

THE UJI REBELLION: A STUDY OF CHINESE POLICY  
IN XINJIANG (1944-1949)

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## ABSTRACT

In November of 1944, Moslem rebels attacked the Chinese garrison stationed in the city of Yining, in China's far northwestern province of Xinjiang and declared the establishment of an independent Moslem state, the East Turkestan Republic, on November 12, 1944. Thus began a period of six years freedom from Chinese rule for the Turki population of the three western-most districts of China's Central Asian province.

The creation of this small independent state by a coalition of Uighur and Kazakh Turks was a manifestation of local antipathy toward the Han Chinese, who fifty years earlier, had forcibly incorporated the region of Xinjiang into the Chinese empire, after putting down a rebellion which had inflamed the northwest for some twenty years. Increasingly oppressive rule by a series of Chinese governors in the region contributed to a growing sense of Turki nationalism and ultimately led to the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic in 1944.

This fledgling republic posed a direct threat to Chinese control in Xinjiang and forced the Chinese government to turn its attention to the long neglected question of national minority aspirations there. Unable to resolve the conflict by direct military intervention, the Government took diplomatic steps to secure a Peace Agreement with representatives of the three districts in 1945-46. Conciliation and concession were introduced into the traditional Chinese border policies which relied on military force. But the change was both temporary and temporizing. By 1947, the new coalition government, composed of Chinese and representatives of the local population, collapsed under the pressure of mutual

distrust and Chinese covert military activity in Xinjiang, leaving the province divided into Moslem and Han Chinese sectors until 1950 when the army of the new People's Republic of China incorporated the East Turkestan Republic into the new Chinese state.

This dissertation is primarily a study of the challenge which the rebellion in the three districts presented to the Nationalist government and of the response which that government made. It examines the basic Chinese policy objectives in the area, the policies chosen as the best means to achieve these goals, and policy implementation within the region itself. It also examines the growth of nationalism among the Moslem Turks of Xinjiang, and the place of this nationalism in the attitudes adopted by the East Turkestan Government to Chinese policy between 1944 and 1949.

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## PREFACE

In November of 1944, in a remote part of a north-western China, a group of Turkic Moslems and White Russians rose against the Chinese government and established an independent Islamic state. Their ultimate goal was to oust the Han Chinese from the whole of what they referred to as East Turkestan, the Chinese province of Xinjiang.

The formation of a new republic is likely to be a matter of international interest, but the new East Turkestan Republic, remote as it was, received almost no attention at the time of its formation; up to the present day no detailed account of its existence has been published in English. When I first read of this small state in the middle of the Eurasian continent and discovered that it had existed for six years before it was swallowed by the more powerful revolutionary forces of the Chinese Communist Party, I became intrigued by this fascinating subject and the many questions - indeed, mysteries - which surrounded it.

Who were these rebels and what was the motivation behind their "Three Districts Revolution"? Were they the agents of the USSR, as most available sources suggested? Or, were they Turki patriots, fulfilling the old dream of an independent Turkestan? And what was the fate of the leadership in 1949?

A search through libraries revealed that there was, in fact, little information on Xinjiang as a whole for this period, and detailed accounts of the region's history even prior to this time were not to be found outside a few specialized libraries' shelves. Part of the reason for this appeared to lie in the fact that Xinjiang is physically remote from the centres of civilization in Europe and Asia - a geographic fact which makes the region one of the world's most mysterious and romantic. Xinjiang lies within China, and yet is not a part of it, for the peoples and history of this



region are more closely related to those of Central Asia, of which it is a natural extension both culturally and geographically. Deserts cover much of its territory and the remainder boasts high mountains with lush pastureland in their foothills, suitable for animal herds but not for traditional Chinese agriculture. Thus, despite the fact that Xinjiang formally became a province of China in 1884, it attracted few Chinese settlers. Those who did arrive in this land "beyond the jade gate" were mainly soldiers sent to man the garrisons and through whom the Chinese continued their hold on the region; a smaller number were government officials and traders, hoping to acquire some of Xinjiang's fabled riches. In the 1940s the majority of the population was the same as it had been for centuries - Moslem Turks. The largest group lived in the region's bases while smaller, more traditional peoples like the Kazakhs followed their herds in the region's rich pasture lands.

Like a true crossroads of great cultures, Xinjiang's history offers much of interest. The region has been scarred by past waves of invasion, rebellion and short-lived independent states, seeking to control the lucrative Silk Road which once directly linked the area to both China and the Middle East. Even in more modern eras, only the most intrepid of explorers - and the inevitable Chinese government officials - reached Xinjiang, a situation which has only recently begun to change.

Xinjiang offers much to interest scholars in many disciplines, but little work has actually been done. The reasons are only partly due to its extreme geographic isolation. There are also linguistic barriers. The greatest amount of information available is in Chinese, a language that takes time to learn to use. Other relevant materials are in Turkish and Russian, of which

the same is true. Another major difficulty lies in locating the source materials. They are scattered and difficult to find; moreover, when located, access to all relevant papers is not always available, due to the politically sensitive nature of this area. In other cases, materials are available, but they remain unclassified and unregistered, so that consulting them is time-consuming and somewhat haphazard. When material is found, it is sometimes in forms difficult to read, due to the aging of a poor quality medium, or damage. The reason why many works on Xinjiang have relied on existing English language sources becomes obvious.

Yet the questions about Xinjiang and the East Turkestan Republic remained and as I became more involved in the search for information these questions quickly were joined by new ones. For example, it was often hard to make out just who the people involved were, where they came from and what they did. If one of them was met only through a non-Turkic source, then his very name stayed in doubt. If he was met in several sources in different languages, then it had to be established whether he was one or several persons. (I hope I have avoided the possible pitfalls; I have come across one secondary work where the existence of two versions of one name has led the author to believe two people are in question. He deserves sympathy).

