang, *Dongtujuesitan*, 88.

he began to carry out mass arrests and remove minorities from governmental positions.<sup>27</sup> As Stalin began purging Turkic intelligentsia around 1937, Sheng took the chance to do so too, using Soviet troops to kill an estimated fifty to one-hundred thousand people.<sup>28</sup> In order to continue receiving Soviet support, Sheng employed the term “Trotskyite” in order to remove anyone that he did not like, even leveling accusations against Apresof, the Soviet consul-general in Urumqi.<sup>29</sup> In 1938, action was taken against Turkic elites, particularly those who had studied in the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> Khoja Niyaz who had been granted a special governmental position in Hami, along with other members of the Provincial Assembly were arrested around this time,<sup>31</sup> an easy task since Sheng’s “affirmative action” policies had brought these elites to the provincial capitol.<sup>32</sup> While the specific details are murky, it appears that the periodic purges were so intense that when Sheng’s relationship with the Soviets was fraying in 1942, he received a letter from Molotov directly addressing his actions and how they had “taken on an extremely broad and dangerous character” and threatened to liquidate “a large part of the civilian and military personnel in Xinjiang.”<sup>33</sup> These actions were not motivated by ideology, but rather by concerns that empowered minorities, particularly elites, could usurp Sheng’s power.

Critically, Sheng’s nationality policies did not eliminate what can be labeled Turkic-Muslim “nationalist” or “separatist” tendencies. Rather, as historian Andrew Forbes has written, these movements were largely driven underground.<sup>34</sup> Combined with later economic pressure

---

<sup>27</sup> “Excerpt on Xinjiang from Minutes No. 40 of the VKP(b) CC Politburo Meetings”, May 4, 1934, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 162, D. 37, ll. 76-79. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/excerpt-xinjiang-minutes-no-40-vkpb-cc-politburo-meetings>.

<sup>28</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 302.

<sup>29</sup> Wang, *Dongtjujesitan*, 104, 205.

<sup>30</sup> Eric T. Schluessel, “History, identity, and mother-tongue education in Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 4 (2009): 393.

<sup>31</sup> Nyman, “Sinkiang,” 100.

<sup>32</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 313.

<sup>33</sup> “Letter from Cde. V. M. Molotov to Governor Shicai Sheng”, July 3, 1942, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F. 558, Op. 11, D. 323, l. 54-57. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/letter-cde-v-m-molotov-governor-shicai-sheng>.

<sup>34</sup> Forbes, *Warlords*, 162.

caused by a cutoff in Soviet economic ties and support after Sheng's warming of relations with Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalists, as well as policy missteps by a later governor, these sentiments would again bubble to the surface in late 1944 and received local support from Turkic Muslims and international support from the Soviets.

### **Education Policies**

In the education field, Sheng Shicai diverged from his predecessors Yang Zengxin (r. 1912-1928) and Jin Shuren, allowing a larger number of students to study abroad, predominantly in the Soviet Union, and established a network of schools supported by Cultural Promotion Societies, organizations centered around education, ethnic language and culture, throughout Xinjiang. These policies served two intended purposes: first, sending students to study in the Soviet Union provided the governor with competent bureaucrats to staff his administration. Second, the expansion of provincial schools allowed the state to extend its control to the non-Han population, aiming to make the people of Xinjiang less "superstitious"<sup>35</sup> and to erode the traditional authority of non-Han figures.<sup>36</sup> While not creating a "proletarian intelligentsia" as in the Soviet Union, Sheng's policies did share the goal of early Bolshevik ones in that they aimed to produce subjects that were loyal to the state.<sup>37</sup>

On July 4, 1935, the Chinese Foreign Ministry received two telegrams from the Chinese consulate in Zaisan regarding students sent from Xinjiang to the Soviet Union. The first one stated that students had been sent to Tashkent and the second relayed that there was a mix of

---

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 307-308.

<sup>36</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 108-109.

<sup>37</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3.

both Han and non-Han.<sup>38</sup> On November 12, it was reported that a second batch of students had arrived and was followed on December 25 with a telegram detailing the activities and curriculum of the students.<sup>39</sup> According to these telegrams the students sent to Tashkent had all arrived by late December and were beginning to survey Soviet factories and attend political courses.<sup>40</sup> Less than eight months later on August 10, the first batch of students had returned and a third cohort had already been chosen.<sup>41</sup> Soviet Politburo minutes from June 1936 instructed “the acceptance of a new group of 100 Xinjiang youth in the Administrative Law Faculty of Central Asian State University in the autumn of 1936 on the same basis as in 1934 and 1936.”<sup>42</sup> This would have been the authorization of the third batch of students that had arrived in August. According to one historian, from 1935 to 1937, a total of 300 students from Xinjiang were educated in “Soviet universities” (it is not specified which ones), and while this seems like an insignificant amount, under the previous governor only five students had been sent to Germany.<sup>43</sup> Also, any claims that as many as 30,000 students were sent to the Soviet Union<sup>44</sup> seem inflated, especially considering that even after 1949 CCP authorities struggled to find competent technicians to staff requisite industries in addition to the fact that Xinjiang under Sheng was still industrially underdeveloped and had no demand for such a large cohort of university-educated professionals. Nonetheless, if one compares Sheng’s educational policies to those of the previous two governors, especially that of Yang Zengxin (r. 1912-1928), under whose rule a teacher’s college, middle school and Russian-language political and legal academy were founded in which no more than one hundred

---

<sup>38</sup> “Xinjiang zhengqing (yi)” (April 1935-August 1936), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 11-30-19-01-001, 16, 24.

<sup>39</sup> “Xinjiang zhengqing (yi),” 11-30-19-01-001, 89.

<sup>40</sup> “Xinjiang zhengqing (yi),” 11-30-19-01-001, 88.

<sup>41</sup> “Xinjiang Zhengqing (yi),” 11-30-19-01-001, 123.

<sup>42</sup> “Concerning Soviet Trade with Xinjiang”, June 17, 1936, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 162, D. 19, I. 195-196. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/concerning-soviet-trade-xinjiang>.

<sup>43</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 103.

<sup>44</sup> Hasanli, *Soviet Policy*, 57.

students had studied at a time,<sup>45</sup> Sheng's educational policies were a watershed moment in the history of Xinjiang. However the study abroad programs were not to last, as by 1937 Sheng had ceased sending students to Tashkent, apparently in order to prevent Islamists and other undesirable elements from conspiring with the Soviets.<sup>46</sup>

Domestically, a network of schools were established which eventually led to the institutionalization of Uyghur and other national identities.<sup>47</sup> In accordance with ethnic classification, 14 Cultural Promotion Societies, or CPS, were created, one for each nation in Xinjiang, with the first one being founded in December 1933 in Kashgar by "Russian-oriented intellectuals".<sup>48</sup> These were supported by the Ministry of Education and by 1943, CPS and Ministry of Education Schools had spread to every county of Xinjiang, with the former accounting for two-thirds of elementary schools in any given area.<sup>49</sup> These schools would later be integrated into provincial structures, as Sheng later came to worry about their nationalist bent and potential ideological ramifications.<sup>50</sup>

While Sheng's policies did lead to the education of some of Xinjiang's residents, it was stymied first due to changes in educational policy, second due to purges and third due to unequal reception among various groups. Though 300 students had been educated in Tashkent, they could not adequately staff the administrative apparatus, demonstrated by the fact that after Sheng's initial purges, he had to invite CCP experts to staff his bureaucracy,<sup>51</sup> as the resulting administrative dearth from the purges was too great for local expertise to replace. Not only were future technocrats being cut off from educational opportunities, but current ones were being

---

<sup>45</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 270.

<sup>46</sup> Wang, *Dongtjuesitan*, 107.

<sup>47</sup> Schluessel, "History," 384.

<sup>48</sup> Schluessel, "History," 390.

<sup>49</sup> Schluessel, "History," 392-393.

<sup>50</sup> Schluessel, "History," 394. Wang, *Dongtjuesitan*, 90.

<sup>51</sup> Wang, *Dongtjuesitan*, 105.

liquidated at an astonishing rate. Also, there was a difference in how various groups interacted and benefited from these policies. In Xinjiang, there was a divide between nomadic and sedentary populations. Though there were quotas at schools, children sent to schools for nomads were either sickly or dropped out mainly due to economic reasons.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, Sheng was unable to inculcate loyalty into his subjects as initially envisioned. The dearth of professionals in Xinjiang would be a constant issue well after the Nationalists were driven out by the Communists with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

### **Gender, Land and Industrial Policies**

Regarding gender, land and industry in Sheng Shicai's Xinjiang, there is a striking dearth of policy similarity with Soviet Central Asia. Regarding land and gender, this was because the Soviet Union explicitly ordered Sheng not to take drastic emancipatory policies regarding women and because the revolt that brought Sheng to power resulted from botched land and tax reform paired with rumors playing on ethnic tensions. The Soviets did not see it in their interest to completely transform Xinjiang's society but rather to ensure that it was stable and resource-providing.

*Gender and Land.* It appears that Sheng initially made some effort through the Anti-Imperialist League (the sole party-like structure in Xinjiang) to implement policies that would greatly raise the status of women in Xinjiang. In fact, a document from the period claims that Sheng's wife was leading some sort of "women's liberation movement",<sup>53</sup> but this is not mentioned in other Chinese or Soviet documents. It is difficult to gauge whether these moves

---

<sup>52</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 108-109.

<sup>53</sup> "Xinjiang zhengqing (yi)," 11-30-19-01-001, 201.

were made in order to impress upon the Soviets that he was a “progressive” force or not, but it seems as if these policies would have been carried out if they had garnered Soviet support.

After the Anti-Imperialist League had published their charter, the Soviets responded by stating that, “the paragraph about equal rights for women... we advise removing from the charter... this is premature in the conditions of backward Xinjiang with an overwhelmingly Muslim population.”<sup>54</sup> Sheng would later cable back unambiguously that, “The fifth paragraph... speaking of the need for equal rights for women has been corrected by us in accordance with your instruction.”<sup>55</sup> Is it possible that the Soviet Union had somehow learned a “lesson” from its own campaigns and thus did not pursue the elevation of the status of women in Xinjiang? While possible, the most straightforward explanation appears to have been the underlying rationale for the whole Soviet policy in Xinjiang, namely stability, as certain religious and ethnic lines could not be crossed at this point due to institutional weakness in Xinjiang.

Regarding the rebellion of the early 30s, the conditions that underwrote it were a rejiggering of the tax structure and land-related policies, but the actual event triggering the uprising was the rumor of a Han tax collector marrying a Uyghur girl, leading to him and his associates being killed at the wedding.<sup>56</sup> It appears that Yolbars Khan, a local elite figure, may have spread rumors of forced intermarriage that led to the rebellion by playing “race and gender cards” due to the fact that land reform ran counter to his and other nobles’ interests.<sup>57</sup> As the Soviets’ main concern was a stable and secure Xinjiang a repeat of a situation that would lead to the ouster of the governor that they backed was eminently undesirable. Thus, while there is a

---

<sup>54</sup> “Letter from Cdes. Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov to Governor Sheng Shicai”, July 27, 1934, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI F. 558, Op. 11, D. 323, I. 12-21. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/letter-cdes-stalin-molotov-and-voroshilov-governor-sheng-shicai>.

<sup>55</sup> “Letter from Governor Shicai Sheng to Cdes. Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov”, November 1, 1934, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI F. 558, Op. 11, D. 323, I. 26-29. Contributed by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/letter-governor-shicai-sheng-cdes-stalin-molotov-and-voroshilov>.

<sup>56</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 280.

<sup>57</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 255-257.

lack of Chinese and Soviet documents clearly spelling out why land reform was not pursued, stability is not a far-fetched claim.

*Industry.* When Sheng visited Moscow just five years into his rule in 1938, Molotov inquired of the governor “whether there were any industrial enterprises in Xinjiang,” to which Sheng replied that “there were none yet”.<sup>58</sup> When Molotov pressed further by inquiring whether or not Sheng had any plans to develop the province’s industry, Sheng replied that he lacked a, “big plan, but only the plan in accordance with which the five-million [ruble] was made.”<sup>59</sup> This may seem puzzling at first, but the latter part clarifies why Sheng would be unable to undertake large development projects - namely that Xinjiang was quite poor and any project was contingent on Soviet loans. As such, plans for developing industry could not be made without knowing if in fact the Soviets were willing to financially support such projects. While an earlier Soviet document underlined that the basis of economic relations between Xinjiang and the USSR was the provision of raw materials to the Soviet Union, with prospecting and other geological work to be financed by Moscow,<sup>60</sup> little industrial development that benefited locals resulted from this. In most cases when mines and oil fields were opened, the resources were extracted in Soviet facilities staffed by Soviet technicians and transported to the Soviet Union on Soviet trucks along Soviet-built roads.

---

<sup>58</sup> “A Conversation Between Cdes. Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov and the Governor Shicai Sheng which Occurred in the Kremlin on 2 September, 1938”, September 2, 1938, Wilson Center Digital Archive RGASPI, F. 558, Op. 11, D. 323, 32-41. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/conversation-between-cdes-stalin-molotov-and-voroshilov-and-governor-shicai-sheng-which>.

<sup>59</sup> “A Conversation Between Cdes. Stalin, Molotov, and Voroshilov and the Governor Shicai Sheng which Occurred in the Kremlin on 2 September, 1938”, September 2, 1938, Wilson Center Digital Archive RGASPI, F. 558, Op. 11, D. 323, 32-41. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/conversation-between-cdes-stalin-molotov-and-voroshilov-and-governor-shicai-sheng-which>.

<sup>60</sup> “VKP(b) CC Politburo Decree concerning Xinjiang”, March 22, 1935, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 162, D. 17, I. 174-179. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/vkpb-cc-politburo-decree-concerning-xinjiang>.

