Frontier Politics And Sino-Soviet Relations: A Study Of Northwestern Xinjiang, 1949-1963

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Abstract
This is an ethnopolitical and diplomatic study of the Three Districts, or the former East Turkestan Republic, in China's northwest frontier in the 1950s and 1960s. It describes how this Muslim borderland between Central Asia and China became today's Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture under the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The Three Districts had been in the Soviet sphere of influence since the 1930s and remained so even after the Chinese Communist takeover in October 1949. After the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s, Beijing transformed a fragile suzerainty into full sovereignty over this region: the transitional population in Xinjiang was demarcated, border defenses were established, and Soviet consulates were forced to withdraw. As a result, the Three Districts changed from a Soviet frontier to a Chinese one, and Xinjiang's outward focus moved from Soviet Central Asia to China proper.

The largely peaceful integration of Xinjiang into PRC China stands in stark contrast to what occurred in Outer Mongolia and Tibet. Previous scholarship has attributed this to many factors, such as the flexibility of CCP's ethnic and frontier policies, the success of local party building and cadre recruitment system, the use of military power, and mass migrations of Han people to Xinjiang. While these studies broke new ground, the scarcity of archival documents weakened their arguments. By taking advantage of documents from Xinjiang local archives, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing, as well as the Russian archives recently made available, this study demonstrates that rather than implementing exceptional social policies in Xinjiang, the CCP excelled at strategic negotiation with the USSR, greatly aiding their bid for power. This dissertation also reveals that the relations between the Chinese communist state and its borderlands must be understood in the context of CCP's nation-building process.

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FRONTIER POLITICS AND SINO-SOVIE RELATIONS:  
A STUDY OF NORTHWESTERN XINJIANG, 1949–1963

Sheng Mao

A DISSERTATION

in

History

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

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FRONTIER POLITICS AND SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS:
A STUDY OF NORTHWESTERN XINJIANG, 1949–1963
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I began my Ph.D. study at the University of Pennsylvania, Barack Obama had just came to power as the 44th president of the United States. When the time came to defend my dissertation, he had already left the White House. Writing a dissertation takes longer than serving as the president of the United States, it seems. Longer even than serving two terms.

I finished the bulk of my dissertation in Hong Kong. During the past three years, many things occurred in this city that still trigger vivid emotions. In 2014, almost every day at 8:30 a.m., I would send my 3-year-old daughter to her preschool and then go to the main library of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). Each morning, Judy had her schoolbag on her back and I had mine. We both were students going to school every day, yet she was a kid and I was already the father of two girls. I was embarrassed every time I had to write “graduate student” as my occupation on my daughters’ many preschool application forms. My discomfort only grew when their teachers double-checked to make sure I had filled the form correctly regarding my occupation. Hong Kong was nonetheless an excellent place to write a dissertation on Xinjiang. The libraries of CUHK have rich English and Chinese collections on modern China. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the professional and kind librarians at CUHK. More significantly, recent events in Hong Kong have helped me to better understand how Northwest Xinjiang changed from a Soviet frontier to a Chinese frontier.
Pursuing a Ph.D. degree was a very long journey for me. It began in 2004 when I enrolled as a Ph.D. student in the Department of History at Nanjing University. Before that, I was trained in journalism and mass communication, and worked as a radio host for several years—by all rights, I should have become a TV reporter. What drove me to become a historian was a history book, *How the Red Sun Rose* by Gao Hua, my late supervisor at Nanjing University. In this regard, I want to thank Professor Gao Hua for leading me to become a historian.

When I was in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona, I was very lucky to work with Professors Fabio Lanza and Hai Ren. They both were supportive even when I decided to transfer to another program. It was at UA that I was first exposed to American academic education, which was both challenging and rewarding. It was also at UA that I adapted to English as my working language. I also want to thank Professors Douglas Weiner and Dian Li. I learned a lot from their courses, especially Professor Weiner’s “Russian History.” I also would like to thank the UA students who attended the first courses I taught as a teaching assistant, and thus played a part in my becoming a more experienced teacher.

At the University of Pennsylvania, I have been blessed with advisors who have helped me in so many ways. My principle advisor Professor Arthur Waldron has been a constant source of encouragement and sound advice. Not only did Professor Waldron allow me the freedom to pursue whatever topic I was interested in, but he also made sure that I had the financial support so vital to international students who have limited opportunities for outside funding. Professor Frederick Dickinson was always a resource
whom I could depend on. When I felt I was off track in some way, he was the first person I asked for help. His “slogan,” “Japan is not uniquely unique,” has inspired me to focus more on the similarities than the differences between the history of China and its Western counterparts. Professor Siyen Fei’s research on frontiers in the Ming era inspired me to follow her intellectual path, and her enthusiasm about transnational history convinced me that my study of Xinjiang was worth pursuing. From the moment he arrived at Penn, Professor Christopher Atwood was an inspiration and a role model to me and many other graduate students. With permission from Professor Atwood, I audited his course, “China’s Last Empire: The Qing.” This course has challenged both my Han-centered and Eurocentric views and led me to look at the Qing Empire from the perspective of Inner Asia. Professors Eugene Park, Kathleen Brown, Peter Holquist, Lynn Hollen Lees, Michael Kates and Benjamin Nathans have all been more instrumental in my scholarly development than they likely realize.

I am deeply grateful to many professors, scholars and language teachers. Without their help, it would have been impossible for me to finish my dissertation. Professor Xiaoyuan Liu at the University of Virginia agreed to serve on my dissertation committee. As an established scholar of Chinese frontier studies, his research has inspired me and his advice has benefited me in many ways. Professors Li Danhui and Shen Zhihua have generously shared with me precious archival documents, which made my research possible at the first place. My thanks also go to Professors David Brophy, Peter Carroll, Cai Hongsheng, Janet Chen, Chuang Chi-fa, Roger Des Forges, Huang Ko-Wu, Perry Link, Mao Haijian, Susan Naquin, Q. Edward Wang, Wang Qisheng, Wu Zhe, Yafeng
Xia, Yang Guoqiang, and Yang Kuisong. Mr. Zhao Yuanchao and Ms. Maria Alley taught me Russian, a language essential for my research.

Throughout my graduate studies, from Nanjing to Tucson to Philadelphia, I have benefitted immeasurably from my fellow graduate students and friends. Thank you in particular to Nick Admussen, Joe August, Cai Zhongyue, Samuel Casper, Yi Chen, Fangyi Cheng, Rashon Clark, Wendy Doyon, Emily Fridlund, Robert Hegwood, Nagatomi Hirayama, Xiaobai Hu, Huang Guangsheng, Jiang Baolin, Jing Shijie, Wah Guan Lim, Xiaoyi Liu, Sydney Xu Lu, Salar Mohandesi, Lara Netting, Ke Peng, Alexander Ponsen, Jawan Shir Rasikh, Yi Ren, Leander Seah, Xiaolin Shi, Tang Xiaolu, Sarah Xia Yu, and Zhu Xiangfeng. At CUHK, Gan Qi, Lin Ying, Yu Kwok Leung, Lin Xiao, Angelina Wong and Yuan Zaijun supported me in various ways. Every time I met Bei Dao, he would ask about my dissertation progress. Their kindness made Hong Kong a home for me. Last but not least, I am greatly thankful for generous financial support from the University of Arizona, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Harry Bradley Foundation.

My parents have always supported my studies because they believe that nothing is more important than education. I thank my parents for their unconditional support and for being constantly proud of me. My sisters Libin and Yonghong are taking care of our aged parents while I am abroad. Their selfless contributions to the family make me realize that I am far from a dutiful son. My daughters, 5-year-old Judy and 3-year-old Lydia, have dramatically changed my life and personality. After becoming a father, I transformed into a more patient, more considerate, and overall more mature person. Thank you so much,
my little demons! My greatest debt is to my wife, Minlei. Without her help and encouragement, I might not be able to survive as a Ph.D. student. She has sacrificed so much for me and for our family. Above all, thank you for sharing your life with me!

Penn graduates can often tell their fellows how successful they have been, but I do not have such a feel-good story. The language barrier and culture shock made my experience as an international student remarkably difficult. Reading, listening, writing, presenting, studying Russian and Japanese, publishing, and job hunting were one challenge after another. These hurdles remind me that I became a Penn graduate not because I am more intelligent than others but because I got lucky. I am determined to work hard in the future in order not to waste my good luck.
ABSTRACT

FRONTIER POLITICS AND SINO-SOVET RELATIONS:
A STUDY OF NORTHWESTERN XINJIANG, 1949–1963
Sheng Mao
Arthur Waldron

This is an ethnopolitical and diplomatic study of the Three Districts, or the former
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describes how this Muslim borderland between Central Asia and China became today’s
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sovereignty over this region: the transitional population in Xinjiang was demarcated,
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The largely peaceful integration of Xinjiang into PRC China stands in stark
contrast to what occurred in Outer Mongolia and Tibet. Previous scholarship has
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The Three Districts (Yili, Tacheng, Altay) in Xinjiang Province, 1949–1952
INTRODUCTION

Background

In 1988, after traveling around Xinjiang, an American journalist wrote, “The longer I stayed in Kashgar, the more I began to realize that Xinjiang was a country within a country, one with far closer connections to its central Asian neighbors than to China. The Sunday market, the social event of the week, was an exhilarating mix of local tongues and minorities. Ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajiks from the surrounding countryside arrived on donkey carts piled high with watermelons, or trailing dispirited lines of sheep, to join the Uighurs and Pakistanis in selling their wares. The different languages vied with each other to such overpowering effect that I no longer felt I was in China.”¹

If the transnational characters of Xinjiang were impressive even in the late 1980s, after a series of political campaigns to Sinicize this vast Muslim borderland, it would be reasonable to ask how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) integrated Xinjiang with China proper after the Communist takeover in 1949. While “integration” involves many aspects such as politics, economy, culture, and the military,² this dissertation focuses mainly on the ethnopolitical and diplomatic aspects; namely, how the CCP reoriented Xinjiang from Soviet Central Asia to China proper in almost every way. By placing the frontiers and their ethnic inhabitants at the center of the nation-building process in PRC

² According to Dreyer, “integration” is defined as the process whereby ethnic groups come to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities towards a new center, whose institutions assume jurisdiction over, and responsibility for, said groups. Theoretically, integration can take place among an infinite number of equal ethnic groups. In practice, however, it often involves a majority-minority group(s) situation. See June Teufel Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People’s Republic of China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
China, I hope to shed new light on the role of the periphery in shaping the modern identity of “socialism” and “Chineseness.”

After Qianlong Emperor conquered this vast borderland and renamed it “New Dominion” (新疆) in 1768, Xinjiang had been served as a tributary nation rather than an integral part of China. Xinjiang functioned as a buffer state, tributes and exchanges of gifts symbolized friendly relations between Xinjiang and the Inland. In the mid-nineteenth century, tsarist Russia rapidly annexed vast territories in Central Asia, bringing it for the first time into close contact with Chinese territories in Xinjiang. In 1871, Russians occupied the Yili Valley and finally returned it to the Qing court after the signing of the Treaty of Saint Petersburg in 1881. To forestall Russian expansion into the Yili Valley, the Qing court institutionalized Xinjiang as a province in 1884, which was regarded by many historians as the beginning of Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang in a modern sense.  

From the collapse of the Qing court in 1911 until 1933, Xinjiang was isolated from both China proper and Soviet Central Asia. It was ruled by the warlord Yang Zengxin 楊增新 (1864–1928) and his successor Jin Shuren 金樹仁 (1979–1941). When Sheng Shicai 盛世才 (1897–1970) came to power in 1933 with essential support from the Soviets, Xinjiang became a Soviet satellite state, administered as a police state along Soviet lines. When Sheng Shicai broke with the Soviets and realigned with Chiang Kai-

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shek in late 1944, a Muslim rebellion was instigated and supported by the Soviet government within the Three Districts in Northwest Xinjiang—Yili, Tacheng, and Altay. Direct Soviet military involvement in the Three Districts resulted in the 1945 establishment of the East Turkestan Republic at Yili. The Three Districts became a Soviet frontier. In 1949, when the CCP’s military victory was imminent, Stalin encouraged and even facilitated the Chinese communists to penetrate the Muslim borderland. But the Three Districts remained within the Soviet sphere of influence. This dissertation focuses on how the Three Districts were transformed from a Soviet into a Chinese frontier following CCP’s penetration into Xinjiang in October 1949, especially after the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s.

**Literature Review: Chinese Frontier Studies**

In the field of modern Chinese history, China’s transition from empire to nation-state has been a widely discussed topic. The main questions are how traditional Chinese civilization, especially Confucianism, would be able to mediate globally diffused practices of modernization and how the frontiers and its ethnic populations adapted to such process of modernization.

One major issue in regard to China’s frontier history is how to come to terms with various peoples and cultures inhabiting within the territory of so-call “China” today. In imperial China, the most important political strategy to unify various communities into

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one single polity was the discourse of *tianxia* 天下 (all under heaven) and *yixia zhi bian* 夷夏之辨 (distinguishing the Chinese from barbarians). In the *tianxia* system, the closeness of a state’s relationship to the Son of Heaven, China’s emperor, relied on both physical proximity to the capital and cultural affinity with China proper. The cultural affinity was sustained by rituals formalized in the tribute system. Through the tribute system, barbarians could become Chinese if they were willing to accept Confucian rituals and to respect the leading role of “China.” In this regard, “Chineseness” was more a cultural term than an ethnic or racial one. John Fairbank’s edited volume *The Chinese World Order* (1968) describes how the Qing Empire used such ideas and practices to deal with foreign relations. Holding a Sino-centric worldview, China did not treat its neighbors as sovereign states in modern terms. The same reason can explain the rocky Sino-American relations in the nineteenth century. China made strides toward modernity only in response to the western threat.  

Fairbank’s student Joseph Levenson challenged the “Chinese world order,” emphasizing continuity in Chinese thought. In *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, Levenson concludes that, “the intimate association of bureaucracy with the mastery of high culture was cracked by modern western pressure and its concomitant, Chinese Nationalism.” In replacement of Confucianism, communism became the philosophical base of the Chinese intellectuals. Fairbank’s “Chinese world order” and “impact-react” paradigms and Levenson’s “culturalism-to-nationalism” thesis became the most influential approaches in the field of China studies in US during the 1970s and 

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1980s. Even today, the field of China studies in Taiwan and Mainland China has still been dominated by this modernization view, emphasizing that the lack of modernity impeded the progress of China as a modern nation-state in the twentieth century.\(^7\)

Another group of historians look at the Chinese history not from the center but from its frontiers. As early as the 1930s, Owen Lattimore, arguably the founding father of Chinese frontier studies, created the concept of a “reservoir zone.” By this term, Lattimore states that the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural zone of China’s Inner Asian frontiers bridged the nomadic steppe and the central plains. It served as a possible source of administrators familiar with both nomadic and sedentary cultures.\(^8\) Mongolian historian Sechin Jagchid examines the relationship between economic tiles and confrontation along the Great Wall in the long Chinese history. He argues that nomads on the other side of the Wall depended economically on China proper to such an extent that they had to raid the Chinese when there were no markets or tributes accessible. Commerce was the major element that determined trade or raid (peace or war).\(^9\) Thomas Barfield challenged the traditional Chinese way of describing the tribes as barbaric. He noted that the tribes have complex society with basic stability; their relationship with the Chinese was not only

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symbiotic but parasitic. Furthermore, nomads understood for sure that they heavily depended on a strong and settled Chinese state.\textsuperscript{10} Joseph Fletcher and Morris Rossabi depicted a more flexible and a “symbiotic relationship” between China proper and its frontier areas. Through this relationship, “trans-frontiersmen” crossed a fluid frontier zone carrying backward and forward both goods and cultures.\textsuperscript{11}

Following the first generation of Chinese frontier scholars, studies in and after the 1990s demonstrates a dynamic “poly-ethnic” or “multi-state” system which is in a constant state of change. This trend of “new frontier history” corresponds to the change in American frontier studies, which transferred its perspective from Frederick Turner’s ethnocentric, nationalistic frontier to a focus on the diversity of Western settlers.\textsuperscript{12} Stevan Harrell’s edited volume, \textit{Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers}, examines the relations between the ethnic peoples and the central state from this new perspective. Based on case studies of ethnic Naxi, Yi, Miao, Yao, Manchu, and Tai peoples, the authors show that the civilizing project imposed by a “cultural superior and economic powerful” center on the periphery is not a unified thing, either in its purposes and methods or in the reaction of the people imposed. In this way, this book intends to bring the frontier to the center of our understanding of the formation of so-called “China.”\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} Stevan Harrell ed., \textit{Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers} (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1996); Leibold, \textit{Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism}, p. 21.
Accordingly, the study of Chinese state-border relations has shifted from a Sino-centric perspective to a new approach that acknowledges the importance of the margins. The Sino-centric view considered the integration of the Chinese state and its peripheries as an ongoing process of how “barbarians” accepted Confucian culture and turned into an integral part of China after being civilized. The state adopted two competing frontier policies when dealing with the barbarians, cultural and military. The main strategy the state adopted was to “cherish” (huai’rou 懷柔) and “assimilate” (hanhua 漢化) frontier peoples through education and moral indoctrination. In the meanwhile, a “loose rein” (jimi 放濫) policy was applied to maintain the boundary between xia (the Chinese) and yi (barbarians). When the barbarians were too evil and too stubborn to be civilized, the state would employ military tactics to forcibly bring them into the Chinese political sphere, or to prevent them from crossing the Great Wall and raiding the central plains.¹⁴ Many scholars consider the Sinification of ethnic peoples a way to empower the barbarians with higher culture. As Ping-ti Ho’s 1967 paper noted, it was one of the main factors that made the Manchu Qing rule so successful in territorial expansion, population growth, cultural development, and a greater degree of interregional integration.¹⁵

Revisionist schools of Qing history have effectively challenged the Sino-centric approach by Ping-ti Ho and others. William Rowe points out that Qing historiography has been marked by three important revisionist turns in the past two decades. The first was

¹⁴ Leibold, Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism, pp. 22–23.
the so-called “social history turn.” This school turned away from political and military history but focused on social, economic, and cultural structures whose rise and fall occurred very slowly over the *longue durée*. With critique of the “impact-response” model proposed by John Fairbank, historians emphasized the dynamic domestic history of China, which would have gone through significant changes even without stimulants from outside. The second turn was the “Inner-Asian turn,” which features an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical study and anthropology. Influenced by cultural studies, scholars representing “Inner-Asian turn” focus more on “representations” than “facts,” which de-constructed such categories as gender and race, seeing them as culturally historically formed rather than biologically determined. The third was the “Eurasian turn,” which was not just a geographic shift, but an intellectual trend integrating cultural studies, world history, and ecological studies. With this turn, the binary history of Western challenge and Asian response proposed by the Fairbank school has surrendered to a new emphasis on comparable developmental trajectory. The Qing empire was viewed by no means as an exception, but considered as equally dynamic as the Ottoman, Moghul, and even European empires.  

These three turns were often named as “New Qing History.” Thus, “ethnic sovereignty” and “Manchu identity” became key terms when historians discussed about the rule of the Qing dynasty.  

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These three academic turns under the flag of the “New Qing History” have dramatically changed the way we view relations between the state and its periphery. With their efforts of seeing the border regions as places in their own right, scholars not only revealed the richness and complexity of the interactions between the center and the borderlands, but also challenged many so-called “historical truth.” For instance, it became problematic to consider borderland as “backward society” and border inhabitants as “under-developed, uncivilized peoples” when we put the frontier at the center. A collection of fine articles edited by Diana Lary in 2007 questioned the assumption that the center-border relations were fixed and static. The authors argue that: (1) the present borderlands of China were formed not from time immemorial but historically; (2) there were ups and downs in regard to the control from the center in the borderlands; (3) the borderlands were corporated into China proper mostly by military conquest rather than through a kind “civilizing” process; (4) Han migrants in the border regions were not civilizers but mainly criminals, refugees, and demobilized soldiers; (5) inhabitants of the

borderlands were and are more closely connected by ethnicity, religion, and culture to peoples beyond China than Han people.  

The last two decades witnessed a fourth academic trend in the field of China studies in general and Qing history in particular—“the transnational turn.” Prasenjit Duara has pointed out in 1995 that historical consciousness in modern society has been overwhelmingly framed by the nation-state. Historians tend to see the past by regarding the nation-state as the basic unit of intellectual studies. When we question the center-periphery structure and view borders as continuously changing, this naturally leads to viewing borders from a transnational perspective. From such perspective, borders are not the end of a nation-state, but a part of a cross-border community. Using the Pyrenean frontier of France and Spain as a case study, Peter Sahlins observes that “the zonal character of the frontier persists after the delimitation of a boundary line.” Sahlins’s study challenges our perception that one of the main characteristics of a nation-state is its fixed borders. Peter Perdue’s research on the frontiers of Ming and Qing reveals that Imperial China’s borders were more like shifting zones of influence and contention, containing multiple flows of goods, soldiers, civilian migrants, weapons, and religions in both directions, than lands with fixed boundaries. Even national allegiance for one nation-state is arguable. Using the term “national indifference,” Tara Zahra challenges

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19 Prasenjit Duara, _Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China_ (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 3.
the nationalist narrative that had dominated European and Eurocentric historiography. By “national indifference,” she means the situation that some people hold an ambivalent attitude toward the nation-state, they do not necessarily have a clear national consciousness or a strong desire to belong to a specific national community. The most outstanding example of peoples with “national indifference” were probably inhabitants of the hills of Zombia, the largest remaining area of Southeast Asia that has not been integrated into any nation-state. Through his well-known study of Zombia, James Scott argues that those “raw people” living in the highlands consciously choose to live outside the reach of the state. Given the possibility of being subject to states’ predatory behaviors—including conscription, slavery, taxes, forced labor, and war—people chose on their own initiative to stay away from state institutions. In an edited volume Empire at the Margins, authors focus on the issue of ethnicity and frontier during Ming–Qing transition. In historical moments when the cultural identities of imperial “centers” appeared contingent, where was the “periphery”? How should one position the ethnic others in physical and discursive landscapes? They argue that we should consider “center” and “periphery” as mutually constituted processes. David Brophy investigates the formation of Uyghur national identity during the Qing dynasty. He states that the loosely controlled Xinjiang–Soviet Central Asian borders did not prevent “Xinjiang Uyghurs” and “Soviet Uyghurs” from forming a sense of community as the “Uyghur Nation.” On

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24 Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).
the contrary, Xinjiang was a frontier that various Muslim peoples crossed without cutting their ties to the other side. Recovering the story of these transnational people, Brophy’s work complicates the familiar narrative of single nation-state.²⁵

In the field of Chinese frontier studies, it is a popular argument that Chinese regimes occupied border regions often not so much for the material value of the border land itself, but driven by strategic and political concerns.²⁶ Allen S. Whiting’s classic study of Xinjiang, *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot?*, reveals how great powers, such as the Soviet Union, United Kingdom, United States, and China, used and controlled Xinjiang for their own geopolitical interests. As the most balanced narrative of Sheng Shicai’s rule in Xinjiang, Whiting’s work not only furthered our understanding of the vital role the Soviets had played during the period of Sheng Shicai, but also demonstrated the difficulties the CCP had to face in Xinjiang after its takeover in 1949: the non-Han population as the predominant majority, rampant anti-Han sentiment, and a Soviet-dominated economy.²⁷

In a collection of papers examining the transition from empire to nation in the world, Joseph Esherick asks why leaders of Republican China abandoned their previous call to “expel the barbarians to restore China to the Chinese” in favor of a Greater China that intended to take over the land and peoples of the Qing empire. This sentiment of Greater China sentiment was a fervent nationalism designed to fight against imperialist

ambitions to tear Mongolia and Tibet away from China, especially the Russian and British. He gave two reasons why the Republic of China succeeded in keeping most of the Qing territory: First, the Chinese believed that the loss of frontier territories would threaten the Chinese core; second, the great powers trusted that a China with territorial integrity would best be able to pay off the debts and fulfill treaty obligations of the Qing dynasty.\(^\text{28}\)

Examining the strategies of political intervention and narratives of cultural innovation adopted by Han male elites, James Leibold highlights how the umbrella-like phrase *Zhonghua minzu* (中華民族) was used by both the Nationalist Party and the CCP to construct a uniform community called China from the poly-ethnic fragments of the Qing empire.\(^\text{29}\) Hsiao-ting Lin’s study shows that the Nationalist Party’s expansion into Xinjiang and other frontier regions was not only motivated by nationalism but was linked to specific pragmatic concerns regarding regime consolidation and security, an accidental result of the Second World War.\(^\text{30}\) Xiaoyuan Liu further reveals that when Sun Yat-sen and his followers changed their ethnic policy from “expelling the barbarians to restore China to the Chinese” to “five races under one union,” their intent was to unify not “five races” but “the lands of the five races.” In other words, the Nationalists’ main concern


\(^{29}\) Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*. This study has benefited from Leibold, who successfully combined the secondary literature on the modern Chinese frontier and ethnicity.

was keeping Qing territory as Chinese territory, and only for this purpose was the non-Han population not expelled.\(^{31}\)

Justin M. Jacobs’ new book shows, to maintain Han rule in the Muslim borderland, Xinjiang was in effect ruled in the form of an inclusive empire during the Republican era, though under the name of an exclusive nation-state. In this regard, he suggested calling Republican China a “national empire.” Jacobs’s work indicates that the Han ruling class proved adept at countering threats to its rule both from within and from without, which guaranteed the preservation of Chinese sovereignty in a non-Han borderland until a strong central government (the PRC) was able to reassert control along the frontier. The continual Han rule during the Republican era explains why Xinjiang was integrated with China proper peacefully in 1949 while Tibet and Outer Mongol were not.\(^{32}\)

**Literature Review: Xinjiang Studies**

A classic work on the Three Districts, later Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, is George Moseley’s *A Sino-Soviet Cultural Frontier: The Ili Kazakh Autonomous Chou*. The Three Districts in Xinjiang had been long subjected to Russian influence. Neighboring the Soviet Union’s Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, the Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture was especially open to Soviet influence. Its non-Han peoples,


who composed almost 95% of the whole population, had natural ties with Soviet national minorities in culture, religion, and ethnicity. When the CCP took Xinjiang in 1949, China’s influence had been almost completely supplanted by that of the Soviet Union. Moseley analyzes a dilemma the CCP had to face: if it faithfully pursued the “proletarian internationalism,” which was the announced goal of its national minority policy, it could not justifiably restrict the influence of the Soviet Union, China’s fraternal socialist country. On the other hand, if it permitted Soviet influence to remain and even to grow, Beijing’s authority in Yili would never be secure. Since the principal purpose of the national minority policy developed by the CCP, though cast in the dialectical language of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, was to eliminate foreign influence from China’s frontier regions, “Sinification” and “socialist transformation” became the substance of the CCP’s national minority policy. The policy inevitably led to conflicts between the Han government and the ethnic people as well as the Sino-Soviet rupture.33

Though Moseley’s work is among the best scholarship on the history of Yili during the PRC era, it is not without problems. In the 1960s when Moseley did this research, it was nearly impossible for foreigners to gain access to primary materials in China. As Moseley has confessed, his research was wholly based on official publications of the Chinese government, such as People’s Daily. Also not available was Soviet source materials. Even with the author’s strong ability to read between the lines, the scarcity of primary sources made the author’s analyses on Sino-Soviet relations and the CCP’s minority policy in Xinjiang too simple to be true. For example, Moseley overemphasizes

the contention between the socialist states. He failed to demonstrate that Sino-Soviet relations had ups and downs over time, which made the story in Xinjiang much more complicated than Moseley had portrayed.\(^{34}\)

June Dreyer’s well-accepted work, *China’s Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People’s Republic of China*, asks the question of why Beijing paid so much attention to China’s minorities, which constitute only 6% of its total population. She argues that the reasons are multiple, and among them, the first and perhaps foremost reason is strategic. Most minority groups live on China’s frontier. In many cases the borders as presently demarcated divide a minority community between two or more states. For instance, ethnic Kazakhs live in Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, and ethnic Mongols live in Russia, China, and the Mongolian People’s Republic. If the minorities are antagonistic to the Chinese government, they could challenge border defenses, increase the dangers of foreign invasion, or cause a loss of territory for the PRC. On the contrary, a sincerely pro-China minority community not only strengthens border defenses but also provides potential for exerting influence on a neighboring state’s borders and for increasing the PRC’s territory. Thus, what the CCP persists to call “the minorities problem” has played a vital role in Chinese policymaking. In fact, it is an issue of integration: for reasons of defense, economic and social well-being, and national pride, the current government attaches considerable importance to gaining the allegiances of minority peoples and putting them under Chinese jurisdiction. Dreyer’s book examines the steps the CCP had taken since 1949 to achieve integration. The CCP’s policy toward

\(^{34}\) Moseley, *A Sino-Soviet Cultural Frontier*. 
minority groups was impacted greatly by the Soviet Union but adapted in many ways in order to better serve the purpose of the CCP. As a result, it differed not only from those of previous Chinese governments but also from that of the Soviet Union. Dreyer also claims that the ethnic policy the CCP adopted finally achieved great success in “solving” the nationalities problem. As an important study of CCP’s ethnic policies, Dreyer’s book was published in 1976 when foreign scholars had no access to archival documents in China. All source materials Dreyer used were propagandistic materials produced by the Beijing government. This book might be able to offer the reader a general picture of the policies the CCP had adopted to integrate ethnic people with their Han counterparts, however, it lacks detailed case studies to pin down the actualization of these policies at the local level and their effects. In Xinjiang’s case, whether the integration would be achieved by the Chinese depended more on how successfully to deal with the Soviets rather than the ethnic people. In this case, diplomatic policy was more essential than ethnic policy in the Xinjiang issue, which was completely ignored in Dreyer’s research.

Donald H. McMillen’s Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949–1977 shares the same problem. McMillen focuses on the evolution of Communist power and policy in Xinjiang from the founding of PRC to the 1970s. Because the region’s ethnic minorities, strategic location, and natural resources have had such a crucial impact on the larger issues of PRC China, efforts have been made to assess the party’s attempts to achieve the ultimate political, socioeconomic, and cultural integration of Xinjiang and its overwhelmingly Muslim population with the more “advanced” Han areas. Different

35 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions.
from Dreyer, who focuses on the ethnic policy at the top reaches of the CCP government, McMillen examines the party-building and cadre-recruitment policies at the local level in Xinjiang. Particular attention is given to describing and analyzing the emergence of a party-military-government hierarchy under Wang En’mao 王恩茂 (1913–2001) and his Han comrades from the First Field Army of the PLA. Based on CCP’s propaganda materials as well as newspapers and journals published by red guards, McMillen concluded that there were significant differences between the local and central powers.\textsuperscript{36} Archival documents used for my dissertation put this conclusion into question—In fact, Wang En’mao faithfully implemented the policies and orders from Beijing; he also concealed the real reason for the severe death toll in Xinjiang in 1960, caused not by the inefficiency of transportation but by a shortage of grain.

A fine book on Republican Xinjiang is \textit{Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang, 1911–1949} by Andrew D. W. Forbes, a student of Owen Lattimore. Forbes relied on archival materials from the British consulate at Kashgar, supplemented by English-language travelogues and memoirs of Western travelers and diplomats who visited Xinjiang. However, he failed to use either Chinese or Russian sources. By revealing the process of the deepening of Soviet involvement in Xinjiang affairs over time during the Republican era, Forbes’s study

furthered our understanding of the omnipresence of the Soviets in Xinjiang, which was what the CCP had to face after the takeover in 1949.37

Linda Benson, another student of Lattimore’s, published two books on ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang. Her 1990 monograph, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944–1949*, examines the origins of the second East Turkistan Movement in 1944. Different from most scholars, who attribute the Muslim uprising to Soviet mobilization,38 Benson argues that the Muslim rebellion, though not without heavy Soviet involvement, was part of the anticolonization movement that was pervasive at the end of the Second World War. In Benson’s eyes, the rebellion was more an autonomous political appeal for national independence within the Muslim community than a mere foreign intervention in the local affairs of Xinjiang.39

Benson’s second book, the co-authored monograph *China’s last Nomads: The History and Culture of China’s Kazaks*, examines the experience of Kazaks as a minority population in China, focusing on the twentieth century and examining the Kazak experience in the multiethnic region of Xinjiang. This work, as claimed by Benson, is intended to provide an account of the history and circumstances of the Kazaks in China in the twentieth century, a period that saw them separated from Kazaks in the Soviet Union, introduced to Communism, and, most recently, allowed to return to the family-owned

flocks and herds that constituted the local Kazak economy prior to 1949. As demonstrated in the chapters that follow, the days when Kazaks of the northwest pursued the independent lifestyle of their ancestors are gone. The future will be shaped by increasing interactions with the growing number of Han Chinese residents of China’s great northwest, and by Chinese policies that determine patterns of land and water use as well as market exchange. In addition to utilizing many of the same sources as Forbes’s work, Benson’s books also rely on US government records and sources in Chinese, Turkish, and Russian. Unfortunately, owing to the parameters of scholarly access at the time, these latter sources are mostly public-source newspaper accounts and exile narratives written abroad. No archival documents in either Chinese or Russian were consulted for either book. Though Benson’s books are flawed by their sources, they furthered our understanding of the anti-Han mentality that was pervasive among the Muslims in Xinjiang.

An important study on Xinjiang in PRC China is Wu Zhe’s 2006 dissertation at National Taiwan University, “Xinjiang: National Identity, International Competition and Chinese Revolution, 1944–1962.” Relying on archival documents from Xinjiang, this 828-page dissertation reveals how the CCP managed to integrate Xinjiang, turning this vast Muslim region from “a country within a country” into “a province among provinces” by military power, ethnic policy, political campaigns, and economic control. Most of

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41 Wu Zhe, “Xinjiang: Minzu rentong, guoji jingzheng yu zhongguo geming, 1944–1962.”
42 Wu Zhe, “Xinjiang: Minzu rentong, guoji jingzheng yu zhongguo geming, 1944–1962.”
the archival documents the dissertation engaged had never been used before. However, Wu focuses mainly on Urumqi rather than the Three Districts.

**Primary Sources**

While the secondary literature on the integration of Xinjiang with China proper has inspired me in several ways, these sources all suffered from the scarcity of Chinese-language sources. Since anything related to ethnicity and China’s frontiers is considered to be sensitive politically, related research is difficult to get approved by the censors, and the archives are classified. The Russian archives also held essential information regarding the unfolding of modern Xinjiang history; however, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, they too were unavailable for study. Without access to the Chinese and Russian archives, authors of the secondary literature published before 1991 had to engage with propaganda materials published in either China or the Soviet Union and refugee memoirs in the West. Russian archival documents finally became accessible to scholars in 1991, but the availability of Chinese archives is still limited and in recent years even more so.

Fortunately, I was able to gain access to personal collections, including rich Xinjiang archival documents from both the Archives of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (AXUAR) and the Archives of the Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (AYKAP). These local archival documents revealed a detailed picture of how the local governments in Xinjiang interacted with Beijing and the Soviet consulates. What were the intentions of the CCP regarding Xinjiang in general and the former East Turkestan
Republic in particular? How did the ethnic community, especially the ethnic cadres, react to the Chinese policies? How much were the Soviets involved in local affairs?

Besides local archives, archives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (AMFA) in Beijing are important primary resources for this study. These materials include detailed information on the diplomatic negotiations between the Chinese government and its Soviet counterpart. In addition to archival documents, I extensively examined published administrative documents edited by local governments and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. These published documents and interviews, though carefully chosen to follow the government line, still serve well as historical sources. While Chinese archival documents form the bulk of my sources, Russian-language documents offered me a better understanding of the Xinjiang story from the Soviet perspective. The Russian documents and sources I have used are from *Russian-Chinese Relations in the 20th Century: Documents and Materials* and *Soviet-Chinese Relations, 1945–1980* edited by O. B. Borisov and B. T. Koloskov.44

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Dissertation Structure

Using the Chinese and Russian archives, in this dissertation I examine how, in the decades following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the CCP transferred the fragile suzerainty of the Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture from dependence on the Soviet Union to full Chinese sovereignty. The prefecture is located in the northwestern portion of Xinjiang, a region known as Dzungaria. It comprises the three frontier districts of Yili, Tacheng, and Altai, and is home to most of China’s ethnic Kazakhs. The remainder of the ethnic Kazakhs reside across the frontier in Kazakhstan and in the Mongolian People’s Republic.

On the eve of the CCP takeover in late 1949, being all but isolated from China proper geographically and facing the historical inadequacy of transportation and communication, this region was more appendage to the Soviet Union than the Chinese state. Following the Russian penetration into Central Asia, the Three Districts had long been subject to Russian influence, both imperial and Soviet. The decades following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 were marked by a growing Soviet influence in Xinjiang’s affairs first economically and soon comprehensively. The Soviet influence was strongly strengthened under warlord Sheng Shicai, who granted the Soviets exclusive rights in exchange for their aid, which included troops, advisors, weapons, loans, and diplomatic recognition. Though the Soviet presence in Xinjiang was significantly weakened when Sheng broke off ties with the Soviet Union in 1942, the Soviets soon managed to stage a comeback through the Soviet-sponsored Yili Rebellion of 1944 and the establishment of the short-lived East Turkestan Republic (ETR) in the Three Districts. By the eve of the
communist takeover in 1949, the Three Districts were rapidly evolving as a de facto Soviet dependency.

Using Xinjiang as a bargaining chip against the CCP for maintaining Outer Mongolian as Soviet satellite state as well as eradicating the presence of any other Western powers in this vast region, the Soviets invited and facilitated the CCP’s occupation of Xinjiang in late 1949. For the sake of national security, however, the Soviets still maintained this vast region as a Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviet presence was more overwhelming in the Three Districts, the base of the former ETR. Through the Soviet consulates and the former ETR cadres who remained to serve the local government after 1949, the Soviets wielded dominant power over the CCP in this frontier region. While the Soviet presence worked more as a blessing than a curse for the Chinese government in the early years of the PRC, after the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1950s, the Chinese regarded it as an imminent threat that might cause the region to either declare independence or be annexed by the Soviet Union. In this study I examine how the CCP eradicated the Soviet influence over the Three Districts and thus integrated this region with China proper after the Sino-Soviet rupture in the late 1950s. While previous scholars have examined Xinjiang from the perspectives of ethnic policies or human rights, I argue that the relations between the Chinese communist state and its peripheries are better understood in the context of nation building than the conflicts between communist ideology and liberal ideology.

Chapter 1 introduces the actors of the story, the Soviets, the CCP, and the former ETR cadres. With different motivations, they adopted different approaches to the
Xinjiang issue. The Soviets, on the one hand, provided whatever aid necessary for the Chinese government to penetrate and survive in Xinjiang. On the other hand, they diligently maintained their power over local affairs in this region so that Soviet interests could be well guaranteed in the name of proletarian internationalism. The former ETR side remained loyal to the Soviets in order to gain the authentic ethnic autonomy in their homeland that had been promised by both the Soviets and the Chinese. After 1949, the CCP launched a series of campaigns to socialize and Sinicize the ethnic community and used the Han-dominated Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps to control Xinjiang. The initial goal of the CCP was not to eradicate the Soviet presence but to integrate this region with China proper and impose a Chinese identity on the indigenous people. In this chapter I describe how the three parties pursued their goals individually and the role the Soviets played in this triangle relations.

Chapter 2 focuses on the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations and how it contributed to the 1962 mass exodus and social unrest as well as how the Chinese government reacted to them. When Sino-Soviet relations started to deteriorate in late 1958, the Soviets were perceived by the CCP no longer as a “big brother” but as a “revisionist” who had been pursuing its territorial ambitions in Xinjiang. In the mass exodus more than seventy-six thousand indigenous people fled to the Soviet side of the border. More than a thousand ethnic people in Ining demonstrated their desire to migrate to the Soviet Union and their protest devolved into a riot. These incidents formed a turning point for the three frontier districts, because the perceived Soviet aggression made the Chinese government believe that it was urgent to turn their suzerainty into
complete sovereignty. In this chapter I analyze how the failure of domestic policies and the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations contributed to the flight and riot and how the CCP viewed them mainly as a Soviet conspiracy.

To eradicate the Soviet presence in the region, several overlapping measures were taken by the Chinese government. Viewing the Soviet General Consulate in Urumqi and the Consulate in Ining as the headquarters for the mass exodus and the Soviet national associations at all levels as the grassroots hands of the Soviet government, the Chinese government decided to force the consulates to withdraw and the associations to close. Chapter 3 reveals how the Chinese government forced the Soviet diplomatic institutions and all organizations to retreat.

For historical reasons, in the three frontier districts, a significant part of the indigenous population in Xinjiang, especially ethnic Kazaks, had close Soviet ties. Some had immigrated from the Soviet Union or held dual citizenship. The others acquired Soviet passports from the black market. Soviet and Chinese government policies in dealing with them changed over time. Before the “virgin lands” campaign launched in 1953, the Soviet policy was to dump Soviet nationals in China and for them to be naturalized. Since exploiting the previously uncultivated lands required manpower, the Soviets decided to recall their nationals to reclaim the wasteland. On the Chinese side, the policy transitioned from cooperation to restriction after encountering a labor shortage following the massive deportation in this sparsely populated region. When Sino-Soviet relations worsened, the Chinese decided to halt deportation and claim these people as ethnic Kazakh of China rather than Soviet citizens. Because of the mass exodus, the
Chinese government doubted the loyalty of those who had Soviet ties. For the security of the region, government policy thus changed to drive them out and hinder their reentry.

Chapter 4 focuses on how these two socialist states demarcated the transitional population who had a complicated background regarding nationality, especially after the flight. As this chapter reveals, the fluctuations in Sino-Soviet relations and national interests were the main factors that greatly contributed to the change in migration policy.

When the CCP occupied Xinjiang, the border defenses stationed in this region protected not against the Soviet Union but against China proper. The Xinjiang-Soviet border was “a frontier without boundary and a boundary without defense,” to quote the framework that the Chinese government used. When the Sino-Soviet alliance was at its peak, the Chinese side did not think it was necessary to have its own defense force. When the relations deteriorated, the Chinese side was planning to build its own border defense but was discouraged for fear of being criticized by the Soviets for violating Sino-Soviet friendship. Only after the mass exodus did the CCP determine to use the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps of the People’s Liberation Army to strengthen border defenses by building a farm belt along the Sino-Soviet border. Chapter 5 reveals the process of building the border defenses that isolated Xinjiang from Soviet Central Asia.

In conclusion, the endeavor secured the frontier from perceived Soviet aggression, and never was this region so integrated with China proper in its history. With the sealing of the Sino-Soviet border and the railway being extended to Urumqi in late 1962, the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture and even the whole of Xinjiang were reoriented from toward the West to the East and Urumqi also replaced Ili to be the center of Xinjiang.
However, the Three Districts, the socially and economically dynamic zones of transition, where different peoples and states met and interacted and which were defined by the transitional nature of those interactions, turned into an isolated battlefield dominated by the ethnic Han Chinese. While the state-building campaign the CCP launched is regarded as a limited success, the nation building in Xinjiang remains an ongoing project.
CHAPTER 1
SOVIET SHADOW

Night is long. And slowly comes the crimson sun-moon dawn.
Demons and monsters danced about and whirled for hundreds of years
and five hundred millions were not a family.

Yet in one song the cock whitens the world.
Song pours on us from ten thousand corners
And musicians from Yutian play.
Never before were we poets so moved.

—— Mao Zedong, “Poem for Liu Yazi,” October 1950

Setting of Xinjiang and Soviet Presence

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, historically known as the “East
Turkistan,” is the largest administrative division of the PRC China, with an area of
640,000 square miles, or one-sixth of China’s territory. Located along China’s western
frontier, Xinjiang is bounded by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in the
west; Mongolia in the northeast; Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Tibet in the south; and
Qinghai and Gansu provinces in the east. Xinjiang consists of three major sub-regions:
the Dzungarian Basin in the north, the Tianshan Mountains in the center, and the Tarim
Basin in the south. While the center of Xinjiang is taken up by the barren deserts, its
major population centers are located at the edges of the region, making Xinjiang a “land
of borderlands.”46 On the northwest side, a series of strategic passes and low-lying gaps
through the mountains on the western frontier of Xinjiang, including those near the Yili

45 Mao Zedong, The Poems of Mao Zedong, translations, introduction, and notes by Willis Barnstone
(Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008 [originally published by New
River valley, and the Dzungarian Gates, offered relatively easy access from Central Asia and contribute to the region’s geographical orientation toward the west.

Because of its greater distance from the national capital than from the Central Asia, historically, the integration of Xinjiang with China has been difficult to achieve. As a result, the indigenous non-Han inhabitants and the local Chinese administration centered in Urumqi have often been virtually independent from the central authorities in China proper and have been subject to a great deal of Russian influence in the modern period.47

Russia not only exerted substantial influence on the area through embassies inside Xinjiang, but also fostered cross-border ties by supporting trade and interaction between Xinjiang’s Muslims and their respective Muslim subjects in the bordering areas of Russian Central Asia. Russian/Soviet influence reached a peak at that time through the close relationship between the Soviet Union and Xinjiang’s warlord leader Sheng Shicai 盛世才 (1897–1970), who became a full-fledged member of the Soviet Communist Party, and Xinjiang under his rule became “a virtual dependency of the Soviet Union.”48 While Sheng made a break with the Soviet Union in 1942, Soviet influence remained extensive in the region during 1940s through the Soviet-sponsored Yili rebellion of 1944 and the establishment of the East Turkistan Republic (ETR) in Xinjiang’s Three Districts, Yili, Tacheng, and Altay.49

As Jamil Hasanli’s work reveals, the goal of Moscow’s policy from 1931 to 1949 regarding Xinjiang was to make sure that this vast borderland was always under the Soviet control, and Stalin himself was the chief architect of this policy. In maintaining a tight grip on this region, Stalin was not going to help the Muslims gain the independence they dreamed of. This approach was clearly revealed by Anastas Mikoyan, then vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers, when he met CCP leaders during his secret mission to China right before the Communist victory in 1949. He informed Mao Zedong and his comrades that “we [the Soviets] do not intend to make the independence of the ethnic community happen, and neither do we cast greedy eyes on Xinjiang. We believe that Xinjiang is and should be a part of China.” The main reason for the Soviets maintaining Xinjiang as a Chinese territory rather than creating an independent state as they had done with the Outer Mongolia was that Stalin feared that once a Muslim state was established in Xinjiang, the Muslims of Soviet Central Asia would pursue independence as well. Furthermore, an independent Muslim state would be hard to control, given that the independence-seeking Yili clique led by Elihan Tore had already caused a great deal of trouble for Moscow. Only after the Soviet KGB abducted Tore to the USSR on June 12, 1946, and put him under house arrest after the signing of the peace agreements with the

KMT did Stalin bring the ETR under his control once more. To avoid this occurring again, Stalin envisioned using Xinjiang, especially the Three Districts, to serve first as a buffer zone for the safety of the regime and then as a market for Soviet goods and a supplier of raw materials for Soviet industry. In 1930s, the Soviets achieved this goal by supporting Sheng Shicai, who maintained a pro-Soviet approach as his main policy for a decade. After Sheng betrayed Stalin and turned to Chiang Kai-Shek, the Soviets achieved the same goal by mobilizing the Muslims in Yining to rebel against the Chinese government, thereby using the Muslims to serve Soviet purposes.

