

# The Formation of Modern Uyghur Historiography and Competing Perspectives toward Uyghur History

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## **ABSTRACT**

Uyghur historiography has been subject to widely disparate interpretations in the past century. Turko-Islamic, Russian-European, and Chinese influences have all competed for primacy in understanding the ethnogenesis of Uyghurs. This article focuses on the key issues in this debate, its politicization, and the roles played by Uyghur and Chinese historians in shaping it. The author argues that the political ideologies underpinning it should not diminish its value for Uyghur historiography and the context in which these histories has been written (Eds.).

*Keywords* • Uyghur Historiography • Ethnogenesis • Xinjiang • Turko-Islamic Civilization

## **Introduction**

Just as Uyghur regions have been a battleground for competing powers, twentieth-century Uyghur historiography has been the site of an ideological battle between the competing nationalist projects of the Uyghurs and the Chinese state. This article outlines the factors that influenced Uyghur historiography in the last century and discusses Uyghur and Chinese perspectives toward the history of Xinjiang (East Turkistan) and the Uyghur people. The first half of the article highlights the roles of Turco-Islamic historiographical traditions, Soviet methodologies, and Chinese research practices in the writing of Uyghur history. The latter half of the article contrasts the views of Uyghur historians and key figures in twentieth-century Uyghur nationalist movements, with those of Han Chinese scholars and Chinese government-generated versions of Uyghur history. The article uses 1949 as a dividing point for the two phases of twentieth-century Uyghur historiography. Because Uyghur modern historiography was produced in

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both Soviet Central Asia<sup>1</sup> and East Turkistan, this article takes the scholarship of Uyghurs in both regions as representative of Uyghur perspectives of Uyghur history.

### Influences in the Development of Uyghur Historiography

Turco-Islamic, Russian-European, and Chinese historical research methods, along with the political and ideological viewpoints attached to these methods, influenced historiography among the Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples in Central Asia. These influences have continued to the present day to play important roles in the formation and development of Uyghur historiography.

#### *Turco-Islamic Influence*

Classical Uyghur historiography was closely tied to the Central Asian Turco-Islamic traditions of recording and understanding history. This classical Uyghur mode of interpreting history has continued through modern times and has laid the foundation for Uyghur historiography in present day. The Uyghur historian Molla Musa Sayrami (1836 - 1917), whose history book *Tarikhi Hamidi* was a cornerstone of modern Uyghur historiography, used the form of the traditional Islamic chronicle in his own works.

Geographic, ethnic and cultural connections between East Turkistan and other parts of the Turco-Islamic world played an important role in the development of Uyghur cultural and socio-political life. Starting with the advent of Jedidism, Uyghurs were exposed to the development of new forms of education and culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Uyghur capitalists invited Turkish and Tatar intellectuals to teach at their new schools, which became training grounds for increasing numbers of Uyghur intellectuals. During the same period, many Uyghur intellectuals who had studied in Turkey, India, and Egypt returned to their homeland to open schools and publishing houses in order to educate other Uyghurs with the advanced knowledge and nationalism that they had learned abroad.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, books, journals and papers about

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the direct influence of Russian and European culture, modern Uyghur historiography appeared in Soviet Central Asia earlier than in Xinjiang. Educational opportunities available to Uyghurs living in Central Asia spurred the development of Uyghur studies and produced numerous Uyghur scholars of history, literature, and linguistics.

<sup>2</sup> Nabijan Tursun, "The Formation of Uyghur Nationalism and Uyghur Identity." (Unpublished article on file with author). See; also Nabijan Tursun, *Uyghur Reader* (Hyattsville, MD: Dunwoody Press, 2007), pp. 120-121. Influential intellectuals during this period include Mesud Sebiri (1887-1952), Qutluq Shewqi (1876-1937), Abduqadir Damolla Warisi (? -1924), Tursun Ependi (1896-1937), Memet Eli Tewpiq (1901-1937), Abduxaliq Uyghur (1896-1933), Sabit Abdulbaqi Damolla (1883-1941), and Mexsut Muhiti(1885-1933).

Turkic, Islamic, and world history were brought to Xinjiang from cities such as Istanbul, Kabul, Cairo, Kazan, and Tashkent. These outside influences from elsewhere in the Islamic world reinforced traditional Uyghur modes of historiography rooted in the Turco-Islamic tradition.

