

THESIS

CRY ME A RIVER: THE ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE
TARIM RIVER BASIN AND ITS IMPACT ON CHINESE-UYGHUR RELATIONS,
1949-2009

Submitted by
Xiaoran Wang
Department of History

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: John Didier

Mark Fiege
Christopher Fisher

ABSTRACT

CRY ME A RIVER: THE ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE TARIM RIVER BASIN AND ITS IMPACT ON CHINESE-UYGHUR RELATIONS, 1949-2009

This thesis focuses in the study of the environmental, social, political, and economic / resource-extraction history of China's Xinjiang Province. Not only does the author trace the historically most significant environmentally depredating human events in Xinjiang over the past two thousand years, I also explains these events within the context of social, political, economic, and resource-extraction history, thus providing insight into the nature of the political, social, economic, and natural-resource backdrops that created the need of the Chinese to engage in environmentally hazardous / destructive activities in its far western / northwestern borderlands. My treatment in Section Two of the role that the Chinese government saw Xinjiang playing in the development of the Chinese economy and national security on the world stage enables not only China specialists but also non-specialists to grasp the overall impetus of the Chinese economic / security developments of the past 60 years.

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Introduction

It was October 1949 when the leaves of the maple tree began to turn red. So did the entirety of China. New China was established, and, soon after the foundational ceremony, an infantry with 7,500 members, led by General Wang Zhen, began to march toward Xinjiang in northwest China. Xinjiang is the largest province of China, one that constitutes about one sixth of China's total territory. At that time Xinjiang was inhabited mostly by Uyghurs and other minorities such as Kazaks, Tongans, and Mongolians; at that time, the percentage of Han Chinese living in Xinjiang was merely 1% of the total population of the province.

At the time this infantry that General Wang led was called the Fifth Division. Attached to the First Field Army, it was one of the most famous fighting units among Chinese Communist troops. Most of the soldiers of this infantry did not know what kind of fate awaited them. All they knew was that they were about to enter one of the most arid regions of the world and that they had to suppress potential rebels there who likely would rise against the New China. On October 10, 1949, they left from Jiuquan city, Guansu Province, which neighbors Xinjiang. On foot they marched through about 1,300 miles of the Gobi desert, and, after about a month or so, on November 29, 1949 they reached a town called Aksu in Southern Xinjiang (Fig.1-2).



Fig.1. The Fifth Division marching to Southern Xinjiang in 1949.¹



Fig.2. General Wang Zhen with the military colonizers in Xinjiang.²

¹ Illustration from Jun Xun, ed., “Wushi budui jinzhu nanjiang gedi” 五师部队进驻南疆各地 (*The Fifth Division Marching to Southern Xinjiang*). http://bt.xinhuanet.com/200605/09/content_6930233.htm. (May 9, 2006). Accessed on March 10, 2010.

Although few images of the march of General Wang's infantry are preserved today due to the lack of photographic instruments available at the time, a famous song sung by those soldiers on their way to Xinjiang remains fresh today, offering a glimpse into the hearts of those who marched into the desert, so that from the lyrics we can infer the presence of a Chinese version of Manifest Destiny in China's own western territory: the suffering Xinjiang (Tibet) minorities' happiness depended on the saving grace of the arriving Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), and it was the army's inescapable responsibility to rescue all of the people of Xinjiang who lived there in their extreme misery.

Move forward, move forward,
To Xinjiang and Tibet!
March to the Pamirs!
The desperate people living there,
Suffer from many years of disaster and pain!
They are looking forward to the People's Liberation Army!
Let's go and set them free!³

Obviously, the self-deceiving heroic sentiment was a strong and necessary catalyst that helped to push these typical Chinese soldiers to enter the hinterland and

² Illustration from china.com, "Wang zhen he xinjiang nongken zhanshi zai yiqi" 王震和新疆农垦战士在一起 (*General Wang Zhen with the Xinjiang Military Colonizers in Xinjiang*). http://news.china.com/zh_cn/history/all/11025807/20100426/15910891.html. (April 26, 2010). Accessed on March 10, 2010.

³ Shouchao Wang, ed., "1949 Nian gansu lintao baiming nvzi tubu jin jiang ji" 1949 年甘肃临洮百名女子进疆记 (*Hundreds of Women of Lintao, Gansu Province, Marching into Xinjiang*). <http://gansu.gansudaily.com.cn/system/2009/08/25/011238306.shtml>. (August 25, 2009). Accessed on March 10, 2011.

protect it. Sources indicate that they did hunt down numerous minority rebels, such as Osman Batur, Ali Beg Hakim, Janimhan, and so on. They also established state farms, irrigation works, and villages to fortify their control over the region.

Four years later, on June 5, 1953, a new order arrived from Chairman Mao Zedong, who at that time was, of course, the absolute leader of China: “All soldiers must participate in agricultural activity, and no one is allowed to refuse”.⁴ At that point, the name of the Fifth Division was changed to become Agricultural Division One. This was to be the founding organization of what later came to be the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). There are no detailed accounts describing the personal feelings and reactions of the soldiers of the Fifth Division who became peasant-farmers in just one day, but we can imagine that it must have been very hard for some of them to accept this transition, since the order made their stay in Xinjiang permanent. Some of them did return to China proper about fifty years later, but it was too late for most of them to reignite their old lives there. Perhaps some of the soldiers felt betrayed or abandoned by the government, and surely some felt it hopeless to start a new life in the desert. But what we do know is that no one dared to question the structure or discipline dictated by the central government, and they had no choice but to face squarely their newly arranged destinies as military-agricultural colonizers in Xinjiang.

Then came the issue of survival. Who should feed these colonizers? The answer was simple: help yourself! The new Chinese government felt no obligation to treat these soldiers as components of a national army but rather considered them military colonizers who were supposed to support themselves while they fulfilled their frontier duty. The logic was easy for Mao: the best way to deal with his soldiers during peacetime was to

⁴ Pingxiang Tan, et al., eds., *Tunken Shubian Sishi Nian* (Beijing: China Statistics Bureau Press, 1994), 14.

ask them to farm, since most of them came from peasant families, and, thus, he believed, it should not be too difficult for them to simply revert to who they really were. In addition, they could still guard the frontier of China as military colonizers and remain loyal to him. It was one stone killing two birds. The nation cared little about personal freedom and happiness when national security was involved.

My thesis focuses on the story of these military colonizers and the environmental transformations that they caused in Xinjiang from 1949 to 2009. Within this context, I will also discuss the evolution of Chinese-Uyghur relations during this sixty-year period. Numerous articles and books have covered much of the historical development of Xinjiang, but few of them tend to look at this massive Chinese westward movement from an environmental perspective. Actually, the transformations that occurred in Xinjiang during the latter half of the 20th century represent important and high-level ideological and political issues when they are studied in light of matters of national security versus ethnical nationalism. However, when we consider how these military colonizers began to plow the land of Xinjiang and construct as many ditches and canals as they could, it then becomes a matter of the most ancient relationship between humanity and nature.

This story is also about the concrete daily interactions occurring between different ethnic groups who simply needed more natural resources with which to survive in the arid desert. Comparing this specific region and its history with the development of the American West, there appear to be more similarities than differences in terms of physical transformations and ideological motivations. Therefore, I will in this thesis also

juxtapose the experiences of the American West with the Chinese conquest of the Western region, with the purpose of better illuminating the import of the Chinese development of Xinjiang.

With the rise of environmental history in the 1970s, the study of the sun, climate, water, soil, plants and animals, and so on, once worshipped as gods and spirits by our primitive ancestors, began to shed light on new versions of human history that demonstrate that history no longer can be understood to be solely a human affair. Richard White has stated that if human history is the husband and environmental history is the wife, then the “marriage” of the two is what the complete version of history tends to look like.⁵ Demonstrating the ways in which this marriage was arranged and consummated is the exact purpose of my thesis. My intention is to enrich our understanding of Xinjiang’s modern history by focusing on its environmental transformations, explaining modern influences on Xinjiang that caused it to change, and to provide an account of the different people who have lived there and influenced its development.

Our story begins with a basin and a river. The Tarim River Basin is positioned in Southern Xinjiang, enjoying a quite unique natural environment that provides an ideal opportunity to examine the direct impact of human behaviors on the fragile and simple natural environment. This basin is surrounded by great mountains such as the Tian, Karakoram, Kunlun, and Altun, and it can be divided into three parts: the piedmont plains, the internal Taklamakan Desert (340,000 square kilometers), and the eastern Gobi Desert. The Taklamakan desert deserves some attention here. Though to most readers it is less

⁵ Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995): x.

well known than the Sahara and Arabian Deserts, it is the world's second-largest desert. The meaning of its name is "no outlet". Some Xinjiang natives call it the "Dead Sea," instead. Judging from its geographic environment, the Tarim River Basin is a little like a lonely castle floating above the sea of desert. It is isolated, insular, exotic, and dangerous.

Unsurprisingly, the typical desert climate, with sparse precipitation and high evaporation, prevents any water from remaining in the Tarim River Basin for very long. The annual average precipitation of Xinjiang is only 147 mm, much lower than China's national average.⁶ If we compare it with other places of the same altitude on earth, it is also the driest place. It is even drier than California. Consequently, water means a great deal in this place. The geographic circumstance of the Tarim River Basin contributes to a very special internal hydrological cycle that can be characterized as a "closed, independent, and self-balanced hydrological area".⁷ (Fig. 3) All of the 144 rivers of the Tarim ecosystem originate from the above-mentioned mountains, structured into nine tributary river systems of the Tarim River.⁸ The Tarim River, one of the longest inland-rivers in China, originates in the Yarkant River and flows 2,437 kilometers to and beyond Taitema Lake. The main stream is 1,321 kilometers long, divided into the upper reaches of 495 kilometers, the middle reaches of 398 kilometers, and the lower reaches of 428

⁶ Ruisen Zhong, Xinguang Dong, and Yingjie Ma, "Sustainable Water Saving: New Concept of Modern Agricultural Water Saving, Starting from Development of Xinjiang's Agricultural Irrigation over the Last 50 Years," *Irrigation and Drainage*, 58 (2009): 384.

⁷ Leiwen Jiang, Tong Yufen, Zhao Zhijie, Li Tianhong, and Liao Jianhua, "Water Resources, Land Exploration and Population Dynamics in Arid Areas: The Case of the Tarim River Basin in Xinjiang of China," *Population and Environment*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (2005): 474.

⁸ The Aksu, Yarkant and Hotan rivers are the three largest river systems in the Tarim river basin. Today, the Tarim main stream is replenished only by the Aksu and Hotan Rivers, and with a little in the extreme flood period by the Yarkant River. With the Yarkant supplying small amounts of water during summer, the Tarim River could receive extra inflow. Please refer to Jiebin Zhang, "Water Manage Issue and Legal Framework Development of the Tarim River Basin," in J. Wallace and Patricia Wouters, eds., *Hydrology and Water Law: Bridging the Gap* (London: IWA Publishing, 2006): 110.

kilometers that are known as the “Green Corridor”. Amazingly, this river flows right along the border of the Taklamakan desert and, downstream of Taitema Lake, finally evaporates and dissolves into the dry air and soil.

There is no exaggeration in identifying the Tarim River as the lifeline of Southern Xinjiang. The Tarim River has always been to the Uyghur inhabitants of Xinjiang what the Yellow River is to the Chinese and the Mississippi River is to North Americans: all of these rivers nourish the local people and therefore have come to establish themselves as powerful cultural bearings and symbols.



Fig.3. Map of the Tarim Basin in western China.⁹

Over the past fifty years, the Tarim River has witnessed the most dramatic changes ever to occur in Southern Xinjiang. Whoever controls the river controls the Tarim River Basin and therefore also Southern Xinjiang. Coincidentally, nowadays

⁹ Illustration from bing.com. *Map of the Tarim Basin in west China.* <http://www.esacademic.com/pictures/eswiki/84/Tarimrivermap.png>. (September 8, 2010). Accessed on March 10, 2011.

about 85%-90% of Uyghur folk still live in Southern Xinjiang. Thus, the Tarim River Basin has become a pivotal ground for maintaining Chinese national security and unity. To put it simply, Chinese national security in this northwestern borderland depends on the stability of the Tarim River Basin. This, of course, was the first area of Xinjiang to have been touched by the hands of the Chinese military colonizers, the troops of the above-mentioned Fifth Division infantry.

My thesis is divided into two sections according to chronology: the first section treats the period of 1949-1976. I call this period the infiltration era. I will clarify how the Chinese military colonizers managed to control the region by tapping successfully the water resources of the Tarim River. I believe the ditches and dams that they constructed paved the way for reclaiming Xinjiang's desert land and caused the first wave of the greatest-ever historical inflow of Chinese Han people into Xinjiang territory. The little water empire established by the XPCC in Xinjiang and especially in the Tarim River Basin set up a system that gave the Han Chinese the upper hand over the Uyghurs.

Section two will cover the period 1977-2009. I call this the domination era. The main concern in this section is to describe and analyze the role that cotton played in incorporating Xinjiang into China more thoroughly than ever before through this crop's attraction of the second wave of the massive migration from China proper. Finally, in conclusion I consider the consequences of these activities and potential threats that the Chinese government and its people will face in Xinjiang in the future.

Background

In December 2009, *National Geographic* published an article entitled “The Other Tibet”, referring to the Uyghur people who live in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (hereafter Xinjiang).¹⁰ It describes the miserable political and economic conditions of the Uyghurs, and the author states that the Uyghurs are the “other Tibetans” in China who should make a claim for their political autonomy, just as their Tibetan neighbors have done. This article has brought some international attention to the situations of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs in the 21st century. Perhaps this article has, for the first time, brought awareness of this ethnic group of China to the attention of some Western readers. Some Uyghurs even compare themselves to the Native Americans and believe that the Chinese government is morally wrongful in colonizing their land and people. However, this rough and simple comparison among Uyghurs, Tibetans, and the Native Americans hardly can explain anything in a constructive way. It is rather necessary for us to understand Xinjiang’s unique history and natural environment before we can appreciate the contemporary Chinese policy toward the Uyghurs and their land, Xinjiang, as well as its associated consequences.

Who Are the Uyghurs?

The oasis people living in the far west of China are called Uyghurs. Although the name Uyghur derives from a medieval name, Justin Jon Rudelson believes that the modern “Uyghurs” group has existed only since 1935:

¹⁰ Matthew Teague, “The Other Tibet,” *National Geographic*, Vol.21. No.6 (December 2009): 30.

It was not until the mid-1930s that the Chinese government defined the modern Uyghurs as oasis-dwelling Muslims of Xinjiang's Tarim Basin. Prior to 1935, the name Uyghur was not associated with Islam. It was first used (744-840 C.E.) to refer to a "Turkic, steppe, nomadic, shamanistic, and Manichaean society in Mongolia".... Later, (844-932), it became the name for a sedentary, oasis, Buddhist, Manichaean, and Nestorian Christian society centered in Turpan.... Finally, (932-1450), it became the referent for an elite, primarily Buddhist, Turkic society centered in the Turpan oasis, which during this period was known as Uyghuristan. The term was used to distinguish this society from the Islamic Turks living to the west.... The term fell into disuse for 500 years after the Buddhist Uyghurs converted to Islam in the 15th century.¹¹

However, the above statement irritates some Uyghur scholars, who feel a certain prestige about their own history. Dolkun Kamberi, for example, questions Rudelson's account by tracing the Uyghurs' genetic linkage back to the first millennium B.C.: "The Uyghurs and their forebears are an ancient people who have lived in Central Asia since the first millennium B.C."¹² He believes that Uyghurs are descendents of the Di, Chidi, Xiongnu, Dingling, and Gaoche peoples who lived in the Heavenly (Tian) Mountains. Kamberi also explains the meaning of Uyghur to be "unite".

One might believe that Kamberi's account may hold some water. For instance, we might infer from the name of the Uyghurs as expressed in Chinese written characters during the Tang dynasty (618 A.D. -- 907 A.D.), *Huihu* (回鹘), meaning a kind of hunting raptor, that the reason that the Uyghurs wished to use this name was to claim their blood lineage with Xiongnu people.¹³ However, the ethnic groups such as the Di, Xiongnu, and so on had by that time long disappeared without a trace. Even if the genetic linkage did

¹¹ Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur nationalism along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5-6.

¹² Dolkun Kamberi, "Uyghurs and Uyghur Identity," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, 150 (2005): 5.

¹³ The Uyghur was called Huihe (回纥) at first, and later they requested that the Chinese Tang government change their name into Huihu (回鹘), meaning "raptor," which through these characters provided them a linguistic-cultural linkage to the Chale (敕勒) people and therefore also the Xiongnu. For further information please see Suying Song, "Huihe Gaiming Huihu De Shiji Yu Shishi Kao," *Minzu Yanjiu*, No. 6 (1995): 80.

exist as claimed by Kamberi and others, it has little to do with the formation of the modern Uyghurs and their cultural and religious characters.

Chinese history records an immense battle fought between Tang China and the Turks around 600 A.D. China finally broke the Turks into two parts, the Western Turks and the Eastern Turks. The latter merged with local minorities near the Turpan Basin located in the eastern part of Xinjiang, and gradually these mingled groups became one people with a distinctive cultural identity. The Western Turks initially joined with the Byzantine Empire to suppress Persia. Between the 620s and 640s they were defeated many times by Tang Chinese troops led by the second Tang Emperor, Taizong, and, later, they surrendered to the Tang and resided in the area of the Yili River and Issyk Lake.¹⁴

Thomas Barfield notes that the Uyghur were once a subject tribe of the Turkish Empire who shared with the Turks many similarities in customs, titles, and political organization.¹⁵ Later, in 744, the Uyghurs defeated the Eastern Turks and other allies and founded a new Uyghur Empire in the steppe. Barfield describes how the Uyghurs replaced the Turks to become the new dominant power of the steppe, which was good news for the Tang Dynasty. This new neighbor had an interest in preserving the Tang Dynasty in exchange for receiving enormous gifts of silk from China, which made them the richest people in Inner Asia. The Uyghurs also established with Tang China marriage alliances and a military mutual aid relationship. When the destructive An Lushan Rebellion occurred in China in 755, the Uyghurs aided the Tang decisively by sending

¹⁴ Denis Twitchett & John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China. Vol 3. Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 223.

¹⁵ Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China 221 B.C. to AD 1757* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 151.

4,000 crack horsemen to China and finally rescued for the Tang house both of its capitals, Luoyang and Chang'an.¹⁶

Though the Uyghur Empire was destroyed in 840, it “developed a greater degree of civilization than other steppe peoples, which became an important legacy for Inner Asia long after their empire was gone”.¹⁷ One of the biggest achievements was that the Uyghurs had established a permanent Uyghur capital city, Karabalghasun, in which to store all of the Chinese gifts of silk and grains. Indeed, through this city, the Uyghurs themselves became the middlemen in the lucrative trans-Eurasian silk trade. In addition, the Uyghurs kept written records and established agricultural communities on the steppe. Barfield indicates that the Uyghurs’ legacy lasted for so long that even after 400 years the Mongols relied on Uyghur advisors to organize their government.¹⁸

In conclusion, we can say that, first, the Turks paved the road for the rise of the Uyghurs in the steppe, and the Turks and the Uyghurs have shared more than others a common cultural identity. This explains the aspiration of the current Xinjiang Uyghurs to reestablish so-called Eastern Turkistan. It also explains why the modern Uyghurs claim to be the descendents of the people who founded the great medieval Uyghur Empire, maintaining through the present this unique cultural prestige as their own and thus actively resisting the current imposition of the Pan-Chinese identity.

The year 1935 is special for the Uyghurs: after the tribal name had fallen into disuse for five hundred years, it was in this year that the Chinese government officially readopted this name for the people of Xinjiang. The government of China at that time, the

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 151-152.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 151.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 159.

Republic of China, used the term “Uyghur” to refer to the Islamic people living in Xinjiang oases, and, twenty-some years later, Mao Zedong’s new government, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), entitled Xinjiang as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In practice, the administration there was neither Uyghur nor autonomous. However, the Chinese “helped” the Uyghurs by giving them a sense of a region-wide Uyghur identity, solidarity, and a belief in their autonomous political rights. Thus, it is fair to say that the idea of a unique Uyghur identity was erected by the Han Chinese themselves.¹⁹

Where Do the Uyghurs Live?

The area in which the Uyghurs dwelled for centuries is the center of Asia with an area of about 1.66 million square miles, which accounts for about one sixth of China’s total area. It is as big as three Frances, or six-and-a-half Britains. With Tibet to the south, Xinjiang shares a 5,600-kilometer international frontier with eight countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

¹⁹ Christian Tyler, *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 136.



Fig.4. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region travel map.²⁰

Xinjiang's geographical features include “three mountains and two basins” (Fig. 4). The Altai Mountains in the north and the Kunlun Mountains in the south encircle the main territory of Xinjiang. With the 1,700-kilometer-long Tian Mountains in the middle, Xinjiang is divided into two parts: the north is called *beijiang*, the northern territory, and the south is called *nanjiang*, the southern territory. *Beijiang*, where the Junggar Basin is located, was historically the home of the Junggar Mongolians and is where now reside the Chinese Kazaks. The Tarim Basin is located in *nanjiang* and is populated by the majority of the Uyghurs. The latter group and territory are the central foci in this thesis.

²⁰ Illustration from chinatrekking.com. *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Travel Map*. http://www.chinatrekking.com/UserFiles/Image/Maps/Xinjiang_map/map-of-xinjiang-L.jpg. (July 24, 2007). Accessed on March 10, 2011.

