

LINDA BENSON

THE
ILI
REBELLION

THE MOSLEM CHALLENGE
TO CHINESE AUTHORITY
IN XINJIANG
1944-1949

*Wish all good wishes -
Linda Benson
1/22/91*



An East Gate Book

M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
Armonk, New York
London, England

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Available in the United Kingdom and Europe from M. E. Sharpe, Publishers, 3 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8LU.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Benson, Linda K.

The Ili rebellion : the Moslem challenge to Chinese authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949 / by Linda K. Benson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-87332-509-5

1. Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region (China)—History
2. Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region (China)—Ethnic Relations.
3. I-li Ha-sa-k'o tzu chih chou (China)—History
4. I-li Ha-sa-k'o tzu chih chou (China)—Ethnic relations.
5. China—Ethnic relations.

I. Title.

DS793.S62B37 1989

951'.6—dc20

89-37237

CIP

Printed in the United States of America



ED 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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PREFACE

In November 1944, in a remote part of northwestern 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—that surrounded it.

Who were these rebels, and what was the motivation behind their “Three Districts Revolution”? Were they the agents of the Soviet Union, 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 little information on Xinjiang as a whole for this period, and detailed accounts of the region’s history were not to be found outside a few specialized libraries. Part of the reason for this appeared to be that Xinjiang is physically remote from the centers of civilization in Europe and Asia—a geographic fact that 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 ex-

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