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**CHINA
PROSPECTS FOR THE UIGHUR PEOPLE IN THE CHINESE
NATION-STATE HISTORY, CULTURAL SURVIVAL,
AND THE FUTURE**

By Dru C. Gladney

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E-mail: writenet@gn.apc.org**

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United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
CP 2500, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

E-mail: cdr@unhcr.ch
Web Site: <http://www.unhcr.org>

1. Introduction¹

In 1997, bombs exploded in a city park in Beijing on 13 May (killing one) and on two buses on 7 March (killing 2), as well as in the northwestern border city of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, on 25 February (killing 9), with over 30 other bombings last year and 6 in Tibet alone. Most of these are thought to have been related to demands by Muslim and Tibetan separatists. Eight members of the Uighur Muslim minority were executed on 29 May 1997 for alleged bombings in northwest China, with hundreds arrested on suspicion of taking part in ethnic riots and engaging in separatist activities. Though sporadically reported since the early 1980s, such incidents have been increasingly common since 1997 and are documented in a recent scathing report of Chinese government policy in the region by Amnesty International.² A very recent report in the Wall Street Journal of the arrest on 11 August 1999 of Rebiya Kadir, a well known Uighur business woman, during a visit by the United States Congressional Research Service delegation to the region, indicates China's random arrests have not diminished since the report, nor is China concerned with Western criticism.³

Despite on-going tensions and frequent reports of isolated terrorist acts, there has been no evidence that any of these actions have been aimed at disrupting the economic development of the region. Most confirmed incidents have been directed against Han Chinese security forces, recent Han Chinese émigrés to the region, and even Uighur Muslims perceived to be too closely collaborating with the Chinese Government. Most analysts agree that China is not vulnerable to the same ethnic separatism that split the former Soviet Union. But few doubt that should China fall apart, it would divide, like the USSR, along centuries old ethnic, linguistic, regional, and cultural fault lines.⁴ If China did fall apart, Xinjiang would split in a way that, according to Anwar Yusuf, President of the Eastern Turkistan National Freedom Center in Washington DC, "would make Kosovo look like a birthday party". It should be noted that due to this fear of widespread civil disorder, Mr. Yusuf indicated that the Eastern Turkistan National Freedom Center did not support a free and independent Xinjiang.⁵ On 4 June 1999 Mr. Yusuf met with President Clinton to press for fuller support for the Uighur cause.⁶

¹ Dru C. Gladney is a cultural anthropologist, Professor of Asian Studies and Anthropology at the University of Hawaii and Senior Research Fellow at the East-West Center but currently serving as Dean of Academics at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu. The present paper has been written in a personal capacity. Further background material and analysis relevant to the subject of the current paper can be found in the author's *Ethnic Identity in China* (Fort Worth: Harcourt-Brace, 1998), *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, editor), and *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic of China*, 2 ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996)

² Amnesty International, *Peoples Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* (London, 21 April 1999)

³ *Wall Street Journal*, Ian Johnson, "China Arrests Noted Businesswoman in Crackdown in Muslim Region", 18 August 1999

⁴ Dru C. Gladney, "China's Ethnic Reawakening", *Asia Pacific Issues*, No. 18 (1995), pp. 1-8

⁵ Anwar Yusuf, President of the Eastern Turkistan National Freedom Center, Washington DC. Personal interview, 14 April 1999

⁶ Turkistan News & Information Network, "Press Release", 8 June 1999

The historical discussion of the Uighur in Section 2 of this paper will attempt to suggest why there have been increasing tensions in the area and what the implications are for future international relations and possible refugee flows. The ethnic and cultural divisions showed themselves at the end of China's last empire, when it was divided for over 20 years by regional warlords with local and ethnic bases in the north and the south, and by Muslim warlords in the west. Ethnicization has meant that the current cultural fault lines of China and Central Asia increasingly follow official designations of national identity. Hence, for Central Asia, the break-up of the USSR did not lead to the creation of a greater "Turkistan" or a pan-Islamic collection of states, despite the predominantly Turkic and Muslim population of the region. Rather, the break-up fell along ethnic and national lines. China clearly is not about to fall apart, not yet anyway. Yet it also has ethnic problems and it must solve them for other more pressing reasons.

2. Cultural and Historical Overview

Chinese histories notwithstanding, every Uighur firmly believes that their ancestors were the indigenous people of the Tarim basin, which did not become known in Chinese as "Xinjiang" ("new dominion") until the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the identity of the present people known as Uighur is a rather recent phenomenon related to Great Game rivalries, Sino-Soviet geopolitical manoeuvrings, and Chinese nation building. While a collection of nomadic steppe peoples known as the "Uighur" have existed since before the eighth century, this identity was lost from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.

It was not until the fall of the Turkish Khanate (552-744 C.E.) to a people reported by the Chinese historians as *Hui-he* or *Hui-hu* that we find the beginnings of the Uighur Empire. At this time the Uighur were only a collection of nine nomadic tribes, who, initially in confederation with other Basmil and Karlukh nomads, defeated the Second Turkish Khanate and then dominated the federation under the leadership of Koli Beile in 742.⁷ Gradual sedentarization of the Uighur, and their defeat of the Turkish Khanate, occurred precisely as trade with the unified Chinese Tang state became especially lucrative. Sedentarization and interaction with the Chinese state was accompanied by socio-religious change: the traditional shamanistic Turkic-speaking Uighur came increasingly under the influence of Persian Manichaeism, Buddhism, and eventually, Nestorian Christianity. Extensive trade and military alliances along the old Silk Road with the Chinese state developed to the extent that the Uighur gradually adopted cultural, dress and even agricultural practices from the Chinese. The conquest of the Uighur capital of Karabalghasun in Mongolia by the nomadic Kyrgyz in 840, without rescue from the Tang who may by then have become intimidated by the wealthy Uighur empire, led to further sedentarization and crystallization of Uighur identity. One branch that ended up in what is now Turpan, took advantage of the unique socio-ecology of the glacier fed oases surrounding the Taklamakan and were able to preserve their merchant and limited agrarian practices, gradually establishing Khocho or Gaochang, the great Uighur city-state based in Turpan for four centuries (850-1250). With the fall of the Mongol empire, the decline of the overland trade routes, and the expansion of trade relationships with the Ming,

⁷ For an excellent historical overview of this period, see Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *Cambridge History of China: Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States (907-1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Turfan gradually turned toward the Islamic Moghuls, and, perhaps in opposition to the growing Chinese empire, adopted Islam by the mid-fifteenth century.

The Islamicization of the Uighur from the tenth to as late as the seventeenth century, while displacing their Buddhist religion, did little to bridge their oases-based loyalties. From that time on, the people of “Uighuristan” centred in Turpan, who resisted Islamic conversion until the seventeenth century, were the last to be known as Uighur. The others were known only by their oasis or by the generic term of “Turki”. With the arrival of Islam, the ethnonym “Uighur” fades from the historical record.