The more I inquired, the more involved I became in trying to untangle the events and answer some of the questions about this mysterious republic of Uighurs, Kazakhs and Russians. This study is the result. It is an investigation of Chinese government policy in Xinjiang between 1944 and 1949 as seen in the Chinese response to the Ili Rebellion and the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic. It is based on sources drawn from many repositories and collections. It is not an exhaustive work - no study of Xinjiang can be when major

sources are incomplete and records not available. But it does manage to move beyond currently available sources on the period and so contribute to our understanding of what occurred in this region during the period in question.

Before beginning the story, it is necessary to ask the reader's indulgence and present a certain amount of introductory material. The following linguistic note explains the choices of form and of romanization for terms from the various languages, so that the reader is prepared for the "new" form some proper names assume. The next section offers a description of the sources used - their location and quality - and a brief discussion of the problem of political bias, which affects almost every source used.

The text itself begins with a general introduction to this research, outlining its scope and purpose, as well as establishing the historic and theoretical context. Chapter Two introduces the general field of Republican China's national minority policy; Chapter Three offers geographic and historic background to Xinjiang. Together, these chapters provide the necessary background for an understanding of the Ili rebellion and the Chinese government's response.

#### Linguistic Note

Xinjiang lies geographically within Central Asia. As a result, materials concerning its history are to be found primarily in three languages - Chinese, Turkish and Russian. Problems occurred in rendering all of these languages into English and in translating between them, especially in the case of names. The following discussion on forms of romanization used in this study indicates the extent of some of these problems.

There are currently several methods of romanizing Chinese, the most recent of these being the system called "Pinyin" developed in the People's Republic of China. As this form is the simplest and easiest form of romanization currently in popular use, it is the form used in this study. However, in the cases of certain names which have a well-established and generally accepted English form, e.g. Chiang Kaishek, Sun Yatsen, these have been used in the text. All Chinese names are listed in Pinyin, Chinese characters and the Wade-Giles system in a glossary at the end of the work.

The form of romanization of the Turkic languages used is modern Turkish, which has been adopted for several reasons. First, Xinjiang's Turkic languages form one branch of Turkish, to which they are closely related. Variations among the Turkic languages are small so that speakers can generally understand each other whether they were born in Turkey or northwestern China.

Second, although the People's Republic of China ( hereafter PRC) has developed a romanized form for Uighur and Kazakh based on the Pinyin system, in addition they have created new written symbols that make recognition and pronunciation of words and names by English speakers difficult. Furthermore, dictionaries for the Pinyin form of Uighur are of limited vocabulary and do not include proper nouns and names so that there is no authoritative guide to the writing of names and titles - an important consideration in this work since the names of Turkic individuals have often been a cause of confusion to researchers and readers alike. The use of Turkish to systemize transcription helps to clarify the identity and proper titles of important figures in Xinjiang's modern history.

A further impetus to the use of Turkish is the fact

that there are now many works available in the Turkish language concerning Xinjiang, written in most cases by persons - or their direct relatives - who were involved in Xinjiang's modern history. The names in these books are in their Turkish forms, and are far more complete than the names of Turkic individuals in Chinese language accounts, which often abbreviate names to the point of confusion; for instance, "Aisha" is commonly used to refer to Mr. Isa Yusuf Alptekin, to cite but one example. The use of the modern Turkish form is clearly more accurate. Further discussion of the Chinese transliteration of Turkic names is in Appendix C, which includes a list of Xinjiang Turki people's names, along with their Chinese forms in characters and in Pinyin, as well as their common English renderings, many of which reflect their origins in Chinese sources.

There are, however, some exceptions to the use of modern Turkish for Xinjiang place names. Because the region is multi-ethnic, many of the towns and cities as well as geographic features bear several names. A good example is the city which the Chinese call "Tacheng" on the Sino-Soviet border. In addition to its Chinese name, it also appears on some maps as "Chugachak" or "Qoqek". This is the town's Mongolian name. Because the area is also the home of Manchu troops sent out to man the border under the Qing Empire, it has also been called "Tarbagatai," the name given to this outpost of the Manchu Empire by the Qianlung Emperor in the eighteenth century. However, Xinjiang's Kazakhs call the same town "Savan". This example can be easily matched elsewhere in the province. The question of what to call a city - or a mountain - or a river - has consequently been something of a problem. The PRC has clearly had its own troubles deciding whether to use the local language name - and if so, which local language name - or the Chinese form. They have compromised, so that today we

see the regional capital called "Urumqi", the old Uighur name for the city, whereas the Chinese name "Tacheng" has been retained for the town on the Sino-Soviet border. Chinese names have been given to "Yining" (formerly Kulja), "Kashi" (Kashgar), and "Shache" (Yarkand), while local names are retained for "Aksu" and "Emin". This practice is a clear recognition of the problems of nomenclature in Xinjiang.

In most cases, names in this work follow current Chinese practice, e.g. Urumqi, Yining. However, in instances where the currently used name is not easily recognized as the name of a city which also has a generally accepted English form of its name, the latter is used, e.g. Kashgar, Yarkand.

The romanization of Russian names has also been problematical. They pose a problem because some occur only in Chinese or Turkish sources that do not include the original Russian. Moreover, in the instances where English sources refer to Russians in Xinjiang, the forms used do not appear to conform to any particular system. As a result, Russian names are not given in strict keeping with any standardized form, although the names of the authors do follow the standard Library of Congress form.

