History of Xinjiang: Between China and the Soviet Union (1910s-1940s)

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In 1933 Dr Khalid (*né* Bertram William) Sheldrake (Muslim convert, Life President of the Western Islamic Association, Honorary President of the Islamic Cultural Union, Honorary President of the Pan-Islamic Society of London, founder of the Western Islamic Movement, editor of *The Minaret* , Honorary Ecuadorian Consul to the UK, and sometime leader of prayers at the mosque in Peckham) left his wife Ghazia (*née* Sybil) in their South London home to embark upon an international speaking tour. He reports that a delegation from Chinese Turkestan approached him at his Beijing hotel that summer and entreated him to be their monarch. He agreed, and Sheldrake appeared in subsequent newspaper accounts and speaking engagements across Asia as 'His Majesty King Khalid of Islamestan'.

King Khalid never actually bothered to go to Xinjiang, and there is no reason to expect anyone there ever knew of his existence. But from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth increasing numbers of European archaeologists, geographers, diplomats, missionaries, spies and other adventurers did. The Greco-Armenian Sufi, hypnotist, occult charlatan and Tsarist agent G.I. Gurdjieff chose Keriya and Yengisar as spots to recuperate from the death of a colleague and his own gunshot wounds, respectively. Sven Hedin, Aurel Stein, Albert Van de Coq, Paul Pelliot, Count Kozui Otani and others reaped from the barren Xinjiang soils a rich harvest of archaeological artefacts to supplement the written accounts of the region's early history. These provided the first material evidence of the remarkable early communication of goods and ideas between India, China and the Mediterranean—a history of intercultural exchange captured in the term 'Silk Road'. Despite the turmoil of those years, Swedish missionaries in Kashgar and missionaries including Mildred Cable, Francesca French and G.W. Hunter with the Chinese Inland Mission opened schools, ran a printing press, took care of orphans, and found many welcome recipients of their medical, if not spiritual care. Agents of foreign governments, most notably the great gaming British and Russians, their Indian, Kazak and Uzbek proxies, but also the first field casualty of the American CIA, drew maps, learned languages, dined with local dignitaries, promoted their national products, and gathered intelligence from consulates in several Xinjiang cities. European travellers endured insufficient food, brackish water and the ever-troublesome camels to attempt extraordinary journeys (or, rather, journeys that were unexceptional in the context of Xinjiang travel but which sounded extraordinary when written up for European readers).

And they wrote many books. These enjoyed brisk sales, no doubt because of their seemingly remote and exotic settings. However, the very fact that so many European, Russian, American and Japanese accounts of Xinjiang ('Chinese Turkestan') were issued between the 1870s and the 1940s suggests something quite different: that Xinjiang was increasingly linked to global events and trends. Expansion of modern communications (rail and telegraph) brought Xinjiang closer to political, commercial and cultural centres to the east and especially the west; the new ideologies of nationalism, modernisation and socialism inspired members of both Turkic and Chinese elites in the region. At the same time, Anglo-Russian rivalry, revolutions in Russia and China and two world wars created a shifting political and economic context from which emerged new models for the region's political status. These included Chinese warlord satrapies paying lip-service to weak Chinese central governments, hopeful Turkic republics and satellites of the Soviet Union. Neither Chinese warlords nor Turkic nationalists could escape outside influences, however, especially that of the Soviet Union, and the region's political fate ultimately turned upon the vicissitudes of Sino-Soviet relations more than on the aspirations and efforts of local residents.

Yang Zengxin's Administration

A Bloody Banquet

One famous incident sums up the cold-blooded real politic by which Yang Zengxin dominated Xinjiang for seventeen years. He later described his strategy with the adage, 'when a cat catches a mouse, the cat emits no cry; when a hawk attacks a bird, it does not reveal itself.' In 1915, when Yuan Shikai, President of the young Chinese Republic, proclaimed a restoration of the monarchy with himself on the imperial throne, politicians, officials and generals throughout China opposed him. Yunnanese General Cai E launched a rebellion against Yuan, which many progressive Yunnanese military figures in Xinjiang planned to join. Yang Zengxin, however, did not believe the republican form of government suited China, and announced his support for Yuan Shikai. The group of Yunnanese officers in Xinjiang then began conspiring against Yang. When a Sichuanese officer, Xie Wenfu, brought the plot to Yang's attention, Yang feigned disbelief, calling in his Yunnanese subordinates to reassert their loyalty personally, which of course they did. Yang then had Xie Wenfu executed, 'to set his officers' minds at ease', and had them move their families into the governor's compound for safety.

Soon after, in February 1916, Yang invited the same group of officers to a Chinese New Year's banquet at the ministry of education. After a few cups of wine Yang gave a signal and his guards beheaded three of the plot organisers, Xia Ding, Li Yin and Ma Yi, where they sat at table. Yang then calmly finished his dinner. (Yang may have seen himself as a latterday Ban Chao, the Han dynasty general who had staged a similar dinner party ambush while pacifying the Western Regions). Later the governor deported some seventy Yunnanese cadets implicated in the plot back to China proper.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Yang came to power in Xinjiang by outmanoeuvring and then executing his rivals, including the Gelao hui, republican revolutionaries in Yili and Turkic rebels in Hami and Turfan. Yang's main goal in Xinjiang remained the retention and enhancement of his personal power. He thus at first relied heavily upon relatives, his coterie of fellow Yunnanese and a personal army of Chinese Muslims. He appointed a trusted aide, Ma Shaowu, a Hui from Yunnan, as Military Commander at Kucha. He put Ma Fuxing, a commander who had helped him seize power and another Yunnanese Muslim, in charge at Kashgar. However, Yang was also perfectly capable of turning on his allies when necessary, as the banquet executions of Yunnanese officers shows. For example, Ma Fuxing installed himself up as padishah in Kashgar, gathered a harem of Uyghur women, manipulated the local economy to his personal benefit, and hung the amputated limbs of criminals and opponents on the city gates. When by 1924 Ma Fuxing's vicious despotism threatened to destabilise the south, Yang dispatched troops to arrest and execute him in a carefully planned coup.

Yang Zengxin also recognised that in a region with such complex local and ethnic interests, maintaining centralised control required patronising and balancing various élites, and allowing them, within limits, to enrich themselves off the territory under their control. Yang gave the Turkic Muslim local headmen (the institutional descendents of the Qing Beg's), nomad chiefs and the khans of Hami and Turfan latitude to enrich themselves from their populace. Though his writings reveal chauvinistic views about the non-Han peoples of Xinjiang, he did not implement any new sinifying policies or attempt wholesale replacement of local and non-Han leaders with Chinese. Rather, he played groups off against each other, as, for example, when he supported Kazaks against Mongols and the conservative Islamic *'ulama* against the jadids.

Yang's Isolationism

Yang was particularly keen to prevent outside economic and intellectual influences from penetrating his territory. Thus he refused to use provincial budget funds for inter-provincial road projects, and actively impeded private efforts to build paved roads linking Xinjiang to north China. He censored mail, kept tight control on the telegraph (Xinjiang's first lines had been built in the 1890s), and attempted to keep newspapers and other publications from China and Soviet territory out of Xinjiang. After coming to power he closed many of the new provincial Chinese schools, allowing others to languish or to continue only Confucian-style education; he allowed conservative Muslims to shut down jadidist schools. Although his administration's dire need for trained personnel eventually forced him to open a teacher's college, a provincial middle school, and a Russian language political and legal academy, there were never more than one hundred students enrolled in these schools at any one time. Indeed, both Uyghur and PRC historians consider Yang's "ignorant people policy" to be one of the most damaging aspects of his regime.

In keeping with his isolationist goals, Yang encouraged development of Xinjiang's infrastructure and economy only in ways that could enhance provincial revenues. Thus he improved irrigation systems between 1915 and 1918, resulting in an almost 40 per cent increase in grain yield per acre, a total increase in grain production of 1.4 million hectolitres (cubic metres). He also constructed a system of motor roads within Xinjiang and purchased a fleet of automobiles and trucks for transport. However, Yang did little to alleviate Xinjiang's shortage of medical facilities or doctors and epidemics raged unchecked in southern Xinjiang from 1912. Only in 1917, after British and Russian consular officials in Kashgar complained through their embassies to the Foreign Ministry in Beijing, was Yang pressured into a belated and underfunded effort to train medical personnel. Yang publicly called for development of industry and commerce, but those enterprises that depended on substantial investment, imported technology or external markets, including iron and steel, oil and electric power, gold, copper and other mineral extraction, and cotton textile production, stagnated during the 1910s and 1920s. In 1927, near the end of Yang's rule, Xinjiang investment in construction and communications amounted to only 0.13 per cent of Xinjiang's reported annual budget, while the military took over 72 per cent.

Yang's fiscal policies were driven by the need to cope with the chronic revenue shortfall that followed the fall of the Qing and the end of annual subsidies from China proper. Yang achieved some success increasing his government's share of tax revenues by eliminating abuses in collection. But as deficits continued, he also printed money: four separate paper currencies (in tael denominations) with different exchange rates circulated in Urumchi, Turfan, Yili and Kashgar areas. Annual deficits deepened nonetheless, and the provincial debt accumulated during Yang's tenure amounted to almost 50 million Chinese dollars in 1927. Although printing unbacked paper money did little to help with the persistent budget shortfalls and produced high inflation, the multiple currency systems did allow Yang to manipulate exchange rates and control Xinjiang's external trade. Yang's administration forced merchants—and even the Sino-Swedish geographical and archaeological expedition under Sven Hedin—to exchange specie for Xinjiang currency in order to do business in the province. Much of this bullion fell into the hands of Yang and other high provincial officials, who in turn shipped it to China proper and elsewhere. Yang himself reportedly opened a bank account under American protection in the Philippines.

All of this merely demonstrates that Yang Zengxin was a warlord not unlike others of the same era in China. One important difference, however, lies in Xinjiang's distance from the centres of political and military power in China and relative proximity to Russia and the Soviet Union. While voicing nominal allegiance to the national government, Yang enjoyed virtual autonomy from power-holders in the fragmented Chinese state. He was less protected from influence across his other borders.

Impacts from Russia/the Soviet Union

Soon after coming to power in 1912, Yang faced a threat from newly independent Mongolia, where followers of the new Mongolian ruler, the Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu, massacred Chinese in Khobdo

(Khovd), near the Xinjiang border. Yang reinforced military defences in the Altai region, and in the process consolidated his own control in this nomadic area. A little later, during a Tsarist settlement campaign in 1912-14 and a revolt in 1916, tens of thousands of Kazaks fled Russian territory for Xinjiang. Still later, in the 1920s, Soviet collectivisation stimulated a further mass migration from the Kazak Soviet Socialist Republic into Yang's Xinjiang. During each of these refugee crises, Yang negotiated repatriation agreements with the Russian or Soviet authorities. He also played the nomadic peoples against each other, arming Kazaks in northern and eastern Xinjiang to counterbalance Mongol groups and potential threats from Outer Mongolia.

The October Revolution and civil war that followed it drove a total of 30, 000 to 40, 000 Russian refugees and armed White Russian soldiers into Zungharia, including defeated forces under Generals Annenkov and Bakich. Around twenty thousand of their troops camped in the Ghulja and Tarbaghatai (Tacheng, Chughuchaq) areas, plotting revanchist assaults on the Soviets, communicating with White Russian forces in Mongolia and causing trouble locally. Yang did not want his province to become a base for opponents of his powerful neighbour, whose historical designs on Xinjiang were well known. He thus attempted to close the border and prevent the White armies and refugees from entering. When that did not work (Yang had few troops at his disposal) he used his favourite trick of scattering his enemies and dealing with them individually over time. He invited Annenkov and his force to Urumchi where they camped in the old Russian trade enclosure; later Yang had Annenkov detained and eventually repatriated via China proper to Soviet territory, where he was executed. Yang invited the Soviet Red Army into Xinjiang to deal with Bakich's forces; an attack into the Tarbaghatai region drove the Whites to Altai; a second invasion defeated them badly. The remnants fled to Khobdo, in Mongolia, and the Red Army withdrew north. Yang thus dealt successfully with a series of refugee crises.