According to Morris Rossabi, it was not until 1760, and after their defeat of the Mongolian Zungars, that the Manchu Qing dynasty exerted full and formal control over the region, establishing it as their “new dominions” (*Xinjiang*), an administration that had lasted barely 100 years, when it fell to the Yakub Beg rebellion (1864-1877) and expanding Russian influence.⁸ Until major migrations of Han Chinese were encouraged in the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing was mainly interested in pacifying the region by setting up military outposts, which supported a vassal-state relationship. Colonization had begun with the migrations of the Han in the mid-nineteenth century, but was cut short by the Yakub Beg rebellion, the fall of the Qing empire in 1910, and the ensuing warlord era which dismembered the region until its incorporation as part of the People’s Republic in 1949. Competition for the loyalties of the peoples of the oases in the Great Game played between China, Russia and Britain further contributed to divisions among the Uighur according to political, religious, and military lines. The peoples of the oases, until the challenge of nation-state incorporation, lacked any coherent sense of identity.

Thus, the incorporation of Xinjiang for the first time into a nation-state required unprecedented delineation of the so-called nations involved. The re-emergence of the label “Uighur”, though arguably inappropriate as it was last used 500 years previously to describe the largely Buddhist population of the Turfan Basin, stuck as the appellation for the settled Turkish-speaking Muslim oasis dwellers. It has never been disputed by the people themselves or the states involved. There is too much at stake for the people labelled as such to wish to challenge that identification. For Uighur nationalists today, the direct lineal descent from the Uighur Kingdom in seventh century Mongolia is accepted as fact, despite overwhelming historical and archeological evidence to the contrary.⁹

The end of the Qing dynasty and the rise of Great Game rivalries between China, Russia, and Britain saw the region torn by competing loyalties and marked by two short-lived and drastically different attempts at independence: the proclamations of an

⁸ Morris Rossabi, “Muslim and Central Asian Revolts” in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills Jr. (eds.), *From Ming to Ch’ing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)

⁹ The best “Uighur nationalist” retelling of this unbroken descent from Karakhorum is in the document “Brief History of the Uyghers”, originating from the Eastern Turkestani Union in Europe, and available electronically at <www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1730/buh.html>. For a recent review and critique, including historical evidence for the multi-ethnic background of the contemporary Uighur, see Dru C. Gladney, “Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Identity in China: Considering the Uyghurs and Kazakhs” in Victor Mair (ed.), *The Bronze Age and Early Iron Age People of Eastern Central Asia: Volume II* (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of Man, 1998), pp. 812-34. For a discussion of the recent archeological evidence derived from DNA dating of the dessicated corpses of Xinjiang, see Victor Mair, “Introduction” in Victor Mair (ed.), pp. 1-40

“East Turkestan Republic” in Kashgar in 1933 and another in Yining (Ghulje) in 1944.¹⁰

As Linda Benson has extensively documented,¹¹ these rebellions and attempts at self-rule did little to bridge competing political, religious, and regional differences within the Turkic Muslim people who became officially known as the Uighur in 1934 under successive Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) warlord administrations. Andrew Forbes describes, in exhaustive detail, the great ethnic, religious, and political cleavages during the period from 1911 to 1949 that pitted Muslim against Chinese, Muslim against Muslim, Uighur against Uighur, Hui against Uighur, Uighur against Kazak, warlord against commoner, and Nationalist against Communist.¹² This extraordinary factionalism caused large scale depletion of lives and resources in the region, which still lives in the minds of the population. Indeed, it is this memory that many argue keeps the region together, a deep-seated fear of widespread social disorder.

Today, despite continued regional differences among three, and perhaps four macro-regions, including the northwestern Zungaria plateau, the southern Tarim basin, the southwest Pamir region, and the eastern Kumul-Turpan-Hami corridor, there are nearly 8 million people spread throughout this vast region that regard themselves as Uighur, among a total population of 16 million.¹³ Many of them dream of, and some agitate for, an independent “Uighuristan”. The “nationality” policy under the KMT identified five peoples of China, with the Han in the majority. The Uighur were included at that time under the general rubric of “Hui Muslims”, which included all Muslim groups in China at that time. This policy was continued under the Communists, eventually recognizing 56 nationalities, the Uighur and 8 other Muslim groups split out from the general category “Hui” (which was confined to mainly Chinese-speaking Muslims).

A profoundly practical people, Uighur and regional leaders actually invited the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into the region after the defeat of the Nationalists in 1949. The “peaceful liberation” by the Chinese Communists of Xinjiang in October 1949, and their subsequent establishment of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region on 1 October 1955, perpetuated the Nationalist policy of recognizing the Uighur as a minority nationality under Chinese rule. The on-going political uncertainties and social unrest led to large migrations of Uighur and Kazak from Xinjiang to Central Asia between 1953 and 1963, culminating in a Central Asian Uighur population of

¹⁰ The best discussion of the politics and importance of Xinjiang during this period is that of an eyewitness and participant, Owen Lattimore, in his *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950)

¹¹ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990)

¹² Andrew Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

¹³ Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uighur Nationalism along China’s Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 8. For Uighur ethnogenesis, see also Jack Chen, *The Sinkiang Story* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 57, and Dru C. Gladney, “The Ethnogenesis of the Uighur”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1990), pp. 1-28

approximately 300,000. This migration stopped with the Sino-Soviet split in 1962 and the border was closed in 1963, reopening 25 years later in the late 1980s.¹⁴

The separate nationality designation awarded the Uighurs in China continued to mask very considerable regional and linguistic diversity, with the designation also applied to many “non-Uighur” groups such as the Loplyk and Dolans, that had very little to do with the oasis-based Turkic Muslims that became known as the Uighur. At the same time, contemporary Uighur separatists look back to the brief periods of independent self-rule under Yakub Beg and the Eastern Turkestan Republics, in addition to the earlier glories of the Uighur kingdoms in Turpan and Karabalghasan, as evidence of their rightful claims to the region. Contemporary Uighur separatist organizations based in Istanbul, Ankara, Almaty, Munich, Amsterdam, Melbourne, and Washington may differ in their political goals and strategies for the region, but they all share a common vision of a continuous Uighur claim on the region, disrupted by Chinese and Soviet intervention. The independence of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics in 1991 has done much to encourage these Uighur organizations in their hopes for an independent “Uighuristan”, despite the fact that the new, mainly Muslim, Central Asian governments all signed protocols with China in Shanghai in the Spring of 1996 that they would not harbour or support separatists groups. These protocols were reaffirmed in the recent 25 August 1999 meeting between Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin, committing the “Shanghai Five” nations (China, Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) to respecting border security and suppressing terrorism, drug smuggling, and separatism.¹⁵ The policy was enforced on 15 June 1999, when three alleged Uighur separatists (Hammit Muhammed, Ilyan Zurdin, and Khasim Makpur) were deported from Kazakstan to China, with several others in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan awaiting extradition.¹⁶