### Sources

In general, the history of the independence movements among national minorities in China during the twentieth century has received relatively little attention from scholars of contemporary Chinese history. One primary reason for this has been the difficulty in locating first-hand sources, a problem which has also plagued other areas of research for the Republican era but which is particularly true of events in the border areas.

In recent years, however, two factors have made previously unavailable materials accessible. One is that the political climate has changed sufficiently in various countries to enable foreign scholars to use formerly inaccessible records and documents related to this area. The second factor is that the thirty-year period for which many western governments' files remain closed has now passed for the events of the 1940-50 decade. Thus relevant materials in the United States and Great Britain are now available for examination. As a result of these two factors, it has been possible to explore the many questions related to minority issues in such border areas as Xinjiang more fully.

The existence of national repositories like the United States National Archives and the British Public Record Office gives the neophyte false illusions about the location of sources. Not all countries are so fortunate. In the case of China, materials in the National Library in Beijing are not always available for consultation and there are few open depositories of official documents. The National Library has organized a group to collect materials related to Xinjiang and Islam in China, but what it will produce is still conjecture. In Taiwan, many more sources are available but in various places and in varying degrees. It is to be hoped that in the future more materials from these two places will be available to interested scholars.

The major sources for the present study include both newly accessible materials and also previously available but unexplored materials in Chinese, English, Turkish and Russian. Of basic importance are the official Xinjiang Provincial Government records and the local Xinjiang newspapers of the period. Certain records of the Xinjiang Provincial Government (of the Republican period) are available at the National History Institute (Guoshi Guan) in Xindian, Taipei, Taiwan. Other repositories of relevant

materials in Taipei are the Archives of the Guomindang Party History Commission (Qangshi Hui) at Yangming Shan, and the Bureau of Investigation (Diao Cha Ju) at Xindian. Access to these materials remains on a formal basis; usually one can only see those documents which one specifically requests, and as some documents remain unclassified finding relevant materials can be problematic. However, after spending a considerable amount of time in Taipei, and having had the good fortune to elicit the sympathetic interest of officials as well as of local scholars interested in China border area research, it was possible for me to see many items from these Taiwan collections.

One of the important holdings of the Guomindang Archives is the Xinjiang Daily in its original form. As this newspaper was the official organ for the Nationalist government in the region, it offers an excellent view of the nationalist interpretation of local events as they happened. Unfortunately, neither the Guomindang Archives nor any other institution holds a complete run of this paper. As a result, it has been necessary to collect together runs of the paper held in the United Kingdom, the United States, China and Taiwan. Between the microfilms of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the National Library of China in Beijing, as well as the Taiwan collection, a great deal of the Xinjiang Daily covering the years 1944-1949 has been seen, but a complete run of the paper does not now appear to exist, even using these various repositories. It should also be noted that the China microfilms were made from poor originals (as can be readily seen from the fragile condition of the issues available in Taiwan). On occasion, therefore, the notation "unclear" is entered for some names and data - indicating an especially faded or torn original.

In addition to the Xinjiang Daily, other important newspapers from Xinjiang include two published in the East



Turkistan Republic between 1946-1949. These are the Mingshu Bao (Democratic Daily) published in Chinese in Yining, and a few issues of Minshong Bao (People's Livelihood Daily) also published in Chinese, in Tacheng. Some issues of these papers are held at the Library of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, at Stanford. Although the collection is fragmentary, most of it dating only from the year 1947, the available issues make a fascinating addition to sources on Xinjiang during this period.

Issues of important Chinese periodicals on Xinjiang are also held at the Hoover, including issues of Aertai (Altai), Hanhai Chao (Desert Tide), and Tianshan Huabao (Tianshan Pictorial). These offer some of the most nationalistic of the Turki writings of the period. (The British Library in London also holds good originals of the latter).

No less important than the Chinese sources mentioned above are the files of the Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) and the India Office Records (hereafter IOR) held in London. The information derived from the careful, detailed reports of the British Consular officials who served in Urumqi and Kashgar is indispensable to an understanding of the period and its complexities. These British materials are among the most accessible and complete of all foreign government records for Republican Xinjiang.

Also interesting and important are materials in the National Archives of the United States. A series of reports by the US Office of Strategic Services (hereafter OSS) and by US Consular officials in Urumqi complement the British and Chinese sources. A portion of the U.S. Consular reports are contained in the series "Foreign Relations of the United States: The Far East," (hereafter FRUS), which includes both Xinjiang Consular reports as

well as other correspondence related to the situation in Xinjiang during the 1940s.

Another important cache of materials exists in the Soviet Union. Although direct access to these holdings is not possible, there is indirect knowledge of Soviet runs of East Turkistan newspapers, for instance, in the dissertations of Kutlukov and Mingulov. In particular, the studies by Kutlukov frequently cite Free East Turkistan (Azad Sharqi Turkistan) so that it is possible to ascertain the contents of many of that paper's issues. However, the heavy reliance on Marxist interpretation occasionally intrudes to detract from otherwise interesting work that has useful comments to offer on the motive force behind the rebellion and on several key events during the period in question. There is also in his work a tendency to take at face value and without critical comment any information published in the East Turkistan newspapers, but this nonetheless adds to our knowledge of the East Turkistan press.

Together, the materials mentioned above, in Chinese, English and Russian, present a fascinating picture of the political manoeuvring and conflict in Xinjiang among the Chinese, the native population of Xinjiang, and foreign powers, all of whom pursued their own goals in this strategic border region after World War II.