The proximity of Russia and the Soviet Union also posed challenges in economic matters. Russian commercial interests in Xinjiang had been growing since the mid-nineteenth century, and since the Treaty of St Petersburg (1881) Xinjiang's exchange of raw materials for Russian manufactured goods played a large role in the Xinjiang economy. However, as the political situation in Russia deteriorated after 1914, trade declined. The collapse of the Russian rouble undermined the Xinjiang tael, contributing to escalating inflation and fiscal troubles. By 1919 Russian trade had evaporated, with grave effects on the Xinjiang economy as cotton and pastoral products found no ready market and imported Russian cotton cloth, ceramic and metal products, sugar and fuel fell into short supply. Soviet trade picked up again in the 1920s, and Yang concluded temporary trade treaties with the Soviets even before the Chinese Republic had recognised the government of the Soviet Union. By these agreements, Russian merchants would no longer enjoy exemption from customs duty or extraterritorial privileges. Once the Republic of China and the Soviet Union had restored relations, Yang finalised a treaty (1924) allowing Soviet consulates in Ghulja, Tarbaghatai, Urumchi, Kashgar and Sharasume in the Altai. The institution of the restricted 'trade pavilion' was abandoned, and these cities were completely open to traders. For the first time, moreover, China opened reciprocal consulates in Alma-ata, Tashkent, Semipalatinsk, Andijan and

Zaisan. Xinjiang's trade with the Soviet Union boomed and by 1928 had reached a total value of over 24 million roubles—almost ten times the value of Xinjiang's trade with China. Northern Xinjiang was only a few days land travel from the nearest Soviet railhead, so Soviet products were much cheaper than Chinese goods, which reached Xinjiang only after a three-month caravan journey. After the completion in 1929 of the Turkestan-Siberian Railroad, which ran parallel to the Xinjiang border from Semipalatinsk to Frunze (today's Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) rail transport became relatively accessible to southern Xinjiang as well. Despite some trade with India and Afghanistan, and a continued small-scale trade with central China, Xinjiang was gravitating closer to the Soviet economic sphere.

Yang's Fall

Through iron-fisted rule, a wide-ranging intelligence network and his willingness to use guile and violence, Yang managed to defuse a series of challenges to his rule over seventeen years, though the province was far from calm during that time. His relationship with the Chinese central government was cordial, and he filed detailed memorials regarding the situation in Xinjiang and his policies. Nevertheless, he remained free from any substantial political influence from Beijing. On the other hand, his attempts to isolate the Turkic population from intellectual currents flowing from Turkey, Russia and Central Asia were less successful. To a large degree this was because of the relative openness of trade and communications with Soviet territory and the porosity of the border to merchants, refugees, migrant labourers, students and others. Finally, Yang's autocratic rule multiplied what Marxist historians like to call 'contradictions' among his ministers, officers and subjects, Chinese and non-Chinese alike. These would bring him, and the whole province, to grief.

Yang's downfall stemmed from political factionalism within his own provincial government. After crushing the Yunnan clique in 1916, he relied increasingly on a group of officials from the north-west provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi; a rival faction originating in Hunan and Hubei coalesced around an official named Fan Yaonan, a moderniser and supporter of republican government. Fan had studied law at Waseda University in Tokyo before coming to Xinjiang with a personal recommendation from President Li Yuanhong and an understanding that Beijing would like to see him replace the intractable Yang as provincial head. Yang allowed the well-connected and well-educated Fan to advance through a series of lower posts eventually to become the *daoyin* of Urumchi, all the while contriving to deny Fan any real power. Frustrated by this treatment, and uneasy under Yang, whose murderous treatment of other rivals was legendary, Fan submitted his resignation several times, only to have it refused by the governor. Yang preferred to 'raise a tiger' close by, rather than allow Fan to return to Beijing and tell tales of Yang's regime.

In 1928 Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition defeated or co-opted the warlords and established national government in Nanjing under the Nationalist Party (Guomindang). Yang immediately proclaimed his allegiance to the new government, changed his own title to match Guomindang (GMD) nomenclature

and effected paper reforms of Xinjiang government structure. This was mere charade, of course, but Nanjing promised to take a more direct interest in Xinjiang affairs than had the various warlord governments in Beijing. Against the background of this shift in the national political terrain, Fan Yaonan decided to move against Yang.

That year, following the graduation ceremony at the Russian-language political and legal college Yang, Fan, assorted officials, the Soviet consul and the consul's wife attended a banquet. At one point during the meal Fan asked meaningfully if the wine was ready. A colleague replied that it was, and banged a wine-pot on the table. At the next toast, soldiers emerged and shot Yang Zengxin seven times. (The assassination took place on the seventh day of July and is thus known as the 7-7 Incident). 'The revolution is not a dinner party', Mao Zedong once famously said, but Xinjiang history is thick with banquet *coups d'etat*.

Fan Yaonan failed to seize control of Xinjiang for himself. He and his supporters quickly moved into the Provincial yamen (headquarters) to take control of the seals of office, but were surrounded there by government troops loyal to Jin Shuren, Yang's second in command and Xinjiang Commissioner for Civil Affairs. Jin executed Fan and his supporters and appointed himself Provincial Chairman and Commander in Chief, positions in which Nanjing officially invested him five months later.

The Deluge: Conflicts of the 1930s

Governor Jin Shuren

Jin Shuren (1883-1941), originally from Gansu, came to Xinjiang in 1908 and rose through official ranks as Yang Zengxin's protege. After coming to power, he followed precedent and placed his relatives and fellow-provincials in key military posts. As or more obsessed with security than his mentor, he nonetheless lacked Yang's self-discipline and—if the word can be applied to such a man—restraint. Whereas Yang printed 10 million taels worth of unbacked paper bills, Jin increased that value to 145 million to meet his sky-rocketing deficits. Jin raised taxes and added new ones, such as a much-resented levy on the butchering of livestock. He monopolised the gold, jade, lambskin and other industries for his own benefit, and exported personal profits to Beijing. Peter Fleming (one of the European travellers who chose these sanguinary years to pass through Chinese Turkestan), summed Jin up as 'an official whose rapacity was insufficiently supported by administrative talent'.

Most disruptive for Xinjiang, however, was Jin's abandonment of Yang's careful balancing act with regard to the regions' non-Han elites, in favour of a return to the sinicising approach first envisioned in the mid-nineteenth century by Gong Zizhen, and which Qing governors had attempted to implement in the years after the reconquest and creation of Xinjiang province. Whereas Yang had followed early Qing precedent and co-opted indigenous élites, Jin Shuren alienated many of them with his policies. Besides

such culturally inflammatory acts as banning Xinjiang Muslims from going on hajj, Jin sought to replace local non-Chinese leaders with Han officials. In one case he appointed Han officials to take charge of Mongol and Kirghiz nomads in mountain regions, sparking armed resistance. In another he attempted to replace the Torghut Mongols' ruler (a holy emanation like the Dalai Lama in Tibet or Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu in Mongolia) with Han officials. He also eliminated the status of the 'khanate' of Hami.This third move set off a conflagration.

As discussed in preceding chapters, the Turkic khans (called *wangs*, or princes, in Chinese) of Harni and Turfan (theTurfan khanate was known as Luqchun) had enjoyed special privileges since Qing times owing to their assistance in the Qing wars against the Zunghars. They held their territories as personal sultanates, with Muslim Turkic subjects owing them labour service as well as annual livestock tribute. Allowing such a khanate a quasi-independent status within the empire was an Inner Asian arrangement that the Manchus not only tolerated but promoted, as they had the similar domains of the Mongol aristocracy, and various non-Chinese chieftains *(tust)* throughout the empire. After remaining loyal to the Qing during the great rebellions of the nineteenth century, the Hami khanate survived the administrative changes accompanying Xinjiang's conversion to provincial status in 1884. However, in the post-Qing period, Chinese rulers were trying to extend state power and replace the patchwork of local arrangements made by the Qing in non-Han frontier areas with regular administration, a process known as *gaitu guiliu*, to gain control of new territory and potential tax revenues. When traveller Xie Bin spent a few days in Hami in 1917, he reported that there was much 'unopened land' in the area, and suggested a settlement and reclamation programme in Hami such as the Qing and Zuo Zongtang's troops had employed. (A Turfan official had proposed opening such lands to Han settlement in the early nineteenth century, but the Manchu He-ning had overruled him on the grounds that so doing would upset relations between Uyghurs and Han.)

Under Yang, and when Jin first took office, the khan of Hami (the Hami *wang)* was Maqsud Shah, purportedly a Chaghatayid descendent. In Qing times he had travelled regularly to Beijing for audiences at the Qing court, to which he also dispatched tributes of melons. He was fluent in Chinese, designed his palace garden in imitation of Beijing gardens, and dealt well with Chinese authorities, who provided a Chinese garrison to back up his Uyghur guard. He had his own staff to collect taxes and conduct other business in the city, which had a mixed population of Uyghur and Chinese and was a busy commercial crossroads. Immigration by Han and Hui, who owed only rents and tax, not Maqsud's heavy labour service, had contributed to resentment and rebellions by Uyghur subjects of the khan in 1907 and 1912 (see Chapter 4).

Maqsud died in 1930, and Jin Shuren, eager to assert Urumchi's control over the large Hami district that commanded the east-west route into Xinjiang, abolished the khanate and in its place established three new administrative districts: Hami, Yihe and Yiwu. (The latter names were historical Han dynasty names for outposts in this general area; the replacement of indigenous Turko-Mongolian place names

with historical Chinese names was a common practice in Republican period Xinjiang, one partly reversed by the PRC.)

Though there may have been some Uyghurs who initially welcomed the end of khanal rule and *corvée* duties, hopes were dashed when Urumchi immediately assessed double agricultural taxes for the first year after abolishing the khanate. To make matters worse, Chinese refugees were at the time fleeing into eastern Xinjiang to escape famine and war in Gansu. The government expropriated farmlands left fallow by Uyghur farmers, and gave them to Han settlers as 'wasteland' to reclaim, in addition providing the settlers with tools and seed and waiving their taxes for the first two years. In compensation Uyghurs received unimproved, unirrigated lands abutting the desert. Corruption, extortion and commandeering of grain and livestock by Chinese military forces deployed around the region by the new county governments further frustrated and angered Uyghurs.

The Hami Rebellion, 1931

A Chinese named Zhang, the tax collector and police chief in the village of Xiaopu outside Hami, has the distinction of touching off the rebellion in February 1931 that would enflame southern Xinjiang. He coerced a Uyghur father into giving him his daughter in marriage, and while he and his men were carousing at the wedding, a gang of angry Uyghurs attacked and killed them. The mob grew, and next stormed the hated police garrisons throughout the county, capturing weapons at each one. They slaughtered some one hundred families of Gansu Chinese and buried the settlers' heads under their own fields—thus clearly expressing their feelings about the recent settlement of Chinese in Hami. The Hami Muslim town fell as well, but soon a relief force from Urumchi forced the rebels to retreat to the mountains.

At this point the character of the rebellion shifted from that of a peasant *jacquerie* to a somewhat more organised movement, and adopted as one goal the restoration of the Hami khanship. This fact has given Chinese Marxist historians pause, for while they are obligated to view peasant uprisings as progressive, the desire to restore a 'feudal' ruler in preference to Chinese provincial governance is, from their point of view, most certainly reactionary. Of course, historical materialism aside, ethnic concerns and fury at the Chinese warlord government adequately explain Hami Uyghurs' nostalgia for Maqsud Shah. The rebellion now came under the leadership of two former khanal ministers, Khoja Niyaz (? -1937) and Yulbars Khan (1888-?).