This historiographical tradition served to counter Russian influences on the ethnic identity of the Uyghurs. Leading Uyghur historians in 1940s, including Muhemmed Imin Bughra (1901-1965), Polat Qadiri (-1974), and Abdul'eziz Chinggizkhan (1912-1952) opposed the Soviet approach of separating the Uyghurs from other Turkic people and viewing them as an independent ethnic group with a unique history and culture. In contrast to Russian scholars, they unanimously referred to all the people living in Central Asia as Turks.

During this period, Muhemmed Imin Bughra wrote the first general history of East Turkistan. His *History of East Turkistan* adopted the viewpoints of earlier scholars writing in the Turco-Islamic tradition but also adapted it to suit the specific conditions within Xinjiang. He was the first Uyghur historian versed in the science of archeology and integrated Aurel Stein's archeological findings into his works. His book covered the archeological heritage and political, social, and cultural development of the Uyghurs from the stone age until 1937. He described the revolutions that took place in the 1930s as national independence movements aimed at overthrowing Chinese rule. His viewpoint met with criticism from both the Chinese government and scholars well before Chinese communist rule was established in 1949.

#### *Russian-European Influence*

The socio-political and cultural changes that took place in Central Asia in the beginning of the twentieth Century also contributed to the formation of Uyghur modern historiography. Soviet Russia supported cultural and educational undertakings in Central Asia within a communist ideological frame after it established control in the region. Uyghur intellectuals, poets and scientists were trained in European-style schools in Tashkent and other Central Asian cities. Graduates of these institutions went on to do extensive research on the ancient, medieval and modern history of the Uyghurs. Such intellectuals included two political leaders of Uyghurs in Central Asia, Abdulla Rozibaqiyev (1897-1937) and Ismail Tahirov (?-1937); the first Uyghur professor at Tashkent Central Asia National University, Burhan Qasimov (? - 1937); historian Nezer Ghoja Abdusemetov (1887-1951); and linguist Latip Ensari (? - 1937). They studied Russian and Tatar scholars' earlier work on the Uyghurs and

published a range of articles and journals aimed at a Uyghur audience and focused on Uyghur history and other fields related to Uyghur studies.<sup>3</sup>

Russian influences on Uyghur national identity and historiography were especially salient during the period of the second East Turkistan Republic (ETR) (1944-1949), based in the districts of Ili, Tarbaghatay, and Altay.

During this period, the Soviet Union, which supported the ETR, established special political-military and propaganda organizations in Central Asia to help the liberation movement in Xinjiang province. These organizations published journals such as "*Qazaq Eli*" (Kazakh country) and "*Sherq Heqiqiti*" (East Justice) in the Uyghur language and sent them to the ETR and surrounding areas.<sup>4</sup> Both Uyghur and Russian scholars in Central Asia published works that pronounced the glorious history of the Uyghurs and advocated that as the natives of East Turkistan who developed their own great civilization the Uyghur should be liberated from Chinese control.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, Russian scholars such as Bernishtam, Baskakov, Nasilov, Yakubovsky, Malov, Najip, Sherbak, Bertilis, Borovkov, Tihonov and others made great strides in the study of Uyghur ethnopolitical and cultural history. The goal of the Russian scholars at this time was to promote a unique ethnic identity and history of the Uyghurs as opposed to a common Turkic history and Turkic identity. As Russian-influenced Uyghur nationalism took deep root and permeated all spheres of political and cultural life, terms such as "national independence," "national liberation," and "self determination" became an integral part of public discourse. Uyghur scholars followed suit with their own articles and works on Uyghur history that promoted a similar Uyghur nationalist agenda. At the same time, anti-Soviet Uyghur political leaders such as Mesud Sebiri Bayqozi, Muhemmed Imin Bughra, and Isa Yusuf Aliptekin countered this perspective by publishing books that

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<sup>3</sup> Representative works include the articles "*Kembegheller Awazi*" [Voice of the Poor] (1921) and "*Qutulush*" [Being Free] (1927) and the journals "*Yash Uyghur*" [Young Uyghurs] (1922-1923), and "*Birinchi Chamdam*" [First Step] (1924).