As mentioned above, the mercantile activities of the Uyghur people contribute a very distinctive character of the Uyghurs as compared against other Chinese minorities. They have maintained this distinctive ethnic characteristic till the present. Besides the oasis agricultural civilization developed by the Uyghur desert dwellers, the Uyghurs' homeland is also famous for its delicate handicrafts, such as "carpet making, cotton and silk spinning and weaving, alcoholic beverage production, leather tanning and fashioning of goods, and jade carving...." (Fig. 5)²¹

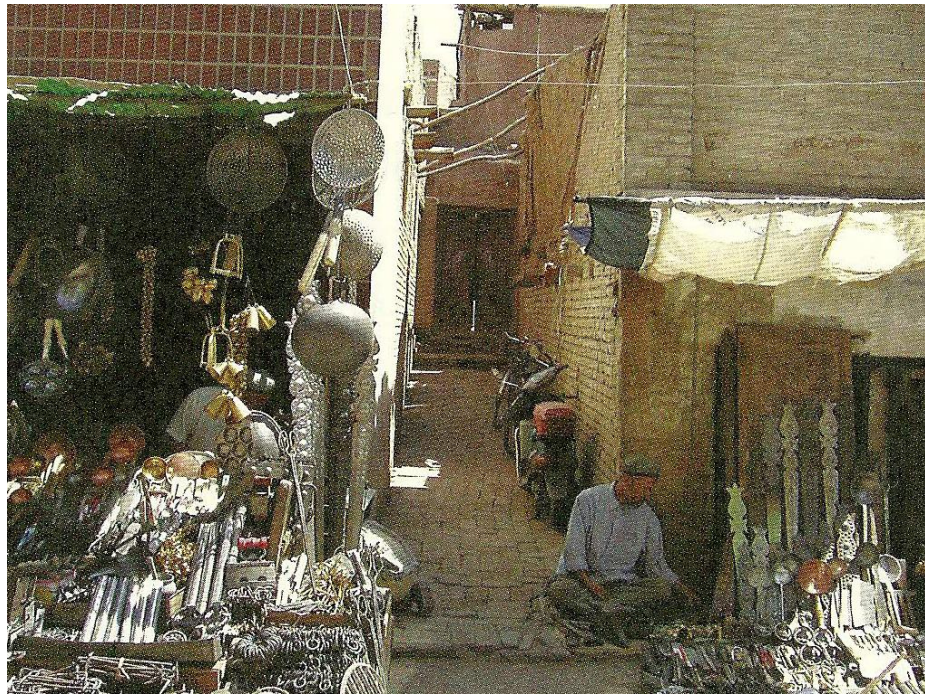


Fig.5. Xinjiang's handicrafts.²²

²¹ S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 165.

²² Illustration from Lixiong Wang, *Wo De Xiyu, Ni De Dongtu* (Taipei: Dakuai Wenhua Press, 2008), 435.

Xinjiang's History before 1949

Historically, Xinjiang was called *Xiyu*, “the western region”. It was one of the most important regions through which the Silk Road passed. It was through this passage that the Tang Buddhist Xuanzang travelled in the mid-7th century to India and brought back to China a variety of Buddhist scriptures that influenced the entirety of East Asia. This land was at that time controlled by the Turks and was later conquered by the Mongols.

In 1759, the Manchu (Qing dynasty of China, 1644-1911) rulers of Beijing declared this land to be *Xinjiang*, the New Territory. Uyghurs resented this name since it reflected Chinese imperial expansion upon the unfortunate Uyghur people. For Chinese scholars as well “Xinjiang” is an awkward term, because it makes the popular Chinese notion that Xinjiang had belonged to China since the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C. -- 9 A.D.) seem self-contradictory. At any rate, both Chinese and Uyghurs reached an agreement that it was not until the Qing dynasty that Xinjiang was completely integrated into China.²³

James Millward indicates that it wasn't until the 1820s that the Qing government began to control Xinjiang under its philosophies and structures of statecraft.²⁴ Before then, the majority of Chinese government officials rejected the idea of expanding Chinese territory into Xinjiang, for two main reasons. First, the Uyghurs were too barbaric to be integrated into the Chinese cultural circle; second, Xinjiang was just a desert land that

²³ James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 33.

²⁴ James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 136.

would consume enormous revenues of the Qing government while providing little benefit in return.

A similar attitude could be found around the same time in the United States with regard to the American West. “The American appetite for land west of the Mississippi was originally meager.”²⁵ After the U.S. had spent 15 million dollars for the Louisiana territories in 1803, many federalists thought that the huge land of the west “endangered the republic by threatening to disperse its population over a huge area in which it would prove to be ungovernable.”²⁶ The enormous value of these “virgin” lands had not been fully understood at the time, at least for either of the U.S. and China. And if the governments saw any benefit in laying claim to these vast lands, they were considered ideal places in which to place criminals, especially political prisoners. Lin Zexu, the famous officer who fought furiously against the British opium trade, was sent to Xinjiang in the 1840s as a punishment for his having offended the British.²⁷

The Qing government did send many troops to secure the “New Territory”. But for the civilian part, only a small number of Chinese businessmen were encouraged to trade with the Chinese immigrants and local Uyghur people there. After the 1764 Ush

²⁵ Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 61.

²⁶ White (1991), 62.

²⁷ Lin Zexu was exiled to Xinjiang in 1842 and played a great role in establishing military colonies in Xinjiang during his presence there. Three years later, Lin was reappointed as the Shaanxi-Gansu Governor. He died soon thereafter, in 1850.

rebellion,²⁸ the Qing government even decided to separate Chinese from Uyghurs to prevent further conflicts.

The 1820s marked the starting point of true Qing imperialism in Xinjiang. It is the same imperialism that occurred everywhere in the world at that time. This involved exporting Chinese peasants to Xinjiang in order to assimilate the local ethnic groups and placing Chinese above the minorities living in Xinjiang in order to enhance the success of the assimilation. The goal was for the Uyghurs to adopt in the end Chinese language and customs. Chinese scholars at that time, such as Gong Zizhen and Wei Yuan, advocated this imperialist strategy to the Qing government. They refuted the earlier notion that the government should abandon Xinjiang. Gong and Wei both believed that it was the earlier insufficient expansion of the Qing government into Xinjiang that caused the ethnic and political problems there. Gong said that the rich resources of Xinjiang were so attractive to Chinese peasants that only one out of ten would be likely to return to China proper. Wei also mentioned that the great abundance of Xinjiang's natural resources (oil had not yet been discovered then) could benefit the central Chinese state if the government allowed Chinese civilians to explore that region.²⁹

However, during the 1840s, China's defeat in the first Opium Wars (1839-1842) broadly opened the doors to foreign encroachment in Xinjiang in particular. Xinjiang fell into chaos, and the alliances of the foreign powers with the local Turk leader Yaqub Beg facilitated those foreigners' entry into Xinjiang. In the late-Qing period, the Russians controlled trade in the northern territory, centering their activity in Ili, with consulates

²⁸ Millward (1998), 124. Central Asian tribes aside from the Uyghurs communicated with each other and also with the Muslim monarchs to resist Qing rule. This led to the Ush Massacre by the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing.

²⁹ Millward (1998), 243-245.

also in Urumqi, Tacheng, Altay, and Kashgar. The British controlled the south, directing all of the intercourse between Kashgar and the Indian subcontinent.³⁰



Fig.6. Governor-General Zuo Zongtang³¹

Inspired by Gong's and Wei's argument, the Qing governor-general Zuo Zongtang (Fig. 6) "regained" Xinjiang militarily after the Yaqub Beg Rebellion there in 1875. Zuo believed that Qing imperialism was the panacea that could solve eternally all troubles in and with Xinjiang. Thus, after 1875, Xinjiang was finally treated as a province under the rule of the Manchu Qing dynasty.³²

After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in early 1912, from 1912 to 1949, during the Republic of China period, there were four nationalist rulers in Xinjiang: Yang Zengxin (1911-1928), Jin Shuren (1928-1933), Sheng Shicai (1933-1942), and Zhang

³⁰ Calla Wiemer, "The Economy of Xinjiang," in Starr ed., (2004), 165.

³¹ Illustration from Xiaojuan Liu, "Zuo zhongtang xiang" 左中堂像 (*Governor-General Zuo Zongtang*). http://www.ahzydzszp.com.cn/ren_wu/rw%EF%BC%8Dzt01.html. (August 24, 2005). Accessed on March 15, 2011.

³² Millward (2007), 106.

Zhizhong (1942-49). The Chinese Civil War (1926-1949) and WWII (1937-1945) drove most attention in Xinjiang away from the Republican government, which resulted in much local autonomy in Xinjiang. The local rulers became independent lords there, and the Uyghurs used this opportunity to seek independence from China. On November 12, 1933, in the Kashgar region, the first but short-lived East Turkistan Republic was declared (ETR), but it disintegrated quickly in the next year due to its suppression by Sheng Shicai and his Russian allies. The second ETR survived from 1944 to 1949, when it was finally conquered by PLA of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³³

³³ Starr ed., (2004), 83.

Section One

Any tourist who pays his first visit to Xinjiang will be stunned by its vastness and desolation. It has forever been a barren land, but never a blank paper. Historically, Xinjiang was a place inhabited by non-Chinese, and it is necessary to examine the historic pattern of the interaction of Chinese and their non-Chinese neighbors before we can begin to understand reasonably the current Chinese-Uyghurs relations. Sinologists, especially in the Western academic circle, including Owen Lattimore, John King Fairbank, Paul Cohen, and others, have more complete understandings than some Chinese scholars of how the non-Chinese of Xinjiang and Asia, such as Xiongnu, Mongolians, Manchurians, Turks, Tibetans, and so on, helped to shape Chinese history.

Historians such as Fairbank have developed a beat-and-react theory according to which the East has only waited for the punch from western lands to beat it up before it decided to intervene in Inner Asia. Fairbank believed in the passive nature of Chinese politics and its relations with outsiders. However, some contemporary Sinologists have criticized this theory, and many new models have been established to tackle the Han / Minority, or Chinese / non-Chinese, issue. For example, Thomas Barfield has developed his own theory about the tributary / mutual-aid relationship that developed historically between China and the Asian non-Chinese. Nicholas Di Cosmo posits an aggressive nature of the ancient Chinese in their construction of the Great Wall to explain the Chinese conquest of Xiongnu territory in the north, thoroughly refuting the traditional image of a passive Chinese culture.³⁴

³⁴ Nicholas Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 140.

Regarding all such theories, the active and sometimes even aggressive response of China toward what are now its minorities appears to suggest that the aggressor model is most accurate. Chinese *juntun* 军屯, military colonies, have been the product of an ever-existent ideology by which Chinese rulers have conquered and controlled outside folk, and, far from being a passive response, the true intent of the *juntun* system is very aggressive, determined, and forceful. The basic idea of *juntun* was to force Chinese troops stationed in frontier areas to support themselves by farming these regions that during the emergent period were often populated by non-Chinese peoples. Theoretically, the *juntun* approach solved the problems of national security, military material transportation expense, military food supply, and the over-abundance of veterans, all at the same time. Famous Chinese emperors such as Qin Shihuang (259 B.C. -- 210 B.C.), Han Wudi (156 B.C. -- 87 B.C.), Tang Taizong (599 A.D. -- 649 A.D.), and so on all employed the *juntun* system. Take Han Wudi, for example. In 119 B.C., after his armies' defeat of the Xiongnu, he ordered 720,000 Chinese civilians from eastern provinces to migrate to the northern and northwestern frontier regions to occupy the newly gained land as colonizers.³⁵ And, in 117 B.C., he established four military colonies in the western regions, at Jiuquan, Wuwei, Dunhuang, and Zhangye, and he managed to break the alliance between the Qiang and Xiongnu people, which paved the way for Chinese control of the far west.³⁶

However, Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), who practiced *juntun* as a national policy, proved *juntun* to be an ecologically,

³⁵ Ban Gu, *Hanshu. Vol. 1* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1990), 178.

³⁶ Denis Twitchett & Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China. Vol 1. The Chin, and Han Empires, 221 B.C.-A.D. 220* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 164-165.

militarily, and economically flawed strategy. During his reign, constant flooding occurred along the banks of the Yellow River, which banks essentially constituted the state border in the north. It is likely that such floods resulted from military colonies having been established along the banks of the Yellow River to tame its resources. The destruction of the Loess Plateau, having become disturbed through its massive and intensive cultivation during the Ming period, caused tons of soil to drain into the river every year, which finally raised the level of the riverbed and was responsible for the constant and serious Yellow River floods in years thereafter.³⁷ Unfortunately, the subsequent Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, and the current People's Republic of China all have been adherents of the ancient *juntun* policies, especially in the Xinjiang region. Thus, before the military colonizers entered Xinjiang in 1949, a well prepared, historically practiced, and mature pattern already waited for them to adopt it.

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and Chinese Manifest Destiny

The traditional *juntun* system is embodied in the modern Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) that exists through the present. The above-mentioned Fifth Division of the PLA was the founding unit of the XPCC organization, and it was responsible for colonizing Xinjiang. When the XPCC was established in 1953-54, it was a “vast quasi-military, quasi-civilian, quasi-prisoner work force comprised of people who were obliged, for one reason or another, to remain in Xinjiang.”³⁸ As the Chinese soldiers of the XPCC transformed into peasants again, their direct supervision shifted to the State

³⁷ Nianhai Shi, Erqin Cao, and Shiguang Zhu, *Huangtu Gaoyuan Senlin Yu Caoyuan De Bianqian* (Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Press, 1985), 190.

³⁸ James D. Seymour and Richard Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts: Prisons and Labor Reform Camps in China* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 47.

Council,³⁹ which meant that the XPCC has been essentially independent of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region's government. Besides, the XPCC was allowed to maintain its own prison, twenty-four jails, public security bureau, court system, and justice department. Thus, the XPCC was just like an independent kingdom inside of Xinjiang, and only distant Beijing could monitor it. This has caused millions of people to question the legitimacy of the XPCC, since it has exceeded the domain of the Constitution of China and no specific law is designed to regulate this organization. In other words, it is only responsible to the Chinese Communist Party and its state apparatus, not to the Chinese people.

The organization was divided into prefecture-level divisions; the original plan was to establish twelve divisions, each with twelve regiments (*tuan*). However, there were only ten divisions in practice, which instantly became known as agricultural divisions. The first was located in Aksu, the second in Korla, and the third in Kashgar, all of which were located in the Southern Xinjiang Tarim River Basin. The fourth division was located in Yining, the fifth in the Junggar Basin, the sixth in Urumchi, the seventh in Kuitun, the eighth in Shihezi, the ninth in Ta Cheng, and the tenth in Altai.⁴⁰

The Function of the XPCC was simple. From the cultural perspective, it was a Chinese cultural exporting entity, spreading Chinese culture, philosophy, and language to the Xinjiang minorities. In the 1940s and 1950s, as well as in the present, the historic impressions that the Chinese possessed of the minorities as backward, uncivilized, and naïve were and are still popular among the Chinese Han people. Thus, the Han Chinese convinced themselves that it was their duty to assimilate the “Uyghurs”. This is the

³⁹ The State Council is the chief administrative authority of the People's Republic of China.

⁴⁰ Seymour and Anderson (1998), 104.

modern Chinese version of Manifest Destiny. Actually, it has existed in Chinese culture for nearly three thousand years and has hardly changed.

From the military perspective, metaphorically the XPCC was the nose of Beijing and was designed to smell the first sign of an external threat or an internal ethnic uprising. And there were good reasons for establishing such a remote-sensing structure. For example, when Sino-Russo relations deteriorated around 1960, national border security between Xinjiang and Russia became the most concerning issue for the Chinese government. In 1962-3, about 60,000 residents of Xinjiang sought asylum in the Soviet Union to avoid either the political persecution or the devastating famine then occurring in central China. In the following year, the XPCC sealed the border and established fifty-eight state farms (a third of the total of the XPCC farms) along the 2109-kilometer Sino-Russo frontier.⁴¹

War against the Desert!

When the world began to move into the post-World War II period around the mid-twentieth century, China's far west was preparing to launch the biggest war in Chinese history between humanity and the desert. The Fifth Division, our protagonists in this thesis, right after their arrival at Xinjiang, welcomed their fellow military colonists from China proper. In addition to the Fifth Division, Agricultural Division Two and the early members of Agricultural Division Three entered the Tarim River Basin by the end

⁴¹ Gaye Christoffersen, "Xinjiang and the Great Islamic Circle: The Impact of Transnational Forces on Chinese Regional Economic Planning," *The China Quarterly*, No. 133 (1993): 136.

of 1949. And Agricultural Divisions Four, Five, Six, Seven, and Eight reached northern and central Xinjiang before 1954.⁴²

Unsurprisingly, the lives of the military colonizers were very difficult during this early period. Like the American pioneers in the American West, adjusting to a new life in the far west was a matter of life and death. Aside from extreme threats from the harsh local weather and wild animals, the daily lives of the military colonizers tested the very resilience of human nature. In the summer, the colonizers camped in the wild, and, in the winter, like moles they slept in underground tunnels and caves (Fig. 7). Sometimes for nearly half a year only pickles and dried vegetables were available to eat, and often the colonizers had to eat rice with salt water to survive the other half-year. Nonetheless, under such harsh conditions they had to play the role assigned to them: survive, beat the enemy, and tame nature (Fig. 8).



Fig.7. The underground tunnel and cave dwellings of the early Xinjiang military colonizers.⁴³

⁴² Tan, et al., eds., 23. Agricultural Division Three was established in 1965, while its founders entered Xinjiang in 1949 and were under Agricultural Division One's supervision.



Fig.8. Xinjiang military colonizers cultivating the land.⁴⁴

To survive in such a forbidden area, water scarcity became the first issue that needed to be resolved. The military colonizers needed water to live on, and so did their animals and crops. Clearly, no matter whether for colonizers in China or in the U.S., water was a matter of success or failure in transforming the arid West. Wang Enmao, the successor of General Wang Zhen in leading the XPCC, said later, “Water is the foundation of the XPCC,”⁴⁵ and I believe he had every reason to say so. Constructing

⁴³ Illustration from Jing Chen and Jinhong Ruan, eds., “Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan zai gebi shang kaihuang de qingjing” 新疆生产建设兵团在戈壁上开荒的情景 (*The Underground Tunnels and Caves of the Early Xinjiang Military Colonizers*). http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2004-10/09/content_2069581.htm (October 9, 2004). Accessed on March 15, 2011.

⁴⁴ Illustration from Jing Chen and Jinhong Ruan, eds., “Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan de ‘diwozi’” 新疆生产建设兵团的“地窝子” (*Xinjiang Military Colonizers Cultivating the Land*). http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2004-10/09/content_2069581.htm (October 9, 2004). Accessed on March 15, 2011.

⁴⁵ Chengqu Yan et al., eds., *Xinjiang Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan Shuili Wushi Nian* (Urumqi: Xinjiang People Press, 2003), 3.

ditches, canals, and reservoirs thus became the priority activity for the first batch of military colonizers.

In 1950, right after the Xinjiang military colonizers settled down, General Wang Zhen hired a great number of hydraulic scientists to explore both sides of the Tian Mountain range that divides Xinjiang into two parts. Their mission was to find suitable places to irrigate and to establish as many state farms as possible.⁴⁶ Actually, Wang had prepared for this field study long before he reached Xinjiang. The long journey between Jiuquan and Aksu provided him enough time to recruit all kinds of skillful people on his way to Xinjiang. Especially hydraulic engineers and students majoring in sciences were more than welcome to join his army.

After they had returned from their field studies in the Tian Mountains, Wang ordered, “We should construct the Eighteenth Regiment Canal!”⁴⁷ (Fig.9). This canal was designed to take water from Bosten Lake and the Kongque River and transport it to the various colonies located at Korla, a town that was near their base camp in Aksu. This Canal was the first canal that had ever been built along the Kongque River, a tributary of the Tarim River. The canal officially launched the irrigation projects in Xinjiang in the modern era, and no one knew at the moment that, fifty years later, these colonizers were going to manipulate billions of cubic meters of water and forever turn the desert into man-made oases.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 1.