Over the following months Jin Shuren gravely mishandled the situation, particularly in contrast to the finesse with which Yang Zengxin had dealt with the Hami and Turfan rebellions two decades earlier. After retaking Hami, Jin's military, especially brigade commander Xiong Fayou, gave no quarter, massacring Muslim townspeople and villagers in reprisal for Chinese casualties. When it became evident that surrender meant death, the Uyghur rebels in the surrounding countryside saw no choice but to continue fighting. Other dissatisfied groups, including Kazaks, Kirghiz and Huis, joined the rebellion. In an

attempt to even the military balance *vis-à-vis* the provincial forces, Yulbars travelled east to seek help—ostensibly, according to his own memoir, from the Nationalist government in Nanjing. In the event, however, he called upon the services of a young Muslim Chinese warlord named Ma Zhongying.

Ma Zhongying

Ma Zhongying (1911-?) was a product of the near apocalyptic devastation of Gansu and Qinghai in the 1920s. The region had been ravaged by earthquake, drought, famine, opium, floods of refugees and battles between Han warlord Feng Yuxiang and several Hui militarists, all surnamed Ma, most related to Zhongying. Zhongying (originally named Ma Buying), was a cousin of Ma Bufang, one of the infamous Mas who dominated north-western China. Ma Zhongying has inspired much colourful reporting (Cable and French call him the 'Baby General'; Hedin dubbed him 'Big Horse'). He seems to have emerged early as a charismatic leader, commanding an army ostensibly in the service of his uncle Guzhong in Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia and Suiyuan while only a teenager in the 1920s. According to some accounts, Ma studied briefly at a Guomindang military academy in Nanjing in 1929 or 1930 before returning to Gansu and reassembling his personal Hui force. Whether or not he actually attended the academy, the Nationalist government appointed Ma 'Commander of the 36th Division', though the government in fact exercised no real authority in north-west China. His exalted title notwithstanding, by the spring of 1931 Ma Zhongying had exhausted his cousins' patience and they jointly drove him to far north-western Gansu.There Yulbars Khan found him eager to move in a new direction and lend a hand against Jin Shuren.

In the summer of 1931 Ma's ill-armed cavalry force of some five hundred men accumulated weapons, recruits and notoriety from a series of successful engagements with Jin's forces on the westward road to Hami. Combining forces with Uyghurs under Khoja Niyaz, they laid siege to the Hami Chinese town and dispatched a sortie to take nearby Barkol.

Jin Shuren sent a force of one thousand men to relieve the siege of Hami, but Ma's force ambushed and destroyed it. His options shrinking fast, Jin called upon theTorghut Mongols in the Ko ria area for help, but they resented Jin's earlier efforts to replace their own Torghut regent with Han officials, and remained aloof. (Jin would later execute this Torghut regent—at a banquet.) Finally, provincial forces fromYili in the north, including 250 experienced White Russian troops, rode south in October under the command of Zhang Peiyuan and met Ma Zhongying between Hami and Urumchi. Ma was wounded in the engagement and retreated to Gansu with most of his army. (Missionaries Cable and French tended his wounds there.) Zhang Peiyuan relieved the Han Chinese in Hami, who by the end had mounted a defence with little more than opium, boiled leather, bales of wool and incendiary arrows from a buried Qing arsenal. As was now the norm in Xinjiang warfare, Zhang's men took horrible reprisals among Muslims in Hami and the surrounding countryside. Surviving rebels took refuge in a mountain fortress

above the old summer palace of the Hami khan, and for several months waged guerrilla war against provincial forces.

Rebellion in Turfan

During his recuperation, Ma Zhongying dispatched a lieutenant, Ma Shiming, to Xinjiang to fight beside Khoja Niyaz and Yulbars Khan. Many accounts of the period attribute further rebellions in eastern Xinjiang cities in late 1932 to this coalition. However, also deeply involved in the 1932 Turfan rebellion was a secret society consisting of Mahmut Muhiti (brother of the jadidist school founder Maqsud) and several others, including the son of the khan of Turfan and a camel-driver from Artush who gathered intelligence throughout the Urumchi-Qitai-Turfan area. In the course of the Turfan uprising rebels captured and killed the reviled commander Xiong Fayou. Soon after, despite Mahmut's suspicion of the Hui leaders, he and Ma Shiming jointly led a force in an attack on Pizhan (Shanshan).

During the winter of 1932-3 rebellion spread quickly throughout the province. These events are sometimes depicted as simple bilateral conflicts, as Muslims against their infidel rulers, or as an ethno-nationalist revolt of Uyghurs against Chinese authorities. For example, a brief history of the Uyghurs that appears on many Uyghur advocacy websites states that 'The Uighurs, who also wanted to free themselves from foreign domination, staged several uprisings against the Nationalist Chinese rule during this [1911-49] period. Twice, in 1933 and 1944, the Uighurs were successful in setting up an independent Islamic Eastern Turkestan Republic.' Although communal and ethnic concerns were important factors in the strife of the mid-1930s in Xinjiang, and certainly contributed to its bloody character, the reality is complex and multi-sided. In fact, besides Hui and Uyghur fighting in concert, there were also struggles among Turkic and Chinese Muslims. Besides the Uyghurs and Huis, forces arrayed against the provincial government included Kazaks, Kirghiz and other Chinese commanders and armies. Moreover, outside influence and intervention played a role: the Nationalist government dispatched 'Pacification Commissioners' and Guomindang party agents, and muddied the waters by extending recognition and official titles to Huis who were themselves fighting the recognised Xinjiang provincial government. Ultimately it was the Soviet Union's support and military intervention on behalf of certain Chinese and Uyghur groups that proved decisive against both Hui and Uyghur rebel movements. (Claims of significant and substantial Japanese or British influence or support of rebel groups in Xinjiang in the 1930s are exaggerated.) It was a time when ethnic, religious and political alliances were fungible; even the 'White' Russian troops in the employ of the Xinjiang government were by 1934 largely commanded and armed by the Soviets.

The events of 1932—4 are most easily treated by dividing them into two 'theatres': the northern and eastern region, where the fighting focused on Urumchi, and the Tarim Basin, where various early rebellions later converged in a struggle for control of Kashgar and the proclamation of an independent Turkic state.

Northern and eastern Xinjiang

After the fall of Turfan at the end of 1932 a coalition of Hui and Uyghur forces under Ma Shiming and Khoja Niyaz gathered in the Turfan, Toqsun and Pijan area, preparing an attack on Urumchi via the pass at Dabancheng. Other Huis approached Urumchi from the north. The Hui and Uyghur rebels fought frequent engagements with provincial troops, including the White Russians, under Sheng Shicai (1895-1970), the new Commander of Bandit Suppression on the Eastern Circuit.

Sheng, originally from Liaoning province, had studied both at Waseda University and at military academies in Japan and Guangdong before serving on the staffs of warlord Zhang Zuolin (in Manchuria) and then under Chiang Kai-shek on the Northern Expedition in 1928. A year later he was recommended to a delegate from Jin Shuren's government who was hoping to recruit officers in Nanjing to help reorganise Xinjiang's forces. Sheng took up the job in Urumchi in early 1930.

From January through March 1933 rebels attacked the Urumchi area and refugees poured into the city; food became scarce and disease rampant. Late in March the Soviet Union repatriated a force of some two thousand experienced Chinese troops who had fled into Soviet territory after the Japanese invasion of north-east China in 1931. As a North-easterner himself, dismayed by the Japanese occupation, Sheng established a rapport with this 'Manchurian Salvation Army' *(Dongbei yiyongjun)*. With these battle-hardened men reinforcing the Xinjiang provincial force, Sheng Shicai successfully relieved the capital.

True to form, Jin Shuren managed to alienate these new allies, who conspired with similarly aggrieved White Russians, Han Chinese in Jin's own government and Guomindang representatives to stage a coup against him on April 12. Sheng kept his hands clean during this '4-12 Incident', and even executed the leading Chinese conspirators, but ultimately emerged as formal military commander-in-chief, and *de facto* ruler, of Xinjiang's provincial government. Russian exiles in Urumchi met each other after the coup with a play on a traditional Easter-time greeting: 'Khristos voskres, Sinkiang voskres' (Christ is risen, Xinjiang is risen). Certainly Soviet representatives were pleased to have a vehemently anti-Japanese leader in charge at Urumchi.

Next, Ma Zhongying re-entered the fray in person, and Zhang Peiyuan, Chinese commander from Yili, turned against Sheng. By the spring and summer of 1933 Sheng in Urumchi faced Hui adversaries to the south and east, and Zhang Peiyuan to the north. However, for reasons that remain unclear, but which may have involved Soviet incentives, in June Khoja Niyaz, Mahmud Muhiti and their Uyghur army also switched sides. They declared support for Sheng and began fighting occasional battles against the Huis from a new base in Kucha. Despite this defection, by the winter of 1933 Huis throughout Zungharia were at war, and Ma Shiming had occupied the northern frontier town of Tarbaghatai while Ma Zhongying led the attack on Urumchi with his core force.

Southern Xinjiang

From late 1932 uprisings and rebel movements spread around the Tarim along two main trajectories. One branch of Huis proceeded westward along the northern edge of the basin from Karashahr. They joined forces with the Uyghurs commanded by Timur, then in control of Kucha. Then Huis and Uyghurs, under Ma Zhancang and Timur, marched on to Bai and Aqsu, and eventually, after battles with troops dispatched by the Kashgar *daotai* (circuit governor) Ma Shaowu, entered Kashgar.

Along the southern rim of the Tarim Basin a rebellion which started among gold miners in Khotan led to the declaration of an Islamic government by Muhammad Emin Bughra (1901-65) and his two brothers, who had been organising for a rebellion in Khotan for some time. The Bughras styled themselves 'emirs' of the new state. Muhammad Emin was a member of the Islamic scholarly community and had worked as head of a madrasa in Karashahr, but, according to Yasushi Shinmen, he was also sympathetic with the modernising thrust of the jadidist education movement and belonged to secret societies working to overthrow Chinese rule. The Khotan regime established after the rebellion extended its power into neighbouring towns of Chira, Niya and Keriya, and pushed towards Yarkand, where its army ousted and, with Kirghiz help, massacred Chinese and Hui soldiers in April 1933.

From the spring through the fall of 1933 the Muslim city of Kashgar changed hands with bewildering frequency. First, it was occupied in early May by the Kirghiz army of Osman 'Ali whom Ma Shaowu had originally commissioned to help defend the city. Soon thereafter Timur and his Uyghur army arrived, followed closely by the Hui force of Ma Zhancang. In this uneasy period ethnic affiliations trumped political and religious ones. Though the Huis claimed to be allied with Ma Zhongying, who had been warring against the Xinjiang provincial authorities for two years, they nonetheless rode to join the *daotai* (and fellow Hui) Ma Shaowu, then defending himself in his yamen. Later all Huis and Chinese would retire to the walled Chinese city (known as Hancheng, or Shule) a few kilometres from the Muslim old town. There they were besieged and occasionally stormed by the Turkic groups. Then relations soured between the Uyghur, Timur, and the Kirghiz, Osman. Having by now already looted Kashgar, Osman led his men back to the hills in late July. Timur rode in pursuit but failed to capture him. Upon his return in August Timur encountered a regiment of Ma Zhancang's men, who killed him and displayed his head on a spike at Kashgar 's Id Kah mosque. Osman returned to Kashgar, again attacked the Chinese cantonment with much violence and few results, and then once more sacked the old city.