That Islam became an important, but not exclusive, cultural marker of Uighur identity is not surprising given the socio-political oppositions with which the Uighur were confronted. In terms of religion, the Uighurs are Sunni Muslims, practising Islamic traditions similar to their co-religionists in the region. In addition, many of them are Sufi, adhering to branches of *Naqshbandiyya* Central Asian Sufism. However, it is also important to note that Islam was only one of several unifying markers for Uighur identity, depending on those with whom they were in co-operation at the time. This suggests that Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan will have only limited appeal among the Uighur. For example, to the Hui Muslim Chinese in Xinjiang, numbering over 600,000, the Uighur distinguish themselves as the legitimate autochthonous minority, since both share a belief in Sunni Islam. In contrast to the formerly nomadic Muslim peoples, such as the Kazak, numbering more than one million, the Uighur might stress their attachment to the land and oasis of origin. Most profoundly, modern Uighurs, especially those living in larger towns and urban areas, are marked by their reaction to Chinese influence and incorporation. It is often Islamic traditions that become the focal point for Uighur efforts to preserve their

¹⁴ The best account of the Uighur diaspora in Central Asia, their memories of migration, and longing for a separate Uighur homeland is contained in the video documentary by Sean R. Roberts, *Waiting for Uighurstan* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Center for Visual Anthropology, 1996)

¹⁵ CNN News Service, Rym Brahimi, “Russia, China, and Central Asian Leaders Pledge to Fight Terrorism, Drug Smuggling”, 25 August 1999 (electronic format <www.uygur.org/enorg/wunn99/990825e.html>)

¹⁶ Eastern Turkistan Information Center, “Kasakistan Government Deport Political Refugees to China”, Munich, 15 June 1999 (electronic format: <www.uygur.org/enorg/reports99/990615.html>)

culture and history. One such popular tradition that has resurfaced in recent years is that of the *Mashrap*, where generally young Uighurs gather to recite poetry and sing songs (often of folk or religious content), dance, and share traditional foods. These evening events have often become foci for Uighur resistance to Chinese rule in recent years. However, although within the region many portray the Uighur as united around separatist or Islamist causes, Uighur continue to be divided from within by religious conflicts, in this case competing Sufi and non-Sufi factions, territorial loyalties (whether they be oases or places of origin), linguistic discrepancies, commoner-elite alienation, and competing political loyalties.

These divided loyalties were evidenced by the attack in May 1996 on the Imam of the Idgah Mosque in Kashgar by other Uighurs, as well as the assassination of at least six Uighur officials last September. It is this contested understanding of history that continues to influence much of the current debate over separatist and Chinese claims to the region.

3. Chinese Nationalities Policy and the Uighur

The Uighur are an official minority nationality of China, identified as the second largest of ten Muslim peoples in China, primarily inhabiting the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (see Table 1).

Table 1
Population of Muslim Minorities in China and Xinjiang¹⁷

Minority Ethnonym	Location	Language Family	1990 Census Population	Percent in Xinjiang
Hui	All China, esp. Ningxia, Gansu, Henan, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Yunnan, Hebei, Shandong*	Sino-Tibetan	8,602,978	7.9%
Uighur	Xinjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	7,214,431	99.8%
Kazak	Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai	Altaic (Turkic)	1,111,718	--
Dongxiang	Gansu, Qinghai	Altaic (Turkic)	373,872	--
Kyrgyz	Xinjiang, Heilongjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	131,549	--
Salar	Qinghai, Gansu	Altaic (Turkic)	87,697	--
Tajik	Xinjiang	Indo-European	33,538	--
Uzbek	Xinjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	14,502	--
Baonan	Gansu	Altaic (Mongolian)	12,212	--
Tatar	Xinjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	4,873	--

*Listed in order of size

Many Uighur with whom I have spoken in Turfan and Kashgar argue persuasively that they are the autochthonous people of this region. The fact that over 99.8 per cent of the Uighur population are located in Xinjiang, whereas other Muslim peoples of China have significant populations in other provinces (e.g. the Hui) and outside the country (e.g. the Kazak), contributes to this important sense of belonging to the land. The Uighur continue to conceive of their ancestors as originating in Xinjiang, claiming to outsiders that “it is our land, our territory”, despite the fact that the early

¹⁷ *Renmin Ribao* [Beijing], “Guanyu 1990 nian renkou pucha zhuyao de gongbao [Report regarding the 1990 population census primary statistics]”, 14 November 1991, p. 3; Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, p. 21

Uighur kingdom was based in what is now Outer Mongolia and the present region of Xinjiang is under the control of the Chinese State.

Unprecedented socio-political integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese nation-state has taken place in the last 40 years. While Xinjiang has been under Chinese political domination since the defeat of the Zungar in 1754, until the middle of the twentieth century it was but loosely incorporated into China proper. The extent of the incorporation of the Xinjiang Region into China is indicated by Chinese policies encouraging Han migration, communication, education, and occupational shifts since the 1940s.

Han migration into Xinjiang increased their local population a massive 2,500 per cent between 1940 and 1982 compared with the 1940 level (see Table 2), representing an average annual growth of 8.1 per cent. Indeed, many conclude that China's primary programme for assimilating its border regions is a policy of integration through immigration.¹⁸ This was certainly the case for Inner Mongolia, where Mongol population now stands at 14 per cent, and given the following figures may well be the case for Xinjiang.

TABLE 2
Muslim and Han Population Growth in Xinjiang, 1940 - 1990¹⁹

Ethnic group				% population	% population
	1940 - 1941	1982	1990	increase	increase
Uighur	2,941,000	5,950,000	7,194,675	102.31	20.92
Kazak	319,000	904,000	1,106,000	183.38	22.35
Hui	92,000	571,000	681,527	520.65	19.36
Kyrgyz	65,000	113,000	139,781	73.85	23.70
Tajik	9,000	26,000	33,512	188.89	28.89
Uzbek	5,000	12,000	14,456	140.00	20.47
Tatar	6,900	4,100	4,821	-40.58	17.58
Han	202,000	5,287,000	5,695,626	2,517.33	7.73
Total Population	4,874,000	13,082,000	15,155,778	168.40	15.85

Note: Military figures are not given, estimated at 275,000 and 500,000 military construction corps in 1985.

Minority population growth rates during the 1980s are particularly high in part due to reclassification and re-registration of ethnic groups.

The increase of the Han population has been accompanied by the growth and delineation of other Muslim groups in addition to the Uighur. Accompanying the remarkable rise in the Han population, a dramatic increase in the Hui (Dungan, or mainly Chinese-speaking Muslim) population can also be seen. While the Hui population in Xinjiang increased by over 520 per cent between 1940 and 1982

¹⁸ For China's minority integration program, see Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994)

¹⁹ Table based on the following sources: Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims*, p 7; Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp 322-3; *Minzu Tuanjie* [Beijing], No. 2 (1984), p 38; Peoples Republic of China, National Population Census Office, *Major Figures of the Fourth National Population Census: Vol. 4* (Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House, 1991), pp. 17-25

(averaging an annual growth of 4.4 per cent), the Uighur population has followed a more natural biological growth of 1.7 per cent. This dramatic increase in the Hui population has also led to significant tensions between the Hui and Uighur Muslims in the region, and many Uighur recall the massacre of the Uighur residents in Kashgar by the Hui Muslim warlord Ma Zhongying and his Hui soldiers during the early part of this century.²⁰ These tensions are exacerbated by widespread beliefs held among the exile Uighur community and international Muslims that the Muslim populations of China are vastly underreported by the Chinese authorities. Some Uighur groups claim that there are upwards of 20 million Uighur in China, and nearly 50 million Muslims, with little evidence to support those figures.²¹