## **Pivoting Towards the Nationalists and Assessing A “Pro-Soviet” Governor**

Sheng’s relationship with the Soviets would end in the early forties after what he perceived an untenable encroachment on his authority. Though he had joined the CPSU during his 1938 visit to Moscow, the bilateral relationship deteriorated shortly thereafter. When Soviet officials forced an agreement for mineral extraction upon Sheng in 1940, he refused, only to be met with the response that since he was a party member not only did he have to sign, but he could not change a single word of the agreement.<sup>61</sup> Essentially, he was being presented with an ultimatum to extract minerals in a foreign-concession type of agreement which would be valid for fifty years.<sup>62</sup>

After this, Sheng began secret outreach to Chongqing.<sup>63</sup> He would relay in his letters his ideological pivot, contending that he had been misled by the Soviets and desired to reengage with the Nationalists. Serious talks began around 1942, with Sheng requesting all Soviet technical and military experts to leave the province at the end of the year.<sup>64</sup> An English translation of a letter from Sheng to Chiang Kai-shek<sup>65</sup> from July 1942 saw Sheng admit his earlier belief in Marxism and that the Soviets would help the “backward”, but that they instead tried to use close relations to “bring destruction to Sinkiang.”<sup>66</sup> Sheng believed that the Soviets had “forsaken Marxism” and engaged in “imperialist aggression,” though he was happy to hear

---

<sup>61</sup> “Sheng-Su miyue yiben [Translated Version of Sheng-Soviet Secret Agreement]” (July 1942-March 1950), Taipei: Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Catalogue Number: 11-04-15-09-05-003, 13.

<sup>62</sup> “Sheng-Su miyue yiben,” 11-04-15-09-05-003, 31-36.

<sup>63</sup> Due to the ongoing Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Nationalist government had relocated their wartime capitol to Chongqing in the interior of China.

<sup>64</sup> Jacobs, “Empire,” 352.

<sup>65</sup> Chiang Kai-Shek was the de-facto ruler of the Republic of China after the Northern Expedition in 1928 and remained in the position in one form or another until his death in 1975 on Taiwan.

<sup>66</sup> “Sheng-Su miyue yiben,” 11-04-15-09-05-003, 56.

that The Three People's Principles, the ideological basis of the GMD, were a form of socialism.<sup>67</sup> He also used this letter to say that he had no choice to listen to Soviet requests to implement Marxism in 1934 because he was in dire straits.<sup>68</sup> Though the attested Soviet requests to implement Marxism were definitely not true, these overtures worked, and eventually the Nationalists would come and replace the Anti-Imperialist League with their own party office,<sup>69</sup> with the Soviet-constructed administrative structure still in place. Essentially, the Soviets had constructed a governing structure that later allowed the Nationalists to assert direct control over the province for the first time since 1911.<sup>70</sup>

In 1944 when he realized that the GMD was encroaching upon his position, Sheng tried to pivot back to the Soviets by sending them a letter explaining himself. The Soviets, tired of Sheng, simply relayed the letter to Chongqing. Sheng had run out of road, and he was officially transferred out of his position in late August 1944. This was the point when Xinjiang was finally integrated into the modern Chinese state, as it was the first time in over thirty years that Beijing or Nanjing was able to appoint a governor of their own choosing. This was a result of the administrative and institutional buildup by Sheng with Soviet support.

Over his eleven years as governor of Xinjiang, Sheng had utilized Soviet aid to build up the administrative and institutional capacity of the region. Yes, there was a lack of educated bureaucrats, whether Han or non-Han, to staff these organizations, as demonstrated by Sheng's invitation of Chinese Communist Party members after his initial purges. However, the state was still able to expand into the daily lives of Xinjiang's residents to a degree unseen in Republican Chinese history. Though this control did not completely extend down to the grassroots, Sheng

---

<sup>67</sup> "Sheng-su miyue yiben," 11-04-15-09-05-003, 56-57.

<sup>68</sup> "Sheng-su miyue yiben," 11-04-15-09-05-003, 58.

<sup>69</sup> Jacobs, "Empire," 350.

<sup>70</sup> Lin, "War," 207.

left an administrative superstructure behind which operated at two levels to erode the negotiated state.

First, Soviet assistance had strengthened institutions that were functional enough for bureaucrats to be switched out at a rapid pace. This may not seem significant, but the fact that Sheng's administrative structure survived so many purges, whether of non-Han or Chinese communists, demonstrates that there was enough of a bureaucracy in place that crises would no longer risk breaking basic institutional arrangements. Whereas before provincial governors would switch out leading administrators, now entire parts of the administrative mechanism could be restaffed. This allowed Nanjing to staff Xinjiang's governorship with their choice candidate as well as fill Xinjiang's administrative structure with their bureaucrats, essentially a repeat of what Sheng had done during his purges, although this time it was central Chinese authorities initiating the process.

Second, it appears that organizations such as the cultural promotion societies as well as the expanded reach of the security services tied some of Xinjiang's residents closer to the state apparatus, or at least created a deterrent to rebelling. Through educational initiatives, the cultural promotion societies, later rolled into the education ministry, were able to extend state control into the non-Han population through schools and cultural activities. This created a strengthened sense of the state among Xinjiang's society and presumably offered some positive incentives for working with it, unlike before where the state usually collected taxes directly or indirectly and left the non-Han portion of the population alone. Also, though there is no hard evidence, it is possible that the role of Sheng's purges played a role here as well. Due to the scale of his purges, the violence that could be exercised by the state apparatus became a very real fear in the minds of many, and thus increased the psychological presence of the state. Whereas before the Chinese

state was seen as a force that could be resisted when it overstepped its boundaries, leading to province-wide unrest in the early thirties, after the rule of Sheng any anti-state unrest was always quite localized and never expanded into the whole of the province.

Thus, Sheng's reign from 1933 to 1944 laid the groundwork for the erosion of the negotiated state. Through Soviet assistance and institutional infusion geared towards Moscow's objective of a stable, secure and resource-providing Xinjiang, the administrative apparatus of the region was built up and the state's reach was expanded to an unprecedented degree. This eased the transition to Nationalist rule in 1944, allowing Nanjing to appoint a governor of their own choice, the first time this was done in many decades. However, problems from Sheng's rule still remained, as his nationalities policies and purges did not diffuse Turkic-Muslim elites' desires for political and cultural rights. These sentiments, while temporarily driven underground, would bubble up and then spread to the surface as a result of terrible economic conditions leftover from the waning years of Sheng's rule.

### **The Rule of a Centrally-Appointed Governor**

Wu Zhongxin (r. 1944-1946) was appointed by the Nationalists as Governor of Xinjiang, becoming the first centrally-appointed official to lead the province in decades. This was the result of the policies of the Soviets and Sheng that led to the erosion of the negotiated state in Xinjiang, namely the need for the center to acquiesce in what was essentially the self-appointment of Han administrators of the province. Whereas before Nanjing was stuck with accepting self-appointed governors that were usually the center's least-desired choice, now the GMD could appoint whoever it wanted to the post, even Han administrators without local experience. Though other facets of the negotiated state were still in existence, such as the need

for Xinjiang's governor to work with local elites whose support was necessary to reach the local non-Han population, the central government was able to exert more control over the region than it had in decades. This was the result of the Second Sino-Japanese War which provided the Nationalists an opportunity to expand their rule westwards, bringing with them state structures and eliminating disloyal warlords in the process.<sup>71</sup> From his perch in Dihua, Wu set about governing the province. Though he inherited residual problems from Sheng's rule, he also unwisely exacerbated structural tensions within the province related to race which would provide fertile ground for the Ili Rebellion that led to the founding of the East Turkestan Republic.

Once Wu assumed his post, inflation and corruption were running rampant throughout the province. A report by a Soviet official in October 1944 noted how the economic situation was worsening and aggravating the already fragile political situation, which demonstrated that the Nationalists were incapable of arresting the situation.<sup>72</sup> Ili, the origin point of the rebellion which later became the East Turkestan Republic, was particularly hit hard by the economic break with the USSR.<sup>73</sup> These economic problems compounded the dormant but still simmering ethnic problems of the province.

After Sheng's pivot back to the Nationalists, Chiang Kai-Shek had begun a "Northwest Development Movement" starting in late 1942 which led to an influx of Han into Xinjiang, despite that fact that the ethnic question had brought about the fall of Jin Shuren and that Sheng had stopped emigration; as with past waves of immigration, this one was met with "hostility".<sup>74</sup> Once Wu assumed the governorship, he continued down this track, with his plan for integrating the province including the stationing of 100,000 Han and Hui troops in Xinjiang in addition to

---

<sup>71</sup> Lin, "War," 203-207.

<sup>72</sup> "Information Letter from Yasnovsky to Cdes. Petrov and Plyshevsky", October 16, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI F. 17, Op, 128, D. 992, I. 158-160. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/information-letter-yasnovsky-cdes-petrov-and-plyshevsky>.

<sup>73</sup> Forbes, *Warlords*, 172-173.

<sup>74</sup> Forbes, *Warlords*, 168-169.

repressing “local ethnic national movements.”<sup>75</sup> Wu even touched the third rail of inter-ethnic marriage,<sup>76</sup> the exact trigger of the rebellion that led to the ouster of Jin Shuren and had long been abandoned by Xiang Army administrators and their descendants.

Though Wu’s policies alone did not trigger the unrest which would erupt in the autumn of 1944, considering that he had just assumed office, they definitely did not alleviate a crisis which had been brewing over previous years. In fact, these policies exacerbated underlying tensions and may have even encouraged the further spread and motivation of the East Turkestan independence movement once it got off the ground.

### **The Ili Rebellion**

After being booted out of Xinjiang, Moscow sought to return once it had the requisite material and bureaucratic resources to stage a comeback. However, it would need a reason to claim that it had a role to play in the province. As such, a new opportunity would present itself which the Soviets would seize upon to try and not only regain control over Xinjiang but also to assert leverage over the central Chinese government: the Ili Rebellion. Though Sheng had cracked down hard against dissent during his tenure, Turkic-Muslim separatism was not eliminated, but merely went underground.<sup>77</sup> This presented an opportunity for the Soviets to take back the initiative. On May 4, 1943, the Soviet Politburo adopted a new line against Xinjiang whereby a separatist movement would be organized, as the Soviets felt that it was impermissible to allow an “openly unfriendly regime” such as Sheng’s to operate on the border of the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> In October 1944, the first stirrings of what would later evolve into the Second East

---

<sup>75</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 306.

<sup>76</sup> Hasanli, *Soviet Policy*, 108.

<sup>77</sup> Forbes, *Warlords*, 162.

<sup>78</sup> Hasanli, *Soviet Policy*, 96-97, 100.

Turkestan Republic began in the town of Nilka in the Ili region and continued to spread,<sup>79</sup> over time reaching both Altai and Tarbagatay.

As the rebellion spread, the Soviets had begun to hint at a potential role for themselves as a mediator between Nanjing and the authorities in Ghulja. Sitting down with Petr Georgievich Evseev, the Soviet consul general, on June 17, 1945, Liu Zerong, a Chinese diplomat and Russia expert, was told among other things that the Soviet Union was “the only country to help China keep hold of Xinjiang”, pointing out that the USSR did not take advantage of the situation when China faced problems and even withdrew a tank brigade that had been stationed in the province.<sup>80</sup>

By September 1945, the Soviets considered it “advisable to assume responsibility for mediation between the insurgents in Xinjiang and the Central Government of China.” Due to the vested interest in “establishing order on its border”, the Soviets were ready to charge their consulate in Ghulja to mediate between the parties. As such, it was recommended that ETR military operations cease until a reply was received from the Chinese Government regarding the time of negotiations.<sup>81</sup> The Nationalists for their part would select Zhang Zhizhong, a general who would also take up negotiations with the CCP during the waning years of GMD rule on the Chinese mainland. Not only was Zhang trusted by Chiang Kai-shek, whose support he deemed vital given what he later recalled as anti-Soviet hostility within the Nationalist government, but he would also be respected by all major regional parties and go down in history as someone earning the respect of even historians.<sup>82</sup> Now, for the first time in decades, central Chinese authorities were entering into direct negotiations with local actors in Xinjiang with an eye to

---

<sup>79</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 309.

<sup>80</sup> Brophy, *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy*, 570.

<sup>81</sup> “The Situation in Xinjiang”, September 15, 1945, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI F. 17, Op. 162, D. 37, II. 150-151. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/situation-xinjiang>.

<sup>82</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 312.

resolving underlying issues of dissatisfaction towards Chinese rule while simultaneously interacting with the Soviets to achieve an outcome acceptable to both Nanjing and Moscow. Such negotiations would have been impossible in previous periods, as central Chinese authorities did not have the capacity to extend their control into Xinjiang.

### **Negotiating a New State**

Zhang appears to have realized the necessity for reform instead of a return to the status quo.<sup>83</sup> In his memoir he attested that his position was that, “[The] Xinjiang problem is a national (minority) problem; the Xinjiang problem is also not a diplomatic problem; in accordance with the above understanding, I considered implementing lenient policies and methods towards Xinjiang’s people... the point of giving Xinjiang’s people freedom and equality would be hard to get a majority of support for within the Guomindang; especially [regarding] the pro-Soviet (亲苏) policy, the resistance was large.”<sup>84</sup> This was the first time that an envoy from the Chinese metropole seriously considered a major revamp of the governing structure in Xinjiang. Additionally, the fact that a separatist group was willing to talk to central authorities combined with the fact that Nanjing was capable of directly addressing local grievances signified the extent to which the negotiated state had been eroded and central power had been extended into the region. Thus, the parties would attempt to negotiate a new type of state.

Negotiations began between ETR leadership and the Chinese delegation under Zhang Zhizhong in Urumqi. On Friday, October 19, the Chinese delegation, after much discussion, had formulated a proposal and presented it to the Ghulja delegates. The proposal opened by claiming that China’s nationalities enjoyed full equality in line with Sun Yat-sen’s Three People’s

---

<sup>83</sup> Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 303-304.

Principles, formulating the position that since the war with Japan was over, the central authorities had a duty to reach an agreement that ensured the unity of nationalities that would allow for national development. The proposal, consisting of twelve total points, emphasized that minorities should receive cultural and religious protection, the implementation of “autonomous governance” which involved elections at various local levels after order was restored to “rebel counties”, tax reduction, the establishment of schools, and other issues such as opportunities for participants to later “serve their country.”<sup>85</sup> What was significant about this proposal is that it demonstrated that the central Chinese government, while in a position to negotiate with local actors in Xinjiang, needed to consider their political demands in order to maintain stability in the province. Whereas before provincial governors had found ways to resolve these issues within the framework of the negotiated state, now the central Chinese state was grappling with the new demands of direct governance of the region.