<sup>4</sup> A.B. Barmin *Sinziyan v Sovetsko-Kitajskix Otnosheniyax 1941-1949gg* [Xinjiang in Sino-Soviet Relations during 1941-1949] (Barnaul, 1998), pp.71-72; *Obuxov V Sxvatka shesti Imperij .Bitva za Sinziyana* [Fights of Six Empire. Battle for Xinjiang] (Moscow: Veche press, 2007), p. 301; Li Sheng, *Zhongguo Shinjang Lishi Yu Fazhan* [History and Development of Xinjiang, China] (Urumchi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), p. 187; James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," in Frederick Starr, Ed., *Xinjiang ; China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> A.N. Bernshtam "*Problemy Istorii Vostochnogo Turkestana*" [Problems in the History of East Turkistan] no..2, (VOI, 1949), p. 71; See also A.N. Bernshtam, *Uyghur Xelqining Qedimki we Ottura Esirler Tarixining Qissiliri* [History of the Uyghurs in Ancient Times and Middle Ages], (Alma-Ata, 1951), pp. 1-3.

argued for a common Turkic identity, a view which Soviet scholars criticized as Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Chinese Influence*

Chinese scholars' influence on Uyghur historiography started after 1949. From 1949 to 1960, the period in which the communist Chinese government established and consolidated its control of Xinjiang, the new political regime banned the scholarship of Uyghur intellectuals, especially historical works published before 1949, because they were seen as incompatible with the state's ideological bases for control of the region.

Although the People's Republic of China government implemented its own form of "territorial autonomy" rather than Soviet-style autonomous republics, Chinese communists initially drew on aspects of Soviet models of national identity in order to promote a form of Uyghur national identity deemed compatible with PRC goals and to develop further scholarship on the Uyghurs. The government sent Uyghurs to study in the Soviet Union until 1959, when Sino-Russian relations worsened and as the Chinese government determined that the Uyghurs' aspirations for independent statehood were reinforced by Soviet influences.

Chinese scholars undertook their own research on the Uyghurs during the 1950s, publishing works on Uyghur history, some of which were translated into Uyghur, that included an emphasis on Xinjiang's historical ties with China. The goal of Chinese historical studies in this early period was to create and strengthen a distinct pro-China Uyghur ethnic and historical identity to counter a Turkic nationalist sentiments.

Uyghur studies, like other fields of scholarship, came to a standstill during the Cultural Revolution and resumed in 1978. The post-Cultural Revolution period saw new publications in Uyghur literature, history, and culture, and the establishment of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences. Numerous works by Chinese scholars were translated into Uyghur, ushering in a new stage of Chinese influence on Uyghur historiography. At the same time, both older and new generations of Uyghur scholars began to conduct their own research on Uyghur history, literature, and language. Such Uyghur scholars active in the 1980s and 1990s included T. Almas, A. Ötkür, I. Mutii, H. Yaqub, A. Muhammad

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<sup>6</sup> Bernshtam A., *Uyghur Xelqining Qedimki we Ottura Esirler Tarixining Qissiliri*, p. 1-2. According to Isa Yüsuf Aliptekin, the Soviet government established an Uyghur radio program in Tashkent and broadcasted news and various articles accusing him and others of Panturkism, Isa Yüsuf Aliptekin, *Esir Dogu Turkistan Icin* (Istanbul, 1985), p.509-510. For more information in Isa Yüsuf Aliptekin and his contemporaries, see Linda Benson, "Uyghur Politicians of the 1940s: Mehmet Emin Bugra, Isa Yusuf Aliptekin and Mesud Sebri" *Central Asia Survey* 10, 4 (1991), pp. 87-114.

Imin , I. Tursun, M. Osmanov, E.Ziyayi, H. Nurhaji, A. Hoja, I.Yusup, T. Ayup, D.Kambari, K. Barat, K.Weli, M. Zeyidi and Kyrgyz scholar A. Baytur.

Chinese and Uyghur historians took divergent approaches to Uyghur studies. Although forums for interaction between the two communities increased, Uyghurs were distrustful of Chinese scholarship due to the tight bonds between Chinese academic spheres and the Chinese state. In contrast to state-supported versions of Uyghur history, many Uyghur scholars instead promoted approaches to Uyghur history that underscored the Uyghurs' unique historical development and independence from Chinese ruling powers. Turgun Almas, who published a general history titled *The Uyghurs* in 1989, was the first Uyghur scholar to systematize this approach. The Chinese government, cognizant of the book's position as a landmark of modern nationalist Uyghur historiography, banned the book, along with Almas's *The Ancient Uyghur Literature* and *A Concise History of the Huns*, in an effort to dislocate Uyghur nationalism from its ideological underpinnings. In the 1990s, following the emergence of independent republics in Central Asia, the Chinese government intensified its efforts to co-opt the field of Uyghur studies and employ scholars to write versions of history to meet state goals.