Fig. 9. Wang Zhen in the canal during the opening ceremony of the Eighteenth Regiment Canal, May 1951.⁴⁸

In 1950-1951 alone, Wang Zhen mobilized 110,000 people to participate in irrigation construction and farming in Xinjiang. Wang's people fixed old ditches and built eighty new ones, reclaimed 40,000 hectares of wasteland, and irrigated about 100,000 hectares of land. Four years later, they had built 115 canals, twelve of which were large- and medium-sized canals, and overall they had constructed 800 permanent water projects. The Xinjiang military colonizers by then were able to transport 160 cubic meters of water per second, and they produced 325 million kg of grains, which indicated

⁴⁸ Illustration from Di Yao, ed., "1951 Nian wuyue, zai shibatuan fangshui dianli shang, wang zhen xingfen de tiaojin shuiqu zhong" 1951 年五月，在十八团的放水典礼上，王震兴奋地跳入水中 (*Wang Zhen Jumped into the Canal during the Opening Ceremony of the Eighteenth Regiment Canal, May, 1951*). http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2008-04/11/content_7959979_11.htm. (April 11, 2008). Accessed on March 15, 2011.

that they were now self-supportive. These tough men began to see some hope in this barren land.⁴⁹

The irrigation works mentioned above were still primitive compared to later accomplishments. One of the most surprising facts that needs to be mentioned here is how these pioneers built a large number of sizable irrigation works without concrete.⁵⁰ In 1949, Xinjiang was not yet able to produce its own concrete, and the XPCC would have had to import it from either the Soviet Union or China proper, which would have cost them too much money. Thus, the military colonizers decided to build their own water works without any concrete. This has become a new Chinese myth of heroism in the modern era. As we know, when the military colonizers entered Xinjiang, the limited life-subsistence resources prevented them from doing anything but survive. Nevertheless, superhuman power often can be aroused under extreme conditions, and the Xinjiang military colonizers constituted such a case. Lacking modern machines such as tractors and reaping machines found in the modern American West, the Chinese colonizers were akin to primitive people living in the Stone Age. These pioneers thus adopted the most primitive ways to build their modern water projects. Horses, cattle, and donkeys were harnessed to transport construction materials and life-subsistence resources. They did not possess even wheelbarrows or dollies with which to move stones and bricks. However, these handicaps did not pose a problem for them. They used shoulder poles and baskets to carry their loads. Facing all these obstacles, they successfully invented their very own concrete. By mixing calcium oxide with argil according to certain proportions, they created their own “concrete”. Amazing as this was, it also explains why, a couple years

⁴⁹ Yan, et al., eds., (2003), 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 31.

later, some irrigation works began to reveal their poor quality, and many of them needed to be repaired.⁵¹

The peak period of Xinjiang irrigation works was around the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, when more resources and skills were available coming from China proper. From the second half of the 1950s, many large irrigation works built earlier, such as Liberation Canal No.1, Liberation Canal No. 2, the Aksu Success Ditch, the Hami Red Star No. 1 and No. 2 Ditches, were repaired and updated and are still in use today.⁵²

At this time hydraulic development also became institutionalized. There was a special branch of the XPCC responsible for water works that General Wang Zhen urged to build the permanent hydraulic works. By the end of 1959, twenty-two reservoirs were built with a total water capacity of 910 million cubic meters. Furthermore, 145 military colonies were set up, and the Xinjiang colonizers cultivated and irrigated about 562,400 hectares of land.⁵³ By 1965, the number of the canals increased to 170, providing ten times the earlier water transportation ability at 1,100 cubic meters per second. Reservoirs now totaled thirty-five, with a total capacity of 1,494 million cubic meters of water.⁵⁴

Besides their accomplishments building water works, the sheer scale of the XPCC colonies deserves mention here. According to the Chinese sources published by the Xinjiang People's Press, by 1966 cultivated lands in Xinjiang had been expanded to 556,200 hectares.⁵⁵ But Seymour and Anderson estimate that, by the 1960s, the XPCC

⁵¹ Tan, et al., eds., 119.

⁵² Yan, et al., eds., 30.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 34.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 34.

was farming over 700,000 hectares, or almost a third of the region's arable land, mainly for grains and cotton. These activities constituted about a third of the economic output of Xinjiang.⁵⁶ It has been estimated that about two-thirds of the land now under cultivation was reclaimed only in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁷

Another source published by the China Statistics Bureau Press distinguishes the two concepts of farming area and sown area, clarifying that the farming area was just as Seymour and Anderson noted, 780,000 hectares, while the sown area was only about 593,950 hectares.⁵⁸ This might explain the discrepancy found among the sources. Seymour and Anderson focused on the farming area, while the Xinjiang People's Press was concerned with the actual sown land. Probably, then, about 190,000 hectares of land were cultivated but not sown. It is possible that the XPCC was employing a shifting cultivation method, or they simply did not have enough hands to take care of all of the arable lands at the same time.

Our main concern, the Tarim River Basin, was transformed largely by Agricultural Divisions One, Two, and Three. With Agricultural Division One situated along the upstream portion of the Tarim River and Agricultural Division Two along the downstream area, the entire Tarim River was under the active management of Chinese military colonizers. Furthermore, Agricultural Division Three was positioned in Kashgar City, utilizing the Yarkant River, which was one of the three main tributaries of the Tarim River. These arrangements were designed to exploit the entire Tarim River, such

⁵⁶ Seymour and Anderson, 104. At that time the XPCC was able to produce 332,900 tons of cotton and 1,107,000 tons of grain.

⁵⁷ Starr, ed., 177.

⁵⁸ Tan, et al., eds., 320, 324.

that even its tributary river, the Yarkant, was tapped. The following table indicates the main achievements of the three divisions along the Tarim River during the 1949-1976 period.

Table 1. Water Projects and Irrigation Areas in the Tarim River Basin, 1950-1969⁵⁹

Organization/ Works	Agricultural Division One	Agricultural Division Two	Agricultural Division Three
Main Irrigation Constructs	Success Canal One Success Canal Two Success Canal Three	Eighteenth Regiment Canal Liberation Canal One Liberation Canal Two Kailai Canal	None
Large Reservoirs	Upstream Reservoir Success Reservoir Duolangqu Reservoir	Kala Reservoir Daxihaizi Reservoir	Xiaohaizi Reservoir Yonganba Reservoir
Main Irrigation Areas	Shajinzi Irrigation Area (405,300 mu ⁶⁰) Tarim River Upstream Irrigation Area (931,000 mu) Fifty Regiment Irrigation Area (100,600 mu),	Shibatuan Irrigation Area (310,000 mu), Tarim River Downstream Irrigation Area (277,800 mu).	Qianjin Irrigation Area, Xiaohaizi Irrigation Area (450,000 mu),

As we can tell from Table 1, between 1957 and 1962 four big reservoirs in Xinjiang were built along the Tarim River and its branches: the Daxihaizi, Kala, Upstream, and Xiaohaizi. At this time, including the four new reservoirs, the entirety of Xinjiang only had seven reservoirs.

By the end of 1969, the total irrigated area in the Tarim River Basin, according to Table 1, was about 2,500,000 mu, (about 170,000 hectares). Surely this can be associated with the massive migration to Xinjiang since 1949. According to Leiwen Jiang's

⁵⁹ Numerical data derived from Yan et al, eds., *Xinjiang Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan Shuili Wu Shi Nian* Urumqi: Xinjiang People Press, 2003.

⁶⁰ 15 mu = 1 hectare.

research, since the 1950s the Tarim River Basin became one of the most important migrant-receiving areas and cultivation bases in Xinjiang.⁶¹ The total amount of cultivated land in the basin grew from 20,000 hectares in 1950 to 142,000 hectares in 1959. At the same time, the total population of Divisions One and Two increased from less than 20,000 in 1950 to approximately 420,000 in the mid-1970s. The full exploitation of the Tarim River thus had been materialized at this point, which buried the seed of the ecological disasters to come.

When China reached the decade of 1966-1976, it plunged into a period of utter turmoil that helps us to view how important were the irrigation works in Xinjiang, especially in Southern Xinjiang (the Tarim River Basin). The Cultural Revolution (CR) launched by Mao in 1966 was such a destructive force that even Xinjiang, in the Far West, was seriously affected by this political movement. In effect the CR thoroughly destroyed the irrigation works. None of the reservoirs functioned properly at that time. None dared to preserve water in their reservoirs, and the canals could not deliver as much as they had in the past, which led to direct damage to the colonies of the various Agricultural Divisions. As a result, the lack of water management in these areas led to agricultural collapse. We can compare the figures from 1966 with those of 1974. In just these eight years, the once-profitable XPCC shifted from being a creditor to being a debtor. Whereas once it had made a profit of about 113 million RMB annually, in 1974 it encountered a deficit of 196 million RMB;⁶² while in 1966 it had exported its excess grains to China proper, by 1974 the XPCC could no longer support itself. The XPCC had to rely on grains imported to Xinjiang by the central government. The production of

⁶¹ Jiang, et al., 477.

⁶² Yan et al., eds., 35.

grains and cotton, the water-dependent crops, serve as examples of how far Xinjiang agricultural production dropped during this period: from 1966 to 1974, grains production dropped from 720 million kg to 525 million kg, and cotton production dropped from 24.9 million kg to 15.2 million kg over all.⁶³

The irrigation work named United Ditch, on the Kuitun River, is a representative hydraulic failure of the time. Because of the purely ideological propaganda promulgated by Mao at that time, the ditch builders didn't dare refer to hydraulic scientists for any rational advice before they built this project. They just built it to flatter the undisputed leader, Mao. As we would expect, this work proved to be flawed. The Ditch was destroyed every year by spring flooding. Just as Sisyphus pushed the rock every day, so did the builders repair the canals every year. Similar hydraulic tragedies occurred outside of Xinjiang, too. In China Proper, along the Yellow River, the Sanmenxia Dam raised the level of the Yellow River bed by several meters such that the people of Weinan in Shaanxi Province literally lived below the level of the river.⁶⁴

The Cultural Revolution dismantled the entire structure of China during this period, but without its effects, we might not be able to observe the importance of the irrigation works in Xinjiang. Western environmental historian Donald Wooster and others have pointed out that water projects played a fundamental role in enabling the new European-derived immigrants to dominate the entire American West.⁶⁵ Likewise, it is also true, given Xinjiang's background, that the lifeline of this forbidding area is water,

⁶³ *Ibid*, 35.

⁶⁴ Linying Li, *A Huang He...* (Shanghai: Wenhui Pressing House, 2006), 179.

⁶⁵ Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 50.

and whoever enjoys access to utilize water and prevent others from controlling its access will enjoy possession of absolute power there. After twenty-seven years of transformation from 1949 to 1976, the Xinjiang military colonizers had seized the throat of all the waters in Xinjiang, particularly the Tarim River. The Uyghurs witnessed how their homeland changed into Chinese standard state farms and how their precious water became a powerful agent working against their very autonomy. By utilizing Xinjiang's water, the Chinese gradually built up a water-control system that the Uyghurs could not resist at all. Either they lived under the newly created Chinese irrigation empire, or they fled to even drier places yet untouched by the Chinese.

Military Colonizers and other Migrants

Aside from water, another important resource in Xinjiang was human labor. The purpose of irrigation and land reclamation could not be achieved without huge numbers of Chinese immigrants to secure as labor. The first batch of Chinese pioneers, of the Fifth Division / XPCC, having successfully entrenched themselves in Xinjiang, opened the door for successive immigrants. The idea was simple: the more Chinese there were in Xinjiang, the more deeply and widely Xinjiang would be developed, and the more likely that Xinjiang would become sinicized and thus an inseparable part of China.

Most members of the XPCC were from the First Field Army, which became the brains of the organization. Besides the Chinese First Field Army, the remnants of the earlier peasant-soldiers, probably over 60,000, who had originally belonged to local *Guomindang*, or Nationalist, garrison units of the Republic of China, also became members of the XPCC after its establishment. Some retired PLA soldiers later joined the

XPCC's various divisions. In addition, some convicted criminals had no choice but to work in the XPCC to prove their commitment to communist China.⁶⁶

The total population of the XPCC at the very beginning, in 1952, was estimated to be around at least 160,000.⁶⁷ However, Chinese Statistics Bureau records of 1952 show that the total population of the XPCC was 273,300 but that it suddenly dropped to 150,300 in the next year, 1953. The sudden drop in population between 1952 and 1953 probably can be explained by noting that in 1953 the Chinese government transferred a certain number of soldiers from the XPCC to the National Defense Troop.⁶⁸ Thus, besides the 150,300 military soldiers working in the XPCC, there were approximately 123,000 soldiers who continued their military service by guarding the frontier. This explains the decline in the population of the XPCC.

After Chinese troops established colonies in Xinjiang, one unexpected crisis occurred: the entire XPCC had no available women to marry. Although this may seem a trivial thing compared to national security and frontier development, in this case women determined the fate of the XPCC. Even Chairman Mao Zedong urged Xinjiang to “solve the marriage and other difficulties”.⁶⁹

Unlike many European colonizers across the world, some of whom ended up marrying native women, the Xinjiang colonizers did not have the chance to marry local women. The local Uyghurs are Muslims, and they were fairly conservative at that time.

⁶⁶ Seymour and Anderson, 46, 52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 46.

⁶⁸ Mao Zedong announced in February 1952 that the troops in Xinjiang should be divided into two sections, the national defense and the production sections. This organization was completed by May 1953.

⁶⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 15. The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution, 1966-1982* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 66.

If a Chinese wanted to marry a Uyghur girl, he needed to obtain permission from every relative in the girl's home. And if he were lucky enough to obtain all of the permissions he needed, the possibility of their marriage taking place was still tiny, since there was one condition that he needed to fulfill before he could be accepted by the Uyghurs: he must convert to Islam. Ceremonies would be held, and he had to have his stomach and gut cleaned by soapy water because he was stained by the pork that he had eaten before this conversion. Thus, this Chinese-Uyghur marriage seldom occurred, and, when it did, it often failed. Additionally, given the cultural and linguistic differences between the Chinese and the Uyghur, merging into the local population was difficult and thus fairly uncommon. The XPCC leaders were aware of this situation before they entered Xinjiang, and thus the order, "No marriage is allowed between the XPCC military colonizers and Uyghur women," was issued at the very beginning of the First Division's intrusion into Xinjiang.⁷⁰ Consequently, importing as many Chinese women as possible into Xinjiang became a practical solution. It helped to stabilize the presence of the XPCC members in the Far West, and, in addition, the offspring of those colonizers guaranteed the next generation of Chinese control in Xinjiang.

In 1994, the Chinese Statistics Bureau published the text *Tunken Shubian Sishi Nian (Colonizing and Guarding Xinjiang for Forty Years)*. It contains an interesting statistics chart showing the gender ratio of the population of the XPCC through the years. According to this chart, in 1952 the sex ratio of men to women was 3.104:1. In 1953 the ratio rose even higher, to 3.107:1, the highest on record. Though the total population number or count varied greatly between the two years (the numbers of the National Security Force were subtracted from the XPCC's total population), the

⁷⁰ Yiping Lu, *Baqian Xiangnu Shang Tianshan* (Beijing: Shiyue Wenyi Press, 2006), 8.

ratio remained nearly the same.⁷¹ We can be quite sure that the unbalanced gender ratio did occur in Xinjiang, and this means that two out of every three men could not get married to begin families. The XPCC organization understood this unbalanced sexual ratio to constitute a serious crisis that was no less important than the scarcity of water. According to one rumor, some of the XPCC soldiers even shared a wife.⁷²

The solutions that the XPCC devised included both persuading soldiers' wives, most of whom lived in China's countryside, to come to Xinjiang and join their husbands, and offering jobs to single women from China proper as a means of attracting them to come to Xinjiang. Most of the soldiers who joined the First Field Army were pretty young, and very few of them had had chances to get married before they joined the army, so attracting soldiers' wives to Xinjiang did little to alleviate the sex ratio problem. Thus, we can leave aside for now the soldiers' wives and focus rather on how the XPCC managed to import large numbers of single women to Xinjiang during the 1950s.

These single women can be divided into two types, poor young peasant women and prostitutes. Most of the peasant women were single village girls, recruited to assist with the frontier work, support the PLA, and guard the nation. Once they entered Xinjiang, they became members of the XPCC and thus became military colonizers.⁷³ A large number of these women were from the provinces of Henan, Shaanxi, and Gansu in the Chinese North; Gansu in particular was at the very beginning the most important region for exporting single women to Xinjiang. Lintao County in Gansu, for example, organized the first batch of female military colonizers to march to Xinjiang (Fig. 10).

⁷¹ Tan, et al., eds., 282.

⁷² Picai Gong, *Biandi Muqin* (Lanzhou: Gansu People Press, 2006), 321.

⁷³ Lu, 10.

About 150 women were recruited from Lintao, and they marched into Xinjiang with other, male, soldiers, hand in hand. All of these women became the wives of higher officers of the XPCC and none of them divorced their husbands.⁷⁴

Some of the wives of XPCC soldiers also came from the southern part of China. There was a famous story about the “Eight thousand Hunan girls moving up to the Tian Mountains”, and others were sent from the southeastern provinces of Fujian, Guangdong, and so on.⁷⁵

From 1949 to 1954, about 60,000 female soldiers were transported to Xinjiang, and most of them were teenagers.⁷⁶ It was said that the top ranking-officers could pick first, and the lower-ranking officers, according to rank, lined up to get their own wives until no unpicked woman remained in the end. Also, elder soldiers were allowed to pick their wives before younger soldiers.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Shouchao Wang, ed., “1949 Nian gansu lintao baiming nvzi tubu jin jiang ji” 1949 年甘肃临洮百名女子进疆记 (*Hundreds of Women of Lintao, Gansu Province, Marching into Xinjiang*). <http://gansu.gansudaily.com.cn/system/2009/08/25/011238306.shtml>. (August 25, 2009). Accessed on March 10, 2011.

⁷⁵ Lu, 8.

⁷⁶ Lu, 10.

⁷⁷ Lu, 17.



Fig. 10. The 150 Lintao female soldiers marching to Xinjiang in 1949.⁷⁸

Besides the peasant women, prostitutes were also imported to Xinjiang. According to tradition, they were mainly from Shanghai, Beijing, and other large cities. However, the only confirmed report regarding these women states that 920 Shanghai prostitutes entered Xinjiang in 1955.⁷⁹ (Fig. 11) To some people's surprise, the Republic of China, before the PRC, allowed prostitution, and all prostitutes had to have licenses when they provided sexual service. However, prostitution was prohibited when the PRC was established in 1949, and thus prostitutes became jobless while having few opportunities to find new work opportunities. Frankly, they had been abandoned by the

⁷⁸ Shouchao Wang, ed., "1949 Nian gansu lintao baiming nvzi tubu jin jiang ji" 1949 年甘肃临洮百名女子进疆记 (*Hundreds of Women of Lintao, Gansu Province, Marching into Xinjiang*). <http://gansu.gansudaily.com.cn/system/2009/08/25/011238306.shtml>. (August 25, 2009). Accessed on March 10, 2011.

⁷⁹ Lu, 13.

state and society, and the XPCC seized upon this opportunity to offer them new chances to support the Big West. The central government promised to erase their unhappy pasts from its archives as long as they went to Xinjiang.⁸⁰



Fig. 11. The Shanghai prostitutes' departure for Xinjiang in 1955.⁸¹

Another method by which the military colonizers could obtain wives was having the soldiers take shifts in returning to China proper to get married and then bring their families back to Xinjiang.⁸² We do not know if these semi-arranged marriages were successful or not. But a common phenomenon occurred about twenty years later, which is that most of the soldiers' wives became widowers, since their husbands, often ten or

⁸⁰ Lu, 14.

⁸¹ Illustration from "1955 Nian shanghai jinv jin xinjiang" 1955 年上海妓女进新疆 (*The Shanghai Prostitute Departure for Xinjiang in 1955*). <http://news.qq.com/a/20090531/000623.htm>. (May 31, 1955). Accessed on March 15, 2011.

⁸² Lu, 16.

twenty years older, had predeceased them.⁸³ Marriage, being the foundation of stability, was thus the most important thing in the eyes of the XPCC leadership. It seems that the individual's happiness was too trivial to consider.

However, although the sexual ratio dropped to 2.292:1 in 1958 and the female population rose from 36,600 in 1953 to 116,900 in 1958,⁸⁴ the XPCC still believed that it needed to accelerate the speed of importing females into Xinjiang. This time the targets were well-educated Chinese women. The entire scheme was a part of the “Support the Big West” campaign launched by the Central Government in 1958, and it involved attracting large numbers of educated youth, such as high-school graduates, to go to Xinjiang and other Northwest frontier areas. I believe that the quick increase in the female population of the XPCC in 1958 alone could be linked to nothing but the Support the Big West campaign. Though male youths came at the same time, this yet constituted another way to introduce women into Xinjiang to solve the problem of the imbalanced sexual ratio. The intention behind this mass demographic movement was to solve the problem fundamentally.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 119.

⁸⁴ Tan, et al., eds., 282.



Fig.12. Shanghai and Jiangsu Educated Youth migrating to Xinjiang in the 1960s.⁸⁵

As a result of the Support the Big West campaign of 1958, the decade from the end of the 1950s to the end of the 1960s was the period of the educated youth in Xinjiang. And in only a year, from 1958 to 1959, the female population of the XPCC rose from 116,900 to 183,700.⁸⁶ The migrants came from ever-wider areas of China. In the late 1960s, large numbers immigrated from eastern provinces such as Shandong, Shanxi, and also from nearby Shaanxi and Gansu. These colonial laborers were also integrated with military exercises. It is said that by 1967 more than a million youths from

⁸⁵ Illustration from Jing Chen and Jinhong Ruan, eds., “Liushi niandai shanghai he jiangsu de zhiqing laido xinjiang” 六十年代上海和江苏的知青来到新疆 (*The Shanghai Educated Youth Migrated to Xinjiang in 1960s.*) http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2004-10/09/content_2069581.htm (October 9, 2004). Accessed on March 15, 2011.

⁸⁶ Tan, et al., eds., 282.

eastern cities had moved to Xinjiang as part of the national Support Border Security campaign.⁸⁷ Usually these youths would be accepted by the XPCC as colonizers. Among the newcomers, the most famous civilian migration group was the Shanghai Educated Youth, who were asked to migrate there to “Support the Big West” (Fig. 12). Some of the Shanghai youths worked in the Yumen oilfield in Gansu Province and on other large projects; some of them were also involved in construction work at the nuclear test base in Lop Nor.⁸⁸ Their fates were thoroughly changed by this political campaign, and many of them never returned to Shanghai. As a result of these migrations, by the end of the 1960s, the male : female sexual ratio had dropped to 1.176:1.⁸⁹ The imbalanced gender crisis had finally been thwarted.