Collections of secondary printed sources dealing with Central Asia used in this research include the Owen Lattimore Collection held at the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, England. This consists of Lattimore's own extensive collection of books and pamphlets on Central Asia, including a wealth of titles on such wide-ranging topics as geography, ethnography and politics. In London, other interesting collections are held at the British Library, the Central Asian Research Centre, and the

University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. All of these have holdings in both Chinese and English.

Collections of books in Chinese which provided general background for this research include those in the Libraries of National Zhongzhi University in Taipei, the library of the Xinjiang Provincial Government (Taiwan), the University of Hong Kong library and the holdings of the University Services Centre in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

In addition to the above sources in Chinese, English and Russian, yet another language offers materials on Xinjiang's modern history and that is Turkish. After 1949, many Kazakh and Uighur refugees from Xinjiang made their way to Turkey where the government - and the closeness of traditions and language - made them welcome. Although many were not well-educated people, the tradition of oral records among the Kazakhs, especially, has meant that accounts of their histories have been kept alive in the traditional way. Today, books based on this oral tradition have been published, many of them dealing with events in Xinjiang between 1944-49; their origin in traditional style accounts for the scarcity of dates and, certainly, for the heroic style in which most of these books are written. Many also reflect the bitter intervening years of refugee life in a foreign country, but nonetheless, used with caution and restraint, they also constitute a valuable source of information, especially on the current Kazakh interpretation of the 1944-49 period.

The use of these primary and secondary printed sources was followed up with interviews whenever possible. By far the largest group of interviewees are former residents of Xinjiang, many of them national minorities from the Ili valley area. Among those interviewed are people of Uighur, Kazakh, Sibo, Hui, White Russian and Han Chinese nationalists. The list (given in Appendix D)

also includes both British and American nationals who were in Xinjiang during the period in question in official and un-official capacities.

Besides often being a pleasant and extremely stimulating experience, interviews also served several important functions. First, they often served to corroborate existing accounts; they also resulted in the addition of further details to these accounts, particularly with regard to personalities active in the region during the period in question.

Interviews also furthered my understanding of the role played by rumor in a region where communication was notoriously poor and a general lack of education among the population made them especially susceptible to the forces of rumor.

Afternoon talks held with Xinjiang Kazakhs over bowls of hot salted tea offered a vital sense of the times in which these events took place. The insecurity, the doubt of official versions of the news, the fear which marked everyday life for many people in Xinjiang, and the complexity of the relationships between nationalities were clearly conveyed during memorable interviews with former Xinjiang residents.

Most of these interviews took place over a period of time, although some individuals could only be interviewed once or twice due to extenuating circumstances. As most of these people were trying to recall events which occurred some forty years ago, specific dates and sometimes details were missed, and often, depending on when and where the individual was living in Xinjiang, their individual accounts of the period were incomplete. The educational level and political bias of individuals were also factors that had to be taken into account when assessing a particular individual's contribution. But much information could be

checked, at least partially, against existing accounts. Generally speaking, the interviews with members of the national minority peoples to a large extent reflected the records of "professional" observers such as the British and American representatives in Xinjiang; in many cases interviewees were able to fill in certain gaps in existing accounts with information that appears both reasonable and accurate. In cases where the accounts of interviewees are uncorroborated, however, this is indicated in the text or footnotes.

In instances where important individuals have not been available for interview, autobiographies have had to substitute. Fortunately, for this study, several important individuals have been able to record their memoirs for us; these include Burhan Shahidi, Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Pugra (now deceased).

Although today much material and many individuals are available for consultation, it must be pointed out that virtually all are influenced to some degree by their political views which reflect in turn their national origin. This bias can most easily be seen in the fact that some printed sources, for instance, choose to omit information on entire incidents or series of events if the events tend to reflect negatively on the author's country or government. At several points in the following pages, there is discussion on the conflict of opinions among sources or the deletion of materials in some accounts. This type of discussion has been included primarily to show that, first, the establishment of the actual course of events in Xinjiang during this time is, in itself, a difficult task, and, second, that caution in using virtually all the materials is a constant necessity, with sources being carefully cross-checked against each other at each stage of consideration.

In addition to political bias, another problem is the

patchy nature of much of the material. As mentioned earlier with regard to the Xinjiang Daily complete runs of some newspapers do not exist, and the discovery of government documents is sometimes no more than serendipity. This has made it necessary to extend the search for relevant materials to institutions in various countries and in a number of languages. The gaps in the historical account have thus been reduced and the interpretation of Xinjiang's modern history can once again be brought out into what will hopefully be fruitful discussion in the coming years.

For much of its history, Xinjiang has been an isolated area; this situation was just beginning to change when, in 1949, another kind of isolation began. After Xinjiang's incorporation into the PRC, the region was, for some years, closed to all but the most sympathetic of journalists. Happily, today this situation has changed in at least one respect. Parts of Xinjiang can now be visited with relative ease, via train and airlinks with most major cities in China. Less happily, research facilities in Xinjiang and throughout China are not yet at a point at which they can accommodate all interested foreign scholars. Even when access is gained, many materials remain unclassified and uncollected; persons in authority often seem unsure as to what exactly the holdings of the nation's repositories are. Nonetheless, the acquisition of valuable microfilm from the National Library of China in Beijing and books acquired in Urumqi both contributed to this study.

While in Xinjiang, I was also able to observe for myself something of the continuing difficulties between Han Chinese and Moslems in the palpable tension visitors experience when travelling in the region. A personal visit also conveys something of the grim grandeur of the Gobi Desert, and the incredible logistic obstacle this presents to any Chinese government intent on binding this vast territory to the Chinese state.