### **Conflicting Perspectives on Key Issues in Uyghur Historiography**

Chinese communist rule over Xinjiang starting in 1949 ushered in a new phase in the ideological battle over the study of Uyghur history. The Chinese state sought to advance scholarship that legitimized its control of Xinjiang and supported the notion of a unified China. The state both propagated its own historical interpretations and supported scholars working in this vein. Chinese viewpoints were neither static nor uniform during this period, but on the whole could be used to support the political goals of the state. The state highlighted different versions of history as the political situation merited it, at times casting aside one historical interpretation to emphasize another version of history that best met its current political needs. This excessive politicization of Chinese historical studies, strengthened Uyghur nationalist historians' views toward the history of the Uyghurs as a separate people with distinct. The competing ideologies of Chinese and Uyghur historians crystallized around six key issues.

#### *The Ethnic Origin of the Uyghurs*

The ethnic origin of the Uyghurs has been one of the most contested points among Uyghur and Chinese scholars, as well as among other scholars of Uyghur history. While Chinese scholars working since the

Republican Period have set forth a range of viewpoints on the ethno genesis of the Uyghurs, a number of scholars active since 1949, such as Feng Jiasheng, Chen Suluo, Lu Zhixiao, and Su Beihai have drawn on Chinese historical sources to identify the Turkic tribe Dingling as the first ancestors of the Uyghurs.<sup>7</sup> Other scholars have used Chinese sources to identify different starting points for Uyghur history. Chinese scholar Duan Lianqin pushed this back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century B.C, giving the Uyghurs 3800-3900 years of history.<sup>8</sup> Duan Lianqin identified the Uyghurs' ethnic origins in the Guyfang, Dili, Dingling, Gaoche, Tiele, Huihe, Huihu, and other ancient ethnic groups recorded by Chinese historians, arguing that they are all ancestors of the modern Uyghurs.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the Uyghur politician and historian Muhemmed Imin Bughra wrote in his book *A History of East Turkistan* that Turks have a 9000-year history.<sup>10</sup> The historian Turgun Almas, active in the 1980s and 1990s, relied on findings from mummies excavated from the Tarim basin to conclude that Uyghurs have over 6400 years of history.<sup>11</sup> By using the information recorded in ancient Chinese histories, Uyghur scholars also have pointed out that the Huns (Xiongnu) are the ancestors of Uyghurs and describe the Hun Empire as the most important part of ancient Uyghur history.<sup>12</sup> Chinese historians, who considered the Huns as an ancient Chinese group, contested this viewpoint. Uyghur scholars also supported the idea of the Eftalits (White Huns) and Hun tribes who immigrated to Europe as their ethnic kin.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Uyghurs as the Original Inhabitants of Xinjiang*

The question of who were the original inhabitants of Xinjiang has engendered a fierce debate between Uyghur and Chinese scholars. Politically motivated interpretations by Chinese historians separate the Uyghurs' ethnic origins from present-day Xinjiang and

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<sup>7</sup> Feng Jiasheng, Mu Guangwen, Cheng Suluo. *Weiwuer Shiliao Jianbian* [Short Collections of Uyghur Historical Materials] (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1956 and 1981), volume 1, pp.3-7; Liu Zhixiao, *Uyghur Tarixi* [Uyghur History] (1988), volume 1, p. 9; Su Beihai, "Uyghurlarning Etnik Menbesi Toghrisida Yéngi Izdinish" [New Research on the Ethno genesis of the Uyghurs] *Shinjang Ijtimaiy Penler Tetqiqati*, 11 (1981).

<sup>8</sup> Duan Lianqin, *Dingling Gaoche yu Telie* [Dingling, Gaoche and Telie] (Shanghai, 1991), p. 2, 411.

<sup>9</sup> Nabijan Tursun, *Voprosy Politicheskoy Istorii Uygurov V Kitajskoj Istorigrafii* [The Issue of the Political history of the Uyghurs in Chinese Historiography] (Moscow, 1998), p.51-53; Lianqin, *Dingling Gaoche yu Telie*, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Muhemmed Imin Bughra. *Sherqiy Türkistan Tarixi* [East Turkistan History] (Istanbul, 1998), pp. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> T. Almas, *Uyghury a* (Russian translation) (Almaty: Idatelskij Dom "Mir", 1989 (2008)), p. 6-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 52-103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 52-100.

connect them to Mongolia, asserting that Uyghur tribes became the main social and political force in Xinjiang only starting from the ninth century. This group of scholars claim that Han Chinese were the original inhabitants of Xinjiang and that Uyghurs migrated to the region from Mongolia after the mid-ninth century<sup>14</sup>. Recently, the state-controlled Chinese press in Xinjiang carried out a propaganda campaign to advance this view.