On August 14, 1945, using the Xinjiang issue as a bargaining chip, the Soviets successfully forced the government of the Republic of China led by Chiang Kai-shek to sign the “Sino-Soviet Friendship and Alliance Treaty.” According to this treaty, the USSR would maintain control over Outer Mongolia and also regain the interests the Russians had seized in Manchuria but lost to the Japanese during either the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 or the Mukden Incident of 1931. In return, the Soviets promised not to support the military actions of either the CCP or the Muslim movement. However, when the American army landed in North China in September 1945 right after the Japanese surrendered, in order to prevent the Americans from entering Manchuria, a Soviet sphere of influence at that time, the Soviets decided to break the treaty and support the CCP. For the same reason, in Xinjiang, the Soviets were wary of penetration by Americans invited and even intentionally manipulated by Chiang.

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Regarding Xinjiang as a backyard where no other major powers should be present, the Soviets decided to support the Muslims and use them once more as a bargaining chip against the KMT,\(^{54}\) while at the same time keeping it a secret even from the CCP.\(^ {55}\)

Supported by the Soviets, the ETR leaders maintained the Three Districts as a de facto independent state even after the Nationalist government made a major political concession to them by signing a peace treaty in 1946.\(^{56}\)

As the CCP’s victory loomed, Stalin considered cooperation with the Chinese communists to prevent possible American penetration of Xinjiang. After all, the USSR would benefit more from a Xinjiang ruled by the CCP than from one ruled by the KMT and American government.\(^ {57}\) What worried Stalin regarding this decision was that Mao might become another Josip Tito, who had insisted on Yugoslavia having more latitude to pursue its own interests rather than Soviet interests, and who in 1948 even publicly broke with Stalin. To sound out the CCP’s policy toward the USSR and the frontiers, Stalin in late January 1949 sent Mikoyan on a secret mission to China to an initial top-level meeting in Xibaipo, the seat of the CCP leadership in Yan’an.\(^ {58}\) Mikoyan reported that Mao repeatedly referred to himself as a disciple of Stalin and said that he would adopt a pro-Soviet diplomatic policy. Furthermore, Mao expressed strong support for Stalin’s


\(^{55}\) When Mao Zedong asked Anastas Mikoyan whether the ETR was supported by the Soviet government, Mikoyan claimed that he had no idea of whether there were any Soviet communists there. According to Mikoyan, the cause of the rebellion was that the KMT did not grant the greater autonomy the Muslims demanded. See “1949 g., febralya 4: Zapic A. I. Mikoyana s Mao Tsze-dunom o sovetskoy pomoshchi Kitayu, drugim sovetsko-kitaiskogo sotrudnichestva,” Russko-Kitaiskie otnoshenie v XX veke, Vol. 5 (2), 1946–February 1950, p. 67.


\(^{57}\) Deng Liqun, “Xinjiang heping jiefang qianhou,” p. 147.

criticism of Tito’s so-called “nationalist line,” which meant he would put the interests of the USSR over Chinese interests. However, Stalin was also informed that Mao had taken the initiative to discuss the Xinjiang issue with Mikoyan and had been suspicious that the Soviets were supporting the Yili rebellion in order to separate Xinjiang from China. What worried Stalin most was that the frontier policy Mao adopted regarding Outer Mongolia was more nationalist than that of the KMT. While Chiang Kai-shek ultimately acknowledged the independence of the Outer Mongolia, Mao envisioned reclaiming Chinese sovereignty over Outer Mongolia after the founding of the communist China. In order to maintain Outer Mongolia as a Soviet buffer zone, Stalin once again decided to use Xinjiang as a bargaining chip, even if it meant sacrificing the interests of Muslims. Stalin’s determination to play the Xinjiang card may have also been strengthened by his belief that by facilitating the CCP, the USSR might further legitimate its presence in Xinjiang and even control this region more tightly.

When meeting a Chinese delegation led by Liu Shaoqi in Moscow to reach a consensus on the next steps and conclude concrete agreements on Soviet aid in June 1949, Stalin suggested and even ordered the CCP to penetrate Xinjiang in 1949, even though his Chinese comrades were still engaged in the Civil War in China proper and planned to occupy this remote vast borderland no earlier than 1951. Stalin informed the Chinese

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delegation that the delay of occupying Xinjiang would trigger a possible intervention of the British government in the Xinjiang affairs. Once the British intervened, the Muslims and even Indian Muslims would be mobilized to carry on the civil war against the CCP. As soon as this occurred, it would not only challenge the security of the Soviet Central Asia, but made the conflicts in Xinjiang an international issue that might legitimize possible international intervention rather than merely a domestic one. Therefore, Stalin claimed that “this should be prevented from happening.” It seems that one of the reasons that hindered the CCP to penetrate Xinjiang was the army of Ma Bufang, a prominent Muslim Ma clique warlord ruling the provinces of Qinghai and Gansu. To encourage the CCP, Stalin informed the delegation that Ma’s army was mainly cavalry and would easily be smashed by cannon. If the Chinese were willing, Stalin promised that the Soviets would provide the Chinese with 40 fighter planes which would smash Ma’s army promptly. Being informed that Mao was very interested in knowing the oil reserves Xinjiang had, Stalin also reminded the Chinese delegation that Xinjiang was rich in both oil and cotton, which were exactly the materials the CCP desperately needed.

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When Mao decided to follow the orders from Moscow, Stalin kept his promise and went all out to aid the Chinese comrades. Since the CCP was not well equipped to penetrate the vast region, Stalin offered them vehicles and airplanes that could ship enough PLA soldiers right away. Another obstacle the CCP was facing was the lack of any cadres in Xinjiang to rely on. All the CCP organizations there had been uprooted by Sheng Shicai when he turned to Chiang Kai-shek in 1942. Due to the ethnic tension between Han and Muslims, the CCP did not have any connections with the Yining clique. Therefore, the Soviets helped the CCP not only to build up connections with the Muslims but forced the KMT army in Xinjiang to give up resistance and surrender to the CCP. Arranged by the Soviets, the CCP could successfully send its representative to the Three Districts to form a connection with the Yining clique. Through the consulate in Yili he could negotiate with the Muslim leaders regarding the details of how to cooperate after the founding of the new Chinese government. On September 25, the KMT army finally made a declaration to switch its allegiance to the CCP. Obviously, it was only

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65 Mao Zedong, “Jianqu zhengzhi fangshi jieju xibei diqu” (Using the political way to solve the problem of the northwestern area) (6 August 1949), in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed., Mao Zedong minzu gongzuo wenxuan (Selected works of Mao Zedong on ethnicity work) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2014), p. 15.


through the Soviets that the CCP managed to occupy Xinjiang by political methods rather than through a bloody military conflict.

After occupying Xinjiang, the CCP benefited significantly from the presence of its Soviet comrades. As the representative of the CCP in Xinjiang admitted, the authority the Soviet consulates and Soviet cadres had among the Muslims, especially the youth, offered the CCP great “convenience” in establishing its rule in this ethnic borderland. The biggest challenge the CCP encountered when governing Xinjiang was how to recover the economy of Xinjiang, especially the former KMT occupied seven districts which were impoverished due to the halt of Xinjiang-Soviet border trade. Without the border trade, neither the civilians nor the PLA soldiers could survive. Thus, resuming and even enlarging the Xinjiang-Soviet border trade would be the most effective way to relieve the poverty. The Soviet side responded to the economic request actively and in December 1949 the Xinjiang-Soviet trade was resumed. On February 14, 1950, under Mao’s pressure, a new Sino-Soviet treaty was signed in Moscow and the Sino-Soviet alliance was officially established. Because of this treaty, the USSR could not keep the Soviet-Chinese treaty of 1945 intact but gave up significant interests the USSR had

70 “Deng Liqun tan Xinjiang lingshiguan yu Suqiao wenti” 鄧力群談新疆領事館與蘇僑問題 [Deng Linqun’s comments on the Soviet consulate in Xinjiang and the issue of Soviet nationals], Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (AMFA), File No. 118-00294-001.
gained in China before 1949 and offered the CCP economic aid, something “not only look good but taste good,” to use Mao’s wording. With all-sided cooperation, the Sino-Soviet relations in Xinjiang, as confessed by the representative of the CCP in Xinjiang, were much more important than merely diplomatic relations.

However, the aid and cooperation Stalin offered the Chinese was far from free. Both the Soviets and the Chinese claimed that the close cooperation the two socialist states had constructed was based on “proletarian internationalism,” an idea based on the view that capitalism is a global system and therefore the working class must act as a global class in order to defeat it in class conflict. For Stalin, by proletarian internationalism, it not only meant that the Soviets should support the Chinese in the way a big brother helps a little one but the CCP should follow him and always put Soviet interests above Chinese interests. That was why Stalin was seriously offended by the new Soviet-Chinese treaty of 1950 which favored the Chinese at the expense of Soviet interests in China, though the PRC still admitted that the Outer Mongolia was an independent country. Ever since Mao Zedong’s rise to power during the Chinese communist revolution, Stalin had been regarding him as “the second Tito” because of his

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unorthodox “Marxist theory,” and this new treaty furthered this impression. As Mao later complained, only after the Chinese joined the Korean War, fighting for Kim II-sung as Stalin had ordered, did the Soviet leader change his attitude toward the Chinese government and finally decided to offer the Chinese massive Soviet aid sincerely.

In the case of Xinjiang, Stalin continued to use this borderland to serve the Soviet purpose through close cooperation with the CCP. First, through the Supplementary Agreement to the new Soviet-China treaty of 1950, Xinjiang was made an official Soviet sphere of interest. By requiring the Chinese not to allow any foreign powers except the USSR to present in Xinjiang, the Soviets could still dominate this region and at the same time eradicate any possible threats from foreign countries.

Second, all Soviet consulates were resumed, through which orders from Moscow could be put into practice. Before 1949, the USSR had already managed to have five consulates in this vast region. In the Three Districts, each district had a consulate and they were led by the one in Yining. Both in Urumqi and Kashgar there were consulates and the Kashgar consulate was led by the Urumqi one. The consulate in Yining and the one in Urumqi were equal bureaucratically and both were led by Moscow directly.

Through this network, the Soviet presence in Xinjiang was made official and omnipresent.


78 Ibid., p. 398.


After the political transition in 1949, these five consulates remained, actively intervening in local affairs. The Soviet intervention was taken advantage of by the CCP right after 1949 to make its penetration in this region easier. However, as the following chapters will reveal, when the rupture of the Sino-Soviet relations occurred, the Soviet presence was no longer regarded as a blessing but a curse that should be eradicated promptly.

Third, through maintaining the loyalty of the ethnic cadres the Three Districts had for the USSR, the Soviets managed to use the Northwest Xinjiang as a buffer zone. After the Yili rebellion in 1944, the people in the Three Districts were encouraged by the Soviet consulates to gain Soviet nationality. This caused a significant number of local people to become either Soviet nationals or dual citizenship holders. Therefore, most local cadres identified themselves as Soviet nationals and devoted their political allegiance to Moscow. Since the CCP occupied Xinjiang mainly through political methods, the so-call “peaceful liberation,” the bureaucratic composition of the Three Districts was left intact. The political allegiance the cadres there had, was not toward the Chinese, but still toward the Soviets.

To better control Xinjiang through the cadres of the Yining clique, the Soviets even suggested that their Chinese comrades move the capital of Xinjiang from Urumqi, a city in the center of Xinjiang, to Yining, a city adjacent to the Soviet-Xinjiang border. Some ethnic cadres, being advocates of this plan, also exerted serious pressure on the Chinese side. The nominal reasons the Soviets provided were both political and

economic. As the place of origin of the Yili rebellion and where most “democratic cadres,” a term refers to the Soviet trained Muslim cadres, were located, Yining was more qualified to serve as the capital of Socialist Xinjiang. The economic reason was even more convincing. Serving as the passage of the Soviet-Xinjiang commerce, Yining was the economic engine of the border trade. But the CCP was reluctant to follow this suggestion, knowing that making Yining the capital would encourage the autonomy of Xinjiang.

How to deal with the issue of dual citizenship and the political loyalty of the ethnic cadres was what both the Chinese government and its Soviet counterpart had to work on. As Chapter Three will demonstrate, this issue had been dealt with differently over time and finally it further worsened the already troublesome Sino-Soviet relations.

Fourth, the USSR used trade as a way to serve the Soviet interests. The Soviet interests in the natural resources of Xinjiang had become obvious during the year of Sheng Shicai’s rule in the region, when the latter authorized the Soviets to exploit various natural resources in exchange for loans and military assistance from the USSR. This could be proved when Mikoyan informed Mao that the Soviets had exploited and refined a large amount of oil but failed to ship it to the USSR due to a lack of transportation in Xinjiang. After the Second World War, Soviet need for Xinjiang’s raw materials, such as wool, cotton, leather, and meat, all items that Xinjiang had previously traded to the

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USSR, had grown. By trade, Xinjiang would serve as a source of raw materials for the USSR. Furthermore, Soviet-Xinjiang trade enabled the USSR to incorporate Xinjiang as a part of the Soviet economic empire. Ever since being ruled by the warlord Yang Zengxin, Xinjiang became a trade partner of the USSR and the border trade was an essential way for this region to survive economically after the halt of the financial subsidy from China proper on which Xinjiang once heavily depended. As pointed out by Wang Ke, the border trade further isolated Xinjiang from China proper and facilitated integration with the USSR. Though economic cooperation triggered the USSR to exert tremendous pressure on Xinjiang, it would be unfair not to point out that the Chinese government depended on the cooperation more heavily than its Soviet counterpart. After the Chinese occupation of Xinjiang in 1949, to satisfy the Chinese needs for border trade, the Soviets reopened border ports and recovered the trade with the seven districts that used to be ruled by the KMT. Besides border trade, the Soviet-Xinjiang economic cooperation which granted Xinjiang an opportunity to take advantage of the Soviet investments was also an important part of the Soviet aid. After Stalin finally decided to compromise with Mao to sign a new Soviet-Chinese treaty, besides the Chinese delegation led by Zhou Enlai, the premier of the PRC, a Xinjiang delegation was also

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87 Deng Liqun, Deng Liqun zishu, p. 213.
sent to Moscow. \(^{89}\) Right after the signing of the new Soviet-China treaty, in March 1950, three agreements regarding establishing joint Sino-Soviet ventures in Xinjiang on airplane, oils, nonferrous metal were signed. \(^{90}\) Being backward technically, what the Chinese side could offer was some labor force. As a result, these companies were dominated by the Soviet specialists. \(^{91}\) In April, to further develop economic relations, both countries decided to set counsellors of commerce or bureaus of representatives of commerce as an embassy faculty. \(^{92}\) Accordingly, in Xinjiang, bureaus of representatives of commerce were also set. When the Sino-Soviet split occurred, as this project will demonstrate, the economic cooperation, no matter which side had initiated it, would serve as solid evidence by the Chinese government as economic aggression the Soviets had in Xinjiang. \(^{93}\)

Since the USSR was the leader of the socialist camp in which Communist China was one of the followers, the relations between the USSR and China were not equal but more like superior and subordinate. Being dependent heavily on the Soviet aid, the Chinese leader had to be as docile as possible in the name of “strengthening mutual friendship and cooperation.” \(^{94}\) With the Soviet presence in Xinjiang, and a significant

\(^{89}\) Deng Liqun, *Deng Liqun zishu*, p. 211.
\(^{91}\) Deng Liqun, “Xinjiang heping jiefang qianhou,” p. 149.
\(^{94}\) “Xinjiang gongzuo sannianlai de zongjie ji jinhou yijian” [Summaries of three years working in Xinjiang and advice on work in the future] (August 1952), Archives of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (AYKAP), File No. 11-1-11.
number of the local population being loyal to Moscow, the CCP merely had fragile suzerainty rather than full sovereignty over the Three Districts. In other words, the Three Districts were more a Soviet frontier than a Chinese one.

**The Yining Clique**

While the Muslims had to accept that Xinjiang would become a part of Communist China in 1949, the main strategy they adopted was to keep as much autonomy as possible. However, the Muslims were pretty sure that the extent of autonomy they could enjoy under the Chinese rule depended mainly on how much support the Soviets would be willing to offer. Thus, even after the Chinese occupation, the Muslims in the Three Districts still tried to maintain this region “a special zone” as it used to be, a de facto Soviet satellite state. Contrary to the pro-Soviet attitude, the Muslims were very cautious with any penetration the CCP had toward the special zone.

The pro-Soviet attitude the Muslims had for gaining autonomy was to some extent an irony though they barely had any other choices. As mentioned earlier, the Soviets did not intend to make the independence of Xinjiang happen but merely used the Yili rebellion as a bargaining chip. When Mikoyan was sent to Xibaipo for a secret mission, he first claimed that the USSR acknowledged that Xinjiang was Chinese territory. Then he warned Mao and his comrades that the CCP should not let the ethnic people be independent. What the Chinese instead should do regarding Xinjiang, as Mikoyan ordered, was actually to “allow them to be self-governed but not be
independent.” What made the situation more ironic was that when the CCP planned to maintain the Muslim army but be adapted as the fifth army corps of the PLA, it was Stalin who suggested Zhou Enlai not to let the Muslims have their own army. Otherwise, they might have the possibility of declaring independence. It was the CCP, on the contrary, who declined Stalin’s suggestion and decided to let the Muslims keep their army at least nominally. Since the KMT army in Xinjiang would be maintained as a way to solve the power transition of Xinjiang, the CCP had no reason to disband the ethnic army who used to be strongly backed by the Soviets. Before 1949, though the independence of Xinjiang was not supported by the USSR, due to the tension between the KMT and the USSR, the Soviets still left the Muslims two choices: either be a part of the China or Join the USSR as a republic. After 1949, with the forming of the Sino-Soviet alliance, unification with Chinese proper was the only option the Muslims had to accept.

Though the Yining clique had to follow the Soviet line, they were reluctant to be governed by the Chinese. The domestic reasons for the Yining rebellion as being pointed out by Linda Benson are still eloquent in explaining the attitudes of Muslims after 1949. The antipathy among Muslims toward the Han Chinese caused by the Chinese policies adopt by the KMT government served as a collective trauma that hindered the Muslims from accepting the Chinese communist rule. Furthermore, the “Turki nationalism” the

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96 Deng Liqun, “Xinjiang heping jiefang qianhou,” p. 150.
97 According to the memoir of Zhang Zhizhong, when he was visiting the Three Districts after the singing of the Agreements between KMT and Yining Clique, the noticed that no matter which districts and counties he went, there were always radical faction and conservative one. They had serious conflicts due to their different approached toward which path Xinjiang should take. See Zhang Zhizhong, Zhang Zhizhong huiyilu, pp. 307–08.
indigenous people developed, no matter what the origins were, was fostered by the Han suppression and thus served as an ideology to be resisted.\(^9^8\)

Besides the anti-Han mentality and nationalist consciousness, the reasons that hindered the Yining clique from accepting the Chinese penetration were multiple. After the Yili rebellion, the Three Districts had already formed a quasi-Muslim Republic with all the elements a nation state should have: defended territory, bureaucracy, homogenous Muslim population, Islamic legal system, independent financial system, an economy based on border trade with the USSR, and a Soviet equipped army. For the leaders of the Yining clique, though different schools had different approaches, emulating the path Outer Mongolia had already taken was always considered the final goal.\(^9^9\) No doubt, to be unified with China proper for them meant a big loss: not only would it be impossible to gain national independence but what they had already gained would diminish soon. Furthermore, being trained and led by the Soviets directly and having founded their own socialist Republic as early as 1944, the Yining clique considered themselves as more revolutionary than the CCP. The sense of superiority made the Muslims feel reluctant to be led by the CCP and they refused to follow the campaigns the CCP had ordered to launch because the Three Districts were “already a liberated zone” and thus did not need

\(^{99}\) Not only the Muslims who were pro-Soviets had been seeking independence, but those who adopted a pro-KMT approach, also believed that Xinjiang was not a part of China and should be independent. For example, in 1957, Muhammad Amin Bughra, an exiled Turkic Muslim leader Chu Chia-hua, a high KMT official. Bughra listed at least four reasons why Xinjiang should be separated from China: first, Xinjiang is unique in geography, history, culture, and economy; second, Xinjiang was a colony conquered by the Han militarily; third, Xinjiang had rebellions against the despotic rule of Han; finally, the Han Chinese in Xinjiang are like overseas Chinese in Vietnam, South Asia, and America. See Wang Yujun 王聿均 and Sun Bin 孫斌 ed., \textit{Zhu Jiahua xiansheng yanlunji} [Collected works of Mr. Zhu Jiahua] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1977), p. 688.
to be socialized anymore.\textsuperscript{100} This attitude was regarded by the CCP as “arrogant mood of these self-claimed liberators,” and should seize whatever opportunities available to punish them harshly so that they would “docilely follow the party and listen to the party’s order.”\textsuperscript{101}

While independence was no longer a realistic goal, the Yining clique had been aggressively pursuing the authentic autonomy that had been promised by both the Soviets and Chinese. In the process of bargaining, what they had gained from the KMT would be the bottom line for the Muslims regarding the kind of autonomy they should be granted by the CCP. “The Peace Agreement” of January 2, 1946 signed between the Yining clique and the KMT was a big compromise for the KMT under serious pressure from the USSR, and as a result it offered the Three Districts a series of privileges for self-governing.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, though the KMT and the Yining clique had signed a supplementary agreement on how to adapt the Muslim army to be a part of the KMT army, but the Yining clique finally managed to maintain its own army and because of the military power, they gained de facto independence.

The Muslims hoped the same thing would happen when dealing with the CCP. In February 1951, the CCP published a draft of the framework for Regional National Autonomy and asked Yining for their feedback. To offer the CCP a response that might represent the will of the people in the Three Districts, on March 4, some Muslim elites held a conference, which later was called “colloquia of fifty-one intellectuals.” When

\textsuperscript{100} Wang Yongqing 王永慶, Lishi de huisheng: Ge’rxia huiyilu 歷史的回聲：格爾夏回憶錄 [Echoes of History: A Memoir of Ge’rxia] (Wujiaqu: Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan chbuanshe, 2012), p. 73.
\textsuperscript{101} Wang Yongqing, Lishi de huisheng, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{102} Benson, The Ili Rebellion, pp. 185–87; Zhang Zhizhong, Zhang Zhizhong huiyilu, pp. 273–75.
responding to the question, “the autonomy given to us should be in what kind,” the
Yining clique detailed their expectations to Beijing. The main points are as follows: 1)
Xinjiang should be established as Uyghurstan Republic; 2) The name of the Uyghurstan
Republic should be added on the national emblem of the PRC; 3) The PRC should be in
charge of military and diplomacy; 4) However, the PLA should retreat from Xinjiang and
the defense and the security of the Uyghurstan republic should be authorized by the
national army composed of local youth; 5) the rights of constructing direct connections
with the Soviet republics regarding education and culture should be granted; 6) An
observer of Uyghurstan Republic should be set under the full-fledged representative of
PRC to the United Nation; 7) Xinjiang (new territory) literately meant “a new land being
conquered” and thus should be changed to either “Tianshan mountains,” “Turkistan,” or
“Three Districts,” etc.\(^{103}\)

Obviously the expectations were based on the peace agreement of 1946, but much
higher than both the peace agreement and the autonomy the Kazakhstan Republic had
gained from the USSR. For example, the Yining clique still wanted to maintain their own
army, the privilege neither the KMT compromised to grant to the Muslims nor the
Soviets had granted to any of its republics. The Yining clique’s high expectation revealed
that they believed that as an ethnic community and liberators of this region, they were
entitled to enjoy more advantages than the Muslims on the Soviet territories were
enjoying. Two months later, however, the expectations the Muslim elites had raised were

\(^{103}\) Wang Yongqing, *Lishi de huisheng*, pp. 75–76; “Eryue ershiri Wangzhen yu Saifuding tongzhi jiaohuan
minzu quyu zizhi de tanhua jiyao” 二月二十日王震與賽福鼎同志交換民族區域自治的談話紀要 [Notes on the
Exchanges between Wang Zhen and Safudin on National Autonomous Zone](20 February 1951), Archives
of Xinjiang Uygar Autonomous Region (AXUAR), File No. 0-3-10.
criticized harshly as aiming to “separate the fatherland and seriously destroy the national unity.” The medals that were decorated with a star and crescent the military officers wore were seen by the CCP as an evidence of promoting “Pan-Turkism,” a movement to unify all Turkic-speaking people as a country.\(^{104}\) It was a serious accusation because in January 1950, the Xinjiang government had already claimed that “Pan-Turkism was supported by the British and American imperialists and their running dogs” and thus violated the nationalist policy and should be fought against.\(^ {105}\) Soon these “arrogant” “self-claimed liberators” would be labeled as promoters of “local nationalism,” a Chinese term for “Pan-Turkism,” and be punished harshly through a series of political campaigns.\(^ {106}\)

If the Muslim’s “separatist tendency,” to use the term of the CCP, was something that made the Chinese government worry, the maintaining of the leader-follower relations between the Soviet consulates and the ethnic cadres after 1949 was the evidence of this tendency. It was first and foremost a legacy of the Yili rebellion, which was mobilized, organized and led by the USSR. Being led directly by the Soviets before the Chinese occupation, the ethnic cadres still took the Soviet leadership in this region for granted. Moreover, since Moscow was the superior leader of the global socialist movement and even Mao himself declared that China would join the socialist camp headed by the

\(^{104}\) Wang Yongqing, *Lishi de huisheng*, pp. 76–79.


\(^{106}\) Wang Yongqing, *Lishi de huisheng*, p. 86.
the ethnic cadres had every reason to believe it was better to listen to the Soviets who usually had the final say.

Furthermore, many local people, especially ethnic cadres, were either Soviet nationals or dual citizenship holders and not willing to give up their Soviet citizenship. Local people, especially the ethnic cadres believed that “the Soviet Union is better than China and therefore being a Soviet is more revolutionary and glorious.” During the Yining rebellion, many local people gained Soviet nationality. As once briefed by the Soviet consul-general in Urumqi, there were more than 100,000 to 200,000 dual citizenship holders in the Three Districts. The number of the transitional population was so significant there, that neither the Soviet government nor the indigenous people would keep it as a secret. That was also why one of the expectations the Muslim elites raised was to maintain “the rights of constructing direct connections with the Soviet republics regarding education and culture.” In other words, people in the Three Districts still wanted to be a part of the Soviet Central Asia at least culturally.

Actually, after 1949, the Soviets were careful with this issue to avoid being criticized by both the CCP and any capitalist governments as using the local cadres to control Xinjiang. When the Xinjiang government asked the Soviets to recommend some Soviet nationals to serve as cadres who were desperately short of ethnic cadres, the USSR was cautious with it. Although they agreed to recommend some Soviet nationals in

108 “Xinjiang gongzuo sannian yilai de zongjie ji jinhou yijian” (August 1953), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-11.
110 “Eryue ershiri Wangzhen yu Saifuding tongzhi jiaohuan minzu quyu zizhi de tanhua jiyao” (20 February 1951), AXUAR, File No. 0-3-10.
Xinjiang to serve, the head of the Soviet Foreign Administration advised the Soviet consulate in Urumqi to ask the Xinjiang government to propose it to the Central government of the PRC in advance.\footnote{“Eluomike zhi Sulian zhu Xinjiang lingshi dian: Sulian gongmin zai Xinjiang zhengfu renzhi wenti” 萧洛米利致蘇聯駐新疆領事電：蘇聯公民在新疆政府任職問題 [A telegram from Andrei Gromyko to the Soviet consulate in Xinjiang: The issue of Soviet nationals working as officials of Xinjiang government], in Shen Zhihua 沈志華 ed., Eluosi jiemi dang’an xuanbian: Zhong Su guanxi 中蘇關係 [Selected declassified Russian archival documents on Sino-Soviet relations] (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2015), Vol. 2, p. 174.} In other words, the Soviet government was careful not to make Beijing think that using Soviet nationals to serve the Xinjiang government was a Soviet plan for controlling this region but an aid offered by the Soviet side, but initiated by the Xinjiang government. Furthermore, as a result of criticisms from the Capitalist states and some Chinese, that the USSR was colonizing Xinjiang through Soviet nationals who served as top officials of the local government, in October, Saifuddin Azizi, then the vice chairman of Xinjiang province, gained permission from both Stalin and Mao to quit his membership of Soviet Communist Party and join the CCP.\footnote{Mao Zedong, “Zai Saifuding rudang shenqingshu shang de piyu” 在賽福鼎入黨申請書上的批語 [Comments on Saifuding’s application letter to become a CCP member] (23 October 1949), in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室 ed., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian 1949–2010 內蒙古工作文件選編 1949–2010, p. 23.} Then, in February 1950, the Political Bureau of the Soviet Central Government abolished 16 Soviet nationals who were ranking officials in Xinjiang, including Saifuddin.\footnote{“Liangong(bu) zhongyang zhengzhiju jueyi: Quxiao yixie Xinjiang Sulian gongmin de guoji” 中共中央政治局決議：取消一些新疆蘇聯公民的國籍 [Decision from the Soviet Central Committee: Abolishing citizenship of some Soviet nationals in Xinjiang], in Shen Zhihua ed., Eluosi jiemi dang’an xuanbian, Vol. 2, pp. 328–29.} Though the Soviets tried to show their hands-off position, the local people, especially the ethnic cadres still regarded the Soviet government as their government and the USSR as their fatherland. Though nominally the ethnic cadres acknowledged the
Chinese government as the legal government of Xinjiang, they still followed the Soviet consulates and worked with them directly. In 1949, it was merely a Soviet decision for the Yining clique to cooperate with the CCP with whom the Muslims had no contacts but distrust. Thus, all the interactions between the two sides were made possible mainly through the Soviets.\footnote{“Zhongyang guanyu heping jiefang Xinjiang gei Deng Liqun de dianbao” 中央關於和平解放新疆給鄧力群的電報 [A telegram to Deng Liqun from the Central Committee on peaceful liberation of Xinjiang], in Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao, Vol. 1, pp. 372–74.} This situation has remained ever since.

The local ethnic cadres, when dealing with local affairs, still went to the Soviet consulates either for instruction in advance or briefed them afterwards.\footnote{“Deng Liqun tan Xinjiang lingshiguan yu Suqiao wenti,” AMFA, File No. 118-00294-001.} Even the Soviet consul-general in Urumqi confessed to the Chinese side multiple times that cadres there were willing to offer him secrets of the state.\footnote{Deng Liqun, “Xinjiang hepine jiefang qianhou,” p. 146.}

Beside the political allegiance and administrative relations, local officials developed economic cooperation directly with the USSR without realizing that now any interactions between Xinjiang and the USSR should be considered as diplomatic relations, and thus should be done through the diplomatic organizations of the Chinese government. For example, in 1950 a deputy head of the Communication Department of Xinjiang, without the permission from Beijing, went to Almaty and signed a contract with the Soviet government to establish postal and tele communication between Xinjiang and the USSR. The Xinjiang government, without asking for any instruction from Beijing in advance, permitted the deputy head’s trip to the USSR.\footnote{“Xinjiang gongzuo sannianlai de zongjie ji jinhou yijian” (August 1953), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-11.} When the Sino-Soviet alliance worked well, the “diplomatic mistakes” were viewed by Beijing as the “backwardness of
the ethnic cadres.” After the Sino-Soviet split, they were criticized by the CCP as not being able to “differentiate the inner (China) and the outer (the USSR).” In other words, it demonstrated that the status of the sovereignty the Chinese government had over Xinjiang had yet been accepted by the local ethnic people.

The role of the Soviets on the Yili side was more than a leader but a patron. The degree of political autonomy the Muslims could gain, depended heavily on this relationship. Furthermore, with so many Soviet nationals in Xinjiang, the Soviet presence was the only way for maintaining a sense of belonging to this region though now a part of China. Therefore, any retreat Soviets did in the region would cause insecurity in the local communities. For example, on October 12, 1954, China and the USSR signed a joint communique, claiming that the Soviet share of four Sino-Soviet joint ventures, two of them in Xinjiang, would be turned over to the Chinese government by 1955. For Beijing, it was a diplomatic victory over the USSR and a sign of a good form of the Sino-Soviet alliance. The Soviet nationals and ethnic people, however, viewed it pessimistically. For the ethnic people of Soviet nationality, the turnover shocked them. Some were confused why the Soviet share was turned over to the Chinese four years after the signing of the treaty since the treaty claimed that the period of validity of the joint

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ventures was for 30 years. They began to worry about what they should do when the Soviets returned home after the turnover. They were thinking of returning to the USSR as well. Those who only spoke Russian and ethnic languages were scared because they might lose their jobs as translators. “Life would become hard for people not speaking Chinese.” The indigenous ethnic people were no better. Some worried that without the Soviets serving as leaders and mediators, it would be hard for the ethnic people to survive in the companies dominated by Han Chinese. “The Han comrades are like the right eye, the Soviet comrades the nose and the ethnic comrades the left eye. If the nose were gone, the right eye would eat the left one up.” 120 This quotation indicates how much the ethnic population depended on the USSR politically, economically and psychologically. This not only made the integration of the Three Districts with the rest of Xinjiang and the China proper a difficult task for the CCP to fulfill, but can also explain why the Sino-Soviet rupture contributed greatly to the mass exodus of 1962 which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Dilemma of “Leaning to One Side”

The goal of the CCP regarding the Xinjiang issue was to incorporate this vast Muslim region into China, which involved at least two missions: one was “to eliminate

120 “Zhong Su huitan gongbao bongbuhou Dushanzi shiyouguang zhigong de fanying” 中蘇會談公報公布後 獨山子石油礦工的反映 [Responses of the workers at Dushanzi Oil Factory after the announcement of Communiqué of Sino-Soviet talks] (13 October 1954), Archives of Urumqi Autonomous Region (AUAR), File No. 0-6-59.
foreign influence from China’s frontier regions,” as noted by George Moseley,\textsuperscript{121} and the other was to prevent the Muslims from claiming independence. The first mission was about dealing with the foreign powers, including the USSR, and the other was how to interact with the Yining clique. Since the dependence of the Three Districts would only be possible with the Soviet support, the second mission was still how to deal with the USSR. Therefore, the Xinjiang issue for the CCP was mainly a diplomatic issue.

On June 30, 1949 Mao Zedong published the article, “On People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” and announced his “lean to one side” policy, which explained how to deal with the Sino-Soviet relations after the victory of the CCP.\textsuperscript{122} By this approach, the CCP decided to give up the “third road” approach which was represented by the opinion of General Zhang Zhizhong, a former close associate of Chiang Kai-shek and former governor of Xinjiang province but joined the CCP. He suggested that the new China, while uniting with the USSR, should seek accommodation with the United States and other western countries.\textsuperscript{123} Envisioning that the whole world was divided into capitalism and socialism, the CCP decided to side with the camp of socialism. The Chinese thus regarded their cause as a part of the Soviet-led international proletarian movement and were willing to follow the Soviet leadership in future. One of the main reasons for the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[122] In this article, Mao claimed that revolutionary China must be “united in a common struggle with those nations of the world that treat us as equal and unite with the peoples of all countries—that is, ally ourselves with the Soviet Union, with the People’s Democratic Countries, and with the proletariat and the broad masses of the people in all other countries, and form an international united front…We must lean to one side.” Mao Zedong, “Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng,” \textit{Mao Zedong xuanji}, Vol. 4, pp. 1472–73.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
CCP’s adoption of this approach, as pointed out by Chen Jian, was to gain enough support from allying itself with other socialist countries to protect the new born China from the possibility of military intervention from imperialist countries, especially the U.S.. In Mao’s own words, “we need friends,” so that “if the imperialists would attach us, we have already hired a helper.” In the case of Xinjiang, as this chapter showed earlier, the CCP’s willingness to be allying with the USSR was also why Stalin decided to invite the Chinese to penetrate this Muslim borderland.

For the Chinese side, the implementation of the pro-Soviet approach in Xinjiang was even more pragmatic: only by working closely with the Soviets could the CCP survive in this remote Muslim borderland. The authority the Soviets had among the local ethnic people, especially among the youth, as confessed by a high Chinese official in Xinjiang, “offered us (the CCP government in Xinjiang) great convenience in dealing with local affairs.” Since the CCP did not have any organization established in Xinjiang before the takeover, the Soviet consulates were the only power to rely on.

What was most urgent for the CCP after taking Xinjiang was how to feed the more than 240,000 people in the region who were soldiers of the PLA and the National Army, soldiers crossed over from the KMT Army in Xinjiang, and the administrative personnel. The local finance revenue was far from making the local government self-

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124 Besides security concerns, the other reasons for the pro-Soviet approach, as Chen Jian reveals, are ideological commitments and to maintain and enhance the inner dynamics of the Chinese Communist revolution at the time of its nationwide victory. See Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 50–51.
sufficient: only 30% of the expenditure could be covered by the local government while the rest 70% should be allocated by the central government, which itself already had many financial difficulties to cope with. Economically, Xinjiang had been relying heavily on the USSR ever since the suspension of the annual financial subsidy after fall of the Qing rule. Due to the halt of the Xinjiang-Russian trade in 1942 after Sheng Shicai changed tack from Stalin to Chiang Kai-shek, the financial situation was worsened significantly in the seven districts controlled by the KMT. After the Chinese takeover in late 1949, the financial condition further deteriorated with inflation skyrocketing more than 100 times. Therefore, the CCP was desperately seeking to restore the Soviet-Xinjiang trade to feed not only the indigenous population but the PLA soldiers. It was also in this context that Peng Dehuai, then the leader of the First Field Army of the PLA controlled Xinjiang militarily, asked the central government not only to restore the border trade but also to resume the agreement that had been already drafted by the Soviet government and KMT on establishing two joint-stock companies of metal and oil in Xinjiang. By taking advantage of the Soviet investment and technology, the Chinese government might exploit the resources and modernize Xinjiang.

As noted by Yang Kuisong, the Sino-Soviet alliance based on the “lean to one side” policy and the Chinese nationalists who advocated national independence had been

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conflicting ever since it had been issued in June 1949. After the Second World War, a wave of decolonization and nationalism as two sides of a coin was pervasive all over the world. The anti-Chinese sentiment and the dream of the Turkic state among the Muslims in Xinjiang was impacted heavily by this worldwide movement. So also, abolishing all the unequal treaties signed between Chinese governments and the Western powers and therefore forming diplomatic relations with foreign countries based on equality was a part of this movement. Among the unequal treaties, the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1945 was the most notorious. In a declaration made in connection with the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance signed by the KMT and the USSR, the Nationalist Government of the Republic of China accepted the independence of Mongolia. It granted the Soviets the privileges of using Lushun (Port Arthur) and Dalian as navy bases and partnership in the Chinese Eastern Railway for a 30-year period. The expectation for eradicating any unequal treaties was further flamed by Mao’s emotional slogan, “the Chinese people have stood up!,” and the anti-Western presence policy put into operation by the CCP as soon as they took control of the areas of the Western population. As Liu Shaoqi reported to Stalin, the CCP refused to acknowledge the foreign diplomats in China as diplomats but

merely foreign aliens. The purpose for doing this, as Liu emphasized, was to make the Chinese feel China has stood up and the CCP did not fear the imperialists at all.\footnote{134 “Liu Shaoqi gei Liangongbu zhongyang he Sidalin de baogao” [A report from Liu Shaoqi to the Soviet Central Committee and Stalin] (4 July 1949), in Shen Zhuhua ed., E’guo jiemi dang’an: Xinjiang wenti, p. 331.}

While playing the card of nationalism contributed greatly to the CCP’s victory over the KMT,\footnote{135 Chalmers Johnson, Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962).} the “lean to one side” diplomatic approach adopted by the CCP after victory challenged the nationalist position the CCP had been promoting: how to maintain a nationalist independence but lean to USSR at the same time? The idea of “proletarian internationalism” both the USSR and the CCP had been promoting served as an evidence to justify that “the CCP has never attached enough importance to ‘country’ ideologically.” After 1949, the CCP had been demonizing Chiang Kai-shek by blaming him for “always following American government.” However, the nationalist card the CCP used was no longer effective. If Chiang was “a running dog of the American Imperialists” though he had never claimed to adopt a pro-America policy, someone argued, how about the CCP who claimed the “lean to one side” approach publicly and went all out to “learn from the USSR.”\footnote{136 Lao Sze-kwang 勞思光, “Yanlun zhi qizha” 言論之欺詭 [Fraud of Speech], Lao Sze-kwang, Lishi zhi chengfa xinbian 歷史之懲罰新編 [The punishment of history], rev. ed. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2000), pp. 176–77.} Domestically, this radical diplomatic policy diminished the CCP’s legitimacy as a nationalist party and made it as merely a Chinese agent of the USSR. Both the democratic parties and some students and workers, regarded the Soviet privileges in China as aggressions that should be abolished. As Liu Shaoqi informed Stalin, the issues these people were considering included the Soviet military presence in Port Arthur, the
Soviet backed independence of the Outer Mongolia and the machines left by the Japanese and the weapons left in Manchuria after their surrender but transferred to the USSR by the Soviets. With the influx of the Soviet specialists invited by the Chinese government and allocated to working units nationwide, some began to worry that the domestic economy would be totally controlled by the Soviets as a trophy. When the Soviet specialists began to dominate the schools and colleges and Russian became a language that most faculty were ordered to study, elites who believed that China should be independent culturally worried that under this cultural policy, not only the “demise of the regime” (wangguo 亡國) but the “demise of the human society” (wang tianxia 亡天下) would occur, using Ming loyalist Gu Yanwu’s quotation.  

138 Wu Mi 吳宓, a Harvard trained scholar, one of the founders of Chinese comparative literature, was very critical to the pro-Soviet attitude the Chinese government and his fellow Chinese scholars had. A diary of 2 May 1953 recorded his feelings after attending a party held by the Russian language department of Southwest Normal University to welcome a Soviet professor. He recalled that when he was a little boy, the Chinese admired Japanese teachers; When he was in Tsinghua University, people worshiped American teachers; However, the way people today admired Soviet teachers was much stronger than people worshiped the Japanese and American ones. At that time, there existed some criticisms against this phenomenon. However, at this point, “the whole country are the same and people no matter at high lever or low level are eager to flatter the Russian. No one dares to identify oneself is a Chinese.” Wu further worried that Chinese language has been impacted greatly by Russian. For example, traditionally the Chinese language did not have a phrase “jiaoxue 教學,” which literally means “teach and learn.” According to the Chinese tradition, “jiao 教” (teach) and “xue 學” (learn) cannot be combined to use, but this rule was changed when the Russian word “учить” (teach and learn) was adopted by Chinese language. Wu further identified several Chinese phrases directly borrowed from Russian, such as “weida 偉大” (great), “yingming 英明” (wise), “zhengqu 斗爭” (fight for), “zhijing 致敬” (salute), “mofan 模範” (model), and “shuiping 水平” (level). He then claimed that “according to this, today, not only the country(China) no longer exists, but the Chinese language has indeed perished.” See Wu Mi 吳宓, “Wu Mi riji xubian 吳宓日記續編 [Diary of Wu Mi, continued] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian chubanshe, 2006), Vol. 1, pp. 525–26. Chen Yinque 陳寅恪, one of the most eminent historians in modern China, also Wu Mi’s close friend, published a paper in 1951 titled “On the matter of Tang Gao Emperor submitted himself to the rule of the Turks.” When Tang Gao Emperor just rebelled in Taiyuan, being weak militarily, he had to acknowledged allegiance to Turks. Only 12 to 13 years later, he conquered the Turks and ruled them. The purpose for Chen to write this paper, many Chinese scholars believe, was to use the historical story to imply to the Sino-Soviet relations. Chen’s wishful thinking at that time was that the “lean to side” policy was very much like Tang Gaozu submitted himself to the Turks. It was expedient. See Chen Yinque 陳寅恪, “Lun Tang Gaozu chengcen Tujue shi” 論
The social mentality of nationalism sometimes was extreme. On December 16, 1949, when Mao Zedong arrived at the North train station in Moscow, he was welcomed by the No. 2 Soviet leader but not Stalin himself. This was viewed by some Chinese nationalists as a sign that the USSR had not treated the Chinese leader with respect and dignity. The surveillance report revealed that “many were surprised that Stalin had not been to the station to meet Mao in person.” Mao’s journey to Moscow was viewed as something similar to a vassal state to pay a tribute to the Suzerain state, and thus “violated the dignity of the country.”