Altogether, there is today a wealth of first-hand material on Xinjiang available to the researcher, albeit only in countries that are literally at opposite ends of the earth. Used together, these materials now permit the presentation of a reasonably full analysis of the twists and turns of Chinese Nationalist policy in Xinjiang and its response to the formation of the East Turkestan Republic. Above all, this information points to the growth of nascent Turki nationalism in Xinjiang, rooted in the pervasive anti-Han Chinese sentiment which, more than any other factor, marks Han Chinese-national minority relations during this period.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Community Party
Cn	Chinese Central Government Currency, Republican period
ETR	East Turkestan Republic
GPP	Government Political Programme
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic
PLA	People's Liberation Army



Abbreviations (Continued)

PRC People's Republic of China  
ROC Republic of China (Taiwan)  
Xn Minjiang dollars, Republican period

Measurements

Chaceak 20 pounds  
Hectares 2.471 acres  
Jin 2.205 pounds  
Sheng 31.6 cubic inches or approximately one pint

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Scope and Purpose

In the early morning hours of November 7, 1944, Moslem Turks in China's far northwestern province of Xinjiang attacked the Chinese garrison stationed in Yining, the principal city of the Ili valley, near the Sino-Soviet border. Despite the fact that the Moslem rebels were, at the outset, vastly outnumbered by the Chinese troops, they quickly gained effective control of the city, and within days had succeeded in forcing the Chinese into the confines of their main headquarters, the local airfield barracks, and a temple on the outskirts of the town. Secure in their expectation of ultimate victory, the Moslems declared the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic (Hereafter ETR) on November 12, 1944. This new Moslem state's declared objectives were to establish freedom and democracy for the Islamic peoples of the Turk's ancient homeland, and to oust all Chinese from the whole of what they referred to as Turkestan, the Chinese province of Xinjiang.

By 1945, the military forces of the ETR had successfully driven Chinese troops from all towns and borderposts in the three northwestern-most districts of the province. Their troops pushed as far east as the Manas River and were poised for an advance that would have taken them to the very gates of the provincial capital itself. Hurried diplomatic activity and a personal appeal to the Moslems by Chiang Kaishek led to negotiations between representatives of the independent three districts and the Chinese Central Government, which resulted in a Peace Agreement, signed by both sides in 1946.

The course of this rebellion and succeeding events in this remote part of the world have long been a subject of

interest, but nearly all of what happened - especially the complex inter-relation of political and ethnic forces - has been shrouded from view and described only in the briefest form in reference works of a general nature. Today there are newly available materials which provide information that makes it possible to elucidate the development of Chinese policies in this strategic border area between 1944-49 and so assess a complex and fascinating period in Xinjiang's modern history.

Such an assessment is the object of this study. Through an examination of Chinese objectives and policy implementation during the existence of the ETR, it will be demonstrated that Chinese policies in Xinjiang served to increase local antipathy among Moslems toward the Han Chinese and, inadvertently, to foster the nationalism nascent in Chinese Turkestan for nearly a century. While aiming to foster "unity among nationalities" (minzu tuanjie) in Xinjiang, Chinese policy and implementation were in fact divisive, ultimately driving Han and Moslem further apart and exacerbating existing tensions in the region.

Further, despite clear evidence presented to the Central Government by its own representatives in Xinjiang on the need for immediate and extensive reform in provincial administration and in Chinese border policy in general, such reform was never seriously undertaken. An extensive programme of political, economic and social reform was indeed adopted by the region's first multi-ethnic coalition government in 1946, but a state of tension constantly existed between this and the basic objective of the Central Government which was the restoration of the region as an integral part of China. With this objective, Xinjiang was treated on different levels, one responding to the nationalities problem, the other reasserting the status of the area as basically that of a Chinese province. Despite recognition of the demands of the region's multi-ethnic population, the core of Chinese policy continued to be military

and political domination by the Han Chinese minority. The reforms begun under the coalition faltered by early 1947, and with the removal of the coalition chairman, Zhong Zhizhong, in May of 1947, the reform movement collapsed.

The provisions of the Peace Agreement of 1946 - which might have led to real reform on the local level - were never fully implemented. A major reason for this was the interference in civil government by the local Chinese military establishment in Xinjiang. They were assisted in foiling the attempt at reform by many Chinese bureaucrats who continued to wield the power of great inertia; their resistance to change and the constant lobbying of government by local Han Chinese intent on maintaining the predominance of Han Chinese in government posts slowed the effects of any reform directives issued by the coalition.

A further aspect of Chinese policy - one which worked directly against China's own interest in maintaining her position of supremacy in Xinjiang - was the Central Government's chosen interpretation of the significance of the "Ili Incident", as it is called in Chinese history. Even before the full details of the affair were available, it was decided in Chongqing that this was a Soviet-backed insurgency movement. Despite later information to the contrary, which emphasized the need for immediate reform to ensure lasting peace among the region's nationalities, the Central Government continued to choose to blame the incident on the USSR. Military reports emphasized the propinquity of the three districts and the Soviet Union, and Chinese officials, anxious to absolve themselves of any blame or responsibility for the events of 1944-45, privately condemned the Soviet Union for its action.

There was undoubted tacit, if not more, support from the USSR, but other factors account for the widespread local support of the LTR movement. One was increasing Moslem hostility toward all Han Chinese as a result of the

excesses of Sheng Shicai, under whose rapacious hand countless underground resistance groups had formed, particularly in the northern, Kazakh-dominated part of the region. Such hostility, in turn, contributed to the upsurge in Turki nationalism that made the EPR of 1944 initially a popularly supported nationalistic movement, aimed at establishing an independent Turki homeland.