The Chinese central government's official White Paper on Xinjiang also promotes this claim, concluding, "In 840, large numbers of Uighurs (an ancient name for modern Uyghurs) entered Xinjiang. The Uighur, originally called Ouigour, sprang from the ancient tribe Teli."<sup>15</sup> It also asserts:

"The Xiongnu entered Xinjiang mainly around 176 B.C. The Han was one of the earliest peoples to settle in Xinjiang. In 101 B.C., the Han empire began to station garrison troops to open up wasteland for cultivation of farm crops in Luntai (Bügür), Quli and some other places. Later, it sent troops to all other parts of Xinjiang for the same purpose. All the garrison reclamation points became the early settlements of the Han people after they entered Xinjiang. Since the Western Regions Frontier Command was established in 60 B.C., the inflow of the Han people to Xinjiang, including officials, soldiers and merchants, had never stopped."<sup>16</sup>

This government-sponsored view has been widely propagated in scientific and popular arenas, though some Chinese historians disputed it in the 1980s. Chinese scholars such as Gu Bao<sup>17</sup>, and Su Beihai<sup>18</sup> pointed out early that Uyghur ancestors such as the Dinglings lived in Xinjiang even before the common era. Gu Bao wrote that the bulk of the Uyghur population already lived in Xinjiang before the arrival of Uyghur tribes from Mongolia.<sup>19</sup> On the whole, however, most Chinese scholars follow the government-sanctioned theory; some Chinese historians such as Ge Jianxiong who initially supported the government's version, later rejected it.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Wang Zhilai, "Atalmish Sherqiy Türkistan Toghrisida" [About So-called East Turkistan] *Tarix Bétini Waraqlighanda*. (Shinjang Xelq neshriyati, 2001), pp. 424-426.

<sup>15</sup> Chinese government white paper, "History and Development of Xinjiang", 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Gu Bao, "Xinjiang Weiwuerzu Zuyuan Xintan" [New Research on the Ethnogenesis of the Uyghurs], *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue* 6 (1980).

<sup>18</sup> Su Beihai, "Uyghurlarning étnik Menbesi Heqqide Yéngi Izdinish" [New Research on the Ethnic Origin of the Uyghurs] *Shinjang Ijtimaiy Penler Tetqiqati* 11 (1981).

<sup>19</sup> Bao, "Xinjiang Weiwuerzu Zuyuan Xintan" [New Research on the Ethnogenesis of the Uyghurs].

<sup>20</sup> Ge Jianxiong, "How Big was Ancient China?" Available via: <<http://granitestudio.blogspot.com/2007/02/chinese-historian-disputes-claim-that.html>> (October 15 2008).



Uyghur historians' views sharply differ from those of their Chinese counterparts. According to Uyghur historians, including Muhemmed Imin Bughra and Turghun Almas, Xinjiang has always been the Uyghur homeland, and Uyghur-Turkic tribes were the region's original inhabitants. This rejection of the state-sanctioned history not only intensified the conflict between Uyghur scholars and Chinese scholars, but also inspired strong resentment among Uyghur people.

*The Question of Whether Xinjiang Has Been a Part of China Since Ancient Times*

After the political changes in Central Asia in the 1990s and the growth of the Uyghur self-determination movement within the Uyghur diaspora, the Chinese government and state-affiliated scholars changed the strategy of their propaganda from an emphasis on the Han as the original inhabitants of Xinjiang to a focus on Xinjiang as an inseparable part of China since ancient times (*Xinjiang zigu yilai jiushi Zhongguo bu ke fengede yibufen*). The advent of this propaganda campaign gave politicians free license to expound on Uyghur history. When PRC President Jiang Zemin visited Xinjiang in 1998, he gave a speech that specially mentioned the historical connections between Xinjiang and Chinese ruling powers, and he called on the local Xinjiang government to protect the unity of China and to fight against the separatist movement. Speaking of Xinjiang's past, he stated:<sup>21</sup>