The new Sino-Soviet treaty signed on February 14, 1950 was considered by the CCP as a big diplomatic victory and a big compromise by Stalin. The treaty dealt with a range of issues such as Soviet privileges in Xinjiang and Manchuria and one of its most important points was the provision of a $300 million loan from the USSR to the PRC. By this treaty, the Sino-Soviet alliance was formed legally. With the USSR serving as an ally, the CCP could safely “do constructive work domestically” and “fight jointly with the Soviets against possible imperialist

139 “Xia’ai minzuhuiyi sixiang de biaoxian” [Representation of narrow nationalist thoughts], Zhongguo xinwen zongshu ed., Neibu cankao 内部参考 [Internal reference], 1 January 1950; Yang Kuisong, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianguoshi yanjiu, Vol. 2, p. 84.
aggression.”140 In order not to give the democratic parties and other nationalists any excuse to consider the new treaty as “treason,” Mao himself had to carefully revise the editorial of the Xinhua News Agency and praised the signing of the treaty as a signal of “a new age of Sino-Soviet friendly cooperation.”141 At the same time, he ordered that when organizing mass conferences to celebrate the signing of the treaty, all the comments should follow the line of the editorial of the Xinhua News Agency. No “improper” opinions should be expressed.142 When the news that the signing of two Sino-Soviet joint-stock companies in Xinjiang was announced, some students in Beijing suspected that the agreements would violate the Chinese sovereignty. They questioned the government and asked for an explanation. Some even attacked the “Soviet aggression” and “the traitors of the government.” Some students decided to quit their Youth League membership and protest against the government.143 If the domestically the pro-Soviet approach was viewed as violation of Chinese sovereignty and even treason, internationally, the CCP was viewed as a puppet of the USSR. Mao Zedong, Liu shaoqi,

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Zhou Enlai and their comrades were marionettes controlled by Moscow through the Soviet specialists serving in China.144

Facing both domestic and international criticism, the CCP had to balance between “lean to one side” and “self-dependence.” As mentioned earlier, the adoption of the pro-Soviet diplomatic approach was for practical reasons, such as the security of the regime and financial aid. The Civil War experience had taught the CCP that surviving sometimes was more important than following orthodox Marxism and Leninism. A story told by Khrushchev which can also be proved by archival documents, serves as a good example by demonstrating how practical Mao was as a strategist. When the PLA was approaching Shanghai, Mao halted the march and refused to capture the city. When asked by Stalin why he did not take Shanghai, Mao answered that if the CCP took the city, they would have to feed all these people which would become a huge burden.145 Being a communist party leader but refusing to take the city where the biggest Chinese working class were located, Mao’s pragmatic way was labeled by Stalin as “margarine Marxist” and blamed by Khrushchev as not a Marxist: “always relied on the peasants and not on the working class.”146

146 Nikita Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, p. 462.
Mao dealt with the issue of Port of Arthur and Dalian in a similar pragmatic way. Mao himself told Mikoyan that a female Chinese woman serving as a law maker in the legislature of KMT once claimed that it would be a great achievement if the CCP could reclaim Port Arthur from the Russian. Mao commented that this woman did not really know politics.147 Mikoyan informed the Chinese that the Soviet government believed that the Sino-Soviet treaty regarding the Soviet privilege in Port of Arthur was an unfair treaty and therefore the USSR decided to abolish it. If the CCP believed that the Soviet army should retreat promptly, the Soviet government would do it accordingly. The reaction of Mao and his comrades was the same: At this point, the Soviets should not retreat from the Liaodong Peninsular and Port Arthur. Otherwise, this would offer the Americans an opportunity to take advantage of the military weakness. Mao further claimed that the CCP would never consider revising this treaty until with the Soviet aid and “we (Chinese government) finally can govern ourselves.”148 According to Mikoyan’s reports, Mao and his comrades knew very clearly that without the Soviet presence, the impending new communist regime would hardly survive. For the security of the regime, the CCP would rather risk being blamed as a Soviet puppet.

It would be unfair to blame the CCP for being “never attaching enough importance to ‘country’ ideologically.” Mao and his comrades had a strong “victim mentality,” a mind-set that sees China as a victim of imperialism while regarding the

Chinese as an ethnic group bullied and discriminated against by the Westerners.\textsuperscript{149} Therefore, Mao and his comrade were very sensitive to anything related to international relations. When Mikoyan visited Xibaipo in 1949, Mao was cooperative and even docile, as this chapter has already shown. However, Mao later complained to Yudin, the Soviet Ambassador to China then, that he was very dissatisfied with Mikoyan. “He (Mikoyan) is always arrogant just because he is senior. He regards us as inferior as sons. He is acting big. So arrogant. In 1949 when he first came to Xibaipo, he put on airs. Later, he has been to China several times and every time he was like that.”\textsuperscript{150} In the case of Xinjiang, Beijing had been promoting the Xinjiang-Soviet trade and even risked taking blame for betraying China for signing joint-stock company agreements and inviting Soviet specialists to the remote borderland. However, though “lean to one side” propaganda was pervasive, the way the CCP dealt with the Xinjiang-Soviet commerce agreements was nationalist. When being asked to advise on how to revise the commerce agreements drafted by the Soviets, the Xinjiang representatives were not willing to find any fault with the Soviet draft, regarding the USSR as a “country of the working class” as well as an “elder brother” of China. However, Zhou Enlai reminded them that “as Chinese Communist Party members, you not only should consider what is good for the USSR but should also consider what is good for us (Chinese government). The agreements were something between two countries. Not only both countries should respect each other but


be equal with each other.”  

In order words, during the negotiation, what Zhou meant was that the Chinese side should put national interests over the interests of the USSR.

To further claim the sovereignty over Xinjiang, at the end of 1950, the Xinjiang Foreign Affair Bureau was established. Since the only foreign power allowed to present was the USSR, the Bureau was merely targeted at the Soviet consulates. With the establishment of this organization, Beijing intended to inform both the Soviets and the local ethnic cadres that Xinjiang was not a “special zone” as it used to be and any interactions between the USSR and Xinjiang should been done through the diplomatic organization that were authorized by Beijing. From 1951 to 1952, branches of the Bureau had been set in South Xinjiang, Yili, Tacheng and Altay. With these organizations established, according to the local report of 1953, Beijing gradually transformed “direct,” “individual” interactions between local governments and the Soviet consulates, to a “normal foreign relations.” That means the Xinjiang-Soviet interactions were changed from administrative relations to diplomatic ones. In 1960, when the tensions between Beijing and Moscow tightened, any direct interactions between local cadres and the Soviet consulates, such as asking the Soviet consulates for a favor or leaking any domestic information to the Soviet would be criticized and even punished for “not being able to differentiate the domestic and the foreign.” Otherwise, it might do harm to the “normal” relations between Xinjiang and the Soviet consulates.  

151 Deng Liqun,  

Deng Liqun zishu, p. 213.  

152 “Xinjiang gongzuo sannianlai de zongjie ji jinhou yijian” (August 1953), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-11.  

153 The report revealed three events that violated the diplomatic disciplines: 1) On 22 August, a people’s commune mailed the General Consulate of the USSR in Urumqi, asking for borrowing a car; 2) A person working for an airline school end a letter with money to the General Consulate of USSR, asking someone there to buy a female watch from the USSR for him; The post office in Urumqi sent the General Consulate
Chinese government obviously meant that any interactions between Xinjiang cadres and the Soviet consulates not going through the diplomatic organizations, would be considered as violating the diplomatic relations between these two socialist states.

The nationalist emotions pervasive nationwide as the backlash of the “lean to one side” policy impacted the CCP’s policy towards the USSR heavily though the Party was reluctant to admit. Right after the founding of the PRC, Mao went to Moscow and determined to revise the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1945 so that he could gain something “not only beautiful but also tasty,”154 even if it meant offending Stalin who was afraid that any change of the treaty might challenge the world order that was maintained by the Yalta Treaty signed at the end of the World War Two.155 One of the purposes for signing the new Sino-Soviet treaty was to achieve a so-called “diplomatic victory” over the USSR,156 convincing the nationalists that “lean to one side” policy did not mean “the CCP was a Soviet running dog,”157 and always putting the Soviet interests over the Chinese ones.158

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156 Ibid., p. 52.
Even after the signing of the new treaty, the pressure for national independence from the democratic parties and the society had been challenging the political legitimacy of the CCP rule ever since the founding of the PRC. To mold peoples’ minds for supporting the pro-Soviet policy, the Sino-Soviet friendship associations of all levels were established with Liu Shaoqi as the chair.\textsuperscript{159} A series of campaigns to promote a friend like the USSR and a father like Stalin had been carried all over the nation. Many examples testify to the pervasiveness of the propaganda of the Sino-Soviet friendship even in the countryside. When Mao Zedong visited a small village near the Yellow River in October, 1952, an old woman with bound feet ran to see Chairman Mao. She was very happy to see Chairman Mao, and said to Mao, “Chairman Mao! You’ve come! Has Stalin come too?”\textsuperscript{160} To an illiterate old person living in a remote village, who did not even know the exact geographic location of the Soviet Union, the “friendship” between Chairman Mao and Stalin in propaganda posters impressed her so much that she thought Chairman Mao must always be accompanied by Stalin.

Besides the propaganda campaigns, the CCP was under pressure and eager to show its nationalist position when dealing with anything related to the USSR. For example, the industrial projects initiated by the Chinese side to hasten Xinjiang’s economic recovery and development, the Sino-Soviet Nonferrous and Rare Metals Joint-


Stock Company (中蘇有色及稀有金屬股份公司) and the Sino-Soviet Petroleum Joint-Stock Company (中蘇石油股份公司), were viewed by many as Soviet aggression made possible by the cooperation of the CCP. The agreements were signed on March 27, 1950 and the agreements would be effective over the next 30 years.\(^{161}\) However, the agreements gradually turned from a Chinese initiation for the joint exploitation of mineral resources in Xinjiang into “an insult to the Chinese people,” a treaty that Stalin forced his Chinese comrades to sign, as claimed by Mao and Khrushchev, both of them intending to use this case to demonize Stalin.\(^{162}\) Mao had been asking the Soviet government to turn over the companies to China after the death of Stalin in 1953. To gain the support from Mao, the new leader Khrushchev decided to do Mao a favor. It served, for the Chinese side, as a diplomatic victory which could be used for propaganda purpose. However, the turnover was too early for the Chinese side to be ready at least technically. Some in a factory worried that “after the turnover, the Soviets will not offer us machines and materials anymore. Neither can produce them by ourselves. What should we do?” Technicians claimed that “the agreement was supposed to let the Soviets and the Chinese


run the company cooperatively for 30 years. Therefore, our plans for being trained as technicians were designed on the basis of a 30-year term. However, only after four years the Soviet specialists would retreat. What should we do since we have not mastered the technology at all?"  

For the purpose of developing industry in Xinjiang, the Sino-Soviet cooperation should have lasted longer so that the Chinese side would be better prepared technically. However, too eager to relieve the pressure from the nationalists, the CCP believed that showing self-sufficiency of the Chinese government was more important than gaining aid from the Soviet side.

At the local level in Xinjiang, the Chinese officials sometimes loathed the Soviet consulates for being involved in local affairs too much by instructing ethnic cadres. A military commander, as a report reveals, was reluctant to contact the Soviet consulate in Yili and showed his dislikes directly. He was reported by the consul in Moscow for having “narrow nationalist attitude.” When the CCP needed the Soviets desperately for controlling the ethnic cadres and aid in Xinjiang, the attitudes among the Chinese cadres toward the Soviets were being criticized for being “narrow minded,” and “not realizing the Sino-Soviet relations were more than diplomatic ones.”

Due to the nationalist positions both the Chinese and the Soviets adopted, the “proletarian internationalism” would be more rhetoric than a lasting policy. The Soviet presence in Xinjing would soon be no longer a blessing but an eyesore that should be pulled out.

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163 “Zhong Su huitan gongbao bongbuhou Dushanzi shiyouguang zhigong de fanying” (13 October 1954), AUAR, File No. 0-6-59.
CHAPTER 2
MASS EXODUS

In the spring of 1962, a mass exodus took place in Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (YKAP), the Sino-Soviet borderland in northwestern Xinjiang. Between late March and the end of May, more than 67,000 border inhabitants, most of whom were ethnic Kazaks and Uighurs, successfully fled to the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR). In Yining, the capital of YKAP, the mass exodus triggered social unrest. On May 29, a crowd of 2,000 demonstrated in front of the Communist Party headquarters, asking for permission to migrate to the Soviet Union. The CCP government opened fire on the protesters: five demonstrators were killed and more than ten were seriously injured. In the parlance of the Chinese government, this became known as the Yi-Ta incident.

The Yi-Ta incident had a wide-ranging impact, leading directly to the extensive de-Sovietization campaign launched in Xinjiang by the CCP in the name of halting illegal

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166 “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Xinjiangzizhiqu da dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyang wenjian” 中共中央转发新疆自治区党委和外交部的三份重要文件 [Three important documents from the Party Committee and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, forwarded by the CCP Central Committee] (22 August to 4 September 1962), Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (AMFA), File No. 118-01100-01.
border crossing. As a consequence of the campaign, the loosely controlled Sino-Soviet border of Xinjiang, which had been a symbol of the friendship between China and the USSR, was abruptly sealed, and would not be re-opened until 1983. Mao Zedong also interpreted the Yi-Ta Incident as a conspiracy of “Soviet revisionism,” a term used to attack the Soviet regime under Nikita Khrushchev, and even called on his comrades to “be prepared for a war.” Xinjiang was thus transformed from a remote hinterland of China proper to a battlefront. This chapter first examines how the domestic policies, ethnic policy regarding Xinjiang and the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations contributed to the Yi-Ta incident. Then, this chapter also demonstrates CCP’s perceptions on what caused this incident and how the perceptions caused the campaign of Sinification in Xinjiang.

The Yi-Ta Incident

Xinjiang officials began receiving the first reports on people successfully fleeing to the USSR in late March of 1962. On April 9, a dozen ethnic Kazaks traveled across the Bakhtu border and entered the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR), along with all their cattle and belongings. This group originated from a commune in Tacheng County,

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169 “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Xinjiangzizhiqu dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyao wenjian,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-01.
17 kilometers away from the Bakhtu check point on the Sino-Soviet border. This was the beginning of a mass exodus that would have a serious impact on Xinjiang. Within less than a week, a large number of people from across the county had fled as well. According to official records, Tacheng County lost 28,984 residents by the end of May, or 88% of the total population of 33,000. Of the 50 production teams in Tacheng County (a production team being equivalent to a village), 48 were abandoned. The only two production teams that remained stable were overwhelmingly composed of Han Chinese. 26,610, or 90%, of the emigrants were ethnic Kazakhs. This mass exodus spread not only to nearby counties like Yumin, but also to Huocheng, a county between Yining and the border of Kazakhstan. Uighur slogans such as “Brothers, let’s run to the Soviet Union!” circulated among the local people. Thousands of lost animals were scattered near the border. In less than ten days, Tacheng and Huocheng counties lost more than 50,000 residents. At first, the flight often occurred at night, in secretive small groups. As the border crossing snowballed, in some places, whole villages were abandoned in an organized public exodus led by local minority cadres. At first, most participants in the exodus were peasants, herdsmen, and local cadres from rural and pasturing areas. Later, urban residents, students, state employees, and even minority officials at the county level

170 According to the memoir of a Chinese immigrant in Kazakhstan, the first Chinese border crossers accepted by the Soviet government in late March of 1962 were a couple. The woman was Han Chinese and the man was Uighur. As the author of the memoir indicates, Han and Uighur were not allowed to marry each other in Xinjiang at the time. The couple decided to emigrate to the USSR after their application for a marriage certificate was denied. By granting this couple entry, the Soviets sent a message inviting people in Xinjiang to cross the border. See Lei Guanghan 雷光漢, Sulian taowangji 蘇聯逃亡記 [Exile in the Soviet Union] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press), p. 65.
172 Lei Guanghan, Sulian taowangji, p. 66.
also began crossing the border. In Tacheng, more than 150 county-level cadres fled.\(^\text{173}\) The early emigrants were mainly Kazakhs, but the movement soon swelled to include Uighurs, Hui people, Kyrgyz people and even Han Chinese.\(^\text{174}\) Local governments sought in vain to halt the exodus through administrative measures and propaganda. In May of 1962, it was reported that more than ten counties were involved, despite their greater distance from the border. For example, some 14,000 residents of Emin County reached the border, but were forced to turn back when the Soviets began denying entry under serious pressure from the Chinese government.\(^\text{175}\)

The mass exodus ended on May 29, when a riot broke out in Yining City, the capital of YKAP. Large numbers of people had passed through Yining Bus Station in late May, to purchase bus tickets for Huocheng, as the distance from Yining was too great for a journey by foot. The ballooning demand for bus tickets left an agitated crowd stranded at the bus station, including some Soviet nationals, some of whom assembled before the offices of the Yili CCP Sub-Bureau on May 21, seeking permission to travel to the USSR. On the afternoon of May 29, a crowd of five hundred people of mixed ethnicity gathered to demand more bus tickets. The road between the bus station and the Yili CCP Sub-Bureau was filled with demonstrators and bystanders. When Kuerbanali Osman, the governor of the YKAP and an ethnic Kazakh, went to the bus station to negotiate with his

\(^{173}\) “Xinjiang zizhiqu dangwei guanyu Tacheng Yili diqu shaoshuminzu jixu yuejing taowang Sulian de qingkuang baogao” [Report by the Xinjiang Party Committee on the situation of minority ethnic groups in Yili and Tacheng continuing to flee to the Soviet Union] (24 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01100-11.

\(^{174}\) According to the observation of Lei Guanghan, Han people fled to the Soviet Union for various reasons, such as escaping from political pressure, seeking freedom of marriage, reunion with family members, or merely following their friends and neighbors.

\(^{175}\) “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanya Xinjiangzizhiqu dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyang wenjian,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-01.
fellow Kazakhs, he was instantly besieged by the crowd. Labeling the demonstration an anti-revolutionary rebellion and the demonstrators a violent mob, the local government ordered militiamen to disperse the crowd, with force if necessary. Militiamen from the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps were dispatched under the lead of the Yili party secretary, but their truck was intercepted by the demonstrators, who beat up the secretary and several militiamen, and seized one of their guns. The demonstrators then drove the truck to the Soviet consulate and turned in the gun to the consuls, in the hope that the Soviets could help them leave.

However, the Chinese government had applied heavy diplomatic pressure demanding that the Soviets return all refugees without proper immigration documents. In the face of such demands, the Soviets were compelled not only to reject new border crossers, but also to repatriate some of the migrants they had already accepted. Caught in this predicament, the Soviet consuls refused to offer any assistance to the demonstrators, instead instructing them to obtain permission from the local government before heading to the Soviet Union. Seeking to overcome the obstacles imposed by the Communist Party, a crowd of 2,000 gathered in front of the local prefectural government building, shouting slogans such as “Sell us bus tickets!” “Let us go to the Soviet Union!”

176 Zhang kexun, “Baowei Yilizhou renmin weiyuanhui: wo zai pingding 5.29 fangeming baoluan zhong de yiduan jingli” [Defending the People’s Committee of YKAP: My experience of suppressing the May 29 anti-revolutionary rebellion], in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji ed., Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji, No. 22, p. 151.
177 “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Xinjiangzizhiqu dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyao wenjian,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-01.
“Abolish grain rationing!” “The Hans have been suppressing us for 12 years. Down with the Chinese Communist Party, eradicate the Han Chinese, release the political dissidents!” One group seized the offices of the prefectural government, while other protesters sought to occupy the headquarters of the Yili CCP Sub-Bureau next door. The demonstration was put to an end when the government opened fire on protesters, leaving five dead and a dozen seriously injured.\(^{179}\) The People’s Liberation Army moved into Yining shortly after to prevent further social unrest. According to a witness, the city was under martial law for one month after May 29. Work units were barricaded with sandbags, and all Han Chinese were ordered to remain in their units and armed with weapons for their defense.

According to official reports, by the end of the mass exodus, more than 67,000 local inhabitants had fled, leaving a vast swathe of empty villages and uncultivated land. While the emigrants were overwhelmingly of Kazakh and Uighur ethnicity, a few Han Chinese crossed the border as well.\(^{180}\) Since the majority of the people fled from the Yili and Tacheng areas, this exodus is often referred as the Yi-Ta Incident.

\(^{179}\)“Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Xinjiangzizhiqu dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyao wenjian,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-01; “Huang Jinming gei zizhiqu renwei waiban de baogao” 黃金明給自治區委外辦的報告 [A report from Huang Jinming to the Foreign Office of Yili People’s Committee] (10 Oct 1962), Archives of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (AYKAP), File No. 11-1-114. Witnesses described a chaotic scene after the gunfire, including enough abandoned shoes to fill half of a big basket. See “Bingtuan jianli bianjing non gchang fangtanlu zhiyi: Zhuanfang yuan bingtuan fuzhengwei Zhao Yuzheng” 兵團建立邊境農場訪談錄之一：專訪原兵團副政委趙正征 [Interviews on the establishment of border farms by Xinjiang Production Construction Corps, No. 1: Deputy political commissar Zhao Zhengyu], in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji, No. 22, p. 114.

\(^{180}\) According to Xiao Mo, most Han migrants in Xinjiang were victims of a series of political campaigns launched by the CCP. Their main reason for crossing the border was to escape political repression. See Xiao Mo 蕭默, Yiye yiputi: Wo zai Dunhuang shiwunian 一葉一菩提：我在敦煌十五年 [To see a world from a leaf: My life in Dunhuang for fifteen years] (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu chuban gongsi, 2011), pp. 31–32.
Causes of the Exodus

When news of the Yi-Ta Incident reached Beijing, Saifudin Azizi (1915–2003), the regional Chairman of Xinjiang and the vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), petitioned the central government to let him return to Xinjiang. Just prior to Saifudin’s departure, Zhou Enlai discussed with him how to handle the crisis in Xinjiang. Zhou attributed the incident to two factors: foreign interference (from the Soviet Union), and domestic causes. Though Mao claimed in late August that the USSR held complete responsibility for the incident, source documents reveal that Zhou Enlai’s interpretation was more balanced and comprehensive, though still problematic. With regard to domestic causes, Zhou admitted that “in past years, we have not properly considered the ethnic minorities, the religion, and the local economy.” In other words, Zhou Enlai attributed the decision of the emigrants to leave for the USSR to the failure of the domestic policies implemented in Xinjiang over the previous 12 years.

Some American scholars, sympathizing with the ethnic minorities under communist rule, tend to emphasize domestic reasons while ignoring foreign causes. In his groundbreaking work on Yili, George Moseley argues that the people who fled to the USSR can be divided into two categories. The first category included so-called “local nationalists” and their sympathizers, who were Soviet-oriented, while the other group was comprised of Kazakh herders with family ties or previous business connections with the Kazakhstan Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR), who fled to seek material benefits in

the USSR. In other words, Moseley believes that some people left for political reasons, such as being disappointed with the policy of self-governance, while others were seeking a better economic life during the time of the Great Chinese Famine.¹⁸² Linda Benson argues that, while the poor economic conditions caused by the Great Leap Forward were partly to blame for the flight, the steady influx of Han Chinese settlers was another important factor in the growing Muslim discontent.¹⁸³ She points to an economic decline exacerbated by issues related to ethnic equality. In his overview of Xinjiang history, James A. Millward also asserts that some or all of the policies from the era of the Great Leap Forward engendered disaffection in northern Xinjiang. He lists several elements that may have contributed to the exodus, such as campaigns against Sovietism and local nationalism, heightened CCP penetration and control of the former East Turkestan Republic (ETR) and Kazakh lands, a surging inflow of Han Chinese, economic disruption associated with communization and industrialization (especially among nomads), the commandeering of pastureland for agriculture, and grain requisitions that seemingly favored Han over Uighur areas in a time of famine. Unlike Benson, who merely criticizes the Chinese government, Millward notes that Soviet propaganda helped incite people to flee.¹⁸⁴ The literature above offers persuasive insights, but the arguments are too generalized. Without access to Chinese or Soviet archives, the above authors had to base

their conclusions primarily on reading between the lines of the propaganda materials available at the time.

The landscape of research on this issue changed dramatically when a Chinese scholar finally gained access to the Chinese archival documents. Based on the collections from Xinjiang and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Li Danhui argues that, although the great famine had an enormous death toll in China proper, it “had a smaller impact on Xinjiang than on other parts of the country.” Xinjiang accounts for one sixth of China’s territory, but it is sparsely populated. The Great Leap Forward did lead to the development of economic troubles, but the burden was far lighter than in China proper. On the contrary, during the time of the Great Famine, Xinjiang had a utopian reputation as a refuge for people from across the country. Li acknowledges some cases of death by starvation, but argues that the primary cause was not food shortages, but rather inadequate transportation, limited manpower, and lack of telecommunication equipment, which were the same excuses offered at the time by Wang En’mao (1913–2001), then Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). 185

Though the Great Famine had a light impact on Xinjiang, Li admits that the somewhat diminished living standards of the local population created psychological support for admiration of the Soviet life. However, she asserts that the exodus was caused not by famine but by mobilization from the Soviet Union. Li supports the argument that a Soviet conspiracy incited border crossings after the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations,

based on evidence collected by the local Xinjiang government to demonstrate active
Soviets intervention in mobilizing Soviet nationals to leave for the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{186}

Li accurately points out that Moscow changed its policy toward the repatriation of
Soviet nationals after the Sino-Soviet rift widened.\textsuperscript{187} However, it is still difficult to pin
down how much weight the Soviet penetration carried with regard to the exodus, since
Li’s argument is supported only by the Chinese archives. The declassified Russian
archival files, as she has admitted, fail to demonstrate direct Soviet involvement.\textsuperscript{188} The
Chinese archives were produced in 1962, at a time when anti-revisionism was the main
objective of the CCP. Therefore, the local government’s fact-finding mission was
intended to serve the diplomatic struggle against the Soviets. Most documents produced
by the local government point fingers at the Soviet consulates and the Soviet National
Association as the power behind the scenes. However, the evidence provided is far from
convincing. For example, the Chinese pointed to the letters and parcels mailed from the
USSR by relatives and family members during the famine as evidence of Soviet efforts to
mobilize Xinjiang people to flee.\textsuperscript{189}

However, my research demonstrates that people asked their relatives to mail
parcels of daily necessities to Xinjiang due to the restriction or even banning of imported
goods from the USSR during the Great Leap Forward campaign. Some letters did contain
vivid depictions of the good life enjoyed by Kazakhs in the USSR, accompanied by

\textsuperscript{186} Li Danhui, “Antagonized Centers and Troubled Frontiers at the Height of Sino-Soviet Tensions,” pp.
167–95.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., p. 194.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., p. 195.
\textsuperscript{189} “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang” 伊塔事件真相 [Truth of the Yi-Ta incident] (December 1962), Archives of
Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (AYKAP), File No. 11-1-114.
suggestions that the recipients leave Xinjiang, but these appear to be more of a family matter than a conspiracy of the Soviet state. In the archival documents, the local government stated: “The incident of May 29 was clearly an organized and planned conspiracy, but our security department has not found a direct organizer behind the scenes as of yet. It can be concluded that this incident is closely related to the Soviet consulate, but no clues have yet been uncovered.” In other words, the conclusion that the Soviets were responsible for the mass exodus was based more on speculation than actual facts. In the service of foreign policy objectives, one high-ranking local official even scolded his subordinates for accusing too few demonstrators of having Soviet ties and working for the Soviet consulate, and suggested that more people be added into this category to strengthen the critique of the Soviets. By accusing the Soviets of mobilizing the border inhabitants to flee, Beijing could convince the Communist world that the Soviet Union, rather than China, was responsible for the rift between the two parties. The local government also benefited from blaming the Soviets, as this allowed them to evade responsibility for the incident of May 29. The Chinese archives should therefore be read with a critical eye.

I argue that there should be two focal points in exploring the origins of the mass exodus: the first is popular sentiment among ethnic minorities regarding the policies in Xinjiang, and the second is changes instituted by Beijing to Xinjiang policies following the incident. Popular sentiment was expressed via the so-called anti-revolutionary slogans recorded in the official archives, which are a rough snapshot of people’s dissatisfaction.

190 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
191 Ibid.
The policy changes can obliquely demonstrate what mistakes the government felt it made leading up to the unrest. I argue that the economic decline, ethnic conflict, and the deteriorating relations between Beijing and Moscow and other related problems were all important factors contributing to the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962.

**Impact of the Great Famine**

Common sense tells us that when a famine occurs, refugees will flee to seek material benefits. This was the case in the Chinese borderland of Xinjiang. As discussed above, Western scholars generally believe that the famine was the main cause for the exodus, but lack solid evidence to reveal how much the lives of the people in the border region were impacted. In contrast, Li Danhui believes that the deteriorating standard of living in Xinjiang was not grave enough to cause people to flee, but did increase yearning for life in the Soviet Union among the border inhabitants. Based on evidence found in archives and gazettes, this study argues that the famine impacted the region more heavily than Li believes, and that 1961 was a pivotal year during which the standard of living for local people worsened sharply. Furthermore, dissatisfaction among local people was not solely in response to the decreases in food and grain rations (the key factor on which both Li and the Western scholars focus), but also to the way in which the government sought to resolve the problem. To relieve the pressure of urban food shortages, a significant part of the urban population and ethnic cadres in YKAP were transferred to rural areas. This population shift further worsened the standard of living among both the urban and rural people involved, leading to increased dissatisfaction.
The evidence that Li relied upon to argue that the Great Famine had little to no impact in Xinjiang is problematic. According to the report by Wang En’mao, the first secretary of the CCP Xinjiang Committee, around 5,000 people died of starvation in March 1960 in Baicheng, a county not far from the border. The surrounding counties experienced approximately 1,000 deaths. Around 1,000 prisoners died of hunger. Wang claimed that the loss of 7,000 people was merely caused by “the clumsy handling of the food problem at a time of abundant grain reserves.” In other words, Xinjiang had no food shortages at the time, but “the serious bureaucratism and subjective planning by leading members of the county party committee” delayed the transportation of the grain.\(^\text{192}\)

However, a recently-published memoir reveals that this was a complete fiction. The truth was that Xinjiang had a shortage of food-grain, because the reports of good harvests all over Xinjiang were fictitious. Under the huge pressure of the competition to produce more grain in a shorter time period during the Great Leap Forward, local cadres audaciously padded reports on the amount of food-grain harvested. He Jinnan, a former Party Secretary of Aksu Prefecture, where Baicheng County is located, expressed similar excuses at the time, but later confessed that he and other local officials dared not contradict the cover-up by Wang En’mao.\(^\text{193}\)

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\(^{193}\) He Jinnan, the First CCP Secretary of Aksu at the time, said in a conference regarding the famine in Baicheng that the government had more than ten million kilograms of food-grain. However, the communication problem caused by a long-lasting period of heavy rainfall meant that the grain could not be shipped to Baicheng on time. Later, He Jinnan confessed that he was parroting Wang Enmao’s statement, but the truth was that there was no more food-grain at all. The agricultural production statistics were padded by local officials to show the fulfillment of tasks assigned by their superiors. Though Wang Enmao made an excuse at the time, he still removed He Rui, the Party Secretary of Baicheng County, from his position just after the famine. See Wang Yongqing 王永慶, \textit{Lishi de huisheng: Ge’rxia huiyilu 歷史的回聲：格爾夏回憶錄} [Echoes of history: A memoir of Ge’rxia] (Urumqi: Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan chubanshe, 2012), pp. 123–24.
Northern Xinjiang, where YKAP located, is a pasturing area. Its nomadic residents depended on herding and hunting, which left them perpetually short of grain. To obtain these essential goods, the nomads became heavily reliant on the agricultural economy. This is the reason why nomadic peoples historically adopted a policy of “trade or raid” in dealing with China, as pointed out by Sechin Jagchid: “This economic dependence, more than any other factor, was the chief cause for nomadic incursion into China.”¹⁹⁴ Since northern Xinjiang was so dependent on agriculture, the Great Leap Forward impacted this border region in two ways: first, the supply from southern Xinjiang diminished sharply, as shown in the case of Baicheng; second, northern Xinjiang saw a decrease in production. Evidence from gazettes shows that the great famine had a grave influence on the Tacheng and Yili regions. The available data demonstrates that the economic situation had declined in comparison to 1960, plummeting sharply in 1961 in almost all respects. As Table 2.1 below shows, in 1960, the output of grain decreased by 2,630,100 kg. 1961, however, witnessed a sharp fall of 7,861,000 kg, nearly a threefold increase of the decline seen in 1960.

Table 2.1: Grain Production in Tacheng, 1958–1961 (ten thousand kg)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1961</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>3031.80</td>
<td>3265.66</td>
<td>3002.65</td>
<td>2216.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>+233.86</td>
<td>−263.01</td>
<td>−786.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The production of rapeseed oil in Tacheng, as Table 2.2 shows, plummeted by 1,062,100 kg in 1961; the situation worsened further in 1962, with a drop of 585,600 kg. Furthermore, the establishment of “large, collective” People’s Communes limited the amount of private livestock herdsmen could own, leading to a sharp decline in privately-owned livestock after 1960. This policy not only interfered with the Kazakh way of life, but also heavily curtailed their income. As Table 2.3 on Page 85 shows, the annual income of an average person in rural Tacheng had been slowly increasing since 1959, but plummeted by 106.21 yuan in 1960, falling further by 52.92 yuan in 1961. This could well explain how Soviet propaganda that “people in the USSR can have more livestock and a more prosperous life” could serve as a stimulus for the Kazakhs to flee. The grave economic situation of Tacheng in 1961 also applied to the rest of the YKAP, which experienced a dramatic decline in overall grain production.

Table 2.2: Rapeseed Oil Production in Tacheng, 1958–1961 (ten thousand kg)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1961</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>114.79</td>
<td>121.55</td>
<td>127.56</td>
<td>74.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>+6.76</td>
<td>+6.01</td>
<td>–52.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


195 Compared with the amount of livestock in Tacheng in 1949, after Yi-Ta incident in 1962, the amount declined by 19.69%. See Yao Kewen ed., *Tachengshi zhi*, p. 166.

196 “Xinjiang waiban guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao” 當地政府關於伊犁塔城地區邊民逃往蘇聯的報告 [A report from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office on the border people of Yili and Tacheng who fled to the Soviet Union] (21 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.
Table 2.3: Average Annual Income in Rural Tacheng, 1958–1961 (yuan)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1961</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>74.07</td>
<td>200.71</td>
<td>94.50</td>
<td>35.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>+126.64</td>
<td>–106.21</td>
<td>–58.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.4: General Grain Production in Yili Prefecture, 1960–1961 (ten thousand tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>Corn</th>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Beans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>30.32</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>20.21</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.4 above shows that in the YKAP, production across all the primary grain categories of wheat, corn, rice, and beans dropped sharply in 1961. Grain rationing for herdsmen was instituted in 1958 as a policy of the Great Leap Forward following the establishment of the first People’s Commune in Tacheng in August of that year.\(^{197}\) The standard for food-grain was set as 120 kg per person annually in 1958, and later increased to 150 kg. The nomads complained of low rations, even after the increase. During the famine, the rations dropped to 100-120 kg per year.\(^{198}\) Sources show that in December of 1961 and January of 1962, the rations were decreased to a monthly per capita of 10 kg, while in February and March of 1962, the rations further dropped to 8 kg. Since even rations of 12.5 kg were still insufficient for most nomads, one may conclude eloquently

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\(^{197}\) Yao Kewen ed., *Tachengshi zhi*, p. 25.
\(^{198}\) Ibid., p. 315.
that most people in Tacheng were seriously short of grain. In the Yili region, since natural conditions were better than in Tacheng, the food-grain rations were 11 to 13 kg per capita each month. However, these rations were also significantly reduced compared to 1958. Moreover, the grain was of reduced quality, because the only grain available was coarser than the refined grain that ethnic minorities in Yili were used to consuming. In March of 1961, people in counties like Huocheng suffered edema, an illness caused simply by malnutrition.¹⁹⁹ This was why demonstrators on May 29 shouted slogans like “Everything is rationed,” “Abolish rations!”, and “Great Leap, great slaughter!”²⁰⁰ Common sense tells us that people choose to emigrate based on their standard of living as well as their confidence in the future. The sharp economic decline of 1961 led some to believe that things would be much worse in the years to come. Although the standard of living in the Yili and Tacheng regions was better than in China proper, even in 1961, people in such a border region might still seek migration, since crossing the border was convenient. One might convincingly argue that the events of 1961 set the stage for the mass exodus in the spring of 1962.

**Shortage of Daily Necessities**

The dissatisfactions of the local people were caused by a shortage not only of food but also of daily necessities. In his report to Beijing on the causes for the mass exodus, Xu Huang, then the deputy director at the Consular Department of the Chinese

¹⁹⁹ The most urgent work the local government had to do at the time was to prevent edema from spreading. See Song Jiaren 宋家仁 chief ed., *Yili hasake zizhizhou zhi* 伊犁哈薩克自治州志 [Gazette of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2004), p. 51.
²⁰⁰ “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote that daily necessities such as sugar, tea, cloth and boots were all of short supply. He even claimed that people were more dissatisfied with the unavailability of daily necessities than the shortage of grain, since the shortage of necessary goods was more severe. As shown above, 1961 was the year that the negative effects of the Great Leap Forward campaign on the Yili and Tacheng regions became salient, with a sharp decline in almost all economic areas, including the supply of daily necessities.

The difficulty of purchasing daily necessities was mainly caused by the import policy adopted by the Chinese government in Sino-Soviet trade. When the CCP took control over Xinjiang in October 1949, its economic situation was characterized by poverty and deprivation. Historically, Xinjiang was heavily dependent on trade with the Soviet Union, as it was far from China proper but neighbor to Soviet Central Asia. However, following the implementation of the anti-Soviet policies of the Chinese warlord Sheng Shicai in 1942, Sino-Soviet trade was brought to a halt for several years everywhere in Xinjiang except the Three Districts of Yili, Tacheng, and Altai, which later formed Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, causing the production of furs, cotton, and silk in Xinjiang to shrink to half of the figures seen in the 1930s. From 1944 to 1949, the Three Districts area of northwestern Xinjiang was briefly under the control of the Soviet-backed East Turkestan Republic, leading to the resumption of cross-border trade between

201 “Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao” 領事司副司長徐晃關於邊民外逃的情況報告 [A report from Xu Huang, the Deputy Director of the Consular Department, on the situation of the exodus of border residents] (23 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04.
202 “Waijiaobu lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang tongzhi dianhua huibao yaodian” 外交部領事司副司長徐晃同志電話匯報要點 [Key points of the telephone report from Comrade Xu Huang, Deputy Director of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (21 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01109-02.
this area of Xinjiang and the USSR. The imports mainly consisted of daily necessities, with a total trade volume of 11.23 million rubles between 1946 and 1949. The Soviet goods shipped to the Three Districts primarily included cotton fabrics, silk fabrics, clothes, sugar, tea, matches and some petroleum products.

Because the distance between Xinjiang and China proper rendered regular trade impossible, the remaining seven districts of Xinjiang outside of Soviet control experienced extreme market shortages of daily necessities in the late 1940s. To relieve this serious economic pressure, in December 1949, Peng Dehuai, then the commander-in-chief of the Northwestern Field Army, reported the problems in Xinjiang to Mao Zedong, who was visiting Moscow. Peng suggested to Mao that China must seek tremendous support from the Soviet Union to resolve its current economic problems and exploit Xinjiang. Xinjiang should promptly resume official trade with USSR, exchanging local products for necessary Soviet goods. Peng’s report demonstrates that Sino-Soviet trade restarted in 1950 to satisfy the local people’s needs for daily necessities.

However, Beijing’s principles in regard to trade with the USSR changed dramatically after the founding of the PRC: imports should first satisfy the need for socialist construction in Xinjiang. With this precondition, the needs of the market and people’s live should be met moderately. In other words, the first objective was to import

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large quantities of essential production goods, and daily necessities fell second.\textsuperscript{205} Under this principle, between 1950 and 1952, the import ratio of production goods to daily necessities was far from balanced. Table 2.5 shows that the percentage of daily necessities as part of Sino-Soviet trade, declined from 52.04\% to only 13.9\% over the course of three years.

Table 2.5: Ratio of Goods Imported from the USSR, 1950–1952

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production Goods</th>
<th>Daily Necessities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>47.96%</td>
<td>52.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Great Leap Forward campaign was launched in 1958: to develop Xinjiang’s economy as quickly as possible in line with this policy, the import percentage of production goods further increased while that of daily necessities fell. Although the total Sino-Soviet trade volume only amounted to 197,243 rubles in 1958, the only necessary good that China imported from the USSR that year was 10,000 tons of sugar.\textsuperscript{206}

In 1960, although the total Sino-Soviet trade volume declined due to the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations, trade in Xinjiang increased by 1.8\% year over year. However, due to the policy of rapid economic development, the import percentage

\textsuperscript{205} Usually the materials and equipment for production that PRC imported from the USSR were as follows: trucks, cars, automobile parts, tractors, machine tools, instruments, steel, concrete, chemical materials, etc.

of daily necessities further declined to 0.12%. With the surfacing of the great famine, in 1961, the central government enacted the “Instructions on Reducing the Purchasing Ability of Social Groups,” ordering provinces and cities to reduce foreign exchange as much as possible. According to this policy, non-emergency goods were not to be purchased through foreign trade, or only purchased in small quantities. Even emergency goods, the instructions noted, should only be bought after careful calculation and consideration. Under this policy, Xinjiang significantly reduced its imports from the USSR, and unfulfilled contracts with the USSR dating to the past few years were suspended. Under the dual impact of restrictive trade policies and worsening Sino-Soviet relations, 1961 witnessed a decline in import volume to 148,665 rubles, only 51.2% of 1960. The situation was exacerbated by the government’s view of daily necessities as “non-emergency” goods: virtually no daily necessities were imported in 1961.

As shown above, from 1950 to 1961, the import percentage of daily necessities declined from 52.04% to 0%. The shortages led to deteriorating living standards for the local people, who resorted to asking their relatives on the other side of the border to mail them daily necessities such as food, cloth, and clothing. For this reason, the number of parcels mailed from the Soviet Union to Tacheng skyrocketed to 1777 in 1961. In the early months of 1962, 562 parcels were mailed to Tacheng, and 2519 were sent to Yili. The Chinese government regarded the increasing parcel volume as solid evidence that the Soviet Revisionists were taking advantage of the temporary economic difficulties faced

207 Li Sheng, Xinjiang dui Su (E) maoyi shi, 1600–1990, pp. 632–33, 653.
208 Ibid., pp. 637–38.
209 Ibid., pp. 638, 653.
by China using material stimulations to mobilize local people to cross the border.\textsuperscript{210} The shortage of daily necessities reached its peak in 1961, worsening the living standards of the people. Unlike the populace in other parts of Xinjiang, the people in YKAP only began to suffer shortages of necessary goods under the rule of the CCP. This experience intensified their dissatisfaction with the CCP as well as their admiration for the USSR. This was one reason why people in YKAP decided to cross the border to pursue a better life in Central Asia.

**Influx of Han Migrants**

In January 1962, a report on how to halt the influx of the people from China proper submitted by the Committee for the Allocation of the Work Force in the Autonomous Zone became a headache for the XUAR Party Committee. Xinjiang had gained 1,700,000 residents between 1959 and 1961, many of whom were refugees traveling to Xinjiang without permission. By November 1961, around 890,000 refugees had arrived in Xinjiang. The Youth for Frontier Support (\textit{Zhibian qingnian}) were another group that contributed greatly to the growing population. Between 1959 and November 1961, some 800,000 youths, mostly from eastern China, were mobilized by the central government to contribute to the socialist construction in remote borderlands, and resettled in Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{211} Based on the fact that many migrants survived in Xinjiang during the

\textsuperscript{210} “Xinjiang waiban guanyu Yili Tancheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.

\textsuperscript{211} Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., \textit{Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: Gong’an zhi} 新疆通志 20 卷：公安志 [A comprehensive gazette of Xinjiang, Vol. 20: Public security] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2004), p. 49.
years of the Great Chinese Famine, Li argues that the economic situation in Xinjiang was much better than that in the China proper. It might be true that a higher standard of living was maintained in Xinjiang than in China proper, but the large number of refugees pouring into Xinjiang put further strain on already tight food-grain rations. This was the predicament faced in the Yili and Tacheng areas.

Since 1949, the Chinese government had been systematically moving Han Chinese into Xinjiang to strengthen its grip on this vast region populated mainly by ethnic minorities, offering veterans jobs that were not available anywhere else. Furthermore, in the eyes of the Chinese central government, though not the Kazakhs, Xinjiang was a vast and sparsely populated land. The government therefore believed that the main obstacle to accelerating the so-called socialist construction of Xinjiang and other frontier lands was the lack of manpower.\[212\] The state moved 82,245 people into YKAP between 1949 and 1953. When the Great Leap Forward campaign was launched, the central government made plans to mobilize two million more people from China proper into Xinjiang.\[213\] The number of migrants to YKAP reached 735,303 between 1954 and 1966, for an annual average of 56,563 migrants entering this area. Some were sent by a


\[213\] The 2 million people mobilized to move to Xinjiang were mainly from four provinces, Hunan, Hubei, Anhui and Jiangsu. “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dongyuan qingnian qianwang bianjiang he shaoshu minzu diqu canjia shehuizhuyi jianshe de jueding,” in Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian, pp. 202–03.
state project “youth for frontier support” (*zhiban qingnian* 支邊青年). However, this sharp uptick in the number of migrants occurred in the context of the Great Chinese famine. People from provinces such as Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, Henan and Shandong sought refuge by moving to Yili without official permission. The tables below show the changing population in YKAP between 1949 and 1961.