Negotiations continued over the succeeding weeks, with one proposal after another being considered and then either accepted, rejected or altered. Throughout this process, the Chinese delegation had been working closely with the Soviets. The fact that the Soviet Union had input into the negotiating process with the ETR was significant because it meant that Chinese authorities were resolving issues in a shared frontier region with the Soviet Union for the first time in decades, a situation that was previously delegated to provincial officials under the negotiated state model. The discussions with the Ghulja delegates on November 19 orbited around the issues of political representation, the language of administration and language education in university and foreign trade, with the Chinese delegation returning to Zhang who was “willing to make certain compromises”. Nonetheless, the sticking point was the political one,

---

<sup>85</sup> Brophy, *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy*, 619-621.

to which Zhang tasked Liu with consulting Evseev.<sup>86</sup> Over the following weeks, each delegation would haggle about the specifics of each of the points, some of which were accepted, some of which were met with counterpoints, and others which were rejected altogether. By January 1, 1946, it was decided by both sides that an agreement would be signed the next day.

The next day witnessed the signing of the agreement at 10 pm.<sup>87</sup> Zhang would proudly recall later that after the agreement was signed, the Ghulja representatives said, “We are Chinese [people],” (我们是中国人, to be understood as citizens) for the first time and committed to support the mother country, leading Zhang to conclude that they were honest and that the Xinjiang problem could be peacefully resolved.<sup>88</sup> As a result of the agreement, Kazakh and Uyghur were to be official languages in addition to Chinese, there would be native-language education at all levels and non-Chinese cultures would be promoted.<sup>89</sup> For the first time in the modern era, central Chinese authorities had addressed non-Han discontent by directly negotiating with local actors and the Soviet Union, demonstrating the extension of central Chinese power and the erosion of the previous negotiated state model. They had negotiated a new type of state - one where non-Han were officially granted certain political rights. But would it hold?

### **Post-Agreement, 1946-1949**

The year 1946 saw the opening steps in the implementation of the agreement. In his diplomacy with the Soviet Union, Zhang would aim to enhance goodwill, promote economic cooperation and encourage cultural and scholarly exchange.<sup>90</sup> The economic factor was particularly important as Zhang realized that due to Xinjiang’s economic reliance on the Soviet

---

<sup>86</sup> Brophy, *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy*, 638-639.

<sup>87</sup> Brophy, *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy*, 661.

<sup>88</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 317.

<sup>89</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 314.

<sup>90</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 337.

Union, it was impossible to cut them off from each other economically.<sup>91</sup> Economic initiatives had to be undertaken to improve people's livelihood if there was to be any hope of reintegration with the center, thus he established a "Northwest People's Livelihood Industry and Commerce Company" and a "Northwest Cultural Construction Association". The first organization was tasked with transporting basic goods to Xinjiang while the second was tasked with what could be described as propaganda work.<sup>92</sup> This was a continuation of older Chinese conceptions for how to govern the province which emphasized economic development and changing residents' attitudes towards Chinese rule through education in one form or another.

Speaking with A.A. Petrov, the Soviet ambassador to China, on January 12, 1947, Zhang demonstrated his view that the Soviet Union was vital to the development of Xinjiang and China's foreign relations more broadly, and thought that Xinjiang should become a "model province of Soviet-Chinese friendship." Similarly, Zhang relayed his view that Sino-Soviet "should not occupy a place which differs" from Sino-American relations. He continued by discussing the centrality of Sino-Soviet trade and economic relations and how proposals had already been sent to the Soviet consul in Urumqi with the Chinese waiting for a reply.<sup>93</sup> It demonstrated that the Chinese bureaucracy, while moving to expand its control over Xinjiang and integrate the province into the Chinese polity simultaneously recognized that it would need to work with the Soviets in order to maintain stability and security in the northwest as Nanjing was still limited in its ability to unilaterally exercise control. Though the negotiated state had been eroded, Xinjiang was now a contact zone between Nanjing and Moscow, necessitating that

---

<sup>91</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 318-319.

<sup>92</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 364-366.

<sup>93</sup> "Record of a Conversation between Soviet Ambassador in China A.A. Petrov and General Zhang Zhizhong on 7 January, 1947", January 7, 1947, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Dmitrii Antonovich Volkogonov papers, 1887-1995, mm97083838. Translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-conversation-between-soviet-ambassador-china-petrov-and-general-zhang-zhizhong-7>.

each side engage with the other to manage the province in a way that was acceptable to both parties.

Thus, every time unrest broke out in the province, Zhang Zhizhong would first go to the Soviets to express his concerns about the situation. A meeting in August 1947 was a case in point. On August 17, Zhang communicated to Savel'yev, the new Soviet Consul General in Urumqi, his gratitude for the Soviet Union's role in mediating between the ETR and China. However he noted that from the time of signing "the situation in Xinjiang has not developed properly and normally... the negative phenomena are getting worse." He pressed his point that he was the right man for the job by stating that the central Chinese authorities put him in his position to pursue a dual-pronged policy of peace and friendship with the Soviet Union, essentially elaborating that the main obstacle to their realization was the predominant view that the Soviet Union and China were seen as two poles of a dichotomy in which being in favor of one meant being against the other, something which would have to change. Geographically and militarily, Zhang attempted to placate the Soviets by stating that Xinjiang was a security zone "untouched by artillery fire", with neither China nor the Soviet Union having a need to attack the other.<sup>94</sup>

What is interesting here is how Moscow and Nanjing appear to have begun neglecting the ETR and moved towards direct negotiations among themselves to manage Xinjiang. Whereas in previous decades provincial governors had interacted with the Soviets and local actors on behalf of the Chinese center, a model which was later supplanted during negotiations between the ETR, Nanjing and Moscow, now the local authorities had been cut out of the equation. Though Zhang was quite forward-leaning in his proposals for minority rights in Xinjiang, the situation had changed as the end of 1947 approached, as Zhang, Nanjing's envoy, interacted with Moscow's

---

<sup>94</sup> "Letter from General Zhang Zhizhong to Mr. Savel'yev, Consul General of the USSR in Urumqi", August 19, 1947, RGASPI F. 17, Op. 128, D. 391, ll. 120-125. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/letter-zhang-zhizhong-mr-savel'yev-consul-general-ussr-urumqi>.

envoys to solve the problems of ethnic unrest in Xinjiang. This demonstrates that in less than two years, the position of local actors such as the ETR had diminished in importance to the point that they could be cut out of negotiations with both the Chinese and the Soviets. In essence, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union in Xinjiang had evolved into a relationship common among states: direct negotiation between metropolises.

### **Republican Collapse and the Question of Xinjiang**

As 1949 began, the Nationalist government was preoccupied with its increasingly desperate position against the Chinese Communist Party and the latter's gains in other areas of China. Seeing the rising power and influence of the CCP, Moscow sent Anastas Mikoyan to Xibaipo for conversations with the Chinese Communist Party leadership in early February. Over a series of meetings that touched upon a wide range of topics relevant to the future governance of the CCP, the minority question related to Xinjiang was discussed multiple times, revealing both the CCP's and Moscow's desired outcome in China's northwest. This demonstrated Moscow's belief that a Communist victory was now possible and as such necessitated that the ground be prepared to work out outstanding issues in the bilateral relationship, including how to properly administer Xinjiang.

On the first of February, Mikoyan met with Zhou Enlai. When the question shifted to the political rights and demands of Chinese Muslims, Zhou told Mikoyan that the Muslims would request autonomy and that they "will cooperate with us... if we give them autonomy and display caution with regard to their religion."<sup>95</sup> This foreshadowed later policies implemented by the

---

<sup>95</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Zhou Enlai", February 1, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 39, Op. 39, D. 39, Ll. 25-30. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), p. 48-51. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.

CCP in the early fifties (detailed in chapter 3) that were quite circumspect in their handling of Xinjiang's ethnic issues, recognizing that while Chinese power had been extended to the province, Beijing still doubted for a time its abilities to erode localized authority. Also, this conversation appears to demonstrate that the CCP considered the inhabitants of China's northwest as potential partners, at least while central power was limited in its ability to project authority into the province.

On February 4, Mikoyan engaged with Mao Zedong. Mikoyan relayed that the Soviet Union did not advise China to “go overboard in the national question by means of providing independence to national minorities and thereby reducing the territory of the Chinese state in connection with the Communists’ take-over of power.” Instead, autonomy and not independence should be granted.<sup>96</sup> The situation then shifted to Xinjiang specifically. Regarding Ghulja, Mikoyan relayed that the “national movement... was triggered by the incorrect policy of the Chinese government, which does not want to take into account the national specifics of these nationalities, does not present rights of self-rule, does not permit the development of the national culture.”<sup>97</sup> He followed this by stating:

If the nationalities of Xinjiang were given autonomy, the soil for the independence movement would likely remain [sic]. We do not stand for the movement of independence of the Xinjiang nationalities and do not have any claims on Xinjiang territory, considering that Xinjiang is and must be a part of China. We stand for economic cooperation

---

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-anastas-mikoyan-and-zhou-enlai-0>.

<sup>96</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong”, February 4, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, LI. 54-62. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), p. 66-72. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-anastas-mikoyan-and-mao-zedong-2>.

<sup>97</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong”, February 4, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, LI. 54-62. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), p. 66-72. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-anastas-mikoyan-and-mao-zedong-2>.

and trade with Xinjiang, like that which is taking place, and which the Guomindang government itself, in the person of its representative in Xinjiang, Zhang Zhizhong, proposed to formalize by a treaty.”<sup>98</sup>

How should one untangle the Soviet position on Xinjiang as described by Mikoyan in this conversation with CCP leadership? Hasanli has posited that Mikoyan “was lying” when he relayed that Xinjiang should be part of China.<sup>99</sup> However, the Soviet position on Xinjiang’s independence should be understood as conditional. For one, this conversation reflected that the independence movement was brought about by GMD misrule, something that should be seen as a warning to any future Chinese central government in control of the province. While Mikoyan attested that if autonomy was granted, the underlying causes of independence would remain, this was directly linked to the mismanagement of the province by Chinese authorities. In other words, if Chinese authorities treated the local population properly, there would be no need to worry about actual independence, and thus Xinjiang would be stable and secure.

At the end of June 1949, the CCP sent a delegation to Moscow to meet with Stalin. Turning to Xinjiang during their discussion, Stalin pointed out the fraught ethnic situation in the province and its negative ramifications for security in the region. Noting that the Chinese made up less than five percent of the population, Stalin advised that after gaining control of Xinjiang the CCP “should bring the percentage of the Chinese population to 30% by means of resettling the Chinese for all-sided development of this huge and rich region and for strengthening China’s border protection.”<sup>100</sup> In a single sentence, Stalin said, “In general, in the interests of

---

<sup>98</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong”, February 4, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 39, Op. 1, D. 39, Ll. 54-62. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), p. 66-72. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-anastas-mikoyan-and-mao-zedong-2>.

<sup>99</sup> Hasanli, *Soviet Policy*, 233.

<sup>100</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Stalin and CCP Delegation”, June 27, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 45, Op. 1, D. 329, Ll. 1-7. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi

strengthening the defense of China one should populate all the border regions by the Chinese.”<sup>101</sup> If Xinjiang was controlled by China, especially by a favorable regime such as the CCP, the region could develop economically and sate the Soviet appetite for natural resources, all the while becoming less prone to ethnic unrest with further Soviet economic penetration and influence that was buttressed by a larger Chinese population that would bring more control with its accompanying security and administrative apparatuses.

Stalin’s position on emigration to Xinjiang reappeared in talks between CCP leadership and Zhang Zhizhong, who had decided to start working with the CCP. During their discussions, Mao was of the position that there could be autonomy in principle, provided it all be dictated by the national policy of the “Common Program” (共同纲领).<sup>102</sup> When the discussion turned to the issue of the Han population in Xinjiang, Zhang suggested that GMD forces leave as they had no links to Xinjiang, but Mao countered by saying that it would be better to bring the soldiers’ families and property to the region in order to set down roots “forever.”<sup>103</sup> Though not explicitly stated, it is not a stretch to assume that the permanent stationing of leftover GMD troops in China’s northwest was mainly geared towards maintaining the Chinese state’s administrative reach in the province, as the CCP would only be able to transport a limited amount of PLA troops by air to Xinjiang in addition to the need for the PLA to continue fighting GMD forces elsewhere.

By the middle of October, General Tao Zhiyue who held authority in Xinjiang had met with Peng Dehuai, the PLA’s general who would take charge in Xinjiang during the initial

---

Mysli, 2005), p. 148-151. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-stalin-and-ccp-delegation>.

<sup>101</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Stalin and CCP Delegation”, June 27, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF: F. 45, Op. 1, D. 329, Ll. 1-7. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mirovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovetsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), p. 148-151. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-stalin-and-ccp-delegation>.

<sup>102</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 425.

<sup>103</sup> Zhang, *Zhang Zhizhong*, 426.

spread of CCP governance into the province. In their discussions, questions such as the reorganization of GMD troops and the entry of the PLA were resolved.<sup>104</sup> After transporting PLA troops by air, they reached Urumqi on October 20. According to a telegram by a Soviet official in Urumqi, the locals, “greeted the PLA troops which had entered the city with great excitement and enthusiasm.”<sup>105</sup> Though not as colorful in his description of events, Liu Zerong confided to his diary that, “the People’s Liberation Army has entered the city. Everyone can breathe again.”<sup>106</sup> The period of Republican rule in Xinjiang had reached its formal end.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The period of the early thirties to late forties in Xinjiang began not only with a lack of central power over the province, but chaos, though it ironically ended with the region being more integrated into the Chinese state than at any time since at least the late Qing. Though this period saw high levels of Soviet influence in the province and even an independence movement, since Soviet goals were a stable, secure and resource-providing Xinjiang, their policy of institutional infusion largely worked in favor of Chinese authorities who desired greater integration and in the long term led to the acquisition of a sort of provincial equilibrium.