Meanwhile, the Khotan regime had sent its own representatives to this busy neighbourhood. In early July 1933 Muhammad Emin's brother, 'Abd Allah Boghra, arrived in Kashgar accompanied by Sabit Damulla, a publisher and author from Artush who had met Muhammad Emin Bughra some years earlier while they were both returning from Mecca. Timur had arrested the pair, but after Timur's death in August they were released and opened up a'Kashgar Affairs Office of the Khotan Government' (Khotan

Idarasi). Here Sabit Damulla gathered Uyghurs and west Turkestanis with progressive views. In September this group metamorphosed into the East Turkestan Independence Association; in October Osman retired to his mountain camp once again; and in November 1933 Sabit Damulla proclaimed the foundation of the East Turkestan Republic (about which, see below).The constitution of this new state declared Khoja Niyaz 'president-for-life' in absentia, and Sabit Damulla and his cabinet emerged for a time in control of Kashgar, with Ma Zhancang and the Hui forces still holding out in the Kashgar Chinese city.

Soviet Intervention

Jin Shuren had continued Yang Zengxin's pattern of relations with the Soviet Union, rebuffing Nanjing's attempt to take the 'Chinese' consulates in Central Asia away from Xinjiang provincial control, and concluding a new trade treaty with the Soviet Union in 1931 (only revealed to Nanjing a year later), through which he received some Soviet planes and other military and economic aid in return for lower tariffs on Soviet goods. Trade continued to expand between Xinjiang and Soviet territory, with Xinjiang exchanging raw materials (wool, cotton, livestock, hides) for Soviet manufactured goods. Xinjiang ran continuous trade imbalances with the Soviet Union.

Besides this economic interest, after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, Soviet strategic and political interests in Xinjiang also developed rapidly. Japanese pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic propaganda stimulated Soviet fears that Japan planned to roll on to Xinjiang in order to create an Inner Asian buffer between China and the Soviet Union. Rumours of Japanese military aid to Ma Zhongying and the discovery of a Japanese among Ma Zhongying's entourage (he also had Turkish *aides-de-camp)* lent substance to this concern. Should they take control of Xinjiang, the Japanese would not only have been expected to cut off trade with the Soviet Union, but to use forward bases to launch air strikes on oil facilities at Baku. Moreover, the Soviets did not like the establishment of an independent Islamic republic in southern Xinjiang, just across the border from its own Central Asian territories, where the religiously-inspired Basmachi guerrilla movement remained a recent memory. Thus a first step in pursuing its strategic interest in the region was to facilitate the transit and repatriation of the Chinese Manchurian Salvation Army to Xinjiang. Once the anti-Japanese General Sheng had taken provincial power with the help of these troops, the next step was to save him and Urumchi from the Huis. In October of 1933 Sheng appealed to Garegin Apresoff, Consul-General in Urumchi, for military assistance. (A few months earlier Sheng had paved the way for this request by inviting the Urumchi Soviet consul-general in Urumchi to dinner and showing off volumes of *Capital, The Communist Manifesto* and *Problems of Leninism* on the shelves of his library.) In January 1934 two brigades of Soviet troops entered Xinjiang via Ghulja and Tarbaghatai and quickly crushed Zhang Peiyuan and the Hui forces in north Xinjiang. After two months of fierce fighting, during which Soviet aircraft dropped chemical weapons on Ma Zhongying's forces, the Huis were driven from the Urumchi area towards the

south-west. Xinjiang provincial forces pursued them, Soviet officers now in command of the White Russians.

As they fled, the Huis entered territory occupied by Uyghur armies. Khoja Niyaz had arrived in Kashgar to a warm welcome as President of the new Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) in January 1934, and his lieutenant, Mahmut Muhiti, revived the assault upon Hui and Han Chinese in the Chinese city. Units of Ma Zhongying's Hui army were not far behind Khoja Niyaz, however, and in February they attacked Kashgar in the name of the Nanjing Government. After driving Khoja Niyaz and the government of the Eastern Turkestan Republic to Yengisar, Huis from the Chinese city recaptured old Kashgar and proceeded to slaughter the Uyghur civilian population: one primary source estimates 4, 500 dead. In April Ma Zhongying himself drove into Kashgar, where he delivered a speech at the Id Kah mosque exhorting the local populace to show loyalty to Nanjing.

Then in early July Ma Zhongying reached a very strange decision. He dispatched the bulk of his '36th Division' to Khotan, while he and 280 men rode across the border into Soviet territory in the company of Soviet representatives. They journeyed to Moscow, supposedly to undertake military training. He later sent letters, a voice recording and photograph of himself in the uniform of a Soviet Red Army cavalry officer to his compatriots in the Khotan region, but after 1937 no more was heard from him. What happened? A recent Chinese source lists three explanations in current circulation: He died (1) while training to be a fighter pilot (2) in the Spanish Civil War, or (3) as a soldier defending the Soviet Union from Nazi attack. A Western source suggests that Stalin simply liquidated him, but the case remains open.

Khoja Niyaz and Mahmud Muhiti, meanwhile, having themselves made contact with Soviet agents on the border near Tashkurghan, moved on to Yengisar and Yarkand, where they found Sabit Damulla and a few of the other ETR ministers. Khoja Niyaz then took prisoner the very people who had named him president-for-life. Eluding the Huis on their own trail, Niyaz and Muhiti delivered the erstwhile leader of the Eastern Turkestan Republic into the custody of Soviet forces in Aqsu. Other members of the ETR government fled to Afghanistan and India. Sheng appointed Khoja Niyaz Vice-Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government, and made Mahmut Muhiti Deputy Commander of the Southern Xinjiang Military Region at the head of a division of Chinese and Uyghur provincial troops garrisoning Kashgar. The remnants of the Hui army concluded a truce with Sheng and established a rapacious government of their own in the southern Tarim Oases under Ma Zhongying's half brother, Ma Hushan. Sheng kept Muhiti under close watch, and in various ways chipped away at his authority. In 1937, when Muhiti fled to Afghanistan and Uyghurs and Huis in the south rose up again, Sheng called on Soviet troops to repress both the Uyghurs and the independent Huis, thereby securing control over the whole province.

The Eastern Turkestan Republic, 1933-4

The establishment of the Eastern Turkestan Republic, or Eastern Turkestan Islamic Republic, in Kashgar on 12 November 1933 was an event of great historical moment in the development of Uyghur nationalism. It is also an ambiguous one, due to confusion over exactly how 'Islamic' the state was intended to be; due to its odd gesture in appointing as its President Khoja Niyaz, the former vizier of the khan of Hami and present ally of the provincial warlord; and because the government was destroyed by Ma Zhongying's Huis before it had much chance to develop.

Politicised Chinese sources now routinely equate Uyghur separatism with religious extremism and foreign incitement. For example, a document released in early 2002 by the State Information Council of the PRC claims that 'in the beginning of the twentieth century, a handful of fanatical Xinjiang separatists and extremist religious elements fabricated the myth of "East Turkestan" in light of the sophistries and fallacies created by the old [European] colonialists.' This is clearly propaganda, but the main account of the period in English also stresses Islamic aspects of the 1933-4 Eastern Turkestan Republic, arguing that it was inspired and controlled from Khotan by the madrasa teacher Muhammad Emin Bughra, and pointing out that after the Khotan rebellion, the new regime in that city mistreated Christian missionaries.

Shinmen Yasushi presents a different picture in a study based on various Uyghur-language publications, Eastern Turkestan Republic documents, contemporary memoirs and British consular reports from Kashgar. He argues that the Republic, as reflected in its constitution, was founded not only on Islam, but on the modernising, nationalistic ideals of the jadidist movement of the 1910s and 1920s. Indeed, this ambiguous nature is reflected in confusion over the names used for the new state: although some primary sources refer to this proclaimed state as the 'Eastern Turkestan *Islamic* Republic', in other places, including the constitution itself, it is simply called 'Eastern Turkestan Republic'.

There was also ethno-nationalistic ambiguity: the new government struck its first copper coins in the name of the Republic of Uyghuristan (*Uyghuristan Jumhuriyiti*), but later coins and passports were labelled 'Eastern Turkestan Republic'. According to one man present at the time, the government decided upon 'Eastern Turkestan Republic' only after some debate, on the grounds that there were other Turkic peoples besides Uyghurs in Xinjiang and in the newly established government.

This confusion over the ethno-religious identity of the new state may stem from the nascent government's precarious position betwixt the Khotan emirs, the Hui armies and the pro-Soviet provincial government. In any case, Shinmen's analysis of the membership of the East Turkestan Independence Association and the subsequent leadership of the (Islamic) Republic of Eastern Turkestan is revealing. One would expect that if Muhammad Ernin Bughra was behind the independence movement much of its leadership would come from Khotan; in fact only a few did. Rather, a high percentage of the ETR leaders were educators or rich merchants from the Kashgar-Artush area and had been associated with the 'Uyghur enlightenment' movement of the 1910s-1920s. These included, first of all, Prime

Minister Sabit Damulla himself, whose Artush publishing business had been shut down by Yang Zengxin. Another was Abuhasan, Minister of Agriculture, said to be the younger brother of the merchant industrialist Musa Bay brothers who founded the first jadidist schools in Artush and Kashgar. The Minister of *WaqfAffairs* (mosque and shrine endowments), Shams al-Din Damulla, was formerly a teacher in the Artush schools, and is mentioned in the memoir of Ahmed Kemal (the Turkish consultant brought in by Hüsäyin Musa Bay) as a progressive participant in the modern education programme of the 1910s. The Turfan jadid educational movement launched by the international trader Maqsud Muhiti was also represented in the Kashgar Republic: Yunus Beg, a peasant from Turfan, had been the secretary of Maqsud's secret organisation, and held the post of Minister of Internal Affairs in the Republic. Later, of course, Maqsud's brother, Mahmud, also briefly held an ETR position.

Besides this prosopographic evidence, further indication of the founders' vision for the Eastern Turkestan Republic can be adduced from the political theatre surrounding the declaration of independence on 12 November 1933. Some 7, 000 troops and 13, 000 people, prominently featuring students and teachers from local schools, attended a mass rally on the Tumen river. The streets around the area were festooned with blue banners reading 'Eastern Turkestan Islamic Republic'. Sabit Damulla presided over a rally at which the principal ministers delivered speeches; at noon a cannon was fired forty-one times, and the crowd waved Eastern Turkestan flags and shouted 'Amen, amen!' The students of the Normal College then sang a song with the lyrics, 'Our flag is a blue flag, our horde (*orda*, i.e. our people, our khanate) is a golden horde, Turkestan is the homeland of our Turk people, it has become ours.'

Following the ceremony Sabit Damulla led a parade back into town, where the crowd reassembled in the square before the Id Kah mosque at the centre of old Kashgar. Here the leaders gave more speeches from the roof and minaret of the mosque. A published programme of the day's events, including the formal proclamation of the Eastern Turkestan Republic, pledged the new government to the goals of restoring peace and security, and included assurances to foreigners in Kashgar that the new government would not interfere in their activities. The proclamation invokes God at the beginning and end (somewhat less frequently than an average US presidential inaugural address), but the document's tone is not religious overall. Shinmen points out that the techniques of mass mobilisation utilised here were unprecedented in the region's history. Although people had been roused to rebellion and holy war in the past, the promulgation of printed speeches and political promises, parading of school children and soldiers, and the introduction of a national flag and anthem all draw from the repertoire of modern nationalism.

The constitution of the 'Eastern Turkestan Republic' (the name used in the constitution title itself) likewise reflects modernising, nationalistic ideology, while nonetheless highlighting the Islamic character of the East Turkestan nationhood then in the process of conception. In its first clauses the constitution announces that the new state is founded and will govern in accordance with *shari'ah;* the next clauses stress the new government's democratic character and state that it is to be a republic. Taken as a whole the document underlines the reformist and developmental goals of the founders, emphasising the im-

portance of education, promising to support foreign study, recruit foreign specialists, create libraries and promote publishing; there is a similar approach to the medical and other infrastructures. The state defined in this constitution would no doubt have been highly centralised; despite vague references, the national assembly was not defined in the same detail as were the central executive organs; in particular, there were no indications as to how and when this assembly would be convened. Likewise, the document provides few specifics about local government or local representative bodies within the region claimed by the state (which in theory encompassed Aqsu, Kashgar and Khotan).