Chinese incorporation of Xinjiang has led to a further development of ethnic socio economic niches. Whereas earlier travelers reported little distinction in labour and education among Muslims, other than that between settled and nomadic, the 1982 census revealed vast differences in socio-economic structure (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Occupational Structure of Muslim Minorities in China
in per cent, 1982²²

Occupation	Hui	Uighur	Kazak	Dong Xiang	Kyrgyz	Salar	Tajik	Uzbek	Bao An	Tatar	All Ethnic Groups
Scientific Staff	5.75	4.25	11.25	1.00	7.00	3.25	5.75	17.25	1.50	23.50	4.00
Administration	1.75	0.75	2.00	0.25	1.50	0.75	2.75	3.75	2.25	4.50	1.00
Office & related workers	1.75	1.00	2.00	0.25	1.75	0.75	2.00	3.25	0.75	4.25	1.00
Commercial workers	3.50	1.50	1.25	0.25	0.75	0.75	0.50	10.75	0.50	5.25	1.25
Service workers	4.00	1.50	1.50	0.25	1.00	0.75	0.75	6.50	0.50	4.50	1.25
Farming, forestry, fishing & animal husbandry	60.75	84.00	74.50	96.75	84.00	90.50	85.75	31.50	92.25	38.50	84.00
Production & transport	22.25	7.00	7.50	1.25	4.00	3.25	2.50	27.00	2.25	19.25	7.50
Others	0.25	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.25	--

Differences in occupational structure between the Uzbek and Tatar on the one hand, and the Uighur and Hui, on the other, suggest important class differences, with the primarily urban Uzbek and Tatar groups occupying a much higher socioeconomic niche. This is also reflected in reports on education among Muslim minorities in China (see Table 4).

²⁰ Forbes, pp. 56-90

²¹ See the discussion of population numbers in Eastern Turkistan Information Center, "Population of Eastern Turkistan: The Population in Local Records", Munich, n.d. (electronic format: <www.uygur.org/enorg/turkistan/nopus.html>). A useful guide with tables and breakdowns is found in International Taklamakan Human Rights Association (ITHRA), "How Has the Population Distribution Changed in Eastern Turkestan since 1949", N.d. (electronic format <www.taklamakan.org/uygur-L/et_faqs_pl.html>, where it is reported that the Xinjiang Uighur population declined from 75 per cent in 1949 to 48 per cent in 1990. The problem with these statistics is that the first reliable total population count in the region did not take place until 1982, with all earlier estimates highly suspect according to the authoritative study by Judith Banister (Banister, *China's Changing Population*)

²² Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, p. 32; table adopted from People's Republic of China, National Population Census Office, *Population Atlas of China* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.xx, 28

TABLE 4
Educational Level of Muslim Minorities in China in per cent, 1990²³

Educational Level	Hui	Uighur	Kazak	Dong Xiang	Kyrgyz	Salar	Tajik	Uzbek	Bao An	Tatar	All China
University Graduate	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.05	0.3	0.3	0.2	2.6	0.2	3.6	0.5
Undergraduate	0.9	0.4	0.7	0.08	0.5	0.3	0.3	1.9	0.1	2.5	2.4
Technical School	1.6	1.6	2.6	0.30	2.4	0.9	2.1	4.7	1.0	5.8	17.6
Senior Middle School	6.2	3.5	5.5	0.60	3.4	1.6	2.5	10.8	2.9	11.0	6.4
Junior Middle School	19.9	11.9	16.4	2.80	10.2	6.3	9.3	20.3	7.2	22.0	23.3
Primary School	29.1	43.9	43.9	12.00	43.4	18.8	40.4	33.7	16.2	32.7	37.2
*Semi-literate or Illiterate	33.1	26.6	12.3	82.60	24.9	68.7	33.5	8.3	68.8	4.9	22.2

*Population age 6 and above whom cannot read or can read very little

The Uighur are about average in terms of university graduates (0.5 per cent) and illiteracy (26.6 per cent) as compared with all other ethnic groups in China (0.5 and 22.2 per cent respectively). The Tatar achieve the highest representation of university graduates among Muslims (3.6 per cent) as well as the lowest percentage of illiteracy (4.9 per cent), far below the average of all China (22.2 per cent). The main drawback of these figures is that they reflect only what is regarded by the state as education, namely, training in Chinese language and the sciences. However, among the elderly elite, there continues to be a high standard of traditional expertise in Persian, Arabic, Chagatay, and the Islamic sciences, which is not considered part of Chinese “culture” and education. Although elementary and secondary education is offered in Uighur, Mandarin has become the language of upward mobility in Xinjiang, as well as in the rest of China. Many Uighur have been trained in the thirteen Nationalities Colleges scattered throughout China since they were established in the 1950s. It is these secular intellectuals trained in Chinese schools who are asserting political leadership in Xinjiang, as opposed to traditional religious elites. Many Uighurs in Urumqi point to the establishment of the Uighur Traditional Medicine Hospital and *Madrassah* complex in 1987 as a beginning counterbalance to this emphasis on Han education.²⁴ However, most Uighur I have spoken with feel that their history and traditional culture continues to be down-played in the state schools and must be privately re-emphasized to their children. It is through the elementary schools that Uighur children first participate formally in the Chinese nation-state, dominated by Han history and language, and most fully enter into the Chinese world. As such, the predominant educational practice of teaching a centralized, mainly Han, subject content, despite the widespread use of minority languages, continues to drive a wedge between the Uighur and their traditions, inducting them further into the Han Chinese milieu.

²³ People’s Republic of China, Department of Population Statistics of State Statistical Bureau and Economic Department of State Nationalities Affairs Commission, *Population of China’s Nationality (Data of 1990 Population Census) [Zhongguo Minzu Renkou Ziliao (1990 nian Renkou Pucha Shuju)]* (Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House, 1994), pp. 70-3, 76. See also Dru C. Gladney, “Making Muslims in China: Education, Islamicization, and Representation” in Gerard A. Postiglione (ed.), *China’s National Minority Education: Culture, State Schooling and Development* (New York: Garland Press, 1999)

²⁴ The late Uighur historian Professor Ibrahim Muti’i in an unpublished 1989 paper provides an excellent historical synopsis of the role of the Central Asian Islamic *Madrassah* in traditional Uighur education. Professor Muti’i argues that it was the *Madrassah*, more than religious or cultural continuities, that most tied the Uighur into Central Asian traditions. Ibrahim Muti’i, personal communication, May 1989.