Local actors such as Sheng Shicai and the East Turkestan Republic received Soviet support, though they both were neither Moscow’s clones nor puppets. Instead, this period saw each receive support from Moscow in ways that served their own ends but also led to the expansion of the local administrative apparatus. In effect, Sheng’s tenure eroded Xinjiang’s

---

<sup>104</sup> “Ciphred Telegram No. 58986 from Kovalev to Filippov [Stalin]”, October 12, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI F. 5588, Op. 11, D. 332, ll. 0117-0118. Translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/ciphred-telegram-no-58986-kovalev-filippov-stalin>.

<sup>105</sup> “Ciphred Telegram No. 32616 from Savel’yev in Urumqi”, October 20, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI F. 558, Op. 11, D. 219, l. 111. Translated by Gary Goldberg.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/ciphred-telegram-no-32616-savelyev-urumchi>.

<sup>106</sup> Brophy, *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy*, 1231.

negotiated state whereby central Chinese authorities had previously had to accept the self-appointment of local Han provincial governors. But by the end of his tenure the GMD was able to choose its own person for governor for the first time in the Republican era. The ETR for its part acted of its own accord but accepted Soviet support and under Moscow's pressure entered into mediation with Chinese authorities. Thus, while causing unrest, the emergence of the East Turkestan Republic should not be associated with the chaos of the early thirties that enveloped the entirety of Xinjiang. Rather, it was a local movement involved in the larger context of Sino-Soviet relations that allowed both Moscow and Nanjing to reach a modus vivendi. In the contact zone of Xinjiang, Moscow and Nanjing felt each other out, both directly and indirectly, eventually sidestepping the involvement of entities such as the ETR and negotiating directly with each other to realize their shared goal of a stable and secure Xinjiang.

By the time the Chinese Communist Party extended its rule into Xinjiang with Soviet assistance, the administrative infrastructure was in place to exercise increased control over the region, though some groups such as nomads remained out of the state's reach, thereby necessitating accommodating policies until control could be extended further. The next thirteen years would see Chinese authorities attempt to develop the region, gradually dislodge Soviet influence and extend control over the population, culminating in the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962 which saw the finalization of a decades old process of domesticating the province.

### **Chapter 3: Development, Migration and Xinjiang's Integration**

The end of 1949 and beginning of 1950 was the first time in the modern era that the central Chinese state had significant administrative reach into Xinjiang while simultaneously lacking any pressing local security concerns such as independence movements. As such, Beijing had a chance to begin the final phase of domesticating Xinjiang: it would attempt to economically develop the region and handle ethnic issues in a way that further integrated the province into the Chinese polity, economically developed the region and provided a political and social framework for the region's non-Han inhabitants. In order to do this however, Beijing would enlist the help of Moscow in the task of economically and administratively developing the region. As such, joint stock companies were founded and holders of Soviet passports were allowed and even welcomed into local administrative structures, though this was always viewed as a temporary measure, as the citizenship issue and the related issue of extraterritorial legal jurisdiction would eventually need to be solved if Xinjiang was ever to truly become "domesticated" and integrated as part of a modern state. What effectively occurred was that the economy and local administration was developed and the citizenship issue shelved until 1962 when a mass exodus to the Soviet Union forced the administrative hand of Beijing, leading to the creation of a domesticated Xinjiang inhabited by individuals who had to equally abide by Chinese laws, the first time in modern Chinese history that this occurred.

Looking out from Beijing towards Xinjiang in 1950, central Chinese leadership had many reasons to be optimistic. To start, the Chinese Communist Party did not have to deal with the negotiated state model of governance the way the Nationalists had, allowing them to interact with local elites through centrally-appointed officials. Second, there was no serious conflict being waged on the Chinese mainland with which to distract bureaucratic and material resources from focusing on the northwest. Third, within Xinjiang there was no local insurgency from which to distract from local development. Finally, Beijing seemed to be ideologically aligned with Moscow, the largest potential trump card to any vision for Xinjiang's future as part of the Chinese state.

There still remained however, many obstacles preventing the further extension of central Chinese power into Xinjiang. One issue was the lack of economic investment in the region, an issue not easily remedied due to both a lack of foreign and domestic capital. Another problem was the still relative weakness of Chinese authorities in terms of their unilateral capability to police the province. A third issue was a lack of trained Chinese cadres to staff the requisite administrative organs and carry out future development plans. Lastly, there was a lack of trained workers who could act as the engine of Xinjiang's economic development.

In order to fix these issues, Beijing would turn to Moscow for assistance. Chinese leaders would travel to the Soviet Union to secure economic and technical assistance to develop Xinjiang and cement their hold on the province in the process. Chinese Communist Party leadership not only willingly and eagerly allowed the establishment of joint stock companies in the province, but they also allowed Soviet nationals in Xinjiang to enter into local administrative organs to staff the bureaucracy. It was hoped that these measures would lead to economic and bureaucratic development, if effect creating a stable and secure Xinjiang.

In Moscow, Beijing found a largely willing partner. Though Stalin initially had some misgivings about the renegotiation of Republican-era agreements, he acquiesced due to considerations of global magnitude, namely great power competition with the United States. Realizing the historic Soviet goal of a stable and secure Xinjiang was of prime importance, even if it meant temporarily giving up leverage against the Chinese state. Even after Stalin's death, Soviet leadership continued to generously accommodate Chinese requests for full control over the joint stock companies as well as sorting out issues related to Xinjiang residents' nationality. As Xinjiang was still effectively a contact zone between these two Eurasian land polities, even in the absence of the negotiated state, this cooperation was easily realized. However, this cooperation only lasted roughly a decade before international and domestic issues buffeted the bilateral relationship. In time, these issues led to the exacerbation of local issues in Xinjiang and culminated in the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962 which saw a mass exodus of Xinjiang's residents to the Soviet Union, the expulsion of most Soviet nationals in Xinjiang and securitization of the border. Though this incident greatly contributed to the breaking of the back of Sino-Soviet relations, it in effect allowed for the realization of territorial incorporation of Xinjiang into the People's Republic of China while simultaneously removing a potentially disruptive segment of the population, leading to a stable and secure Xinjiang. Thus, this chapter argues that the final part of Chinese efforts to domesticate Xinjiang first entailed inviting in Soviet economic assistance and the interrelated thorny issue of citizenship, though once the requisite economic and administrative conditions matured, a mass exodus incident allowed the Chinese state to quickly solve the citizenship issue, thereby fully domesticating the region and integrating it into the modern Chinese polity.

## The Heyday of Soviet Assistance, 1950-1955

Though the CCP had gained control of China, it faced the new task of governing an entire nation that had been wracked with high-intensity war in one form or another for decades. Looking out from Beijing towards Xinjiang, the new Chinese leadership realized the need for Soviet assistance in economically developing their northwestern periphery. Reporting to his superiors in the capitol, Peng Dehuai reported his belief that Xinjiang's "economic stagnation" would not disappear in the absence of an assistance package from Moscow, a message that found receptive ears in Beijing, as Liu Shaoqi believed that foreign ventures and investment were essential to developing China's economy.<sup>1</sup>

Mao would make his first foreign trip in his whole life to the Soviet Union during the winter of 1949-1950. This tale is quite familiar to those with knowledge of the postwar Sino-Soviet relationship and as such will not be retold in great detail here.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, after arriving in Moscow, Mao desired to meet with Stalin, a chance which he was not readily given, prompting Mao to stew in his living quarters for days on end, refusing to leave until a meeting was granted. Eventually, international public attention to Mao's "disappearance" necessitated that Stalin finally agree to meet with the recently victorious revolutionary to hammer out details pertaining to the renegotiation of Republican-era treaties as well as the formation of new agreements.

Sitting down for talks at a later meeting on January 22, 1950, Mao inquired about how both sides would reach a trade agreement, to which Stalin deferred to Mao and asked whether

---

<sup>1</sup>Kraus, "'Semi-Colony'," 144-145.

<sup>2</sup> For those interested in this trip and the interactions between Mao and Stalin, Sergey Radchenko's recently published *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2024) provides a good retelling, especially considering Radchenko's usage of Chinese and Russian Sources. For those interested in Chinese retellings, *The Memoirs of Shi Zhe* (Newest Expanded Edition (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2015) is a useful firsthand retelling. The first volume in *Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016) edited by Shen Zhihua and others also provides a good, digestible scholarly retelling.

separate agreements would be made with Xinjiang and Manchuria, among other provinces, or if there would be a “single agreement under the central government?”<sup>3</sup> Mao replied that a “single, central agreement” was preferable, but eventually “Xinjiang may have a separate agreement.”<sup>4</sup> Stalin then posited that the Soviets would prefer that the central government “sanction and take the responsibility” for such an agreement, with Mao replying that an agreement with Xinjiang “must be signed in the name of the central government.”<sup>5</sup> The negotiations on the bilateral agreements began, with the main set centering upon issues such as loans, technical support and Port Arthur among other issues. By February 10, Molotov made a proposal that access would not be given to foreigners and organs and entities of third parties in the Soviet Far East, Central Asian Republics, Manchuria and Xinjiang, a proposal that Zhou said Mao agreed to, though there needed to be some changes to the wording.<sup>6</sup> In such circumstances, these areas would be secure, stable and economically viable, a historical meeting of interests that was being realized at the national level for the first time. Though the Soviets initially did not want to sign a new treaty, in the end they were the ones who made concessions, with Mao and Stalin signing the main

---

<sup>3</sup> “Record of Talks between I.V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China Mao Zedong,” January 22, 1950, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of the President, Russian Federation (APRF), f. 45, op. 1, d. 329, ll. 29-38. Translated by Danny Rozas.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-talks-between-iv-stalin-and-chairman-central-peoples-government-peoples-republic>.

<sup>4</sup> “Record of Talks between I.V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China Mao Zedong,” January 22, 1950, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of the President, Russian Federation (APRF), f. 45, op. 1, d. 329, ll. 29-38. Translated by Danny Rozas.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-talks-between-iv-stalin-and-chairman-central-peoples-government-peoples-republic>.

<sup>5</sup> “Record of Talks between I.V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China Mao Zedong,” January 22, 1950, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Archive of the President, Russian Federation (APRF), f. 45, op. 1, d. 329, ll. 29-38. Translated by Danny Rozas.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-talks-between-iv-stalin-and-chairman-central-peoples-government-peoples-republic>.

<sup>6</sup> Shen Zhihua eds. 沈志华, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang: 1917-1991nian zhongSu guanxi ruogan wenti zai tantao shan* 中苏关系史纲：1917-1991年中苏关系若干问题在探讨（上）[Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991 (Upper Volume)] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016), 162.

series of agreements in the Kremlin on February 14.<sup>7</sup> Regarding Xinjiang, a delegation comprised of local officials made their way to Moscow to hammer out the remaining details of the joint stock company agreements which were signed a few weeks later.

Traditional accounts of these agreements take the position that these agreements were forced upon the Chinese by the Soviets, a position substantiated by later Chinese meeting records and memoirs citing them as “unequal treaties” used to turn Xinjiang into a “semi-colony”. This is exemplified by the memoirs of Mao’s translator Shi Zhe who has attested that the two agreements signed regarding Xinjiang on March 27 relating to the joint stock companies and Soviet consulates were a continuation of Tsarist policies.<sup>8</sup> However, recent research from the historian Charles Kraus counters this point by claiming that the Chinese actually requested Soviet economic assistance. Kraus writes that, “The PLA invasion of Xinjiang has often been portrayed as a response to strategic threats, but at its core, the “peaceful liberation” of Xinjiang in 1949 was a response to Mao’s economic concerns.”<sup>9</sup> This concern was expressed by Mao as early as February 1949 during his meeting with Mikoyan in Xibaipo when he inquired about the potential wealth of natural resources in the province.<sup>10</sup> In this situation, Mao’s economic considerations seem to have been the prime factor” in China’s quest for Soviet assistance, viewing ties between Xinjiang and the Soviet Union as an asset and not a liability.<sup>11</sup> This also fell in line with the thinking of Republican Chinese officials faced with the tasked of integrating

---

<sup>7</sup> Shen, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang* (shang), 162.

<sup>8</sup> Shi Zhe 师哲 and Li Haiwen 李海文, “Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu (zuixin xengdingben)” 在历史巨人身边: 师哲回忆录 (最新增订版) [The Memoirs of Shi Zhe (Newest Expanded Edition)] (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2015), 322.

<sup>9</sup> Kraus, “Semi-Colony,” 135.

<sup>10</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Anastas Mikoyan and Mao Zedong”, February 4, 1949, Wilson Center Digital Archive, APRF, f. 39, op. 1, d. 39, LI. 54-62. Reprinted in Andrei Ledovskii, Raisa Mitrovitskaia and Vladimir Miasnikov, *Sovietsko-Kitaiskie Otnosheniia*, Vol. 5, Book 2, 1946-February 1950 (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2005), pp. 66-72. Translated by Sergey Radchenko.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-conversation-between-anastas-mikoyan-and-mao-zedong-2>.

<sup>11</sup> Kraus, “Semi-Colony,” 130-131, 137.

Xinjiang: economic development would improve the lives of the people while simultaneously tying them closer to the interior of China. This time, there was enough of an institutional base in Xinjiang through which Beijing could exercise authority and direct such efforts. Additionally, whereas during the Republican era Chinese leadership envisioned developing the province with an eye towards reducing already-established Soviet economic influence in addition to provincial integration, the CCP was now inviting Moscow in to jointly bring about economic development and hopefully secure Xinjiang more tightly into the Chinese polity.

By the early fifties, not only did central Chinese leadership see the necessity in Soviet assistance for developing Xinjiang but so did the province's local leadership. V. A. Zorin, the Soviet deputy minister of foreign affairs, recalled in his diary a visit by Burhan Shahidi in February 1952 where the latter invoked the 1950 agreements and stated that Xinjiang needed experts from fields ranging from hydro-technology to teaching, simultaneously suggesting that these specialists could be "used in the capacity of specialists in the Xinjiang government."<sup>12</sup> Burhan observed that the Soviet Central Asian republics had a ready supply of "well-trained Soviet citizens" who had resided in and understood Xinjiang and as such he had suggested to Zhou Enlai and Peng Dehuai that appeals be made to the Soviets to allow Soviet citizens who had previously lived in Xinjiang to return and fulfill the immediate need for cadres and simultaneously prepare "their own [Chinese] national cadres."<sup>13</sup> As one Chinese scholar described it, dual-national Soviet cadres became the core of the Soviet nationals' presence in Xinjiang, with the Chinese accepting their employment in local governance organs due to the

---

<sup>12</sup> "Reception of the Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government, Burhan, February 22, 1952, Wilson Center Digital Archive, (AVPRF), f. 0100, op. 44, d. 11, l. 6-7. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Austin Jersild. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/reception-chairman-xinjiang-provincial-government-burhan-20-february-1951>.