In fact, this early Chinese immigration to Xinjiang since 1949 was less a push-and-pull issue than it was a political campaign. No one at that time had the chance to evade their arranged fates. Wherever one wanted to go, whoever one wanted to be, whatever one wanted to do could not be decided by oneself. These quick and harsh migration policies in the name of “constructing our new communist country” caused numerous social problems, such as destabilizing ethnic relations and increasing social stratification. But such problems were hidden at the time, and it took about another twenty years to let them rise to the surface. Thus, for now we will leave aside these issues before picking them up again in Section Two.

In the meantime, nature, as the most sensitive factor, could not sustain itself beneath the large-scale transformations that occurred in Xinjiang. By the Mid-1970s, the

⁸⁷ Seymour and Anderson, 53.

⁸⁸ Lynn T. White III, “The Road to Urumqi: Approved Institutions in Search of Attainable Goals during Pre-1968 Rustication from Shanghai,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 79 (1979): 490.

⁸⁹ Tan, et al., eds., 282.

extremely severe natural consequences of the Chinese immigration and environmental transformation appeared, many of which I believe are irreversible.

Ecological Disaster

The environmental degradation caused by the XPCC's massive reclamation in Xinjiang is very apparent in the Tarim River Basin. As early as the 1960s, the XPCC had caused some irreversible damage to the local environment of the Tarim Basin. From 1962, problems of irrigation began to occur. Soil salinization was caused by wandering water left uncontrolled on the ground. Consequently, the fervent reclamation process slowed, and the military colonizers of the XPCC reduced the amount of sown land back to 430,600 hectares.⁹⁰ We can assume that at least 130,000 hectares of land were abandoned due to poor management, and it is reasonable to conclude that much reclaimed land became wasteland without vegetation, which made the degradation of the environment even worse. But at that time no one was aware of the danger.

The reduced river flow in the productive areas of tributary systems resulting from rapid population growth, extensive reclamation, and large withdrawals of water for irrigation all contributed to worsen the already fragile ecosystem. In many cases such impacts are irreversible. The most frightening case happened with the Tarim River. Investigations have shown that more than 320 kilometers of the lower reaches of the Tarim River, along with Taitema Lake, dried up in 1972 following the construction of the Daxihaizi reservoir in the lower reaches of the mainstream Tarim.⁹¹ This further caused significant withering of vegetation, the parching of land, and expanding desertification

⁹⁰ Yan, et al., eds., 34.

⁹¹ Wallace and Wouters, eds., 109.

along the lower reaches. Abandoned land is all that remains. The great lake Lop Nor diminished and dried up in 1972 and became a salt desert forever. Furthermore, Taitema Lake lost its water supply in the late 1980s and turned into a dry lake basin. These hydraulic disasters can be linked directly to intensified cultivation along the Tarim River, Manas Lake, and the Manas River. In addition, Kuitun River and Hotan River have shrunk and shortened in length, such that they no longer reach their lakes. The famous poplars once found in the Tarim River Basin became dead trees pointing to the sky as if they harbored everlasting regrets.

The Fall of the XPCC

For the XPCC, the Cultural Revolution was a disaster. The tumultuous decade of 1966-1976 disturbed all of the divisions of the XPCC such that almost none of them functioned properly. The profitable grain and cotton production was suspended, and the leader of the XPCC was harassed by the Red Guards. Wang Enmao, who was the governor of Xinjiang at that time, refused to go back to Beijing. He even threatened Mao that he would use the nuclear weapons of Lop Nor against Beijing if the situation became worse.⁹² Apparently, Mao was terrified of this tough fellow and stopped the Red Guards from further harassing Xinjiang.

Finally, with his death Mao terminated this fervent political campaign of the CR. On September 9, 1976, Mao Zedong arrived at the end of his life. His death ended the Mao era, but a new ideology had not yet been established. For the military colonizers in Xinjiang, during the very last years of Mao's life, their presence was meaningless since

⁹² June Teufel Dreyer, "The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region at Thirty: A Report Card," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 26. No. 7 (1986): 725.

the “emperor” was insane and unable to influence the organization with any positive ideas.

In 1975, due to the turmoil caused by the Cultural Revolution, the planned economy of the XPCC collapsed. The XPCC was quickly replaced by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Reclamation Bureau (XUARRB).⁹³ Facing this chaos, some former colonists decided to leave the region. According to statistics, there was a drop of about 500,000 in the population of the XPCC in 1974-75 alone. And the official explanation offered by the XPCC itself was that the newly established XUARRB could not absorb all of the former employees of the XPCC, which caused about 486,000 former XPCC military colonists to lose their jobs.⁹⁴ This was the first time that the Chinese population in Xinjiang had begun to drop.⁹⁵ However, the decreasing trend of the Chinese population in Xinjiang continued through the late 1970s and early 1980s, because, as by then the second generation of Xinjiang-born Chinese had reached their adulthood, many of them preferred to return to their homeland in the East where the economy and living conditions were far better than those in the far West. To counter the net emigration of Chinese population from Xinjiang, both the Xinjiang and the Shanghai governments strongly opposed against such migrations. Take the *Shanghai Zhiqing* (Shanghai Educated Youth) group, for example. They protested against the governments for not allowing them to return to Shanghai in 1978.⁹⁶ And it is said that about 1500 Shanghai youths launched a 100-day “hunger strike” in Aksu to counter the unfair

⁹³ Yan, et al., eds., 35.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 178.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 282.

⁹⁶ Thomas B. Gold, “Back to the City: The Return of Shanghai’s Educated Youth,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 84 (1980): 760.

policies imposed upon them that prevented them from emigrating. In 1979, their request to return to Shanghai was finally granted by the authorities, while the Shanghai Youth leaders were arrested and imprisoned.⁹⁷

Now, without either Maoism or the XPCC, how could China continue to fulfill its national security mission in Xinjiang?

⁹⁷ Millward (2007), 280.

Section Two

The Revival of the XPCC

As we've learned above, the period of colonization in Xinjiang in the 1950s-1970s occurred alongside the various and constant communist political movements, and finally the collapse of the XPCC in 1975 marked a transition point in Xinjiang's history. Anxiety filled the air in Xinjiang, and the former military colonizers of the XPCC questioned their identities again and wondered to where on earth their new lives pointed. But they did not need to wait too long to get their answer. In 1981, after Deng Xiaoping visited Xinjiang, the XPCC was revived overnight and became one of the largest trading entities in Xinjiang, becoming second only to the Xinjiang government. At that time the former XPCC leader, Wang Enmao, was reappointed to lead the XPCC and returned to Xinjiang the following year. The six-year closure of the XPCC seemed in retrospect like a nightmare, or a bad joke, for most military colonizers who remained in Xinjiang then realized that the XPCC's closure was merely a false alarm, and life for them in Xinjiang could continue as long as Communist China existed.⁹⁸

However, we cannot help but wonder why the XPCC was revived. As we know, its development had been proven already to have been an ecologically and economically

⁹⁸ Tianyi Zhao, "1981 Nian Bayue Deng Xiaoping De Xinjiang Zhi Xing" 1981 年八月邓小平的新疆之行 (*Deng Xiaoping's Trip to Xinjiang in August 1981*). <http://www.jrxjnet.com/lishigouchen/renwufengyun/201005/3322.html> (May 11, 2010). Accessed on March 20, 2011. In 1975 the former XPCC was replaced by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Reclamation Bureau. In 1981, General Wang Zhen submitted to both the Chinese central government, and in person, Deng Xiaoping a report about reviving the XPCC, and, later, in August, Wang Zhen accompanied Deng Xiaoping to Xinjiang for a field survey. After he returned from Xinjiang, Deng felt an urgent need to revive the XPCC, and he said so in public: "It is necessary to revive the XPCC." Furthermore, before Wang Enmao returned to Xinjiang, Deng impressed upon him how critical was the XPCC's role in stabilizing Xinjiang. In December 1981, Beijing, the Chinese Community Party Central Committee, the State Council, and the Military Commission of the CPC Central Committee together published the announcement of the XPCC's revival in the document *The Decision to Revive the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps*, and, from then on, the XPCC was officially revived.

flawed strategy, so how could Deng have readopted this organization to control this vast frontier land inhabited by Uyghurs and other minorities without making the same mistakes that Mao already had made, and only very recently? What made the Chinese government under Deng Xiaoping decide to give the XPCC another chance? What are the true reasons behind the XPCC's rebirth?

Xinjiang meant something different to Deng, though we can be certain that at the very least he understood the importance of Xinjiang's status in matters of national border security. Beyond this, though, he very apparently envisioned something new in Xinjiang. After Mao was gone, in 1978 China was able to launch a new economic development plan, and Deng began to see Xinjiang as an important potential economic partner in China's newly developing economy.⁹⁹ However, this partnership was never intended to be a mutually beneficial relationship, since someone needed to make a sacrifice for the benefit of the other, just as Deng indicated famously in a speech: "Let certain people become rich first".¹⁰⁰ China needed Xinjiang to provide abundant raw materials in order to for the eastern coastal cities to develop their economies. As a matter of fact, at the very beginning of the Deng era, not just Xinjiang, but also the entire Chinese West, including Gansu, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and other interior provinces, were designated as

⁹⁹ Tianyi Zhao, "1981 Nian Bayue Deng Xiaoping De Xinjiang Zhi Xing" 1981 年八月邓小平的新疆之行 (*Deng Xiaoping's Trip to Xinjiang in August 1981*). <http://www.jrxjnet.com/lishigouchen/renwufengyun/201005/3322.html> (May 11, 2010). Accessed on March 20, 2011. Deng was greatly impressed by the quality and quantity of Xinjiang cotton. He asked a lot detailed questions about cotton agriculture when he visited the XPCC. Finally he urged Wang Zhen to expand cotton production in Xinjiang. Deng concluded that his trip was "worthwhile." Four months later, the XPCC was revived under Deng's vigorous support.

¹⁰⁰ Deng first offered this new slogan in a speech that he delivered as he received the American Enterprise Delegation, who visited China in 1985. This was the same year in which Xinjiang officially launched his plan to develop a national cotton base in Xinjiang.

providers of raw materials serving the East.¹⁰¹ At the moment, however, no one could have foreseen the dire consequences to come.

Thus, Xinjiang, besides its importance in security matters, was also a vast colony that would help to support the entire national economic development, especially of the eastern coastal provinces. It was under this national development strategy that the new Chinese national leader Deng Xiaoping justified the resuscitation of the XPCC in 1981. Deng needed the XPCC to continue its supervisory role in Xinjiang, and, if possible, to do so permanently. From this period, the early-1980s, China was too afraid of losing control of Xinjiang, and, thus, from that moment forward, Xinjiang was not only a national border that needed to be secured and a region to be inhabited and farmed by Chinese military colonizers, it was also a key to the national economic revival, to accelerating the development of the Chinese East Coast, so that China's industry and economy could catch up with foreign countries. Since Xinjiang was a historic cotton-producing area, and with the initial Chinese export revivalist strategy of the early-1980s focusing mostly on the export of clothes and toy manufactures, undoubtedly Xinjiang was designed to become the national cotton base in internal Chinese cooperative efforts to build the entire national economy.

Westerners, Wait a Minute!

Deng Xiaoping's initiation of his open-door economic policy in 1978 terminated the constant frenzy of extreme political movements that occurred during the Mao era, but it also planted the seed of regional economic disparity that is evident today in China.

¹⁰¹ Hingyi Harry Lai, "China's Western Development Program: Its Rationale, Implementation, and Prospects," *Modern China*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2002): 438.

Indeed, besides developing in China's economic planning the concept of an Asia-Pacific economic circle,¹⁰² which the General-secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Zhao Ziyang, adopted in 1988, at the same time, to a lot people's surprise, China further planned two additional economic circles intended to boost China's economic revival plan. One was the Northeast Asian Circle, which included the northeastern Chinese provinces and Russia, and the other was the Great Islamic Circle that linked Xinjiang primarily with Soviet Central Asia.¹⁰³ Since the open-door policy became the primary national economic principle in 1980, Xinjiang and other western provinces initially tried to benefit from the Great Islamic Circle. This trade / economic association was designed to use cross-border Islamic ethnic ties to facilitate Xinjiang's opening first to Soviet Central Asia and then to the Middle East. At the same time, the Xinjiang provincial government liberalized its policies towards Islam and established friendly contracts with Muslims outside of China. Theoretically, Xinjiang was entitled to maintain a double identity in China's open-door policy, first as a supplier of raw materials to the coastal region for the latter to export or use in its industrialization, and, second, as the nexus in the Great Islamic Circle of an internationally beneficial Central Asian economy. It was a strategy

¹⁰² Christoffersen, 132-133. Zhao Ziyang's coastal strategy, formally adopted in early 1988, announced extensive privileges afforded the coastal region when it gave that region investment priority and promoted its further specific integration into the Asia-Pacific economic circle of outward, export-oriented development. In the beginning, the parties of the coastal regions were not supposed to take advantage of the inland areas by obtaining the inland areas' raw materials at subsidized prices while simultaneously dumping on their Chinese compatriots in the West their surplus goods at market price. The eastern coastal cities were supposed to import and export goods both from and to foreign countries. Further, in theory, the privileges and subsequent economic activities offered the eastern coastal region were not to have interfered with the economic revival of the Chinese interior region.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 134.

that stressed both the domestic economy and foreign trade with the Soviet Union / Russia and Central Asian countries.¹⁰⁴

However, according to Gaye Christoffersen, the Northeast Asian Circle and Great Islamic Circle appeared to undermine the unity of the national Chinese economy, nudging it toward disintegration. Moreover, perhaps due to its native population's Islamic religion and heritage, Xinjiang was perceived to be not as "loyal" to the Chinese state and society as were the coastal regions by Beijing.¹⁰⁵ Or perhaps the Chinese government at the time possessed insufficient capital and energy to supervise the three circles at the same time. At any rate, subsequently Beijing focused on the coastal strategy to support its participation in the Asia-Pacific Circle to the exclusion of other internal regions such as the northwest and the northeast. As a result, Xinjiang and the entire northwest region had to endure the economic problems pursuant to a widening gap between the coast and the interior.¹⁰⁶ General-secretary Zhao Ziyang's intent to establish the industrial-economic-trade independence of the Asia-Pacific Circle did not materialize, and its success was based rather on the exploitation of the Chinese West.¹⁰⁷ For example, Xinjiang and other western provinces were asked to export energy resources to meet demand in the coastal areas. (Fig. 13) The price of natural gas in Xinjiang was the same as in Shanghai, though the net income of the residents of Xinjiang was much less than that enjoyed by the people of Shanghai,¹⁰⁸ and that means the percentage of their income

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 131.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 145.

¹⁰⁶ Lai, 438.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 438.

¹⁰⁸ Lixiong Wang, 246.

that the residents of Xinjiang paid for their natural gas consumption was higher than that paid by the residents of Shanghai. In 1989, all of the western provinces sold their raw materials at state-planned prices and purchased industrial consumer goods from the coastal provinces at rising market prices.¹⁰⁹ This contributed to the coastal region's earning of hard currency through the exportation internationally of value-added goods, even while the energy demands of the northwest areas were not being met. Thus, Xinjiang and other western provinces were foregoing development in order to support the resource-deficient eastern region. However, such sacrifice made by the Chinese Westerners was "repaid" by the eastern coastal region when it thereafter treated the West as the dumping ground of its surplus goods.¹¹⁰

As a matter of fact, from the very beginning, Beijing had paid great attention to Xinjiang's energy resources. Besides cotton (Fig. 14), the central government had also long milked Xinjiang's oil, natural gas, coal, aluminum, wool, and other resources. The discovery of massive oil deposits in the Tarim River Basin in 1989 only further accelerated the exploitative situation in Xinjiang. It was believed that the Tarim Basin might become one of the largest oil suppliers in China, and Xinjiang might contain as much as one-third of China's oil resources.¹¹¹ The Chinese authorities justified the exploitation by claiming that "[Xinjiang's] resources are owned by the state and the people throughout the country, and neither by a certain region nor by a certain nationality."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Christoffersen, 140.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 141.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 131.

¹¹² Christoffersen, 138.

The consequence of such uneven development between the east and west accounted for the different Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of each region. While the coastal area's share in China's national GDP rose from 52.5% in 1978 to 59% in 1995, during the same period the share that the central and western regions enjoyed dropped from 29.7% to 26.5% and from 17.8% to 14.5%, respectively.¹¹³ According to David Goodman, the GDP of Guizhou Province during the 1990s, which is one of the poorest regions of the west, amounted to only one twelfth of Shanghai's GDP.¹¹⁴ It is estimated that about 90% of the Chinese poor lived in the western and central regions of China in the 1990s.¹¹⁵



Fig.13. The pipeline transporting Xinjiang's natural gas to Shanghai. ¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Lai, 437.

¹¹⁴ David Goodman, "The Campaign to open up the West: National, Provincial-Level and Local Perspectives," *The China Quarterly*, No. 178, (2004): 318.

¹¹⁵ Lai, 438.

¹¹⁶ Illustration from Lixiong Wang, 275. This transcontinental gas pipeline cost \$15 billion and spans about 4,200 kilometers, from the Tarim Basin to Shanghai.



Fig.14. The vehicles that transported Xinjiang's cotton to China proper.¹¹⁷

Undoubtedly, Xinjiang's role in the nation's development had been expanded considerably, and with this expansion came a concern to increase control over the province. Such increased control was cloaked in propaganda that claimed that the central government wished to improve the living standards of the people of Xinjiang and open its door so that it could join the international trade network.¹¹⁸ In truth, Chinese authorities began to focus ever more stringently and rigidly on Xinjiang's borderland security. Indeed, the new policy of an open Xinjiang sustained the development of the region while keeping it safe and secure in the hands of the central Chinese government. Beginning in the 1980s, in this far-west land we can observe how politics and economics walked hand-in-hand and how political control was exercised under the name of the "Open Xinjiang Campaign". The colonizing and hydraulic / agricultural development activities of the 1950s-1970s period had paved the foundation for the quick integration of

¹¹⁷ Illustration from Lixiong Wang, 405.

¹¹⁸ Christoffersen, 131.

Xinjiang with China proper in the following period such that the connection between the frontiers with the center quickly became more advanced and stable. The case of the city of Kashgar, reviewed below, represents how well Chinese economic reform and political control have been intertwined in Xinjiang's transformation since the 1980s.

The Case of Kashgar

Kashgar, a very famous ancient Silk Road city located in the western periphery of the Tarim River Basin of Xinjiang and a city representative of Uyghur culture, has experienced a most dramatic city renewal since the 1980s. Numerous historic buildings and other structures in the Old City district of Kashgar have been demolished. In particular, the giant mud-and-brick wall that once encircled the entire Old City of Kashgar was destroyed in order to create new spaces for modern buildings. (Fig. 15)

Behind an apparent friction between traditional and modern architecture actually lies a profound political motivation. In truth, the intricacy of the internal layout of the Old City of Kashgar prevented Chinese policemen from being able to hunt down Uyghur rebels within. (Fig. 16) If the city could be redesigned as a gridded one, then such rebels would be easier to control.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Lixiong Wang, 124.

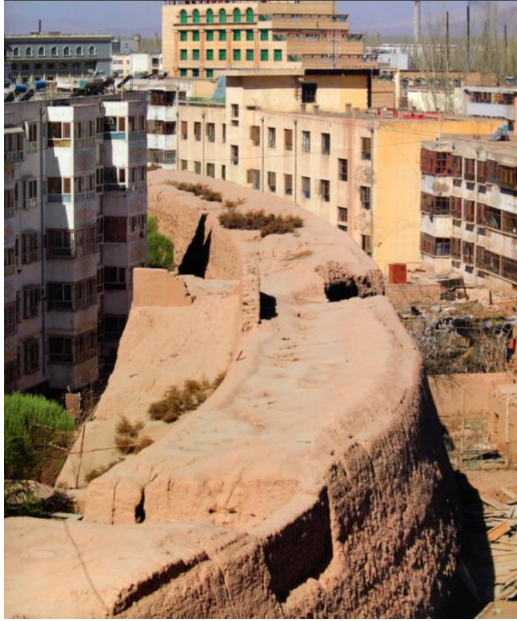


Fig.15. Portions of the massive mud-brick walls that once completely encircled the Old City of Kashgar¹²⁰

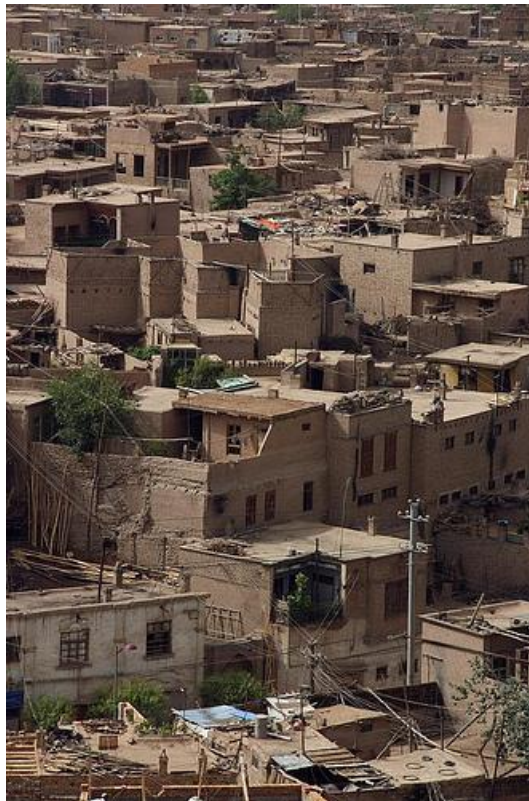


Fig.16. The ancient city of Kashgar.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Illustration from John Gollings, George Michell, Marika Vicziang and Tsui Yen Hu, *Kashgar: Oasis City on China's Old Silk Road* (London: Frances Lincoln Ltd., 2008): 81.