Of course, with few resources to carry out any of its ambitious goals, the new government focused mainly on survival. Military requisitions, the printing of new paper currency (with cooperation of the Swedish mission, which ran the only press in town) and the looming threat from the Hui and Soviet armies all contributed to runaway inflation. Food prices doubled between October and December 1933. The new government, moreover, failed to receive international recognition or help from any foreign source. From Turkey came professions of solidarity, but no military or economic aid. The Soviet Union actively opposed this independent Turkic or Islamic Republic on its doorstep. Although Chinese sources routinely assert that Britain supported the ETR, and historians have found evidence of contacts, interest and even enthusiasm for Sabit's government on the part of the British consulate in Kashgar, they have found no evidence of material support. Rather, it appears that concern on the part of both the Indian government and London not to harm relations with the Nationalist Chinese government was a restraining factor. Nanjing, of course, denied the legitimacy of the ETR, and continued to recognise Ma Zhongying, Ma Zhancang and other Chinese Muslims as well as Sheng Shicai as its official representatives in Xinjiang, despite the fact that Nanjing had no real control over these figures, who were in any case busily savaging each other and the people of the province. (In retrospect, of course, the policy of defiantly maintaining their claims to Xinjiang through thick and thin, even absent any real influence or monetary investment, proved successful for the Chinese government).

The Sheng Shicai Era

Ethnic Policies Under Sheng

Taking his cues from the Soviets, Sheng gave the Xinjiang government a public posture that involved non-Han groups more prominently than had his Qing and immediate post-Qing predecessors. Soviet policy towards the many non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union was to categorise them and promote aspects of their cultural and even political identity, while working in other ways (such as gerrymandering the boundaries of their 'republics') to undermine separatist and nationalistic impulses. Sheng brought Stalinist-type ethnic taxonomy to Xinjiang, the same approach the PRC would later apply to minorities throughout China.

A few words about how the Nationalist Chinese regime conceived China's ethnic diversity will underscore the significance of Sheng's shift. Sun Yat-sen had considered nomad and sedentary, Chinese and Turkic Muslims all as one 'race' in his scheme of the 'five races of China'—Han, Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan and Hui (Muslim—oddly translated as 'Tartar' in English versions of Sun's speeches). Chiang Kai-shek's version, expounded in his book *China's Destiny (Zhongguo zhi mingyun*) and serving as official line in the 1940s, employed the same five categories. However, in a bizarre marriage of ancient mythology and modern racialist thinking, Chiang argued that they were all actually offshoots of the original Chinese stock, all descendents of the Yellow Emperor, which had diverged only by unfortunate accidents of geography and history.

Under Soviet influence Sheng departed from Guomindang ideology to recognise fourteen ethnic categories in Xinjiang: Uyghur, Taranchi, Kazak, Kirghiz, Uzbek, Tatar, Tajik, Manchu, Sibe (Xibo), Solon, Han, Hui (Tungan or Chinese Muslim), Mongol and Russian. This represented the first time 'Uyghur' entered official and common use to apply to the Turki-speaking, non-nomad population of southern Xinjiang, while continuing the use of 'Taranchi' for people in north Xinjiang who call themselves Uyghur today. Russian Orientalist scholars in the late nineteenth century had proposed that the Muslim inhabitants of the Xinjiang oases were Uyghur by virtue of descent from the Turfan Uyghur kingdom and the Qarakhanids. Starting in the 1910s Uyghurs in Tsarist and Soviet-controlled Ferghana and Semirech'e embraced this historical connection, and at a 1921 conference in Tashkent, 'The Organisation of Workers and Farmers of Altishahr and Zungharia' took a new name, 'the Organisation of the Revolutionary Uyghur'. Some activists with Russian and Soviet connections in the Turfan area had also adopted the term in the 1920s and 1930s (notably the poet Abdukhaliq 'Uyghur'), and as we have seen, the 1933-4 Kashgar republic considered calling itself'Uyghuristan'. But up till Sheng Shicai, Chinese governments distinguished Turkic Muslims from Chinese Muslims by referring to the former as 'wrapped-head' or 'turbaned Muslims' (*chantou, chanhui*) after the turbans some Uyghur men wore. Sheng gave the term 'Uyghur' its first official currency.

Ethnic categories such as Uyghur seem natural today, and insofar as they often reflected real cultural, linguistic and occasionally physical differences between communities of Xinjiang's peoples, they were generally accepted in the late 1930s and 1940s. Sheng's government reinforced them, moreover, assigning representation in the provincial legislature on the basis of the fourteen categories and creating an official cultural association for each. However, the shift from a broadly defined sense of 'Turk' to narrowly drawn categories had political implications, threatening to divide Muslim and Turkic peoples against each other. In fact, from his new home in Chongqing (where he had settled after his flight from Khotan), Muhammad Emin Bughra criticised Sheng's adoption of these categories, maintaining that 'Turk' or 'Türki' was sufficient designation for the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang. However, with some exceptions Sheng's categorisation stuck, and his identifications as continued by the PRC remain the basis of 'minority nationality' policy in the region.

Sheng's ethnic policies appear liberal in some ways. Each of his major policy statements (the 'Eight Great Proclamations' of 1934, 'Nine Duties' of 1935 and 'Six Great Policies' of 1936), contained, along with pledges of friendship to the Soviet Union, language guaranteeing the equality of Xinjiang's various nationalities (*minzu*), or promising to protect the status and rights of princes (*wanggong*), ahongs and lamas—i.e. the non-Han élites. He employed prominent non-Chinese in his government (though as the cases of Khoja Niyaz and Mahmut Muhiti show, the warlord's sincerity in so doing is doubtful). Sheng also promoted publication and education in languages other than Chinese, although, as in the Soviet Union, the main intent of the literacy programme was to extend the reach of propaganda. In other ways as well Sheng Shicai achieved some positive results. He implemented a currency reform, promoted agricultural recovery, constructed schools and roads, and expanded medical facilities. Soviet investment and renewed commerce led to an economic recovery, especially in the north.

Stalinism in Xinjiang

The darker side of this pro-Soviet turn was the flowering of Stalinism in Xinjiang. Sheng and his Soviet advisers wove an elaborate network of intelligence and secret police agencies to spy on, incarcerate and eliminate potential rivals, especially Turkic leaders suspected of nationalistic leanings. Stalin was purging the Turkic political élites and intelligentsia of the Central Asian republics at the same time that Sheng faced a renewed challenge to his rule in 1937 from Turkic forces (followers of Mahmud Muhiti) and Huis (under Ma Hushan) in southern Xinjiang. Sheng dealt with the military threat with Soviet troops, killing an estimated 50, 000 rebels, and then launched his own series of purges against 'traitors', 'pan-Turkists', 'enemies of the people', 'nationalists' and 'imperialist spies'. These detentions and executions swept up an entire cohort of Uyghur and Hui intellectual and political leaders, including Khoja Niyaz (accused of spying for the Japanese), Ma Shaowu and many of the White Russian generals who had helped Sheng come to power. In a later wave of purges, Sheng arrested as 'Trotskyites' a group of Han Chinese originally sent to him by Moscow. In the midst of this terror in Xinjiang, Sheng travelled to Moscow, where Stalin and Molotov regaled and enrolled him in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Estimates of those killed in Sheng's purges range from 50, 000 to 100, 000. Having so thoroughly cleaned house, Sheng found his government short-staffed. He thus approached the Chinese Communists in Yan'an. In the same spirit of wartime 'united front' through which it was cooperating with the GMD, the CCP seconded dozens of its cadres to Xinjiang. The CCP members worked mostly in high-level administrative, financial, educational and cultural ministerial positions in Urumchi, Kashgar, Khotan and elsewhere, helping to implement Sheng's Six Great Policies and maintain the communications corridor with the Soviet Union—the CCP's one open route from Yan'an. Mao Zedong's younger brother, Mao Zemin, served as Deputy Finance Minister in Sheng's Xinjiang government.

Sheng Misplays His Hand

There is evidence that Turkic leaders in Kashgar were in indirect contact with the Japanese ambassador in Afghanistan, and Sheng played up the alleged Japanese threat in his political propaganda. Despite (or because of) his education in Japan, Sheng had been strongly anti-Japanese since the Japanese occupation of his home in north-east China. Indeed, these anti-Japanese credentials made Sheng an attractive ally to the Soviet Union in the late 1930s.

However, balanced as it was between world powers, Xinjiang's situation was highly sensitive to shifts in their strategic alignments. The 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact and supplies of raw materials had allowed Hitler to expand in Europe. However, in April of 1941 the Soviet Union signed an anti-aggression pact with Japan to protect its eastern flank while concentrating on the upcoming conflict in the west. In June Hitler invaded the Soviet Union with three million men, and in December 1941 the United States joined the war against Japan, throwing its weight behind the Guomindang regime still holding out in south-west China. Sheng Shicai, whose hold on Xinjiang depended upon outside aid, thought the tide had turned against his Soviet backers and reopened channels to the Nationalist Government, which with US aid now had the wherewithal to assert its hitherto theoretical sovereignty in Xinjiang. Beginning in the spring of 1942 Sheng closed Xinjiang to trade with the Soviet Union, dealing a major economic blow to the region. He started purging Chinese communists and pro-Soviet Turkic Muslims, and ultimately had Mao Zemin and many others executed in prison. By mid-summer Sheng concluded negotiations with the Guomindang (GMD) with a ceremony attended by Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Soong Mei-ling). The GMD began moving its own troops into Xinjiang and founded a Xinjiang party branch with Sheng as official Chairman. In the spring of 1943, on Chongqing's invitation, the United States opened a consulate in Urumchi, and by the autumn the Soviets had withdrawn their military units, advisers and technical teams. They capped the Dushanzi oil fields and took their drilling equipment with them.

Sheng's mercurial career took one last twist. When the Soviets finally prevailed over the German armies in February 1943 in the Battle for Stalingrad, Sheng yet again attempted to switch patrons. He arrested Guomindang representatives in Xinjiang, wrote to Stalin claiming that they were Japanese spies and informing Chiang Kai-shek that they were Communists. (With this last about-face Sheng had incarcerated just about every Xinjiang political figure of any persuasion from the late 1930s to the early 1940s). By now, however, Stalin was fed up with Sheng. He refused Sheng's request for a resumption of support and passed Sheng's letter on to Chiang Kai-shek. This forced Sheng to crawl back to the Nationalist Chinese government, who finally removed him from Xinjiang in September 1944. It is said that only a donation of 500, 000 Chinese dollars to the GMD treasury allowed him to escape execution. He served out the war as Minister of Agriculture and Forests in Chongqing, and retreated to Taiwan with the Guomindang in 1949.

Guomindang Xinjiang

As the Guomindang government transferred troops into Xinjiang, Kazaks were already in revolt in the north. Kazak tribes had moved into northern Xinjiang after the Qing eliminated the Zunghars in the mideighteenth century. They traded with the Qing authorities and private Chinese merchants, but remained autonomous during Qing times, coming to trade fairs and making winter camps in Zungharia, then returning north beyond Qing watch-posts in the spring. Maintaining such a status became increasingly difficult over time as the Kazaks of the Middle and Greater Horde were caught between expanding Qing and Tsarist empires and forced to conclude agreements with both imperial governments. Moscow and Beijing each chose to interpret these treaties as proof that Kazaks had accepted their exclusive sovereignty. As the Qing and Russia demarcated their mutual border in the late nineteenth century, and as Russian and Soviet policies towards Kazaks grew harsh in the early twentieth century, more Kazaks moved south from Tarbaghatai and the Altai to the Tianshan range north of Hami and around Qitai. Still, Kazak migrations across the border remained an issue into the twentieth century.