<sup>13</sup> "Reception of the Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government, Burhan, February 22, 1952, Wilson Center Digital Archive, (AVPRF), f. 0100, op. 44, d. 11, l. 6-7. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Austin Jersild. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/reception-chairman-xinjiang-provincial-government-burhan-20-february-1951>.

need for expertise as well as the hope that the cadres would eventually forfeit their Soviet nationality.<sup>14</sup> In essence, Chinese authorities hoped that further institutional and economic infusion, combined with trained cadres would create a situation whereby central rule could be more firmly established, thereby domesticating the province by integrating the local population into the Chinese polity.

Though the joint stock companies had already begun operating in Xinjiang at Chinese invitation, friction at the local level soon became apparent. Relations with Soviet advisors were poor, as Chinese workers and technicians felt “marginalized” and complained that the Soviets did not teach them and that even manuals were not translated into Chinese; Soviet diplomats lobbied for expanded regional influence and disagreed with the Chinese on where the companies could operate.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese, for their part, argued with the Soviets over the expanded range of prospecting not because of considerations of sovereignty, but due to Moscow’s reluctance to share the costs of said expansion.<sup>16</sup> Considering that all non-Soviet influence had been expelled by this point, there was no need for the Chinese to acquiesce in order to balance external influence with Soviet power. However, Soviet support and influence was still accepted due to the need for assistance in local economic development, though discontent was mounting which would necessitate a later change in policy.

As time progressed, international factors also impacted the CCP and Mao’s calculus regarding Soviet economic aid. According to Charles Kraus, Stalin’s policies during the Korean War that ran counter to the desires of the Chinese leadership led to an erosion of trust and disillusionment towards the bilateral relationship and thus created the conditions for a

---

<sup>14</sup> Li, “Xinjiang,” 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> Kraus, “Semi-Colony,” 133, 156.

<sup>16</sup> Kraus, “Semi-Colony,” 156.

“reappraisal” of the relationship after Stalin’s death.<sup>17</sup> Upon coming to power, Khrushchev believed that if he could gain support from the CCP then his own position would be strengthened. Seeing that Mao’s standing within the socialist camp had been elevated by the Korean War,<sup>18</sup> Khrushchev acquiesced to Chinese demands to adjust the bilateral relationship and thus in July 1954 decided to transfer control of the Xinjiang oil and metal companies to the Chinese and also committed to assisting China in building a railroad connecting Lanzhou, Urumqi and Almaty.<sup>19</sup> The handover officially occurred on January 1, 1955.

### **Soviet Nationals in 1950s Xinjiang**

The issue of Soviet citizenship among the residents of Xinjiang during the fifties has always been difficult to deduce to a set of concrete, verifiable numbers. This has been due to issues of accounting as well as differences in how the Soviets and the Chinese designated citizenship in specific situations. However, based on publicly available archival data, one can piece together a relatively coherent picture about how many Soviet citizens were residing in Xinjiang at the time that simultaneously takes account of potential discrepancies in the data.

Regarding the issues of citizenship and nationality in the early fifties, a report by the Chinese government from April 27, 1962 painted a clearer picture of the situation in Xinjiang since 1917. The report divided the individuals in question into three groups: those who came between 1917 and 1933, those of mixed Chinese and Soviet descent and those who had their Soviet citizenship restored in 1946 but had still not received their passports.<sup>20</sup> According to the

---

<sup>17</sup> Kraus, ““Semi-Colony”,” 155.

<sup>18</sup> Shen, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang* (shang), 211.

<sup>19</sup> Shen, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang* (shang), 213-214.

<sup>20</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

report, the first group consisted of individuals who came for various reasons, though the majority of them were working-class and estimated at half a million, with the “overwhelming majority” being Kazakhs.<sup>21</sup> Under Sheng Shicai, they had been declared ethnic minorities but due to policies implemented in 1953 were thereafter considered stateless.<sup>22</sup> In the early to mid-fifties, the Soviets were quite amenable to Chinese requests regarding the nationality issue in Xinjiang, though they stopped being cooperative after the middle of the decade. Starting in 1954, these individuals were the targets of Soviet repatriation efforts. On July 12, 1955 the Soviets and Chinese agreed that the Soviets would slow down reissuing Soviet citizenship.<sup>23</sup> In October 1956, the Soviet consul in Urumqi reached an agreement with Chinese officials that when giving Soviet passports to Chinese citizens, they were required to have approved documents from local government organs, a requirement which would change as the bilateral relationship continued to deteriorate,<sup>24</sup> evinced by Soviet issuance of passports without Chinese consent after 1956.<sup>25</sup> Repatriation from 1954 onwards ceased in 1958, with 99,000 Soviet nationals from the entirety of China returning to the Soviet Union and out of the remaining thirty thousand, two-thirds were in Xinjiang.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, according to Chinese data, in 1953 there were roughly 86,000 Soviet nationals in Xinjiang, a number which decreased to around 80,000 by the next year and

---

<sup>21</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.  
<sup>22</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>23</sup> Li, “Xinjiang,” 83.

<sup>24</sup> Li, “Xinjiang,” 83.

<sup>25</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>26</sup> Shen Zhihua eds. 沈志华, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang: 1917-1991nian zhongSu guanxi ruogan wenti zai tantao xia* 中苏关系史纲：1917-1991年中苏关系若干问题在探讨（下）[Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991 (Lower Volume)] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016), 459.

while there is no authoritative accurate data afterwards, it appears that this number further decreased to 20,000 by 1958,<sup>27</sup> a number corroborated by other sources.

The second group identified by the 1962 report were those of mixed Soviet and Chinese descent, a group that was harder to profile, as both China and the Soviet Union had conflicting positions about how to determine their citizenship.<sup>28</sup> This was mostly due to the fact that because of their mixed background, it was difficult to determine their citizenship based upon the citizenship of their parents, a situation further complicated by the fact that they had been born on Chinese territory.<sup>29</sup> While at the time of the report there were no exact statistics, “preliminary estimates” put their number at 30,000,<sup>30</sup> thus indicating that by the early fifties, this group likely numbered in the thousands and increased thereafter, accounting for a significant portion of the Soviet nationals that did not voluntarily repatriate after the establishment of the PRC. However, as there were no clear criteria for identifying the citizenship of this group, it is possible that in previous surveys they had not been counted as Soviet citizens and thus were not included in the previously described counting of 20,000 Soviet nationals residing in Xinjiang.

The third group were those who had their nationality restored under a resolution of the Supreme Soviet in 1946 but had not yet been given Soviet passports.<sup>31</sup> This group however, was quite small, with data from the late fifties and early sixties reflecting Soviet requests for

---

<sup>27</sup> Li, “Xinjiang,” 83.

<sup>28</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>29</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>30</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>31</sup> “Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union,” April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

citizenship processing for a few dozen families in an ad-hoc manner over many years.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore quite unlikely that this category of Soviet nationals existed in great numbers by the late fifties, with most having already received Soviet citizenship and returned to the Soviet Union.

In short, during the early fifties there were probably around eighty to ninety thousand official Soviet citizens in Xinjiang, though an unclear number of those with mixed citizenship. While these individuals had been allowed continued residence and were even invited into the local administrative apparatus, this was only a temporary measure, as inhabitants regulated under frameworks of extraterritoriality clashed with the goal of domesticating Xinjiang and integrating it into a modern Chinese polity, a problem that would have to be solved eventually. A significant number of these individuals were most likely advisors, given the fact that their numbers dwindled to about 20,000 by 1958, just as the number of Soviet experts in China began to rapidly decrease. For the first decade of the PRC's existence, Chinese leadership not only tolerated but actively requested the employment of Soviet nationals in governing organs in Xinjiang in order to build up local governing infrastructure and to advise on issues that would help in developing the economy. As time wore on, these individuals would begin to be viewed as a liability and even a danger by Chinese leadership, a trend which culminated in their mass expulsion after the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962. This was due to the fact that while the citizenship issue and the related issue of extraterritorial legal jurisdiction could be tolerated in the name of administrative and economic development, domesticating Xinjiang would require integrating it into a "modern" state structure whereby all inhabitants, both local and foreign, followed Chinese laws.

---

<sup>32</sup> "Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union," April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

## **Ethnic and Social Policies in PRC Xinjiang**

After gaining control of Xinjiang at the end of 1949, CCP leadership began pondering what type of ethnic and social policies would allow for the domestication of Xinjiang in order to more firmly integrate it into the Chinese polity. As such, they needed to implement policies which would further erode parallel systems of authority at the local level that simultaneously offered incentives and opportunities to non-Han residents once they were integrated into said polity. However, Beijing had to tread carefully. On the one hand, the GMD had already laid a base for expectations of minority representation in governing structures. On the other hand, the CCP had not unified the Chinese mainland under a single government in order for border regions to be granted high-level autonomy or independence. What was desired was a Xinjiang that was stable, secure and integrated into the Chinese polity to a degree unseen in modern Chinese history. While the CCP invited Soviet assistance and expertise to administratively and economically develop the region, Chinese authorities simultaneously pursued cautious ethnic and social policies with an aim to eliminating rival sources of administrative power and expanding their influence down to the grassroots.

Faced with the question of what type of polity China would be, Zhou Enlai declared that China would be a republic, not a federation, given that people were trying to “split” provinces off,<sup>33</sup> a point which he elaborated upon in a post-liberation speech, stating that because China was not imperial and did not inherit imperial legacies, it did not need to incorporate the Soviet model which was a result of imperialist legacies.<sup>34</sup> According to James Milward, the CCP’s theory of autonomy was to distance itself from the GMD’s assimilationist policies and to “avoid

---

<sup>33</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 178.

encouraging separatism in key frontier regions.”<sup>35</sup> As a later Soviet report put it, the CCP was “carrying out administrative construction for the non-Chinese nationalities without providing them the right to secede or create autonomous republics.”<sup>36</sup> Autonomy meant that local nationalities served on local representative bodies that were not popularly elected and worked in government offices, though there was a common phenomenon whereby non-Han staffed lower levels and Han continued to hold higher posts.<sup>37</sup> Thus, while the CCP used ethnopolitical discourse to “mitigate the inevitable backlash to its integrationist thrust in Xinjiang”, geopolitical considerations of overcoming industrial nations meant that in practice “economic development” took precedence over “ethnopolitical import”, with Han migrants becoming “de-facto masters of the house” due to technical requisites.<sup>38</sup> As one might expect, this new economic order contributed to dissatisfaction among non-Han towards their newly arrived Han “brothers”. The Chinese government thus initially responded in a way that portrayed themselves as being sympathetic to non-Han, criticizing individuals for “Han chauvinism” due to inappropriate actions in the workplace<sup>39</sup> - essentially positioning itself as an authoritative neutral arbiter in relations between Han and non-Han.

At this time, land reform was used to undermine local elites and gain followers, with collectivized agriculture the “ultimate goal”, though it appears that the CCP was initially cautious of disturbing the pastoral economy because of the Soviet experience of the thirties and the fact that livestock were a major export to the USSR.<sup>40</sup> Although not explicitly stated by CCP leadership, it is highly likely that their policies were also impacted by memories of the unrest in

---

<sup>35</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 350.

<sup>36</sup> “Iu Andropov to the Central Committee of the CPSU, ‘On the Struggle with Local Nationalism in China’”, February 5, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 36-43. Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/iu-andropov-central-committee-cpsu-struggle-local-nationalism-china>.

<sup>37</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 345, 352.

<sup>38</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 175, 185, 190.

<sup>39</sup> Jacobs, *Xinjiang*, 189.

<sup>40</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 346, 347-348.

Xinjiang in the early thirties - the same unrest which prevented Sheng and the Soviets from pursuing equal rights for women and systematic land reform. The difficulties encountered during land reform were exemplified by a conversation between Zhou Enlai and Stalin on September 19, 1952. When the situation shifted to events in Xinjiang, Zhou stated that in general the work was “going well” but simultaneously admitted to “leftist excesses” which resulted in rectification measures.<sup>41</sup>

Essentially, Chinese leadership still had to proceed cautiously in their mission to economically develop Xinjiang and integrate it into China proper. Though their end goal was the economic and social transformation of the province, in the early fifties policies were pursued in a more circumspect manner, as stability and security were the underlying conditions for the end goal of integration. Thus, the CCP needed to work with both local elites and invite Soviet assistance due to their lack of a preponderance of administrative power and a lack of control at the grassroots. This would help them to achieve their goal of integrating the local population into a modern state by breaking down parallel institutions without causing too much unrest. However, discontent was growing and would spill out into the open by the middle of the decade, thereby prompting less circumspect integrationist policies by the Chinese government.

### **Growing Strains, 1956-1961**

Though the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union had closely cooperated in Xinjiang during the first half of the fifties, starting in 1956-57 both domestic and international political turbulence began to impact the larger bilateral relationship, cooperation in Xinjiang and Chinese policies in the province in general. The Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956 exposed

---

<sup>41</sup> “Minutes of Conversation between I.V. Stalin and Zhou Enlai”, September 19, 1952, Wilson Center Digital Archive, (APRF), f. 45, op. 1, d. 343, ll. 97-103. Translated by Danny Rozas with Kathryn Weathersby. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/minutes-conversation-between-iv-stalin-and-zhou-enlai-1>.

the CCP to unwelcome amounts of criticism, reflected in Xinjiang through dissatisfaction towards the governance model of “autonomy” and the presence of Han in the province. Thus, a fight against “local nationalism” was initiated and reached a head at a 1958 provincial expanded plenum. Simultaneously, disagreements over broader foreign policy issues led to an increase in ill-will bilaterally while by the late fifties, the Soviets had begun to impede the resolution of nationality issues in Xinjiang. While the relationship had not completely broken down yet, fissures were appearing that would culminate in a break in relations in the early sixties.