The connection between city layout and political supervision has been debated hotly in recent years. Kate Brown has promoted such a connection in her bold article, *Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place*. In this paper, Brown confirms that city visibility and political supervision are closely interconnected.¹²² In his famous book *Seeing like a State*, James Scott has also indicated that, “When urban revolts occurred, the authorities wanted to be able to move quickly to the precise locations that would enable them to contain or suppress the rebellions effectively”.¹²³

The city planning in Kashgar, however, was not merely an isolated case. In fact, it exemplifies the primary ideology of the Chinese nation-building strategies carried out in Xinjiang during the 1980s-2000s: the Chinese authorities during the post-1970s period began to use less harsh political methods to integrate Xinjiang into China. Under the economic development campaign, the real intention of an even stronger political presence and control by Chinese authorities became less visible from the outside. Xinjiang, a historically non-Chinese region, thus became an ideal example through which we may examine how the post-Mao Chinese government since the 1980s exercised its new policy and programs of integrating ever more closely minorities’ lands and societies into modern China.

Structure of this Section

¹²¹ Illustration from Fred Chiang, *The Kashgar ancient city*. <http://heritage-key.com/blogs/rebecca-t/would-unesco-world-heritage-status-stop-ughur-kashgar-destruction> (July 7, 2009). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹²² Kate Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place,” *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 106, No. 1 (2001): 22.

¹²³ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New York: Yale University Press. 1998), 55.

There is a saying that Xinjiang's economy relies on two pillars, one black and one white. That is, Xinjiang's economy relies on the production or extraction of oil and cotton. However, since the oil industry has become the hottest topic in the modern world, the "black" often dwarfs the importance of the "white". While cotton once had supported the first industrial revolution in the world, its economic might has faded in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, I believe cotton has played a more significant role than oil in transforming Xinjiang to become a fully Chinese territory.

This section will focus on cotton production in Xinjiang and particularly in the Tarim River Basin. My purpose is to try to explain how cotton planting became a new tool of Chinese statecraft in Xinjiang during the 1980s through the 2000s. I believe the Chinese government integrated Xinjiang into China ever more thoroughly by transforming it into a national cotton production base while the Chinese government held an ever tighter rein on the province's border security.

Beginning in the 1980s, Xinjiang's transformation entered a new stage. It was no longer a barren land that only military colonizers were willing to explore, reside in, and develop. Now Chinese labor entered Xinjiang's vast lands on a massive scale. These new demographics heralded a new civilian era in Xinjiang. It was due to the influx of these ordinary Chinese laborers that Xinjiang finally became utterly inseparable from China.

In fact, the government's cotton strategy was not an unrealistic invention created by Chinese politicians; historically Xinjiang has been a place famous for its cotton production. For over 100 years, its raw cotton has possessed great commercial value, since the high quality of Xinjiang long-fiber cotton has been welcomed by consumers

everywhere, such that “cotton cloth became Xinjiang’s number one export by the turn of the twentieth century.”¹²⁴

Xinjiang is not alone in Central Asia in producing high-quality cotton. Other Central Asian countries sharing similar environmental conditions have invested in the production of cotton, and particularly in Soviet Central Asia, where have occurred the most dramatic developments in cotton cultivation. In the 1930s the Soviet Union turned Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan into the Soviet Union’s cotton-production base, long before the Chinese government conceived of its cotton strategy in Xinjiang. Two large rivers, the Amur Darya and Syr Daria, were channeled to irrigate cotton cultivation.¹²⁵

Westward, Ho! To Xinjiang!

Beginning again in 1981 it was vital to the Chinese government to reverse the downward population trend in Xinjiang that had begun in the 1970s and try to introduce as many Chinese as possible to migrate to Xinjiang, mostly to the reborn XPCC. It seems apparent that the economic impetus of the “Open Xinjiang” campaign to transform it into a national cotton base was for the Chinese government embedded within a deep political anxiety. “The ultimate explanation for the importance of cotton in Xinjiang lies in the opening up of new land through reclamation, a key element in bringing in massive

¹²⁴ Starr ed., 165.

¹²⁵ Kiaras Gharabaghi, “Development Strategies for Central Asia in the 1990s: In Search of Alternatives,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1994): 112. Due to the large scale of intensive cotton cultivation activity in Central Asia and the consequent environmental problems there of desertification and water scarcity, the already fragile environment of Central / Inner Asia was degraded considerably by cotton planting, which led directly to the desiccation of the Aral Sea, land salinization, and damage to vast areas of the arable lands there.

numbers of Han Chinese settlers to reinforce territorial consolidation.”¹²⁶ However, the Han Chinese population inflow was only promoted; it was no longer the forced migration that occurred according to the Mao-era model of deporting people from China proper to Xinjiang. Still, I believe the more recent migration campaign was every bit as politically charged as that which had occurred under Mao.

In a way different from when the military colonizers and educated youth of the 1950s-1960s arrived in Xinjiang to irrigate and cultivate its lands, this time Xinjiang became the place to accept lower-level laborers while the better-educated population began to flow from rural China into the urban centers of the eastern coastal regions. There even exists a popular term, *xiahai* 下海, meaning “jump into the sea,” to refer to these higher-level workers who migrated to the eastern coastal urbanized areas to look for better opportunities. Among them, a lot were coming from the Chinese West, and many western officials resented the East for stealing their intellectuals, as well.¹²⁷ The less-educated, often hopeless, and overly abundant country laborers from all over rural China, however, began to realize that there were very few chances available to them to change their fates unless they migrated west to farm the desert of Xinjiang. As cotton-planting peasants, without difficulty they could make a living there using their lower-level skills. Thus, a very interesting and important phenomenon occurred at that time: two tides of migration in China moved independently of each other to each of the southeast and northwest, and each case represents a very distinct story to tell.

¹²⁶ Nicolas Becquelin, “Xinjiang in the Nineties,” *The China Journal*. No.44 (2000): 83.

¹²⁷ Jiaoshen He and Jim Pooler, “The Regional Concentration of China’s Interprovincial Migration Flows 1982-90,” *Population and Environment*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2002): 158.

This latter-day Chinese migration into Xinjiang must be related to the expansion of cotton farming in Xinjiang. The greater the number of Chinese, the more that Xinjiang's lands would be transformed, and, thus, the more that further Chinese immigration would occur. In 1985, the central government launched its campaign to transform Xinjiang into China's biggest cotton base.¹²⁸ As we know, cotton, as a profitable cash crop, could only benefit the cultivator if it were cultivated on a large scale. By the end of the 1980s, for the first time cotton accounted for the largest share of sown acreage in Xinjiang, at about 30%, beating wheat for the first time.¹²⁹ This change reflected the Chinese government's resolution to establish the basis of Xinjiang's economy on what was purely a cash crop.

With the massive increase in population occurring in the 1990s, the amount of Xinjiang's land devoted to cotton growing enjoyed an unprecedented increase, as well. From 1991 to 1997, cotton-planted acreage further doubled, and Xinjiang became the leading national cotton producer, accounting for about one-quarter of China's national production of the crop.¹³⁰

The XPCC was the largest landlord responsible for executing cotton production in Xinjiang, with about 40% of Xinjiang's production of cotton coming from the XPCC by the late 1990s.¹³¹ Between 1996 and 2000, 5 million *mu* of land in Xinjiang were under

¹²⁸ Xinjiang, as cotton production area, ranked No. 5 in 1985, and became the leading cotton supplier in 1995, with 1.46 million tons per year, took up about one third of China's total cotton production from then on.

¹²⁹ Starr, ed., 177.

¹³⁰ Becquelin (2000), 81.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 81.

cotton cultivation.¹³² In 2002, the XPCC owned or controlled over 16 million *mu* (more than 1 million hectares) of farmland, about a third of Xinjiang's arable land.¹³³ By 2007, the total amount of Xinjiang's irrigated land jumped to 4 million hectares (about 60 million *mu*), with the land devoted to cotton production constituting about 1.8 million hectares, that is, nearly half of the total irrigated area.¹³⁴

According to the Xinjiang Statistics Bureau's annual published data, which forms the basis of Table 2 below, during the 1980s the Chinese population of Xinjiang increased from 5.3 million to 5.7 million while the population of Uyghurs increased rapidly from 5.7 million in 1980 to 7.2 million in 1990. The different rate of increase might be explained by the one child-policy that the Chinese Han population was forced to obey, such that the natural increase of the Chinese should be lower than that of the Uyghurs, who would have been allowed to bear up to two children in each family. Thus, during the 1980s, the population of Chinese in Xinjiang increased more slowly than that of the Uyghurs, and the percentage of Chinese among the total population in Xinjiang remained nearly the same, roughly around 37%.

Frankly speaking, the Chinese government's efforts aimed at migrating as many Chinese as possible into Xinjiang were not quite successful during the 1980s. However, the gradual and peaceful inflow of Chinese cotton laborers into Xinjiang was suddenly altered in 1991 by the biggest political upheaval in Asia in generations. With the collapse of the Soviet Union at that time, an enormous power vacuum formed in

¹³² *Ibid*, 83.

¹³³ Nicolas Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," *The China Quarterly*, No. 178 (2004): 367.

¹³⁴ Xufu Zhao and Clem Tisdell, "The Suitability of Cotton Production in China and In Australia: Comparative Economic and Environmental Issues," *Economics, Ecology and the Environment*, No. 157 (2009): 13.

Central Asia, which led to the establishment of five independent Central Asian republics on Xinjiang's border. Would Xinjiang follow its Turkish neighbors and become the next independent republic? For the Chinese government, at least, the answer was an emphatic "No!"

Table 2. Xinjiang population and the percentages of Uyghur Chinese inhabitants, 1980-2004¹³⁵

Year	Total population	Uyghur	Chinese
1980	12.8324	5.7646	5.3103
1981	13.0305	5.8793	5.3499
1982	13.1590	5.9868	5.3233
1983	13.3330	6.0728	5.3714
1984	13.4408	6.1700	5.3463
1985	13.6114	6.2944	5.3492
1986	13.8364	6.4310	5.3863
1987	14.0633	6.5622	5.4298
1988	14.2642	6.6752	5.4701
1989	14.5416	6.8273	5.5316
1990	15.2916	7.2495	5.7466
1991	15.5457	7.3628	5.8421
1992	15.8063	7.4741	5.9400
1993	16.0526	7.5895	6.0367
1994	16.3270	7.6973	6.1648
1995	16.6135	7.8000	6.3181
1996	16.8929	7.9160	6.4328
1997	17.1808	8.0200	6.6013
1998	17.4735	8.1395	6.7411
1999	17.7500	8.2503	6.8715
2000	18.4941	8.5233	7.2508
2001	18.7619	8.6056	7.4220
2002	19.0519	8.6923	7.5957
2003	19.3395	8.8235	7.7110
2004	19.6311	8.9767	7.8025

Note: The unit is millions of people

Consequently, from the beginning of the 1990s, the flow of the Chinese population into Xinjiang skyrocketed. From 1991 to 2000, the total population of

¹³⁵ Yuanyao Qiu, ed., *Xinjiang Wu Shi Nian, 1955-2005* (Beijing: China Statistics Bureau Press, 2005).

Xinjiang grew to around 18.49 million, with the Chinese population increasing from 5.84 million to 7.25 million during that period, while the Uyghur population increased only from 7.36 million to 8.52 million.

Simply from the perspective offered by the statistics, we draw the conclusion that the dramatic increase of Chinese in Xinjiang during the decade of the 1990s was not simply a natural increase among the native-born population. If we calculate the population growth rate for the 1990s, the Chinese population grew by almost a third, twice the growth rate of the Uyghur population. And, thus, an irrefutable fact is that the sizable increase in Chinese population of Xinjiang can be attributed largely to the vast wave of immigration that had been promoted by the Chinese government since the early 1990s.¹³⁶

Finally, we may point out that the percentage of the Chinese population in Xinjiang had risen from 37% in 1980 to 40% in 2000. For the first time in the history of Xinjiang, the ethnic minorities' percentage of the total population fell below 60%, to 59.4%, even though during the 1990s there occurred overall an increase in the population of ethnic Uyghurs of 1.16 million people. At the beginning of the new century and millennium, the Uyghurs had lost their absolute advantageous presence in their own homeland. Understandably, the Uyghurs felt that the Chinese migration policy constituted in fact a genocide of them as it blended them together with the massive Chinese population of China overall. Recalling now that the Chinese pioneers in Xinjiang in 1949, along with the local Chinese people, together only constituted 1% of the total population of Xinjiang, and fifty years later, nearly half of the population was

¹³⁶ Becquelin (2004), 369.

Chinese, we can understand the Uyghurs' alarm. This dramatic demographic redistribution represents the largest demographic movement in China during this period.

The organization responsible for such "success" in transforming Xinjiang's demographic composition was the XPCC. By 1996, the XPCC had become a gigantic organization with 2.24 million members, or 14 percent of Xinjiang's population, of which members about 90% were Chinese. Most of the new members of the XPCC had arrived from all over China year after year.¹³⁷ The XPCC thus functioned as a sort of labor-absorbing machine that attracted to Xinjiang laborers from across China. The base city of the XPCC, Shihezi City, in 1997 alone recruited about 70,000 migrants in order to have them reclaim farms.¹³⁸ Nicolas Becquelin has demonstrated that, in addition, in 2000 the XPCC solved the problem of an excess population resident at the Three Gorges Dam construction site in Sichuan Province when it arranged for about 70,000 people to migrate to Xinjiang and reside there permanently.¹³⁹

In addition, the roles of Chinese provincial-level governments in promoting the migration of Chinese to Xinjiang were quite impressive. Numerous companies of China proper, supported by different provincial governments, began to invest in Xinjiang in the areas of both finance and labor. Henan Province, one of the most populous provinces in China, provides an instructive example. In the early 2000s the Henan government was eager to find opportunities and outlets for its own residents.¹⁴⁰ The Henan Zhengzhou

¹³⁷ Becquelin (2000), 77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Xiaoyun Wang, ed., "Hennan ren qu xinjiang zhongdi cheng xianshi" 河南人去新疆种地成现实 (*Farming in Xinjiang Became a Reality for the Henan People*). <http://news.dahe.cn/2010/11-09/100519064.html> (November 9, 2010). Accessed on April 5, 2011.

Foreign Economic Relations Association was established in 2003, and, with strong governmental backing, played an important role in transferring Henan labor to other provinces and countries. In 2005, they shifted their aim from overseas to Xinjiang. At first, in 2005 only twenty people from Henan contracted with the association and went to Xinjiang to cultivate cotton. Four years later, their success in Xinjiang induced the further migration of Henanese to Xinjiang. The association chose Kuche, a city located in southern Xinjiang, to be the location of the new plantation, where they believed it was both convenient to facilitate transportation and a good location for Chinese residents.¹⁴¹

Another example of government-level encouragement and facilitation of migration to Xinjiang is found in the case of the enormous city of Chongqing, in Sichuan Province. During the 2000s Chongqing city tried assiduously to export its population to Xinjiang. The mayor of Chongqing was very proud to declare that there were about 100,000 permanent laborers from Chongqing in Xinjiang, and that more and more would migrate there soon.¹⁴²

The large size of the floating population deserves some mention here. Normally, the strict Chinese *hukou* permanent residence registration system prevented the unauthorized internal migration in China of any Chinese civilian. The *hukou* system therefore disallowed anyone from moving to and working in different, unauthorized, places. However, during the 1990s, the *hukou* system seems not to have prevented the

¹⁴¹ Xiaoyun Wang, ed., “Henan ren qu xinjiang zhongdi cheng xianshi” 河南人去新疆种地成现实 (*Farming in Xinjiang Became a Reality for the Henan People*). <http://news.dahe.cn/2010/11-09/100519064.html> (November 9, 2010). Accessed on April 5, 2011.

¹⁴² “Chongqing shiwan nongmingong xinjiang zhai mian maichu san da bu” 重庆十万农民工新疆摘棉迈出三大步 (*Ten Thousand Chongqing Cotton Pickers Took Three Big Steps in Xinjiang*). <http://www.cqngx.com/detail.asp?pubID=356262&page=1> (March 10, 2009). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

migration of Chinese laborers to Xinjiang. As a matter of fact, as early as 1995, temporary migrants in Xinjiang constituted more than 5% of the total population.¹⁴³ Becquelin discovered from the Xinjiang population census of 2000 that some 790,000 people were “without a permanent place of residence” in Xinjiang.¹⁴⁴ According to Zai Liang and Zhongdong Ma’s report, the number is even larger. They estimated the size of the floating population in Xinjiang in 2000 to be as large as 1,917,000, which constituted 10% of the total of Xinjiang’s population.¹⁴⁵ This figure seems to suggest the actual size of the ghost-like floating migratory labor population in Xinjiang.

Aside from the size of the Chinese population, the geographic extent of the Chinese presence in Xinjiang deserves some attention, too. Wang Lixiong visited Xinjiang four times during the 1990s and found that a huge number of Chinese immigrants were already dwelling in some remote areas of southern Xinjiang, such as in Pimo, Shache, and Yecheng, where no Chinese had dwelled previously. And numerous Chinese-style restaurants were opened there to serve and entertain the growing Chinese population. Traditionally, most Chinese have preferred to live in the north or the center of Xinjiang. The Tarim River Basin in southern Xinjiang was considered a terror zone for most Chinese civilians. However, Wang’s description of the sinicization of southern Xinjiang proves that a thorough infiltration of Chinese into every corner of Xinjiang had occurred by the 1990s. Aside from the countryside, Wang also noticed that numerous young rural workforce laborers from the impoverished central provinces of China had

¹⁴³ Zai Liang, “The Age of Migration in China,” *Population and Development Review*, Vol.27, No. 3 (2001): 506.

¹⁴⁴ Becquelin (2004), 369.

¹⁴⁵ Zai Liang and Zhongdong Ma, “China’s Floating Population: New Evidence from the 2000 Census,” *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004): 472.

been attracted to come to the Xinjiang to take jobs in various urban areas, such as in construction work, restaurant employment, hawking, and sundry petty jobs.¹⁴⁶ Quite apparently, both Xinxiang's cities and rural areas were being flooded by the massive immigration of Chinese, which transformed Xinjiang thoroughly.

Railroad of Hope

With the second line of the Lanzhou-Urumqi railroad (1,892 km) having been completed in 1996, the entry of Chinese laborers into Xinjiang became much easier than before, even though passengers aboard from Lanzhou station still had to spend three days and two nights on the train before it reached its destination. In 1999, the documentary film *Railroad of Hope*, directed by Ying Ning, told the story of Sichuan cotton harvesters on the train traveling to Xinjiang. The camera centered on these common Chinese laborers who, embracing the hope that they could harvest cotton in Xinjiang in order to make more money than they could at home, were crammed into the hot and filthy train. A cotton picker in Xinjiang was offered twenty RMB (three U.S. Dollars) per day as the basic salary, about four times the daily income in his or her home province in China proper. This was difficult for a poor Chinese laborer to resist. As demonstrated through the title of the film, the journey to Xinjiang was a journey of hope. Xinjiang was no longer a remote or dangerous area for Chinese people. It had begun to become a land of hope not only for the natives but also for outsiders. As early as the 1990s, the Xinjiang government began to realize the need to recruit Chinese cotton harvesters to come to

¹⁴⁶ Lixiong Wang, 165.

Xinjiang. Since cotton in Xinjiang had always been a labor-intensive agricultural commodity, large numbers of cotton pickers were desperately in need.¹⁴⁷

During the 1990s, the cotton pickers in Xinjiang were not well organized, no governmental support or social services were in place to take care of them, and the salaries were often not fully paid. It was not until 2000 that various Chinese provincial governments began to take on the role of trust agent to lure local people to travel to Xinjiang to harvest cotton while promising to secure the property and personal safety of the peasant laborers. After that, over the next decade, between September and November of each year somewhere between a half million and one million Chinese relocated temporarily to Xinjiang to harvest cotton.¹⁴⁸ This northwest migration constituted a very distinct migratory movement as compared against the long and steady southeast migration occurring in China since the 1980s.

About two-thirds of the cotton pickers came to Xinjiang from Henan, Gansu, and Chongqing. Thus, below we concentrate most particularly on the cotton pickers who migrated to Xinjiang from these regions since 2000. Nearly all the migrating cotton pickers entered Xinjiang through Gansu Province, a close neighbor of Xinjiang and the transportation hub of the Longhai - Lanxin railroad. Taking advantage of this opportune placement, Gansu, one of the poorest provinces in China, decided to try to earn a fortune in Xinjiang cotton picking. According the local newspapers, by 2006 the number of cotton pickers from Gansu in Xinjiang had reached 420,000, and each year over the

¹⁴⁷ Lingling Wang, ed., “Zhongxi duijie 20 nian” 中西对接 20 年 (*Twenty Years of Connecting the West with the Center*). <http://news.sohu.com/20081124/n260814439.shtml> (November 24, 2008). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Yawen Wang, “Zhengqian buyiding wang dong zou” 挣钱不一定往东走 (*You Don't Have to Go to the East to Make Money*). <http://henan.people.com.cn/news/2008/11/24/341972.html> (November 24, 2008). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

subsequent three years, about 500,000 people marched to Xinjiang to harvest the local cotton. It has been estimated that the total income of Gansu cotton pickers in 2008 was 1.418 billion RMB.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, in 2006 the government of Chongqing City, Sichuan Province organized and sent about 100,000 people to Xinjiang to pick cotton (Fig. 17). A 53-year old Chinese woman named Benying Chen told a reporter that in 2006, for only two months' work harvesting cotton in Xinjiang, she had earned 2000 RMB (300 U.S. Dollars), which constituted about half of her total annual family income.¹⁵⁰ Since 2006, the Chongqing city government has continued to export cotton laborers to Xinjiang.