The increased incorporation of Xinjiang into the political sphere of China has led not only to the further migration of Han and Hui into the region, but opened China to an unprecedented extent for the Uighur. Uighur men are heavily involved in long-distance trade throughout China. They go to Tianjin and Shanghai for manufactured clothes and textiles, Hangzhou and Suzhou for silk, and Guangzhou and Hainan for electronic goods and motorcycles brought in from Hong Kong. In every place, and especially Beijing, due to the large foreign population, they trade local currency (*renminbi*) for US dollars. Appearing more like foreigners than the local Han, they are often less suspect. "We use the hard currency to go on the *Hajj*", one young Uighur in the central market square of Kunming, Yunnan Province, once told me, "Allah will protect you if you exchange money with me". While some may save for the *Hajj*, most purchase imported or luxury goods with their hard currency and take them back to Xinjiang, selling or trading them for a profit - a practice that keeps them away from home six months out of the year. As Uighur continue to travel throughout China they return to Xinjiang with a firmer sense of their own pan-Uighur identity vis-a-vis the Han and the other minorities they encounter on their travels.

International travel has also resumed for the Uighur. An important development in recent years has been the opening of a rail line between China and Kazakstan through the Ili corridor to Almaty, and the opening of several official gateways with the surrounding five nations on its borders. With the resumption of normal Sino-Central Asian relations in 1991, trade and personal contacts have expanded enormously.

This expansion has led many Uighur to see themselves as important players in the improved Sino-Central Asian exchanges. On a 1988 trip from Moscow to Beijing through the Ili corridor, I was surprised to find that many of the imported Hong Kong-made electronic goods purchased by Uighur with hard currency in Canton and Shenzhen found their way into the market place and hands of relatives across the border in Almaty - who are also identified by the Kazakstan state as Uighur.

4. Uighur Response: Struggles to Sustain Cultural Survival

Increasing integration with China has not been smooth, however. Many Uighur resent the threats to their cultural survival and have resorted to violence. After denying them for decades and stressing instead China's "national unity", official reports have recently detailed Tibetan and Muslim conflict activities in the border regions of Tibet, Yunnan, Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Inner Mongolia. With the March 1997 bus bombings in Beijing, widely attributed (though this has never been verified) to Uighur separatists, coupled with the Urumqi bus bombings on the day of Deng Xiaoping's 1997 memorial on 25 February, Beijing can no longer keep them secret. The Yining uprising on 7 February 1997, which left at least nine dead and hundreds injured, with seven Uighur suspects arrested and most probably slated for execution, was heavily covered by the world's media. This distinguishes the last few events from on-going problems in the region in the mid-1980s that met with little media coverage.

In 1996, the *Xinjiang Daily* reported five serious incidents since February 1996, with a crackdown that rounded up 2,773 terrorist suspects, 6,000 lbs of explosives, and 31,000 rounds of ammunition. Overseas Uighur groups have claimed that over 10,000 were arrested in the round up, with over 1,000 killed. The largest protest from 2 to 8 February 1996, was sparked by a Chinese raid on an evening *Mashrap* cultural

meeting. Protests against the arrests made during the meeting led to 120 deaths and over 2,500 arrests. On 2 March 1996 the pro-government *mullah* of Kashgar's Idgah mosque and his son were stabbed by knife-wielding Uighur militants, on 27 May there was another attack on a senior government official, and in September of the same year six Uighur government officials were killed by other Uighurs in Ye Cheng.

The government has responded with a host of random arrests and new policy announcements. In Spring 1998, the National Peoples Congress passed a New Criminal Law that redefined "counter-revolutionary" crimes to be "crimes against the state", liable to severe prison terms and even execution. Included in "crimes against the state" were any actions considered to involve "ethnic discrimination" or "stirring up anti-ethnic sentiment". Many human rights activists have argued that this is a thinly veiled attempt to criminalize "political" actions and to make them appear as illegal as traffic violations, supporting China's claims that it holds "no political prisoners". Since any minority activity could be regarded as stirring "anti-ethnic feeling", many ethnic activists are concerned that the New Criminal Law will be easily turned against them.

On 12 June 1998 the *Xinjiang Daily* reported "rampant activities by 'splittists' inside and outside China", that had contributed to the closure of 10 "unauthorized" places of worship, the punishment of *mullahs* who had preached illegally outside their mosques, and the execution of 13 people on 29 May in Aksu county (an area that is 99 per cent Uighur) supposedly for murder, robbery, rape, and other violent crimes.

Troop movements to the area have reportedly been the largest since the suppression of the Baren township insurrection in April 1990, perhaps related to the nationwide "Strike Hard" campaign. This campaign, launched in Beijing in April 1997 was originally intended to clamp down on crime and corruption, but has now been turned against "splittists" in Xinjiang, calling for the building of a "great wall of steel" against them. The *Xinjiang Daily* on 16 December 1996 contained the following declaration by Wang Lequan, the Region's First Party Secretary: "We must oppose separatism and illegal religious activities in a clear and comprehensive manner, striking hard and effectively against our enemies". These campaigns, according to an April 1999 Amnesty International report, have led to 210 capital sentences and 190 executions of Uighur since 1997.²⁵

Chinese authorities are correct that increasing international attention to the plight of indigenous border peoples have put pressure on the regions. Notably, the recently elected chair of the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization (UNPO) based in the Hague is the Uighur, Erkin Alptekin, son of the Uighur Nationalist leader, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, who died in Istanbul in December 1995 where there is now a park dedicated to his memory. There are at least five international organizations working for the independence of Xinjiang [under the name of Eastern Turkestan], based in Amsterdam, Munich, Istanbul, Melbourne, and New York. Clearly, with Xinjiang representing the last Muslim region under communism, Chinese authorities have more to be concerned about than just international support for Tibetan independence.

²⁵ Amnesty International, *Peoples Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights*

The real question is, why call attention to these Tibetan and Muslim activities and external organizations now? The Istanbul-based groups have existed since the 1950s, and the Dalai Lama has been active since his exile in 1959. Separatist actions have taken place on a small but regular basis since the expansion of market and trade policies in China, and with the opening of overland gateways to Xinjiang in addition to the trans-Eurasian railway since 1991, there seems to be no chance of closing up shop. In his 1994 visit to the newly independent nations of Central Asia, Li Peng called for the opening of a “new Silk Road”. This was a clear attempt to calm fears in the newly established Central Asian states over Chinese expansionism, as was the April 1996 Shanghai communique that solidified the existing Sino-Central Asian borders. This was perhaps the most recent and clearest example of Chinese government efforts to finally solidify and fully map its “internal colonies”.

Practically speaking, China is not threatened by internal dismemberment. Such as they are, China’s separatists are small in number, poorly equipped, loosely linked, and vastly out-gunned by the People’s Liberation Army and People’s Police. Local support for separatist activities, particularly in Xinjiang, is ambivalent and ambiguous at best, given the economic disparity between these regions and their foreign neighbours, which are generally much poorer and in some cases, such as Tajikistan, riven by civil war. Memories in the region are strong of mass starvation and widespread destruction during the Sino-Japanese and civil war in the first half of this century, not to mention the chaotic horrors of the Cultural Revolution. International support for Tibetan causes has done little to shake Beijing’s grip on the region. Many local activists are calling not for complete separatism or real independence, but more often express concerns over environmental degradation, anti-nuclear testing, religious freedom, over-taxation, and recently imposed limits on child-bearing.