The Hundred Flowers campaign was initially supposed to allow Chinese citizens from all over the country to voice their opinions in a free manner within public domains. However, rather than complimenting the Chinese Communist Party, what transpired was that the party was inundated with criticism, particularly from intellectuals. Within Xinjiang, local minority leaders took the chance to express their grievances, including negative views on the Chinese government’s conception of “autonomy”, rhetoric that soon metastasized into a reflection of broader dissatisfaction.<sup>42</sup> A Soviet report made a few years later noted that since the beginning of 1956 “anti-Chinese feelings had strengthened among the local nationalists” and talk of the expulsion of Chinese and their interference in the region had intensified as a narrative spread that “the Chinese have taken the place of the landlords” and like the latter had come to exploit the local population and were “colonizers as were the previous Chinese”.<sup>43</sup> As such, the CCP had determined that “rightist elements in the national regions” were “hindering the further successful construction of socialism” and thus the struggle against local nationalism should become the main focus of various rectification and educational campaigns, a policy formalized at the third

---

<sup>42</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 368.

<sup>43</sup> “Iu Andropov to the Central Committee of the CPSU, ‘On the Struggle with Local Nationalism in China’”, February 5, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 36-43. Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/iu-andropov-central-committee-cpsu-struggle-local-nationalism-china>.

plenum of the Central Committee of the CCP in September 1957.<sup>44</sup> Dissatisfaction had accumulated to the point that in 1957 in “national minority regions... hostile elements were able to provoke unrest”, with Xinjiang witnessing an “uprising” which led to the “control of more than 60 cooperatives” accompanied by proclamations of “Down with the Chinese” and “Cooperation doesn’t suit the national regions”.<sup>45</sup>

Simultaneously, local pressures resulting from the Hundred Flowers campaign in Xinjiang had reached a culmination point, with James Milward describing 1958 as a “watershed” moment that saw the transition from more conciliatory and cautious policies to more hardline ones.<sup>46</sup> This was evinced by an expanded plenum hosted in Urumqi at the beginning of the year. Based upon Soviet records of conversations between the Urumqi consul and local officials, this expanded plenum was where the battle against local nationalism was waged.

In early January G. S. Dobashin, the Soviet consul general in Urumqi had a conversation with the secretary of the party committee of XUAR (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region), Lv Jianren. According to this conversation, the plenum centered around many issues, such as the discussion of a report detailing how non-Han workers were dissatisfied with Han workers and did not want to work with the latter.<sup>47</sup> There were also points made by non-Han workers that the CCP was only defending the Chinese nationality, thinking that resources were being extracted

---

<sup>44</sup> “Iu Andropov to the Central Committee of the CPSU, ‘On the Struggle with Local Nationalism in China’”, February 5, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 36-43. Translated by David Brophy.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/iu-andropov-central-committee-cpsu-struggle-local-nationalism-china>.

<sup>45</sup> “Iu Andropov to the Central Committee of the CPSU, ‘On the Struggle with Local Nationalism in China’”, February 5, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 36-43. Translated by David Brophy.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/iu-andropov-central-committee-cpsu-struggle-local-nationalism-china>.

<sup>46</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 372.

<sup>47</sup> “Memorandum on a Discussion held by the Consul-General of the USSR in Ürumqi, G.S. DOBASHIN, with the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Comrade LÜ JIANREN”, January 7, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 49-53. Translated by David Brophy.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-held-consul-general-ussr-urumchi-gs-dobashin-secretary-party>.

from the region just to send to the interior of China.<sup>48</sup> Recalling the main issues of the plenum, the report pointed out that the two main “tendencies” were “the creation of an independent Uyghur republic” and “the creation of a republic along the lines of the Soviet Union republics.”<sup>49</sup> In the case that these demands could not be met, some “local nationalists” insisted on “greater nationalization of the local organs of power”, to be understood as “the departure of a section of the Chinese cadre workers from Xinjiang, and their replacement by Uyghurs.”<sup>50</sup>

According to James Milward, “local nationalism” was linked to “revisionism” and pro-Soviet sentiment began being used to attack minority cadres in the late fifties and early sixties.<sup>51</sup> This however, is somewhat contradicted by records of conversation between Soviet and Chinese officials at the time of the expanded plenum. On January 22, G. P. Blokin, manager of the Soviet consulate in Ghulja, confided to his diary about a meeting with Wang Huangzhang, head of the foreign affairs office of the prefectural people’s committee, where the latter reported that the expanded plenum had been extended by one month and that a “particularly fierce struggle was being waged against a group of leading workers from the national minorities, among whom nationalism ha[d] manifested most seriously.”<sup>52</sup> Based upon accusations brought against

---

<sup>48</sup> “Memorandum on a Discussion held by the Consul-General of the USSR in Ürumqi, G.S. DOBASHIN, with the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Comrade LÜ JIANREN”, January 7, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 49-53. Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-held-consul-general-ussr-urumchi-gs-dobashin-secretary-party>.

<sup>49</sup> “Memorandum on a Discussion held by the Consul-General of the USSR in Ürumqi, G.S. DOBASHIN, with the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Comrade LÜ JIANREN”, January 7, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 49-53. Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-held-consul-general-ussr-urumchi-gs-dobashin-secretary-party>.

<sup>50</sup> “Memorandum on a Discussion held by the Consul-General of the USSR in Ürumqi, G.S. DOBASHIN, with the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Comrade LÜ JIANREN”, January 7, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 49-53. Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-held-consul-general-ussr-urumchi-gs-dobashin-secretary-party>.

<sup>51</sup> Milward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 367.

<sup>52</sup> “Memorandum on a Discussion with Wang Huangzhang, Head of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Prefectural People’s Committee”, January 22, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 61-64.

Abdurehim Äyasev, deputy chairman of the people's committee of the Ili-Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, who advocated for the "creation of an independent Uyghuristan",<sup>53</sup> these workers were not merely puppets wishing to integrate into the Soviet Union. Äyasev was accused of "struggle against the CCP and the CPSU", taking the position that "neither the Chinese nor the Russian Communists were carrying out a correct nationalities policy", with "no genuine independence" in either Xinjiang nor in Soviet Central Asian republics.<sup>54</sup> There is the possibility that Wang was trying to drive a wedge between Äyasev and the Soviets, however this seems unlikely given that relations with the Soviets had not deteriorated to the point that local officials would resort such tactics. In fact, based upon the evidence it could be argued that "local nationalism" could not just be linked with anti-CCP behavior but also anti-Soviet behavior depending on the circumstances. As such, this record demonstrates that calls for increased autonomy or even an independent Turkic state in China's northwest, while desirable for some Turkic leaders, were seen as a threat by Chinese authorities to the point that they were willing to share such internal conflict with their Soviet interlocutors, possibly in the hope of receiving Soviet assistance in managing the issue.

Internationally, the relationship with the Soviets was fraying due to ideological and foreign policy differences. While the Soviets had initially held back on their public criticism of the Great Leap Forward, as the campaign progressed and bilateral relations worsened, they began to criticize China more openly. In Xinjiang, propaganda began to be broadcast from speakers on

---

Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-wang-huangzhang-head-foreign-affairs-office-prefectural-peoples>.

<sup>53</sup> "Memorandum on a Discussion with Wang Huangzhang, Head of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Prefectural People's Committee", January 22, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 61-64.

Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-wang-huangzhang-head-foreign-affairs-office-prefectural-peoples>.

<sup>54</sup> "Memorandum on a Discussion with Wang Huangzhang, Head of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Prefectural People's Committee", January 22, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 5, op. 49, d. 130, listy 61-64.

Translated by David Brophy. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/memorandum-discussion-wang-huangzhang-head-foreign-affairs-office-prefectural-peoples>.

the Soviet side of the border glorifying the Soviet way of life, while mail that contained daily necessities was weaponized and sent to relatives in China to demonstrate the superiority of Soviet standards of living.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Levee Breaks: The Yi-Ta Incident and its Aftermath, 1962**

The year 1962 was the culmination point of Xinjiang's internal pressures and political turbulence in the broader Sino-Soviet relationship which led to the perfect storm exemplified by the Yi-Ta Incident. Domestically, economic pressures from the Great Leap Forward created discontent in border regions adjacent to the Soviet Union. Though Local Chinese authorities attempted to address these issues, a mass exodus still occurred starting in April and continued for weeks. Though it is still unclear if central Soviet decision makers instigated the entire incident, the actions of local consular officials, combined with a lack of cooperation on the issue of Soviet nationals in recent years, cross-border propaganda and greater stresses in the bilateral relationship created an atmosphere in which the event and its aftermath were highly politicized. After the event, Chinese authorities took advantage of the circumstances to unilaterally resolve the issue of Soviet nationals once and for all, leading to their expulsion en masse. This resulted in the removal of potentially subversive inhabitants and combined with closure of the border, finally established complete Chinese territorial control over a Xinjiang that was stable and secure.

Regarding the Yi-Ta Incident, some Chinese scholars present it as the result of a Soviet "hegemonic policy" that took advantage of the local situation to implement subversive activities, however most serious analyses do not solely blame Soviet interference but rather recognize

---

<sup>55</sup> Li, "Xinjiang," 97.

domestic reasons for the exodus, labeling them “internal contradictions among the people.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Chinese scholars of the Cold War admit that to this day there is insufficient evidence that Soviet decision-makers directly planned the incident.<sup>57</sup> Based upon previous Soviet policies in Xinjiang, it is hard to determine if the exodus was a result of centrally directed policies or not. During Yang Zengxin’s rule, local Soviet officials and residents had taken advantage of the chaos of Russian imperial collapse to push narratives and pursue goals related to Uyghur identity, activities which were later stopped by authoritative Soviet organs. Later Soviet authorities intentionally intervened to smother the unrest of the early thirties and support Sheng Shicai in order to bring stability to the region. Once the ETR was declared, though the Soviets took advantage of events of the ground, it appears that they did not completely invent the local unrest but merely influenced and went along with a situation in flux in order to achieve their geopolitical goals. In the early fifties, as evinced with the joint stock companies, local Soviet diplomats had lobbied for expanded influence in Xinjiang,<sup>58</sup> but it is unclear if this was under the direct direction of Moscow. It is thus highly plausible that the local conditions which caused the unrest were genuine factors which were seized upon by local Soviet diplomatic officials, potentially as a pressure point against Chinese authorities in some way, shape or form. However, whereas previous Soviet involvement in the region had been grudgingly accepted by central Chinese authorities as they lacked the authority to combat it, this time Beijing decided that it had developed the region enough to secure its further control without Soviet support, leading to policies which forced out Soviet nationals and expelled Soviet influence from the region rather than working with Moscow to reach a new *modus vivendi*.

---

<sup>56</sup> Yao Yong, ““YiTa shijian” yu Xinjiang bingtuan bianjing tuanchang de chuangjian” “伊塔事件”与新疆兵团边境团场的创建 [“Yili-Tacheng Incident” and the Establishment of Border Regiments of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps], *Xinjiang daxue xuebao* 新疆大学学报 vol. 50, no. 6 (Nov. 2022): 84, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Shen, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang* (xia), 470.

<sup>58</sup> Kraus, ““Semi-Colony”,” 133.

Among researchers of the Yi-Ta Incident, Charles Kraus is of the position that Chinese authorities “had a nuanced understanding of the 1962 violence in Xinjiang.”<sup>59</sup> As such, they would later try to enact policies to “rectify... precipitating factors”.<sup>60</sup> It seems that before the Yi-Ta Incident, local officials actually were attempting to address issues resulting from the Great Leap Forward. On March 22, the Yili District Party Committee requested policy adjustments and relief supplies to alleviate the situation, including adjustment to individual grain allocations, adjustments to the amount of cotton cloth provided and specific tea rations.<sup>61</sup> In spite of the attempts of local officials to alleviate local conditions, a mass exodus still began in April.

On April 21, 1962 the Xinjiang foreign affairs office sent a cable to the ministry of foreign affairs detailing that based upon incomplete information, two thousand individuals had fled from the Tarbagatay region during April 10-20 to the Soviet Union.<sup>62</sup> This analysis blamed the exodus on “difficulties in... livelihoods” and the Soviets for both interfering internally and externally, claiming that during the previous winter Soviet consulate staff went to Tarbagatay multiple times and encouraged locals to leave while also strengthening the work of Soviet Nationals Associations and broadcasting propaganda, weaponizing mail and cutting border

---

<sup>59</sup> Kraus, “Laying Blame,” 506.

<sup>60</sup> Kraus, “Laying Blame,” 506.

<sup>61</sup> “Cable from Yili District Party Committee, ‘Provisions on Making Proper Arrangements for the Livelihoods of People Living in Border Areas’”, March 22, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Zhonggong Yili Hasake zizhizhou weiyuanhui dang shi yanjiushi and Yili Hasake zizhizhou dang’anju (guan), eds. Zhongguo gongchandang Yili Hasake zizhizhou weiyuanhui zhongyao wenjian xuanbian (Selected Important Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture Committee) (Yili: Yili zhou dangwei dangshi yanjiushi, 2001), 337-338. Translated by Max Maller. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/cable-yili-district-party-committee-provisions-making-proper-arrangements-livelihoods>.

<sup>62</sup> “Cable from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office, ‘Report on the Flight of Border Residents from the Yili and Tacheng Areas to the Soviet Union’”, April 21, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 118-01100-06, 1-4. Translated by Charles Kraus. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/cable-xinjiang-foreign-affairs-office-report-flight-border-residents-yili-and-tacheng>.

fences among other activities, with Chinese officials worried that if the situation was not quickly rectified, then there would be a ripple effect across the province.<sup>63</sup>

On April 24, the Chinese sent vice foreign minister Zhang Hanfu to the Soviet embassy to relay their complaints and present a report on the situation.<sup>64</sup> As the conversation opened up, Chervonenko, the Soviet ambassador, relayed the urgency felt by the Soviets towards the issue and they they were “very concerned about the issue,” though he denied the accusations that the Soviets helped and encouraged border residents to cross and countered the Chinese claim that the total number of individuals numbered twenty thousand, claiming that the number was closer to half of that.<sup>65</sup> Zhang then countered by expressing that the Chinese side felt “astonished” and further blamed the Soviets for their involvement, stating that because of this “the number of people crossing the border [was] increasing.”<sup>66</sup> Both sides continued to argue about the accusations, however as the conversation came to a close, one is left with the impression that both sides desired for the situation to be brought under control: Zhang pointed out that “evildoers” would seize upon the situation to “drive a wedge in relations between China and the Soviet Union”, with Chervonenko emphasizing the necessity of investigating and solving the issue, assessing that the fleeing locals “crossed the border into the Soviet Union from the Chinese side

---

<sup>63</sup> “Cable from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office, ‘Report on the Flight of Border Residents from the Yili and Tacheng Areas to the Soviet Union’”, April 21, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 118-01100-06, 1-4. Translated by Charles Kraus. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/cable-xinjiang-foreign-affairs-office-report-flight-border-residents-yili-and-tacheng>.