¹⁴⁹ Di Cheng, "Gansu 09 nian jiang zuzhi 50 wan nongmingong fu xinjiang zhai mianhua chuangshou" 甘肃 09 年将组织 50 万农民工赴新疆摘棉花创收 (*In 2009 Gansu Organizes 500,000 Cotton Harvesters to Go to Xinjiang*). <http://content.caixun.com/NE/01/ec/NE01ecdj.shtm> (June 26, 2009). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ "Chongqing shiwan nongmingong xinjiang zhai mian maichu san da bu" 重庆十万农民工新疆摘棉迈出三大步 (*Ten Thousand Chongqing Cotton Pickers Took Three Big Steps in Xinjiang*). <http://www.cqngx.com/detail.asp?pubID=356262&page=1> (March 10, 2009). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

Fig.17. A special train conveyed cotton harvesters from Chongqing to Xinjiang, 2006.¹⁵¹

The most interesting case is that of Henan Province, and, in particular, Henan's Hua County. To some degree, Hua County established the model for successful cooperation between the XPCC and various Chinese provincial and county governments. It was also one of the first regions to export cotton harvesters to Xinjiang. The Hua County government began to organize cotton pickers in 2000. In 2000, only 230 people participated. By 2007, however, this number had grown to 200,000. It is estimated that in 2007 Henan Province had earned 0.6 billion RMB through cotton harvesting (Fig. 18).¹⁵² And Hua County's income for cotton picking increased to 14 million RMB in that year.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Illustration from Chan Liu, "Chongqing fu jiang zhai mian gong zhuanlie" 重庆赴疆摘棉工专列 (A Special Train Took the Chongqing Cotton Harvesters to Xinjiang, 2006). http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/photonews/2006-08/19/content_7820619.htm (August 9, 2006). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵² Yawen Wang, "Zhengqian buyiding wang dong zou" 挣钱不一定往东走 (You Don't Have to Go to the East to Make Money). <http://henan.people.com.cn/news/2008/11/24/341972.html> (November 24, 2008). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵³ Jiuhui Guo, "'Mian gong jingji' shi huaxian nongmin zengshou 1410 wan" "棉工经济" 使滑县农民增收 1410 万 (The "Cotton Harvester Economy" Contributed 14.1 Million RMB to Hua County, Henan). http://www.ha.xinhuanet.com/xhzx/2003-11/17/content_1209495.htm (November 17, 2003). Accessed on March 20, 2011.



Fig.18. Henan cotton harvesters working in a field.¹⁵⁴

During the early period of the 2000s, the cotton pickers' salary was set at 0.45-0.55 Yuan (0.08 U.S. Dollars) per kilogram of cotton.¹⁵⁵ A healthy adult can harvest at least eight kg of cotton per day. That is about 4 RMB per day. A reporter estimated that in 2003 the Xinjiang government spent 1.2 billion RMB in payments to cotton pickers. In 2006, the amount had risen to 1.4 billion RMB.¹⁵⁶ From 2000 to 2009, the total of an

¹⁵⁴ Lingling Wang, ed., "Zong xi duijie 20 nian" 中西对接 20 年 (*Twenty Years of Connecting the West with the Center*). <http://news.sohu.com/20081124/n260814439.shtml> (November 24, 2008). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ Guoen Chen and Hui Yan, "Dao xinjiang zhai mianhua qu" 到新疆摘棉花去 (*Go and Pick Cotton in Xinjiang*). <http://www.southcn.com/weekend/top/200311060013.htm> (November 16, 2003). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵⁶ "Shu shi wan waisheng nongmingong luxu jinru xinjiang zhai mianhua 'Taojin'" 数十万外省农民工陆续进入新疆摘棉花 "淘金" (*Tens of Thousands of Chinese Laborers Enter Xinjiang to Pick Cotton*). <http://finance.sina.com.cn/roll/20070814/01101600692.shtml> (August 14, 2007). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

individual cotton picker's annual income increased from 1,000 RMB to 4,000 RMB.¹⁵⁷

In 2009, the Xinjiang government began to raise the individual salary paid to cotton pickers from 0.85 RMB/kg to 1.2 RMB/kg in order to attract more laborers.¹⁵⁸

Beginning in 2003, the XPCC decided not to wait for cotton harvesters; instead, they went to China proper to recruit cotton laborers with the help of local governments. Aside from the three locales mentioned specifically above, in 2005 Sichuan Province, for example, organized 10,000 people go to Xinjiang to pick cotton.¹⁵⁹ Through the 2000s cotton pickers from Shandong, Anhui, and Shaanxi Provinces also gradually joined the cotton harvesting army. Overall, in 2006 the XPCC imported 660,000 cotton harvesters, and, in 2007, 580,000 cotton pickers.

Among the cotton pickers, the women laborers are very distinct. Actually, about 70% of the cotton harvesters have been women. We may consider again the example of Hua County, Henan Province. In 2002, about 5000 women were sent from Hua County to Xinjiang to pick cotton, which doubled the previous year's number sent from Hua County.¹⁶⁰ Now, in 2002 the total number of cotton pickers from Hua County in Xinjiang

¹⁵⁷ Yawen Wang, "Zhengqian buyiding wang dong zou" 挣钱不一定往东走 (*You Don't Have to Go to the East to Make Money*). <http://henan.people.com.cn/news/2008/11/24/341972.html> (November 24, 2008). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Zhen Li, "Xinjiang yingdui mianhua caizhai gong duanque wenti" 新疆应对棉花采摘工短缺问题 (*Xinjiang Faces the Problem of a Lack of Cotton Harvesters*). <http://www.uighurbiz.net/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=227068> (September 24, 2009). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁵⁹ "Sichuan wan ren chengzuo zhuanlie dao xinjiang zhai mianhua" 四川万人乘坐专列到新疆摘棉花 (*Ten Thousand Sichuan People Took the Train to Xinjiang to Pick Cotton*). <http://cdtb.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/zonghsw/200509/20050900342882.html> (September 2, 2005). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

¹⁶⁰ Yan Zhu, "Henan huaxian 5000 ming funv lijia fu xinjiang zhai mianhua" 河南滑县 5000 名妇女离家赴新疆摘棉花 (*Five Thousand Women of Hua County, Henan, Went to Xinjiang to Harvest Cotton*). <http://news.eastday.com/epublish/gb/paper148/20020903/class014800012/hwz759223.htm> (September 3, 2002). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

was 5,235, which means that there were only 235 males from Hua County who joined the 5000 female laborers to pick cotton in Xinjiang that year. The sexual ratio thus was about 20:1. While this must be a very extreme case, nonetheless it demonstrates the existence of a very unique market in labor exportation to Xinjiang. Even more unusual, the cotton pickers were mostly middle-aged women.¹⁶¹ The reason is that the demand in Xinjiang for cotton pickers provided a great opportunity for middle-aged women to work outside of the home.¹⁶²

Explaining the overwhelming dominance of Chinese female workers in cotton harvesting in Xinjiang might be quite simple. As China entered the era of urbanization, most young females and males coming from rustic areas preferred to find better opportunities in the big cities, while middle-aged country women, often married, had to stay at home and alone take care of their families and the cultivation of their crops. Often, the short-term commitment and high pay for harvesting cotton was very attractive to these women, and many of them decided to take the chance to boost up their family income by migrating temporarily to Xinjiang to pick cotton. (Fig. 19) These women became very skillful in cotton harvesting, and there was no reason to keep them from making more money in Xinjiang again, year after year.

¹⁶¹ “Wanxin zhang and zhenting liang, henan zhai mian gong tamen gandong le xinjiang” 河南摘棉工她们感动了新疆 (*Xinjiang Was Moved by the Henan Cotton Harvesters*). <http://cng.dili360.com/cng/jcix/2008/07071588.shtml>. (July 7, 2008). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

¹⁶² Di Cheng, “Gansu 09 nian jiang zuzhi 50 wan nongmingong fu xinjiang zhai mianhua chuangshou” 甘肃 09 年将组织 50 万农民工赴新疆摘棉花创收 (*Gansu Will Organize 500,000 Cotton Harvesters to Go to Xinjiang in 2009*). <http://content.caixun.com/NE/01/ec/NE01ecdj.shtml>. (June 26, 2009). Accessed on March 20, 2011.



Fig.19. Female cotton harvesters from Henan in Xinjiang, 2003.¹⁶³

A significant reason to draw so much attention to the cotton-harvesting group is the important role that cotton-harvesting activities played in integrating Xinjiang with China proper during the 1980-2009 period. First, as our account of cotton harvesting in Xinjiang shows, the interdependent relationship between Xinjiang cotton production and surplus laborers of China proper is quite obvious. The marriage established between the two appeared to be a win-win solution for China: it not only guaranteed the success of the cotton strategy in Xinjiang, on the one hand, but it also enriched greatly the economic

¹⁶³ Illustration from Guoen Chen and Hui Yan, “Xinjiang mianhua dajun zhong de nvxing” 新疆棉花大军中的女性 (*The Female Cotton Harvesters from Henan in 2003*). <http://www.southcn.com/weekend/top/200311060013.htm>. (November 16, 2003). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

circumstances of the laborers from China proper, on the other hand, especially of these less-educated middle-aged laborers.

Xinjiang's cotton industry also served as an important absorbent cushion of refugees from other regions of China that had experienced natural disasters. An example involves once more Chongqing city, Sichuan Province. In 2006, a severe food shortage occurred there due to drought, and about 115,000 refugees were sent to Xinjiang both to earn the only income that they might expect during that year and to evade the drought at home. One such peasant refugee told a reporter that he might have experienced great difficulty in 2006 if he had not gone to Xinjiang. Although the 2006 drought was among the most severe ever to strike Chongqing, the total income of Chongqing city in that year reached a very healthy 0.23 billion RMB when compared against historical data,¹⁶⁴ which indicates that the cotton harvesting in Xinjiang by Chongqing-originating laborers earned the city a healthy portion of its robust annual income that year. The Xinjiang cotton industry thus appears to have become an economic (and likely also social) savior of both governments of and individual laborers from various locales in China proper, sheltering them from unanticipated natural disasters.

Aside from the temporary cotton pickers who came from China proper, since 1994 Xinjiang's students, about 100,000 of them,¹⁶⁵ whether Chinese or Uyghurs, were

¹⁶⁴ Bing Gu, "<Xinwen diaocha>: chumen qu dagong" 《新闻调查》：出门去打工 (*News Report: Find Jobs Outside*). <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2007-02-14/152112318340.shtml>. (February 14, 2007). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Fei Xin, "Bai mian beihou de heihan-xinjiang baiwan xuesheng beipo 'qingongjianxue' zhai mianhua" 白棉背后的黑暗——新疆百万学生被迫“勤工俭学”摘棉花 (*The Dark Side behind White Cotton: Millions of Xinjiang Students Were Forced to Pick Cotton*). <http://www.epochweekly.com/b5/043/3811.htm>. (July 22, 2007). Accessed on March 25, 2011. The report indicates that the number of student cotton pickers could have numbered as many as a million. In 2005, there were about 2,689 schools participating in the cotton harvesting, and the total gain of cotton harvesting by the students was 93,400,000 RMB.

asked to engage in a “work-study program” to pick cotton during the autumn.¹⁶⁶ (Fig. 20) Students’ schoolteachers collected all the salaries paid to students from picking cotton in order to “upgrade school facilities”.¹⁶⁷ Even primary school students were mobilized to join the cotton-picking army. It was quite obvious that the Xinjiang government took advantage of free child labor. Some primary students were too little to finish the tasks of picking thirty to forty kg of cotton per day, and the parents had to pay their children’s schools for the “loss” caused by their children, or they hired some skillful adult cotton pickers to help their little children.¹⁶⁸ It is said that, later, when social critics all over China chastised the government over this abominable practice, primary school students of the first and second grades were banned from picking cotton. However, the only valid source we possess regarding the changed policy is a notification issued by the Xinjiang government on May 8, 2006. In this announcement the Xinjiang government declared that only students from the third grade and above could participate in the picking of cotton.¹⁶⁹ This regulation prescribed that primary students (third grade and above) were allowed to work seven days per semester, and middle and high school students could

¹⁶⁶ Fei Xin, “Bai mian beihou de heihan-xinjiang baiwan xuesheng beipo ‘qingongjianxue’ zhai mianhua” 白棉背后的黑暗——新疆百万学生被迫“勤工俭学”摘棉花 (*The Dark Side behind White Cotton: Millions of Xinjiang Students Were Forced to Pick Cotton*). <http://www.epochweekly.com/b5/043/3811.htm>. (July 22, 2007). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

¹⁶⁷ Lixiong Wang, 181.

¹⁶⁸ Peng Xu, “Xinjiang zuzhi shiwan xuesheng zhai mianhua yinfa zhengyi” 新疆组织十万学生摘棉花引发争议 (*The Controversy about the Ten Thousand Xinjiang Student Cotton Harvesters*). http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2005-09/14/content_3489114.htm (September 14, 2005). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

¹⁶⁹ “Xinjiang weiwuer zizhiqun renmin zhengfu bangongting wenjian, 72 hao, guanyu jiaqiang zhongxiaoxue qingongjianxue laowu huodong guanli de yijian” 新疆维吾尔自治区人民政府办公厅文件, 72 号, 关于加强中小学勤工俭学劳务活动管理的意见 (*XJAR People’s Government Clerical Office Document No.72: Enforce the Management of the Primary and Middle School Students’ Work-Study Program*). <http://www.xinjiang.gov.cn/10013/10031/10005/2006/30913.htm>. (May 8, 2006). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

work fourteen days per semester.¹⁷⁰ Even though the number of child laborers had dropped significantly, still many students from middle and high schools and universities continued to be organized to pick cotton as a means for them to pay their tuition. And, according to an Environmental Justice Foundation's report issued in 2007, even neighboring Gansu Province sent tens of thousands of children to the Xinjiang cotton fields during the annual harvest.¹⁷¹



Fig.20. Uyghur students picking cotton.¹⁷²

However, one of the most important questions seems to be buried beneath the surface here. Why did the Chinese and Xinjiang governments not use machines to harvest the cotton instead of employing hand-picking laborers? The efficiency of a

¹⁷⁰ “Xinjiang weiwuer zizhiqu renmin zhengfu bangongting wenjian, 72 hao, guanyu jiaqiang zhongxiaoxue qingongjianxue laowu huodong guanli de yijian” 新疆维吾尔自治区人民政府办公厅文件, 72 号, 关于加强中小学勤工俭学劳务活动管理的意见 (*XJAR People's Government Clerical Office Document No.72: Enforce the Management of the Primary and Middle School Students' Work-Study Program*). <http://www.xinjiang.gov.cn/10013/10031/10005/2006/30913.htm>. (May 8, 2006). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

¹⁷¹ EJF, 2007, *The Children behind Our Cotton*. Environmental Justice Foundation, London, UK. ISBN No. I-904523-13-7, 16.

¹⁷² Illustration from Lixiong Wang, 181.

machine picking cotton can be as high as 150 *mu*/day (10 hectares/day), while a single cotton laborer cannot even complete the harvesting of one *mu* a day.¹⁷³ Some explanations have been offered, such as the high quality of hand-picked cotton.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, it is said, since most of the cotton in Xinjiang has been harvested by human laborers instead of machines, Xinjiang's cotton thus has remained relatively free from pollutants that otherwise would have been introduced into it by harvesting machinery.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, it is said, the quality of Xinjiang's cotton has been higher than that of most of the cotton available in the world market.

However, none of these explanations really hits the mark. The United States began to mechanize its cotton harvesting in 1945, and it was not until 1966 that the transformation finally had been completed. During the process, with regard to urbanization and the reduced cotton price, the federal governmental intervention was one of the major reasons for such a transformation.¹⁷⁶ Besides China, various Central Asian countries preferred the hand-picking method. As for the case of China, there is only one true reason for cotton being hand-picked, and that is that the Chinese central government purposefully prevented the Xinjiang cotton-picking process from being mechanized.

The historically well-known fact of China's ever-overabundance of labor, resulting in the slow progress of mechanization of Chinese agriculture and industry, can

¹⁷³ Guoen Chen and Hui Yan, "Dao xinjiang zhai mianhua qu" 到新疆摘棉花去 (*Go and Pick Cotton in Xinjiang*). <http://www.southcn.com/weekend/top/200311060013.htm>. (November 16, 2003). Accessed on March 20, 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Jiaming Zhou, "Zhongguo mianhua biao zhi zhongguo mianye zengzhang fangshi zhuanbian" 中国棉花标志中国棉业增长方式转变 (*Chinese Cotton Demonstrates Methods of Growth of the Chinese Cotton Industry*). <http://www.guoxin.org.cn/djinfo.asp?id=589>. (February 23, 2010). Accessed on May 10, 2011.

¹⁷⁵ Lixiong Wang, 123.

¹⁷⁶ Wayne A. Grove and Craig Heinicke, "Better Opportunities or Worse? The Demise of Cotton Harvest Labor, 1949-1964," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2003): 761.

be found here exactly. It appears as if the Chinese government purposely hindered the mechanization of Xinjiang's cotton production in order to preserve the cotton-picking jobs for the seasonal cotton pickers from China proper. Compared against other significant investments in high-technology agricultural harvesting equipment in so vast an expanse of land of China proper, cheap human labor was more appealing – and useful -- to the Chinese central government. By maintaining the labor-intensive quality of the Xinjiang cotton industry, China killed two birds with one stone: it employed millions of people, thus both increasing their personal income and concomitantly helping to prevent social / political unrest that otherwise might have been caused by too many laborers remaining unemployed. Few harvesting machines have been used to harvest cotton in Xinjiang, partly because Chinese laborers cost less than would operating machines, and also surely because it was believed that the influx into Xinjiang of the floating Chinese migrant laborers might, socially and politically, tie Xinjiang more securely with Chinese society and the Chinese state.

Summary

Xinjiang's development relied on both a non-mechanized, labor-intensive approach to its largest industry as well as intensive political control over non-Chinese minorities. In these ways the Chinese development of its West differed to some degree from the development of the U.S. West. First, unlike the American West, the Chinese West is a land that had been inhabited since prehistoric times by numerous ethnic groups who were culturally, politically, and militarily quite advanced. Thus, the process of colonizing these people's land and resources was very complex and challenging. China's

transformation of its West has been one of its greatest modern missions, developing the West rapidly while keeping this sensitive border region politically, militarily, and socially secure. The demographic transformation in Xinjiang on the basis of the development of cotton production was in fact a process of state-building. Ideally, the greater the inflow of Chinese immigrants to the region, the less chance there was for Xinjiang to develop as an independent political entity outside of the sphere of the umbellate Chinese state.

As China modernized, human labor rather than industrial machinery played the most significant role in developing China's West, and it is very likely that labor will continue for a long time to dominate the pattern of Chinese modernization. This ancient society and polity needed to rely on its greatest and most abundant resource, human labor, to compete against other developed and developing countries. And, no differently from the pre-modern periods, on China's path to modernization were sacrificed countless human laborers.

Richard White emphasizes the flow of energy as a crucial foundation for understanding the changing relations between human beings and the rest of nature and also the interactions among the local, national, and international in the modern world.¹⁷⁷ Since the 1980s, the flow of energy in and through Xinjiang could be generalized as importing human labor from China proper to Xinjiang, on the one hand, and exporting natural resources from Xinjiang to the rest of China, on the other. Just like the Qing dynasty scholar Gong Zizhen said, "The center gives up people to benefit the west, and the west gives up wealth to benefit the center."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ White (1995), ix.

¹⁷⁸ Millward (1998). 241.

In the Western world, the replacement of human labor by machines announced the industrial age. However, the pace and direction of history in distinct regions of the world can be quite different. China, whose historic, pre-modern prosperity was due mainly to its ready labor supply found in its massive population, still relies largely on human labor as the most important force impelling it forward to its modernity. And this is one of the most important factors that distinguishes Chinese modern development from what occurs in other countries. Like water, Chinese human laborers have always been viewed as a both cheap and renewable energy.

Therefore, the modernizing of the Chinese West was a manifold story. It included national security, demographic movement, cultural homogenization, economic development, and ecological management.

The Outlet of Xinjiang Cotton

Obviously, Xinjiang cotton represented the exploitative nature of the eastern Chinese economies over that of the western region. The XPCC, under the direct supervision and control of the Chinese central government, was not only the biggest cultivator of cotton in Xinjiang, but also the monopolist supplier of Xinjiang cotton to the rest of China. Only the XPCC enjoyed the right to collect all of the cotton from its employees / farms and sell it to the market. No XPCC individual was allowed to conduct cotton transactions. Furthermore, the price of raw cotton was always fixed by the Chinese government. Thus, by fixing the channel, direction, and the price, Beijing always controlled directly Xinjiang's cotton production and sale.