Xinjiang has been a part of our homeland since ancient times. In ancient times, Xinjiang and its surrounding regions were together known as the Western Regions. As far back as 101 B.C.E., the Western Han set up local officials in the Western Regions and administered military-agricultural colonies. In 60 B.C.E., the Western Han set up the Western Regions Frontier Command and provided a unified administration of the Western Regions' military and political affairs. This indicates that Xinjiang was already an official part of our country from that time. Since the Han Dynasty, and during the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties in particular, [all dynasties] have attached extreme importance to and carried out the administration of the Western Regions. After the Opium War, the imperialist powers engaged in widespread occupation of our land and plundered our territory, and English and Russian powers seized the opportunity to invade the Xinjiang region. After resisting the outside forces and recovering Xinjiang, the Qing Dynasty government established Xinjiang Province in 1884.

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<sup>21</sup> Quotes from speech by Jiang Zemin taken from the book titled *Zhongguo Lidai Zhongyang Wangchao Zhili Xinjiang Zhengce Yanjiu* [Research on the Policy of Historical Chinese Central Dynasties toward Xinjiang], Urumchi, Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2004, p. 1.

This speech of Jiang Zemin's embodied the political orientation of the research on Xinjiang and Uyghur history to which Chinese and Uyghur historians were forced to adhere. Scholars who deviated from this contemporary Sino-centric viewpoint and opposed this politicized historical standard fixed by the Chinese government, were dealt with using political or legal standards rather than academic ones.

Following this political standard, Chinese scholars asserted that "separatists" distorted history to assert their claims over Xinjiang and attempt to split the region from China. In the words of scholar Wang Zhilai, "Some people keep harping on about Pan-Turkism...going around saying they want to establish an independent 'East Turkistan.' Isn't a suitable territory needed to establish an independent country? Where is this territory? Is it in Xinjiang? But isn't Xinjiang China's? Xinjiang has belonged to China for more than two thousand years."<sup>22</sup>

Other scholars reinforced this viewpoint. The book *Zhongguo Lidai Zhongyang Wangchao Zhili Xinjiang Zhengce Yanjiu* (Research on the Policy of the Historical Chinese Central Dynasties toward Xinjiang) was emblematic of this government-generated position. Authors argued that Chinese ruling powers administered Xinjiang for the region's two thousand year history.

#### *Uyghurs' Role in Xinjiang*

According to Uyghur scholars, Uyghurs were the dominant players in Xinjiang's political, economic, and cultural life, and Chinese influence and control over politics was present only after 1759 and 1884.<sup>23</sup> Chinese scholars, in contrast, argued that Chinese were important actors in Xinjiang's history well before the eighteenth century, and after the Qing dynasty took control, Chinese exerted not only political but cultural control over the region.

#### *The Independence of Uyghur States*

The greatest ideological battle between Uyghur scholars and Chinese scholars centers around the issue of the independence of Uyghur states prior to PRC control. Chinese historians have insisted that Uyghurs never established independent states. Cheng Suluo argued that Uyghurs never established long-term dynasties in the history<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Wang Zhilai. 2001, p. 424-427.

<sup>23</sup> M. Bughra, *Sherqiy Türkistan Tarixi*, 1998. A. Khojayev, *Cinskaya Imperia, Jungaria I Vostochniy Turkestan* (Ching Empire, Junggaria, and East Turkistan). Moscow: 1990.. Dawut Issiyev, *Yette Sheher Döli* (Seven-City State). Alma-Ata, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Cheng Suluo. "Zhong wai Youguan Weiwuerzu Shi Yanjiu" [Uyghur Historical Studies in China and Abroad]. *Tang Song Huihu Shi Lunwenji*. 1993.p.1 (Renmin chubanshe), and See, his work; "Huihede Xinqi Jiqi he Tang Chaode Guanxi" [Rising of Uyghur and Relations with Tang Dynasty]. *Lishi Jiao xue*. 1979. No7. See, p.366.

Chinese historians have argued that the political entities Uyghurs administered were just local governing entities under the control of the central dynasties and that they did not enjoy full independence. In doing so, they have portrayed Uyghur history as a mere component of Chinese history<sup>25</sup>. This conclusion is a common viewpoint within modern Chinese historiography and agreed upon by almost all Chinese scholars. It serves to reinforce the PRC's claims to Xinjiang by asserting an unbroken chain of direct control over the region. The Chinese government has also used this approach as a shield to thwart a perceived rising nationalist sentiment among the Uyghurs.