Table 2.6: Total Population in Yili Prefecture, 1949–1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>101,765</td>
<td>432,655</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>103,089</td>
<td>438,669</td>
<td>+6,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>104,634</td>
<td>445,699</td>
<td>+7,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>106,624</td>
<td>459,780</td>
<td>+14,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>107,865</td>
<td>480,402</td>
<td>+20,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>102,813</td>
<td>489,433</td>
<td>+9,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>98,625</td>
<td>477,205</td>
<td>−12,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>103,470</td>
<td>496,269</td>
<td>+19,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>109,959</td>
<td>531,570</td>
<td>+35,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>115,106</td>
<td>560,527</td>
<td>+28,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>123,286</td>
<td>558,357</td>
<td>−2170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>120,116</td>
<td>577,459</td>
<td>+19102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>152,379</td>
<td>661,844</td>
<td>+84385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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Table 2.6 on Page 94 shows that the population in YKAP had been increasing since 1949. Only the years of 1955 and 1959 witnessed declines, a change caused merely by the repatriation of the Soviet nationals and their family members. The fastest increase of the population was in 1961, with an unprecedented addition of 84,385. The Tacheng region experienced a similar influx.

Table 2.7: Population in Tacheng from 1949–1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Households</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>10315</td>
<td>45524</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>10460</td>
<td>46116</td>
<td>+592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>10614</td>
<td>46808</td>
<td>+692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>10816</td>
<td>47697</td>
<td>+889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>11598</td>
<td>48746</td>
<td>+1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>11330</td>
<td>48839</td>
<td>+93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>11014</td>
<td>46127</td>
<td>–2712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>10331</td>
<td>45185</td>
<td>–942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>10656</td>
<td>45950</td>
<td>+765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>10691</td>
<td>46219</td>
<td>+269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>11186</td>
<td>49784</td>
<td>+3565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>11645</td>
<td>51459</td>
<td>+1675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>15992</td>
<td>60363</td>
<td>+8904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Except the years in which many Soviet nationals and their families were sent back to the USSR, Table 2.7 on Page 95 demonstrates that most years since 1949 experienced significant increases to the population. In a reflection of the overall situation in the YKAP, Tacheng took in the most migrants in 1961, reaching another unprecedented total of 8904. Table 2.8 below provides a breakdown of the migrants by ethnicity. As Table 2.8 shows, between 1949 and 1959, the population of Han Chinese in Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture increased by 327,151, including only 65,770 Kazakhs and 67,047 Uighurs. Han Chinese gradually became the majority in Yili. By 1969, the number of Han Chinese had skyrocketed to 1,196,477, an increase of 1,158,378.

Table 2.8: Population of Ethnic Kazakh, Uighur, and Han in 1949, 1959 and 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1949</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>361,655</td>
<td>427,425</td>
<td>471,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uighur</td>
<td>171,823</td>
<td>238,870</td>
<td>295,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>38,099</td>
<td>365,250</td>
<td>1,196,477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to the analysis above, 1961 was the worse year economically in the Yili and Tacheng areas, while also witnessing sharply rising numbers of the Han migrants to the YKAP. One might fairly note that the region experienced “one disaster after another” in 1961. In its official report, the Chinese government was also forced to admit that the sharp drop in food-grain rations was caused not only by “natural disasters” (a
euphemism for the failed agricultural policies of the Great Leap Forward), but also by the influx of outside refugees in 1961.\footnote{“Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04.}

Reducing and Transferring Campaign

The campaign of reducing and transferring urban people to rural areas (\textit{Jingjian xiafang} 精簡下放) was launched just after the end of the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. Those who had made mistakes during the Anti-Rightist Campaign were to leave for the countryside, in an effort to purify the Party. In Xinjiang, following the end of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Party Committee of XUAR officially distributed instructions for the “Cadre Reduction Project in XUAR,” which sought to transfer 60,000 cadres within Xinjiang; 10,508 were transferred in that year.\footnote{Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 組黨委新疆維吾爾自治區地方志編纂委員會 ed., \textit{Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi} 新疆通志 14 巻：共產黨志 [A comprehensive Gazette of Xinjiang, Vol. 14: The CCP] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2001), p. 253.} Official documents reveal that, in order to avoid further angering ethnic minorities, the Party Committee of XUAR instructed local governments to implement this policy in accordance with practical local circumstances. The lack of data makes it difficult to judge how well the local government followed these instructions. Since most local cadres in YKAP were minorities, the campaign would have had a heavy impact on this community, leading to dissatisfaction with the CCP and the Han Chinese.

The great famine caused by the Great Leap Forward created huge pressure on the supply of food-grain, especially in cities and towns. To relieve pressure on the urban food
supply, by the end of 1961, the Chinese government had transferred 41,700,000 urban residents to rural areas all over the country.\footnote{217} As early as late 1960, the Yili region also faced the task of reducing the urban population. According to the decision issued by the Party Committee of the Yili region, cadres at the prefectural, zone, county and commune levels were to be transferred to rural areas. Around 10% of the cadres at the prefectural and zone levels, and no less than 5% of the cadres at the county and commune levels were to be transferred.\footnote{218} In December 1961, Tacheng County transferred 292 local urban residents to rural areas.\footnote{219} By the end of 1961, the whole prefecture had transferred 17,335 urban employees to rural areas, meeting 124.45% of the requirement set by the XUAR, along with 25,107 urban civilians (not including the Tacheng region), or 127.33% of the requirement. In other words, unlike many other cities involved in this campaign, the local government in YKAP transferred more people to rural areas than they were assigned. As a result, more urban minority residents lost their jobs and homes in the cities, causing more complaints among those impacted. At the same time, these people were relocated to rural areas, placing more economic pressure on the already impoverished countryside.

\footnote{217}“Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu jinyibu jingjian zhigong he jianshao chengzhen renkou de jueding” 中共中央、國務院關於進一步精簡職工和減少城鎮人口的決定 [Decision of the Central Committee and the State Council concerning further cutting off staff members and decreasing urban population] (27 May 1962), Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun guofang daxue dangshi dangjian zhenggong jiaoyanshi 中共中央軍委國防大學黨史建政工教研室 ed., Zhonggong dangshi jiaoxue cankao ziliao [Reference materials for teaching CCP History], Vol. 24 (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, internal circulation, 1987), p. 83.

\footnote{218} Song Jiaren chief ed., Yili hasake zizhizhou zhi, p. 50.

\footnote{219} Yao Kewen ed., Tachengshi zhi, p. 25.
In February of 1962, the campaign was expanded to the whole YKAP. In 1962, YKAP transferred 25,700 urban employees and 56,600 urban residents to rural areas. From 1959 to 1961, Yili also resettled 10,695 zhibian qingnian (Youth for Frontier Support) and their families. After 1960, refugees from all over the country poured into the YKAP. Yili had to establish two Accept-and-Repatriate stations to process and resettle these migrants. As a result, the Yili region faced a dilemma: the influx of Han Chinese into Yili was pushing out local minorities, who were forced to leave for rural areas. The resettlement program may have been the best solution for famine relief, especially in China proper, but for local ethnic minorities, this was a sign of Han Chinese suppression of ethnic nationals in their own homeland. In other words, ethnic minorities saw the daily shortages of food-grains as a result not only of the Great Leap Forward campaign launched by the Han-controlled government, but also of a food distribution policy that obviously favored the Han Chinese, most of whom had migrated to Yili illegally. This could explain the slogan people shouted during the May 29 demonstration: “You Han Chinese have eaten all the grain here!”

To make matters worse, the transfer of Han Chinese to villages and communes to live amongst local ethnic minorities gave rise to direct ethnic clashes. These former city residents, workers, cadres, and unofficial migrants had no experience as herders, which was often a more complicated job than farming or working in a factory, and their

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221 Ibid., p. 51. In March 1962, the party committee of Yili Prefecture decided to further reduce 70,000 workers and cut down 180,000 urban population in Xinjiang. See Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqiu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., *Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi*, p. 37.
223 Ibid., p. 399.
224 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
performance fell far short of local people’s expectations. Resentful of being forced out of their urban homes and jobs, the migrants usually lingered over their work in the commune. Local people had to make up for the shortfall of labor to fulfill the heavy workload assigned by the commune.

Furthermore, due to the famine, the financial support provided by the state for the transferred residents was barely enough to live on. According to official reports, in order to survive, some Han Chinese in the communes were forced either to steal local people’s belongings or borrow money from the commune, which they never repaid. The local people were most offended by Han Chauvinism, which violated the local Muslim way of life.225 The local ethnic people regarded life in general, and the Han in particular, through the lens of their cultural and ethnic identity. When living in isolation, ethnic people may have had a stereotypical image of the Han Chinese, but little real experience in dealing with them. Once they were living together, their sense of Han Chauvinism was confirmed by their daily interactions, and relations were even polarized by trivial matters. In other words, the campaign of Reducing and Transferring may have relieved urban economic pressure, but it led to the worsening of ethnic relations between the Han Chinese and Kazakhs. This is why anti-Han Chauvinism was so common among ethnic minorities, contributing greatly to the mass exodus.

225 “Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04.
Anti–Han Chauvinism

Anti-Han chauvinism was caused by many reasons, both historical and of the present. After the Qianlong Emperor conquered Xinjiang, the local minorities were ruled first by the Manchus and later by the Han Chinese. Xinjiang borders with Soviet Central Asia, a vast place with a robust demand for labor from the early twentieth century to the 1930s. To make a better living, ethnic people in Xinjiang, especially Uighurs, often crossed the border to do seasonal labor or conduct business. Ethnic and religious ties led to active cross-border relations. Although the Soviet Revolution of 1917 halted the connection, once the USSR implemented its New Economic Policy in 1924, some 20,000 to 30,000 Uighurs and Khalkha Mongols annually travelled to Soviet Central Asia to seek work opportunities. As Saifudin recalled in his memoir, the Xinjiang minorities were exposed to the national Soviet policy of self-governance in their travels, which they found deeply appealing. In the eyes of the minorities in Xinjiang, the Soviet Kazakhstan Republic and the other four Soviet Republics in Central Asia were perfect examples of how Kazakhs and Uighurs could be governed by leaders of their own ethnicity.

During the early part of the warlord Sheng Shicai’s rule over Xinjiang, he essentially governed Xinjiang according to pro-Soviet policies. As a result, “equality among ethnicities” was not only a new slogan for the region but a policy more or less

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implemented by Sheng.\textsuperscript{228} As increasing numbers of Soviet-educated minority elites returned to Xinjiang, they sought opportunities to emulate Soviet Central Asia. However, in 1942, Sheng reversed his policy to crack down on connections to the USSR. In 1944, a Soviet-supported ethnic rebellion rose up to establish the East Turkestan Republic, with a minority army occupying the Three Districts. One of their main objectives was to “drive out Han Chinese,” and most of the Han Chinese in the Three Districts were slaughtered.\textsuperscript{229} The USSR primarily supported the rebellion in order to find a new way to penetrate Xinjiang after its betrayal by Sheng Shicai, but the goal of the Kazakhs and Uighurs was to build an independent Islamic state ruled by leaders of their own ethnicity.\textsuperscript{230} In 1946, the so-called Eastern Turkistan movement ended with the signing of a peace treaty between the ethnic army and the Nationalist Chinese government (KMD) through the intercession of the Soviet government. Even after the founding of the united government, the Three Districts were still separated from the other seven districts in Xinjiang. Though the military conflict came to a halt, the Three Districts still maintained a military presence and self-governance. The nominal cooperation between the ethnic government and the KMD was fragile, and it came to an abrupt end in early 1947.\textsuperscript{231} Under pressure from the Soviet Union, in September 1949, the representatives of both the

\textsuperscript{228} Du Zhongyuan 杜重遠, \textit{Sheng Shicai yu xin Xinjiang} 盛世才與新新疆 [Sheng Shicai and a new Xinjiang] (Guangzhou: Shenghuo shudian, 1938), pp. 52–57.

\textsuperscript{229} See Lei Guanghan, \textit{Sulian taowangji}, p. 103. In 1949, the total population in Yili, Tacheng, and Altay was 675,125, which included only 38,099 Han nationals. See Song Jiaren ed., \textit{Yili hasake zizhizhou zhi}, p. 177.


KMD and the Three Districts government expressed their loyalty to the CCP, welcoming the Chinese First Field Army into Xinjiang.\(^{232}\)

Since Xinjiang was peacefully occupied by the CCP and no underground CCP organizations were available to begin performing administrative tasks, cadres from the Three Districts government remained the main body of the local government in this area.\(^{233}\) For the CCP, maintaining the ethnic cadres as the main administrative body in the borderland was an expedient policy. The goal was first to penetrate the borderland politically, before integrating Xinjiang with China proper. However, cadres in the Three Districts sought to establish a Soviet-style relationship between Xinjiang and China proper, with Xinjiang joining China as a satellite state. For example, on the eve of the first National Holiday on October 1, 1950, representatives from all over the country were invited to Beijing to attend the celebration ceremony. On the night of September 30, 1950, during a banquet for the representatives from Xinjiang, a Uighur official in the national army proposed to toss for the establishment of the Uighur Republic, while a Kazakh military official instead proposed tossing for the establishment of the Kazakh Republic. The quarrel was swiftly mediated by someone tossing for “the big unification of all the nationalities in China.” However, this event was regarded by Beijing as a kind of “separatist behavior,” as Wang Zhen later revealed.\(^{234}\) Beijing was further worried by a proposal offered by the “Conference of 51 Intellectuals” in Yili. In May of 1951, the central government published the “Draft Regulations for the System of Regional Ethnic


\(^{233}\) Xinjiang sanqu gemingshi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., *Xinjiang sanqu gemingshi*, p. 267.

Autonomy” (SREA) and “The Survey Outline of the Nationality Committee of the Northwest Bureau.” Saifulayev organized a conference along with other fifty ethnic elites in Yili to propose a different plan for the administrative relationship between Xinjiang and China. Their main ideas involved the establishment of a Turkistan Republic and the continuing military presence of the national army in Xinjiang. The proposal was regarded by Beijing as evidence of serious separatist tendencies among ethnic leaders, and the organizers and attendees were harshly criticized.\(^{235}\)

While Beijing was always on the alert for “separatist tendencies” among ethnic leaders, the autonomy of the Three Districts posed difficulties for the CCP’s penetration of the borderland. Local cadres resisted the “Reduce Rents, Anti Landlords” campaign launched by the YKAP CCP Sub-Bureau in 1951, which was a kind of land reform targeting the owners of large lands and pastures. They claimed that the Three Districts are liberated zones and have no need for such a campaign,” but their main objective may have been to present obstacles to CCP intervention in the border region.\(^{236}\) Wang Zhen revealed that Beijing regarded such objections from the borderland as “openly engaging in separatist actions, and thinking of yourself as a king so that you can continue to suppress and exploit the people!”\(^{237}\)

The political campaigns in Xinjiang differed from those launched in China proper in that almost all were aimed at crippling the autonomy of the minority cadres. For example, the “Three Anti” campaign was launched in Xinjiang and China proper in late

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\(^{235}\) Ibid., pp.75–79.

\(^{236}\) Wang Yongqing, *Lishi de huisheng*, p. 73.

\(^{237}\) Ibid., p. 78.
1951, targeting cadres at a local level. Official documents indicate that the primary objective of the campaign was “anti-embezzlement, anti-waste, and anti-bureaucracy.”

Although the Northwest Bureau instructed the Xinjiang Sub-Bureau to approach the problem of embezzlement among minority cadres cautiously to avoid ethnic conflicts, the results were precisely the opposite. The Xinjiang campaign treated the cadres harshly due to the campaign’s ulterior motive of punishing and menacing minority officials.

As the official in charge of the campaign later revealed in his memoir, Wang Zhen’s intention in launching this high-profile campaign was not to catch “big tigers” (a nickname for officials who embezzled large amounts of money), but to counter the “arrogance” among ethnic officials who regarded themselves as the liberators of Xinjiang. In other words, the goal of the “Three Anti” campaign was not to uncover financial misconduct among the cadres, but to stir up trouble for autonomy-minded ethnic

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238 The goal for this campaign in Xinjiang was to catch 150 “tigers” at provincial level and 50 “tigers” at city level. In reality, just at provincial level, 832 “tigers” were caught. Later, the government had to admit that some cadres’ confessions were extorted and the amount of “tigers” should be decreased significantly. See Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi, pp. 410–11.

239 According to the policy, if minority cadres had engaged in embezzlement prior to “liberation” in 1949, they would not be punished, merely educated to correct their mistakes. Former landlords and big merchants who had joined the revolutionary community but refused to correct their mistakes after being repeatedly re-educated could be punished strictly according to the facts. During this process, unity was to be promoted among the minority cadres, and they were not to be punished as harshly as the Han cadres. See Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi, p. 411. It seems that the harsh methods employed in the “Three Anti” campaign in Xinjiang were primarily directed by Wang Zhen 王震, who was later removed from his position in Xinjiang and transferred to Beijing. Despite the differing methods, Wang Zhen and the Northwest Bureau shared the goal of integrating Xinjiang with China proper.

240 According to official documents, 832 cadres at the provincial level, or 13.7% of the total cadres, were caught embezzling more than 10 million yuan (old currency). Later the government admitted that the campaign was too wide-ranging and some people had confessed under duress. Therefore, the number of cases of embezzlement was reduced from 832 to 546. See Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi, p. 410–11.

241 “Tigers” here refers to the cadres who embezzled. The size of “tigers” depends on how much money they stole. “Big tigers” refers to cadres who embezzled more than 100 million yuan (in the old currency), equal to 10,000 yuan of the new currency issued in 1955. See Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi, p. 410.
officials, thus forcing the local officials to realize they had to docilely obey the Party’s instructions. Therefore, the targets of the campaign, as Wang suggested, were high-ranking ethnic officials. The strategy for attacking them was to mobilize other cadres to expose and report any problems these officials might have. To achieve the goal Wang had set, harsh methods were employed in the campaign in Yili. As a result, many cadres had to confess their “crimes,” and two cadres even took their own lives.\textsuperscript{242}

The CCP claimed that it sought to eliminate two problems related to ethnic issues: Han chauvinism, and local nationalism. However, the main goal of the CCP was to eradicate elements of local nationalism.\textsuperscript{243} Ethnic minorities in Xinjiang were largely silenced under the enormous pressure imposed by the CCP, but they were more vocal on the issue of autonomy when possible. In 1957, the campaign “let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend” was launched in Xinjiang as in China proper. On May 26, the Xinjiang Party Secretary Saifuldin Azzi published an article entitled “Let All Flowers Blossom and Let Every School Argue.” He also organized a series of conferences, mobilizing people to advise the Party.\textsuperscript{244} At the Party’s invitation, local elites criticized the policies adopted by the government and the use of narratives

\textsuperscript{242} See Wang Yongqing, \textit{Lishi de huisheng}, pp. 84–88. The author of the memoir was blamed during the campaign by his fellow ethnic officials for being so harsh that some officials committed suicide.


\textsuperscript{244} Chen Chao and Liang Keming, \textit{Xiandai Xinjiang shishi ji}, p. 86.
such as “today is worse than the past,” claiming that “the leadership of the Party equals Han chauvinism.” They argued it was in Xinjiang’s best interests to establish the “East Turkistan Republic” and nationalize the Party organizations in Xinjiang. When such ideas became public, Saifudin reminded people to choose the correct position to argue against these “wrong views.”

In August of 1957, the “Anti–Rightist campaign” was launched in Xinjiang, primarily targeting the organs of local government. The central government noted that the goal of the campaign among ethnic minority cadres was to struggle against local nationalism in order to “further strengthen the unification of the fatherland.” Campaigns targeting “local nationalism” were organized directly by the Party Committee of XUAR. In December 1957, a conference held by this Party Committee revealed and criticized the views and deeds of ethnic cadres related to “local nationalism,” and issued a “Resolution to Oppose and Overcome Local Nationalism.” On May 14, 1958, the Party Committee distributed its “Plan for the Implementation of the Rectification Campaign among Ethnic Cadres and Intellectuals.” This led to a widespread campaign against local nationalism across Xinjiang. By the end of the campaign in March 1959, 1,612

247 3,172 people were labeled as Rightists in Xinjiang in 1957. Later the Xinjiang government admitted that the range of the campaign was too extensive so that more people were impacted than otherwise should. From 1959 to 1964, some “Rightists” were removed from the list of “Rightists.” See Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., \textit{Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan}: \textit{Gongchandang zhi}, p. 253.
249 According to the official “plan,” the anti–local nationalism campaign aimed at uncovering and criticizing those who intended to destroy the national unification and the integrity of the country. For the vast majority with general nationalism idea, they should be educated to realize their mistakes under the principal of “unite-criticize- unite.” See \textit{Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi}, 428.
people had been categorized as “local nationalist elements” in Xinjiang, and some 700 were punished in one way or another.\textsuperscript{250} By June 1959, 679 local cadres in Yili had been labeled either as “rightists” or “local nationalists,” and punished harshly.\textsuperscript{251} In Tacheng County, 34 people were punished as “rightists.”\textsuperscript{252}

The winding down of the “Anti–Rightist” campaign and the campaign against local nationalism did not mark the end of the CCP concerns over local nationalism.\textsuperscript{253} Another four-month campaign was launched in April 1959 against local democratic party members and non-CCP members.\textsuperscript{254} An anti–rightist campaign was launched in Tacheng County in October 1959, and lasted until March 1960. A fifth political campaign against “bad elements” was launched two months later to eliminate “counterrevolutionaries.” That campaign ended in June with the supposed capture of 9 “bad elements.” The purpose of the movement was not only to eliminate Party enemies, but also to purify the members of the local CCP organization. The purification campaign was combined with the Party’s struggle against anyone with an anti-commune attitude.\textsuperscript{255} Anyone who opposed the People’s commune movement in any way would face harsh punishment. Most of the victims of these movements were undoubtedly ethnic minorities.

These campaigns against the ethnic minorities seeking autonomy in the borderland had many consequences. First, although “over 85% of the county magistrates

\textsuperscript{250} Later, the Chinese government admitted that the campaign was necessary for the national unification and national integrity, but the range of the campaign was too extensive. From 1959 to 1964, autonomous regions removed the “local nationalist” label from some people who were regarded by the Party as innocent. See Xinjiang tongzhi 14 juan: Gongchandang zhi, p. 253.
\textsuperscript{251} Song Jiaren ed., Yili hasake zizhizhou zhi, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{252} Yao Kewen ed., Tachengshi zhi, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{253} Zhu De, “Guanyu Xinjiang fazhan shengchan he jiaqiang minzu tuanjie de wenti,” in Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian 1949–2010, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{254} Song Jiaren ed., Yili hasake zizhizhou zhi, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{255} Yao Kewen ed., Tachengshi zhi, p. 25.
and deputy magistrates in Xinjiang were ethnic minorities by mid-1961,” the key positions were overwhelmingly in the hands of the Han Chinese.256 With the influx of Han Chinese, the nominal predominance of ethnic minorities among the administrative leadership of Xinjiang saw rapid change. Second, as the never-ending campaigns against the ethnic elites continued, hope for the autonomy promised by the CCP before marching its army into Xinjiang faltered. The pro-Han policies implemented in Xinjiang intensified anti-Han and pro-Soviet sentiments. This was the reason why one of the most appealing slogans during the May 29 demonstrations in Yining was “The Han Chinese have suppressed us for 12 years. Down with the CCP! Exterminate the Han Chinese! Free all state criminals!”257 Even after the incident in Yining was suppressed, some minority nationals still insisted that “the riot was caused by the Party, because the autonomous zone is not autonomous, and no Party secretary is an ethnic minority.” “The number of the ethnic cadres is declining, and national policy is no longer working.”258 Some people believed that “Wang Enmao is now in charge of everything, while Saifudin has surrendered.”259 In a natural response, some people asserted that “Xinjiang should establish a Turkistan Republic…If Albania can be self-supporting, so can be Xinjiang.”260 Xinjiang residents had the advantage of convenient border crossing, while the growing belief among ethnic elites that Xinjiang was no longer their homeland led

257 “Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04.
258 “Guanyu feifa lingqu Suqiaozheng qingkuang” 關於非法領取蘇僑證情況 [The situation of obtaining certificates of Soviet nationals illegally], AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
259 “Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04.
260 “Guanyu feifa lingqu Suqiaozheng qingkuang.” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
them to advocate leaving Xinjiang for the USSR. When presented with viable opportunities to travel to the USSR, some local cadres even became organizers of the mass exodus, leading their fellow minorities to flee.

The Sino-Soviet Split

As shown above, the sharp decline in the standard of living and the intensifying anti-Han attitude caused by the CCP’s policies in Xinjiang seeded a pro-Soviet attitude among ethnic minorities, leading them to prefer a life in the USSR over remaining in Xinjiang. However, the deteriorating relations between China and the USSR were a more direct cause for the mass exodus of 1962. The Chinese government responded to worsening Sino-Soviet relations by implementing a less cooperative policy for the repatriation of Soviet nationals. This shift imposed serious obstacles to the migration of local people. With such barriers to legal migration, the convenience of crossing the border made it the next best option. When the rift between the formerly amicable countries surfaced after the 22nd Soviet Conference, people in Xinjiang believed that a war between China and the USSR was not only inevitable but imminent. Frightened by the prospect of war and the diminished opportunities to migrate to the USSR, people with family ties on the other side of the border sought any chance to flee. When the Soviets changed their border policy to accept unofficial migrants rather than repatriating them to China as before, border crossing became a possibility for increasing numbers of
The changing Soviet border policy was another factor in the May 29 demonstration. When the Soviet side stopped accepting border crossers under the immense pressure from the Chinese government, the people of Yili had to ask the local government for permission. Their reaction to being rejected led first to demonstrations and then to rioting.

“Cannot Go Back Anymore!”

The USSR began calling for the Chinese government to repatriate Soviet nationals just after Nikita Khrushchev launched the 1953 Virgin Lands Campaign in Central Asia to boost the Soviet Union’s agricultural production. 1954 witnessed the peak of the Sino-Soviet honeymoon, and the Chinese government began to repatriate Soviet nationals in accordance with the USSR’s demands. The Party Committee of YKAP established a special committee to assist in the repatriation of Soviet nationals. In a demonstration of fraternity, the Chinese policy for the identification of Soviet nationals always ruled in favor of the Soviet government. People with Soviet nationality and even stateless people were allowed to leave. 5620 Soviet nationals, stateless people and their families were repatriated from Tacheng County between from 1954 and 1963. In the whole YKAP, 186,295 Soviet nationals, stateless people and their families were repatriated between 1954 and 1963.

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261 Chinese diplomats also criticize the Soviets for not repatriating these illegal migrants in line with their previous policy.
263 See Yao Kewen ed., *Tachengshi zhi*, p. 23. After the Yi-Ta Incident of 1962, in order to eradicate any border residents with Soviet ties, some soviet nationals were forced to leave China for the USSR.
However, the repatriation of the Soviet nationals gave rise to several problems within Xinjiang. First, since Soviet Central Asia was much more prosperous than Xinjiang, almost all people who were qualified to go, especially those with Soviet ties, chose to leave for the USSR. The departure of a vast part of the population had a negative impact on the development of the already sparsely-populated Xinjiang due to labor shortage. The matter was worsened by the enormous number of stateless people in Xinjiang. The total population in YKAP was around 900,000, and 60% were stateless. If they and their families were allowed to leave, the government was very worried that “the whole Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture would no longer exist.” To maintain a sufficient labor force in Xinjiang, the Chinese government began demanding that the Soviet government identify the stateless people as Chinese rather than Soviet. When Sino-Soviet relations were positive, the USSR agreed to let the stateless people to stay. When the relations became problematic, the repatriation of Soviet nationals was soon halted altogether, and both countries began competing for more labor forces. The Soviets changed their policy to claim that the stateless people were originally from the USSR and that they were Soviet nationals. According to Premier Zhou Enlai’s informal instructions issued in November 1960, the Chinese government claimed that these people should be regarded as Chinese citizens and be issued Chinese passports. Since 60% of the population in Yili was stateless, the changing policies had a heavy impact on local people’s lives. People of mixed Chinese-Soviet descent in Xinjiang who had at one point

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265 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao” 新疆地區同蘇聯有矛盾的有關國籍問題資料 [Sources related to nationality in Xinjiang, contradictory to sources in Russia] (27 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
266 Ibid.
been allowed to choose their nationality freely were categorized as Chinese citizens. The local government also employed many methods to compel those with Soviet citizenship to stay. The government began with persuasion, especially for the Soviet nationals who worked as cadres. Faced with the continuing plans of most Soviet nationals to leave, the government used various pretexts to delay their applications. If all these methods failed, the government would punish them to apply pressure to other Soviet nationals who continued to resist. If those diehards were cadres, the government promptly dismissed them from their positions, leaving them jobless. If they were students, they were soon dismissed from school. Since it took almost half a year for the Soviet government to finish processing immigration documents, some Soviet nationals had to wait in Xinjiang and make a living by selling their property. With the tightening of the immigration policy, local people despaired that “they could no longer go to the USSR because of the worsening Sino-Soviet relations.”

**Rumors and Panic**

The border inhabitants promptly sensed any changes in the relations between China and the USSR, and even had access to information from the other side of the border. Sino-Soviet relations began to fail in 1958 and continued to deteriorate thereafter.

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267 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
268 “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui waishifenchu guanyu Li zhouzhang tong lingshi, Wang Huanzhang tongzhi he Suxie zhuxi tanhua jilu de baogao” (Report from the Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Committee of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture: Memo of conversation between Prefectural Governor Mr. Li and the Soviet Consulate and that between Comrade Wang Huanzhang and the Chairman of Soviet Association) (5 July 1958), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-69.
269 “Huang Jinming gei zizhiqu renwei waiban de baogao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
In December 1961, the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was held in Moscow. During the conference, Khrushchev publicly criticized the Albanian Labor Party and its leader, who had openly supported the CCP at the Bucharest Conference of 1960. Realizing that Khrushchev’s main target was the CCP, Zhou Enlai condemned Khrushchev and retreated from the conference in protest.\textsuperscript{270} As a result, the already problematic relations between these two socialist states not only worsened but also became public. Rumors quickly spread of the bad Sino-Soviet relations.\textsuperscript{271}

As Ralph L. Rosnow points out, rumors “give vent or expression to anxieties and uncertainties as people attempt to make sense of the world in which they live.”\textsuperscript{272} The anxious concerns among the border inhabitants caused by the tensions between the country in which they lived and the country to which they were eager to migrate generated many rumors, primarily revolving around two issues. One was updates to the changing migration policies enforced by both China and the USSR; the other was the prospect of war between these two socialist countries.

While Chinese immigration policy were tightened, the message spread about the policy of the Soviet government regarding who would be accepted as Soviet nationals. Some people heard that the Soviets had claimed, “All Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Tatars are Soviet citizens, and all should return to the USSR.”\textsuperscript{273} There was also news about the people of Tacheng: “Most people in Tacheng are originally from the USSR. Even today,

\textsuperscript{271} “Guanyu feifa lingqu Suquiaozheng qingkuang.” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
\textsuperscript{273} “Guanyu feifa lingqu Suquiaozheng qingkuang.” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
the Soviet government regards them as Soviet citizens. The door of the USSR is still open for them."274 The most difficult aspect of migrating to the USSR was obtaining official permission from the Chinese government. The rumor that “anyone with any identification issued by the Soviet government can go to the USSR” fell on glad ears. There was even better news for those who lacked immigration documents either for the Chinese government or for the USSR: “Anyone who originally came from the USSR, regardless of whether they have a Soviet passport or not, is a Soviet citizen. Once you cross the border, you will be issued with a Soviet passport.”275

If legal documents were not a problem, the question became how to cross the border. Local people spread rumors that “the Soviets have opened the border,” and “the Soviets will send buses here to pick us up.” But what about their families and relatives? It was said that the Soviets had instructed them, “When you come, do not come alone. Bring your relatives and friends with you. If you come, we will give you money and houses. We will let you learn to drive buses. We will reward you.” Once the border was opened, people were afraid that it would close again if they did not hurry. Someone claimed “the border will be closed on the date of the 25th.” Others believed that matters were more urgent: “The border will be closed on the date of the 22nd.”276 With the widespread percolation of such messages, it is not surprising that local people were eager to migrate by any means available.

274 “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Xinjiangzizhiqu dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyao wenjian,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-01.
275 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
276 Ibid.
The urge to migrate to the USSR was heightened by rumors of imminent war. Historically, Xinjiang had suffered greatly from war. Most Xinjiang minorities in the 1960s would have had vivid memories of the wars that occurred in previous decades. In the early 1930s, a war had broken out between Muslims and Hans under the regime of Jin Shuren, a Han warlord who ruled over Xinjiang between 1928 and 1933. Both northern and southern Xinjiang were drawn into the conflict. The war did not end until Sheng Shicai gained support from the Soviet Union to replace Jin Shuren. The Eastern Turkistan Movement of 1944 was also unforgettable for people in the Three Districts. Each of these conflicts echoed the tensions between the Han Chinese and the ethnic Muslims of Xinjiang. One individual claimed to have witnessed that “Gani Batur has returned. He lives in a mountain and will lead all Muslims to leave. If the government does not allow it, we will fight.”277 “The downfall of the CCP is imminent. I dreamed of fighting against the Han Chinese. I also dreamed of Allah. He instructed me that all Muslims should unite in a revolution, and victory will be achieved in three or five years. All people will rise with us sooner or later.” “We go to the USSR, leaving Xinjiang to the Han Chinese (Китай).”278

Rumors flew that the Muslims would rebel, and the two former allies were on the verge of war, as soon as the coming August, according to some claims. Some even believed that the war would come much sooner, and Xinjiang would be the battlefield. Official documents demonstrate that such terrifying messages led many young people in

277 Gani Batur (1901–1978) was a war hero during the Three District Revolution of 1944.
278 “Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04. The ethnic minorities in Xinjiang at the time called Han Chinese “Китай,” a Russian word for “China.” For them, China equalled Han Chinese.
Yili to cross the border, leaving their families behind. In the absence of any official statement, people who were used to the word of mouth tended to believe the messages circulating in their community. The snowballing of such rumors set the mass exodus in motion.

_Soviet Factors_

Although Chinese archival documents depict the Soviets as the black-hand behind the scenes of the Yi-Ta Incident, as shown above, the Chinese government did not find any convincing evidence for direct interference by the Soviets. However, it can be pinned down that the Soviets contributed to the incident in at least two ways: propaganda, and changing policies on border defense.

Soviet propaganda targeting residents on the Chinese side of the border perpetuated and even incited the idea that people could go to the USSR for a better life. As mentioned earlier, one of the advantages border inhabitants had was convenient access to information from the other side of the border, rendering the Soviet propaganda targeting Xinjiang even more effective. One factor contributing to the Sino-Soviet split was the disagreement between Khrushchev and Mao regarding Chinese domestic policies, including the campaign to “Let one hundred flowers to blossom, let one hundred schools of thought content” and the Great Leap Forward. The main objective in targeting Xinjiang with the Soviet propaganda machine was to demonstrate that the policies in the USSR were right, and the Chinese ones were wrong. The nominal friendship between

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279 “Guanyu feifa lingqu Suqiaozheng qingkuang.” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
China and the USSR compelled the Soviet propaganda machine to make a detour to criticize the CCP. To reveal that the food-grain shortages were caused by the failure of Chinese policies, the Soviet media went all-out to depict the “happy life” enjoyed by the Soviets. After the “hundred flowers” campaign launched by Mao abruptly turned into the Anti-Rightist campaign, the Soviet propaganda machine mentioned in its programs some eminent writers and actors who had fallen into the category of the rightists, to ridicule Mao’s self-defeating policy and likely also to demonstrate sympathy for Soviet nationals who were labeled as rightists.

Chinese source materials show that such propaganda intensified with the deterioration of the former alliance. In 1961, the newspaper *The Communist Flag*, published in Kazakhstan in the Turkic language, doubled its circulation. Radio programs in the Turkic language, created before 1949 but terminated in 1950, were relaunched in 1961. 462 publications from Soviet Kazakhstan circulated in the Tacheng region in early 1961. By early 1962, this increased to 923, a year over year increase of 99.8%. Needless to say, the propaganda played an important role in inciting people to flee.

“The Soviet Border is Open!”

If the propaganda served as an incentive, the opening of the Soviet border was the key factor that made the mass exodus possible. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Sino-Soviet border was essentially “a frontier without a clear border and a boundary without defense.” This phrase appeared frequently in reports by local officials. The Sino-Soviet

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280 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
border was geographically ambiguous, without natural boundaries such as rivers, waterfalls, mountains, or boundary stones.\textsuperscript{281} On the Chinese side, the border was undefended. The amicable relations with the USSR led China to put off deploying any defense forces along most sections of the Sino-Soviet borderland, and its border control force was rather weak. The YKAP bordered the USSR for a stretch of 2,000 kilometers, but the Chinese side had only two border-control stations and one checkpoint along the entire length, thus the Chinese government only exercised actual control over about 300 kilometers.\textsuperscript{282} Furthermore, the Chinese border guards only patrolled about 30% of the border area every few days, and some other areas were not even accessible. The border was essentially porous due to the loose control on the Chinese side, though the Soviet side was controlled more strictly.\textsuperscript{283}

Although Xinjiang had a long history of border-crossing activities, the forging of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s tended to discourage the Chinese state to strengthen the border, both ideologically and diplomatically. Ideologically, the Marxist-Leninist view was that proletarians should uphold internationalism, rather than nationalism. Based on this viewpoint, both the Soviet Union and China claimed that the Sino-Soviet border was merely nominal. Both announced that the sole reason for a border between the two

\textsuperscript{281} “Xinjiang waiban bao youguan Suqiao wenti ji bianjie bianfang wenti de gongzuqiao qingkuang he cunzai wenti” 新疆外辦報有關蘇僑問題及邊界邊防問題的工作和存在問題 [Report from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office on the current situation and problems of the borders and border defense] (6 November 1960), AMFA, File No. 118-01138-15.

\textsuperscript{282} “Xinjiang waiban bao youguan Suqiao wenti ji bianjie bianfang wenti de gongzuqiao qingkuang he cunzai wenti,” AMFA, File No. 118-01138-15.

\textsuperscript{283} People in Xinjiang, most of whom led a nomadic life, often herded, hunted, or fished on both sides of the border on a daily basis. They were also able to visit their friends and relatives or seek jobs on the other side of the border without applying for any official documents. See “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui guanyu bianjiang gongzuqiao de zhishi” 伊犁哈薩克自治州人民委員會關於邊境工作的指示 [Directions from the people’s committee of the Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture on how to deal with borders] (26 November 1957) AYKAP, File No. 11-1-57.
great fraternal socialist countries was to avoid providing imperialists with an opportunity to suggest that China had lost its sovereignty and territorial integrity, which would give the West an excuse to engage in a global war of aggression. Both the Chinese and Soviet border guards of course were not defending against each other, but rather against imperialism. Both sides were to work together in cracking down on the activities of spies and secret agents dispatched by the imperialists, so as to coordinate closely in protecting the common interests and security of the people of their two countries.\(^{284}\) As the relationship between China and the USSR was more than diplomatic, it was not diplomatically appropriate for the Chinese to strengthen the border. The CCP feared that the Soviets would blame the Chinese side for creating obstacles to Sino-Soviet friendship. Even when the split surfaced in 1961, the only way for the Chinese government to strengthen the 5000-kilometer border was to build up a militia. The main reason why it was “inappropriate to station a formal army” was to avoid giving the Soviets an excuse to attack the CCP.\(^{285}\)

Border crossings were frequent, especially from China to the USSR. Between 1954 and 1957, according to government reports, dozens to hundreds of people from China crossed the eastern and western sections of the Sino-Soviet border each year.\(^{286}\) Before 1962, both sides of the border normally dealt with illegal border crossers by blocking them before entering. If the migrants had already crossed the border, border-

\(^{284}\) Ibid.
\(^{286}\) Heilongjiang Provincial Archives, File No. 34-3-257.
control stations would contact their counterparts on the other side and repatriate them.\footnote{287}

On March 28, 1962, the Soviet consul asked his Chinese counterpart to repatriate disputed “Soviet nationals.” Having failed to gain any response from the Chinese, in April the Soviets abruptly loosened their border.\footnote{288} Although the Soviet diplomats claimed that they accepted these refugees only for humanitarian reasons, it was quite possible that the Soviets were taking advantage of the Chinese famine to gain more workers, whom the Soviets claimed to be their nationals.\footnote{289} Based on available sources, it is difficult to tell how much the Soviets contributed directly to mobilizing the people on the Chinese side to flee. However, Soviet archival documents reveal that the Soviet government had already obtained intelligence regarding the mass exodus before it happened. Rather than repatriating the migrants, Soviet archival documents demonstrate that on April 26, 1962, the Communist Party Central Secretary of the Soviet Kirghiz Republic received instructions on how to welcome and resettle the forthcoming border crossers from the Chinese side in an organized manner.\footnote{290} In early May, as the number of

\footnote{287}“Zhong Su jian guanyu Xinjiang bianjing diqu shaoshuminzu jumin dapi taowang Sulian shi de jiaoshe” 中蘇間關於新疆邊境地區少數民族居民大批逃往蘇聯事的交涉 [Sino-Soviet negotiations on a large number of ethnic minorities fleeing to the USSR] (24 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01764-01.

\footnote{288} In the eyes of the Chinese consuls, loosening the border and accepting as many ethnic border crossers as possible was the means the Soviets adopted to legalize the ethnic minorities as Soviet nationals. See “Zhang Hanfu fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’erwo’onianke tanhua jilu: Zhong Su jian guanyu Xinjiang bianjing diqu shaoshuminzu jumin dapi taowang sulian shi de jiaoshe” 章漢夫副部長接見蘇聯駐華大使契爾沃年科談話紀錄：中蘇關於新疆邊境地區少數民族居民大批逃往蘇聯事的交涉 [Memo of the vice minister Zhang Hanfu meeting the Soviet consul Stepan Chhervonenko, on how to deal with the large number of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang fleeing to the Soviet Union] (29 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01764-05.

\footnote{289} Ibid. Chervonenko claimed that the local Soviet government resettled the border crossers was for humanitarian reasons, to help them to survive the bad weather; food was also offered as there were many sick people, women and children among them.

\footnote{290}“Qiwei’erteke zhi Wusubaliyefu baogao: anzhi yuejie dao Ji’erji de Zhongguo gongmin” 奇韋爾特科致烏蘇巴里耶夫報告：安置越界到吉爾吉斯的中國公民 [A Report Sent from Chvertko to Usubaryev: Resettle the Chinese citizens who crossed the border to the USSR] (26 April 1962), in Shen Zhihua 沈志華 ed.,
refugees escalated, the Kirghiz Republic even established a Resettlement Committee and instructed local governments to treat the refugees like the Soviet nationals who had been repatriated by the Chinese government several years earlier. The border crossing wave did not diminish until the Soviet side of the border was sealed and some of the refugees were repatriated under pressure from Chinese government.

As discussed above, multiple factors, both domestic and foreign, led to the outbreak of the Yi-Ta incident. However, the direct cause for the mass exodus was the diplomatic conflict between China and the USSR following the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations. The impact of the crisis extended beyond the loss of labor power damage of property across Xinjiang, particularly in the YKAP. The Chinese side of the border, once undefended, was closed and further militarized. The population along the border was largely relocated, minorities with Soviet ties were repatriated, and cross-border economic activities were halted. A series of campaigns were also launched just after the incident to remold local minorities’ minds to identify themselves as Chinese. As a result, the USSR was barred from direct involvement in Xinjiang, particularly in the Yili region.

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CHAPTER 3
BORDERLAND PEOPLE

The roc wings fanwise,
Soaring ninety thousand li
And rousing a raging cyclone.
The blue sky on his back, he looks down
To survey Man’s world with its towns and cities.
Gunfire licks the heavens,
Shells pit the earth.
A sparrow in his bush is scared stiff.
“This is one hell of a mess!
O I want to flit and fly away.”
“Where, may I ask?”
The sparrow replies,
“To a jewelled palace in elfland’s hills.”
Don’t you know a triple pact was signed
Under the bright autumn moon two years ago?
There’ll be plenty to eat,
potatoes piping hot,
Beef-filled goulash.”
“Stop your windy nonsense!
Look, the world is being turned upside down.”

——Mao Zedong, “Two Birds: A Dialogue,” Autumn 1965

Chinese efforts to rule Xinjiang faced many obstacles, among them that a significant part of the population had a fluid national identity. The fluidity was more evident among residents of the Three Districts, a frontier zone bordering the Soviet Kazakhstan Republic. This unsettled situation of the indigenous people challenged the Chinese government in governing this area; even who exactly were the subjects was unclear. As indicated by Eric Lohr, the sovereignty of a state is not limited merely to physical boundaries, but extends to all of a country’s citizens regardless of their place of

residence.\(^{293}\) In this case, who were the Chinese by nationality was about not just the human resources the government could exploit, but also the reach of China’s claims to sovereignty in this region. This chapter focuses on the changes of the “citizenship boundary” in the Three Districts set by the Chinese government with the fluctuations of Sino-Soviet relations. This chapter demonstrates how the Chinese government demarcated the transitional population and thus populated this region with homogenous people by nationality.

**Transitional People**

While originally trying to understand why the state has always seemed to be the enemy of “people who move around,” James Scott gradually came to see sedentarization as “a state’s attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and the prevention of rebellion.”\(^{294}\) The demographic composition of the Three Districts was far from legible to the Chinese state: it was not only heterogeneous but also mobile.

The vast majority there were not Han Chinese but Muslims of multiple ethnicities. According to the official source, in 1949 the whole population in the Three Districts was 675,125, whereas the Han Chinese numbered merely 38,099.\(^{295}\) The non-Han people

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\(^{295}\) Song Jiaren 宋家仁 chief ed., *Yili Hasake zizhizhou zhi* 伊犁哈薩克自治州志 [A survey of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 172, 177. As difference sources have different data, it is difficult to pin down the accurate percentage of Han Chinese in Xinjiang on the eve of the Communist takeover. According to the Soviet archives, Stalin revealed that the percentage of
were of multiple ethnicities, including Kazaks, Uighurs, Russians, Huis, Kirghiz, Mongols, Han, and others.