In order to attract numerous cotton farmers to Xinjiang, Beijing raised the price of cotton paid to cultivators from 6 Yuan/kg in 1992 to 14 Yuan/kg in 1995.¹⁷⁹ However, during this period the cotton market changed from a shortage to a surplus condition, and in 1996 raw cotton inventories were piling up. As a result, in 1998 the market price for cotton dropped to 12 Yuan/kg, which hurt most Xinjiang cotton cultivators.¹⁸⁰ In 2003, when Lixiong Wang interviewed XPCC employees, he discovered that the price of cotton had dropped to 4.5 Yuan/kg, and the price offered from the XPCC, which was only 3.5 Yuan/kg, was even lower than the national market price.¹⁸¹ The XPCC farmers, without any choices, were forced to sell their cotton at this low a price. It is quite certain that by the end of the 1990s cotton profits had diminished greatly, and ordinary cotton farmers in Xinjiang hardly benefited from growing this cash crop.

Cotton, as the number-one cash crop in Xinjiang, gradually reduced Xinjiang's economic and political autonomy, which caused Xinjiang's economy to become too fragile to enable it to disobey the central government. About 70% of Xinjiang's cotton was shipped to eastern provinces or to foreign destinations.¹⁸² With the biggest trading agents in the eastern coastal areas, Xinjiang's cotton industry became entirely dependent on the east coast: once the coastal areas caught cold, Xinjiang sneezed.¹⁸³ Further, due

¹⁷⁹ Jianwei Shi, "The New Direction of China's Cotton Policy," in *Agricultural Outlook Forum* (1999), 1.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

¹⁸¹ Lixiong Wang, 105.

¹⁸² Hsin-Hui Hsu and Fred Gale, "Regional Shifts in China's Cotton Production and Use," in *Economic Research Service/USDA, Cotton and Wool Situation and Outlook/ CWS* (2001): 21.

¹⁸³ Chunhui Zhao, "Yanhai fangzhipin chukou nao 'ganmao' xinjiang mianhua shichang jiu da 'penti'" 沿海纺织品出口闹 "感冒" 新疆棉花市场就打 "喷嚏" (*Once the Eastern Coastal Area's Textile Exportation Caught Cold, Xinjiang's Cotton Market Sneezed*). http://news.xinhuanet.com/mrdx/2005-09/28/content_3557245.htm. (September 28, 2005). Accessed on March 25, 2011.

to the high cost of transportation, the price of Xinjiang cotton was still higher than the international cotton price, which reduced the amount of Xinjiang cotton exported to the rest of the world.¹⁸⁴ This afforded to the eastern coastal regions even greater monopolistic economic control of the Xinjiang cotton industry. Thus, the macro-control of cotton by the central government determined the fate of Xinjiang and its people. By this point in the process of sinicizing Xinjiang through its forced economic integration with China proper, this remote province had become thoroughly integrated economically into the greater economy of China proper.

Ironically, the unity of the Chinese economy was disturbed by the Chinese government itself. By favoring the eastern coastal areas while milking the natural resources from its western regions, and from Xinjiang in particular, the government had intensified the economic gap between East and West, between Chinese and minorities (Uyghurs), and between human beings and the rest of nature. The Chinese government's cotton strategy, seemingly thought to be something on the order of one stone killing two birds, was fundamentally counterproductive. It not only intensified the ecological disasters in Xinjiang, but it also gave rise to the Uyghur ethno-nationalism and separatism that moved the Uyghur population of Xinjiang closer to Muslim extremist movements and extremist terrorism. We can be sure that it was a serial effect, the disturbed ecological system finally being reflected in the social domain.

Below we return our attention to the Tarim River Basin, which will serve as a representative ecology and region to demonstrate both the degradation of the environment in Xinjiang that was caused by cotton farming during the 1980s-2000s and the development of damaged and tense Chinese-Uyghur ethnic relations.

¹⁸⁴ Hsin-Hui Hsu and Fred Gale, 25.

Ecological Disasters from the 1980s

The Tarim River crisis of the 1970s seems to have taught Chinese cultivators nothing. One third of the shortened Tarim River was gone forever, and in the beginning of the 1980s the Chinese authorities demonstrated no real attempt to revive or repair the local ecology. And, to make matters even worse, the Chinese government was more interested in developing the Tarim River Basin to become Xinjiang's greatest cotton production area. At this time, China claimed that she was resolute to "open the desert and build China's desert agriculture."¹⁸⁵ Consequently, the weeping Tarim River Basin experienced another round of brutal destruction.

The Constitution of China makes it clear that, first, water resources are owned by the state, that is, supposedly, the people as a whole, and, second, that water in ponds and reservoirs belonging to collective agricultural economic organizations shall be owned by such collective organizations.¹⁸⁶ Surprisingly, within the extreme dry area of the Tarim Basin, in 1997 the water was sold by the government to its Xinjiang farmers at the surprisingly low price of 0.006 Yuan (less than 0.1 US cent) per cubic meter.¹⁸⁷ This extremely low price could not provide economic incentives for purchasers / users of the precious water to regulate their water consumption.

Exacerbating the problem was the fact that the efficiency of water usage in the Tarim River Basin was also very low. The water had to travel overland long distances, and consequently often a lot of it was lost through ground seepage and evaporation. The

¹⁸⁵ Becquelin (2000), 75.

¹⁸⁶ J. Wallace and Patricia Wouters eds., 120.

¹⁸⁷ Jiang, 480.

estimated average conveyance efficiency of the canal system was only about 35-40 percent.¹⁸⁸

Making matters even worse, despite the high rate of loss of the water during its delivery, some cultivators, Chinese and Uyghurs both, allowed the water to flow freely and randomly on their farms and thus wasted water. Such practices only increased soil salinization, which of course decreased agricultural yields from such farms.¹⁸⁹ From 1991 to 1996 over 1.6 million *mu* of Xinjiang's arable land fell into abandonment due to high salinization.¹⁹⁰

Besides salinization, the Tarim River Basin also faced massive desertification and land abandonment during the 1980s-2000s period. Desertification and water scarcity has become ever more serious. Desertification has expanded into 53 of 87 districts of Xinjiang. Many lakes along the Tarim River are drying up.¹⁹¹ One study noted that whereas some 40,000 square kilometers of desert were converted into cultivable land, during the same period the area of desert increased by 50,000 square kilometers.¹⁹²

One of the most salient causes of such problems in Xinjiang was the intensive cotton production activity there. The Chinese Asia-Pacific Circle had made China one of the biggest textile and clothing exporters in the world since the 1980s, and Xinjiang's famous long-fiber cotton was the unseen foundation and supplier of the raw resources

¹⁸⁸ J. Wallace and Patricia Wouters eds., 116. In 1998, Chinese national per capita water use was 435 cubic meters. Xinjiang's usage was 7.5 times the national level. The national water use per thousand GDP was 565 cubic meters, while Xinjiang's was 11.3 times this national level. The national per-hectare irrigated water consumption was 7320 cubic meters, while Xinjiang's consumption was 2.6 times that level.

¹⁸⁹ J. Wallace and Patricia Wouters eds., 116.

¹⁹⁰ Becquelin (2000), 83.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 84.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 84.

that fueled this growth. The rising cotton demand from China's East since the 1980s drove the prices to historically high levels, and most of the cultivators in the Tarim River Basin became engaged in cotton production,¹⁹³ while, further, a large volume of unused land was converted into cotton fields. Even unfavorable land with high salt content was reclaimed. Between the 1970s and the 1990s the percentage of total agricultural cultivation in the Tarim River Basin that cotton cultivation represented rose from less than 20% to more than 70% by the end of the 1990s.¹⁹⁴

Leiwen Jiang and his colleagues conducted research on the quality of the water of the Tarim River and discovered that the high salt concentration in the water of the Tarim River was not directly related to desertification that had occurred in the upper reaches of the river, but it very likely contributed to desertification in the middle and lower reaches. Though the large volume of water used for flushing the salt from the newly reclaimed land in the upper reaches did improve the land quality in the upper reaches, it seriously attenuated the quality, and decreased the quantity, of the water arriving downstream, resulting in desertification there.¹⁹⁵

A marked example of the new ecological crisis in the Tarim River Basin is exemplified by the changing conditions of Agricultural Divisions One and Two during the 1980s and 1990s. With Division One on the upper reaches and Division Two on the lower reaches of the Tarim River, cotton cultivation thoroughly altered the fate of each.

¹⁹³ The domestic Chinese market price for cotton skyrocketed from 1992 to 1995 and then began to descend gradually.

¹⁹⁴ Jiang, et al., 477. From this figure, we may draw the conclusion that, aside from imposed market requirements, the water shortage in the Tarim Basin was another major reason for the reduction in rice cultivation in the Tarim River Basin, given that rice plantations are highly water-dependent and – consuming. The shift to cotton production exacerbated the ecological problems there as it expanded into an ever-wider area.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 485.

Since more cotton was needed in the market, then more lands were reclaimed to cultivate cotton, which required a vast increase in the amount of water that was drained from the river to flush the salt content out of the reclaimed land. The water was then channeled back into the river. Thus, those downstream suffered both a new and much more severe shortage of water and a precipitous drop in the quality of water received through the river. This explains why Division One continued to grow and develop while Division Two was stifled.¹⁹⁶ Take Yuli County of Division Two's region as an example. Yuli County had already faced serious water scarcity in the 1970s, but the rapid shrinking of the water resource forced local residents to abandon about 45% of its total cultivated land by the late 1990s.¹⁹⁷

Moreover, the water shortage and land degradation in the Tarim River Basin created threats to human health and were responsible for population emigration in the downstream areas.¹⁹⁸ When the degradation downstream became severe, residents often moved to the upper reaches of the Tarim River Basin to join Agricultural Division One.¹⁹⁹ But the story does not end there. One would think that the emigration would have released pressure on the demand for resources in the lower reaches. However, in fact, this only worsened the problem there of land desertification and the consequent ecological imbalance. The natural vegetation that once had protected the land from desertification had been removed by the first batch of military colonizers in the 1950s. Now deserted, the land lacked the protection it needed that had been provided by either

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 477-478.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 485.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 488.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 488.

the original native vegetation or later human agricultural management. However, not even this represents the totality of the destruction of the Tarim River ecological system that Chinese settlement and cultivation have wrought there. With the people moving to the upper reaches of the river, the increased pressure on water and land resources there that the augmented population in the upper reaches brought to bear in turn caused ever-decreasing water resources to reach downstream, and, thus, the much-depleted river gradually shortened in length.²⁰⁰ Perhaps, in another fifty years or so, the disaster will have transmitted like a virus upstream along the river to finally terminate Division One's settlements and activities there.

In addition to humans, animals have also suffered considerably from the ecological disaster that has transpired in the Tarim River Basin. Swans are an example. The Bayinbuluke National Nature Conservation Area for wild animals in Southern Xinjiang, with a total area of 136,894 hectares, is one of the most important wetlands in Asia. The number of swans breeding on the reserve has declined from 10,000 in the 1970s, to 2,000-3,000 in the 1980s, and to only 1,000 in 2000.²⁰¹ Several factors may have contributed to the decline in the number of swans present during the breeding season, but one of them certainly is that many lakes and rivers in the downstream plains at lower elevations have dried up due to excessive irrigation of the desert, which has reduced directly the availability of stopover and wintering sites for swans.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 500.

²⁰¹ Ming Ma, & Dai Cai, "Threats to Whooper Swans in Xinjiang, China." *Waterbirds: The International Journal of Waterbird Biology*, Vol. 25 (2002), 332.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 333.

Uyghur-Han Ethnic Conflicts

The human society in Xinjiang can be characterized as being a bit like the Tarim River itself, with the Chinese living in the “upper reaches” and the Uyghurs in the “lower reaches”. By flushing the problems to the lower reaches, the Chinese benefited greatly from the government’s cotton strategy without offering much consideration to the local Uyghurs.

Environmental degradation influences not only the non-human natural environment itself. Its influence also extends to the domain of social relations among different ethnic groups, and it imposes very negative consequences. No matter how advanced any society becomes, basic resources such as land, water, and air will never stop shaping our lives and our relationships with other societies on the globe. The new cotton strategy begun in Xinjiang in the 1980s encouraged a large immigration of Chinese, with the consequence that, “The pressure on land use and the competition for water has increased considerably in recent years (1980s-1990s), giving rise to occasional clashes between Uyghur and Chinese communities.”²⁰³ Uyghur farmers complain bitterly about the increased scarcity of water created by the influx of Chinese farmers.²⁰⁴ And numerous Uyghurs share the view that the Chinese had stolen their limited water resources.

As a matter of fact, the ever-increasing immigration of Chinese since the 1980s that resulted from the government’s adoption of the cotton policy even angered some of the earlier-arrived Chinese residents — the “old Xinjiang” -- for taking away their

²⁰³ Becquelin (2000), 76.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

resources and jobs and creating an unfavorable impression of the Chinese.²⁰⁵ Sometimes, these ethnic conflicts have been solved and compromise achieved between the two groups, but at other times the tensions have resulted in hatred between the two different ethnic groups, even to the point of vengeful murder.

Instead of addressing the already existing ecological depredations and interethnic conflicts to resolve or ameliorate them, the Chinese government even intensified the tensions between the Chinese and Uyghurs over natural resources, and especially water, by continuing to conduct the sizable immigration of Chinese cotton peasants into Xinjiang. From the Chinese perspective, the greater the number of Chinese in Xinjiang, the safer Xinjiang would be. However, this was mere Chinese wishful thinking. It was the huge influx of the Chinese population in Xinjiang that exacerbated the growing violence between the two groups. For the Uyghurs, the very presence of a large number of Chinese laborers in Xinjiang posed the greatest threat to the local people.²⁰⁶ It caused the Uyghurs to unite in their hostility to the Chinese.

Eventually, the tensions between the two ethnic groups over natural resources spread into the political domain, where it played out in such issues as the Uyghurs' resistance against the non-democratic polity that is the PRC, their rejection of ethnic unity and harmony with the Chinese, their criticism of Uyghur poverty and socio-political inequality, their rejection of the use of the Chinese (Mandarin) language, and their criticism of the system of Xinjiang's supposed political "autonomy."²⁰⁷ Among all the

²⁰⁵ Lixiong Wang, 335.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 267-268.

²⁰⁷ Gardner Bovingdon, "The Not-So-Silent Majority: Uyghur Resistance to Han Rule in Xinjiang," *Modern China*, Vol. 28. No. 1 (2002): 46-47.

criticisms, the issue of the social stratification between the Chinese and Uyghurs has been among the most energetically pressed. Uyghurs believe that most of the benefits gained through Xinjiang's development have been monopolized by the Chinese with the Beijing government behind them, not by the Uyghurs or Xinjiang itself. To the Uyghurs, in general the Chinese were thieves who stole the wealth of the Uyghurs.²⁰⁸

The Complex Uyghur Identity

Contrary to most commonly held ideas about Xinjiang, even during the 1980s it was in fact still a pretty disunited society. Each oasis city possessed its own distinct identity. In 1989, Justin von Rudelson conducted research in Subesh of the Turpan Basin into the matter of Uyghur identity and nationalism. In his report on his research he depicted a complex picture of Uyghur nationalism. The middle-income and poor peasants, who for the most part did not travel outside of the Turpan region, identified strongly with Islam and maintained strong Turpan oasis identities. Conversely, both Turpan merchants who traded in China proper, including in and with entities in the large eastern cities of Beijing and Shanghai, and wealthy peasants such as grape growers who benefited from China's development policies, saw themselves as citizens of the Chinese state.

These identities demonstrate the inaccuracy of the words of Uyghur intellectuals, who claim to speak for all Uyghurs when they voice their prescriptive views about Uyghur identity. Such intellectuals are highly nationalistic, supportive of a pan-Turkic ideology that would unify all the Turks of the world; they oppose the Chinese government's own promotion of a "pan-People's Republic" Chinese identity. However,

²⁰⁸ Rudelson, 75.

achieving a pan-Turkic or even pan-Uyghur identity is difficult for Uyghur intellectuals, in that they have competed with one another as a result of their conceptions of identity that were tied sentimentally to the specific oases of their birth.²⁰⁹

One of the means by which Uyghur intellectuals have sought to strengthen the Uyghur ethnic identity has been their attempt to control the language of education in Xinjiang. In Xinjiang there have been available two types of language education for Uyghurs. One is *min kao min* (education in the Uyghur language), the other *min kao han* (education in the Chinese Mandarin language). According to the Chinese government, education in the Chinese language was intended to help the Uyghurs to improve their job opportunities and so upgrade the quality of their lives. However, many Uyghurs have believed that the educational opportunities offered in Mandarin Chinese only have destroyed their ethnic identity as well as the jobs and careers of Uyghur teachers who have taught in the Uyghur language. To be sure, Chinese college education was and remains conducted purely in the Mandarin Chinese language, which has prevented many Uyghur students from pursuing higher education in China.²¹⁰ And, regarding the Uyghur language, a lot of Uyghurs have complained that the script reforms imposed by the Chinese government on the Uyghur script created two generations of illiterate folk.²¹¹ However, in fact, the reuse of the Persian-Arabic script was an essential contribution to the strengthening of Pan-Turkic identity. Further, the two seemingly quite different

²⁰⁹ Rudelson, 9.

²¹⁰ Lixiong Wang, 264.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 121. The Chinese government launched a language reform in 1958, creating a new script for the Uyghur people based on the Latin Alphabet, replacing the earlier Cyrillic script. However, in the 1980s, the old Uyghur script reappeared, which is a modified Persian-Arabic script that the Uyghurs had used long before the Cyrillic script. Thus, in a little over twenty years, the Uyghur script changed twice. See Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang -- China's Muslim Far Northwest* (London: Routledge-Curzon, 2004), 27.

language scripts are not that difficult to master if a person were to spend only a couple of months studying them.²¹² At any rate, some Uyghurs began to rally against the use of the Chinese language and preferred to use only the Uyghur language to communicate and educate their offspring.

As for the *min kao han* Uyghur students, they have often felt rejected by both sides of the society. They are not Uyghurs anymore and not yet Chinese. Some Uyghurs called them the 13th nationality in Xinjiang to mock their awkward presence (Xinjiang has twelve nationalities in total). According to Uyghur intellectuals, by rejecting the Chinese language, a united Uyghur identity will be established. But the irony was that some Uyghurs welcomed the use of English and showed great interest in Western culture.²¹³

The Rise of Uyghur Ethno-nationalism

Another negative impact of the cotton strategy in Xinjiang was that it strengthened the Uyghurs' ethnic identity, which further bolstered Uyghur ethno-nationalism. Gardner Bovingdon reports an interview with a Xinjiang Uyghur woman named Rehile. Their brief conversation perhaps reveals the common Uyghur psychology underlying the hostility that the Uyghurs feel toward the Chinese and their colonization of Xinjiang. Rehile said to Bovingdon, "Xinjiang was ours to begin with"; "my father and others his age were very hospitable, they welcomed people, though to tell you the truth, they looked down on Hans (Chinese)"; "originally, it (Xinjiang) was ours, then you

²¹² *Ibid*, 122.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 176.

(the Chinese) people came and stole our place.”²¹⁴ It is quite clear from the conversation that although the Chinese colonization of Xinjiang integrated the province closely with greater China both politically and economically, it yet failed to transform the Uyghurs to become Chinese. The virtually impermeable line between the two groups has become even more firmly established, and to the Uyghurs the Chinese were nothing but the “others.”

However, when the Chinese government imposed a large number of “others” in the lands of Xinjiang, the “us” was a compelling idea for the Uyghurs, stimulating them to hold their ground and fight for their land and resources. The strengthened and unified Uyghur ethnic identity was a necessary foundation for the Uyghur ethno-nationalism movement, which movement later became associated with the extremist Muslim movement and terrorism.²¹⁵ With the accelerating rate of the importation of Chinese laborers into Xinjiang in the 1990s, the Uyghurs, no matter whether they lived in the south or the north, had to unite together to “defend” their homeland. At that time the Uyghurs believed that all of the miseries that they suffered were directly or indirectly caused by the Chinese and the Chinese government. Whether a Uyghur religious leader, a nationalist, or a common person, it seems that virtually all Uyghurs felt little hope for their lives under the Chinese political regime.

It has been reported that approximately 90-95% of Uyghurs are not satisfied with the government.²¹⁶ For most Uyghurs, they have invested their only hope for improvement in collaborations among Uyghur nationalists, religious leaders, Uyghur

²¹⁴ Bovingdon, 50.

²¹⁵ Rudelson, 142.

²¹⁶ Lixiong Wang, 201.

civilians, and the Uyghur diasporas, who have actively attempted to unite Xinjiang with other Muslim countries.²¹⁷ Their immediate goal has been to establish an independent secular country that could afford them the opportunity later to build a religiously founded Muslim nation.²¹⁸ A Uyghur youth told Wang Lixiong that he had no chance to go to Mecca because Islamic teachings do not allow those who have lost their countries to visit this holy site.²¹⁹ It seems that Xinjiang's Uyghurs were on their way to blending into one form both secular nationalism and religious freedom.

Often it is said that one cannot gain power without resisting something. Some of the Uyghurs' protests of resistance were quite reasonable. One of the most famous Uyghur protests was held on December, 12, 1985. About 10,000 to 20,000 Uyghur students marched in Urumqi to oppose both the continued testing of nuclear weapons in Lop Nor and the immigration policy that allowed the Chinese to pour into Xinjiang. They also protested in favor of opening more positions in the government to minorities. In essence, the students were concerned for environmental protection and the equal rights of Uyghurs with Chinese.²²⁰

Five years later, the bloody Baren Incident occurred.²²¹ At first, it appears, this was a minor protest against China's one-child policy.²²² Later the protest spun out of

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 264-266.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 264-266.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 58.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 303.

²²¹ Baren is a county located along the western periphery of the Taklamakan Desert.