Sheng Shicai's policies, especially the closure of the Soviet border, had angered many Kazaks, especially those in the Tianshan area. The Guomindang did nothing to alleviate their dissatisfaction. Kazaks frequently raided Han settlement and military posts during the 1930s and 1940s, which of course brought on reprisals from provincial forces. In 1940 nomads attacked a Soviet investigation team in the Ashan district, killing the team leader and torching its vehicles. In 1939-40 Sheng began trying to disarm the Kazaks, sending units from camp to camp to confiscate privately owned firearms, including those most Kazaks used for hunting. (Yang Zengxin had helped arm Altai Kazaks in the 1910s and 1920s as a hedge against Mongols in the region). The disarmament law caused anxiety and resentment, especially when Sheng attempted to enforce it through a campaign of kidnapping and intimidation. Those who fled to avoid the order *ipso facto* became 'bandits'. The cessation of Xinjiang's trade with the Soviet Union also created hardships for the Kazaks, who lost the major market for their wool and livestock. Then in 1943-4 Sheng demanded 'contributions' of horses, ostensibly for the benefit of the Nationalist war against Japan. The bulk of the 10, 000 head of horses to be assembled were to be levied from nomads in north Xinjiang; others were to 'donate' 700 dollars (more than a horse's market value). Furthermore, the Guomindang-sponsored settlement of Han refugees on Kazak grasslands near Qitai in 1943 had been accompanied by forced evictions of nomads from the lands; Lattimore reports that camps of non-cooperative Kazaks were machine-gunned from trucks by GMD soldiers.

From the autumn of 1943 Kazak groups in the Ashan (Altai Mountain) region and north slopes of the Tianshan were in sporadic revolt, staging guerrilla raids on provincial targets under the leadership of a tribal chief, Osman Batur ('Uthman Batur, 1899-1951), who received Soviet military aid channelled through Outer Mongolia and who hoped to establish his own state in the Altai. By the time Sheng Shicai left Xinjiang in September 1944, the provincial government had lost control of north-eastern Zungharia and unrest was spreading into the Yili valley

'The Three Districts Revolution' and a Second 'Eastern Turkestan Republic'

The Coalition Government

Zhang Zhizhong is unique in Xinjiang's modern history as a governor who was appreciated by virtually all of the region's rival parties, and who enjoys the respect even of historians. By GMD standards he was incorrupt and free of factional entanglements and gangland connections. We may also credit him with what would today be called multicultural sensitivity. Zhang recognised not only that most of Xinjiang's inhabitants were not Han Chinese, but that rhetorical assertions to the contrary would not help. Quite remarkably, he wrote, 'We Chinese comprise only 5 per cent of the population of Sinkiang. Why have we not turned over political power to the Uighurs and other racial groups who constitute the other 95 per cent?' It is a pity that Zhang's acknowledgement of Uyghurs' desire for a degree of self-determination, in contrast to the Han chauvinism more characteristic of the Guomindang approach to its non-Chinese frontiers, leads one scholar to label Zhang 'pro-Soviet'.

Zhang consulted with three Uyghur leaders who had wound up in Chongqing: Muhammad Emin Bughra, Isa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-95) and Masud Sabri (1886-1951). Bughra, as noted above, was associated with madrasas and secret societies in southern Xinjiang; he had led the Khotan rebellion in 1933 and made himself emir of Khotan after its success. After the destruction of the 1933-4 ETR and invasion of southern Xinjiang by Hui armies, he fled to India and Afghanistan before moving to Chongqing in 1943, where he was appointed a Xinjiang representative within the National Assembly. Isa, a Uyghur whose early education included both Islamic study and time in a Chinese school in Xinjiang (see Chapter 4), was likewise an advocate for autonomy for Turkic peoples in Xinjiang. He became Xinjiang member of the Legislative Yuan (the Nationalist government's parliament) in 1939. Together with Bughra in Chongqing, he ran the Altai Publishing House and edited Turkic nationalist periodicals which were often critical of GMD policy with regard to Xinjiang, stressing such things as the Turkic background of Xinjiang's people and defending the name 'Turkestan' for the region. Masud, a Uyghur from the Yili valley, trained as a medical doctor in Istanbul before returning to Xinjiang in 1915 to found a pharmacy and several schools in Ghulja. He was arrested by Yang Zengxin in 1924, and later supported the first ETR from Aqsu until he too escaped to India. He returned to China in 1934 and like his two compatriots joined the GMD. He likewise wrote in favour of an autonomous 'East Turkestan' within China.

Zhang brought these three knowledgeable Uyghurs to Urumchi as his advisers; they steered him toward more liberal policies in education, publishing and other cultural areas, use of Turkic language in government offices, and greater freedoms of speech, assembly and religion, justifying their stance in favour of Xinjiang autonomy within China by reference to Sun Yat-sen's call for self-determination of non-Chinese peoples. All later served as ministers in the provincial coalition government.

Zhang's opposite number in the negotiations to create a coalition government was Ahmetjan (äkhmätjan) Qasimi, a Soviet-educated Uyghur originally from the Yili valley who had spent time in Sheng's prisons. Although the most prominent early leaders of the anti-Chinese uprising in the Yili valley were religious figures (including Ali Khan Töre, who became Chairman of the new government), by the spring of 1945 control of the movement had shifted to more secular and pro-Soviet figures, Ahmetjan Qasimi pre-eminent among them. Indeed, a year later, a few weeks before the conclusion of the negotiations, Ali Khan Töre would depart for the Soviet Union, possibly for medical treatment but more likely kidnapped, in a disappearance reminiscent of Ma Zhongying's a decade earlier.

The negotiations between the Guomindang and the Yili government took months, and it was not till July 1946 that an agreement was eventually concluded. Zhang Zhizhong would be Chairman and Ahmetjan Qasimi Vice-Chairman of the new Xinjiang provincial government. Both sides consented to direct elections for representatives to county assemblies; these assemblies would in turn elect magistrates and representatives to a provincial assembly. Each of Xinjiang's ten districts (including the three northern districts controlled by the Yili group) would recommend a portion of the ministers in a provincial council, with Nanjing appointing the remainder. Higher-level provincial offices were divided among various ethnicities, including Han, Hui, Uyghur, Kazak, Manchu, Mongol and Tatar, and across political lines with Guomindang and Yili partisans each holding influential positions. Zhang Zhizhong also agreed to work towards an eventual apportionment of civil service jobs in the proportion of 70 per cent non-Han to 30 per cent Han. Uyghur and Kazak were both declared official languages along with Chinese; education at all levels would be in native languages, and non-Chinese cultures were to be promoted in other ways as well. The real stumbling block in the negotiations had been the extent to which the north could keep its own military and police forces. In the end the Yili group retained some 12, 000 men in six regiments under Muslim command, though three of these regiments were in theory to be stationed in southern Xinjiang. Zhang was nominal commander-in-chief of the entire Xinjiang military.

This new coalition government enacted a number of needed reforms and development projects. Zhang released political prisoners, including CCP members, still mouldering in prison. In 1946 he disbanded a provincial import-export monopoly, dating from Sheng's tenure, that competed unfairly with private traders. Commerce with the Soviet Union resumed, as did Soviet extraction of oil and mineral resources in Zungharia. Zhang's government lent money to poor farmers in some areas, and mobilised GMD troops stationed in some southern areas to construct irrigation works. He cancelled arrears of the excessive taxes of his predecessors, and limited the collection of tax in kind. In the cultural arena he prohibited marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims (a regulation sought by the former ETR members and popular among Muslims in southern Xinjiang). He revived the Nationality Culture Promotion Association (dating from the time of Sheng Shicai), which made grants to Uyghur, Kazak and Kirghiz culture associations and promoted publication in Turkic languages (including a Uyghur-Chinese-Russian dictionary edited by Burhan Shähidi). And of course, Xinjiang under Zhang sent song and dance

troops to Beijing, Shanghai and Taipei, thus bringing Soviet-style showcasing of minority song and dance to China. Chinese performers also visited Urumchi.

Zhang may be praised for open-mindedness, but other Chinese leaders in Xinjiang were less conciliatory; furthermore, the Yili group had not entirely abandoned its hope of establishing an independent Turkic state. Neither side of the coalition truly trusted the other, and each continued to manoeuvre for position. The Yili group did this through political organisation and propaganda throughout Xinjiang, and the GMD through its control of the police and key military units. The limitations of the coalition were clear in the run-up to the elections for county assembly in the autumn of 1946, which were disrupted by violence, intimidation and the failure to allow voting or to post results in many counties. Although the election process may have served to politicise people in rural areas, and familiarise them with democratic procedures, the fact was that ultimately not a single Turkic representative from southern Xinjiang (districts under GMD control) made it onto the Provincial Council.

During the year following its formation, neither party in the coalition fully lived up to the spirit or letter of the coalition agreement. The Yili group disseminated propaganda in the southern seven districts and organised Turkic nationalist opposition to the GMD presence in Xinjiang, particularly that of the Chinese military. This it accomplished through a party known as *Sharqi Türkistan Yashlar Täshkilati*, the East Turkestan Youth League. This group and its renamed successors gained supporters rapidly in Urumchi, Aqsu, Kashgar, Khotan, Hami, Yarkand and Korla, to the point where it could challenge the GMD organisation. The old ETR leaders maintained control of their military forces, kept the GMD military out of the three northern districts, and refused to open communications between Urumchi and the north via the bridge over the Manas River. The north maintained its separate currency and remained, in fact, an independent regime.

In the southern seven districts educational reforms moved slowly and few native-speakers of Uyghur and other Turkic languages were recruited as schoolteachers. A number of Han were displaced from comfortable provincial, district and county level government jobs, though not enough to approach the 70:30 proportion. Zhang's 'Turkicisaton' policy thus became a source of resentment both to the Chinese, who were threatened by it, and to Turkic peoples, who felt it remained unfulfilled. In February 1947 there were demonstrations and counter-demonstrations in Urumchi over this and other issues related to the terms of the coalition treaty. GMD General Song Xilian, who opposed Zhang's conciliatory approach, declared martial law and dispatched soldiers and police on destructive house-to-house searches for Uyghur suspects in the city, further exacerbating tensions.

Meanwhile, both Osman Batur, nominally a member of the coalition government, and another Kazak leader, Ali Beg Rahim, had broken from the ETR, possibly because of the disappearance of Ali Khan Töre and the ETR's pro-Soviet tilt. Osman and Ali Beg led their nomad followers into the Altai and Tianshan, where they received covert military aid from the GMD. A parallel rift divided Uyghur and some Kazak

members of the coalition, reflecting the split between Osman and the ETR leaders. News organs in Urumchi and Yili embarked upon a propaganda war, each side accusing the other of bad faith.

Furthermore, the Nationalist Government, now back in Nanjing and dealing with the threat from the Chinese Communists, was not happy about Zhang's cultural pluralism or his apparently soft policies with regard to the Yili group. Frustrated by his increasingly untenable position, Zhang Zhizhong relinquished his position in May 1947 in favour of the anti-Soviet, but also Turkic nationalist, Masud Sabri. Despite the fact that Masud was a Uyghur and had publicly advocated autonomy for Xinjiang's Turkic peoples, his appointment provoked a storm of opposition. The Provincial Assembly even passed a resolution against his chairmanship (Masud dissolved the assembly in June). Much of this opposition derived from the Yili group and from the Soviet Union, who rightly saw Masud as a threat because he, along with fellow ministers Isa Alptekin and Muhammad Emin Bughra, continued to espouse a political and ethnic model for Xinjiang peoples at odds with approaches promoted by the Soviet Union. For years these men had opposed the subdivision of Xinjiang's Turkic peoples into the categories Uyghur, Kazak, Kirghiz, Tatar, Uzbek and so on, arguing instead that these groups were all Turks, or Turki, divided only by dialectical differences and in following an agrarian/urban or pastoral way of life. As Soviet Central Asia was founded on the policy of creating competing nationalities among the Muslim Turkic peoples of former Turkestan, such an assertion of overarching Turkic identity was dangerous from the Soviet point of view. And Masud, Isa and Bughra supported, publicly at least, full autonomy for East Turkestan within a Chinese state, not formal 'independence' with actual dependence on the Soviet Union.