In this case, though they were minorities compared to the Russians and Chinese, these ethnic people were actually majorities in their own surroundings. Among the ethnic peoples, a significant part was nomadic pastoralists, living on mountains and steppes. As Table 3.1 below shows, in 1949, there were more than 360,000 ethnic Kazaks, more than 50% of the whole population of the Three Districts.296

Table 3.1: The Ethnic Demographic Composition of the Three Districts in 1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Kazak</th>
<th>Uighur</th>
<th>Han</th>
<th>Hui</th>
<th>Mongol</th>
<th>Uzbek</th>
<th>Kirghiz</th>
<th>Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>361,655</td>
<td>171,823</td>
<td>38,099</td>
<td>24,279</td>
<td>24,210</td>
<td>7,008</td>
<td>10,758</td>
<td>17,853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Song Jiaren, *Yili Hasake zizhizhou zhi*, p. 177.

Furthermore, the ethnic people there are indifferent to their nationality but hold a pragmatic attitude about choosing whether to be Chinese or Russian. There are many reasons for the national indifference. Historically the Kazaks, Kirghiz, and other non-Chinese people became “Chinese ethnic minorities” due to the contest of power between imperial Russia and Qing China in Central Asia. The Russian conquest of Central Asia started in 1730 and was completed by 1884 with the acquisition of most of the Kazakh

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296 Ibid., p. 177.
Steppe. During a century-long conquest, Russians competed first against the British and later the Chinese. The result of the Russo-British “great game” was that most of the Kazakh Steppe became Russian territory while the ethnic Kazaks there were forced to be subjects of imperial Russia. With relative Russian strength economically and militarily and weak Qing China, the Sino-Russian competition ended up with Qing China losing its vassal states in Central Asia to Russia and being forced to demarcate its territory in Xinjiang to the advantage of Russia. No matter which power was the winner, the Kazaks and other ethnic peoples were always the losers: their lands were conquered either by Russia or China, while they themselves were forced to become Russian or Chinese by nationality. Therefore, as Zhao Zhucheng argues, the community in Central Asia based on a common culture was torn apart by the Sino-Russian national boundaries, which were demarcated according to a series of treaties ending military conflict between Qing China and imperial Russia. It was mainly the military conquest by these big powers that divided the Kazakhs and other ethnic peoples into cross-border ethnic populations. The indigenous people themselves had little active participation. The coercion might have functioned well to impose on them a nationality but not a national identity.

The frontier between China and Russia in Xinjiang was geographically a vast zone rather than a line, as indicated by Owen Lattimore. Limited by the low level of technology and lack of communication infrastructure, the Sino-Russian borderland was

demarcated roughly and defended nominally. Weak though they were, the ethnic people had been taking advantage of the porous border zone and chose to live on a side where the government was less hostile. As Lattimore states, “If one powerful neighbor follows a policy of subjecting the border peoples by force, the other works by attracting them, giving them the feeling of participation in a larger federalized political structure, then the peoples of the border zone will have reason to exercise their own choice to the best of their ability.”300 The mobile nature the ethnic peoples had, as James Scott maintains, made them the “enemy” of the state. Ever since the late Qing era, the Chinese government had been complaining that the “mixture of the peoples with Chinese and Russian nationalities in Yili violated the sovereignty of both the Chinese and the Russian governments. The Russian government regarded those living in Yili but Russian by nationality as illegal immigrants and required the Chinese government to deport them back. The Chinese authority complained that it was a mission impossible because those immigrants had been seeking whatever chances available to come back after deportation.” Many measures had been taken to keep the Russians out of Chinese territory, though not successfully.301

The demographic composition in that region was further complicated with the influx of refugees from the Soviet side. Recent research based mainly on Russian sources reveals that migration between China and Russia in Northeastern Asia after the 1860s

300 Lattimore, “Inner Asian Frontier,” p. 128.
301 “Xinfu Yuan Dahua zi waibu Yili Zhong E minji hunza zuoxu hukou zongshu zhuoni banfa qinghe fuwen” [From the new Governor Yuan Dahua to the Foreign Relations Department on how to count the total population in Yili where the Chinese and the Russian mixed together], in Wang Yanwei 王彦威 and Wang Liang 王亮 eds., Qingji waijiao shiliao 清季外交史料 [Historical materials in late Qing], Vol. 21 of the Xuantong Reign (Taipei: Wenhua chubanshe, 1963), pp. 572–74.
was increasing over time but was more and more dominated by political factors than demographic and economic ones.\(^{302}\) Political factors also played a key role in migration in Xinjiang during the twentieth century. In 1916, approximately 300,000 Kazakh tribesmen sought asylum from Russia in Xinjiang after an uprising over the conscription of young men into forced labor.\(^{303}\) During the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and a series of Soviet political campaigns, especially the collectivization movement of the 1930s, around 500,000 people fled to Xinjiang. Most of these refugees were Kazakhs, along with a small number of Slavs.\(^{304}\)

When the Soviet Revolution occurred, Xinjiang became a shelter for some Russian citizens, most of whom settled in the Three Districts. In 1917, Russian military commanders and soldiers fled to Xinjiang after being defeated, and some Russian civilians also crossed the Xinjiang-Russian border to evade the Bolsheviks.\(^{305}\) The 1930s therefore witnessed a tide of migration to Xinjiang with much greater scope. The agricultural collectivization launched by the Soviet government in 1929, especially the “nomadic settlement” campaign in Kazakhstan, a caused great famine across the entire


\(^{305}\) “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao” 新疆地區同蘇聯有矛盾的有關國籍問題資料 [Sources related to nationality in Xinjiang, contradictory to sources in Russia] (27 April 1962), Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (AMFA), File No. 118-01760-01.

Documents from the Xinjiang government vividly reveal what the exodus was like:

Famine refugees cannot find food, and have to flee to Xinjiang with their old dependents and little children … more than hundreds and even thousands of Soviet ethnic peoples have fled to Xinjiang in groups. Every day, several mass exoduses will happen. Once being driven out, [the Soviets] will cry and ask for help. … In order to strengthen the border, to these Soviet refugees, [we] have been using military power to drive them out. Furthermore, [we] have sent more soldiers to strengthen some key checkpoints. During the past several months, all the military and financial resources in Xinjiang had been used to deport the Soviet refugees. … However, the border soldiers have been kept constantly on the run and the expense of military expenditure is especially high.

The Xinjiang government obviously exaggerated its ability to expel the Soviet refugees because sources reveal that during the early years of collectivization, 200,000 had successfully fled to Xinjiang. While most immigrants fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution were ethnic Russians, most driven by the collectivization campaign were ethnic Kazaks. Most ethnic Russians lived in cities and towns in Tacheng. Kazaks and other ethnic minorities from Russia settled with their fellow ethnics and intermarried locally.

Most Russian nationals in Manchuria, Shanghai, Qingdao, and elsewhere were Slavs who could be easily differentiated from the Chinese. However, most of those in Xinjiang were not Slavs but Muslims from Soviet Central Asia who were difficult to

310 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
distinguish from their fellow ethnic Muslims in this region. While the Sino-Soviet borderlines so clearly drawn on maps served to demarcate the people residing on both sides of the border as Chinese citizens and Soviets, in reality the similarity of these peoples made it impossible differentiate them. Similarities in ethnicity, religion, and culture made Kazakhs on either side of the border essentially one nation, as is true for the Mongols, Kirghiz, and other ethnic groups straddling the border. Furthermore, since the majority of the ethnic population were nomads, border crossing as a way of life was taken for granted and they showed little concern for jurisdictions claimed by either Beijing or Moscow.\textsuperscript{311}

Not only their nationalities were difficult to identify, but the Muslims, especially the nomads on both sides of the border, held an ambivalent attitude toward the state.\textsuperscript{312} As mentioned above, the national identity the Muslims gained was not based on their free will, but merely imposed by the big powers. The 1864 Sino-Russian Treaty of Tacheng instituted the principle of territoriality (rensui digui 人隨地歸); to which country indigenous people belong depends on which country holds sovereignty over the land on which these people live after the demarcation. Under the pressure of the Russian government, the Revised Sino-Russian Treaty of Yili Commerce of 1881 offered people in Yili an option to either stay in Yili or move to Russia. However, in Yili, even during


\textsuperscript{312} Tara Zahra uses the term “national indifference” to challenge the nationalist narrative, categories, and frameworks that have traditionally dominated European and Eurocentric historiography. By “national indifference,” she refers to the situation that some people hold an ambivalent attitude toward the nation-state even in modern societies. These people do not necessarily have a national consciousness or the desire to belong to a specific national community. See Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” \textit{Slavic Review}, Issue 69, No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 93–119.
the Xuantong era (1909–1912), around thirty years after the signing of the Sino-Russian treaty of 1881, many people who had chosen to become Russian subjects moved back and lived with their fellow ethnics. Though the local government had to deport them to Russia as the Russian authorities had required, they still moved back and forth whenever they could.\footnote{“Xinfu Yuan Dahua zi waibu Yili Zhong E minji hunza zuoxu hukou cuoxu zhuo ni banfa qinghe fuwen,” Wang Yanwei and Wang Liang eds., Qingji waijiao shiliao, pp. 572–74.} During the Republican era, the mixture of people of different nationalities in the Three Districts was still common. Even in the early 1940s, the local government was still complaining that Kazakhs did not have any idea that national borders were to be respected. Kazakhs on both sides of the long Xinjiang-Soviet border crossed freely without any legal permission. Many Soviet Kazakh businessmen went to Xinjiang for business while Xinjiang Kazakh businessmen traveled to Central Asia. Since they were members of the same ethnic community, it was hard to discern who were Chinese and who were Soviets. When a riot occurred, it was hard to determine whether Chinese or Soviets were involved. After the Xinjiang-Soviet split at the end of the Sheng Shicai era in the early 1940s, the Soviets took advantage of this indistinguishability to make trouble with the Xinjiang government.\footnote{Sheng Shiji 盛世璽, Jiang Jieshi de fengjiang dari: Wojia dage Sheng Shicai 蔣介石的封疆大吏：我家大哥盛世才 [Minister of Chiang Kai-Shek: My elder brother Sheng Shicai] (Taipei: Wanjuanlou tushu youxian gongsi, 2000), p. 183.} During the era of the Eastern Turkistan movement, there was barely any border between the Three Districts and Central Asia, but the border between the Three Districts and the other seven districts of Xinjiang controlled by the KMT was tightly defended by both sides. As a result, the distinction among the ethnic Kazakhs by nationality in the Three Districts was further blurred.
The nationality imposed on the nomads by the great powers did not necessarily mean national loyalty. The demarcation of the Sino-Russian borderline, based not on the boundaries of pastures but on man-made lines, not only jeopardized the nomadic way of life but could cause them to freeze to death if they lost their winter pastures to the neighboring country. Therefore, nomads ignored and crossed the border to maintain their nomadic life. Another reason for the national ambivalence among the Muslims on both sides of the border was that they were divided into two states by geopolitical strategies, not their own free will. Therefore, the process of demographic demarcation was rather arbitrary. The grandparents of Ehmetijan Qasim, a leader of the Eastern Turkistan Republic, for example, after the signing of Sino-Russian Yili treaty of 1881, turned from being subjects of Qing to those of Russia.\textsuperscript{315} This transformation of nationality could hardly have won over the loyalty of the people involved.

\textbf{From 1949 to 1953}

Before the founding of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, the CCP had been tough on diplomats and foreign aliens from so-called “Imperialist states” in the “liberated zones.” The CCP declined to acknowledge these foreigners as diplomats but treated them as normal foreign aliens, though the diplomats tried whenever possible to gain acknowledgment from the CCP. At the same time, the CCP adopted several measures to push the foreign aliens to leave. Though Liu Shaoqi himself confessed to Stalin that this policy brought great inconvenience to the foreigners as well as the CCP,

\textsuperscript{315} Mahinur Qasim 瑪依努爾·哈斯木, \textit{Huiyi Ahemaitijiang 回憶阿合買提江} [In Memory of Ahmet Jan Kasimi] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2011), Vol. 1, p. 10.
the Communists still believed that the advantages of this policy outweighed the disadvantages. Since nationalism was proved to be an effective ideology in mobilizing people to serve the purposes of the CCP during the Chinese Civil War, playing tough with the diplomats and foreign aliens could further satisfy the sense of nationalism among the Chinese, making them believe that only the CCP could help the Chinese people “stand up.” With this toughest diplomatic policy that any government since the late Qing era had adopted, the CCP aimed at promoting an image that the Party feared not any “imperialists.” Besides this, by not acknowledging the legitimacy of foreign diplomats, the CCP also aimed to distance the democratic parties from diplomats and ordinary people from foreign aliens. Thus, the interference of any “imperialist states” in domestic affairs would be diminished as much as possible.316

But how to deal with the foreigners who were originally from Soviet Russia? The CCP adopted the “lean to one side” policy, according to which the CCP joined the communist world headed by the USSR, and Soviet nationals were to be treated differently. Actually, in the “liberated zones” in Manchuria before 1949, the CCP already treated Soviet nationals better than their fellow Chinese. They were required to pay less taxes than their Chinese counterparts, while being assigned quality lands during land reform movements.317

For the Soviets, they encountered a dilemma with repatriating their nationals. On the one hand, after losing millions of people in the Second World War, the government wanted desperately to draw back their nationals from all over the world. On November 10, 1945, a Soviet edict announced, “persons residing on the territory of Manchuria who on November 7, 1917, were subjects of the Russian Empire, as well as persons who had possessed Soviet citizenship and lost it, and their children, may recover the citizenship of the USSR.” On January 20, 1946, a second edict of the federal Presidium extended the provisions of this act to persons settled in the province of Sinkiang and other cities, giving them until April 1949 to contact the nearest Soviet consulate.\textsuperscript{318} Filled with wartime patriotism and nostalgic for their hometown and relatives,\textsuperscript{319} many immigrants thus recovered their Soviet citizenship. As many as 200,000 ethnic Russians and Tatars recovered their Soviet citizenship; however, ethnic Kazaks and Uighurs from Soviet Central Asia were reluctant to do so and thus became stateless people.\textsuperscript{320} Even for those who had recovered their Soviet citizenship, the residence certificates did not entitle them to enter the USSR at will; they had to apply and wait for additional permission, which typically took a long time to receive.\textsuperscript{321} This rather unusual procedure was made necessary first and foremost because of the difficulty of offering suitable shelter and

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., pp. 310–11.
\textsuperscript{320} “Waijiaobu Zeng Yongquan fubuzhang guanyu Suqiao, Suji ganbu deng wenti xiegei zhongyang lingdao ji budangwei de baogao” [A Report from the Vice Head of the Foreign Ministration Mr. Zeng Yongquan to leaders of the Central Committee and Party Committee of the Foreign Ministration about the issue of cadres with Soviet nationality], AMFA, File No. 118-01137-02, p. 5.
employment to potential returnees due to the wartime devastation that also hampered the admission of the immigrants into the USSR.\textsuperscript{322}

However, the security of the regime was another reason why immigrants recovered their citizenship but needed to apply for official permission to enter their fatherland. As indicated by Eric Lohr, the Soviet government used citizenship law as a “filtering process” based mainly on the idea of “class.”\textsuperscript{323} Thus, the immigrants, most of whom were victims of the Soviet regime, were regarded as politically untrustworthy. What further strengthened this negative impression of the immigrants in the eyes of the Soviet government was that some Russians worked as spies against the Soviet government. For example, Japanese documents seized by the Soviet army in Manchuria revealed that 470 Russian immigrants in China worked as spies for the Japanese government during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{324} Therefore, an expedient way for the Soviets to deal with this issue was to dump these Soviet nationals in Xinjiang and Manchuria and let the CCP carry the burden.

For the CCP, this was something they could trade for Soviet aid. Without comprehensive cooperation and even encouragement from the Soviets, it would be impossible for the CCP to occupy Xinjiang. The CCP planned to penetrate Xinjiang no

earlier than 1951, however, Stalin encouraged the PLA to approach this vast region as soon as possible and showed his willingness to cooperate. The Soviets offered vehicles to the CCP, which at the time was not ready technologically. More importantly, it was the USSR that persuaded the KMT army to surrender to the PLA and forced the East Turkistan Republic government to give up the status quo of political independence from the Chinese government and become part of Communist China. One of the reasons for Stalin to force the CCP to occupy Xinjiang without delay was because otherwise the British would interfere in Xinjiang affairs and thus Muslims there and in India might be further encouraged to fight against Communist rule. Since the main purpose for the encouragement and aid was for the security of the Soviet regime, as a precondition Stalin asked the CCP to maintain Xinjiang as a Soviet sphere of influence. Therefore, for the USSR, not only the Three Districts but the whole of Xinjiang could better serve as a buffer zone as well as a place to dump nationals who were not allowed to enter the Soviet Union.

After the incorporation of Xinjiang into the PRC in 1949, to reward the USSR, the Chinese government went all out to facilitate the Soviets in dealing with Soviet immigrants there. To maintain Xinjiang as a Soviet sphere of influence, according to the

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325 “Migaoyang guanyu zhengce fangmian de poqie wenti yu Mao Zedong de huitan beiwanglu” 米高揚關於政策方面的迫切問題與毛澤東的會談備忘錄 [Memo of Mikoyan’s Meeting with Mao Zedong on urgent issues of Xinjiang policies], in Shen Zhihua ed., *Eguo jiemi dang’an*, p. 301.
326 “Sidalin gei Kewaliaofu zhuan Mao Zedong dian: Guanyu Zhonggong jianli zhengfu deng wenti” 斯大林給科瓦利奧夫轉毛澤東電：關於中共建立政府等問題 [A telegraph from Stalin to Kovalev, cc Mao Zedong: Some issues including the establishment of CCP’s government], in Shen Zhihua ed., *Eguo jiemi dang’an*, p. 322.
supplementary agreement of the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1950, foreigners other than Soviet nationals should be driven out of this vast region.\textsuperscript{329} To fulfill the requirement, right after the Chinese took Xinjiang they set out to handle the foreign aliens there. According to an official report, by August 1952, the Chinese government had naturalized around 3,000 aliens from India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and deported a few who refused to become Chinese citizens. To further satisfy the Soviets, only Soviet diplomats were allowed to remain, while those of other countries were forced to withdraw promptly.\textsuperscript{330}

The cadres of the former East Turkistan Republic, though communication between them and the CCP was usually bridged through Soviet consuls,\textsuperscript{331} remained in their positions, and some were even promoted to high offices in Xinjiang. However, the Soviet nationality of many cadres had become a problem. After instituting the “lean to one side” policy, the CCP government was regarded by not only the capitalist world but also elites at home as a Soviet puppet government.\textsuperscript{332} Many Soviet nationals who remained as cadres in Xinjiang thus provided solid evidence to demonstrate that China

\textsuperscript{329} “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhongyang renmin zhengfu suweiai shehuizhuyi gongheguo lianmeng zhengfu guanyu zuotian youhao tongmeng de buchong xieding” 中華人民共和國中央人民政府蘇維埃社會主義共和國聯合關於中蘇友好同盟互助條約的補充協定 [The supplementary agreement of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship Alliance Mutual Assistance], in Waijiaobu dang’anguan 外交部檔案館 ed., 

\textsuperscript{330} “Xinjiang gongzuo sannian lai de zongjie ji jinhou yijian” 新疆工作三年來的總結及今後意見 [Summary of the Administration Work in Xinjiang in the Past Three Years and Our Advice on Work in the Future], (August 1958), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-11.

\textsuperscript{331} “Zhongyang guangyuan jiefang jiefang Xinjiang wenti tongmeng” 中央關於和平解放新疆問題給各局等的電報 [A telegram from the Central Committee to Deng Liqun etc. on liberating Xinjiang peacefully], in Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文獻研究室 ed., 

\textsuperscript{332} “Liu Shaoqi gei Liangongbu zhongyang he Sidalin de gaobao,” 中央關於周恩來文稿 [Manuscripts of Zhou Enlai since the founding of the PRC], (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), Vol. 1, p. 274.

Even cultural elites like Chen Yinque and Wu Mi regarded the policy of “leaning to one side” as losing cultural independence of China.
was merely a Soviet colony. To avoid this, the Soviet counterpart decided to strip sixteen high officials serving in the Xinjiang government, including Saifuddin Azizi, then the deputy chairman of the Xinjiang government, of their Soviet nationality. At the same time, the Chinese government assisted the Soviet government in detaining Soviet immigrants who had worked as spies for foreign powers and repatriated them to the USSR for further investigation. The religious leaders who had fled to Xinjiang after the Bolshevik Revolution were kept under close surveillance, and those who planned not to go back to the USSR but instead to immigrate to capitalist states were forced to stay and later even forced to return to the USSR. 

After the Chinese Civil War, China was so impoverished that “five people have to share the portion of three people’s food,” to use the phrase of Mao Zedong. Not only the Chinese but the Soviet nationals had encountered tremendous economic difficulties. For the sake of Sino-Soviet relations, the Chinese government always prioritized all policies related to Soviet nationals. In November 1949 in Qingdao, a seashore city in Shandong province, forty-five Russians were living in poverty and decided to migrate to Harbin to establish a new life. Though it was only related to forty-five Russians, the

335 “Guanyu 1955 nian xiezhu Suqiao huiguo gongzuo de zongjie” 關於一九五五年協助蘇僑回國工作的總結 [Summary of how to assist Soviet nationals to return to their country to work in 1955] (14 March 1956), Jilin Provincial Archives (JPA), File No. 77-2-18.
Chinese government treated it seriously. The Premier Zhou Enlai himself contacted Gao Gang, then the chairman of the Northeastern China People’s Government, to resettle them.\footnote{337 Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and and Zhongyang dang’anguan ed., \textit{Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao}, Vol. 1, p. 586.}

The CCP also benefited in several ways from cooperation with the Soviets in the issue of the Soviet nationals. By pleasing the Soviets, the newborn Chinese government could earn more Soviet aid. Furthermore, Soviet nationals could be used as manpower for sparsely populated regions where the labor force was always limited. More importantly, after occupying more and more lands during the Civil War, the CCP was facing a serious shortage of cadres that could be used to build and rule the local governments in recently occupied regions.\footnote{338 “Migaoyang guanyu zhengce fangmian de poqie wenti yu Mao Zedong de huitan beiwanglu,” in Shen Zhihua ed., \textit{Eguo jiemi dang’an}, p. 303.} The shortage of ethnic cadres was even more serious. The CCP’s direct experience of governing ethnic people was based on Inner Mongolia, which the CCP occupied right after the Second World War with assistance from the USSR. What the CCP had learned from that experience was that using ethnic elites rather than Han Chinese to serve as cadres was essential for gaining the cooperation of local residents.\footnote{339 “Guanyu daliang xishou he peiyang shaoshuminzu ganbu de zhishi” [Direction of massively selecting and training ethnic cadres], in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室 ed., \textit{Jianguo yilai zhongyang wenxian xuanbian} 建國以來重要文獻選編 [A Selection of important documents since the founding of the PRC] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), Vol. 1, p. 39.} The East Turkistan Republic cadres, being trained by Moscow and rich in revolutionary experiences, not only made up the shortage but served as role models for other CCP cadres.
While the Chinese government went all out to cooperate with the USSR regarding the issue of Soviet nationals, what bothered the CCP most was that they lacked basic information about these people. The official documents claimed that from 1949 to the early 1960s over 760,000 people were registered as “Soviet nationals” across the country; however, the Chinese government had no way to confirm these data and did not know who the people actually were. But the Soviet government denied to offer the Chinese government basic information about the Soviet nationals. For example, in early 1950, the local government of Dalian, a city in northeastern China, arbitrarily asked the Soviet consulate for the name list and personal files of the Soviet nationals in the city. Officials were denied. Nokolai Roshchin, then the Soviet ambassador to China, approached Premier Zhou Enlai, asking him to withdraw this decision because the Soviets had some “concerns” regarding sharing the information. As a result, for many years the Chinese government was not informed by the Soviet government on the issue of the Soviet nationals and was unable to perform any public census. Though the Chinese government had been investigating the issue of Soviet nationals clandestinely, it remained a gray area.

340 “Xinjiang waiban bao youguan Suqiao wenti ji bianjie bianfang wenti de gongzuo qingkuang he cunzai wenti” [Report from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office on the current situation and problems of the borders and border defense] (6 November 1960), AMFA, File No. 118-01138-15.


342 It was very much for the election of the National People’s Congress that would be held in 1953 that the Chinese government performed a demographic census of the Soviet nationals in the Three Districts. According to this census, this population numbered 64,561. There were 15,196 in Tacheng and 7,000 in Altay. The towns and villages in all counties in the Three Districts had Soviet nationals. Most Russians
While some Soviet immigrants decided to settle in Xinjiang, others planned to return. Before entering the USSR, they had to submit applications and be investigated thoroughly by Moscow. Since the process took a long time and many were rejected, the Soviet nationals in Xinjiang became more and more impatient. In June 1952, in a county in Yili, around one thousand Soviet nationals were organized by the cadres of the Soviet national association, demonstrating for their return to the USSR. The representatives of the demonstrators were received by the Soviet consulate in Yili, but their wish was not satisfied. However, the demonstration did push the Soviet government to determine a solution to dealing with the Soviet immigrants who were denied entry. The best solution was to let these immigrants settle in China.

On the Chinese side, how to solve the issue of Soviet nationals and the stateless people in China was never urgent for the CCP until 1953. In that year, the Electoral Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Local People’s Congresses and Local People’s Governments was published, and the first National People’s Congress was imminent. Therefore, local governments needed Beijing to inform them whether the Soviet nationals should be granted suffrage. In July 1953, as the local government of Yili was preparing

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lived in the towns and villages in Yili and Tacheng and in some areas there were villages of Russians. See Yilizhou waishiban shizhi ban’gongshi 伊犁州外事辦史志辦公室 ed., Yili zizhizhou waishi zhi 伊犁自治州外事志 [Foreign Affairs of Yili autonomous region] (Xinjiang: Yili zizhizhou waishiban shizhi ban’gongshi, internal circulated, unpaged manuscript, 1997).


for the election of representatives for the coming first National People’s Congress, officials were wondering if the local Soviet nationals could vote. They sent a telegram to Beijing for instructions. Beijing also felt it was time to finalize a solution for dealing with the Soviet nationals who had been in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, and other regions for years but were either not allowed to enter the USSR or not willing to go back. After obtaining consent from Moscow through the Soviet consulate in Xinjiang, the CCP changed its policy from treating them as foreigners of an allied country to settling them permanently.\footnote{In March 1950, when a local People’s Congress was going to be held in a banner in Inner Mongolia, they were informed by Beijing that it was not proper for the Soviet nationals to be formal representatives of the Congress. The only thing they could do was to attend as nonvoting delegates. See “Zhongyang guanyu Suqiao buyi canjia rentaihui gei Neimenggu fenju de dianbao” [A telegram from the Central Committee to Inner Mongolia: It is not suitable for Soviet nationals to attend the People’s Congress], in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室 and Zhongyang dang’anguan 中共中央黨務工作部 ed., Liu Shaoqi wengao 建國以來劉少奇文稿 [Manuscripts of Liu Shaoqi since the founding of PRC] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), Vol. 2, p. 167.} In other words, the Soviet nationals would be treated as Chinese citizens and gradually naturalized. On August 12, Yili government received a reply from Beijing, indicating that both the Soviet nationals and dual citizenship holders could be granted the rights to vote and to be elected. Furthermore, in order to encourage them to settle in China, they could participate in the election before giving up their Soviet nationality.\footnote{“Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu Xinjiang suqiao xuanjuquan wenti de zhishi,” in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi and Zhongyang dang’anguan 中共中央黨務工作部 ed., Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian 1949–2010, p. 102.} Besides being granted universal suffrage, during the land reform movement the Soviet nationals were also assigned lands just as Chinese citizens were.\footnote{“Guanyu shuangchong guoji Suqiao de wenti” 關於雙重國籍蘇僑的問題 [On Soviet nationals with dual nationalities] (6 May 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01760-03.} Thus, naturalizing those with Soviet citizenship and Soviet/Chinese dual citizens was the solution for both
the Chinese government and its Soviet counterpart to the issue of Soviet nationals in Xinjiang.

**From 1954 to 1955**

In 1954, the Soviets changed their policy regarding Soviet immigrants from making them Chinese citizens to repatriating them back to Central Asia to serve as part of the labor force. After Nikita Khrushchev rose to power in 1953, in order to boost dramatically Soviet agricultural production to alleviate the food shortages plaguing the populace, he launched the so-called “Virgin Lands Campaign.” He proposed the plowing and cultivation of 13 million hectares (130,000 km²) of previously uncultivated land by 1956; the targeted lands included areas in the northern Caucasus, western Siberia, and northern Kazakhstan. To recruit workers for the program, Khrushchev advertised the opportunity as a socialist adventure for Soviet youth. During the summer of 1954, 300,000 Komsomol volunteers traveled to the regions to be cultivated. For young men from poor villages, orphans, and released prisoners, even though the living conditions were poor, they still experience an improved lifestyle. However, the poor living conditions caused many workers from cities and middle-class families to leave within the first months to years after arriving. To alleviate the manpower shortages, the USSR decided to repatriate Soviet immigrants in Xinjiang to Central Asia. On April 28, 1954,

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349 The Soviet immigrants in Manchuria had been repatriated to Siberia during Khrushchev’s Virgin Land Campaign, in which thousands and hundreds of men and women were sent to farm on previously uncultivated lands in Russia and Kazakhstan.
the Soviet ambassador to China informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC that they decided to repatriate 6,000 Soviet national households (roughly a population of 16,000 to 20,000) from all of China. From June to August, the busy season for farming, they would be repatriated to Caucasia, Siberia, and Kazakhstan to reclaim wasteland there. Those in Xinjiang would be sent to Kazakhstan for the convenience of both location and the similarities of the population on both sides. Those of Soviet citizenship, fit for labor and politically trustworthy, were qualified to return. Their family members could go as well. The policy that returnees could bring back their family members in China regardless of their nationalities was a way the USSR tried to calm the worries of these people. However, this policy soon proved to be a headache for the Chinese government and triggered many conflicts between the alliances.

In order to draw back the maximum number of nationals to Central Asia, the Soviet government offered them multiple benefits: free housing, jobs according to specialties, free job training, sound subsidies, and others. For some, the benefits the government offered might be modest; however, for those in Xinjiang who lived in squalor, the incentives were a draw. The campaign of repatriating Soviet nationals

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351 “Sulian zhu Tianjin zonglingguan guanyu Suqiao huiguo de buchong zhishi (zhishi Tianjin Suqiao gonghui)” 蘇聯駐天津總領館關於蘇僑回國的補充指示（指示天津蘇僑工會）[Supplementary directions from the Soviet Consulate in Tianjin to the Association of Soviet Nationals in Tianjin on the repatriation of Soviet nationals] (1 January 1954), AMFA, File No. 118-00237-02.
collectively was launched by the Soviet consulates in Xinjiang, and those of Russian ties answered the call actively.\textsuperscript{352}

The Chinese government, for the sake of strengthening the Sino-Soviet alliance, cooperated wholeheartedly. Policies related to the USSR, in the eyes of the Chinese government, were usually regarded as critical because they could impact Sino-Soviet relations. Claiming that this “important,” “urgent,” and “complicated” political mission could only be a success, the policy instituted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC was to “cooperate initatively, assist actively, subsidize reasonably, offer convenience considerately, and send them away promptly.” To further facilitate the Embassy of the USSR in Beijing and several local Soviet consulates to fulfill the mission, the Chinese government formed many “committees of assisting to repatriate Soviet nationals” at all levels from central to local.\textsuperscript{353} Many measures had been taken by the Chinese side to encourage the Soviet nationals to return. To guarantee that the Soviet nationals would not hesitate to return for family reasons, the Chinese government claimed that their family members, regardless of nationalities, could go to the USSR as long as the Soviet government allowed. To ensure the possible loss of property would not hinder the Soviets from returning, the Chinese government also enacted a policy that returnees’ properties, including grain, livestock, tools, houses, and seedlings, would be purchased by county governments. Family members who had disagreements on whether to return would enter mediation by the local government and be encouraged to go back to contribute. As a

\textsuperscript{352} “Guanyu Sulian chehui zai Hua Suqiao gei zhongyang de qingshi baogao” (28 April 1954), AMFA, File No. 118-00026-01.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid.
result, both Soviet citizens and dual citizenship holders, as long as they could prove their Soviet origin, were allowed to return with barely any background check. Some stateless people also left for the USSR, as either Soviet citizens or their dependents.

The official source indicates that in 1954, 2,464 Soviet nationals in Xinjiang left for Central Asia; some stateless people left as dependents, though their numbers are unclear. In 1955, while 86,734 people from all of China were repatriated to the USSR, 64,483 were from Xinjiang. Thus, from 1954 to 1955, 114,326 nationwide left for the USSR. Those who left Xinjiang for Central Asia numbered more than 66,947 and were more people in Xinjiang were ready to leave as well.

In 1954, right after the USSR started to repatriate the Soviet nationals collectively, the Chinese government confessed that “we have underestimated the uniqueness and complexity of the situation of Soviet nationals in Xinjiang by assuming Xinjiang is as ‘normal’ as other regions.” First, the Chinese government did not expect that so many indigenous residents of Xinjiang would leave, which heavily impacted farming and herding activities. In 1954, most of those who had left were “activists,” who had been longing to return. When news about a better life in Central Asia reached Xinjiang, more and more people decided to leave. The year 1955 witnessed a loss of workforce in the Yili Zone at least ten times that of 1954. Being sparsely populated, the Three Districts

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356 Yili zhou waishiban shizhi gangongshi 伊犁州外事辦史志辦公室 ed., Yili zizhizhou waishizhi 伊犁自治州外事志 [Foreign affairs in Yili Autonomous Prefecture], internal publication with no page number.
358 Ibid.
thus witnessed a shortage of labor. Furthermore, the government found that more than 60% of the population of Yili (more than 500,000) had Soviet ties. If they and their family members were allowed to return, most of the population would leave and “the whole Kazak Autonomous Region” would no longer exist.\(^{359}\) When people immigrated, they brought their farm tools and livestock, which also imperiled the power of production. For example, in Suiding county, now a part of Huocheng county in Yili, from 1955 to 1956 there were more than 700 households moved to Central Asia. As a result, the number of horses decreased from more than 3,000 to 2,000, carts fell by more than 1,000, and plows declined more than 100. The result was a serious shortage of tools and livestock in the county, impairing greatly local production.\(^{360}\)

Besides the loss of labor force, tools, and livestock, the timing of the repatriation impacted the farming and herding. Since the main purpose of the repatriation was to open up wasteland, the Soviets usually recalled their nationals right before the busy season. Rather than offering enough time for the Chinese government to prepare in advance, the Soviets would inform the Chinese government the date for repatriating at the last minute. With preparations done hastily and without any plan, the Xinjiang government felt the repatriation was chaotic.\(^{361}\) When more and more people were considering immigrating, the social mentality in Yili became more and more unstable, which impacted the production work negatively.

\(^{359}\) “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
\(^{361}\) “Guanyu 1955 nian xiezhu Suqiao huiguo gongzuo de zongjie” (14 March 1956), JPA, File No. 77-2-18.
Second, with so many people deciding to leave, the Chinese government found it was hard to stem the tide because a clear definition of who qualified to be a “Soviet national” did not exist.\textsuperscript{362} As this chapter demonstrates, the lack of a clear demarcation of “Soviet nationals” in Xinjiang was a fundamental problem in claiming national sovereignty for the Chinese government and triggered numerous conflicts in Sino-Soviet relations. The sophistication was caused, as an official inner report indicated, by the “uniqueness” of Xinjiang. The report listed several elements that made Xinjiang special. Xinjiang neighbored the USSR, so the number of Soviet nationals and stateless people in Xinjiang was significant. People in Xinjiang and those in Soviet Central Asia were also from the same ethnic groups, such as Kazaks and Uighurs. It was hard to differentiate these people by nationality.\textsuperscript{363}

Furthermore, some were originally Chinese citizens but for political reasons had acquired Soviet nationality. After the Yining rebellion, supported by the USSR, occurred in 1944, some indigenous people acquired Soviet nationality, fearing genocide targeting Chinese citizens in Xinjiang. The rebels who had killed Han Chinese during the rebellion also sought Soviet citizenship, in order to avoid being punished by the KMT government. Under the Soviet umbrella, they hoped that they would be safer. Some young people in Xinjiang, impacted greatly by the Soviet Revolution, decided to bring a revolution to Xinjiang as well. Being disconnected from the CCP, whose revolution was at ebb tide, they decided to become Soviets in order to be a part of the revolution. Others were educated in the USSR and thus believed that Xinjiang should become either another a

\textsuperscript{362} “Guanyu 1955 nian xiezhu Suqiao huiguo gongzuo de zongjie” (14 March 1956), JPA, File No. 77-2-18.
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid.
satellite state of the USSR like Mongolian Republic or a Soviet national republic. Either way, Xinjiang would be under the thumb of the USSR. Therefore, they decided to become Soviet citizens. These four ways of becoming Soviet citizens, in the eyes of the Chinese government, complicated the borderline between the Soviet nationals and Chinese ethnic minorities. After two years of cooperation always in favor of the Soviet side, the Chinese government believed that the “uniqueness” made it necessary to treat Xinjiang and other parts of China such as Manchuria differently regarding the issue of the Soviet nationals.

**Stateless People, 1956–1961**

While the policy in China proper and Manchuria was intact, beginning in 1956, the Chinese government decided to exert more control on the issue of repatriating in Xinjiang. However, with the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in late 1958, Chinese control was further tightened. Accordingly, the Soviet side also turned from cooperative to antagonistic. The confrontation regarding the borderland population contributed greatly to the mass exodus in 1962. The Chinese side and its Soviet counterpart had several issues to resolve: Who were qualified to be the “Soviet nationals”? Were those who had originally been from the USSR but maintained the status quo of “stateless people” “Soviet nationals?” If not, who were they by nationality? Who was qualified to

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return and in what way? What was the proper way to deal with the cadres in Xinjiang who had Soviet nationality?

Who was qualified to be “Soviet nationals?” In 1953, the Chinese government claimed that “those whose ancestry and place of birth or only ancestry belong to the USSR and hold Soviet passport is regarded as a Soviet national.” Others were regarded as either “Chinese ethnic peoples” or “stateless people.” In 1959, Saifuddin Azizi, then the chairman of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, claimed to the Soviet Embassy in Urumqi that “only the official Soviet passport holders are Soviet citizens.” Thus, those who did not have official Soviet passports, though they were originally from Russia or the Soviet Union, were not entitled to be “Soviet nationals.” The Soviet side was cooperative at first and agreed with this definition in 1956. Only when the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relations occurred in 1959 did the Soviets widen the citizenship boundary to whoever was accepted by the Supreme Soviet of Russia, the legislative bodies of the USSR.

Who were the “stateless people” and what was the proper way to deal with them? These were the most contestable issues between the two socialist states. Troubling the Chinese government the most regarding the issue of nationality were those in three categories. The first group was those who had immigrated to Xinjiang from 1917 to 1933, 1959, 1960.

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365 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guo ji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
fleeing either the Bolshevik Revolution or the forced collectivization of agriculture. They numbered around 50,000. The second group was those of Sino-Russian mixed blood. Finally, the third group was those who recovered their Soviet citizenship in 1946 but had not received a passport.\footnote{The Chinese government regarded those with mixed blood as Chinese citizens. Those who recovered their Soviet citizenship but failed to be issued Soviet passports were treated as stateless people. See “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.} Because around 50,000 fell in the first category, they became the focus of both the Chinese government and its Soviet counterpart.

In 1953, the Chinese government claimed that those who were originally from Russia/USSR and lived in Xinjiang for a long period but did not have Soviet passports could be stateless people if they were not willing to be Chinese citizens. However, when the Soviets started to repatriate their nationals, afraid that many people would not return, the Chinese government mobilized these “stateless people” to go back. To facilitate their return, the Chinese government even helped them to recover their Soviet nationality.\footnote{“Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.} As a result, anyone who could prove their Soviet origin was allowed and even encouraged to leave as long as the Soviet side agreed to accept them. Certificates issued by Soviet national associations (so-called “white notes”), provisional certificates by Soviet embassies, and invitation letters from relatives or collective farms in the USSR could be used as evidence of individuals’ Soviet origin.\footnote{“Zizhiqu dangweishuiji Saifuding yu Sulian zhu Wuluruqi zonglingshi Dabashen jiu Suqiao wenti jiaohuan yijian de tanhua jiyao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-80.} In 1955, because the social order and production work in Xinjiang was impacted negatively due to the massive repatriation, on July 12 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested to the Soviet Embassy in China that it would be better not to mobilize the stateless ethnic Kazaks and Uighurs to
return. Even with the serious negative impact of the massive repatriation, for the sake of the Sino-Soviet alliance, the Chinese government still hold a cooperative attitude toward its Soviet counterpart. On October 15, 1955, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still instructed Xinjiang government that whether the stateless people could recover their Soviet nationality according to “the will of the Soviet side and the free will of the stateless people. If the stateless people are willing to recover their nationality, we should not deter but facilitate. If stateless people are not willing, we should not encourage.”371 In 1957, the policy regarding the “stateless people” was tightened. They were not allowed to go to the USSR unless they were immediate family members of Soviet nationals.372

The Soviet side was also cooperative with its Chinese ally when the Sino-Soviet alliance was in a good shape. The Embassy of the USSR in Beijing agreed that from 1956 on, stateless people would not be repatriated but would stay in Xinjiang permanently. Neither would the Soviet government repatriate their nationals in a collective fashion.373 The Soviet side further sent the Chinese government a memorandum, claiming that “the Soviet government have already instructed the Soviet embassies in Xinjiang that the applications of those who are not Soviet nationals but plan to go to the USSR should be examined strictly. Those who are allowed to return should not be repatriated collectively. Furthermore, they cannot return until they obtain permissions from the Chinese government in advance.”374

371 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
374 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
Either side assumed that the stateless people were their nationals, however, they were sensitive to this issue but handled carefully in order not to offend the ally. In late 1957, it was very much possible that the local government in Urumqi reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC that the Soviet Embassy in Urumqi had regarded whoever was originally from Russia as Soviet nationals and thus issued them passports. Since this issue was serious, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC noted this to the Soviet Embassy to China and asked for an explanation. The Soviet Embassy in Yili thus had to inform the Chinese local official in Yili that “it was not in line with the fact,” but a “misunderstanding.” The Yili side, probably in order to avoid offending the Soviets, informed their Soviet comrades that they had not had an opinion like this nor had reported this to Beijing.375

Though the Chinese government did not blame its ally, Beijing believed that the Soviets had been doing something secretly to solve the problem at their advantage. As a backlash, the Chinese side decided to reverse course, favoring their own interests versus those of the Soviets. In order to reduce the impact the massive repatriation had on the production force in Xinjiang as much as possible, the Chinese government required the Soviets to repatriate mainly the urban population, to treat the country population only as supplementary, and to leave the pastoralist population intact.376 Besides requiring the Soviets to follow this order, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC barely demonstrated enthusiasm for facilitating the Soviets any more. After negotiations, in March 1957 the

375 “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui waishifenchu guanyu Li zhouzhang tong lingshi, Wang Huanzhang tongzhi he Suxie zhuxi tanhua jilu de baogao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-69.
Yili Diplomatic Bureau of PRC and the Soviet Embassy in Yili drafted an annual plan of 1957 for repatriating Soviet nationals. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC did not respond to the plan until three months later. During this period, the Soviet consul and deputy consul had been inquiring with the Yili Diplomatic Bureau multiple times and even suspected the Chinese government was still willing to cooperate. The attitude of Beijing had changed so dramatically regarding the repatriating issue, in its annual report, even the Yili Diplomatic Bureau confessed that the Chinese government’s position was too much in favor of Xinjiang but ignored the intentions and needs of the Soviet side.  

Due to the new policy benefiting the Chinese side, 1957 witnessed a big decrease in the number of people who had been allowed to be repatriated by the Chinese government. Including Soviet nationals and their dependents, only 533 returned to Central Asia. The change from loose to tight control of the immigration policy not only made the Soviet government doubt that their Chinese ally was willing to cooperate but also caused those in Xinjiang with Soviet ties to worry if they would be allowed to go back any more.

With the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations beginning in late 1958, both sides turned from cooperation to conflict regarding the stateless people. The Soviet side was unsatisfied with the control the Chinese government had placed on the immigration policy and changed its policy regarding who were qualified to be Soviet nationals. On November 28, 1959, the general consul of the Soviet Embassy in Urumqi informed the Xinjiang government that the USSR believed that those who immigrated to Xinjiang from the USSR between 1917 and 1933, who had been labeled as stateless people, were

378 Yili zhou waishiban shizhi gangongshi ed., Yili zizhizhou waishizhi.
in fact Soviet nationals. At the same time, the Soviet consulate in Yili had been issuing
certificates and even passports to these stateless people through Soviet national
associations. As the dispute between these two socialist states escalated, in June 1960
the conflict between the CCP delegation and the Soviet Communist Party occurred in
Bucharest, impacting relations between two Soviet consulates in Xinjiang and the local
governments. On the issue of repatriating the Soviet nationals, these two Soviet
consulates changed their attitudes from cooperative to always faulting the Chinese side
and criticizing the Chinese. For example, the Soviet consulate in Urumqi blamed the
Xinjiang government for giving permission to the Soviet nationals to return without
consulting the Soviet government in advance. In 1961, the Soviet consul in Yili even
traveled to some counties to mobilize the locals of Soviet origins to return. The consul
claimed that “we admit that the Kazaks originally came from the USSR, not matter they
have Soviet passports or not, are Soviet nationals. They are welcomed to return to the
USSR.”