<sup>64</sup> “Minutes of Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu’s Talk with the Soviet Ambassador to China Stepan Chervonenko”, April 24, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 118-01764-04, 4-8. Translated by 7Brands. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/minutes-vice-minister-zhang-hanfus-talk-soviet-ambassador-china-stepan-chervonenko>.

<sup>65</sup> “Minutes of Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu’s Talk with the Soviet Ambassador to China Stepan Chervonenko”, April 24, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 118-01764-04, 4-8. Translated by 7Brands. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/minutes-vice-minister-zhang-hanfus-talk-soviet-ambassador-china-stepan-chervonenko>.

<sup>66</sup> “Minutes of Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu’s Talk with the Soviet Ambassador to China Stepan Chervonenko”, April 24, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 118-01764-04, 4-8. Translated by 7Brands. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/minutes-vice-minister-zhang-hanfus-talk-soviet-ambassador-china-stepan-chervonenko>.

of the border. China let them pass and the Soviet Union failed to stop them.”<sup>67</sup> Though a reading of this meeting suggests that both sides were open to resolving the issue and putting it behind them, in successive meetings both sides would reach a deadlock over essentially the same issues of responsibility for allowing the exodus and the conditions under which those who fled would be repatriated. The Soviets claimed that the exodus occurred in China and that the Chinese had the responsibility to block those fleeing Xinjiang in addition to the position that China should send a team over to talk to the individuals and request their return.<sup>68</sup> Ironically, the Soviets were adopting something closer to the American position about POWs during the Korean War, emphasizing the need to repatriate at the individual level based on choice while the Chinese side still stuck to the principle of repatriation en-masse.

### **Soviet Nationality, Frontier Countermeasures and the Yi-Ta Incident**

As mentioned previously, the Soviet Union had largely cooperated with China in resolving the nationality issue throughout the first half of the fifties. Even though there were incidents after 1956 related to issuance of documents without Chinese permission, the waning years of the decade still witnessed Soviet acquiescence to Chinese requests. For example, the 1962 report on the nationality issue detailed how in 1959 there was an incident in which sixty families were allowed to be given Soviet passports, but due to Chinese fears that they would influence those without Soviet passports, the Chinese requested and the Soviets agreed that the

---

<sup>67</sup> “Minutes of Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu’s Talk with the Soviet Ambassador to China Stepan Chervonenko”, April 24, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 118-01764-04, 4-8. Translated by 7Brands. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/minutes-vice-minister-zhang-hanfuf-talk-soviet-ambassador-china-stepan-chervonenko>.

<sup>68</sup> Yan Mingfu 阎明复, “Yan Mingfu hui yi lu (er)” 阎明复回忆录 (二) [The Memoirs of Yan Mingfu (Volume 2)] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2023) 731.

families were not to be allowed to migrate to the Soviet Union.<sup>69</sup> This cooperation largely continued until mid-1960, as with the deterioration of the bilateral relationship, the Soviet Union began to illegally develop Soviet nationals' connections of the USSR and sense of resentment, first through using consular access to aggravate local grievances and encouraging locals to flee to the Soviet Union, preventing Soviet passport holders from resigning their positions in Xinjiang's administrative apparatus and utilizing the weaponization of mail and propaganda to encourage an exodus.<sup>70</sup> The Soviets changed their tactics relating to cadres in Xinjiang of Soviet nationality, impeding said cadres employed within Chinese organs from resigning their positions.<sup>71</sup> Processing of documents was also halted: even though the Soviets said that forfeiture of citizenship was voluntary, none of the applications from May 1960 to March 1961 to forfeit citizenship were approved.<sup>72</sup>

In November 1960, Zhou Enlai issued instructions that deemed people who had fled to Xinjiang between 1917 and 1933 and later rendered stateless to be considered as Chinese nationals.<sup>73</sup> However, in June 1961 the Soviet consulates in Urumqi and Yining considered it inappropriate to give these people Chinese passports, positing that they should be considered to be Soviet nationals, a claim that was rejected by Beijing which reemphasized the need for them to be considered Chinese citizens.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> "Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union," April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>70</sup> Shen, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang* (xia), 459-462.

<sup>71</sup> Li, "Xinjiang," 93.

<sup>72</sup> Li, "Xinjiang," 93.

<sup>73</sup> "Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union," April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

<sup>74</sup> "Data on the Citizenship Problem in the Conflict between the Xinjiang Region and the Soviet Union," April 27, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC MFA 118-01760-01, 1-7. Translated by 7Brands.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/data-citizenship-problem-conflict-between-xinjiang-region-and-soviet-union>.

After the tumult of the Yi-Ta Incident, the Chinese promptly moved to close the border and resolve the nationality issue once and for all. In order to resolve the issue of Soviet interference at the grassroots level, the Chinese government followed a three-pronged strategy: first, Production-Construction Corps were moved into border regions in order to create a buffer between would-be runaways and Soviet Central Asia; second, policies were introduced that cut the Gordian knot of citizenship; and third, aid and surveys at the grassroots were utilized in order to attempt to combat the root domestic causes for the Yi-Ta exodus and prevent any such incident in the future.

When the Yi-Ta Incident occurred, Production-Construction Corps units were able to move quickly to rectify the security situation along the Sino-Soviet border where they created a security barrier and thereafter limited cross-border movement. On April 28, 1962, the General Staff Headquarters gave the order to send five battalions to Altay, Tarbagatay, Khorgos, Zhaosu and Toli regions tasked with working with the local national defense forces and local government to maintain stability and protect the border.<sup>75</sup> Setting up shop, from autumn 1962 to 1966, the corps built farms along the border, reaching 38 by 1966 with a total population of 155,000.<sup>76</sup> This essentially rectified the preexisting condition that current Chinese academics assess as a “frontier without a boundary, a frontier without protection.”<sup>77</sup>

Once the Chinese decided to expedite the exodus of Soviet citizens, policy implementation proceeded at a rapid pace. According to the Chinese historian Li Danhui, after the Yi-Ta Incident, Chinese authorities strengthened regulations over who counted as a Soviet national, going to far as to describe the policy as one of “uprooting” or “eradicating” Soviet

---

<sup>75</sup> Yao, “YiTa shijian,” 86-87.

<sup>76</sup> Yao, “YiTa shijian,” 90.

<sup>77</sup> Shen, *ZhongSu guanxi shigang* (xia), 459.

influence in the province, a much different goal than in 1954-55.<sup>78</sup> As 1963 approached, procedures were simplified in order to completely remove all Soviet nationals in China and “severely manage” (严加管理) those that did not leave, the main task of 1963.<sup>79</sup> Foreign nationals were now required to respect local laws, would be punished commensurately for any violations and were restricted from participating in enterprises, government organs and other organizations.<sup>80</sup> This was a further step in the domestication of the province by Beijing: whereas previously citizenship was murky and sometimes led to the imposition of extraterritorial legal enforcement, that would change. This was because in a domesticated Xinjiang that was integrated into the Chinese polity, Chinese legal organs could exercise control over all inhabitants and border authorities would manage the flow of people across the border in a manner consistent with modern states exercising full control over their borders.

Regarding the internal distribution of aid, measures were taken immediately in the wake of the incident. On June 14, the State Council issued a reply regarding the allocation of supplies to the region. In order to promote ethnic unity, three million yuan worth of assistance would be given, including cotton cloth, raincoats, sugar and other items required for daily life. Though it noted that this assistance would not completely satisfy the full needs of the area, it would come close to doing so, though local officials would have to wait for a response from a separate government organ regarding the issue of grain.<sup>81</sup> This seems to prove that Chinese authorities

---

<sup>78</sup> Li, “Xinjiang,” 89.

<sup>79</sup> Li, “Xinjiang,” 89.

<sup>80</sup> “Orders from the People’s Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Party Committee of the Autonomous Region’s Propaganda Points”, August 15, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhonggong Xinjiang Weiwu’er zizhiwu weiyuan hui, eds., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian (1949-2010nian) (Selected Documents on Work in Xinjiang, 1949-2010) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 214-227. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/orders-peoples-committee-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-and-party-committee-autonomous>.

<sup>81</sup> “Reply from the State Council on Additional Allocations of Commodities for Xinjiang”, June 14, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhonggong Xinjiang Weiwu’er zizhiwu weiyuanhui, eds., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian (1949-2010nian) (Selected Documents on Work in Xinjiang, 1949-2010) (Beijing:

had a nuanced understanding of the situation as argued by Charles Kraus, especially considering that the items being sent included items that had been used in the Soviets' previously weaponized mail sent to Xinjiang to demonstrate the superiority of the Soviet Union.

How were these new regulations portrayed to China's domestic audience? First, they were presented as preserving the bilateral friendship with the Soviet Union. "Illegal actions" were declared to have been exposed in order to preserve the great Sino-Soviet friendship.<sup>82</sup> Second, it tried to cool down ethnic tensions by emphasizing that the Han in Xinjiang had greatly contributed to the region's development and that each ethnic group contained bad elements. According to propaganda points issued on August 15, it was declared "completely necessary [and] correct" to have Han come to Xinjiang after liberation to engage in work and economic development, as without their contribution, Xinjiang would not have developed the way it had over the preceding years.<sup>83</sup> It also pointed out that in each ethnic group in Xinjiang, including the Han, there were those who had done things that ran against national unity.<sup>84</sup> In essence, the Chinese state was signaling that Xinjiang's integration into the Chinese state was here to stay,

---

Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 212-213. Chinese Transcript.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/reply-state-council-additional-allocations-commodities-xinjiang>.

<sup>82</sup> "Orders from the People's Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Party Committee of the Autonomous Region's Propaganda Points", August 15, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhonggong Xinjiang Weuwu'er zizhiwu weiyuan hui, eds., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian (1949-2010nian) (Selected Documents on Work in Xinjiang, 1949-2010) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 214-227. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/orders-peoples-committee-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-and-party-committee-autonomous>.

<sup>83</sup> "Orders from the People's Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Party Committee of the Autonomous Region's Propaganda Points", August 15, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhonggong Xinjiang Weuwu'er zizhiwu weiyuan hui, eds., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian (1949-2010nian) (Selected Documents on Work in Xinjiang, 1949-2010) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 214-227. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/orders-peoples-committee-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-and-party-committee-autonomous>.

<sup>84</sup> "Orders from the People's Committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Party Committee of the Autonomous Region's Propaganda Points", August 15, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhonggong Xinjiang Weuwu'er zizhiwu weiyuan hui, eds., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian (1949-2010nian) (Selected Documents on Work in Xinjiang, 1949-2010) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 214-227. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/orders-peoples-committee-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-and-party-committee-autonomous>.

including the influx of Han necessary for achieving this goal. While previously the Soviet Union and Soviet nationals had contributed to the development of the province, it was now time for the local residents of Xinjiang, under the rule of the central Chinese state, to march forward towards a stable, secure and prosperous future together.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The years 1950 to 1962 were critical in realizing the integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese state that had long been sought by central Chinese authorities. At the beginning of this period, the Chinese desired a stable and secure Xinjiang that could use economic development in order to realize its integration. In Moscow Beijing found a meeting of interests with the Soviets, even actively inviting their nationals and companies into Xinjiang and its administrative organs in order to achieve integration through economic development, a simultaneous continuation and discontinuation of traditional Chinese conceptions of expanding central control into northwestern regions. This cooperation witnessed its heyday during the early to mid-fifties, though it declined as issues in the macro-level bilateral relationship buffeted the much-touted friendship of years past while micro-level issues in Xinjiang slowly built up, leading to tension within the relationship. Once the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962 occurred, Chinese leadership, realizing that Soviet nationals residing in Xinjiang were not the asset of years past but rather a liability, moved swiftly to secure the expulsion of Soviet influence, the securitization of the border and alleviation of economic and social conditions that could contribute to unrest. In effect, by the summer of 1962 the long-term process of Xinjiang's domestication had been completed, with undesirable elements expelled and central power expanded further than it ever had been in the modern era.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated by this thesis, the integration of Xinjiang into the polity of modern China was the result of both traditional conceptions of Chinese governance and Soviet institutional infusion. The negotiated state model was initially used to maintain provincial integrity and stability until Soviet intervention in the early thirties provided an opportunity to improve the governing apparatus's institutional and administrative capacities. This created a template for the extension of central Chinese governance into the region in 1944, after which the negotiated state was eroded.

Because China during both the Republican and People's Republic periods and the Soviet Union both shared the two core goals of a stable and secure Xinjiang, neither country was willing to wage all out war to achieve absolute gains in the province. Rather, a back-and-forth exchange of governing strategies and institutional building occurred in the contact zone that was Xinjiang in the years between 1916 and 1962 with a common goal of domesticating a shared Eurasian frontier, which led to an increase in institutional capacities at both the local and national levels. The process of evolution from the negotiated state model under Yang Zengxin and Jin Shuren gave way to a Soviet-supported governance model under Sheng Shicai from 1933 to 1944, during which the local bureaucracy grew and infrastructure was expanded. Post-Sheng, from 1944 to 1949, central Chinese authorities negotiated with the Second East Turkestan Republic with the Soviet Union acting as middleman, essentially engaging in a negotiation over

a future status quo in the province that would be acceptable to both Nanjing and Moscow. From 1950 to 1962, the welcoming of Soviet advisors and cadres further built up the local economy and administrative capacity in Xinjiang, creating a situation which allowed central Chinese authorities to completely extend control over the province and later expel Soviet influence after the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962. While such a loss of influence was a net loss for the Soviet Union, global imperatives of engaging in great power competition with the United States-led capitalist block against the Soviet-led socialist block in addition to growing hostility with China created a situation whereby there were not enough bureaucratic resources to try and renegotiate the status quo in Xinjiang. Xinjiang was finally stable and secure, though this time it was under complete Chinese control as opposed to a Sino-Soviet condominium.