The Central Government itself also contributed directly to the fostering of Turki nationalism by its intransigence on the questions of autonomy and self-determination in China's border areas. Representatives of Xinjiang in the Chinese capital had long been lobbying the Nationalist government to give Xinjiang Moslems consideration equal to that accorded the Tibetan and Mongolian minorities in China. But, with the formation of the independent EPR, the Chinese attitude on this issue hardened, Chiang's conviction that the Soviets were behind the EPR gave him full justification for repeated refusal to entertain any discussion of the possibility of autonomy for Xinjiang or to accord them any special status beyond that of an ordinary Chinese province. By not recognising the political aspirations of the proud and determined Turki population, the government even managed to alienate the members of the Turki elite who had previously been pro-Chinese.

The events in Xinjiang during this intriguing period of modern history did not, of course, occur in a vacuum. In many respects, the course of events in the northwest was tied to the wider area of China's domestic politics and the Anti-Japanese War which began in 1937. To place the EPR and Xinjiang itself in perspective, we first look at the historical context.

## 1.2 Historical Context

The course of events which led to the dramatic take-over of a Chinese garrison town in remote Xinjiang in 1944,

and succeeding events in the region, form part of an overall pattern of fragmentation within China that began with the birth of the Chinese Republic in 1911. By the time Moslems were establishing their own government in Xinjiang in 1944, the Chinese Republic had been struggling against national disintegration continuously for over thirty years.

Challenges to central control came first from among the Chinese themselves, with warlords and political factions straining to pull parts of the nation under their control. Between 1910 and 1928, in particular, the nation was torn by factionalism. When Chiang Kaishek emerged as head of government in 1928 he won recognition from many of the principal warlords and political groups of China, but during the chaotic period which led to World War II, his government's control over much of China was tenuous, and in the country's borderlands, including Xinjiang, Nationalist Chinese control was virtually non-existent. In these remote regions, warlords ruled independent of outside control and, while some paid nominal allegiance to the Nationalist cause, men such as Ma Bufang in Qinghai province and Sheng Shicai in Xinjiang were able to rule their respective provinces as private fiefdoms.

The Japanese invasion of northeastern China presented a more radical challenge to Central Government authority. This threat was used by Chiang to rally Chinese factions in a common cause and in the early 1940s enabled him to unite dissident Chinese political factions and to launch a drive to re-assert Nationalist influence in many of the regions which had been formerly quasi-independent. Chiang successfully lured, cajoled or forced militarist regimes in the areas of Yunnan, Qinghai and Sichuan back into the nationalist fold. A major coup came in 1944 when he was able to remove the warlord Sheng Shicai from Xinjiang and appoint his own man, Wu Zhongxin, as Governor of the province, thus ending a whole decade of virtual independence of the region.

Even as the Nationalist government began to draw segments of the nation closer to the Central Government, in the Chinese borderlands the non-Chinese inhabitants increased their own efforts at establishing or, in some cases, maintaining their independent status vis a vis the Nationalist government in Chongging. Among such groups were the Turki peoples of the far northwest who rose in rebellion in the Ili valley before the new governor could consolidate Nationalist power in the region.

Chiang viewed the problem in Xinjiang as similar to the situation elsewhere in China where local warlords or factions challenged his authority. Chiang's basic objective in Xinjiang was thus the same as in other areas in opposition to Chiang and the Guomindang: to maintain the traditional borders of China and to prevent any person or group from establishing regional power bases that could threaten Chiang's own Government.

However, the circumstances in Xinjiang were in many ways quite unlike conditions which pertained in Han-Chinese populated provinces of China. These circumstances make the "Ili Rebellion" of particular importance to students of history, geo-political behaviour and international relations. First, there was the geographic reality of the situation. Xinjiang was (and, to a large extent, remains) a remote rugged region of mountains and deserts, populated by non-Chinese, the vast majority of whom were Moslems of Turkic origin who were, at best, reluctant citizens of the Chinese state. Even during the most peaceful of times, the Chinese Central Government had found it difficult to maintain control over the area and the increasingly beleaguered Chiang government was in no position to consider use of military force, the traditional means of enforcing Chinese dominance in this border region. For this reason, a new direction in Chinese border policy had to be followed, at least until the situation in China proper stabilized.

Secondly, the three districts of the ITR were contiguous with the Soviet Union which had a long-standing interest in not only the three districts themselves but also in the rest of the province. From the time of Governor Yang Congxin, the USSR had established itself as the province's foremost trading partner, a status which was strengthened under the rule of Sheng Shicai in the 1930s. Furthermore, it had stationed its own Soviet troops in Xinjiang as far east as the town of Hami, ostensibly to prevent any Japanese attempt to subvert or cut off the region from the rest of the country.

Besides commercial and military involvement, it was also in the Soviet Union's best interests to maintain a careful watch on the development of nationalism and independence movements among Xinjiang's Moslem population since such tendencies could influence the USSR's own Moslem minorities. Clearly, the Soviet Union could not afford disinterest in Xinjiang's affairs.

Well aware of the Soviet position with regard to Xinjiang, the Chinese Central Government was developing and consolidating Sheng's belated attempt to reverse Russian encroachment in the region when the Ili rebellion took place, with at least the acquiescence of the USSR; when the local Moslem forces outmatched the substantial Chinese forces then stationed in the region, the Chinese turned toward an international solution, seeking to use diplomatic means to restore their control. The "Ili Incident" thus moved beyond the sphere of purely domestic politics and became part of the complex negotiations between the USSR, the United States, Britain and China during the summer of 1945.