In contrast to the Chinese viewpoint, the Uyghur historian Turghun Almas, among others, argued that Uyghurs had a long tradition of nation-building and that the states established by them were fully independent. He further argued that those states founded by Uyghurs established diplomatic and commercial relations with China and other countries in their capacity as independent states. He also stated that by establishing those nations and creating distinct civilizations, the Uyghurs and their ethnic brothers made enormous contributions to the development of humanity and world civilization.<sup>26</sup> Turghun Almas's theories intensified the battle over the independence of Uyghur states. As the Chinese government grew uneasy about a perceived nationalist awakening among the Uyghurs in the 1980s, it launched a campaign against Turghun Almas, casting a heavily politicized shadow over the landscape of Uyghur historical studies. At the same time, as a significant number of Uyghur historians published new works in the 1980s and 1990s, they continued to put forth similar views on the independence of Uyghur states, drawing on historical materials in Turkish, Chinese, Russian and the Central Asian Turkic languages to support their scholarship..

#### *The Historical Relationship between Chinese and Uyghurs*

The issue of the historical relationship between Chinese and Uyghurs is one of the most critical and delicate issues for Chinese and Uyghur historians. Scholars have centered this debate around the nature of the diplomatic, political, military and economic ties between Uyghur and *Zhongyang Wangchao* (Central dynasties) in ancient and medieval times. Chinese scholars have stressed in their works that since ancient times, the rulers of non-Han ethnic groups, including the Uyghurs, had close relations with the *Zhongyang Wangchao* (Central dynasties) on the "Central Plains" (*Zhongyuan*) and sent envoys to express their submission

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<sup>25</sup> Gu Bao. "Weiwuerren'de Zuoze Weizao Lishi, Guchui Fenliezhuyi Sixiangde Shizhi" [Fabrication of History and the Character of Preaching Separatist Thought of Writer of "Uyghurs"] Fan Yisilanzhuyi Fantujuezhuyi Yangjiu Lunwenji, ed. Yang Faren. 1993, p.160-173.

<sup>26</sup> T. Almas, *Uyghurlar* [The Uyghurs], 1989, p. 3-4.

as well as pay tribute to the Chinese Emperor. They emphasized that rulers in China's interior established various local administrative units on the lands of non-Han ethnic groups. They also argued that these groups had close economic relations with the ethnic Han Chinese people and were influenced by Han culture. In addition, they claimed that the Karakhan and Gaochang Uyghur dynasties acknowledged that they were local governments under the jurisdiction of the Song dynasty and part of China<sup>27</sup>. This viewpoint served as another strategy for the Chinese government to legitimize its control over Xinjiang and promote state interests.

Uyghur historians, in contrast, have stressed the independent status of Uyghur states in their dealings with Chinese ruling powers. Turghun Almas, for example, argued that the Orkhun Uyghur State (646-845) forced the Tang Dynasty to sign agreements to protect the best interest of the Uyghurs.<sup>28</sup> He stressed that the Uyghur Kingdom was a sovereign nation and did not belong to Tang Dynasty politically or economically. On the contrary, the Tang Dynasty had to pay tribute and have the emperor's daughter marry Uyghur Khans in return for protection of their political needs. Turghun Almas also described the relationship between the Karakhan Dynasty (850-1212), Turpan Idikut Kingdom (850-1335), Kengsu (Ganzhou) Uyghur Kingdom and the Chinese state as a normal and equal political and economic relationship between sovereign nations. But, Chinese historiography denied those viewpoints.<sup>29</sup>

Those ideas advocated by Turgun Almas were also present in works by earlier Uyghur historians such as Muhammad Imin Bugra, Polat Qadiri<sup>30</sup> and the Soviet Uyghur historians such as Ershidin Hidayetov,<sup>31</sup> Malik Kabirov,<sup>32</sup> Meshur Roziyev<sup>33</sup>, Gegel Ishakov,<sup>34</sup> Davut Isiyev,<sup>35</sup> Aziz Narenbayev,<sup>36</sup> and Ablet Kamalov.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cheng Suluo . See, *Tang Song Huihu Shi Lunwenji*. 1993, p.366, p.399, p.398. See, Zhu Peimin, Yang Hong. *Zhongguo Gongchandang Yu Xinjiang Minzu Wenti* [Chinese Communist Party and Ethnic Issues of Xinjiang]. Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, Urumchi, 2004, p.5

<sup>28</sup> T. Almas, 1989 and 2008, p. 142-146.