Many ethnic leaders are simply calling for “real” autonomy according to Chinese law for the five Autonomous Regions that are each led by First Party Secretaries who are all Han Chinese controlled by Beijing. Extending the “Strike Hard” campaign to Xinjiang, Wang Lequan, the Party Secretary for Xinjiang, recently declared “there will be no compromise between us and the separatists”.

Beijing’s official publicization of the separatist issue may have more to do with domestic politics than any real internal or external threat. Recent moves suggest efforts to promote Chinese nationalism as a “unifying ideology” that will prove more attractive than communism and more manageable than capitalism. By highlighting separatist threats and external intervention, China can divert attention away from its own domestic instabilities of natural disasters (especially the recent flooding), economic crises (such as the Asian economic downturn’s drag on China’s currency), rising inflation, increased income disparity, displaced “floating populations”, Hong Kong reunification, and the many other internal and external problems facing Jiang Zemin’s government. Perhaps nationalism will be the only “unifying ideology” left to a Chinese nation that has begun to distance itself from Communism, as it has from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in the past. This is perhaps why religiously-based nationalism, like Islamic fundamentalism and Tibetan Buddhism, are targeted by Beijing, while the rise of shamanism and popular religion goes unchecked. At the same time, a firm lid on Muslim activism in China sends a message to foreign Muslim militant organizations to stay out of China’s internal affairs, and the Taliban to stay well within their Afghan borders. Although it is hard to gauge the extent of support

for Uighur separatism among the broader population, it is clear that cultural survival is a critical concern for many, and a significant attempt to preserve Uighur culture is taking place, assisted to some extent by international tourism and the state's attempts to demonstrate its goodwill toward its restive Muslim population.

5. International Dimensions

The People's Republic of China, as one of five permanent voting members of the UN security council, and as a significant exporter of military hardware to the Middle East, has become a recognized player in Middle Eastern affairs. With the decline in trade with most Western nations after the Tiananmen massacre in the early 1990s, the importance of China's Middle Eastern trading partners (all of them Muslim, since China did not have relations with Israel until recently), rose considerably. This may account for the fact that China established diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in August 1990, with the first direct Sino-Saudi exchanges taking place since 1949 (Saudi Arabia cancelled its long-standing diplomatic relationship with Taiwan and withdrew its ambassador, despite a lucrative trade history). In the face of a long-term friendship with Iraq, China went along with most of the UN resolutions in the war against Iraq. Although it abstained from Resolution 678 on supporting the ground-war, making it unlikely that Chinese workers will be welcomed back into Kuwait, China enjoys a fairly solid reputation in the Middle East as an untarnished source of low-grade weaponry and cheap reliable labour. Recent press accounts have noted an increase in China's exportation of military hardware to the Middle East since the Gulf War, perhaps due to a need to balance its growing imports of Gulf oil required to fuel its overheated economy.²⁶

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, China has also become an important competitor for influence in Central Asia and is expected to serve as a counterweight to Russia. Calling for a new interregional "Silk Route", China is already constructing such a link with rails and pipelines. The ethnicization of several Central Asian peoples and their rise to prominence as the leading members of the new Central Asian states, will mean that economic development and cross-border ties will be strongly influenced by ancient ethnic relations and geopolitical ties.

Since the early 1990s, China has been a net oil importer.²⁷ It also has 20 million Muslims. Mishandling of its Muslim problems will alienate trading partners in the Middle East, who are primarily Muslims. Already, after the ethnic riot in February 1997 in the northwestern Xinjiang city of Yining, which led to the death of at least nine Uighur Muslims and the arrest of several hundred, Turkey's Defence Minister, Turhan Tayan, officially condemned China's handling of the issue, and China responded by telling Turkey to not interfere in China's internal affairs.

Muslim nations on China's borders, including the new Central Asian states, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, though officially unsupportive of Uighur separatists, may be increasingly critical of harsh treatment extended to fellow Turkic and/or Muslim co-religionists in China. However, the April 1996 signing of border agreements between China and the five neighbouring Central Asian nations suggests that there is little

²⁶ James P. Dorian, Brett Wigdortz, Dru Gladney, "Central Asia and Xinjiang, China: Emerging Energy, Economic, and Ethnic Relations", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1997), p. 469

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 461-86

hope that the Uighur separatists will receive any official support from their Central Asian sympathizers. The text of the Mutual Declaration of the representatives of Kazakstan and the People's Republic of China signed on 5 July 1996 specifically prevents Kazakstan from assisting separatists in China. It also indicates that the Uighurs within Kazakstan will receive little support from their government, and a number of suspected Uighur separatists have in fact been returned to China from Kazakstan and Kyrgystan. As stated above, the importance of trade between Central Asia and China is the primary reason. In addition, none of the countries in the region wishes to have border problems with China. At a popular level, however, the Uighurs receive much sympathy from their Central Asian co-religionists, and there is a continuing flow of funds and materials through China's increasingly porous borders.

Dorian, Wigdortz, and Gladney have detailed the growing interdependence of the region.²⁸ Trade between Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics has grown rapidly, reaching US\$ 775 million in 1996, and the number of Chinese-Kazak joint ventures continues to rise, now approaching 200. Xinjiang exports a variety of products to Kazakstan, as well as to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine. Increased economic co-operation with China is providing Central Asia with additional options for markets, trade routes, and technical assistance.

As noted in the discussion of the Uighur people above, cross-border ethnic ties and interethnic relations within Xinjiang continue to have tremendous consequences for development in the region. Muslims comprise nearly 60 per cent of Xinjiang's population, and most of them are Uighur. Being Turkic, the Uighurs share a common Islamic, linguistic, and pastoralist heritage with the peoples of the Central Asian states (Table 5).

The Uighurs and other Turkic groups in the region are also closer culturally and linguistically to their Central Asian neighbours than they are to the Han Chinese. This closeness was demonstrated most dramatically following the Sino-Soviet 1960 breakdown in political relations, that in part led to an Ili rebellion in 1962 which contributed to nearly 200,000 Uighurs and Kazaks fleeing across the border to the Soviet Kazak Republic.²⁹ The majority of the 160,000 Uighurs in Kazakstan today stem from that original migrant population. Most scholars feel, however, that given the comparatively stronger economy in China and the recent border agreements signed between the two countries, a similar uprising now would not lead to such a large cross-border migration. Not only is the border much more secure on the Chinese side than in 1962, but the Kazakstan side would most likely refuse to accept them.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 480

²⁹ The best documentation of this period and the flood of Kazaks and Uighurs to the USSR from Xinjiang is to be found in George Moseley, *The Party and the National Question in China* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1966)

TABLE 5
Ethnic populations of Central Asia, Xinjiang (thousands)³⁰

	Kazakstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Xinjiang (China)
Kazaks	6,535	37	11	88	808	1,710.00
Kyrgyz	14	2,230	64	1	175	139.80
Tajiks	25	34	3,172	3	934	33.51
Turkmen	4	1	20	2,537	122	--
Uzbeks	332	550	1,198	317	14,142	14.46
Russians	6,228	917	388	334	1,653	8.10
Ukrainians	896	108	41	36	153	--
Byelorussians	183	9	7	9	29	--
Germans	958	101	33	4	40	--
Tatars	328	70	72	39	657	4.82
Karakalpaks	--	--	--	--	412	--
Koreans	103	18	13	--	183	1.00
Uighurs	185	37	--	--	36	7,195.00
Han	na	na	na	na	na	5,696.00
Hui	na	na	na	na	na	682.00
Mongolian	na	na	na	na	na	138.00
Dongxiang	na	na	na	na	na	56.40