Third, the situation was a challenge to prevailing Guomindang ideology on the subject of China's national minorities and the border regions. The Guomindang emphasized the sanctity of the traditional Chinese borders and



the responsibility of Chinese leadership to preserve such borders intact for future generations. Chiang himself wrote the Guomindang doctrine which declared that all national minorities were, in fact, simply branches of the greater Chinese race varying in culture and language only by virtue of their relative isolation from the Chinese mainstream over a period of centuries.\* As Chinese, the diverse peoples of the vast border regions had no historical or cultural justification for demands of separation from the Chinese motherland.

The IIR was a direct challenge to this ideology as well as to continued Chinese control over the whole of Xinjiang province. In meeting this challenge, Chiang did not swerve from his primary objective of maintaining direct Chinese control over the borderlands, but he was forced to follow new policies of compromise and conciliation to end this Ili crisis.

### 1.3 Theoretical Context

Problems related to the minority peoples of China have usually been considered as a part of China's domestic politics. This was a natural development, in terms of academic study, since Chinese political and military control periodically extended to the vast homelands of the peoples who are today termed "national minorities" by the people's Republic of China. Further, information on Chinese-national minority relations was mainly in the Chinese language, so the anthropologists and historians whose initial interest had been China and Chinese culture began the modern studies of minority affairs in China.

However, the key to interpreting the events of this century in the Chinese borderlands lies only partly within a Chinese framework. Because the cultures, religions, languages and histories of these peoples are the result of

\* For discussion of this view see Chapter 2.3.

historic development quite different from that of China and the Chinese, it is more useful to place these peoples and their 20th century struggle for independence in a different context. That is, first, to view their modern history as emerging from circumstances and perceptions unique to their own and distinct from that of the Chinese, and second, to view their struggles against Chinese domination not as "rebellion" against Chinese rule, but as an attempt to win political and military control over what they themselves viewed as their traditional homelands. In other words, the peoples of the Chinese borderlands were waging what is today referred to as national liberation struggle, their aim being to set up independent states free of outside control. The framework for discussion thus moves beyond the realm of Chinese domestic politics and into the volatile sphere of 20th century nationalism.

Placing China's nationality question into this context means that the issues and questions involved are seen not only as an aspect of Chinese politics, of which they remain an integral part, but also as an aspect of a greater international phenomenon of post-World War I - the rise of nationalism among minority nationalities throughout the world. This basis for analysis is particularly useful for Xinjiang, whose peoples have strong cultural and historic ties to three great cultural traditions: China, Russia and the Middle East.

Such an approach also serves to emphasize the fact that the upheaval in Xinjiang in the 1940s was similar to that of other colonial or "subject" peoples who were contained within larger political entities, and whose unity of purpose was supplied by unified opposition to the states of which their homelands constituted a part. The cohesion which this opposition provided has been a principal element in many national independence movements.

Parallels between events in Chinese Central Asia and

other areas on the peripheries of the USSR and China also take on new significance viewed from this standpoint. Of particular interest for Xinjiang studies are the movements in Iran and Iraq during the same period, where Kurdish and Azerbaijan Republics were established under Soviet tutelage. While comparison of the Soviet role in the various Moslem republics established on the Soviet periphery during the 1940s is beyond the scope of this work, future research may be better able to describe the parallels and differences between events in Xinjiang and these regions as a result of the information presented here.

Nationalist Chinese policy in Xinjiang, the primary subject of the present work, is also placed in an extended context for, in essence, Chiang Kaishek's government was faced with the same problem which challenged many governments after World War II, namely, how to respond to the newly awakened nationalism of ethnic minorities which increasingly threatened the old national boundaries and the established international order from Asia to Europe.

The reaction of the Nationalists to this problem was similar to that of other governments which, having initially refused to recognise the nature of these struggles, were forced by circumstances to come to some kind of agreement with the new militant nationalists' demands. Thus, the interaction between the Nationalist government in China and the "rebel" government in northwestern Xinjiang in 1944 is a part of the post-World War II pattern of breakdown in the old colonialist and imperialist system, and the seemingly inexorable growth of national liberation struggles in the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER TWO

### National Minority Policy in Republican China

#### 2.1 Overview

During the course of its long history, the Chinese

state gradually expanded into the vast and sparsely populated lands which surrounded it, a process which followed the rhythm of the rise and fall of dynasties in its movements of conquest and retrenchment. Characteristically, this involved the Chinese state in the need for military and diplomatic policies, the classic version of the former being pacification and of the latter the exploitation of differences among the peoples of the border territories, using the barbarians to oppose the barbarians, in order to prevent the coalescence of forces which would threaten the Chinese state.

While China had formally incorporated some borderlands such as Mongolia and Xinjiang into the Chinese state by the end of the nineteenth century, these regions continued to challenge Chinese efforts at control. The advent of the twentieth century and the Chinese Revolution in 1911 did not end centuries old divisions; on the contrary, in some border areas, the desire to be free of Chinese rule gained new impetus from the anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist winds which gathered force after the collapse of the Qing court.

In terms of Chinese attitudes toward the border areas, the Revolution of 1911 meant little actual change in traditional Chinese policy. While Dr. Sun Yatsen eventually adopted the Wilsonian call for self-determination for ethnic minorities in China as the basis for Guomindang policy, the successive Central Governments established after 1911 took no positive steps towards a formal national minority policy. Weak and factionalized, during Sun's lifetime the Central Government was barely able to maintain its own often superficial hold on the reins of power. Thus warlords continued the old Imperial style of rule in many of the border regions, employing both military force and "divide and rule" tactics to maintain their positions of power.