On the Chinese side, as Sino-Soviet relations worsened, the immigration policy
became tighter and the attitude against the Soviets became tougher. The Chinese side
adopted a measure-for-measure policy against the Soviet consulates in Xinjiang. From
1954 to 1958, as the Chinese government claimed, more than 99,000 Soviet nationals had

379 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
380 Yili zhou waishiban shizhi gangongshi ed., Yili zizhizhou waishizhi.
381 “Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu renmin weiyuanhui waishichu 1960 nian de gongzuojie ji 1961nian de
gongzuo anpai yijian” 新疆維吾爾自治區人民委員會外事處 1960 年的工作總結及 1961 年的工作安排意見
[Report from the Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Committee in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region: A
382 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguan guoji wenti ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
been repatriated to Central Asia. In this case, for the sake of the production force of Xinjiang, the Xinjiang government required the Soviet consulate in Urumqi to fulfil their work in half a year.\footnote{383} In the past, the Soviet consulates in Xinjiang mainly approached the indigenous people through Soviet national associations. It was very possible to avoid being controlled by the local governments. Thus, the cadres of the associations of Soviet nationals usually approached their targeted people without informing local governments in advance.\footnote{384} To cripple the ability of the associations to mobilize locals to become Soviet citizens, in 1959 the Chinese government froze ¥600,000 worth of association bank deposits.\footnote{385} To further prevent the Soviet consuls from strengthening the indigenous people’s will for leaving, the Diplomatic Bureau in Yili required the Soviets not to contact any Chinese working units in Xinjiang unless through the Bureau, which infuriated the Soviets.

The attitudes the Chinese officials had when meeting Soviet diplomats also became more hostile. In 1960, when negotiating the repatriation of Soviet nationals, an annual occurrence, this time the atmosphere changed greatly. Wang Huanzhang, the head of the Diplomatic Bureau, who used to be always friendly to the Soviets but this time refuted the Soviet consuls during the conference. The annual report of the Bureau even

\footnote{383} “Zizhiqu dangweishuji Saifuding yu Sulian zhu Wuluruqi zonglingshi Dabashen jiu Suqiao wenti jiaohuan yijian de tanhua jiyao” (3 February 1959), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-80.
\footnote{384} “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui waishifenchu guanyu Li zhouzhang tong lingshi, Wang Huanzhang tongzhi he Suxie zhuxi tanhua jilu de baogao” 伊犁哈薩克自治州人民委員會外事分處關於李州長同領事、王煕章同志和蘇協主席談話紀錄的報告 [Report from the Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Committee of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture: Memo of conversation between Prefectural Governor Mr. Li and the Soviet Consulate and that between Comrade Wang Huanzhang and the Chairman of Soviet Association] (5 July 1958), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-69.
\footnote{385} “Zizhiqiu dangweishuji Saifuding yu Sulian zhu Wuluruqi zonglingshi Dabashen jiu Suqiao wenti jiaohuan yijian de tanhua jiyao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-80.
confessed that the way the Chinese side dealt with the Soviet consulates was “simple” and “rude.” In October 1960, because the Chinese had made solving the issue of the cadres with Soviet citizenship a priority, the repatriation of the Soviet nationals who were not cadres was halted. In November 1960, Zhou Enlai instructed informally that the stateless people were Chinese citizens. Based on the instruction, the Chinese government issued them Chinese passports, which caused the Soviet government to protest. In June 1961, the Soviet Embassy in Urumqi claimed that it was improper to issue Chinese passports to those who had ancestors who lived in the USSR for generations.

On March 28, 1962, the Soviet Embassy to China formally notified the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC to determine the citizenship of three kinds of people with Soviet ties: those who immigrated to Xinjiang from 1917 to 1933, people who were born in Xinjiang with mixed Chinese and Soviet blood, and those who recovered their Soviet citizenship in 1946 but had not yet attained a Soviet passport. The policy the Soviets proposed to the Chinese government was that these people, if willing, could still become Soviet citizens. The Soviet government failed to receive a reply on issues like this as usual. In April, a mass exodus occurred first in Tacheng and then in Yili. The Chinese government believed that the Soviets had opened their borders to immigrants from

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387 Ibid.
388 “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguo de ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
389 “Zhang Hanfu fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’erwo’onianke tanhua jilu: Guanyu Xinjiang bianjing diqu shaoshuminzu jumin dapi taowang Sulian shi de jiaoshe” [Memo of the Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu meeting the Soviet Consulate Stepan Chhervonenko, on how to deal with many ethnic groups in Xinjiang who escaped to the Soviet Union], AMFA, File No. 118-01764-05; “Xinjiang diqu tong Sulian youmaodun de youguo de ziliao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01760-01.
Xinjiang and had even mobilized them in order to solve this problem permanently in an unconventional way after they had failed to solve it diplomatically.\footnote{Zhang Hanfu fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’erwo’onianke tanhua jilu,” AMFA, File No. 118-01764-05.}

**Cadres of Soviet Ties**

In the Three Districts, as mentioned earlier, a significant part of the cadres were from the former Eastern Turkistan Republic. Many of them had either Soviet citizenship or dual citizenship. In Tacheng, for example, there were 3,000 cadres, and 60\% were Soviet citizens.\footnote{Yili zhou waishiban shizhi gangongshi ed., Yili zizhizhou waishizhi.} They were high officials and CCP members though the CCP constitution demonstrated that foreign citizens should not become CCP members.\footnote{“Zizhiqu dangweishuji Saifuding yu Sulian zhu Wuluruqi zonglingshi Dabashen jiu Suqiao wenti jiaohuan yijian de tanhua jiyao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-80.} In order not to offer the capitalist world an excuse to criticize the Soviets for colonizing Xinjiang, sixteen high-ranking officials in Xinjiang were deprived of their Soviet citizenship by the USSR.

Even when Sino-Soviet relations turned friendly, the Chinese side believed that it was problematic that so many cadres served for the CCP, local governments, and the army in Xinjiang but had Soviet citizenship. The Chinese government had been taking opportunities to naturalize them gradually. In 1953, with permission from the Soviet side, the Xinjiang government was instructed by Beijing to offer them suffrage for the National Convention without revoking their Soviet citizenship as a precondition. However, most cadres adopted a “swinging,” “wait-and-see” attitude with their
nationality, and the most common approach they had chosen was “straddling on two boats,” taking advantage of whatever the two countries had to offer. Thus, most of them declined to be naturalized as Chinese citizens but either claimed they were Soviet nationals or denied publicly that they had Soviet certificates or passports, though they or their family members actually had them.

When the Soviet government started to repatriate their nationals in 1954, some cadres resigned their jobs before being permitted by Moscow to return. Some left successfully while the others were denied. When they applied to recover their positions in their former working units, they were informed that the working units declined to have them back. The reason sounded reasonable: the return of the Soviet nationals would inconvenience the units they were serving. Even so, many immigrated anyway and became jobless. Thus, the mobility the cadres with Soviet citizenship had made the local government regard them as temporary and uncontrollable.

The best way to settle them was to naturalize them. Even in 1958, the Soviet Embassy to China still showed its support for the Chinese government to require the local cadres with Chinese ancestry to surrender their Soviet citizenship. Backed up by the Soviets, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC instructed the local organs in Xinjiang to insist on pushing the cadres to renounce their Soviet nationality or not allow them to serve in their positions anymore. The Ministry further instructed the Xinjiang government to exert pressure through the Party organization and the Communist Youth leagues. The

393 “Yili waishifenchu 1957 nian gongzuo baogao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-59.
395 “Yili qu xiezhu Suqiao huiguo weihuiyuan,” JPA, File No. 77-2-18; Yili zhou waishiban shizhi gangongshi ed., Yili zizhizhou waishizhi.
Ministry further instructed that the Soviet government should also be used to persuade the cadres to give up their Soviet citizenship.\textsuperscript{396} Cadres without Chinese ancestry would also be pushed to be Chinese citizens, though pressures facing them were fewer.

It seems that the Soviet citizenship card some cadres played worried the CCP, feeling that the mobility of these cadres would cripple the goals a series of political campaigns planned to achieve. For example, Saifuddin Azizi complained to the Soviet consul in Urumqi how the Chinese government was bothered by the mobility some cadres had during the Anti-Rightist and Anti-Local Nationalism Movements. When some cadres were labeled as “local nationalists,” a political term for those who could seek either independence or high autonomy from Xinjiang or merely were dissatisfied with CCP policies in Xinjiang, they claimed that they were Soviet nationals and decided to return though they had never before claimed to hold Soviet citizenship. Therefore, Saifuddin believed that it was not convenient for some cadres serving the CCP and Chinese government to retain their Soviet nationality. He proposed to the Soviet side that the cadres, especially those with a high raking, remain in Xinjiang rather than being patriated.\textsuperscript{397}

The experience the cadres had during the campaigns made them feel that Xinjiang had become a region for Han Chinese rather than ethnic peoples. In order to elude being further hurt, more and more cadres switched their “straddling on two boats” attitude to return to the USSR as soon as they could. By May 1959, most of them had already gained

\textsuperscript{397} “Zizhiqu dangweishuji Saifuding yu Sulian zhu Wuluruqi zonglingshi Dabashen jiu Suqiao wenti jiaohuan yijian de tanhua jiyao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-80.
permission from their working units and had completed the necessary paperwork.\textsuperscript{398}

However, in the same month, the CCP committee of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region ordered that the cadres with Soviet citizenship generally were not to be allowed to repatriate.\textsuperscript{399}

With the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, the loyalty the cadres of Soviet ties had for the Chinese party and state came into question. Beijing’s policy regarding the steps for solving the issue of Soviet nations had made the problem of cadres in Xinjiang with Soviet citizenship a priority.\textsuperscript{400} In August 1960, right after the Sino-Soviet conflict surfaced in Bucharest, Beijing decided to solve the problem of the cadres with Soviet citizenship once and for all. When asked to choose either to give up their Soviet citizenship and resume their positions in Yili or return to the USSR, only 12 cadres decided to stay while around 200 determined to leave without any hesitation.\textsuperscript{401} Since the determination most cadres had was so strong, in 1960 the Chinese government agreed to repatriate 308 cadres.\textsuperscript{402} Even after the mobilization of Lü Jianren, the Party Secretary of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, and local working units, by April 1961 only 33 cadres with Soviet citizenship in all of Xinjiang had surrendered or promised to surrender their Soviet nationality, while the vast majority determined to leave.\textsuperscript{403} By the end of

\textsuperscript{398} Yili zhou waishiban shizhi gangongshi ed., \textit{Yili zizhizou waishizhi}.

\textsuperscript{399} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{401} “Guanyu Suqiao qianfan de baogao” 關於蘇僑遣返的報告 [Report on Repatriating Soviet Nationals], AXUAR, File No. 13-43-208.


\textsuperscript{403} “Guanyu Suqiao he Suji banbu de chuli wenti” 關於蘇僑和蘇籍幹部的處理問題 [Report on How to Deal with Soviet Nationals and Cadres with Soviet Nationality] (25 March 1961), AXUAR, File No. 13-44-182.
1961, the official census revealed that 1,364 cadres across Xinjiang had claimed to have Soviet citizenship. After intense mobilization, only 17 cadres conceded their Soviet citizenship. There were 1,337 cadres determined to return, constituting 98.2% of the whole cadre population. While in 1961 Beijing had instructed local government in dealing with the issue of cadres with Soviet citizenship “to do more work and let more cadres stay but fewer ones leave,” the local government deliberately interfered with the cadres’ return. Cadres who decided to leave were either delayed permission or punished harshly. In 1961, it was very hard for cadres to return legally, which certainly enraged them.

After the Mass Exodus of 1962

From April 22 to the beginning of June 1962, as the Soviet authorities admitted, around 67,000 border inhabitants, most of whom were ethnic Kazaks and Uighurs, illegally crossed into the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. Many factors contributed to the mass exodus, as Chapter Two demonstrates, and the tightening of the immigration policy by the Chinese government was important. The Soviet authority also indicated that at the beginning of 1962 local authorities in Xinjiang almost stopped issuing exit visas for

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405 “Guanyu Suqiao he Suji banbu de chao yijian de baogao” [Concerning the Soviet and Suji bureaus’ report] AXUAR, File No. 13-44-182.
the USSR to Soviet citizens wishing to return. With things in Xinjiang worsening, more and more people with Soviet ties were eager to leave but were not allowed to do so legally, so they had to choose to cross the Sino-Soviet border without permission.

In June, immediately following the mass exodus, the Chinese government believed that the Soviet side had prepared and organized the mass crossing and that those originally from the USSR were the leaders. In retaliation, Chinese authorities changed their immigration policy regarding people of Soviet origin. Before the incident occurred, the Chinese side had used whatever measures possible to force these people to stay and be naturalized, as this chapter has demonstrated. The main purpose was to maximize the labor force and maintain the stability of the local bureaucracy in Xinjiang. After the mass exodus and especially the May 29 bloody event in Yining, on June 12 the purpose of the immigration policy changed to “uproot thoroughly all the trouble makers,” “make the local environment be beneficial for purifying and solidifying Xinjiang,” and “strengthen the Anti-Revisionism struggle.” In other words, the main goals for the policy would be to get rid of any potential trouble makers to maintain the social order and make Xinjiang a region with unitary Chinese citizens.

Thus, the Chinese government ordered that those with Soviet ties should be pushed out of this region as soon as possible. To prevent the Soviet side from accusing the Chinese government of violating the Sino-Soviet friendship, the Chinese government reminded local governments and organs to achieve the goal of tactical. The most

408 “Xinjiang zhizhiqu dangwei guanyu chuli youguan Suqiao wenti de banfa he guiding” 新疆自治區黨委關於處理有關蘇僑問題的辦法和規定 [Methods and regulations of the Party Committee of Xinjiang Autonomous Region on how to deal with Soviet nationals], AMFA, File No. 118-01145-16.
expedient way to drive them out, as the Chinese authorities determined, was to force
them to cross the border directly, as had recently happened. However, since the border of
the Soviet side was sealed, it was impossible to cross and would offer the Soviets an
excuse for blaming the Chinese. Thus, the Chinese government urged them to apply for
exit visas. To push the cadres with Soviet ties to leave, the local government even forced
them to leave for the USSR by threatening to resettle them in rural areas if they refused to
return. Furthermore, to prevent the Soviet government from sending agents to Xinjiang
to manipulate the indigenous people or collect information, the Chinese government
ordered that Soviet citizens who had left would not be allowed reentry.

To return to the USSR, the routine process a Soviet national went through was
applying first for an exit visa from the Chinese government and then for an entry visa
from Moscow. Before the mass crossing, especially in 1961, it was the Chinese side that
was reluctant to issue the exit visa, though visas from Moscow also took long to obtain.
After the event, while the application process was merely nominal, the applicants gained
visas expediently. Ironically, this time it was the Chinese side that accused the Soviet
government of delaying Soviet nationals’ entry visas. Those who had been expecting
visas from Moscow would sometimes demonstrate their anger and even violate the social
order since the situation in Xinjiang became more and more hostile to them. Therefore,
the Chinese government had been exerting political pressure on their Soviet counterpart

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409 “Xinjiang zhizhiqu dangwei guanyu chuli youguan Suqiao wenti de banfa he guiding,” AMFA, File No.
118-01145-16.
410 Ibid.
to issue these visas without delay. At the same time, the applicants would be mobilized by the Chinese to pressure the Soviet consulates in person. The Chinese government even provided the Soviet consulates a list of those who had been issued exit visas and then urged the Soviets to issue entry visas earlier, claiming applicants were pressuring them. In September 1962 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC requested that the Soviet government permit those persons seeking to leave for the USSR to do so under a simplified procedure. To keep the Chinese side from suspecting Moscow’s delay in issuing visas was a conspiracy to leave Soviet nationals in China to work as agents for the USSR, Soviet authorities temporarily permitted Soviet nationals and members of their families to enter the USSR from China without visas.

To further clarify the boundary of “Soviet national” after the border crossing, as ordered by Mao Zedong, on August 15, 1962, the government of Xinjiang issued an order. Because the main purpose of the order was to differentiate Soviet citizens from

411 “Dui Sulian zhengfu 8yue 9ri guanyu Xinjiang Zhongguo jumin feifa yuejing qu Su wenti de beiwanglu de dafu zhaohui” 對蘇聯政府 8月 9日關於新疆中國居民非法越境去蘇問題的備忘錄的答復照會 [Response to a memo of the Soviet government dated August 9 on Xinjiang citizens entering illegally to the Soviet Union], AMFA, File No. 118-01767-02.
412 “Xinjiang zhizhiqiu dangwei guanyu chuli youguan Suqiao wenti de banfa he guiding,” AMFA, File No. 118-01145-16.
414 “Lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang guanyu bianmin waitao de qingkuang baogao” 領事司副司長徐晃關於邊民外逃的情況報告 [A report from Xu Huang, the Deputy Director of the Consular Department, on the situation of the exodus of border residents], AMFA, File No. 118-01100-04.
417 “Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqiu renmin weiyuanhui mingling he zizhiqiu dangwei de xuanchuan yaodian” 新疆維吾爾自治區人民委員會命令和自治區黨委的宣傳要點 [Directives from the People’s Committee of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and major propaganda points of the Party Committee] (15 August
the Chinese, it defined the boundary and the rights and duties of foreign nationals. According to the order, only those with both foreign passports and resident certificates issued by the Chinese government were qualified to be foreign nationals. In a revision to the former policy, foreign nationals in China were not allowed to participate in local political organizations or engage in political activities. Nor were they entitled to the rights to vote and be elected. More importantly, they were not qualified to serve in any government departments, political organizations, or state-owned corporations.418 Thus, the opportunities for Soviet citizens, dual citizenship holders, and even stateless people to serve as cadres in Xinjiang officially ceased. With the publication of the order, the level of hostility the Xinjiang government had toward those with Soviet ties had escalated.

Under these pressures, between October 15, 1962, and May 1, 1963, as the Soviet authorities revealed, over 46,000 persons entered the USSR from China.419 As Soviet nationals left for the USSR in massive numbers, in 1963 the Soviet community in Xinjiang had been almost uprooted. To further eradicate any hiding Soviet citizens, Soviet organizations were forced to withdraw and a series of campaigns of confiscating “certificates of Soviet citizenship” and “catching Soviet agents” were undertaken across Xinjiang. All these will be discussed in the chapters to come.

CHAPTER 4
GOODBYE MOSCOW

Wind and rain escorted Spring’s departure,
Flying snow welcomes Spring’s return.
On the ice-clad rock rising high and sheer
A flower blooms sweet and fair.

Sweet and fair, she craves not Spring for herself alone,
To be the harbinger of Spring she is content.
When the mountain flowers are in full bloom
She will smile mingling in their midst.

———Mao Zedong, “Ode to the Plum Blossom,” 9 December 1961

The USSR as an Enemy

In his diary entry of April 20, 1962, Yang Shangkun, then the head of the General
Office of the Central Committee of the CCP, wrote, “Lantao called me from Lanzhou,
and we talked on the phone for one hour.” The call was made by Liu Lantao, the top
Secretary of the Northwest Bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP, who had just
traveled from Xi’an to Lanzhou after being informed that a mass exodus occurred in
Tacheng and Yili. During the conversation, Liu must have reported to Yang that border
crossings in these areas turned from sporadic, small-scale, clandestine to continual,
massive, and public. What should be done?

421 Yang Shangkun 楊尚昆, Yang Shangkun riji 楊尚昆日記 [Diary of Yang Shangkun] (Beijing: Zhongyang
422 Yao Kewen 姚克文 ed., Tachengshi zhi 塔城市志 [Gazette of the Tacheng City] (Urumqi: Xinjiang
At the time, the CCP had just held an important large-scale working conference that had lasted for twenty-eight days with more than 7,000 officials and cadres nationwide as participants. The conference was later referred to as the Seven Thousand People Conference in CCP history. The purposes for holding such a conference were multiple. One was to boost the morale of the local officials and cadres who had been demoralized by the great famine caused by the Great Leap Forward campaign. Furthermore, Beijing decided to take advantage of this meeting to touch base with local officials and cadres on how serious the economic situation was and how difficult it would be for the central government to ameliorate grain shortages in big cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai. By doing this, the central government hoped that local officials and cadres would be more willing to assist the central government by contributing more grain that otherwise would be consumed by locals.

Another goal was not domestic but was aimed at the USSR, which at that time was China’s ally, but only nominally. Mao Zedong believed that the Great Leap Forward would be his great contribution to the development of the Chinese economy, but Nikita Khrushchev claimed that Mao’s policies were deviations from the orthodoxy of Marxism and Leninism. Khrushchev’s attitude infuriated Mao so much that historians believe that it contributed heavily to the Sino-Soviet split. Beginning in 1958, Sino-Soviet relations went through several ebbs and flows and reached a new nadir at the end.

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of 1961. At the Twenty-Second Representative Convention of the Soviet Communist Party held in October 1961, Khrushchev once again harshly criticized the Chinese government and Mao. Since this was the time when China was experiencing a great famine, Khrushchev’s criticism was regarded by Beijing as “Revisionists … taking advantage of our domestic difficulties to intimidate us.” In order not to show the weakness of the CCP, Chinese Communists should “stick to our guns and confront the USSR.” Thus, an additional goal of the Thousand People Conference was to mobilize the whole nation to boost the economy to rebut Khrushchev. The conference was urgent and crucial especially when top leaders were troubled by the food shortage. However, Mao was more interested in how to defeat Khrushchev than in how to better prepare for the conference. He believed that the worst of the famine had passed and the economy was recovering. Therefore, the biggest challenge China would face in the near future was Soviet Revisionism. He did feel remorse for the loss of his fellow Chinese caused by the Great Leap Forward campaign, but he still had confidence in his policy for developing economy. Believing that the disaster was mainly caused by the inexperience of officials and cadres when enacting his policy, Mao declined to apologize. He became even more defensive after Khrushchev took advantage of the great famine to reveal how wrong Mao’s heretical economic policy was.

On February 22, 1962, the Soviet Communist Party sent a letter to Beijing, criticizing the CCP for adopting a “heretical” route in the international communist movement. To keep the CCP on the track, the Soviet Communist Party required their

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Chinese comrades to surrender their “unique position,” “unique route,” and accept the
“common route.”427 Khrushchev’s criticism complicated the already tough situation. For
Mao, admitting his policy was a mistake meant not only undermining his own authority
inside his Party, but also giving in when confronting Soviet “Revisionism.” To ensure
everybody was in line with him, at the end of December 1961 he recommended his
comrades read his famous anti-Soviet poem, “Ode to the Plum Blossom,” cited at the
beginning of this chapter.428 In the poem, “ice-clad rock” refers to the “Soviet
Revisionists,” while “Plum Blossom” is a metaphor for Chinese Communists. As Guo
Moruo, a prolific Communist writer and then the president of the Chinese Academy of
Sciences, later revealed, Mao’s purpose for circulating this piece was to encourage his
comrades not to capitulate to the huge pressures of the USSR. On the contrary, they
should stand firm in the international arena to set a role for their fellow Chinese, as a
plum blossom flowers even when buffeted by heavy snow.429 The same idea was
expressed more straightforwardly when Mao met representatives from northwestern
China at the August 1962 Beidaihe meeting. He instructed his comrades that the number-
one enemy the CCP was facing in Xinjiang was “Soviet Revisionism.” To fight against
them, powers should be concentrated. He even proposed to issue an edict so that
provinces, cities, regions, and counties nationwide could be informed. Furthermore,
northwestern China should be well prepared for the possible war the Soviets would

427 Ruan Ming 阮銘, Xunzhao ziyou: Ziyou de zhuiqiu yu huimie 寻找自由：自由的追求与毁灭 [In Search of
428 In his letter written on January 12, 1962 to Kang Sheng 康生, Mao admitted that he had written this
letter aimed at anti-Revisionism.
429 Guo Moru, Renmin ribao 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 15 March 1964. Also see Zhang Suhua, Bianju, pp.
63–64.
Therefore, just when anti-Soviet sentiment became the priority for Mao and he even envisioned an impending Sino-Soviet war that the Yi-Ta incident happened. The CCP’s anti-Soviet atmosphere set the stage for both how to interpret the origins of the incident and how to deal with it.

This chapter demonstrates how the CCP adopted the diplomatic means to halt the mass exodus from the Three Districts and then how Beijing used this incident as an excuse to finally eradicate the Soviet presence in this region as part of the anti-Soviet campaign. Believing that the mass exodus was mainly caused by a Soviet conspiracy, the Chinese government exerted serious diplomatic pressures on the USSR to force the Soviets to seal their side of the border. Furthermore, to uproot the Soviet presence in Xinjiang, the CCP took advantage of the Yi-Ta incident to abolish the associations of Soviet nationals first and then successfully force the Soviet consulates in Yili and Urumqi to withdraw. By these diplomatic means, the Soviet presence in Xinjiang, which for a century had been influencing Xinjiang in almost every way, was abolished.

**Seal of the Soviet Border**

When the border crossing was still sporadic, on April 18 the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office sent a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the abnormal phenomenon and request instruction. The instruction from the Ministry was cautious: First, they should inform the border checkpoint officials on the Soviet side that the

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Chinese government had found Chinese citizens crossing the border to the Soviet side, then ask the Soviets to help repatriate them to China. They were not allowed to mention that the Chinese had spotted Soviets using cars to pick up the border crossers. If the Soviets asked why these people had fled, they were instructed to reply that only after these people were repatriated might they be able to answer this question. The Chinese sought to avoid losing the diplomatic initiative in case the Soviets accused the Chinese side of initiating the problem. As the instruction demonstrated, Beijing was not yet ready to launch a diplomatic war against the USSR but wanted to see what would happen next before deciding how to react.

The first official report on reasons for the mass exodus was probably issued by the CCP Council of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. As the KMT interpreted the Yili rebellion of 1944 as merely a Soviet instigation, the report also claimed that “the causes of these people’s flight are not merely because their lives are miserable but more importantly because of political reasons.” Obviously, the so-called “political reasons” in the report was a euphemism for “Soviet conspiracy” since China and the USSR still maintained mutual friendship at least nominally. This report set the tone for Beijing on not only why the mass exodus had occurred but also how to tackle it.

431 “Duiyu Yi-Ta diqu bianmin xianhou taowang Sulian shi de chuli banfa” 對於伊塔地區邊民先後逃往蘇聯事的處理辦法 [About how to deal with borderland people who escaped from Yili and Tacheng to the Soviet Union], Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (AMFA), File No. 118-01771-10.
433 “Xinjiang waiban guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao” 新疆外辦關於伊犁塔城地區邊民逃往蘇聯的報告 [A report from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office on the border people of Yili and Tacheng who fled to the Soviet Union], AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.
On April 21, the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office sent a detailed report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs explaining why the “political reasons” were more crucial than the domestic ones and suggesting a solution. The Office claimed that much evidence proved that the USSR was the instigator of the incident: from the previous winter to the current spring, officials of Soviet consuls had been to Tacheng six times and met 4,743 people there. The goal of these meetings, the report claimed, was merely to agitate people there to flee to the USSR. To better mobilize them, the report revealed that the Soviet consulate in Yili recently strengthened the leadership of the Association of the Soviet Nationals, the most important organization connecting the Soviet government to Soviet nationals in Yili; the Soviet consulate in Yili had appointed a local ethnic official to be the chairman.

Soviet propaganda targeting the people in Xinjiang, after being halted during the Sino-Soviet honeymoon, was restored. In 1962, radio programs in both Kazakh and Uyghur were restarted, and some people claimed that they had heard that people in the USSR could have more private livestock and therefore a better life. Furthermore, local cadres from Tacheng found nice jobs after going back to the USSR. The Soviets were said to use materials beyond propaganda to agitate people. In recent months, people on the Chinese border had received many parcels, inside which there was a great deal of food, cloth, clothing, and so on. In 1961, the number of the parcels sent from the USSR to Tacheng reached 1,777. In the first season of 1962, 562 parcels reached Tacheng, weighing 4 tons, while the number of the parcels to Yili reached 2,519, weighing 20 tons. In the heavy anti-Soviet atmosphere, the sending of so many parcels and letters was
interpreted in the report as seducing people in Xinjiang to flee. Another way for the Soviets to mobilize people to flee, as the report revealed, was to settle Soviet nationals who were already back to the USSR but had broad social connections with people in Xinjiang on the Soviet side of the border. These people were used as agitators to induce people to flee. It was reported that some physical evidence had been found. When the mass exodus occurred, the barbed wire on the Soviet side of the border had been cut, leaving holes through which migrants could easily cross the border. To resettle the migrants on the Soviet side of the border, tents were placed for migrants to rest, and cars were ready to ferry them to their planned destinations.  

This was the proof the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office used to outline the crucial role of the Soviets in instigating the mass exodus. While some evidence was not baseless, however, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, other information was misleading. For example, skyrocketing parcel shipments to Tacheng and Yili in 1961 and 1962 were mainly the result of a shortage of daily necessities caused by the halt of Sino-Soviet trade rather than the USSR enticing immigrants. However, under the shadow of the anti-Soviet campaign, this information served a political purpose. If the mass exodus could not be halted immediately, the report predicted, the result would be serious. The same thing would happen in other regions of Xinjiang, such as Altay, Borotala, Kashgar. The mass exodus would sharpen the class conflicts, and those who were labeled by the CCP as enemies of the Revolution, such as landlords, rich farmers, anti-revolutionists, bad elements, rightists,

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434 “Xinjiang waiban guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.
and especially the anti-revolutionary local nationalists, would cooperate with the Revisionists and even rebel.\footnote{435} To prevent this from happening, the Chinese government first required the Soviets to seal their border and repatriate the migrants. Since a Sino-Soviet alliance was nominally maintained and it was necessary for the CCP to avoid giving the Soviets any excuse to claim that it was the Chinese who were ruining the Sino-Soviet friendship, Beijing had to deal with this issue cautiously. Thus, on the one hand Beijing had to promote the Sino-Soviet friendship but merely blamed that the mass exodus was caused by the bed elements (\textit{huai fenzi} 壞分子) who aimed to ruin Sino-Soviet relations. Furthermore, the Chinese government claimed that anyone with legitimate reasons to go to the USSR could apply for permission from the Public Security Department. In Huocheng County, in order to halt border crossing, guards opened fire. To prevent the Soviets from labeling the mass exodus as a result of ethnic suppression in Xinjiang, the border guards and local cadres were informed not to halt border crossing forcibly, and especially to avoid employing any military means.\footnote{436}

But on the other hand, Beijing decided to sternly fight against the “Revisionists.”\footnote{437} To fulfill the requirements, the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs what they planned to do diplomatically. The first step was gaining the initiative in diplomatic negotiations between the Chinese and

\footnote{435} “Xinjiang waiban guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.\footnote{436} Ibid.\footnote{437} “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang” 伊塔事件真相 [Truth of the Yi-Ta incident] (December 1962), Archives of Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (AYKAP), File No. 11-1-114.
Soviet border stations (*zhengqu bianfang jiaoshe de zhudong* 爭取邊防交涉的主動). To achieve this, they would ask the Chinese border officials to approach their Soviet counterparts, not the other way around, asking them to repatriate the migrants who had crossed the border. The Soviets would still decline to follow the requirements from the Chinese side, but this guaranteed the Chinese government a favorable position. As a side effect, this might discourage people from fleeing as well. The second step was to collect whatever evidence was available for the upcoming Sino-Soviet diplomatic struggle. To serve this purpose, they would investigate what the Soviet consuls in Yili had done in Tacheng. To collect more visual evidence, they planned to photograph the cut barbed wire on the Soviet side of the border and the Soviet vehicles used to pick up border crossers. In addition, they were trying to catch those who were sent back by the Soviet government to work as “agitators.” Once caught, they would be repatriated through the border station to the Soviet government in order to be used as proof of the Soviet conspiracy. The most wanted people to serve this purpose would be legal Soviet nationals who participated in provoking people to flee. All this proof would be used to accuse the Soviet government in the upcoming diplomatic struggle.

The drama of eradicating the Soviet presence in Xinjiang was following a script that was carefully written by Beijing. On April 23, the head of the checkpoint in Baktu on the Chinese side approached his counterpart on the Soviet side, asking the Soviets to help the Chinese government to chase the border crossers and repatriate them. The next day, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called in the Soviet ambassador to China and sent him the first memorandum, protesting that the Soviets not only opened the
border but resettled more than 20,000 border crossers rather than repatriating them, as prescribed under a previous agreement between these two governments. For the sake of Sino-Soviet friendship, Beijing required the Soviet government to change their border policy of accepting illegal immigrants and restore order on the borderland. The Soviet ambassador also submitted a memorandum to the Chinese side, admitting that around 10,000 people did cross the border to the Soviet side and 6,000 crossed on April 22. They had failed in both halting the influx and successfully convincing them to return, as the Soviets claimed. Then, how to settle these helpless migrants became a headache for the Soviets. For the sake of Sino-Soviet friendship, the ambassador announced, the Soviet government believed that they should inform their Chinese counterpart about this as soon as possible. The Soviet government denied that they had accepted more than 20,000 migrants by purpose but admitted that they had settled around 10,000 merely for humanitarian reasons. If China wanted to have these migrants back, the Soviets claimed, the only means the Soviet government would accept was for the Chinese government to send officials to the USSR to persuade the border crossers to return to China rather than staying in the USSR. Since the Soviets knew very well that no border

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439 “Ji Pengfei fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’erwo’nierke tanhua jilu: Mianjiao dafu Sulian zhengfu 6 yue 7 ri beiwanglu he Sulian dashi 6 yue 11ri koutou buchong shengming de beiwanglu” 姬鵬飛副部長接見蘇聯駐華大使契爾沃年科談話紀錄: 面交答復蘇聯政府 6 月 7 日備忘錄和蘇聯大使 6 月 11 日口頭補充聲明的備忘錄 [Memo of Vice Minister Mr. Ji Pengfei Meeting the Soviet Consulate Stepan Chhervonenko: In Response of the Memo by the Soviet Government on June 7 and the Memo of Extra Declaration on June 11], (AMFA) File No. 118-01765-01.

440 Ibid.
crossers would choose to return to China, promoting a peaceful rather than violent means to solve the dispute was a clear signal that the USSR would not repatriate the migrants but make them Soviet nationals.

The protest from the Chinese government did not work out promptly. After the meeting with the Soviet ambassador, the regions from which people fled to the USSR extended from Tacheng to Emin, Yumin, and Huocheng.441 When the situation deteriorated even further, on April 27 Zhou Enlai held a conference on how to deal with the situation in Xinjiang.442 As a result of the conference, domestically the Xinjiang government was required to institute a plan to use bingtuan (Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps) to station border defense posts and restore social order in regions where the mass exodus was serious.443 Diplomatically, Beijing decided to exert more pressure on the Soviet side. On April 29, 1962, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of PRC called in the Soviet ambassador to China to work on the Xinjiang issue for a second time. The atmosphere was tense. During the meeting, the Soviet ambassador replied to the memorandum, but he merely repeated what he had already said on April 24.

Instructed probably by Zhou Enlai, the Deputy Minister criticized the Soviet government for not answering the memorandum sincerely, and thus failed to satisfy the Chinese government’s concern. He further rebutted the Soviet side, claiming that the truth was not identical with what the Soviet side was suggesting. Not only had the Soviets not repatriated the illegal Chinese migrants to China, as international law required, but they

had been inviting and assisting people to come illegally all the time. The Chinese
government claimed to have solid evidence of the Soviets cutting the barbed wire and
shuttling, feeding, and accommodating border crossers. To make things worse, in order to
prompt more people to flee, the Soviets had dispatched migrants back to Xinjiang,
working as agitators. Beijing believed that mobilizing these people to cross the border
and then resettling them in Soviet Central Asia was how the Soviets solved disputes on
whether the ethnic minorities in the Three Districts were Soviets or Chinese by
nationality. The second meeting between the Deputy Minister and the Soviet
ambassador to China on April 29 was the first time Beijing publicly accused the Soviet
government of not only accepting the migrants but also making the mass exodus in
Tacheng and Yili happen. After a short period of tolerance and preparation, China had
decided to turn hostile against their Soviet allay diplomatically on the Xinjiang issue.
Thus, the diplomatic war to drive the Soviets out of Xinjiang was initiated.

The diplomatic pressure was gradually applied. The Soviets were cautious and
even declined to accept the immigrants who crossed the border after the second
memorandum had been sent by the Chinese government. The Soviet consulates informed
those who were eager to move to the USSR that they had to obtain official documents
from the Chinese government before being accepted as Soviet nationals. As a result, the
scope of the flight was diminishing promptly. For example, on May 8, the mass exodus in
Tacheng was generally halted, though some crossing was still occurring in other regions

444 “Zhang Hanfu fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’erwo’nianke tanhua jilu,” AMFA, File No. 118-01764-05; For details on the Sino-Soviet disputes regarding the issue of Soviet nationals issue, see Chapter 3.
near the border. The change to the migration policy of the USSR might have helped to halt border crossing, but contributed greatly to the violent demonstration in Yili on May 29, a campaign whose main purpose was asking the Chinese government to issue them legal permission to leave. In the eyes of the Chinese, the demonstration that later morphed into a violent riot was another piece of undeniable evidence for how the Soviet consulate in Yili stirred up people to rebel against Chinese authority. The social unrest was finally put down after the military wounded and killed many demonstrators. On May 30, to avoid further enraging the Chinese government, the Soviets strengthened their border patrols and even sealed the border.

**Abolishment of the Association of Soviet Nationals**

For the Chinese government, forcing the Soviets to seal the border was the first aim of the diplomatic struggle, while taking advantage of this chance to eradicate the Soviet presence permanently and forestall any Soviet intervention in the local affairs in Xinjiang was the ultimate goal. To achieve this, the first step was to close the associations of Soviet nationals (ASN), the main agency working as liaison between the Soviet consulates and the local people. On May 14, 1962, the central government ordered the

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446 “Xinjiang waibian guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.
447 “Sulian dashi Qi’er’wonianke zai 1962nian 6yue 8ri mianjiao Zhang Hanfu fubuzhang de beiwanglu” 蘇聯大使契爾沃年科在1962年6月8日面交張漢夫副部長的備忘錄 [Memo that Stepan Chervonenko, the Soviet ambassador to Peking, handed to the Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu], AMFA File No. 118-01765-03; “Ji Pengfei fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’er’woniankefu tanhua jilu” 姬鹏飛副部長接見蘇職新駐華大使契爾沃年科談話記錄 [Memo of Vice Minister Ji Pengfei meeting the Soviet ambassador Stepan Chervonenko], AMFA, File No. 118-01765-04; “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
448 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
Party Committee of XUAZ to eradicate the Soviet presence in Xinjiang by two steps: abolish ASN and then gradually force the Soviets to withdraw their two consulates in Yili and Urumqi.

The ASN in Xinjiang was established in 1946 right after the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR changed its policy on their aliens abroad. According to the new policy, those who were living in Xinjiang, Shanghai, Tianjin, and other parts of China but used to be either the subjects of the Russian Empire or Soviet citizens but were deprived of their citizenship could resume it. So could their offspring. Therefore, Soviet consulates in Yili, Tacheng, and Altay set out to register and formalize the Soviet nationality of the Russians. After many Soviet nationals reclaimed their Soviet nationality, in order to strengthen the connections between the Soviet government and these people, from the end of 1946 to 1947, ASNs were gradually established in China nationwide, including in Yili, Tacheng, and Altay. Sub-associations were gradually established in counties and regions in the Three Districts.\(^{449}\) The most important ASN in Xinjiang was the association in Yili, the first ASN in China, established on January 1, 1946. Beside bridging the Soviet nationals in Xinjiang and their fatherland, the association in Yili served as propagandist for the USSR, ran Sino-Soviet commerce, engaged in agriculture and livestock farming in Xinjiang, served as an intelligence agency, and even provided judicial service. For example, when Sino-Soviet commerce was halted in the regions of Xinjiang controlled by the KMT, the Three Districts maintained active interactions commercially with the USSR. The association was the most active agent in promoting the

\(^{449}\) Associations of Soviet nationals were built not only in Xinjiang but also in Manchuria and other regions of China.
cross-border commerce.\textsuperscript{450} It also offered Russian educations for the local people by running several schools. The ASN had a council with a chairman and vice chairman and many staff members. The total number of those who were working for the association and for the schools reached as many as 972.\textsuperscript{451}

After the founding of the PRC, the Chinese government denied the legitimacy of any organizations of foreign nationals and abolished them gradually. But this was not the case with the ASN. Thanks to the Sino-Soviet alliance formed officially in 1950, ASNs were allowed to function, just not officially. To reserve the rights of abolishing ASNs in the future if they violated the interests of the CCP, and probably to avoid being criticized as a puppet regime of the USSR as well, the Chinese government adopted a “neither legitimize nor deny it” policy. The Soviet nationals in Xinjiang were located extensively, especially in the Three Districts. Therefore, the organizations of Soviet nationals in the 1950s had branches in most counties in Yili, Tacheng, and Altay: the association of Yili had ten county branches, Tacheng had four, and Altay had three. With the extension of the network of the associations, many Soviet nationals were registered as members. For example, according to the survey, until 1954 the association of Yili had 27,095 people registered as their members, making up 73.7\% of the total registered Soviet nationals in

\textsuperscript{450} “Deng Liqun tan Xinjiang Sulian lingshiguan yu Suqiao wenti” 鄧力群談新疆蘇聯領事館與蘇僑問題 [Deng Liqun on the Soviet Consulate and Soviet nationals in Xinjiang], AMFA File No. 118-00294-01.

\textsuperscript{451} The association had several offices, including Office of Secretary, Office of General Services, Office of Human Resources, Office of Justice, Office of Finance, Office of Culture and Education, Office of Women, Office of Commerce and Production, and Office of Livestock; it even used to have an Office of National Affairs. See Yilizhou waishiban shizhi ban'gongshi 伊犁州外事辦事史志辦公室 ed., \textit{Yilizhou waishizhi 伊犁自治州外事志} [Foreign affairs of Yili Autonomous Region] (unpaged manuscript for internal circulation, 1997).
Xinjiang. The survey also revealed that 54.14% of the members were ethnic Kazaks, 20.23% were Russian, and 13.3% were Uyghur.\textsuperscript{452}

At the beginning, the association of Yili was administratively equal to its counterparts in Tacheng and Altay. In October 1955, after the founding of the Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (YKAP), the General Association of Soviet Nationals was established in YKAP, and the associations of Yili, Tacheng, and Altay and those at county level became its branches. The general association had twenty faculties, with a chairman, a secretary, an accountant, four typists, two translators, and eleven others.\textsuperscript{453}

What directly led these organizations to be abolished by the Chinese government was their service of issuing certificates of Soviet nationality to the local people. This task had been controlled by Soviet consulates in Xinjiang, but was assigned to the local ASNs after their founding. After the USSR decided to repatriate their nationals back in 1954, the most important task of the ASNs was “collecting, issuing, filling in, postponing and renewing the certificates of Soviet nationals.” To better serve their fellow Russians, all ASNs established offices and special groups to deal with the applications for reclaiming USSR citizenship, issuing documents for homecoming, and repatriating Soviet nationals. Since the background of the applicants was complicated and the qualification of a Soviet national was far from clear, ASNs had great flexibility to decide who should be issued the official certificates. This flexibility was later seen by the Chinese government as evidence of “issuing certificate illegally.” With the deterioration of both the economic situation in

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{452} Yilizhou waishiban shizhi ban’gongshi ed., \textit{Yili zizhizhou waishizhi}.
\end{footnotesize}
Xinjiang and Sino-Soviet relations, more and more ethnic minorities were applying for Soviet citizenship and to leave Xinjiang for the USSR. With more people applying while the hands of the associations were relatively short, the process of investigation was rough, and some certificates were issued to applicants whose qualifications, from the perspective of the Chinese government, were problematic. The shortage of certificates also encouraged people to gain them either through social networks or from black market, which further convinced the Chinese government that the Soviet consulates had been registering more nationals than they should have through the ASNs. In 1959, three years before the mass exodus occurred, the Chinese authorities who were dissatisfied with the unending repatriation of Soviet nationals in Xinjiang started to warn the Soviet government by freezing the funds of the ASN in Yili. A year later, the government even detained an organizer of the association, accusing him of “illegally registering Soviet nationals in Yili.”

A catastrophe was about to come to the ASNs when the mass exodus occurred in 1962 and the CCP believed that it was mainly a conspiracy of Soviet consulates with the ASNs serving as an accomplice. While abolishing the Soviet consulates might cause diplomatic conflicts, the Chinese government determined to abolish the ASNs for violating the national security of China as the initial step for at least two purposes: to “cut the left and right hands of the consulates” to prevent them from further agitating people

\[\text{454} \text{“Guanyu feifa lingqu Suqiao zheng qingkuang” [The situation of obtaining certificates of Soviet nationals illegally], AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.}\]
\[\text{455} \text{The funds totaled 600,000 yuan. See untitled document (1959), AYKAP File No. 11-1-80.}\]
\[\text{456} \text{“Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu renmin weiyuanhui waishichu 1960nian de gongzuo zongjie ji 1961nian de gongzuo anpai yijian” [Summary of 1960 and suggestions on 1961 from the office of foreign affairs in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region], AXUAR, File No. 13-43-8.}\]
to flee and to obtain evidence of the consulates’ involvement in the mass exodus through interrogating members of the associations.

On May 14, the association of Tacheng was forced to close. This was followed by the association of YKAP, which was informed by Chinese authorities to cease operations on May 21. By the end of May, the association and its seven branches in the YKAP were gradually shuttered. They were accused by the Chinese government of violating national security by issuing certificates to Soviet nationals illegally. Twelve people in the associations were arrested, including the chairman, two translators, the Principal of the Office of Repatriation of the Soviet Nationals, the accountant, and two other staff members in the General Association. The representatives of the associations at the county level such as those in Tacheng, Zhaosu, Wusu, and Turks were also arrested. According to the Chinese authority, seven of the twelve detainees were Soviet nationals, while five were Chinese by nationality. They were forced to confess their criminal behaviors and study the propaganda materials for anti-Soviet Revisionism such as the nice articles the CCP had produced for the Great Debate between China and the USSR

458 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114; Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: gong’an zhi, p. 578. The associations of Soviet Nationals in other parts of China, such as Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Liaoning, Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, and Manchuria, remained intact at the time. However, on May 30, the Ministry of Public and Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered the offices of Foreign Affairs in these regions to put the associations under serious watch and (1) find out all details of the organizations, their staff and representatives, and the affiliated organizations of the associations; (2) discover the illegal activities of the associations and their representatives; and (3) place the staff and representatives of the associations under strict travel control. Those who applied to travel would not be allowed. Neither could they travel to other places with the Soviet consuls. As this instruction indicates, the Chinese government did not want to abolish all the associations at the same time to prevent tense Sino-Soviet diplomatic conflicts but was seeking excuses to abolish them. See “Guanyu Suqiao xiehui wenti de tongzhi” [Notice on Associations of Soviet Friendship], AMFA File No. 118-01094-01.
459 The details of their “crime” are as follows: from January to June 1959 and from January to October 1962, they illegally registered 1,130 Chinese citizens as members. From January to October in 1961, they illegally issued Soviet passports to more than 1,000 Chinese citizens who only had documents issued by local working units. See Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: Gong’an zhi, p. 578.
By investigating these prisoners, the Chinese government claimed that they had discovered twenty “spies” in Xinjiang who were working for the Soviet consulate in Yili. One of them was the governor of YKAP, the local official who the Chinese government claimed to have been beaten by the angry crowd during the social unrest on May 29, 1962. The governor would be further victimized in the hands of the Chinese government as a “Soviet spy” and the “head of an inside the CCP clique of running dogs of the Soviet Revisionists,” as the next chapter reveals.