Opportunities in Xinjiang's energy sector attract many migrants from other parts of China. China's rapidly growing economy has the country anxiously developing domestic energy sources and looking abroad for new sources. In 1993, with domestic oil consumption rising faster than production, China abandoned its energy self-sufficiency goal and became a net importer of oil for the first time. During 1996, China's crude oil production reached a record high of 156.5 million tons, while imports of crude were up 37.5 per cent over 1995, to 22 million tons. China is expected to import as much as 30 per cent of its oil by the year 2000. As China develops into a modern economy, it should see a rise in demand comparable to that experienced in Japan, where demand for natural gas and other energy needs has quadrupled in the past 30 years.

This is particularly why China has begun to look elsewhere for meeting its energy needs, and Li Peng signed a contract in September 1997 for exclusive rights to Kazakstan's second largest oil field. It also indicates declining expectations for China's own energy resources in the Tarim Basin. Estimated 10 years ago to contain 482 billion barrels, today, even the president of China National Petroleum Corporation admits that there are known reserves of only 1.5 billion barrels.

China hopes to make up for its dependence on Kazakstan oil by increasing trade. China's two-way trade with Central Asia has increased dramatically since the Chinese government opened Xinjiang to the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. By the end of 1992, formal trade had jumped by 130 per cent; total border trade, including barter, is estimated to have tripled. Ethnic ties have facilitated this trading surge: those with family relations benefit from relaxed visa and travel restrictions. Large numbers of "tourists" from Kazakstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan make frequent shopping trips into Xinjiang and return home to sell their goods at small village markets. Xinjiang has already become dependent on Central Asian

³⁰ Dorian, Wigdortz, Gladney, p. 465

business, with the five republics accounting for more than half of its international trade in 1993.

Most China-Central Asia trade is between Xinjiang and Kazakstan (Xinjiang's largest trading partner by far). From 1990 to 1992, Kazakstan's imports from China rose from just under 4 per cent to 44 per cent of its total. About half the China-Kazak trade is on a barter basis. Through 1995, China was Kazakstan's fifth largest trade partner, behind Russia, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland. China's trade with Kyrgyzstan has also increased rapidly. Through 1995, Kyrgyzstan was Xinjiang's third largest trading partner, after Kazakstan and Hong Kong. As early as 1992, China ranked as Uzbekistan's leading non-CIS trading partner. Since then, bilateral trade has increased by as much as 127 per cent per year, making Uzbekistan China's second largest Central Asian trading partner. This may be one of the most promising economic relationships developing in Central Asia. The large and relatively affluent Uzbek population will eagerly purchase Chinese goods once remaining border restrictions are relaxed and better transportation is built. Bilateral trade with Tajikistan increased nearly ninefold from 1992 to 1995. However, with much of Tajikistan recently in turmoil and the country suffering from a deteriorating standard of living, trade dropped by half in 1996. Trade between China and Turkmenistan has also risen rapidly. China is expected to eventually import Turkmen gas to satisfy the growing energy requirements in the northwest corner of the country. The sale of natural gas accounts for 60.3 per cent of the total volume of Turkmen exports.

While the increasing trade between Central Asia and China is noteworthy, it essentially is a reflection of China's rapidly growing trade with the entire world: trade with Central Asia increased by 25 per cent from 1992 to 1994; during the same period total Chinese trade increased almost twice as fast. In fact, during 1995, only 0.28 per cent of China's US\$ 280.8 billion overseas trade involved the five Central Asian republics, about the same as the trade with Austria or Denmark. Despite the small trade volumes, China is clearly a giant in the region and will play a major role in Central Asia's foreign economic relations. For example, China's two-way trade with Kazakstan is greater than Turkey's combined trade with all five Central Asian republics. This is so even though predominantly Muslim Central Asia is of a much higher priority for Turkey than for China.

Multinational corporations are beginning to play a larger role in the development of the region. In Kazakstan, for instance, foreign firms are estimated to control more than 60 per cent of electric power output. A proposed Turkmenistan-China-Japan natural gas pipeline, part of the envisaged "Energy Silk Route" which would connect Central Asia's rich gas fields with northeast Asian users, demonstrates the potential for co-operation among countries. But it also highlights the growing importance of international companies - in this case Mitsubishi and Exxon - in financing and influencing the course of oil and gas development in the region. With a potential price tag of US\$ 22.6 billion, this pipeline - as well as many smaller and less costly ones - would not be possible without foreign participation. Hence, the "new Great Game" between China and Central Asia involves many more players than the largely three-way Great Game of the nineteenth century. Yet these new international corporate forces do not supersede local ethnic ties and connections that extend back for centuries.

There is a risk that unrest in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region could lead to a decline in outside oil investment and revenues, with such interests already operating at a loss. Exxon has reported that its two wells struck in the supposedly oil-rich Tarim basin of southern Xinjiang came up dry, with the entire region yielding only 3.15 million metric tons of crude oil, only a small fraction of China's overall output of 156 million tons. The World Bank lends over US\$ 3 billion a year to China, investing over US\$ 780.5 million in 15 projects in the Xinjiang Region alone, with some of that money allegedly going to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), which human rights activist Harry Wu has claimed employs prison *laogai* labour. Already, Senate hearings in the U.S. on World Bank investment in Xinjiang have led Assistant Treasury Secretary David A. Lipton to declare that the Treasury would no longer support World Bank projects associated with the XPCC. International companies and organizations, from the World Bank to Exxon may not wish to subject its employees and investors to social and political upheavals. China also recently cancelled plans to build an oil pipeline from Kazakstan to Xinjiang and inland China, citing lack of outside investment and questionable market returns.

It is clear that ethnic separatism or Muslim complaints regarding Chinese policy will have important consequences for China's economic development of the region. Tourists and foreign businessmen will certainly avoid areas with ethnic strife and terrorist activities. China will continue to use its economic leverage with its Central Asian neighbours and Russia to prevent such disruptions.

Landlocked Central Asia and Xinjiang lack the road, rail, and pipeline infrastructure needed to increase economic co-operation and foreign investment in the region. Oil and gas pipelines still pass through Russia, and road and rail links to other points are inadequate. A new highway is planned between Kashgar, Xinjiang, to Osh, Kyrgyzstan, to facilitate trade in the area. At the same time, China is planning a new rail link between Urumqi and Kashgar. New links from Central Asia could follow several routes west through Iran and Turkey, or Georgia and Azerbaijan, to the Black Sea or the Mediterranean; south through Iran to the Persian Gulf or through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arabian Sea; or east through China to the Pacific. All the routes pass through vast, remote, and perhaps politically unstable regions, and those involving Iran face difficulties in gaining Western financing.