In Tibet and what was formerly called "Outer Mongolia"

the local governments maintained virtual independence from the Central Government from 1914 onwards. Tibet continued its guarded relations with the various Chinese governments established after 1911 but the Chinese, who continued to claim sovereignty, never exercised even a small degree of control in the region.<sup>1</sup> Mongolia, having eliminated most of its Han Chinese population at the time of the Chinese Revolution, came under the protection of the Bolshevik government after 1917. From that time onwards, Chinese control was limited to brief periods of dominance in Inner Mongolia.<sup>2</sup>

With Chiang Kaishek's assumption of the Guomindang leadership on Sun's death in 1925, the latter's programme of autonomy and self-determination as the basis of the Nationalist's national minority policy was dropped. Chiang's primary objective with regard to the minority areas was to hold these territories as an integral, indivisible part of the Chinese state. All political action in the borderlands was designed to serve this one paramount aim.

## 2.2 Sun Yatsen's National Minority Policy

During the first decade of the Chinese Republic, while the problem of national unity dominated political affairs, relatively little attention was paid to the national minority question. But under the influence of Wilsonian doctrine and Soviet advisers, Sun gradually turned his attention toward minority affairs. Writing on the subject in 1918, he called for the eventual "dying out of all names of individual people inhabiting China."<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that at that time five nationalities were recognized as being part of the Chinese nation; these were the Manchu, Mongol, Tartar, Tibetan and Han. Lacking detailed information on the many ethnic groups living within China's borders, but aware of the need for unity within China if she was to survive as a modern state, Sun advocated

the "dying out" of names of nationalities so that China could follow the example of Switzerland and more especially of the United States which, in his view, was a nation able to "satisfy the demands and requirements of all races and united them in a single cultural and political whole."<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of such statements Sun's early views on the question of ethnic minorities have been called assimilationist. In the sense that Sun hoped for a united China where all national groups were integrated as part of the state, he can perhaps be termed as such, but Sun's use of the USA and Switzerland as examples for China to emulate quite clearly show that he would have found a kind of cultural pluralism acceptable even in the early 1920s. A longer quotation from the same source makes this evident:<sup>5</sup>

There are still many people suffering from unjust treatment; the Chinese people must assume the mission of setting free these people from their yoke, in the sense of direct aid for them or uniting them under the banner of a single Chinese nation. This would give them the opportunity to enjoy the feeling of equality of man and man, and of a just international attitude, i.e. that which was expressed in the declaration of the American President Wilson by the words "self-determination." Up to the moment of reaching this political stage, our work cannot be considered as finished. This is the meaning of nationalism - but "positive" nationalism and to this we must give special attention.

As Sun's thinking on the minority question evolved, he became committed to the idea of self-determination for China's ethnic minorities. In January 1923 the Sun-Joffe Manifesto was issued calling for autonomy and self-determination and the following year this call was made part of the Kuomintang's political platform adopted at the first

National Congress in April of 1924. Article Four of the Fundamentals of National Reconstruction drawn up by the Congress stated unequivocally that racial minorities in China were to be helped and guided toward self-determination and self-government should they so desire.<sup>6</sup>

The two basic principles which, theoretically at least, underlay Guomindang - and Sun - policy with regard to national minorities were basic equality for all nationalities in China and the right of self-determination for those peoples who chose the road of independence. However, as neither the party nor the Central Government was, at that time, in a position to act on such principles, no details of how such a policy would be implemented were issued by the government or the party.

### 2.3 Policy Changes Under Chiang Kaishek

Major changes in the basis of minority policy began with the assumption of control over the Guomindang by Chiang Kaishek, successor to Sun upon the latter's death in 1925.

Chiang's view of the minorities within China was that they were simply one part of the greater Chinese race. Although centuries of relative isolation had led to some distinctive differences in language and culture within China's borders, Chiang contended that all had originally been a part of the ancient Chinese race. The ethnic minorities were not, in his view, "minzu" but rather they were "zhongzu". The former term can be translated as nationality, but the latter means simply one branch of a single tribe.<sup>7</sup>

As all of China's peoples were of a single basic root, Chiang declared that there could be no reasonable basis for granting any minority group the right to seek self-determination or independence from the motherland. Rather,

Chiang foresaw a return to the original state of affairs in China in which all peoples were assimilated into one single race. This would be assisted by government policy which, under Chiang, became basically assimilationist and almost totally unyielding in its efforts toward enforced national unity.

Where Sun's views had been formed by Soviet advice and Wilsonian doctrine, Chiang viewed all the old Imperial Chinese territories as permanent and indivisible parts of China. The Provisional Constitution of the political Tutelage Period, promulgated in Nanjing in June of 1931, pointedly included the de facto independent regions of Mongolia and Tibet as part of the territory of the Republic of China, and the Proposed Constitution of 1934, in Part I, Article 4, listed all the provinces and the "areas" of Mongolia and Tibet, adding that no alteration should be made in this territory.<sup>8</sup> In 1943, Chiang himself wrote, "There is not a single piece of territory within these areas . . . which can be torn away or separated from China, and none of them can form an independent unit by itself."<sup>9</sup>

Chiang's views dominated official policy, but they were by no means unanimously supported by all his staff or all political factions. General Zhang Zhizhong, who became governor of Xinjiang, and others in the government were cautious proponents of cultural pluralism, advocating the acceptance of the various nationalities as semi-autonomous units with the right to eventual self-determination and, in the interim, the right to control their own cultural and local affairs.

One school of thought went as far as to advocate a federalist form of government as a possible solution to the continuing rebellions against Chinese rule in the "frontier" areas.<sup>10</sup> However, as Owen Lattimore has pointed out only the Chinese Communist Party openly proposed a federalist type of government. Based on Soviet policy, in 1930