Withdrawal of Soviet Consulates

The Soviet consulates in China had a long history. On 1851, the first year of Xianfeng rein, the Treaty of Commerce in Yili was signed. According to the treaty, the Qing court allowed the Russians to station consulates in Yili and Tarbaghatai. This was the beginning of the presence of Russian consulates in Xinjiang. In 1860, the tenth year of the Xianfeng rein, a renewed treaty between the Qing and Russia was signed, allowing Russians to expand their consulates to Kashgar. In 1881, the seventh year of the Guangxu rein, a new treaty was signed, offering the Russians the right to establish a consulate in one more place, Turpan. In 1887, the Russians proposed to establish a consulate in Urumqi, and in 1895 the Qing court finally allowed them to move the consulate in Turpan. After the October Revolution of 1917, Sino-Russian commerce was halted and Russian consulates in Xinjiang were closed. Because Xinjiang’s economy was

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460 They were finally set free in 1980 after the Ministry of Public Security published an order “The Response to the Plea of Being Lenient and Releasing the Detainees of the Associations of the Soviet Nationals.” See Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: Gong’an zhi, p. 578.
461 Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: Gong’an zhi, p. 578.
overwhelmingly dependent on Sino-Russian commerce, in 1922 Yang Zengxin, the semi-independent governor of Xinjiang, and the Soviet government started to negotiate issues such as restoring Sino-Russian commerce and the reestablishment of Russian consulates in Xinjiang. In 1924, Xinjiang and the USSR reached an agreement that the Xinjiang government could base five consulates in Soviet Central Asia while the Soviets could establish consulates in five regions, Urumqi, Yili, Tacheng, Altay, and Kashgar. When Xinjiang was ruled by Jin Shuren, the successor of Yang Zengxin, the Treaty of Xinjiang-Soviet Temporary Commerce was signed. This treaty further allowed the Soviet commercial organizations to be set in Xinjiang. The government under Sheng Shicai’s watch was a puppet regime of the Soviet Union since military and economic assistance from the USSR was the primary method for this region to maintain a semi-independent status. The Soviet presence was overwhelming until being eradicated after the split between Sheng and Stalin that had caused Sheng to decide to surrender to Chiang Kai-shek.\footnote{Joseph W. Esherick and Matthew T. Combs eds., \textit{1943: China as the Crossroads} (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), pp. 75–101.} The Yining Incident in 1944 and the establishment of the Eastern Turkistan Republic as an aftermath was orchestrated by the USSR, with the Soviet consulate in Yili serving as headquarters. Since Xinjiang retained the status of “the sphere of Soviet influence” after the CCP took Xinjiang, the five Soviet consulates and three branches of Soviet commercial representatives remained.\footnote{The headquarters of the Soviet commercial representatives was located in Beijing and had multiple branches in Xinjiang and Manchuria.} The consulates in Tacheng and Altay were closed in 1955 by the Soviet government, and in 1956 the consulate in Kashgar was also abolished. Thus, by early 1962, the USSR had two consulates remaining, in Yili and
Urumqi. Also remaining were a branch of commercial representatives in Urumqi and commercial staff in the ports of Horgos and Tuoyun.\textsuperscript{464}

The presence of the Soviet consulates and their affiliated organizations for the CCP was a double-edged sword. Through the Soviets who were performing the real leadership in the Three Districts, after 1949 the CCP could easily penetrate the vast region, especially the three independent districts with an anti-Chinese government. Furthermore, at least from the Yang Zengxin era, Xinjiang’s economy had been heavily dependent on the USSR. With the facilitation of the Soviet consulates and other organizations, the CCP government could restore the social order and make the station of the PLA in Xinjiang possible economically. However, the presence of a foreign state in China was also a source of shame for Mao Zedong, who later accused Stalin of not treating the CCP equally but regarding the USSR-Chinese relationship as that of father and son.\textsuperscript{465} Furthermore, the “leaning to one side” policy and the Soviet presence in both Xinjiang and Manchuria made people believe that the Chinese Communist government was merely a puppet regime of the USSR, an image that embarrassed the CCP’s claim as nationalist. The three Sino-Soviet corporations in Xinjiang were also regarded by Chinese elites as evidence of China being exploited by the Soviets, even after Mao claimed that “the Chinese people have stood up.”\textsuperscript{466} Historically, foreign consulates in China were regarded as a national humility, just as Mao Zedong declared that “the history of modern

\textsuperscript{464} “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
\textsuperscript{466} Mao Zedong 毛澤東, “Zhongguo renmin zhanqilai le” 中國人民站起來了 [The Chinese people have stood up], \textit{Mao Zedong xuanji} 毛澤東選集 [Selected Works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 1977, pp. 3–7).
China is a history of imperialist aggression.\textsuperscript{467} Right after the CCP came to power and well before the outbreak of the Korean War, as shown by Beverley Hooper, strong pressure was exerted on most aspects of the Western presence.\textsuperscript{468} The Soviet presence was almost the only foreign power that remained. Right before the CCP took China, Stalin had already asked Mao to eradicate foreign nationals except Russians in both Xinjiang and northeast China, making these two regions Soviet spheres of influence. To gain more Soviet support for the new government, Mao had to acquiesce or risk losing the support of the mass who were eager for national independence. Though what the CCP gained by maintaining the Soviet presence in Xinjiang and northeast China was enormous in many ways, including political consolidation, economic rehabilitation, and social stability, Mao still felt humiliated.\textsuperscript{469} At the local level, Han military officers in Yili also felt that they were bossed around by the foreign Soviets.\textsuperscript{470} When the Sino-Soviet alliance was fruitful, Mao and his comrades tried to tolerate the Soviet presence even when frictions between these two states had occurred. When the relations between the states started to deteriorate at the end of 1958, the Soviet presence transformed from a symbol of Sino-Soviet friendship into an eyesore that should be eradicated as early as possible. When the mass exodus occurred and the ASN and Soviet consulates were regarded as agitators behind the scenes, the CCP finally determined to force the Soviet government to withdraw.

\textsuperscript{467} Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” January 1940.
\textsuperscript{470} “Deng Liqun tan Xinjiang Sulian lingshiguan yu Suqiao wenti,” AMFA File No. 118-00294-01.
To exert diplomatic pressure on the Soviet government, the Chinese side had to provide solid proof, prosecuting how the Soviet organizations had been engaged in some activities that were harmful to the government and the people of China. On April 29, 1962, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed the diplomatic office in Xinjiang to cooperate with other departments to collect evidence of illegal behavior conducted by either the Soviet consulates or the ASNs and report them to Beijing promptly.\(^{471}\) To facilitate the work, on May 18 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security together sent to Xinjiang a working team, which was required to spend three weeks there collecting at least twenty pieces of evidence of the illegal activities in which the Soviet consulates had been engaged.\(^{472}\) To support the working team from Beijing, the local government established a Special Case Office, which was further divided into teams covering investigation, interrogation, evidence, foreign aliens, and materials. Because it was hard to find out the “illegal” activities undertaken by the consulate in Urumqi, they decided to first target the consulate in Yili.\(^{473}\)

The demonstration that occurred on May 29 in Yili contributed greatly to fulfilling the task of obtaining “proof.” The Chinese government seized the opportunity to accuse the Soviet consulate in Yili of instigating people to confront the local government with violence and even take advantage of the unrest to rob the Chinese

\(^{471}\) “Waijiaobu lingshisi fusizhang Xu Huang tongzhi dianhua huibao yaodian,” 外交部領事司副司長徐晃同志電話匯報要點 [The Vice Minister of Mr. Xu Huang Reported the Key Points via Telegraph], AMFA File No. 118-01109-02.

\(^{472}\) “Waijiaobu gong’anbu pai gon gzuozu qu Xinjiang shouji cailiao” 外交公安部派工作小組去新疆收集材料 [The Minister of Social Matters and the Police Department Sent Assistants to Collect Data in Xinjiang], AMFA File No. 118-01109-02.

\(^{473}\) “Waijiaobu gong’anbu gongzuozu yizhouli gongzuozu qingkuang baogao” 外交公安部工作組一周來工作情況報告 [Summary of Work by the Foreign Minister and Police Department], AMFA File No. 118-01109-02.
government of their secret official documents to serve as intelligence for the Soviet government.  

The process of evidence collecting was nothing but the end justifying the means. For example, in order to suppress the demonstration, the CCP Committee of XUAR sent militiamen equipped with weapons to the spot. The cars with militiamen were stopped by the demonstrators; a car carrying an injured militiaman and a gun were captured. It seems that the demonstrators were surprised with the military force the local CCP committee had applied; they decided to show the Soviet consuls how badly the Chinese government had treated them. They drove the car to the consulate and parked it in front of the door. The car later was used by the Chinese government as “solid evidence” of the Soviet consulate serving as the headquarters for agitating ethnic minorities to confront the Chinese government. For several days, the Chinese government intentionally sent people one after another to take photos of the car, which, as noted by a local cadre, made the Soviets feel “embarrassed” and “hard to vindicate themselves.” 

By June 25, the working team reported that they had already collected fifty pieces of evidence on five aspects. First, the Soviet consulates in Urumqi and Yili had issued Soviet passports among the Chinese illegally. Second, these consulates had registered Chinese ethnic minorities as Soviet nationals illegally. Third, their attitudes on the Chinese local officials and cadres were rude. Fourth, they incited the people on the

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474 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
475 Zhang kexun 張克迅, “Baowei Yilizhou renmin weiyuanhui: wo zai pingding 5.29 fangeming baoluan zhong de yiduan jingli” 保衛伊犁州人民委員會：我在平定「5.29」反革命暴亂中的一段經歷 [Defending the People’s Committee of YKAP: My experience of suppressing the May 29 anti-revolutionary rebellion], in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji 新疆生產建設兵團史料選輯 [Selected materials of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps], Vol. 22 (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2012), p. 151.
Chinese side of the border to flee. Fifth, the ASNs, directly under the leadership of the Soviet consulates, were performing illegal activities. It seems that the evidence the working team had collected barely satisfied Beijing, because they were asked to dig even further to collect hidden information, such as how the Soviet consulates provoked ethnic relations in Xinjiang and the activities of spreading their anti-CCP views among the local people.476 What the working team had collected was used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to attack the Soviets, although the Soviet side claimed that China’s conclusion did “not fit the facts.”477

To force the Soviet consulates to withdraw, the first step of the Chinese government was to close the ASNs, as discussed above. After all the associations in the Three Districts were abolished, the Chinese government then limited the activities of the consulates to prevent them from gaining access to the indigenous people in the name of “protecting their personal security.” On May 26 and May 28, the Office of Foreign Affairs in Urumqi and Yili separately informed the two Soviet consulates of the limitations to their activities. First, for the sake of the security of the consulate staff, they were not allowed to leave the cities where they were located. This restriction would be cancelled, the Chinese authority claimed, depending on how things went. Second, the consulate staff members were not allowed to work with the local people. Third, workers

476 “guanyu souji zhengju gongzuo de baogao” 關於搜集證據工作的報告 [A report on the work of collecting evidence], AMFA file No.118-01109-02.
477 The temporary agent of the Soviet embassy to China claimed that the Soviet government would never allow any organization or individuals to agitate the Chinese people to cross the Soviet-Chinese border. The Chinese side had never raised any solid proof that the Soviets instigated the Chinese to flee to Soviet territory. Neither had the Soviets encouraged or organized people to attack the Chinese government in Yining. “Huang Zhen fubuzhang jejian Sulian zhu Hua shiguan linshi daiban Meixiaozifu tanhua jilu” 黃鎮副部長接見蘇聯駐華使館臨時代辦梅曉滋夫談話紀錄 [Memo of the Conversation between the Vice Minister Huang Zhen and the Soviet Consulate in China], AMFA File No. 118-01767-02.
at the consulates were not allowed to contact local ethnic officials directly even when they had business to conduct. The consulates had to contact the local government through the Office of Foreign Affairs. These restrictions kept the staff of the consulates from functioning as they usually did, as if under house arrest, and led to serious conflicts between the local government and the staff of the Soviet consulate.

On the afternoon of May 29, the secretary of the Soviet consulate in Yili called the Office of Foreign Affairs in Yili, asking for permission to leave the city on May 30. The reply stated, “I will respond to the question you have raised after reporting it to my superior leader.” This was the day the social unrest occurred. On the morning of May 30, after failing to obtain a response and probably believing that the Chinese government delayed his application on purpose, the secretary left for the USSR. When he returned to Xinjiang in the afternoon the same day, his car was stopped. He was required by the checkpoint staff on the Chinese side to go through the security check that was usually waived for diplomats. The secretary reacted by refusing to be checked and rebuking the security guards; he even tried to break the checkpoint. The conflict ended up only after the car being forced to stopped and inspected as a way to exert more pressure on the Soviet consulates.

To exert more pressure on the Soviet side, the head of the Office of Foreign Affairs met the Soviet consul in Yili, protesting strongly against the behavior of the secretary. The head claimed that the secretary left the city for the USSR with the

479 “Qingbao Sulingguan jiancha qiche qingkuang” 請報蘇領館檢查汽車情況 [Request to Report on the Soviet Embassy’s Checking of Their Cars], AMFA File No. 118-01082-04.
permission of the local Chinese government. His behavior violated the rule of the local government. Furthermore, at the time Yili was under martial law. It was the order of the local government that the checkpoint guards inspect all cars entering Yili, including that of the secretary. The secretary not only refused to have his car inspected but also insulted the guards as “bandits.” The head further emphasized that the Chinese side was very angry with the secretary’s behavior, which violated the local order. On June 19 the Soviet ambassador protested orally that the secretary was treated illegally by the local government in Yili by offering the story from the side of the secretary. Rather than reaching a compromise, the Chinese government sent a note to the Soviets, refuting their interpretation word by word.

With the house arrest decreed by the Chinese government, the consulates in Xinjiang could barely function at all. To avoid any further conflicts, on June 15 the general consulate in Urumqi informed the Chinese government that they decided to withdraw. On June 18 the one in Yili planned to withdraw as well. To make sure the Soviet consulates withdrew as soon as possible, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Public Security ordered the Office of Foreign Affairs in Urumqi that their main task was to force the Soviet consulates to complete their work and leave expeditiously. They believed that the longer the consulates stayed in Xinjiang, the worse the situation would become. For example, when the Office of Foreign Affairs in Urumqi asked if they should let the Soviet consulates complete all paperwork for those who had

480 “Qingbao Sulingguan jiancha qiche qingkuang,” AMFA File No. 118-01082-04.
482 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
decided to either leave for the USSR or surrender their Soviet nationality and stay in China before withdrawing. Beijing replied that letting them leave promptly was more urgent than anything else. For the paperwork, Beijing informed Urumqi to let them do as much as they could before leaving. Otherwise it could be used as an excuse for the Soviets to decline leaving. Since the staff of the Soviet consulates were meeting people in Xinjiang every day, the CCP believed that it was very much possible that they were instigating people to rebel again. Therefore, the most urgent thing the local government should do was to promote their departure. On July 8 and August 16, the consulates in Urumqi and Yili finally withdrew.

The Soviet organs for Xinjiang-Soviet trade was also facing diplomatic pressure to withdraw. According to the order from Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, when forcing the Soviet consulates to withdraw, the same thing should be done with the Branch of the Soviet Commerce Representatives (蘇聯商務代表處) in Urumqi and permanent port commerce staff (口岸商務員) stationed in the ports of Horgos and Tuoyun. To exert more diplomatic pressure on the Soviet side, on August 30 deputy minister of the Ministry of Diplomatic Affairs convened the Soviet diplomat, handing over a note to him. It was the first time on a diplomatic occasion that the Chinese government claimed the Soviets were responsible for the mass exodus and the Yili riot on May 29. The Chinese

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483 “Fu dui Sulingguan biguan qianhou youguan gongzuode bushu he yijian” 復對蘇領館閉館前後有關工作的部署和意見 [Advice on How to Handle the Closing of the Soviet Embassy in Xinjiang], AMFA File No. 118-01140-02.
484 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
485 “Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu guanyu dafu Sulian zhengfu 8 yue 9 ri jiu Xinjiang jumin dapi feifa yuejing wenti jiadaide qingshi baogao” 中華人民共和國外交部關於答復蘇聯政府 8 月 9 日新疆居民大批非法越境交來的請求報告 [Reply from the Foreign Minister of PRC to the Report of the Soviet Government on August 9 about Large Groups of Xinjiang Residents Escaped Illegally], AMFA File No. 118-01767-02.
government also raised two reasons to force the Soviet counterpart to withdraw the commerce organs. One was that since the commerce between two countries was merely through the central governments, while the scale of the trade between Xinjiang and the USSR was small and the goods could be shipped directly to the port of the other side, there was no need to have any organs in Xinjiang. The other was that the Chinese government had no organ or any permanent commerce staff in the USSR, so it was unnecessary for the Soviets to have such an organ in China. They should be moved, suggested the Chinese, either to Beijing or to the ports on the Soviet side. On September 26, the Soviets informed the Foreign Trade Bureau in XUAZ that they had closed the commerce organ in Urumqi and that all staff planned to withdraw on October 11.

As the “Soviet sphere of influence” that had been proved by the Chinese government, the Soviet consulates, associations of Soviet nationals, and commerce organs were the official organizations that made the Soviet influence in Xinjiang possible. For a century, Russian and Soviet consulates and their affiliated organizations penetrated this Muslim borderland in nearly every way, forcing the local power to maintain good relations with Russia or merely serving as a puppet regime of the Soviets. The Chinese Communist power was no exception. The withdrawal of the Soviet organizations was regarded by the CCP as a “big victory” in terms of national independence. First, after the

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487 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
departure of the “troublemaker,” the Chinese government believed that social order would be restored. Second, without the presence of the “big brother,” the CCP could exert its power independently on the region that had been dominated by the Russians for a century. Thus, the administrative withdrawal of the USSR would pave the way for the CCP to further eradicate the symbolic Soviet presence in the Three Districts, tighten border controls, and catch the possible Soviet cooperators and spies in Xinjiang, which will be discussed in the chapters to come. 488

488 “Yi-Ta shijian zhenxiang,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-114.
Now the Bingtuan is like an iron wall;  
The border shall not move eastward e’ermore.

——Poem by a member of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps

**CHAPTER 5**

**BORDER DEFENSES**

Border Defense Before 1949

After the conquest of Xinjiang, the Qing empire used several measures to control the northwestern borderlands neighboring on vassal states such as Kazak, Bulut, and Khoqand. The measures the court adopted were as follows: building defensive cities and stationing military garrisons, installing pickets, and regularly patrolling the border. Since most peoples of the vassal states were nomads, for the purpose of herding, these people occasionally entered the Qing territory without permission. Therefore, the primary aim of the regular border patrols, as Song Yun noted, was to “nominally check the border while in essence checking the nomads.” In other words, the main purpose for controlling the borders was to prevent the herders, most of them ethnic Kazaks, from crossing the borderline. As local military leaders discovered, wherever the border troops went, nomads who had entered the Qing territory without legal permission would either elude them or leave to escape punishment. Order was thus in effect restored along the border after patrolling. Regular border patrols therefore served as the primary method of

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strengthening control of the border.\textsuperscript{490} After the Russians penetrated the Kazak steppes, the former Qing vassal states were gradually transformed into Russian colonies, creating a border between Xinjiang and Russia, and shifting the purpose of border defenses from “defense against the barbarians” to “defense against the foreigners.” With the weakening of the Qing government, it was militarily and materially impossible for the troops to continue regularly patrolling the borders. The primary method for controlling the border on the Qing side was therefore downgraded to patrols by no more than 70 pickets in the Yili region.\textsuperscript{491} Later, the Qing court had to accept the picket line as the Russo-Chinese borderline in Central Asia. Although the Qing court’s scope of control had shrunk, the purpose for patrolling remained the same: to prevent the Kazaks, now Russian subjects, from entering Qing territories.

After the collapse of the Qing regime, Xinjiang was ruled first by Yang Zenxin from 1912 to 1928; Jin Shuren then succeeded in the regime, until he was forced to step down in 1933. To maintain de facto independence, both Yang and Jin adopted a pragmatic approach toward both the Chinese and Soviet governments. Toward the Chinese government, the Xinjiang government adopted an attitude known as “acknowledging the temple but not the god.”\textsuperscript{492} The Xinjiang government recognized that Xinjiang was part of the Chinese territories and that the Chinese government was the

\textsuperscript{490} Li Sheng 厲聲, “Qingdai Xinjiang xunbian zhidu yanjiu” 清代新疆巡邊制度研究 [A study of the border patrol system in Qing dynasty Xinjiang], in Xinjiang tongshi bianzuan weiyuanhui 《新疆通史》編撰委員會編 ed., Xinjiang lishi yanjiu lunwen xuanbian: Qingdai juan 新疆歷史研究論文選編：清代卷 [Selected research papers on Xinjiang history: Qing dynasty] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2013), Vol. 1, p. 350.

\textsuperscript{491} Li Sheng, “Qingdai Xinjiang xunbian zhidu yanjiu,” pp. 357–58.

central government, regardless of its leader. However, the Xinjiang government also
maintained de facto independence, since the powers of the central government could not
penetrate the local affairs of Xinjiang. Toward the Soviet government, the Xinjiang
government maintained a policy that Jin Shuren termed “neither close nor distant.” As Jin
noted, on the one hand, Xinjiang had to maintain friendly relations with the USSR. The
Xinjiang government had once depended heavily on subsidies from other provinces
during the Qing era. With the collapse of the Qing regime, the subsidies for Xinjiang
dried up, and customs duties from Xinjiang-Soviet trade became the main financial
source for the operations of the Xinjiang government. Without the trade between
Xinjiang and the Soviets, the Xinjiang government would be too impoverished to
continue operating. Furthermore, commerce between Xinjiang and the USSR could
develop the local economy and greatly benefit the indigenous people. However, both
Yang and Jin felt that Xinjiang should keep its distance from the USSR in certain ways.
Otherwise, as both Yang and Jin believed, the USSR would intervene in the domestic
affairs of Xinjiang and might even annex the region. Furthermore, by distancing the
Soviets, the Xinjiang government could avoid criticism of being “Sovietized.”493

Both Yang and Jin adopted a policy of isolationism, keeping Xinjiang away both
from Russia/USSR and from China proper. In the eastern region of Xinjiang bordering on
China proper, troops were stationed in the city of Hami near the border with Gansu, to

493 Pu Qingquan 濮清泉, “Jin Shuren an neimu” 金樹仁案内幕 [The inside story of the Jin Shuren case], in Yu Junsheng 余駿升 ed., Xinjiang wenshi ziliao jingxuan 新疆文史資料精選 [Selected primary sources on
supervise entry into the region. Secret agents were employed to spy on suspicious figures entering Xinjiang.

On the western side of Xinjiang, Yang and Jin resumed the methods formerly used by Qing government to defend the border. The pickets established during the Qing era were preserved, and a number of new checkpoints were established to strengthen the border. In the Tacheng area, after the Sino-Russian border was defined, several pickets fell into Russian territories. The Xinjiang government built several border checkpoints in Jeminay, Baketu, and the Ba’erlukue Mountain area. More than ten border checkpoints were built in Yili, to make up for the loss of pickets after the demarcation of the Sino-Russian border. Troops were stationed at all the checkpoints, and some of them played a significant role in keeping Russian refugees out.494

After Sheng Shicai came to power in 1933, the border policy changed dramatically. Supported financially and militarily by the Soviets, with hardly any connections to the Nanjing government,495 Xinjiang nominally remained a part of China, but in fact was gradually being transformed into a satellite state of the USSR. In 1936, after Sheng’s government promulgated the “Six Great Policies,” the twin policies of “anti-imperialism” and “kinship to Soviet Russia” became the building blocks of the Xinjiang regime.496 As Sheng Shicai later confessed, while the policy of “anti-imperialism” was designed to exclude rival influences by other great powers such as the

495 Sheng Shiji, Jiang Jieshi de fengjiang dali, p. 91.
496 Du Zhongyuan 杜重遠, Sheng Shicai yu xin Xinjiang 盛世才與新疆 [Sheng Shicai and a new Xinjiang] (Guangzhou: Shenghuo shudian, 1938), pp. 73–74.
British and the Japanese, the reverse side of the coin was a “pro-Soviet” orientation. With the USSR as the only legitimate foreign power in the region, Xinjiang’s status as a Soviet satellite was made official. In 1938, Sheng’s application to join the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was finally accepted by Stalin and Sheng’s relationship with Stalin accordingly shifted from diplomatic ties to a relationship between superior and subordinate. Although Sheng still held the position of governor, the de facto power in Xinjiang was Stalin’s man, the Soviet Consul General in Urumqi, who required Sheng to consult with him on any decisions. As a result, Xinjiang’s defenses were no longer independent, but rather were subsumed by the national defenses of the USSR. Xinjiang’s border defenses, which once served the region itself under the rule of Yang and Jin, shifted toward primarily serving the national interests of the USSR. Sheng established several checkpoints on the Xinjiang-Mongolian border, but on the Xinjiang-Soviet border, only three teams of cavalry remained in the Yili region, which were soon disbanded. Thus, during the honeymoon period between Sheng Shicai and Stalin, the Xinjiang-Soviet border was only loosely controlled, while the border between Xinjiang and China proper was tightly defended by Soviet troops.

498 Ibid., pp. 205–07.
From January 1938 to 1943, the Eighth Regiment of the Soviet Red Army and the First Detachment of the Soviet Air Force were stationed at the strategic oasis of Hami.  

The USSR’s military presence in Hami was soon publicized, and the Eighth Regiment of the Red Army was renamed as the Eighth Soviet Cavalry Regiment of the Xinjiang Frontier Force. As revealed by Andrew Forbes, the Soviet garrisons in Hami could serve multiple purposes: to pre-empt a possible Japanese thrust into Xinjiang; to limit and even completely preclude Nanjing’s influence in this region; to prevent further incursions by the Hui warlords; and to suppress further rebellions by the indigenous Muslim peoples of Xinjiang against the rule of Sheng, a Han Chinese dictator. While scholars regard the stationing of the Soviet troops in Hami as evidence of Soviet aggression, the Xinjiang government actually benefited greatly from the Soviet presence, at least when Sheng first came to power: the troops not only blocked the Ma clan of Muslim warlords (Sheng’s chief military opponents) from entering Xinjiang, but prevented the obstruction of the main truck road between Xinjiang and China proper.

To better control Xinjiang, in 1936, an institution for collecting military information called the Border Affairs Department was established. The institution’s establishment was suggested by the Soviets: it was controlled by the Soviet advisors in Xinjiang, and functioned in the fashion of the KGB. Through the Border Affairs

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505 Ibid.
Department, Xinjiang could collect all kinds of information on neighboring states and China proper. Furthermore, with the aid of the Soviet military advisors, Sheng also established border checkpoint troops to inspect travelers and goods.

Xinjiang’s defenses were not reoriented until Sheng Shicai decided in 1942 to break with Stain and realign himself with Chiang Kai-shek. Prior to 1942, hardly any border patrol troops were stationed on the Xinjiang-Soviet border. Yili had at one point had three small garrisons of border patrol troops, but these had been withdrawn in 1940. As Sheng’s relationship with the USSR worsened, he stationed a thousand soldiers on the border. As Xinjiang shifted away from the status of a satellite state, the military presence of the USSR became a sore spot for Sheng’s government. On October 5, 1942, Sheng sent a memorandum to the Soviet government through the consul general in Urumqi, demanding the general withdrawal of the Soviet military from Hami. To push the Soviets out, Sheng systematically initiated and organized anti-Soviet activities, such as arrests of Soviet nationals in Xinjiang on a massive scale by local governments. Even the Soviet Ambassador to China was treated rudely in Yili, though he had twice informed the policemen of his identity. The KMT troops entered Xinjiang in January 1943, and

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the Soviet troops finally retreated in November 1943, along with the Soviet specialists and advisors. As the conflicts between Xinjiang and the USSR intensified, Sheng ordered that several checkpoints be removed, and sealed the Sino-Xinjiang border.512

After Sheng was ousted as governor of Xinjiang, his successor Wu Zongxin replaced the Border Affairs Department with institutions such as “Xinjiang Security Command,” and dispatched the KMT’s so-called “security troops” to patrol the Xinjiang-Soviet border, without any involvement by Soviet military advisors.513 With the sealing of the border, trade between Xinjiang and Soviet Central Asia halted, which was a major economic blow to the region.514 Sheng’s successor tried to open Xinjiang’s border to the USSR to relieve the economic pressure faced by Xinjiang. However, an ethnic rebellion mobilized and supported by the USSR occurred in Yili two months later, in what was later called the Yining Rebellion. Due to Sheng’s betrayal and the stationing of the KMT army, the Soviets felt that this region was no longer a buffer zone, and urgently sought to establish another Soviet puppet government in Xinjiang.515 They turned to the Muslims who had been dissatisfied with the Han rule and promised to help them establish a new Eastern Turkistan Republic with Muslim self-rule.516 Equipped with Soviet weapons and led by Soviet military commanders, the ethnic army soon occupied Yili, Tacheng and

Altay. As a result, the KMT troops stationed on the border, particularly those in the Three Districts, either were killed or retreated. The KMT thus totally lost control of border defenses on the Sino-Soviet border.

On November 12, 1944, the interim government of the Eastern Turkistan Republic was founded. The three rebel districts of Yili, Tacheng and Altay served as the foundation of the newborn Republic, while the other seven districts of Xinjiang remained under the rule of the KMT. The Nationalist Army was founded several months later in 1945, composed of around 14,000 ethnic soldiers. With a significant number of high-ranking military officers who were either trained and dispatched by Moscow, or were of Soviet nationality, the Nationalist Army was completely subject to the manipulations of the USSR. On June 6, 1946, under orders by the Soviet Union, the government of the Eastern Turkistan Republic finally reached a peace agreement with the KMT after eight months of negotiations. The Three Districts of Yili, Tacheng and Altay became a “special zone,” maintaining de facto independence from the rest of Xinjiang.

To prevent KMT influence in the other seven districts from penetrating the “special zone,” the border defenses maintained by the Nationalist Army of the Eastern Turkistan Republic first and foremost targeted the seven districts in which the KMT army was stationed. In contrast, the borders between the Eastern Turkistan Republic and the USSR

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517 Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: gong’an zhi, p. 209.
518 Xinjiang sanqu gemingshi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed., Xinjiang sanqu gemingshi, p. 40.
519 Ibid., pp. 65–67.
520 Ibid., pp. 119–22.
became blurred as the Three Districts merged into Soviet Central Asia. No defenses were stationed on the Xinjiang side of the border.521

The frontiers inherited by the CCP in Xinjiang after its takeover in 1949 were thus far from those of a nation-state: no border defenses existed on the Chinese side of the frontier bordering with the Soviet Union. As the boundary between the Three Districts and Soviet Central Asia blurred, the distinction between the Three Districts as the Muslim “special zone” and the remaining seven districts governed by the Han-Chinese still remained.

**No Need to Defend the Border**

After occupying Xinjiang in late 1949, the Chinese side gradually established border defenses on the Sino-Soviet border. In the 1950s, the Xinjiang-Soviet border had seven checkpoints, frontier stations, and sentry posts, to inspect goods and people and patrol the border. The patrolling methods available to the border guards were primitive: either by foot or on horseback. The frontier guards were first dispatched by the Ministry of Public Security and the Public Security troops of the Beijing PLA. From 1957 on, the mission of border defense was assigned to the Military Subarea of Xinjiang, with border institutions and guards falling under the administration of the Military Subarea.522 However, the Chinese side of the Xinjiang-Soviet border remained porous. The border

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522 Ibid., p. 315.
between Xinjiang and the USSR was 3,084 kilometers long, and it could not possibly be controlled merely by seven border checkpoints and a limited amount of border guards. However, this was not an urgent problem for the CCP at that time, if it was a problem at all, because the USSR was the CCP’s closest ally, and the two states had no border conflicts during that period. The urgent sovereignty issue for the CCP was how to reintegrate the Three Districts where the former Eastern Turkistan Republic was based into the rest of Xinjiang, so that the region as a whole could be reunified with China proper. Another concern was building a railway within five or seven years, to connect China proper with the chief cities of Xinjiang and even Soviet Central Asia. For the CCP, the presence of the USSR in Xinjiang was a blessing with respect to achieving these goals. The crucial aid from the Soviets to support the CCP’s occupation of Xinjiang convinced the Chinese that it was unnecessary to station defensive troops on the Chinese side of the Xinjiang-Soviet border, since the Soviet border troops could work on behalf of both countries. The Three Districts bordered the USSR for a stretch of 2,000 kilometers, but the Chinese side had only two border-control stations and one checkpoint along the entire length, thus the Chinese government only exercised actual control over about 300

kilometers. Furthermore, the Chinese border guards only patrolled about 30% of the border area every few days, and some areas were not even accessible.\footnote{Guanyu Suqiao qianfan de baogao 關於蘇僑遣返的報告 [Report on deporting Soviet nationals] (12 October 1960), AXUAR, File No. 13-43-208; “Xinjiang waiban bao youguan Suqiao wenti ji bianjie bianfang wenti de gongzuowei qingkuang he cunzai wenti” 新疆外辦報有關蘇僑問題及邊界邊防問題的工作情況和存在問題 [Report from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office on the current situation and problems of the borders and border defense] (6 November 1960), AMFA, File No. 118-01138-15.}

The officially forging of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s tended to discourage the Chinese state from strengthening the border, both diplomatically and ideologically. As mentioned above, since the Soviet Union was a close ally, the CCP felt it was not necessary to defend the Chinese side of the border against the USSR. Ideologically, Marxist-Leninist doctrine holds that once human beings reach “a high state of development of communism,” “the complete withering away of the state” occurs.\footnote{Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, The State and Revolution (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1965), Chap. 5.} Based on this theory, Khrushchev once told Liu Xiao, the Chinese Ambassador to the USSR, that it was meaningless for socialist states like the USSR and PRC to engage in any border conflicts. He claimed: “For communists, borders are something merely temporary. In a communist society, borders will perish once and for all. Whoever does not know this is not qualified to be a Marxist.”\footnote{Liu Xiao 劉曉, Chushi Sulian ba’nian 出使蘇聯八年 [Eight years as an ambassador to the Soviet Union] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1986), p. 121.} Both the Soviet Union and China claimed that the Sino-Soviet border was merely nominal. Both announced that the sole reason for a border between the two great fraternal socialist countries was to avoid providing imperialists with an opportunity to suggest that China had lost its sovereignty and territorial integrity, which would give the West an excuse to engage in a global war of aggression. Neither the Chinese nor the Soviet border guards were defending against
each other, but rather against imperialism. Both sides were to work together in cracking down on the activities of spies and secret agents dispatched by the imperialists, so as to coordinate closely in protecting the common interests and security of the people of their two countries. Given that the nominal border was believed to be a symbol of Sino-Soviet friendship, the Chinese side was dissuaded from strengthening the border until the relations worsened. Geographically, the border was also not easy to defend. It was ambiguous, without natural boundaries such as rivers, waterfalls, mountains, or boundary stones. Being economically and technically impotent, the CCP was not able to effectively control the long border.

Thus, it could be argued that, during the 1950s and early 1960s, the Sino-Soviet border was essentially “a frontier without a clear border and a boundary without defenses,” a phrase which appeared frequently in reports by local officials. The border was essentially porous due to the loose control on the Chinese side. The Soviet side was more strictly controlled in comparison, though not as strictly as the Soviet borders neighboring with Europe. Soviet diplomats later confessed that only one hundred border guards had been stationed to patrol the long Sino-Soviet border.

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528 “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui guanyu bianjiang gongzuo de zhishi” 伊犁哈薩克自治州人民委員會關於邊境工作的指示 [Directions from the people’s committee of the Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture on how to deal with borders], AYKAP, File No. 11-1-57.
529 “Xinjiang waiban bao youguan Suqiao wenti ji bianjie bianfang wenti de gongzuo qingkuang he cunzai wenti,” AMFA, File No. 118-01138-15.
530 The majority of Xinjiang’s population had been living a nomadic life. They often herded, hunted, or fished on both sides of the border on a daily basis. They were also able to visit their friends and relatives or seek jobs on the other side of the border without applying for any official documents. See “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui guanyu bianjiang gongzuo de zhishi,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-57.
532 “Zhang Hanfu fubuzhang jiejian Sulian zhuhua dashi Qi’erwo’nianke tanhua jilu: Guanyu Xinjiang bianjing diqu shaoshuminzu jumin dapi taowang Sulian shi de jiaoshe” 章漢夫副部長接見蘇聯駐華大使契爾
Without strict border defenses, border crossings were frequent, especially from the Chinese side to the Soviet side. People in Xinjiang, most of whom led a nomadic life, often herded, hunted, collected firewood, or gathered antelope horns on both sides of the border on a daily basis. They were also able to visit their friends and relatives or seek jobs on the other side of the border without applying for any official documents. There was some crime involved. Taking advantage of the price differential, some smuggled goods such as gold and antelope horns from one side to the other. People imprisoned by the Chinese government sometimes crossed the border to escape punishment. Most indigenous people in the region had no sense of the authoritativeness of borders, and the loosely controlled border did not evoke a sense of inviolability. Furthermore, some areas of the borderland did not even have any signs to remind people where the borders fell. Between 1954 and 1957, according to government reports, dozens to hundreds of people from China crossed the eastern and western sections of the Sino-Soviet border each year.

Before 1962, both sides of the border normally dealt with illegal border crossers by blocking entry. If the migrants had already crossed the border, border-control stations
would contact their counterparts on the other side and repatriate them.\(^{536}\) This gradually became a normal method for the two socialist states to deal with illegal border crossing.

Although border-crossing activities in Xinjiang had a long history, predating the party-state, the forging of the Sino-Soviet alliance during the Cold War in the 1950s tended to encourage these activities. As the USSR provided China with massive material aid and human resources, during the 1950s, the Chinese government initiated a series of mass campaigns nation-wide to motivate people to learn from the Soviet Union. Some indigenous people were so enamored of the Soviet Union that they crossed border simply to satisfy their curiosity about what the USSR looked like.\(^{537}\) When caught, they refused to take it seriously, saying, “The USSR is our big brother. It is fine to take something and eat something of our brother’s.”\(^{538}\) Despite being caught multiple times, some made no efforts to change their behavior.\(^{539}\)

To solve the problems caused by border crossings, as early as 1950, the Soviet Commander of Border Defenses suggested that the Chinese government establish a “border committee” to mediate the daily disputes.\(^{540}\) In 1952, Beijing respectively established a “Foreign Affairs Branch” in Yili, Tacheng, and Altay. Following the withdrawal of the Soviet consulates in Tacheng and Altay in 1955, the “Yili Bureau of

\(^{536}\) “Zhong Su jian guanyu Xinjiang bianjing diqu shaoshuminzu jumin dapi taowang Sulian shi de jiaoshe” [Sino-Soviet Negotiations on the large number of ethnic minorities fleeing to the USSR] (24 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01764-01.
\(^{537}\) “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui guanyu bianjiang gongzuo de zhishi,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-57.
\(^{538}\) Heilongjiang Provincial Archives, File No. 34-3-257.
\(^{539}\) “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui guanyu bianjiang gongzuo de zhishi,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-57.
Foreign Affairs” was established to handle diplomatic issues with the USSR in the Three Districts. One aspect of the work of these organs was to handle the disputes caused by the porous border. Yet regardless of what occurred on the border, both sides held that the principle for mediating disputes was to “strengthen the Sino-Soviet friendship,” promoting cooperation between the Chinese and the Soviets.

Though internationalism superseded nationalism in some ways in the matter of the Sino-Soviet borders, this does not necessarily mean that the governments allowed people to cross the border without any official permission. On the contrary, the frequent “illegal” border-crossing activities made both states worry that the capitalist states would take advantage of this loophole to send agents to disrupt social order. Furthermore, the Chinese government believed that the capitalists had been using whatever methods available to spy along the Sino-Soviet border. Official documents presented several pieces of evidence to prove how dangerous the capitalists were. In the spring of 1956, an unmarked airplane was spotted in the sky above the Sino-Soviet border. It was believed to be quite possible that the plane had airlifted several spies to the border, since some tracks were found. The local authorities also claimed that on June 28, 1957, several balloons were spotted in the sky near the Sino-Soviet border. These balloons, the Chinese authorities claimed, were sent by the American government to collect information. Five of them flew into Soviet territory and landed there. One of the balloons was found to be carrying spying equipment. A balloon similar to that seen in the USSR was also found in

a border city in Huocheng County. It was clear that frequent border crossings by the local people made the work of spy hunting difficult. To restore order along the border, the local government decided to launch a campaign to develop rules-consciousness among the people. The propaganda materials used several analogies to help local people to understand why borders represented national sovereignty, explaining that entering Soviet territory without legal permission was similar to entering a friend’s house, not through the door, but by sneaking through a window without his consent. However, later events demonstrated that the effects of the campaign were very limited.

**No Pretext to Defend the Border**

Strengthening the Sino-Soviet border had gradually become an issue over time. In 1958, during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, in order to resist any possible attack by the Taiwanese government and its ally, the United States, Mao Zedong, likely inspired by his experiences in Yan’an, felt that building up the militia would be an effective method. A CCP decision of August 1958 ordered that, aside from the professional Army, “all men and women nation-wide who are able to carry weapons should be armed. The entire nation should be a nation of soldiers in the style of militia.” In September, after reviewing several provinces and cities in Yangzi Delta, Mao was interviewed by the

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543 “Yili Hasake zizhizhou renmin weiyuanhui guanyu bianjiang gongzuo de zhishi,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-57.
544 Ibid.
Xinhua News Agency. In his speech, he said: “The imperialists bully us to such an extent that we must take it seriously. Not only do we need powerful professional army, we must also extensively build up our divisions of militia. Thus, when the imperialists invade us, the militia will make it difficult for them to move a single step.”

Echoing Mao’s call, Xinjiang government held a conference on militia work and decided to assign this mission to the Bingtuan (Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps of the PLA). In February 1960, just after the national conference on militia work, the Xinjiang government ordered that Bingtuan recruit more than 80% of youth within the age range to serve as militia by the end of July.

The brewing conflicts between China and the USSR came to the surface in June 1960, during the Bucharest Conference. In reaction, Nikita Khrushchev announced in July that all Soviet experts should withdraw from China. Under Beijing’s instructions, the Xinjiang government decided to set up a headquarters to deal with the withdrawal of Soviet experts from Xinjiang. As the Soviets withdrew, the atmosphere on the border shifted from friendly to tense. The Soviets had completed surveying along the entire Sino-Soviet border, which was regarded by the Chinese government, as a possible first


step in Soviets territorial aggression. The Chinese also found that the Soviets had pushed the border eastward into Chinese territory in several areas. Aside from this territorial expansionism, the Chinese side also observed that the Soviets had been strengthening their border defenses. More border posts had been built, and more soldiers had been stationed there, and were better equipped with weapons. Border patrols were strengthened and watchtowers were heightened. The Chinese side also found that Soviet border guards along the border with Tacheng and Yili had been exposed to more military training. The border guard reinforcements at the checkpoint of Khorgas, for example, had been practicing shooting every night. Furthermore, the Soviets began changing the way they treated illegal border crossers from China. First, the Soviets would interrogate the people they seized for information on domestic issues and border defenses. Furthermore, the Soviet border guards no longer evinced a friendly attitude when turning border crossers back over to the Xinjiang government. The activities of the Soviets were suspicious in the eyes of the Chinese, and the Chinese side had to act accordingly.