The author believes that this process that resulted in the integration of Xinjiang into the modern Chinese state was a process that was effectively put on pause from the late nineteenth century until after the formation of the Soviet Union, after which it still proceeded in a sluggish manner of fits and starts. The author believes that this is due to the fact that after the signing of the Treaty of St. Petersburg in 1881, both the Russian and Qing empires became geopolitically distracted by events outside of Central Asia, thereby limiting the amount of bureaucratic resources that could have been brought to bear to resolve outstanding issues such as Xinjiang's integration into the Chinese state and population control. Thus, issues related to Xinjiang's governance and its interactions with the Central Asian region of the Russian Empire was essentially delegated to local bureaucrats such as Yang Zengxin. Progressively, more bureaucratic resources were brought to bear from both local actors in Xinjiang, the Soviet Union and China proper that led to the strengthening of local institutions, the extension of central Chinese control to the region, the further economic and institutional development of the region

and finally the expulsion of potentially disruptive portions of the population which could jeopardize the stability and security of Xinjiang under Chinese rule. The final two steps of this process were only achieved during a brief and unique window starting in the early fifties where Moscow and Beijing worked hand-in-hand to develop Xinjiang, effectively creating a more institutionalized governing apparatus that China was able to take full control of in 1962, though the events which led to this incident were both structurally influenced and the result of spontaneous local unrest.

To close, this thesis demonstrates that two traditional Eurasian land empires, China and Russia and their successor states, while in some ways structurally at loggerheads also simultaneously desired stability and security across their historic frontier regions, areas which until recent decades escaped the administrative reach of each metropole. Due to shared desires for the extension of administrative control and the accompanying stability and security, both powers worked together at both the local and national levels to ensure the integration of Xinjiang into the modern Chinese state. Thus, the final Eurasian frontier had been domesticated by 1962.

## Reference Material

### Archival Collections:

Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei.

Wilson Center Digital Archive

### Non-Archival Sources:

Bai, Yunzeng 白运增. “Yang Zengxin yu baie canbing cuanrao Xinjiang” 杨增新与白俄残兵窜扰新疆 [Yang Zengxin and White Russian Remnants’ Intrusion into Xinjiang]. Master’s thesis.

Minzu University of China, 2011.

Benson, Linda. *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*. M. E. Sharpe, 1990.

Brophy, David. “A Tatar Turkist in Chinese Turkistan: Nushirvan Yavshef’s travels in Xinjiang, 1914-1917.” *Studies in Travel Writing* 18, no.4 (2014): 345-356.

Brophy, David. *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*. Harvard University Press, 2016. Kindle.

Brophy, David, ed., Leonella Liu, Chris McDowell and Anna Yalan Liu, trans. *A Decade in Sino-Soviet Diplomacy: The Diaries of Liu Zerong, 1941-1949*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

Cao Peng and Tan Jing-xia 曹鹏, 谭婧霞. “Lun Yang Zengxin zhi zhijiang linian” 论杨增新之治疆理念 [On Yang Zengxin’s Idea of Ruling Xinjiang]. *Shihezi daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 石河子大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 33, no. 5 (October 2019): 100-104.

Chen, Ziyu 陈子煜. “‘Kuojun’ yu ‘ruobing’: Yang Zengxin zai Xinjiang de zhengjun cuoshi zhi kaocha” “扩军”与“弱兵”：杨增新在新疆的整军措施之考察 [“Expanding Army” and

- “Weakening Army”: An Investigation of Yang Zengxin’s Army Consolidation Measures in Xinjiang]. *Wenshan xueyuan xuebao* 文山学院学报 36, no. 3 (June 2023): 26-32.
- Chokobaeva, Aminat, Chloé Drieu and Alexander Morrison, eds. *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916, A collapsing empire in the age of war and revolution*. Manchester University Press, 2020.
- Clarke, Michael. “The Problematic Progress of ‘Integration’ in the Chinese State’s Approach to Xinjiang, 1759-2005.” *Asian Ethnicity* 8, no. 3 (2007): 261-289.
- Duan, Jinsheng 段金生. “Lun Yang Zengxin yu Xin, Yi yihe” 论杨增新与新、伊议和 [Study on Yang Zengxin and the Negotiation between Xinjiang and Yili]. *Xibei minzu luncong* 西北民族论丛 17, no. 1 (2018): 252-269, 395.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*. of *Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Forbes, Andrew D. W. *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A political history of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Fu, Yang 伏阳. “Yang Zengxin zhixin shiqi diyu “shuangfan” sixiang yanjiu” 杨增新治新时期抵御“双泛”思想研究 [On Yang Zengxin’s prevention of the separatist thoughts of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism in his governance of Xinjiang]. *Yunnan minzu daxue xuebao (zhexue zhehui kexue ban)* 云南民族大学学报（哲学社会科学版） 33, no. 4 (July 2016): 27-31.
- Hammond, Kelly A. *China’s Muslims & Japan’s Empire: Centering Islam in World War II*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2020.
- Hao, Jianying and Yan Zhonglin 郝建英, 闫忠林. “Yang Zengxin yu Su’e (lian) de tongshang jiaoshe ji tedian” 杨增新与苏俄（联）的通商交涉及特点 [Yang Zengxin’s Trade

Negotiations with Russia (the Soviet Union) and Their Characteristics]. *Lantai shijie* 兰台世界, no. 6 (2024): 140-143.

Hasanli, Jamil. *Soviet Policy in Xinjiang: Stalin and the National Movement in Eastern Turkistan*. Lexington Books, 2021. Kindle.

He, Yong-ming 何永明. “Yang Zengxin shiqi Xinjiang zhengzhi yanjiusuo gouchen” 杨增新时期新疆政治研究所钩沉 [The Xinjiang Institute of Politics during the Period of Yang Zengxin’s Governance]. *Xinjiang daxue xuebao (zhexue · renwen shehui kexue ban)* 新疆大学学报(哲学·人文社会科学版) 47, no. 4 (July 2019): 68-73.

He, Yong-ming, Li Yu-lian and Zhao Shan-shan 何永明, 李玉莲 and 赵姗姗. “Yang Zengxin dui liumin wenti de renshi yu cuoshi” 杨增新对流民问题的认识与措施 [Yang Zengxin’s Understanding of the Migrant People]. *Xinjiang daxue xuebao (zhexue · renwen shehui kexue ban)* 新疆大学学报(哲学·人文社会科学版) 48, no. 6 (November 2020): 103-111.

Jacobs, Justin. “Empire Besieged: The Preservation of Chinese Rule in Xinjiang, 1884-1971.”

*eScholarship, University of California*, 2011.

[https://escholarship.org/content/qt2wz654cn/qt2wz654cn\\_noSplash\\_a19c53068c57538f1f39782cde80a76f.pdf](https://escholarship.org/content/qt2wz654cn/qt2wz654cn_noSplash_a19c53068c57538f1f39782cde80a76f.pdf).

Jacobs, Justin M. *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State*. University of Washington Press, 2016. Kindle.

Kokaisl, Petr. “State-building in the Soviet Union and the idea of the Uyghurs in Central Asia.” *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 4 (2020): 709-725.

Kraus, Charles. “Creating a Soviet “Semi-Colony”? Sino-Soviet Cooperation and its Demise in Xinjiang, 1950-1955. *The Chinese Historical Review* 17, no. 2 (2012): 129-165.

- Kraus, Charles. "Laying Blame for Fight and Flight: Sino-Soviet Relations and the "Yi-Ta" Incident in Xinjiang, 1962." *The China Quarterly*, no. 238 (June 2019): 504-523.
- Li, Danhui. "Xinjiang Sulian qiaomin wenti de lishi kaocha (1945-1965)" 新疆苏联侨民问题的历史考察 (1945-1965) [A Historical Review of the Issue of Soviet Nationals in Xinjiang: 1945-1965]. *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究 3 (2003): 80-99, 191.
- Lin, Hsiao-Ting. "War, Leadership and Ethnopolitics: Chiang Kai-shek and China's Frontiers, 1941-1945." *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 59 (2009): 201-217.
- Ling, Xingzhen 凌兴珍. "'Yumin' yihuo 'kaiminzhì' - Minguo shouren xinjiangshengzhang jian dujun Yangzengxin jiaoyusixiang yu shijian pingshu" "愚民"抑或"开民智"? — 民国首任新疆省长兼督军杨增新教育思想与实践述评 ["Keeping the People Ignorant" or "Enlightening the People"? - A Critical Review of the Educational Thoughts and Practices of Yang Zengxin, the First Governor-General of Xinjiang in the Republic of China. *Sichuan shifandaxue xuebao* (*shehui kexue ban*) 四川师范大学学报(社会科学版) 51, no. 6 (November 2024): 161-188, 204.
- Lipman, Johnathan N. *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Studies on Ethnic Groups in China. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997. Kindle.
- Liu, Guojun 刘国俊. "Lun Minguo chunian Yang Zengxin duiyu rujing keerkezi nanmin de yingdui cuoshi" 论民国初年杨增新对于入境克尔克孜难民的应对措施 [On Yang Zengxin's Countermeasures to the Entry of Kirgiz Refugees in the Early Years of the Republic of China]. *Zhongzhou daxue xuebao* 中州大学学报 38, no. 4 (August 2021): 61-66.
- Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

- Millward, James A. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. Revised and Updated Edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. Kindle.
- Nyman, Erik-Lars. “Sinkiang 1934-1944: Dark decade for a pivotal puppet.” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 32, no. 1 (1991): 97-105.
- Perdue, Peter C. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Qi, Mingming 祁明明. “Yang Zengxin zhuzheng shiqi weihu Xinjiang yishixingtai lingyu anquan yanjiu” 杨增新主政新疆时期维护新疆意识形态领域安全研究 [A study on the maintenance of Xinjiang’s ideological Field Security during Yang Zengxin’s Administration]. Master’s thesis. Xinjiang Normal University, 2019.
- Schluessel, Eric. *Land of Strangers: The Civilizing Project in Qing Central Asia*. Columbia University Press, 2020.
- Schluessel, Eric T. “History, identity, and mother-tongue education in Xinjiang.” *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 4 (2009): 383-402.
- Share, Michael. “The Russian Civil War in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang), 1918-1921: A Little Known and Explored Front.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 3 (May 2010): 389-420.
- Share, Michael B. “The Great Game Revisited: Three Empires Collide in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang).” *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 7 (September 2015): 1102-1129.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09668136.2015.1067075?needAccess=true>.
- Shen, Zhihua eds. 沈志华. “ZhongSu guanxi shigang: 1917-1991nian Zhong-Su guanxi ruogan wenti zai tantao” 中苏关系史纲：1917-1991年中苏关系若干问题在探讨 [Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations (Upper and Lower Volumes)]. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2016.

- Shi, Zhe 师哲 and Li Haiwen 李海文. “Zai lishi juren shenbian: Shi Zhe huiyilu (zuixin xengdingben)” 在历史巨人身边：师哲回忆录（最新增订版） [The Memoirs of Shi Zhe (Newest Expanded Edition)]. Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2015.
- Tian, Qingfeng 田庆锋. “Xinjiang diqu de Zhongsu guanxi yu Xinjiang de jindaihua (1917-1949)” 新疆地区的中苏关系与新疆的近代化 (1917-1949) [The Sino-Soviet Relationship in the Xinjiang Region and Xinjiang’s Modernization (1917-1949)]. *Kashi shifanxueyuan xuebao* 喀什师范学院学报 23, no. 2 (March 2002): 35-39.
- Wang, David. “The Xinjiang question of the 1940s: the story behind the Sino-Soviet treaty of August 1945.” *Asian Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (1997): 83-105.
- Wang, Ke 王柯. *Dongtujuesitan duli yundong: 1930 niandai zhi 1940 niandai* 东突厥斯坦独立运动：1930年代至1940年代 [East Turkestan Independence Movement: 1930s to 1940s]. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2013.
- Whiting, Alan S. and General Sheng Shih-ts’ai. *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot?* Michigan State University Press, 1958.
- Wu, Fuhuan 吴福环. “Jin Shuren jiezhang Xinjiang junzheng quanli de quzhe guocheng” 金树仁接掌新疆军政权力的曲折过程 [The Tortuous Process of Jin Shuren Taking Control over Xinjiang’s Military and Political Affairs]. *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究, no. 4 (2022): 44-52.
- Xie, Chengguo 谢承国. “Lun Yang Zengxin dui Suezhongya zhengce de yanbian” 论杨增新对苏俄中亚政策的演变 [On the Evolution of Yang Zengxin’s Policies towards Russia and Soviet Central Asia]. *Xinjiang shifandaxue xuebao (zhe xue shehui kexue ban)* 新疆师范大学社会科学学报 (哲学社会科学版) 23, no. 3 (July 2002): 59-64.

Yan, Mingfu 阎明复. “Yan Mingfu hui yi lu (er)” 阎明复回忆录（二） [The Memoirs of Yan Mingfu (Volume 2)]. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2023.

Yao, Yong. ““YiTa shijian” yu Xinjiang bingtuan bianjing tuanchang de chuangjian” “伊塔事件”与新疆兵团边境团场的创建 [“Yili-Tacheng Incident” and the Establishment of Border Regiments of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps]. *Xinjiang daxue xuebao* 新疆大学学报 vol. 50, no. 6 (Nov. 2022): 83-91.

Zhang, Zhizhong. *Zhang Zhizhong huiyili* [The Memoirs of Zhang Zhizhong]. Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2014.

Zhao, Dawang 赵大旺. “Baie Aliankuofu canbu anzhi Dunhuang shimo” 白俄阿连阔夫残部安置敦煌始末 [The Whole Story of White Russian Annenkov’s Defeated Troops’ Settlement in Dunhuang]. *Silu wenming* 丝路文明 6, no. 1 (November 2021): 227-243.