²²² Traditionally, the Uyghurs have preferred to have four children, and the Chinese one-child policy only allowed each Uyghur household to have two children, which irritated most Uyghurs. Further, the Chinese urged pregnant Uyghur women already with two children to abort the pregnancy. The practice of abortion violated the Islamic religion, and it was thus unacceptable to the Uyghurs.

control, leading finally to a widespread and large-scale Uyghur peasant rebellion followed by a brutal and quick suppression by the Chinese government.²²³ Ten years later, the Chinese government labeled the Baren Incident as a terrorist activity led by East Turkistan terrorists.

Responses provided on a questionnaire used by Wang Lixiong to canvass public opinion in Xinjiang during the 1990s demonstrate that at that time interracial hatred in Xinjiang was reaching its highest point in history.²²⁴ From the beginning of the 1990s there have occurred in Xinjiang a few thousand incidents of violent responses to the Chinese government, including explosions, assassinations, and other terrorist activities. The Yining (Gulja) Riot of February 1997 was one of the most influential Uyghur rebellions of the 1990s. A crowd of Uyghur demonstrators marched on the streets on a February morning, “calling for the release of religious teachers, and demanding jobs for Uyghurs”.²²⁵ About 300 or 500 people were arrested by Chinese policemen, and, later, the Chinese authority began house-to-house searches and arrested another 3000 or 5000. It was said that the captured Uyghurs were tortured with icy water and some of them had to be taken to hospital to have their feet, fingers, or hands amputated. Twenty days after the demonstration, three bombs exploded in Urumqi and another detonated on a bus in Beijing. Chinese authorities were furious over this Uyghur revenge, and, consequently, according to exiles, “162 Uyghur people were shot dead by Chinese security forces between February and June, and hundreds of people were sentenced to death, and about

²²³ Lixiong Wang, 201.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 264.

²²⁵ Tyler, 168.

1,600 were still missing”. Many thousands Uyghurs fled across the border to Kazakhstan.²²⁶

By the end of the 1990s nationalistic outbursts began to give way to terrorist expressions of Uyghur rebellion and hatred.²²⁷ Wang Lixiong wrote in a letter to a Uyghur friend that it seemed likely that some Uyghurs might even extend the realm of terrorist revenge to be taken against the Chinese government to beyond Xinjiang’s borders by attacking the Three Gorges Dam in south-central China.²²⁸ It seems that collaboration between the two races was not possible.

Beijing’s Reaction

In 1999, the Chinese government launched its Open Up to the West campaign to try to balance the Chinese economy by aiding the western provinces. In fact, “The notion of integration... would generally appear to be at the heart of the campaign to Open Up the West”.²²⁹ The Chinese authorities believed that once minority peoples had come to enjoy higher standards of living, they would abandon their ethno-nationalist and separatist aspirations.²³⁰ However, the common reaction by the residents of the western provinces to this campaign has been resistance. They have believed it to be nothing more than another round of Chinese exploitation of their natural resources intended to stimulate

²²⁶ Tyler, 169-172.

²²⁷ Chien-peng Chung, “The Shanghai Co-operation Organization: China’s Changing Influence in Central Asia,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 180 (2004): 991.

²²⁸ Lixiong Wang, 433.

²²⁹ Goodman, 324.

²³⁰ Becquelin (2004), 373.

industry and the economy in the East.²³¹ Surely, given this response, China will counter with even harsher political controls over Xinjiang's Uyghurs and other minorities in the Chinese West.

Meanwhile, Beijing adopted an approach toward Uyghur nationalism, separatism, and terrorism of “using violence to prevent violence,” attempting to smother riots in Xinjiang before they erupted. In 1997, after the Yining Rebellion, the central PRC government released its “Number Seven Document,” in which most of the policies delineated were aimed in particular at the Xinjiang problem. This document identified the cause of instability in Xinjiang to be Muslim / Uyghur separatism and “illegal religious activity.”²³² Beijing began to combat Uyghur separatism fiercely. In addition, China sought international support from Central Asian countries, Russia, and the United States. One of the famous international organizations established as a result of these overtures to counter Uyghur nationalism was the Shanghai Five, which was coalesced in 1996 and then expanded in 2001 to become the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were this organization's founding members, but Beijing initiated and organized it. The main theme of the organization was to “combat transnational security threats in the form of ethnic separatism, religious fundamentalism, international terrorism, arms-smuggling, drug trafficking and other cross-border crimes.”²³³

Under strong pressure from Beijing, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have shut down Uyghur political parties and newspapers operating in their

²³¹ Goodman, 334.

²³² Lixiong Wang, 61.

²³³ Chung, 990.

countries. They have also tracked down militants supposedly linked to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda terrorist network in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Some of those hunted fled to Afghanistan to join Al-Qaeda. Others sought refuge in Muslim religious schools in Pakistan, or they surfaced in Central Asia to train with extremist anti-government groups there. The United States finally classified the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)²³⁴ as a terrorist organization, though it warned China not to use the international counter-terrorism campaign as an excuse to persecute minorities who oppose the Chinese government.²³⁵

In the fall of 2001, the war against terrorism exploded within Xinjiang's rapidly changing socio-political environment. Xinjiang was believed to have become a new locus of terrorist activity and of the Muslim extremism that many terrorists espoused. The Beijing government claimed that it maintained zero tolerance toward terrorism and that terrorism must be wiped out with whatever force necessary to accomplish the job. Now, the sticky part of having so applied the label of terrorism so broadly across a multiethnic social system is that it "denied any opportunity for Xinjiang's non Han Chinese people... to enjoy any right to self-rule."²³⁶ Thus, the question of Xinjiang's "autonomy" was submerged under Chinese anti-terrorism propaganda, which delivered across Xinjiang a very negative image of the Chinese in that, essentially, they viewed every Uyghur as a terrorist. Thus, any remaining mutual trust was lost entirely, and this

²³⁴ ETIM is a Waziri based mujahideen organization established in 1993. Its stated goals are the independence of "East Turkestan" and the conversion of all Chinese people to Islam. Please see Yitzhak Shichor "Blow Up: Internal and External Challenges of Uyghur Separatism and Islamic Radicalism to Chinese Rule in Xinjiang" *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 32, No.2 (2005), 119-135.

²³⁵ Chung, 1004.

²³⁶ Starr, ed., 5.

explains the ethnic conflicts and bloody incidents that continued to erupt in Xinjiang during the early years of the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

My thesis explains the gradual infiltration into and domination of Xinjiang by Chinese power and the consequences this development wrought. From 1949 to 2009, within sixty years, Xinjiang's landscape and demographic composition were altered unrecognizably. It is obvious that China came to control this enormous frontier by transforming the entire region to become an artificial and unsustainable cultivation base that produced the valuable resources needed by the rest of China while at the same time the region absorbed millions of immigrants from all over China. With the success of the XPCC in Xinjiang,²³⁷ this former frontier region no longer constituted China's Far West. Xinjiang had evolved into a new historic stage of development, one in which now it was related intimately with virtually every aspect of the lives of ordinary Chinese citizens all across China proper.

If a nation is constituted of imagined communities, as has been claimed by Benedict Anderson,²³⁸ then, in the case of Xinjiang and China, it is a story of clashing imaginations. The Chinese and the Uyghurs do not share a common understanding and approach to the definition of a nation or, in this case, a nationality.

The sixty-years of transformation that Xinjiang has endured appears as a double-edged sword that simultaneously injures both Chinese and Uyghurs. From the Chinese perspective, millions of Chinese youth devoted their lives to this desert in the hope that

²³⁷ By 2000, the XPCC had established successfully fourteen agricultural divisions and 174 agricultural farms and had expanded the arable land to 1,064,600 hectares, with irrigated land totaling about 999,500 hectares. Its irrigation canals totalled 88,900 kilometers in length. In addition, 105 reservoirs were established and 135 hydraulic stations were built, with a total water capacity of 2.997 billion cubic meters. See Yan, et al., eds., (2003), 1.

²³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

one day that it would become among the most prosperous places in the world. They worked heart and soul and invested their talent and strength, technology and knowledge, to develop this rural frontier region into a modern, civilized society and economy. However, in the end, the Uyghurs showed little appreciation for their sacrifices and achievements, and these “Chinese heroes” became the greatest enemies of the native population of the region whose prosperity had been created by their own hands. The Chinese often became the target of Uyghur rebels and terrorists.

At the same time, for the Uyghurs, the Chinese intrusion brought mostly resentment. Most irritating to them were the uneven development of Uyghur and Chinese interests, the invasion of their homeland by outsiders, the exploitation of their resources by the colonizers, and the loss of their jobs and livelihoods to the masses of cheap laborers flooding in from China proper. Just as the Chinese West had to sacrifice for the Chinese East, the Uyghurs had to sacrifice for the sake of the Chinese, and thus the Uyghurs became a disregarded group, suffering from the development of unwise Chinese policies, about whose sufferings no one really cared. What’s more, their living environment had been damaged irreversibly, as exemplified by the total loss of at least a full third of the length of the cherished mother river, the Tarim River. They could wish that the Chinese would cry them a river, but, sadly, such a river of tears could not even revive the past, a past that many Uyghurs view idealistically, in which all existed harmoniously.

Arguably, no one rose triumphant from this sixty-year exploitation of the Chinese West. Although Xinjiang was integrated into China far more thoroughly than in any previous period, the tensions in this region that resulted from its integration also rose to

their highest level in history. It thus seems a time to rethink once more the presence of the transforming XPCC in Xinjiang.

The Problem of the XPCC

Xinjiang is like Pandora's Box, while the agent opening the box would be the XPCC. It is difficult to determine whether the XPCC could be considered a successful or failed organization. On the one hand, over the past sixty years it indeed stabilized politically this non-Chinese land, transformed millions of hectares of desert land into oasis settlements and farms, made itself into a profitable organization, and provided millions of jobs for both local and immigrating laborers. On the other hand, since the 1950s it not only exacerbated precipitously the ecological degradation of Xinjiang, but it also intensified significantly ethnic conflicts between Chinese and Uyghurs, which led eventually to the rise of all of Uyghur ethno-nationalism, the local and international Muslim fundamentalist movement, and so-called terrorism in northwest of China.

Despite the difficulties that the XPCC caused, members of the XPCC still believe in the necessity of its continuity in Xinjiang. It was designed to stand against the aggressions of the Soviet Union, and now it serves as a firm bulwark protecting Chinese interests from the separatism and terrorism of the Xinjiang Uyghurs. The XPCC is still willing to perform as Beijing's watchdog. Early on many military colonists believed that "the future of the Corps determines the stability and development of Xinjiang." The sinicization, or assimilation, of Xinjiang was seen as the ultimate solution for long-term stability in this borderland.

However, this represents just one side of the story. No one seemed to realize that the presence of the XPCC paved the way to its own failure. The large migratory population absorbed by the XPCC was the main factor causing the ecological disasters and ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang. Regarding the former, it is apparent that the overpopulated military colonies of the XPCC in Xinjiang decimated the environment and its natural capacity; regarding the latter, few people were concerned about the fact that such a sizable increase in the Chinese populace would exacerbate ethnic conflicts rather than effect a sinicization of the Uyghurs population. Just like the Jews or other ethnicities / races of the world, the more they are persecuted, the more they are likely to unite to become even stronger through their resistance. Such is the case with the Uyghurs: the more Chinese that have migrated to Xinjiang, the more the Uyghurs have felt threatened and suppressed, and the more they needed to explode in passionate outbursts.

I believe it is time to change the pattern of behavior according to which Chinese have dealt with minorities and their lands for the past two thousand years. The first change should be to stop immigrating Chinese people into Xinjiang and other minority regions. The primary agent that needs to cooperate in this process should be the XPCC. In other words, the traditional *juntun* method of colonization, which the XPCC embodied fully, should be abandoned as soon as possible. In the past, the Chinese *juntun* military colonies had been only temporary organizations that dispersed when national security had been achieved, the only exception being the *juntun* column formed under the Ming dynasty, when *juntun* were established as part of a nationwide strategy and which eventually helped to drag the dynasty into poverty, chaos, and defeat. At any rate, generally speaking, the relatively short lifespan of historical *juntun* colonies and the

superficial interactions that they caused between humans and nature in the arid Northwest of China made them less destructive than today's severe degradations caused by the XPCC's activities.

The most essential reason to abandon the XPCC is its unprecedented negative impact on the arid and fragile natural system in Xinjiang. The first signs of the ecological disturbance occurred soon after the immigrants entered the region in 1949. The Tarim River lost one third of its original length within just twenty years of the military colonization that was effected along its banks. If that pace continues, it will take just another fifty years before the river disappears entirely into the air. What will happen then? What will happen to the Uyghurs? To China's cotton base? To all of the living creatures that depend on that river to live? If such a tragedy actually were to occur, it is highly doubtful that China could continue to rely on the cotton strategy to hold the region together with China proper when no water would be available to farm there.

Next, one of the fundamental problems of the XPCC is its lawless foundation: the Chinese Constitution doesn't assign any region to the XPCC in Xinjiang. However, the total area that the XPCC occupies is about 74,300 square kilometers, approximately twice the size of the island of Taiwan.²³⁹ Further, the appointment of magistrates of the XPCC is also problematic.²⁴⁰ Take the mayor of Shihezi City, for example; he is also the *shizhang* (Division Commander) of Agricultural Division Eight of the XPCC, located in Shihezi. However, according to Chinese law, city mayors should be elected by the People's Representative Conference, while the *shizhang* should be appointed by the XPCC within itself; thus, the very appointments of mayors, governors, and directors in

²³⁹ Lixiong Wang, 20.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

Xinjiang is in conflict with Chinese law. Moreover, the XPCC is treated by Beijing as an independent political system existing alongside the government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. And the XPCC is allowed to maintain its own prisons, jails, public security bureau, courts, and justice department. “It (the XPCC) is the autonomous region within the autonomous Xinjiang.”²⁴¹

In addition, the cotton farmers employed by the XPCC have felt as if they were serfs on the farms and had no rights to determine how their goods were sold, though they enjoyed the benefits of certain social welfare programs such as inexpensive medical care and utilities offered to XPCC employees as part of their compensation (Fig. 21). However, the removal of these employees from engagement in the free market of goods diminished their motivation, and they often fled the XPCC farms.²⁴²



Fig.21. The typical poor living conditions of XPCC employees.²⁴³

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 20-21.

²⁴² Lixiong Wang, 105.

²⁴³ Illustration from Lixiong Wang, 107.

The Middle Path

If the XPCC were terminated, this might offer better opportunities for the Uyghurs and their land to recover from the earlier destruction. But simply retreating from Xinjiang and returning the Chinese immigrants to China proper would not reduce the critical Chinese concern for national security, and one should not make the mistake of believing that China would grant the Uyghurs an independent nation in Xinjiang.

Some scholars do argue that the Xinjiang issue should be discussed as an international problem and that it would be better if China could give Xinjiang its independent sovereignty. Nevertheless, I believe the Uyghur problem should be handled as a domestic problem rather than an international issue. Truly, separation would not be the best solution for Xinjiang. For the Uyghurs, an independent country could not solve their problems, and it may even exacerbate their miseries. It is very possible that an anarchic situation would occur if Xinjiang's Uyghurs resolved to win their independence from China. However, probably the only territory that they would receive includes just the Tarim River Basin, while northern and central Xinjiang would be divided among Chinese and eleven other minority groups.²⁴⁴ Even if a new Uyghur government were established across Xinjiang, its infrastructure perhaps would not be able to handle the enormous task of reuniting the lands together.

Anyway, the Chinese would not allow one-sixth of China's territory to be taken away, and it would not agree to give away its richest natural resource base in a move that likely would prevent China from developing further. Furthermore, the Chinese who have lived in Xinjiang throughout their lives would not simply surrender and leave Xinjiang. In addition, sooner or later, surely the Chinese government would fight back bitterly if a

²⁴⁴ Lixiong Wang, 452.

separation did occur. Indeed, a strong nation such as China lurking on the border of Xinjiang is the last thing that the Xinjiang Uyghurs would wish for.

As we enter a new century, Chinese national security can be achieved in many different ways other than by establishing agricultural colonies in such arid regions. The colonization policy in Xinjiang reflected that a less than innovative government ruled China in the recent past. The cotton strategy, rooted in the ancient *juntun* ideology, created more troubles than it solved. I am still struggling to locate a resolution that could both maintain Chinese control of Xinjiang while ensuring enough political, social, and economic autonomy for the Uyghurs to satisfy their need for self-determination. But perhaps there is in fact a viable middle path. The middle path would not differentiate the conquered from the conqueror, but rather would afford peaceful coexistence among the groups. Without losing the entirety of Xinjiang, would it not be possible for the central Chinese government to divide Xinjiang into distinct small regions based on geographical ethnic boundaries, allowing the various ethnicities of Xinjiang to exercise locally real political autonomy? Perhaps it is time to reopen the Great Islamic Trading Circle and allow it to boost the economies and sub-polities of the Chinese northwestern provinces instead of sealing China's back door to the vast Eurasian West.

The Ecological Threats in Xinjiang

From an environmental perspective, it is vital to carry on the successive steps necessary to ensure that the deterioration of Xinjiang's ecology can be halted and reversed. As we know, the cotton monoculture in Xinjiang has demonstrated clearly its negative impact on biological diversity and on nature's ability to heal itself. No one can

be certain if the old Tarim River Basin ecology could be recovered, but at least the deterioration of the environment could be slowed. It is also necessary to implement immediately sound land management strategies so that some of the cultivated land can be converted back to pasture land, forest, or wetland. Thus, some of the colonists could shift to tree or hay / grass cultivation. This would not only help to bring a balanced environment back to the Tarim River Basin, it would also prevent the creation of an enormous dustbowl in northwest and central China (Fig. 22).

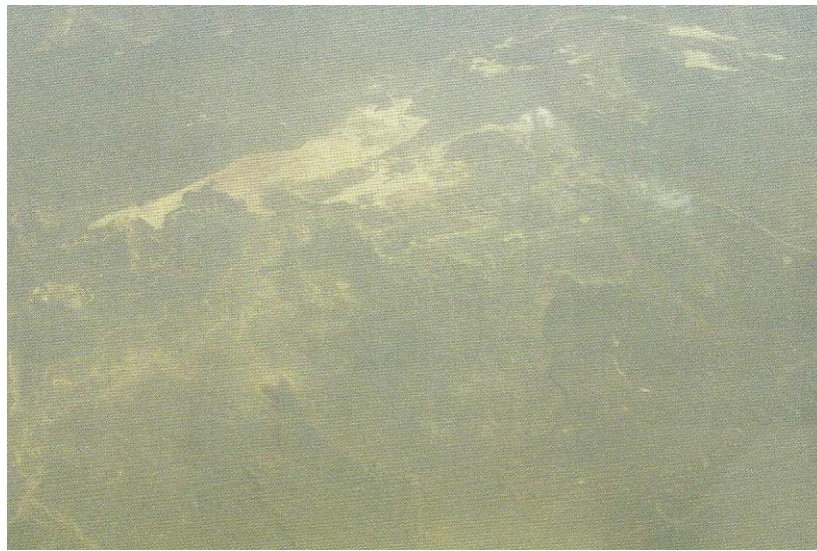


Fig.22. Dustbowl in Southern Xinjiang.²⁴⁵

Some research into a possible climatic cooling trend of Central Asia suggests that the discharge of some mountain rivers and thus also agricultural water resources will be decreased in the coming decades.²⁴⁶ “The shortage threat of water resources or even the drying up of some waters will take place” if some effective measures for water resource

²⁴⁵ Illustration from Lixiong Wang, 192.

²⁴⁶ Ruji Hu, Hong Ma, and Fengqing Jiang, “Yazhou Zhongbu Qihou Bianhua Dui Tarim He Liyu Shui Ziyuan De Keneng Yingxiang,” in Dehua Mao, ed., *Tarim Liuyu Shuiziyuan, Huanjing Yu Guanl* (Beijing: China Environmental Science Press, 1998): 151.

protection are not adopted and the development of cultivation and reclamation are not suitably directed.

Under the current highly undesirable ecological conditions, regulations protecting the Xinjiang ecology must be fortified. Luckily, in December 1997 the Xinjiang People's Congress adopted "The Tarim Regulations".²⁴⁷ This set of regulations promoted the rational development, utilization, protection, and management of water resources in the Tarim Basin, and it aimed to prevent and control hydrological disasters, among other ecologically oriented goals. The good news is that an enormous and comprehensive management project on the Tarim River basin was finally approved by the State Council in 2001 and, on the basis of scientific techniques deployed, the downstream portion of the Tarim River has begun to flow again under close human management. It may be that through means such as these the ecosystem of Xinjiang might be restored, its desertification reversed.

Xinjiang stands at the center of the great Eurasian continent, which once was the most exotic and alluring segment of the trade route known as the Silk Road. The region's character as a "cultural transmitter, receiving, processing, and sending out one of the most diverse cultural and religious impulses,"²⁴⁸ has always been remarkable. Historian Owen Lattimore once predicted that Xinjiang would become the pivot of Asia and a new

²⁴⁷ J. Wallace and Patricia Wouters eds., 126.

²⁴⁸ Starr ed., 4.

center of gravity...in the world after the 1950s”.²⁴⁹ And, somehow, his prediction has begun to make sense.

In 1996, when I was twelve years old, my father took me to Xinjiang. We woke up at seven in the morning to book a bus from Urumqi to Yining. It was still dark outside and nobody walked on the street. We waited for two hours until the sun finally arose to announce the coming of a brand-new day. Yes, the sun comes out late in Xinjiang, but, eventually, it does.

²⁴⁹ Starr ed., 4.

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