Despite these nationalistic credentials, however, Masud appeared even to some Uyghurs in southern Xinjiang as at best a figurehead, at worst a corrupt stooge of the most thuggish GMD elements. Indeed, the influence of General Song Xilian, Minister of Information Liu Mengchun, and Xinjiang GMD party head Chen Xihao increased after Masud's appointment. In July the GMD military repressed an uprising in Turfan, Toqsun and Yanqi (the Tushantuo incident), which may have been organised or supported by the Yili regime. The Nationalist government probably also stepped up its support of Osman Batur—and his 15, 000 Kazaks—who precipitated a clash in June with Mongolian troops at Beidashan in the Altai mountains on the Xinjiang-Mongolia border, and in the autumn attacked the city of Chenghua (Sharasure) in the north. The Kazaks were soon driven out, allegedly by Soviet troops and armour.

By the summer of 1947 the coalition treaty, never well adhered to, fell apart in a storm of mutual recriminations. Ahmetjan Qasimi returned to Ghulja in early August. Although he remained nominal Vice-Chairman of Xinjiang province, in effect he was again Chairman of the Eastern Turkestan Republic; some sources say the ETR name once again came into use and its flag was again unfurled. Politically, power in the ETR was channelled through an organisation known as the Union for the Defence of Peace and Democracy in Xinjiang, which despite the name was the party behind Ghulja's one-party system, also under Ahmetjan's control. By all accounts, this government, which lasted until northern Xinjiang was reunited with the south under the CCP in late 1949, achieved some positive results. Insulated

against the severe inflation of China proper, the three districts of northern Xinjiang enjoyed relative good times thanks to a subsidy from the Urumchi government, trade with the Soviet Union and renewed Soviet investment in mining enterprises. The Ghulja government stabilised the economy and developed a regular and efficient tax system; provided increased elementary education and higher technical training; loaned money and seed to encourage agricultural development; and invested in medical facilities and publications in the region's five main languages, with the result that rates of typhus decreased and literacy increased. Even US consular reports from 1945 noted that the ETR regime was locally popular, and there is no indication that it declined in popularity thereafter.

The same cannot be said for the GMD regime in Urumchi. The end of co-rule with the Yili leadership did not bring an end to ethnic and nationalistic tensions in southern Xinjiang. While keeping some Yili representatives of the former coalition on the books, the Masud administration held new district elections and reshuffled the government to create a semblance of Uyghur and other non-Han participation. Where a district inspector-general was Turkic, his assistants were Han, and *vice versa;* where a Uyghur held a ministerial post, his vice minister was in most cases Han or Hui. (The Manchus used such a diarchic device in controlling the Chinese bureaucracy during the Qing period, and a similar system pertains in the PRC's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region today). Uyghur nationalists, advocating not separatism but greater Turkic autonomy in the GMD state, were elected to the provincial assembly, where they agitated for a return to the policies of Zhang Zhizhongs era. Isa Alptekin and Mohammad Emin Bughra each held ministerial positions and managed to promote moderate nationalism through schools and print media. They ultimately distanced themselves from Masud, especially when the latter became associated with GMD repression and mired in a corruption scandal. Meanwhile, the economy plunged. Severe inflation undermined confidence in the Xinjiang dollar, which was pegged at a fixed rate to the nearly worthless Nationalist *yuan*. Merchants and consumers hoarded goods, and grain, meat and fuel grew scarce.

Finally, in January 1949 Nanjing replaced Masud Sabri with Burhan Shähidi (1894-1989), a Tatar born in Kazan to a family with roots in Aqsu, who had travelled and studied in Germany and the Soviet Union, been imprisoned by Sheng Shicai as a 'Trotskyite' and later served as one of Zhang Zhizhongs deputies. Burhan presided over the transition between GMD and CCP rule in Xinjiang; he was partly successful in stabilising Xinjiang's finances by taking the province off the newest Nationalist currency, the gold *yuan*, and restoring the Xinjiang dollar; and he allowed the expansion of Turkic nationalist organisations. However, besides negotiating with the Soviets to reopen full trade relations (the Soviets wanted, but did not get from Chiang Kai-shek, a return to the unlimited access and tariff concessions they had enjoyed under Sheng Shicai), there was little he could do about the deteriorating economy or political situation before the victory of the CCP in China once again realigned the outside forces that were shaping Xinjiang's fate.

The Character of the Second Eastern Turkestan Republic and the Soviet Role

Though some Uyghur activists today paint it with bold black and white strokes as the immediate well-spring of their national aspirations—the state that the Chinese Communist conquerors took away from them— there is much that remains fuzzy and grey about the Ghulja Eastern Turkestan Republic. For one thing, there is ambiguity, as with the first ETR, about whether the Ghulja regime began as an 'Islamic' republic. Also reminiscent of the 1930s is the fact that the events of 1944-9 were not a simple case of Uyghurs struggling for self-determination against occupying Chinese, but rather a more complex situation with Turkic nationalists arrayed along an ideological spectrum and divided on both sides of a political and territorial divide between the Guomindang and the Soviet Union.

Historical accounts of the second ETR have a Rashomon-like quality. Scholars, states and political actors disagree as to who was really behind the initial rebellion and the Yili regime. PRC accounts stress the influence of the Chinese communists on some figures who would later be leaders of the ETR (especially Abdul Kerim Abbas, whom PRC writers lionise for his opposition to the violent anti-Han tendencies of the rebellion). At the same time, they quietly acknowledge the Soviet role: in PRC materials, the 'Three Districts Revolution' is officially treated as part of the Chinese revolution as a whole, an uprising against 'reactionary' Guomindang rule that occurred under the influence of the CCP, with Soviet support. Other historians, in keeping with the initial political interpretation of the event by the Guomindang, have seen it as fomented and managed by the Soviet Union from the beginning, part of an attempt to regain influence in Xinjiang, detach the region from China, or gain leverage in post-Second World War treaty negotiations. These scholars point to Soviet military aid, direct military involvement by Soviet advisers and troops, as well as the political programme of the ETR itself as evidence of Stalin's handiwork. Others, including Uyghur nationalists, depict the ETR as a locally-led struggle for self-determination by the Uyghurs (or the Turkic Muslim peoples of East Turkestan) that was restrained and even undermined by Soviet machinations.

Let us look first at Islam in the ETR. The early leadership of the rebellion apparently intended to create a state with a strong Islamic character. This is evident in its early pronouncements (see the proclamation of November 1944, quoted above); in the top government positions afforded religious scholars Ali Khan Töre and Ashim Bey Khoja as Chairman and Vice-Chairman (later Ashim Bey and Anwar Musa Bei); the establishment of a religious council as part of the government; and the implementation of an Islamic tithe. On the other hand, other statements of the government's programme imply a more secular orientation. These include the Ghulja Declaration of January 1945 and a handbill circulating in 1944-5 entitled 'Why are We Fighting?' The former lists an eight point programme for the ETR, which had just taken control of the Yili valley. Though there is a strong anti-GMD or anti-Han tone here, there is no reference to religion in the proclamation. 'Why are We Fighting?' calls for an end to Chinese rule; equality for all nationalities, with proportional representation for each in the government and in a national assembly on the basis of their relative size; cultural, linguistic and religious freedom; and restored friendship and trade relations with 'our great, freedom-loving friend and neighbour, the Soviet Union'. Except for one reference to taking an oath in the name of the one God, this document is also free of religious

language; the rhetoric is, rather, that of a leftist political manifesto. It attacks the Chinese not as infidels, but as 'fascist Chinese oppressors'. Yet again, another pamphlet collected by the US consulate two years later ('Struggle for the Motherland', 1947) is religious in the tone of its appeal, with many references to God and no Communist jargon (the Chinese here are 'crafty foxes', not fascists).

The second Eastern Turkestan Republic, then, like the first, embodied both Islamising and secular modernising impulses. Moreover, the Ghulja regime manifested these impulses in factional differences. Ali Khan Töre, the movement's first leader, was removed by mid-1946, and the secular faction under Ahmetjan Qasimi (some sources call these men 'progressive', others 'pro-Soviet') took control. Most of this cohort of leaders had been educated in Soviet territory, though as Benson points out, this was not unusual given the limited educational options in Xinjiang and the decades-long history of travel to Russia/the Soviet Union for business and study. The Ahmetjan group took pains to welcome publicly non-Muslim Mongols, Manchus and Russians as citizens in the republic and ministers in the government. As seen above, this ETR regime attempted to improve conditions for the populace and continued to organise Turkic nationalistic opposition to Chinese rule even after the formation of the coalition government.

One obvious difference between the Kashgar-based ETR of 1933-4 and the Ghulja regime lies in the close relationship of the latter to the Soviet Union. The question of the Soviet role can be divided into four parts. Did the Soviet Union instigate the rebellions of 1944 in northern Xinjiang that led to the creation of the ETR? Did the Soviet Union provide military aid and/or intervene militarily to support the ETR in its war with the GMD forces in 1944-5? Did the Soviet Union pull the strings behind the ETR regime? What were the Soviet aims in involving itself in Xiljiang?

As mentioned above, these are points of contention among specialists of the period, and answers range from downplaying Soviet involvement to implying that without Soviet instigation and orchestration, there would never have been a rebellion or second ETR in northern Xinjiang in the 1940s. Definitive answers may await research in the Soviet and Chinese archives, but the best reading possible at the moment recognises plenty of cause for unrest in Zungharia before November 1944 (including, but not restricted to, the horse 'donations' and Sheng's attempt to disarm the Kazaks), as well as a good deal of local interest in creating an independent Turkic state. This interest arose from over two decades of new-style education, nationalist thinking and communication with expatriate Uyghurs and Kazaks in the Soviet Union. Moreover, Osman Batur's Kazaks and the Muslim rebels at Nilka can be credited with launching the movement that ultimately drove the GMD out of northern Xinjiang. The respect commanded by Ali Khan Töre as a religious figure, and his use of Islam as a rallying cry helped him take control of the rebellion and gather more supporters.

However, there is considerable evidence that the attack on Ghulja in November 1944 was coordinated from both inside and outside the city with prior Soviet knowledge, and that the subsequent campaign

against GMD reinforcements converging on the Yili District took advantage of Soviet military training, materiel and both Soviet military advisers and troops. The Soviet Union participated in the formation, training, arming and strategic planning of the Yili National Army, and likewise provided advisers and weapons to Kazak guerrillas under Osman Batur and Delilhan, who ousted the GMD from Tarbaghatai and Ashan districts. There are many reports that Soviet commanders, troops and aircraft took part in the key battles ofWusu and Jinghe. Whiting, Forbes, David Wang and Roostam Sadri all link the timing of these campaigns, and of the armistice reached in September 1945, to Soviet manoeuvring at Yalta and negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek for the Sino-Soviet Treaty to determine the post-war settlement in Manchuria, Mongolia and Xinjiang, in all of which the Soviet Union had strategic, territorial and economic interests. Xinjiang was thus a bargaining chip, and the ETR a 'pawn' in a larger game.