Although propaganda on the Sino-Soviet friendship resumed and Chinese border guards were instructed to treat illegal border crossers from the Soviet side in as friendly a manner as before, Beijing secretly ordered the Xinjiang government to prepare for Soviet aggression. To counter territorial encroachment, local people in border regions were organized to enter certain territories in dispute to claim Chinese sovereignty over

these lands. For example, in late June 1960, around 100 nomads with about 15,000 sheep were asked to move westward into the Republic of Kirghizia and resettle there, in a region 3 to 4 kilometers from what the Soviets assumed to be the Sino-Soviet border. The nomads were instructed by the Chinese government not to leave without the permission of the head of their People’s Commune. When the Soviets initiated negotiations on this issue, the Chinese side insisted that the region settled by the nomads was a part of Chinese territory. Later, the Chinese side evaded discussion of this issue with the Soviets.553

From being tough on territorial disputes, the Chinese side turned toward strengthening border defenses as well. The continuation of the nominal Sino-Soviet alliance, however, made it diplomatically inappropriate for the Chinese side to station more troops on the border. Otherwise, the CCP feared that the Soviets would blame the Chinese side for creating obstacles to the Sino-Soviet friendship. Furthermore, if professional troops had been stationed there, it would have been financially difficult to meet their supply needs. Therefore, Beijing and Urumqi decided to move several divisions of Bingtuan into the border regions. Local governments, mostly led by ethnic people, apparently held an unfriendly attitude toward the decision. Another alternative is that the ethnic leaders of the local governments feared that penetration by Bingtuan, which was dominated by Han Chinese, would render ethnic cadres powerless. Furthermore, the divisions stationed in the borderlands were barely self-sufficient in

553 “Guanyu Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fangmian zai Bozi’aige’er shankou diqu puohuai Sulian guojie de qingkuang huibao” 關於中華人民共和國方面在博孜艾格爾山口地區破壞蘇聯國界的情況匯報 [Report on the circumstances of the PRC’s actions to damage the Soviet borders in the region of the Bozi’aige’er Mountain Pass], in Shen Zhihua ed., E’guo jiemi dang’an, p. 507.
terms of food production, and had to seek support from other nearby divisions. Given these obstacles, only two divisions were moved to the borderlands in 1960. The 90th Division moved to Alashankou, while the No. 5 Farm Division (nongwushi 農五師) resettled in Bole,\(^{554}\) a county whose border with the USSR stretched 95 kilometers, but which lacked any border defenses.\(^{555}\) The resettlement of the No. 5 Farm Division proved to be a success for Beijing and Urumqi. The presence of this division not only allowed the borderlands to serve an economic purpose, but also prevented local indigenous people from crossing the border when the mass exodus occurred two years later.\(^{556}\) The success later inspired Beijing to build farms all along the frontier as the most efficient way to Sinicize and defend this strategically important ribbon of land, as this chapter will show in the pages to come.

As Sino-Soviet relations worsened, in early 1961, Beijing decided to further strengthen the Xinjiang-Soviet border, and ordered the Bingtuan to take control of the area. For the same diplomatic reasons, to avoid offering the Soviets an excuse to blame China for causing conflict between the two socialist states, at that time Beijing upheld the principle of “neither crossing nor retreating in border efforts; and neither increasing nor

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\(^{554}\) Wu Zhe, “Xinjiang: Minzu rentong, guoji jingzheng yu zhongguo geming, 1944–1962,” p. 487; Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingguan shizhi bianzhan weiyuanhui ed., Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, p. 138; “Bingtuan jianli bianjing nongchang fangtanlu zhiyi: Zhuanfang yuan bingtuan fuzhengwei Zhao Yuzheng” 兵團建立邊境農場訪談錄之一：專訪原兵團副政委趙予征 [Interviews on the establishment of border farms by Xinjiang Production Construction Corps, No. 1: Deputy political commissar Zhao Zhengyu], in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji, No. 22, p. 123.


reducing defensive forces.” As a leader of Bingtuan claimed, the local government’s take on this principle was that it was “inappropriate to station a formal army” for border defenses, even if Sino-Soviet relations worsened. Therefore, the only way for the Chinese government to strengthen the 5000-kilometer border was to build up a militia. While the relations between Beijing and Moscow were tense, at the local level, cross-border interactions continued, and were even still friendly. For example, the checkpoint near Huocheng County was directed by a Chinese Russian, who maintained a friendly attitude toward the people on the Chinese side of the border even as Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated. Trucks crossed back and forth from both sides through the checkpoint. It was only after the mass exodus took place in 1962 that the atmosphere changed on both sides. The head of the Huocheng checkpoint was transferred as both sides turned hostile. Before the imminent threat descended to the local level in 1962, the plans to build up a militia had been regarded by many as “unnecessary,” and had not been taken seriously. Only after 1962 did Bingtuan put the plans into practice.

**Strengthening Border Defenses**

The mass exodus in Tacheng shocked Beijing greatly. To halt the flight and restore social order, aside the serious diplomatic pressures China exerted on the Soviet

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557 “Xinjiang waiban bao youguan Suqiao wenti ji bianjie bianfang wenti de gongzuo qingkuang he cunzai wenti,” AMFA, File No. 118-01138-15.
559 “Bingtuan jianli bianjing nongchang fangtanlu zhisan” [Interviews on the establishment of border farms by Xinjiang Production Construction Corps, No. 3], in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji, Vol. 22, p. 133.
domestically Beijing decided to use Bingtuan to control the borderlands. On April 25, 1962, in response to the reports on the situation in Xinjiang sent by the Xinjiang CCP Committee and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Liu Shaoqi suggested that the opportunity should be seized to send several divisions of Bingtuan to the border, to take over herding and farming work in the area, and control the situation in the Three Districts. For years, the Chinese side had been unable to find a reasonable excuse to legitimize efforts by the Chinese government to strengthen the Chinese side of the Sino-Soviet border, without providing an opportunity to the Soviets to blame the Chinese for violating the Sino-Soviet alliance, despite the fact that the alliance was already nominal. In Liu’s eyes, the events in the border region could finally grant the CCP an opportunity to station the military forces in the area and exercise tighter control of the border. Furthermore, since Bingtuan engaged in both military service and production work, they seemed to be the best choice for stationing in the borderlands. Liu’s recommendations were well received by other high-ranking CCP leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. Zhou Enlai and other high officials such as Yang Shangkun began discuss

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senior Xinjiang officials. The reports sent by the local government depicted the situation in the Three Districts as grave and potentially deteriorating: “If things continue in this way, it is very possible that rebellions may occur in some places.” Deng Xiaoping therefore echoed Liu’s suggestion and declared that once Bingtuan divisions were sent, they “should not come back.” His comment demonstrates that Beijing’s decision to use Bingtuan to control the borderlands was not mere expediency, but rather was regarded as a permanent solution for the instability in the pro-Soviet borderlands. On April 28, following a conference attended by Zhou Enlai as a representative of the State Department, Deng Xiaoping as a representative of the CCP Central Committee, Luo Ruiqing as a representative of the Department of Defense and the Headquarters of the General Staff, and Liu Lantao as a representative of the government of the Grand Northwestern Region, a decision was made: the Bingtuan was to establish five camps in the five border regions most affected by the mass exodus: Altay, Tacheng, Huocheng, Zhaosu and Tuoli. Their missions would be first to maintain social order, and second to restore production in the region.

568 “Zongcanmoubu guanyu Xinjiang shengchang jianshe bingtuan choudiao wugeying jiaqiang bianfang de mingling” 總參謀部關於新疆生產建設兵團抽調五個營加強邊防的命令 [Order from the general staff on dispatching five battalions of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp to strengthen the borders], in Xinjiang shengchang jianshe bingtuan gongzuowenxian xuanbian 1949–2014, p. 78.
The “Three Replacements” Campaign

After the mass exodus, the situation in the Three Districts was fragile. Villages were nearly vacant, and production work ground to a halt. Tacheng, Yumin and Huocheng were the top three counties in terms of loss of population. Tacheng County lost 28,984 residents by the end of May, or 68% of the total population of 33,000.\(^569\) Yuming County lost more than 50% of its total population, while Huocheng County lost 14,000 or 38% of its total population.\(^570\) At first, most participants in the exodus were peasants, herdsmen, and local cadres from rural and pasturing areas. Later, urban residents, students, policemen, state employees, and even county-level minority officials and county heads also began crossing the border. In Tacheng County, more than 150 county-level cadres fled.\(^571\) According to Soviet sources, during the period from April 22 to the beginning of June 1962, around 67,000 people entered the USSR.\(^572\)

As the indigenous people fled, they forsook both their crops and their livestock. The mass exodus occurred during the sowing period in spring, and more than 400,000 \textit{mu} of land was left unsown, while fields with growing crops were abandoned. Some crops had already matured, but the labor required for harvesting was unavailable. The livestock fared no better. The border crossers had taken more than 300,000 head of livestock with

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\(^{570}\) Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, \textit{Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi}, Vol. 1, p. 712.

\(^{571}\) “A report by the XUAR Party Committee on the situation of minorities in Tacheng and Yili continuing to cross the border into the USSR,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-11.

them to the USSR. The animals left behind were scattered across mountains, grasslands and villages, or trapped in sheep pens and mangers, starving. Thousands of lost animals were scattered near the border. Before fleeing, some had taken property belonging to the communes, such as livestock and carts, while others robbed stores and warehouses. In Tacheng, for example, six of the eleven warehouses were robbed. According to an official source, in Tacheng and Yili, the total economic losses were more than 70 million Chinese Yuan. Crossing the border by foot required physical strength, and it was a difficult task for the old and young, the sick and the disabled. They were therefore left behind in the villages as almost all the young, able-bodied people fled. Already lacking in food and daily necessities, the flight of their family members from whom they might have expected aid worsened their situations. When the Bingtuan arrived at the villages where the mass exodus occurred, they generally found a near wasteland.

Dispatched on his mission by Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, Zhang Zhonghan, then the commissar of Bingtuan, returned from Beijing to Urumqi and held a conference to mobilize the soldiers and officers of Bingtuan to initiate the “Three Replacements” campaign. The “Three Replacements” literally referred to “replacement of farming,”

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573 Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingguan shizhi bianzhu bianzhuang weiyanhui ed., Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, p. 137.  
575 Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi, Vol. 1, p. 712.  
576 Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 712–713.  
578 “Bingtuan jianli bianjing nongchang fangtanlu zhi’er: Zhuanfang yuan bingtuan fuzhengwei Li Shujuan” 兵團建立邊境農場訪談錄之二：專訪原兵團副政委李書卷 [The second interview on the establishment of
“replacement of herding,” and “replacement of governance.” The mass exodus left Tacheng and Yili with deserted lands and livestock, and with the departure of the local cadres, some local governments were no longer functioning. All these voids were to be filled by the soldiers and officers of the Bingtuan as “replacements.” To avoid be accused of confiscating the property of indigenous people, the CCP committee of Bingtuan claimed that the purpose of this campaign was to care for the property abandoned by the runaways, and return it to them once they returned.\(^{579}\) To fulfill the mission, beginning on May 11, 1962, the Bingtuan dispatched work teams to four border counties that had suffered a great impact by the mass exodus: Yumin, Tacheng, Huocheng and Emin. The work teams were composed of 810 officers, 16,750 staff members, 39 trucks and 730 farming machines.\(^{580}\)

The first mission was to halt people from crossing the border. Inspired by successful crossings into the USSR, more people were planning to leave as well. The most urgent task of the Bingtuan was to stop them. Once the Bingtuan arrived, villagers were supervised and even controlled. If any signs of flight were detected among the locals, the Bingtuan staff would approach them and ask them to stay. Intermediation might work in some ways, but, the government’s most effective way of controlling the borderland farms by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp: deputy political commissar of the Corp, Li Shujuan], in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliang xuanji, Vol. 22, pp. 126–127.

\(^{579}\)“Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan daigeng, daimu, daiguan gongzuodui gongzuouzhou (cao’an)” 新疆生产建设兵团代耕，代牧，代管工作队工作守则（草案）[Regulations of the work unit of farming, herding, and supervising, Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (draft)] (15 May 1962), in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliang xuanji, Vol. 22, p. 115; Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, pp. 4–5.

exodus was state violence. Those suspected of involvement in organizing the exodus and even those employed by the Soviet consulates were arrested and promptly sentenced to imprisonment. This signaled to the indigenous people that the government would be tough on border crossing, and that the Soviet umbrella could no longer shield them from punishment. Bingtuan members with good military training and combat experience were organized into cavalry troops. As the armed and uniformed military forces swept through the villages, the people considering flight were left terrified. In the lands near the border, before professional soldiers were stationed there, the Bingtuan militia functioned as border guards, patrolling and halting migrants. In Huocheng County, the Bingtuan militia opened fire in order to halt border crossing. The methods used by the militia to halt the migrants was effective but bloody. Moreover, these actions could offer the Soviets an opportunity to claim that the mass exodus was a direct outcome of ethnic suppression being enacted by the Xinjiang government. To avoid these circumstances, Beijing was compelled to order the militia not to use force to halt border crossings, and especially to avoid employing any military means.

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581 “Zhongyang guanyu dui Suqiaoxiehui he sulingshiguan caiqu de fangzhen he zuofa de zhishi” 中央對於蘇僑協會和蘇聯領事館採取的方針和做法的指示 [Instructions from the central committee on principles and practices in dealing with association with Soviet nationals and the Soviet Consulate] (14 May 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01083-02.
583 “Xinjiang waiban guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao” 新疆外辦關於伊犁塔城地區邊民逃往蘇聯的報告 [A report from the Xinjiang Foreign Affairs Office on the border people of Yili and Tacheng who fled to the Soviet Union], AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.
584 “Guanyu Yili Tacheng diqu bianmin taowang Sulian de baogao,” AMFA, File No. 118-01100-06.
robbery, arson, and killing would be jailed, while those who spread rumors, mobilized people to flee or instigated riots would be harshly suppressed.585

The presence of the Bingtuan proved effective in halting the exodus. For instance, the efforts of the Bingtuan were a contributing factor in the circumstances of some 14,000 residents of Emin County who reached the border, but were forced to turn back.586 Furthermore, as border crossings became more difficult and the organizers of the mass exodus were subjected to harsh punishment, those who had hoped to follow were forced to abandon their plans. The social unrest was thus gradually pacified. Even after professional troops were transferred from Gansu Province to the border for patrolling and more border stations were built, the Bingtuan’s role in border defenses continued to be strengthened, as Bingtuan militia were organized to supplement professional forces in border defenses.

The Bingtuan’s other role in the “Three Replacements” campaign was to rejuvenate the local economy, which had been destroyed by the mass exodus. This would not only relieve economic pressures, which had been exacerbated by the mass exodus, but would also allow the CCP to exert control over all levels of local government, which had once been self-governed by ethnic leaders.

585 “Xinjiang gong’anting guanyu Sufang zuijin keneng zaici zai bianjing cedong wo bianmin waitao de baogao” 新疆公安廳關於蘇方最近可能再次在邊境策動我邊民外逃的報告 [Report from the Public Security Office of Xinjiang on the possibility of the Soviet Union planning to urge our border citizens to flee to the USSR] (10 August 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01099-05.
586 “Zhonggong zhongyang zhuanfa Xinjiangzizhiqu dangwei he waijiaobu de sange zhongyao wenjian” 中共中央轉發新疆自治區黨委和外交部的三個重要文件 [Three important documents from the Party Committee and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, forwarded by the CCP Central Committee], AMFA, File No. 118-01100-01.
The border counties suffered grave losses in terms of the labor force and cadres. In Tacheng County, for example, 68% of the overall population took flight. Besides replacing the labor of the farmers and herders, many positions for cadres at the level of small teams (xiaodui), big teams (dadui) and communes (gongshe) also needed to be filled. In Tacheng County, 54 positions needed to be refilled for commune cadres, amounting to 79% of the total commune cadres; 199 positions needed to be refilled for big team cadres, accounting for 93% of big team cadres. For the small teams, 499 cadre positions had to be refilled.\(^{587}\) As part of the “Three Replacements,” Bingtuan members had to perform the work abandoned by those involved in the exodus. Mature crops had to be harvested, and fields had to be sown. Abandoned livestock had to be cared for, while those scattered across the hills had to be reclaimed. The physically weak and disabled who had been unable to cross the border also required care, and were in danger of starvation. The Bingtuan members engaged in relief work, visiting one household after another to investigate the local circumstances and understand the needs of the refuges.\(^{588}\) The “Three Replacements” campaign turned out to be a success for the government. In a short period of time, the flight was halted, social order was restored, the economic pressures were relieved, and the local People’s Communes were reorganized.\(^{589}\) Over the long term, with the replacement of the local ethnic cadres, the power of the Han-dominated government finally penetrated the borderlands. Prior to the mass exodus, resistance by ethnic elites, with the Soviet consulates as their patrons, meant that the Han


government’s control was merely nominal. The fact that several local governments had rejected the plan to station the Bingtuan in the borderlands to serve as border defenses in 1960 was vivid evidence of the autonomy the local governments had once enjoyed. The power vacuum left by the mass exodus turned out to be a blessing for the CCP. After the three-month “Three Replacements” campaign came to an end in August 1962, the Bingtuan work teams withdrew and turned local affairs over to the local governments.\textsuperscript{590} However, after the campaign, the local governments were no longer self-governed by the indigenous people, but instead were tightly controlled by cadres loyal to Beijing. With the replacement of the local government elites, the project to transfer the Bingtuan to borderlands to establish border farms along the frontier, and to Sinicize and defend the ribbon of land against the Soviets, no longer encountered any resistance. Moreover, when the work teams left, some Bingtuan members remained under Beijing’s instructions to continue engaging in farming and herding:\textsuperscript{591} they would later serve as a building block for the Border Farm Belt (\textit{bianjing nongchang dai} 邊境農場帶) project.

\textit{Building the Border Farm Belt}

Believing that the primary instigating factor for the entry of more than 76,000 indigenous people into the USSR was a Soviet conspiracy, the Chinese government urgently sought to strengthen the border to prevent such events from occurring in the future. Another concern was the fact that, after sealing the Soviet border on June 8


\textsuperscript{591} Ibid.
under diplomatic pressure from the Chinese government, the Soviet government declared that it was improper to seal the borders between two socialist states for a long period of time. On August 9, the Soviet Embassy to the PRC made the same comment to the Chinese government, and further claimed that the Soviets would soon reopen the border to normalize relations. The prerequisite for this plan, the diplomat claimed, was that the Chinese government would take actions to build up their own border defenses.\(^{592}\)

Given the mass exodus into the USSR and the impending Sino-Soviet split, the Chinese government interpreted this as another Soviet conspiracy to mobilizing people in flight. Xinjiang was thus transformed from a safe “heartland” into “a battlefront against Soviet aggression,”\(^{593}\) and strengthening the border defenses became crucial. The success of the “Three Replacements” campaign convinced the CCP that Bingtuan was the best choice for defending Xinjiang, since it could fulfill both military and economic functions. A certain number of professional soldiers had been stationed in the borderland, but given the length of the Sino-Soviet border, the Chinese government could not economically support the number of professional soldiers required for a full patrol. Therefore, professional soldiers would never be the primary forces. However, the Bingtuan could remedy the limitations of the Army. Its members could occupy a vast area and operate multiple checkpoints for inspections, and with abundant manpower to carry out their missions. Moreover, as an organization that combined both border control and economic production, Bingtuan had the most sustainable pathway to survival in the remote

\(^{592}\) “Xinjiang gong’anting guanyu Sufang zuijin keneng zaici zai bianjing cedong wo bianmin waitao de baogao” (10 August 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01099-05.

A persuasive factor in Beijing’s decision to build the farm belt was the stability of the population in Bole. While most border counties had lost a significant portion of their population in the spring of 1962, the losses in Bole County were slight, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The main reason for the stability of Bole County was the presence of the No. 5 Farm Division, which had established a border farm in the area. The Bingtuan’s successes thus convinced Beijing that using Bingtuan to establish farms along the frontier was the best choice for border defenses.” On August 11, Beijing and Urumqi made a decision to “instruct Bingtuan to deliberately and promptly construct several border farms along the borderline, as a united barrier for border defenses.” In November, Bingtuan submitted a report to Urumqi on how to build the farm belt, which was approved. Thus, under the heavy hands of the work team from Urumqi, Bingtuan and local governments worked together to fulfill the mission.

Building the farm belt along the border required at least two steps. First, the lands of villages in the borderlands which were organized in the fashion of the People’s Communes had to be expropriated by Bingtuan to build border farms. Given that most of the local powers at all levels had been replaced by those loyal to Beijing, this objective was not difficult to achieve. Border regions including Yili, Bole, Tacheng and Altay allotted 17,600,000 mu of land along the border for building border farms. The second

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594 Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi, Vol. 1, p. 731.
597 Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, p. 144.
598 Ibid., p. 145.
step was to transfer Bingtuan farm divisions to the region, to reclaim and cultivate the borderlands. Cultivating the vast border regions as agricultural farms, tree farms, and pasturelands would make it possible to block cross-border communications. Furthermore, agricultural cultivation in the border areas would make it possible to support the material survival of more than 80,000 Bingtuan members. The presence of Bingtuan members serving not only as farmers and herders but also as militias allowed the border to be secured. Furthermore, 19 of the undefined and therefore disputed border regions on the border between the PRC and the USSR fell inside the farm belt. With the building of farms and the presence of the Bingtuan members, the Chinese side had already seized a favorable position in the impending Sino-Soviet border disputes.

In the Yili region, for example, the border defenses were greatly strengthened after the May 29 Incident. The region had once had only two border defense posts and one checkpoint. Soon, the number of defense posts had been increased to nine. More border guards were stationed in the region, and their patrol line was greatly extended. By December 1962, the local government in the Yili region had formed 8 militia patrol troops and 7 independent platoons, with a total number of 2181 militia members. The eight militia patrol troops had 641 members, all of whom were stationed in the border regions. 12 border farms had also been built along the border, further distancing Yili from the Soviet side.

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600 “Huang Jinming gei zizhiqu renwei de baogao” 黃曉明給自治區委員的報告 [Huang Jinmin’s report to the People’s Committee of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region], AXUAR, File No. 11-1-114.
By late 1966, the Bingtuan had built 38 border farms along the Sino-Soviet border. The border farm belt was made up of 2,341,300 mu of land, with a population of 155,500, including 82,100 Bingtuan members. The regional breakdown of farms included 12 in Yili, 9 in Tacheng, 8 in Boertala, and 3 in Altay. The length of the ribbon of border farms was 2,019 kilometers, and its breadth varied between 10 and 30 kilometers. According to the orders given by the Central Military Committee in August 1962, Bingtuan was to form 300 militia patrol troops over the course of two years. By late 1962, 148 militia patrol troops had been established, and by the first half of 1964, the number of divisions had risen to 315.

Further Strengthening Border Defenses

The local government in Xinjiang had to block migrants from both sides of the border. The local authorities spared no effort to prevent the exodus of inhabitants in border regions on the one hand, while also blocking the re-entry of those who had already fled to the USSR on the other. Even after the “Three Replacements” campaign and the construction of the border farm belt, some local people still had thoughts of flight. The Police Bureau in Yumin County reported that, being determined to leave, some nomads no longer carried out their work, instead butchering their livestock and preparing for flight. Fourteen households had been spotted moving toward the border to seek farming the land and defending the borders in contemporary Xinjiang] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2012), p. 334.

Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, p. 145.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
opportunities to leave. The situation in Tacheng was similar. According to the investigations carried out by the Tacheng County Police Bureau in the Yemener Commune, most of whose population had failed to cross the border during the exodus, some ethnic Kazaks were still restive, either demanding that the government allow them to make way to the USSR, or seeking opportunities on their own. The commune was composed of 144 households and 637 people. Among them, 70 households had been transferred from neighboring Emin County. 90% of the population were ethnic Kazaks. Aside from 4 households, the rest had attempted to flee, but were either blocked on the border or repatriated by the USSR. The report revealed that some of them were planning to flee again and 25 households were preparing to move to a region only 6 kilometers away from the border in late February or early March.

Given the social instability amongst the indigenous people, especially among the Kazak population, local governments were gravely concerned by the letters sent from the Soviet side. The people who had managed to cross the border into the USSR sent letters encouraging their relatives to leave as well. The Police Bureau also found that, as of December 1962, two People’s Communes in Emin Country had received more than 140 letters from their relatives in the USSR. Some letters were intended to reveal the writer’s better life post-resettlement, and suggest that their relatives join them. The official report of the local government demonstrated that the letters from the other side of the border had strengthened some local people’s resolve to flee. The content of other letters was

605 “Eryue shangxun qingkuang” 二月上旬情况 [Situation in the first ten days of February] (1963), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-121.
606 “Guanyu Tachengxian Yemen’er gongshe bianmin dongtai” 關於塔城縣也門爾公社邊民動態 [Current situation of the border peoples in Yemen’er Commune in Tacheng County] (18 February 1963), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-121.
completely the opposite, as some who had earlier fled decided to return. The letters revealed multiple reasons for considering a return to the Chinese side of the border. Some yearned to return because they missed their hometown and relatives. Others found that it was difficult to become accustomed to the Soviet life, or else experienced discrimination on the part of the local Soviet government because of their Chinese nationality.\textsuperscript{607}

Beginning on June 8, 1962, the Soviet side had repeatedly informed the Chinese government that they would soon reopen the border, and that defending the Chinese side of the border was not a Soviet duty but the duty of the Chinese government.\textsuperscript{608} Given the claims made by the Soviet side, the influx of letters, regardless of their content, appeared to the Chinese government to be solid evidence for an ongoing Soviet conspiracy. Furthermore, in March 1963, the Soviet government decided to hand over 300 Chinese citizens who had entered the USSR during the mass exodus, but decided to return for family reasons. In the past, Chinese citizens who had crossed the border into the USSR were handed over to representatives of the Chinese Border Defense Army. Fearing that the Soviets would use some of the border crossers as agents once they reentered Xinjiang, this time, the Chinese government firmly rejected the Soviets’ requests to repatriate the Chinese citizens. Due to the failed repatriation, some of the border crossers made plans to reenter Xinjiang illegally.\textsuperscript{609} As they snuck into Xinjiang, the already suspicious

\textsuperscript{607} “Eryue shangxun qingkuang” (1963), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-121.
\textsuperscript{608} “Xinjiang gong’anting guanyu Sufang zuijin keneng zaici zai bianjing cedong wo bianmin waitao de baogao” (10 August 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01099-05.
\textsuperscript{609} “Guojia anquan weiyuanhui gei Sugong zhongyang de baogao: Zhongguo tichu bianjie yaoqiu” 鄉家安全委員會給蘇共中央的報告：中國提出邊界要求 [A report from the National Security Committee to the
Chinese government became further convinced that the Soviets were engaged in a conspiracy. The local governments claimed that some suspects in the conspiracy had been captured, and that most had reentered from the Soviet side. The general view held by the local governments with regard to the situation of the border inhabitants as follows: Some people had sought opportunities to cross into the USSR, while the Soviets had been using whatever means available to send their agents back into Xinjiang to make trouble for the Chinese government.\textsuperscript{610}

At the same time, the diplomatic environment faced by the Chinese government had gravely deteriorated, making the cause of strengthening the border even more urgent. The Sino-Indian border had been tense since the border conflicts of 1960. On July 21, 1962, armed conflict broke out on the Xinjiang-Indian border, leading the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strongly condemn the Indian government for attacking the Chinese sentry post.\textsuperscript{611} The CCP also no longer enjoyed the once-friendly Sino-Mongolian relations. As Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, so too did the relations between China and the Mongolian Republic, a Soviet satellite state. After the mass exodus in Xinjiang, conflicts occurred frequently on the Sino-Mongolian border.\textsuperscript{612} The Soviet conspiracy and border conflicts between Xinjiang and its neighboring states left Xinjiang insecure and Beijing determined to take measures to further solidify the border defenses.

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\textsuperscript{610} Soviet Central Committee: China’s request on borders] (21 March 1963), Shen Zhihua ed., \textit{E’guo jiemi dang’an}, p. 511.

\textsuperscript{611} “Guanyu Tachengxian Yemen’er gongshe bianmin dongtai,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-121.

\textsuperscript{612} Xinjiang shengchan jianshe hengtuan shiliao xuanji, Vol. 22, p. 165.
First, the Military Area of Xinjiang gave instructions that the border defense project should maintain three lines of defense. The first line of defense was the border defense posts, which were controlled at first by the Bingtuan militia, and later by both the militia and soldiers in the Xinjiang Frontier Defense Army. Since May 21, 1961, Bingtuan had built 19 border defense posts along the Sino-Soviet border. The mission of the border defense posts was to patrol the borders, inspect goods and people, and most importantly, halt undocumented border crossers. The areas where border defense posts were located were “military restricted areas,” which were the most tightly controlled: those who needed to enter not only had to have reasonable cause, but also a pass issued by the local security office. Without a pass, they were forbidden entry. On September 14, 1964, the Yili government issued detailed rules and regulations for supervising the restricted areas. In August 1965, the Department of Public Security of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region instituted requirements for “border region certificates” and “border restricted area passes” to further extend its control. As more regulations were implemented, the restricted areas were gripped more tightly.

The border farm belt served as the second line of defense, controlled by part-time militia and Bingtuan members. The difference between the second line of defense and the first was that the border farm belt was tasked with farming and herding, as well as defense. Farming was generally sedentary, and the lands being farmed could easily coincide with the lands being defended. Bingtuan farmers were therefore required to

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614 Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, p. 153.
615 Song Jiaren ed., Yili Hasake zizhizhou zhi, p. 52.
616 Xinjiang tongzhi 20 juan: gong’an zhi, p. 51.
617 Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi, Vol. 1, p. 730.
function as border defenders while farming. It was not as easy to match up herding with border defense due to mobility during grazing. To make sure that personnel were assigned to take charge of each section of the farm belt, the grasslands were divided into several sections. Each section of grasslands and the livestock that pastured there were assigned to the care of a given group.618

The third line of defense was composed of People’s Communes and Bingtuan units in border regions. This line was assumed to be defended by the indigenous people (most of whom were ethnic Han Chinese) loyal to the Chinese government, alongside the personnel in the Bingtuan units.619 Indigenous people were allowed to inhabit these regions, but only if they had been issued a residence certificate.620 The checkpoints, border farms, and People’s Communes in the border regions thus formed the so-called “three lines of defense.”621

The purpose of the three lines of defense was to guarantee that the farm belt along the Sino-Soviet borderline was defended by both the army and common people, ranging from the front lines to the heartland. During peacetime, military and civilian forces would work together to halt undocumented migration and capture Soviet agents. During wartime, they would be brothers-in-arms to wage a “people’s war,” a military strategy

618 Ibid., p. 731; “Guanche Yili junwei guanyu fangfan taosu renyuan feifa cuanru wojing wenti de zhishi qingkuang baogao” 貴巂伊力（犁）區軍委關於防範逃蘇人員非法竄入我境問題的指示情況報告 [Instructions from Yili Military Commission on preventing Soviet exiles from illegally crossing our borders] (11 July 1963), AYKAP, File No. 11-1-124.
619 Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi, Vol. 1, p. 730.
620 “Guanche Yili junwei guanyu fangfan taosu renyuan feifa cuanru wojing wenti de zhishi qingkuang baogao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-124.
621 Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji, p. 147.
622 Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi, Vol. 1, p. 730.
that Mao Zedong believed to be an important contributing factor in the communist victory over the KMT during the Chinese civil war.

The second step was to move indigenous peoples, especially Kazak nomads, out of the farm belt, and resettle them. Not long after the mass exodus, because herding was not a specialty of the Bingtuan members, who were predominantly ethnic Han Chinese, in order to supplement labor shortages in herding, 5,077 nomads from the neighboring Emin county were resettled in Tacheng, a county whose Kazakh population had declined from 30,803 in 1949 to 9,613 after the mass exodus of 1962.\textsuperscript{623} As the three lines of defense were put in place, most of the borderlands became the property of Bingtuan. The indigenous people therefore had to be assigned to lands elsewhere. To resolve this problem, Bingtuan allotted 140,000 \textit{mu} of land for the resettlement of migrants whose lands had been expropriated.\textsuperscript{624} Another issue was that the mobility of the nomads made difficult to conduct inspections. Their resettlement would prevent them from fleeing across the Chinese border, while also making it easier to spot anyone entering from the Soviet side. For instance, in Zhaosu County, a border county in the Yili region, 89 households had to be resettled. 25 of the households were resettled in a region around 100 kilometers away from the border, while 64 were moved to Tekes County, far from the border.\textsuperscript{625}

As the ethnic population of the borderlands was moved out, the government simultaneously moved ethnic Han people in. The CCP’s decision to transfer the ethnic

\textsuperscript{623} Yao Kewen ed., \textit{Tachengshi zhi}, pp. 26, 647; “Guanyu Tachengxian Yemen’er gongshe bianmin dongtai,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-121.
\textsuperscript{624} \textit{Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan dashiji}, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{625} “Guanche Yili junwei guanyu fangfan taosu renyuan feifa cuanru wojing wenti de zhishi qingkuang baogao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-124.
Han population to the borderlands to strengthen border defenses was inspired by a legacy of the Chinese imperial system. Furthermore, before China consolidated its control over Xinjiang, Stalin had informed his Chinese comrades that Xinjiang could be exploited and better secured only if the percentage of the Han population in this region was increased from the current level of less than 5% to 30%. To strengthen the border defenses, the Chinese government was to resettle ethnic Han Chinese to populate all the border regions. After seizing Xinjiang, the Westward Campaign was launched in the name of “contributing to the construction of socialism in the borderlands,” and Han Chinese were dispatched to the area through multiple channels. Most entered Xinjiang as soldiers in the People’s Liberation Army, and later served as members of Bingtuan. Due to a lack of bureaucratic personnel, over the course of several years, a large number of college and high school graduates were sent to the area as “youth for frontier support” (zhibian qingnian 支邊青年). Military veterans were sent to the region in order to provide them with jobs. With the development of industry and a shortage of manpower, workers and their families were also resettled in Xinjiang. Between 1960 and 1962, Xinjiang also experienced an influx of refugees from China proper due to the Great Chinese Famine. As the refugees settled in the area, their relatives came to join them. After the mass exodus, the government found that most of the residents of border counties who had not entered the USSR were ethnic Han Chinese. As most People’s Communes devolved into wastelands and villages were left vacant, majority-Han communes remained as usual.

626 “Sidalin yu Zhonggong daibiaotuan huitan jiayao: Sulian duo zhonggong de yuanzhu” 斯大林與中共代表團會談紀要：蘇聯對中共的援助 [Summary of Stalin’s conversation with the CCP representatives’ team: Soviet support for the CCP] (27 June 1949), Shen Zhihua ed., E’guo jiemi dang’an, p. 324.
627 Yao Kewen ed., Tachengshi zhi, p. 92.
Tacheng County had 50 production brigades, two of which were majority Han Chinese, while the remaining 48 were primarily composed of ethnic Kazaks. By April 1962, most members of the 48 Kazak production brigades had fled, while the two Han Chinese production brigades were essentially intact. This fact reminded Beijing that ethnic Han Chinese living in the borderlands, who had no Soviet ties, would seldom flee, and could instead serve as a “human fence” to halt border crossing from either side. The most effective means of resettling Han Chinese in the borderlands was assigning Bingtuan members and their families to the area through administrative orders. For this purpose, in September 1962, the General Political Department of the PLA decided to transfer 1500 military cadres from the military zones of Beijing, Shenyang, Nanjing and Jinan, to Xinjiang. While some were determined to contribute to the project of the construction of socialism of Xinjiang, others were subject to deception. Bingtuan members who had participated in the “Three Replacements” campaign did not return to their places of origin, and instead were ordered to settle down on the spot. 38 border farms were built by the end of 1966, and the population in the farm belt was 155,500, primarily comprised of

628 “Xinjiang zizhiqu dangwei guanyu Tacheng Yili diqu shaoshuminzu jixu yuejing taowang Sulian de qingkuang baogao” 新疆自治区党委關於塔城伊犁地區少數民族繼續越境逃往蘇聯的情況報告 [Report by the Xinjiang Party Committee on the situation of minority ethnic groups in Yili and Tacheng continuing to flee to the Soviet Union] (24 April 1962), AMFA, File No. 118-01100-11.

629 “Diaoge Xinjiang junqu shengchan jianshe bingtuan 1500ming ganbu” 請將新疆軍區生產建設兵團1500名幹部 [Dispatching 1500 cadres to Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp] (24 September 1962); “Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun Xinjiang junqu shengchang jianshe bingtuan guanbu guanyu jieshou zhuanye junguan gongzuozuo de tongji baogao” 中國人民解放軍新疆軍區生產建設兵團幹部關於接受幹部工作的統計報告 [Summary on the acceptance of officer transfers by the cadres of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp of the PLA] (15 April 1963), in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji, Vol. 22, pp. 23–27.
With the influx of ethnic Han Chinese, aside from the strengthening of border defenses, the demographic composition of the border regions shifted accordingly from ethnic Kazaks to ethnic Han as the predominant ethnicity.

Collection posts were established for the resettlement of those who fled to the USSR but were repatriated Xinjiang, designed for accommodation but also separation from the local people. In Zhaosu County, for instance, two collection posts were built to collect the border crossers. The Bingtuan militias were ordered to supervise, detain, and escort border crossers when necessary. Physical barriers were also built to halt undocumented migration. Wire nets, walls, visible and concealed blockhouses, and observation posts were installed as part of the defense program. At some farms, military structures such as tunnels, air-raid shelters, fortresses, and ditches were built. Some militias on the front were equipped with communication devices such as radios and electrical engines.

The Yili incident of May 29, 1962, had resulted in the seizure of some classified bureaucratic archives by the Soviets. To prevent the re-occurrence of such events, in 1964, the archives of Bingtuan units in the borderlands were transferred to regions far from the border, such as Hami City. Once the Border Defense Army of Xinjiang took over some of the militias’ border defense operations in 1963, the Sino-

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631 “Guanche Yili junwei guanyu fangfan taosu renyuan feifa cuanru wojing wenti de zhishi qingkuang baogao,” AYKAP, File No. 11-1-124.
632 Fang Yingkai and Li Fusheng, Xinjiang bingtuan tunken shubian shi, Vol. 1, pp. 731–32.
633 “Guanyu bianjing yixian tuanchang yishang danwei dang’an de jiaqiang dang’an baomi gongzu de baogao” 關於邊境一線團場以上單位檔案的轉移和加強檔案保密工作的報告 [Report on transferring the files of units higher than first-level corps in the border area and strengthening classification of these files] (5 November 1964), in Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shiliao xuanji, Vol. 22, pp. 33–36.
Soviet border in Xinjiang was transformed from a “boundary without defenses” to systematic border defense operations. In the description of a Bingtuan veteran, the operations were “four in one,” with a united defense project involving soldiers, policemen, militia and civilians.634

As relations between the two socialist states of China and the Soviet Union deteriorated, the borderlands became a contested region. Once the Bingtuan militias were present, the Chinese side tended to pick fights with the Soviets in almost every conflict. The tensions sometimes snowballed into border skirmishes, causing a death toll.635 The presence of the Bingtuan militias appeared as a threat to the Soviets. According to an autobiography written by a Chinese individual who fled to the Soviet Kazak Republic in 1970, during the interrogation by Soviet border officials, the question most frequently asked was, “Were the militia in Xinjiang equipped with guns?” The author concluded that the Soviets were most terrified not by the Chinese professional soldiers, but by the militia and their skill in guerrilla warfare.636 It would appear that the defense works centered on the Bingtuan militia contributed greatly to China’s state-building process. No further loses were conceded to the Soviet side in the disputed borderlands after the establishment of the farm belt, as claimed by Chinese authorities.637 As the border defenses were being built up, any documents held by local people that could confirm their Soviet nationality,
such as Soviet passports, were confiscated. Cadres with Soviet ties were purged and their positions were filled by Han cadres.
CONCLUSION

The transition of the Three Districts of Xinjiang from a Soviet frontier to a Chinese one in the 1950s and 1960s can be viewed as a “victory” achieved by the CCP at the cost of both the USSR and the indigenous ethnic people. The Soviet lost this Muslim borderland as a buffer zone, while the ethnic people had to accept the Chinese communist rule as a precondition of having autonomy. As a result, Xinjiang, for so long served as a meeting point between the Muslim population in Soviet Central Asia and their Xinjiang counterparts was turned into a battlefield between the USSR and the CCP. If one interprets this story as another evidence to verify the evil nature of the Chinese communism, just like how people view the historical events such as the Great Chinese Famine, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the Tiananmen Massacre, he or she has only understood it superficially. This study shows that it is the nature of a nation-state system that made it possible for Beijing to gain full sovereignty over the once fragile suzerainty of the Northwest borderland of Xinjiang, a region highly dependent on the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Over the years whenever a territorial dispute occurred, the PRC government often claims that the contested land has been a part of Chinese territory since the beginnings of its recorded history. However, the very concepts of territory, sovereignty, nation, and borderline are modern political constructs. The transition from pre-modern empires to modern nation-states reconfigured the global political geography into finite and bounded entities. Nation-state is a system in which authority radiates outward from the center,
with the elastic and imprecise borders replaced by definite ones within which “state sovereignty was fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory.” The shift had important implications along the margins of empire, transforming them from peripheral borderlands where sovereignties overlapped, into valuable and vulnerable bordered lands where territory needed to be constantly patrolled and guarded. Thus, Charles Maier states, the twentieth century could be defined as an epoch of “territoriality,” where state elites used all kinds of modern methods to “saturate,” “enclose,” and “energize” the bordered political space. Thus, a territorial nation became a “space of identity,” “space of decision” and even “space of ideology;” Allegiance to a bounded geographic community replaced pre-modern social hierarchies and vertical forms of group identity. This is a useful interpretive framework to understand the history of modern China.

As Wang Gungwu points out, the Chinese academia is very much dominated by the Sinocentric view, from which China is considered in every way as a growing “central state.” During its interactions with borderland peoples, the central state pushed outwards to secure its borderlands when it was strong; when it was weak, the influence of the

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center on these borderlands decreased. The elastic border under such a “Chinese World Order” system could no longer persist when the Qing Empire was defeated during the Opium War. No matter how reluctantly, the Manchu Qing had to accept the European nation-state system, which was authenticated as the only legitimate expression of sovereignty. The implement of the nation-state system made the Qing court lose its tributary states one after another. Not only the influence of China on its peripheries had shrunk, even the security of Qing court which used to be defended by “barbarians on four sides” (siyi 四夷) was challenged. However, the accidental outcome for the Chinese was that the nation-state system based on international law helped prevent the Western powers and the Japanese from further encroaching the territory of China as long as it was demarcated by international treaties.

In his chapter on Inner Asia of Cambridge History of China, Joseph Fletcher outlined three most important changes occurred in the eighteenth century that set the course of China’s subsequent history—the solid establishment of Europe’s presence, a doubling of Han Chinese population, and the dramatic expansion of its territory under the Manchu Qing empire. Different from what occurred to Ottoman, Habsburg, and Czarist empires, China did not fall apart following its ethnic and sociocultural lines after the collapse of the Qing empire. The subsequent regimes successfully maintained the vast Qing territory and thus kept a population of multi-ethnicity in the form of one nation-state.

On the other hand, the Chinese political elites had and still has to face severe challenges

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when the ethnic people on borderlands seek independence to build up their own nation-states. Thus, twentieth-century China witnessed how militarily and economically weak states attempted to stretch “the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire,” to use the words of Benedict Anderson. They intended to form a bounded and homogeneous nation from among the fluid and poly-ethnic boundaries of the Qing empire, while replacing the Manchu court with a Han-dominated autocratic state. Thus, the so-called “frontier question” and “ethnic question” became a significant agenda for the two major revolutionary party-states, the KMT and the CCP.

When the CCP was just founded, its frontier policy was to support the “national self-determination” of Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Kolonor, a policy designed by the Comintern. As Xiaoyuan Liu's study reveals, from the Yan’an period to the 1940s, the CCP gradually changed its policy in regard to the frontier/ethnic issue, supporting unification rather than partition with the borderlands. Right before the communist take of Xinjiang in October 1949, Mao Zedong publicly praised the Ili rebellion in 1944 as “part of the democratic revolutionary movement of the Chinese people,” while it was notorious as a genocide against ethnic Han population. For the same reason, “self-determination” was no longer the policy that should be promoted; neither was the Soviet

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federal system a choice. To better incorporate the former East Turkestan to China proper, Beijing declared that from December 20th onward, the status of the Three Districts as a “special zone” should be abolished; it should be well connected to the rest of Xinjiang via a new transportation system. To further cripple the power of the Muslims of the former Eastern Turkistan Republic, the CCP reorganized the Muslim Army as the fifth troop of the PLA in December 1949, and soon it was disarmed and the members were made to serve as herders and workers of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. Without any military forces to rely on, the autonomy of the region barely existed.

Sino-Soviet cooperation was the key reason for understanding the “peaceful liberation” of Xinjiang. After the People’s Liberation Army entered Xinjiang, Stalin suggested disbanding the Muslim Army to prevent Xinjiang from declaring independence. It was through the cooperation of the USSR that the CCP occupied Xinjiang without adopting any military means. At the same time, however, the Soviet presence in the Three Districts violated the core value of the nation-state system: Beijing desired to exert its full sovereignty on this vast Muslim borderland. It was indeed a dilemma: On the one hand, Soviet support was crucial for the CCP regime to “liberate” Xinjiang. For this reason, Mao Zedong should claim that he and his comrades were not

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648 Mao Zedong, “Minzu jun ying gaiming wei renmin jiefangjun” 民族军应改名为人民解放军 [The National Army should be renamed as the People’s Liberation Army] (12 October 1949), in Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed., Mao Zedong minzu gongzuo wenxuan, p. 39; Chen Chao and Liang Keming, Xiandai Xinjiang shishi ji, p. 4.
Tito-like nationalists but internationalists; On the other hand, as the ruling party of the nation-state called People’s Republic of China, Mao and his comrades should behave as nationalists who always prioritize China’s national interests. When the Beijing was vulnerable and desperately relied on Soviet aids, the CCP could sacrifice a part of the territorial sovereignty, though under great pressure from people at home. But it has been proved that CCP’s sacrifice was merely expedient. The full sovereignty over Xinjiang that was authenticated by “territoriality” soon made the eradication of Soviet presence in the Three Districts a mandate. During the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s, the CCP totally reshaped the borderland of Xinjiang according to the principles of a nation-state: choosing population that was allegiant to the state, eradicating a hostile foreign power, and stationing border defence.

In *China Marches West*, Peter Perdue argues that the conquest of Xinjiang and Mongolia by Manchu Qing was a contingent product of the crosscutting wills of many players, and thus should not be viewed as merely one link in a chain that inevitably led to a nation-state. However, this dissertation reveals that the incorporation of Xinjiang with China proper was not contingent but inevitable. Then, why the Communists succeeded while the Nationalists failed in the process of nation-building in the borderland? The main reason, as James Leibold noted, was not ideological but tactical. While the Nationalists failed to rein in regional warlords the ethnic people associated with, the Communists successfully deployed the tactic of united front on both the Soviets and the

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indigenous people.\textsuperscript{651} This is the key to understand how Xinjiang became a relatively stable part of China’s frontier in the 1960s.

\textsuperscript{651} Leibold, Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism, pp. 108–09.
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