China's international relations with its neighbours and with internal regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet have become increasingly important not only for the economic reasons discussed above, but also for China's desire to participate in international organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the Asia-Pacific Economic Council. Though Tibet is no longer of any real strategic or substantial economic value to China, it is politically important to China's current leadership to indicate that they will not submit to foreign pressure and withdraw from Tibet. Uighurs have begun to work closely with Tibetans internationally to put political pressure on China in international fora. In a 7 April 1997 interview in Istanbul with Ahmet Türköz, vice-director of the Eastern Turkestan Foundation, which works for an independent Uighur homeland, he noted that since 1981, meetings had been taking place between the Dalai Lama and Uighur leaders, initiated by the deceased Uighur nationalist Isa Yusup Alptekin. As previously mentioned the elected leader of UNPO (the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization based in The Hague), an organization originally built around Tibetan issues, is Erkin Alptekin, the son of the

late Isa Alptekin. These international fora cannot force China to change its policy, any more than the annual debate in the U.S. over the renewal of China's Most-Favoured Nation status. Nevertheless, they continue to influence China's ability to co-operate internationally. As a result, China has sought to respond rapidly, and often militarily, to domestic ethnic affairs that might have international implications.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government feared that the new independence of the neighbouring Central Asian Republics might inspire separatist goals in Xinjiang. It also worried that promoting regional economic development could fuel ethnic separatism by resurrecting old alliances. China, however, was reassured by an agreement reached in April 1996 with Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to avoid military conflict on common borders. It is also resting easier after assertions from Muslim states that they would not become involved in China's internal affairs. Thus, China's policy of encouraging economic development while keeping a tight lid on political activism seems to have the support of neighbouring governments, despite not satisfying the many demands of local and cross-border ethnic groups.

Despite increasing investment and many new jobs in Xinjiang, the Uighurs and other ethnic groups complain that they are not benefiting as much as recent Han immigrants to the region. As noted above, this is a major factor in recent Uighur Muslim activism. They insist that the growing number of Han Chinese not only take the jobs and eventually the profits back home with them, but that they also dilute the natives' traditional way of life and leave them with little voice in their own affairs.

6. Prospects for the Future

To an extent never seen before, the continued incorporation of Xinjiang into China has become inexorable, and perhaps irreversible. The need for the oil and mineral resources of the region since China became an oil importing nation in 1993 means that Chinese influence will only grow. To be sure, the Uighur are still oriented culturally and historically toward Central Asia in terms of religion, language, and ethnic custom, and interaction has increased in recent years due to the opening of the roads to Pakistan and Almaty. Certainly, pan-Turkism was appealing to some, but not all, Uighurs during the early part of this century. Historical ties to Central Asia are strong. Turkey's late Prime Minister Turgut Ozal espoused a popular Turkish belief when, on his first state visit to Beijing in 1985, which sought to open a consulate there, he commented that the Turkish nation originated in what is now China.

Yet separatist notions, given the current political incorporation of Xinjiang into China, while perhaps present, are not practicable. As noted above, this is predicated on the assumption that China as a nation holds together. If China should fail at the centre, the peripheries will certainly destabilize, with Xinjiang and Tibet having the strongest prospects for separation.

The problems facing Xinjiang, however, are much greater than those of Tibet if it were to become independent. Not only is it more integrated into the rest of China, but the Uighur part of the population is less than half of the total and primarily located in the south, where there is less industry and natural resources, except for oil. As noted above, however, unless significant investment is found, Tarim oil and energy

resources will never be a viable source of independent wealth. Poor past relations between the three main Muslim groups, Uighur, Kazak, and Hui, suggest that conflicts among Muslims would be as great as those between Muslims and Han Chinese. Most local residents believe that independence would lead to significant conflicts between these groups, along ethnic, religious, urban-rural, and territorial lines. Given the harsh climate and poor resources in the region, those caught in the middle would have few places to flee. Xinjiang Han would naturally seek to return to the interior of China, since Russia and Mongolia would be in no position to receive them. Yet given the premise that only a complete collapse of the state could precipitate a viable independence movement and internal civil war in Xinjiang, there would be few places the Han would be able to go. Certainly, the bordering provinces of Gansu and Qinghai would be just as disrupted, and Tibet would not be an option. Uighur refugees would most likely seek to move south, since the north would be dominated by the Han and the western routes would be closed off by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. That leaves only the southern routes, and with the exception of Pakistan, no nation in the region would probably be equipped to receive them. Certainly, they would not be better off in present-day Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Given the on-going conflicts in Kashmir, even Pakistan, the most likely recipient of Uighur refugees, would probably not wish further destabilization of the region. Note also that the main southern route to India and Pakistan, along the Karakorum highway through the Torghurat pass, is generally passable less than six months out of the year. India, despite its poor relations with China, would certainly not want to add to its Muslim population. During many conversations in Xinjiang with local residents, Muslim and Han alike, it became clear that this fact is well-known. Most think that in such a worst-case scenario, there would be nothing to do but stay and fight.

In the past 10 years, the opening of China to the outside world has meant much for the Uighur who may easily travel beyond China's borders through Pakistan along the Karakoram highway, through the Ili valley into Kazakhstan, or by several CAAC flights to Istanbul from Urumqi. The number of Uighur pilgrims travelling on the *Hajj* to Mecca has increased by 300 per cent. These contacts have allowed the Uighur to see themselves as participants in the broader Islamic *Umma*, while at the same time being Muslim citizens of the Chinese nation-state. As they return from the *Hajj*, many Uighur who generally travel together as a group have told me that they gained a greater sense of affinity with their own as one people than with the other multi-ethnic members of the international Islamic community. State promoted tourism of foreign Muslims and tourists to Muslim areas in China in hopes of stimulating economic investment is also an important trend related to this opening of Xinjiang and its borders. Urumqi, a largely Han city constructed in the last fifty years, is undergoing an Islamic facelift with the official endorsement of Central Asian and Islamic architecture which serves to impress many visiting foreign Muslim dignitaries.

Most foreigners come to see the colourful minorities and the traditional dances and costumes by which their ethnicity is portrayed in Chinese and foreign travel brochures. One Japanese tourist with whom I once spoke in Kashgar, who had just arrived by bicycle from Pakistan across the Karakorum highway, said that a tourist brochure told him that the real Uighurs could only be found in Kashgar, whereas most Uighur believe that Turfan is the centre of their cultural universe. Yet many of these Kashgaris will in the same breath argue that much of traditional Uighur culture has been lost to Han influence in Turfan and that since they themselves are the

repositories of the more unspoiled “Uighur” traditions, tourists should spend their time, and money, in Kashgar. This search for the so-called “real Uighur” confirms that the nationality statistics and tourism agencies have succeeded. The re-creation of Uighur ethnicity has come full circle: the Chinese nation-state has identified a people who have in the last 40 years taken on that assigned identity as their own, and in the process, those who have accepted that identity have sought to define it and exploit it on their own terms. The Uighur believe they have a 6,000 year cultural and physical history in the region. They are not likely to let it go.

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