The evidence that Moscow called the shots in the ETR after the peace treaty is less compelling, although it is clear that the Soviet Union pressured the ETR representatives in September 1945 to agree to a ceasefire with the GMD, to drop the name 'Eastern Turkestan Republic', and to'enter negotiations that produced the coahtion government. After the formation of the coalition government the Soviets withdrew many personnel and weapons from the ETR. From the time of the formation of the coalition, and even after its collapse, Yili representatives and operatives organised politically, exploited ethnic tensions and helped focus opposition in southern Xinjiang to the GMD government, to the continued Chinese dominance of military and security forces, and to the slow implementation or non-compliance with social and cultural reforms called for in the 1946 treaty. While ethnic tension and déstabilisation of the GMD regime in southern Xinjiang did not run counter to Soviet interests, had Stalin wished to annex the rest of Xinjiang he could have done so in 1946, when ETR armies were almost at the gates of Urumchi. It seems reasonable that the drive behind ETR political activities from the summer of 1946 till late 1949 emanated primarily from nationalist aspirations of Ahmetjan Qasimi and the Turkic leadership of the ETR itself. Of course this may indicate only that Soviet aims in the region had some limits, and not that the ETR leadership enjoyed any real independence of action; it was after all militarily and economically dependent on the Soviet Union. As several historians have noted, the Soviet Union was primarily interested in continued cheap access to Xinjiang's oil, minerals and pastoral products (especially wool), which, with the ETR forces in control of northern Xinjiang as far as the Manas River, they had recovered for the first time since Sheng had cut ties in 1942. This access could be maintained in various ways, and until the outcome of the civil war in China became clear, the Soviet Union could afford to wait and see. In 1945, as long as it remained relatively discrete, Soviet influence in northern Xinjiang also strengthened the Soviet hand in the negotiations with the Nationalist Chinese government over the post-war status of Mongolia and more significant Soviet interests in Manchuria and north-east Asia generally. Outright Soviet annexation of the whole of Xinjiang or creation of a satellite such as the Mongolian People's Republic, by contrast, would have violated the terms of the Yalta Agreement and risked greater US involvement in the issue.

To sum up, then: the rebellion in the three districts of northern Xinjiang in 1944, and the ETR government that followed, arose from local anti-Chinese and Turkic nationalist (not 'Pan-Turkic') sentiment; the movement was aided and arguably enabled and controlled by the Soviet Union, who provided military matériel, training and advisers, while assisting with political organisation and exercising its influence on principal leaders. The Soviet Union supported and exploited nationalistic aspirations among Uyghurs, Kazaks and others in Xinjiang for its own purposes; it also reined them in at the critical moment in September of 1945 for reasons more related to Soviet strategic aims in Asia than to the dreams of East Turkestan nationalists.

Anyone who was alive during the Cold War would be familiar with the argument that a given insurgency —in South-East Asia, say, or Latin America—is a 'Soviet plot'. Although this accusation has generally been intended to delegitimate the movement, astute observers also recognise that the presence of Soviet support does not in and of itself obviate the fact that many such movements, be they anti-colonial or class-based or both, derived from genuine grievances and deeply-held nationalistic feelings. There is a similar tendency in some versions of the events of the late 1940s, particularly those closely following GMD interpretations, to dismiss the 'Moslem rebels' as mere dupes of the Soviets and ignore underlying ethnic tensions and wide-spread nationalist sentiment. Likewise, to apply the epithet 'pan-Turkic' or 'pan-Islamic' to early stages of the movement is a red herring, for there is no evidence that the Yili rebels embraced Enver Pasha's goals of forming a grand Central Asian Turkic state, or intended any confederation extending beyond the boundaries of Xinjiang. (If anything, the Uyghur leaders in the Guomindang, Isa Alptekin, Muhammad Emin and Masud Sabri, were more pan-Turkic than the Yili group, for they disputed the categories 'Uyghur', 'Kazak' and so on, arguing instead that Xinjiang's Turkic Muslims were a single people). That after decades of rule by Chinese regimes the Turkic peoples of northern Xinjiang were by 1944-5 angry enough to massacre Han Chinese is a significant fact, one worth understanding. Simply to call them Soviet tools, Muslim fanatics or pan-Turkists is to avoid questions, rather than answer them. Likewise, to suggest that the movement was merely an extension of the Chinese revolution is equally disingenuous, and hard to reconcile with its strong anti-Chinese thrust.

In fact, what makes the period of the second ETR so complex is that Xinjiang Turkic nationalists joined both Guomindang and Soviet sides, with different ideas of how best to achieve a measure of autonomy for the region and its people, caught as it was between the Soviet Scylla and the Chinese Charibdis. The advent of Zhang Zhizhong, a Chinese provincial chairman who was relatively liberal with regard to the cultural diversity of Xinjiang, led figures like IsaYusuf Alptekin, Masud Sabri and Mohammad Emin Bughra to follow the Guomindang in the hope that this party would eventually eschew Han chauvinism and denial of ethnic difference in China and revert to the policies espoused by Sun Yat-sen in 1923. Likewise, though we know less about the motivations of the Yili leaders, and what we do know is largely filtered through Soviet and PRC sources, there are indications that they too hoped primarily for autonomy for Turkic peoples, but, unlike their compatriots in the Guomindang camp, saw the Guomindang as a greater immediate threat than the Soviets, with whom they shared a preference for so-

cialist or communist paths of development. That even Ahmetjan Qasimi saw his alliance with the Soviet Union as a means toward an end, and could diverge from Soviet policy, is suggested by the denouement of the second ETR, discussed below.

The CCP Takes Control of Xinjiang

The 'Peaceful Liberation' of Xinjiang

By the summer of 1949 the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) First Field Army under Peng Dehuai was assembled in Gansu and Qinghai. Meanwhile, Zhang Zhizhong (who had recently defected to the CCP) opened communications with Burhan and Tao Zhiyue, the garrison commander of GMD forces in Xinjiang. Zhang encouraged them to surrender. Chiang Kai-shek reportedly ordered Tao to fight the Communists until the GMD troops were driven over the Pamirs; some of Tao's own officers also supported resistance, and even wanted to march east to engage the enemy. Around the same time Stalin allegedly urged Tao to declare Xinjiang an independent republic along the lines of Outer Mongolia; the Soviet Union would then see to it that the PLA stayed out of the region, which could later become part of a federal Chinese republic. Faced with these unappetising choices, Tao first allowed those GMD military officers, police and politicians who wished to leave to do so. Isa Alptekin and Muhammad Emin Bughra fled at this time, as did others, including British and US consuls and eventually the US 'man in Urumchi', Douglas MacKiernan.

MacKiernan, a CIA agent monitoring Xinjiang and Soviet aid to the Chinese Communists under the guise of a consular clerk, destroyed documents and worked to close up the Urumchi (Dihua, Tihwa) consulate until it was taken over by Communist Chinese troops on 27 September 1949. That evening, together with Fulbright-sponsored anthropologist Frank Bessac and three white Russians, MacKiernan set out for Osman Batur's camp at Lake Barkol, north of Hami. Though it is doubtful whether he could have provided substantive American aid to Osman, whom he described as 'a friend, fighting for his freedom', and unknown if he even promised any, MacKiernan seems to have encouraged Osman to follow his own inclination to resist Chinese Communist control, just as he had resisted control by Sheng Shicai, the GMD and the ETR. MacKiernan's original brief may have been to urge resistance to the Communists among various Muslim peoples, including Huis in the north-west. In any case, it was time to leave, and in mid-October MacKiernan's small party took off south with a Kazak guide across the Taklamakan, up through the Altyn Tagh into Qinghai, where they spent the winter with Kazaks in a place known to them as Goose Lake. The following March they trekked across the Tibetan plateau en route to Lhasa. MacKiernan had maintained radio contact with Washington so the Dalai Lama's government knew from the US State Department that he was on his way and sent word to grant his party free passage. However, this news had not reached the border guards that MacKiernan and his party encountered, and in a case of suspicion and mistaken identity, MacKiernan and two of the Russians were shot and decapitated at

Shi-garhung Lung at the end of April 1950. The first nameless star on the CIA's wall of honour at Langley is MacKiernan's.

Tao Zhiyue, meanwhile, had cabled the CCP in late September 1949 to announce his surrender with 80,000 troops, and Burhan followed suit the following day. Mao Zedong and Zhu De wired back congratulations for their correct attitude, and urged Tao to 'maintain nationality unity and local order' until the arrival of PLA forces. In mid-October Wang Zhen led his units of the PLA into Xinjiang, where they took control of the seven southern districts with no resistance. The PLA moved more slowly into northern Xinjiang, taking time to reorganise the Yili army, send work teams out among the nomads, and purge any military and political leaders suspected of ethnic separatist sympathies. It was thus easier to liberate that part of Xinjiang under GMD rule than it was those districts that had already undergone 'revolution.'

The Chinese Communists, the Soviet Union, the ETR and a Plane Crash Mystery

The ETR posed a problem for the CCP and *vice versa*. For public political consumption, the Ghulja leadership, like its Soviet backer, treated Mao's incipient government as a fellow member of the socialist fraternity. Though Xinjiang's coalition government was virtually defunct, it still existed on the books; and leaders from the ETR remained on the rosters of Xinjiang government ministers. Though he had not returned to the provincial capital since 1947, Ahmetjan was still technically the Xinjiang provincial Vice-Chairman even while he held the chairmanship of the Ghulja government. Though Stalin had reservations about Mao Zedong (Stalin opposed Mao's homegrown peasant-based revolutionary strategy, preferring those Chinese who had studied in the Soviet Union), the Soviet Union welcomed the success of the Chinese revolution, and the ETR likewise could do little but embrace the upcoming victory of the CCP and consult with its representatives. Ahmetjan Qasimi publicly renounced the former anti-Chinese positions of the Ghulja rebels and even the declaration of an 'independent Eastern Turkestan' as an 'absolutely mistaken, wrong policy'.

In July 1949 Deng Liqun met in Ghulja with Ahmetjan Qasimi, Abdulkerim Abbas and Ishaq Beg (a Kirghiz) to learn about conditions in northern Xinjiang. In August Mao invited a representative delegation from the former ETR to attend the National People's Consultative Conference in Beijing, a meeting intended to bring together representatives of the various non-CCP parties and ethnic groups not actively hostile to the CCP and demonstrate their solidarity with the new government. The five representatives from northern Xinjiang—Ahmetjan, Ishaq Beg, Abdulkerim Abbas, the Kazak Delilhan and a Chinese, Luo Zhi—travelled overland to Almaty and boarded a plane for Beijing. Nothing further was heard of them for several weeks. The following December (after the PLA had occupied northern Xinjiang) Chinese authorities reported that on 27 August the plane had crashed into a mountainside near Lake Baikal in Siberia, killing all on board. Meanwhile, a new Xinjiang delegation led by Säypidin Aüzizi (Saif al-Din 'Aziz, Saifudin) had been appointed and flew to Beijing to participate in the meeting, where its

members agreed to abandon all calls for autonomy in either the northern three districts or Xinjiang as a whole.

Needless to say, conspiracy theories abound concerning this alleged plane crash, which neatly eliminated the top leadership of the autonomous regime in the three districts at a moment critical to CCP ambitions for the area. Many have suspected the Chinese Communists of shooting down the plane or otherwise eliminating its passengers. (Askhat Iskhat, Deputy Chairman of Xinjiang provincial government from 1955-66, supposedly stated privately that Ahmetjan Qasimi and the others had been arrested upon arrival in China.) The fulsome eulogies to the Yili leaders as 'revolutionary martyrs' on the official memorial in a Ghulja city park have only fuelled these suspicions.

More recently, however, Uyghur exiles in Central Asia, Russian historians and one former KGB agent have claimed that Stalin was behind the liquidation of the Yili regime he had done much to create. These sources maintain that Ahmetjan had made clear to the Soviets his intention of lobbying in Beijing for the self-determination of the East Turkestan Republic, an outcome Stalin opposed or had already bargained away in dealings with Mao. Both Mao and Stalin had motive, means and opportunity to liquidate Ahmetjan, the ETR leaders and their hopes for Xinjiang autonomy. It is possible too that the plane crashed. The answer may wait in an archive somewhere.