<sup>29</sup> See, Lin Gan, *Tu jue shi* History of Turks]. Nei Menggu Renmin Chubanshe, Huhehote, 1988, p.188-200. Yang Shengmin, "Huihe Hanguo Yu Tangchaode Guanxi" "(Uyghur Khanate and Relations with Tang Dynasty ) Zizhi Tongjian Tuhue Huihe Shiliao Xiaozhu, Tianjin Guji Chubanshe, 1992, p.362-392; Gu Bao, "Weiwuerren'de Zuozhe Weizao Lishi, Guchui Fenliezhuyi Sixiangde Shizhi" [Fabrication of History and the Character of Preaching Separatist Thought of Writer of "Uyghurs"], 1993, p.166-168.

<sup>30</sup> Polat Qadiri, *Ölke tarixi* [History of the Province] (Urumchi: 1948).

<sup>31</sup> E. Hidayetov, "Uyghur Milli Azadliq Qozghilangliri" [Uyghur Uprisings for National Liberation] *Sherq Heqiqiti*, 1948, no. 2.

<sup>32</sup> M. Kabirov, *Ocherki istorii Uygurov Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* [History of Uyghurs in Soviet Kazakhstan] (Almaty: 1975).

<sup>33</sup> Mashur Ruziyev, *Vozrozhdeniye Uigurskii Narod* [The Reborn Uyghur People] 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Alma-Ata. 1982.

Turghan Almas's writings in particular, however, met with attack from the Chinese government. Although the Chinese government engaged in a wide scale campaign against his works and forced other Uyghur historians to condemn him, his works remained popular and widely read among Uyghurs.

## Conclusion

In the twentieth century, the field of Uyghur history was a platform for the competing aspirations of the Uyghur people and the Chinese state. As Uyghurs yearned to realize an independent state and the Chinese government strived to maintain a unified China, each group drew on competing visions of the Uyghur past to justify its present goals. To be sure, both Uyghur and Chinese historians in the twentieth century made important contributions to the study of Uyghur history and deepened overall knowledge of the subject. At the same time, the study of Uyghur history during this period was rooted in the political ideologies underpinning the respective aspirations of each group. Outside the sphere of scholarship produced by Chinese and Uyghur historians, scholars in western countries, Turkey, Japan, Russia and elsewhere contributed their own research on Uyghur history. Their works — a topic outside the scope of this paper — brought new perspectives to the study of Uyghur history away from the politicized debates raging between Chinese and Uyghur scholars. Nonetheless, Chinese and Uyghur scholars continued to play leading roles in the production of Uyghur scholarship, thus underscoring the importance of their debates to an understanding of Uyghur historiography.

In the struggle among Chinese and Uyghur scholars to define Uyghur history, Chinese viewpoints gained the upper hand, as the Chinese state used political means to suppress Uyghur historians whose interpretations of the Uyghur past deviated from accepted norms. In the heavily politicized environment of twenty-first century Xinjiang, Chinese perspectives continue to dominate, and the threat of repercussions against politically incorrect interpretations of history remains strong. A review of the historiography of the past century, then, serves as a stark reminder

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<sup>34</sup> G. Ishakov, *Etnograficheskie Izucheniye Uygurov Vostochnogo Turkestana Russkimi Puteshestvennikami Vtoroi Polovini XIX veka* (Ethnographic research on Uyghur of East Turkistan by Russian Travelers of the Second Half of the 19th Century), 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Isiev Dawut, *K Xarakteristike Admisitrativnoy Sistemi Ganzhouskogo Uygurskogo Kaganata (X-XI vekov)* [Character of the Administration System of the Uyghur Ganzhou Khanate], 1979. P.I. Kafarov, *I ego Vklad V otechestvennogo Vostokovedenie (K 100-letiu So Dnia Smerti)*, Moscow, Part 1.

<sup>36</sup> A. Narinbayev, *Iz Istorii Obshchestvennoj Mysli Drevnyx I Srednevekovyx Uygurov* [History of Uyghur Social Ideas in the Ancient and Medieval Period]. Bishkek, 1994.

<sup>37</sup> A. Kamalov, *Drevnie Uyguri* [Ancient Uyghurs]. Almaty, 2001.

of the importance of examining contemporary Uyghur historiography against a politicized backdrop of competing aspirations and conflicting ideologies.