

acknowledge. Through military colonies (*tuntian*) first established in 120 B.C.E. and commanderies (*dubufu*) first set up in 60 B.C.E., the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) exercised military and political control over a significant portion of Xinjiang for more than one hundred years, more than two millennia ago. The Tang dynasty (618–907), too, controlled much of Xinjiang for roughly one hundred years until the An Lushan rebellion in the mid-eighth century. After that date, no Central Plains dynasty ruled Xinjiang until generals of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) conquered its northern and southern parts in 1759 (Millward and Perdue 2004: 35–39). It is beyond question that the first two periods of rule far antedated not only the Russian Empire's first forays into the Qazaq steppe but also the very emergence of the Russian Empire itself. Even the Qing conquest of Xinjiang preceded by a full century Russia's subjugating Central Asia proper in the 1860s or the British Empire's taking formal control of India in 1858.

In contrast, contemporary Chinese nationalists prefer not to admit that the various Central Plains dynasties were not, properly speaking, "China." There is a record of the continuous habitation of the Central Plains by Chinese-speaking and -writing people from before the common era, and a series of states governed by Chinese-speakers ruled many of those people for much of the intervening two thousand years. Yet as the historian Victor Mair pointed out, there were no state names or names for human groups that outlasted a single dynasty in the Central Plains (Mair 2005:52). William Kirby argues that "there was no 'China' in a formal sense under dynastic rule," nor was there an idea of the nation (Kirby 2005:107; see also Millward and Perdue 2004:29). Ironically, an early Chinese nationalist acknowledged this inconvenient fact. The well-known intellectual Liang Qichao lamented in 1900 that his people had no name for their country. The term that later generations adopted, Zhongguo (central state or states), he dismissed as a foreign imposition, something "people of other races call us" (Fitzgerald 1996b:67). The "Chinese nation" was a modern invention dating to no earlier than the late nineteenth century, although just as their counterparts around the world had done, Chinese nationalists concocted an ancient origin and a linear history of their "self-same, national subject" moving through time (Chow 1997; Duara 1995:4 and chap. 1 passim; Leibold 2007).<sup>9</sup>

In sum, we must view skeptically the parallel claims of Chinese nationalist historians that "Xinjiang has been part of China since ancient times" and that Uyghurs have been part of China's "great family of *minzu*" for an even longer time. We similarly must scrutinize Uyghurs' nationalist claims that Uyghurs have always been distinct from Chinese and have established many independent states, only to be colonized by the Chinese in the comparatively recent past.

## HISTORICAL QUESTIONS

The nationalist claims of Hans and Uyghurs rest on the answers to four questions: Who were the Uyghurs historically? What was the land? What was the relationship between the people and the land? And what was the relationship between Xinjiang and the core of the state (meaning both the ruling elite and the heartlands) in the Qing dynasty and afterward? The answers to these questions are of more than merely scholarly interest. Uyghur nationalist histories written or promulgated in Xinjiang provide answers that have strengthened the Uyghurs' collective identity and rekindled dreams of an independent state. Meanwhile, Uyghur organizations abroad have used similar answers to build a case for self-determination and thus to gain support from the international community. Conversely, Chinese historians and officials have sought to extinguish Uyghurs' dreams of independence and to dismiss the case for self-determination by insisting on very different answers.

First, who were the Uyghurs historically, and when did they first emerge historically? Uyghur nationalists posit that Uyghurs emerged very early, possibly some six thousand years ago (Qurban Wali 1988; Turghun Almas 1989).<sup>10</sup> Aside from the problem that there are no written records sufficiently old to support this claim, and archeological evidence cannot do so, there is the difficulty that the term Uyghur (variously Weihe, Yuanhe, and Huihe in Chinese sources) is found no earlier than the fifth century (Golden 1992:95, 157). Some Uyghur nationalists claim more recent descent from the Xiongnu, a confederation of peoples who engaged in a "tug of war" with the Han dynasty for control of Xinjiang (Millward and Perdue 2004:36).<sup>11</sup> They place a special emphasis on this lineage because the Xiongnu appear in Chinese-language histories as the mortal enemies of the Han dynasty. Although the topic of ethnogenesis is still contentious, few serious scholars would follow Uyghur nationalists in making the leap from the existence of Xiongnu in the Tarim Basin to the assertion that they were Uyghurs. However that question might ultimately be resolved, the Uyghurs described in Chinese sources several hundred years later were allied with the Tang dynasty for a time in the seventh century before revolting against it (Mackerras 1972:8; Pulleyblank 1956:37). The Uyghurs grew stronger over time until they founded an empire (744–840) in what is today Inner Mongolia, Mongolia, and Siberia. The Qirghiz ultimately crushed the Uyghur Empire and forced the emigration of many of its subjects into Gansu and Xinjiang. Thus, only in the ninth century did peoples bearing the collective name Uyghur settle in the Tarim Basin (Golden 1992; Mackerras 1990).

A second major problem for the history of Uyghurs as a continuously "self-name, national subject" is that when the Qarakhanid Empire moved south into the

Tarim and began to Islamicize the predominantly Buddhist Uyghur population, it set in motion the gradual disappearance of the name Uyghur, along with the Buddhist religion, until, by the fifteenth century, there were no recorded usages in the region.<sup>12</sup> The name Uyghur reappeared in popular discourse only in the twentieth century. Some scholars have argued that it was a Soviet conference in Tashkent in 1921 that led Turks in Xinjiang to adopt the name. Soviet officials had revived the historical term Uyghur when they divided Turkic-speaking Central Asians into various "national" groups to ward off the threat of a Pan-Turkist revolt. The strategic adoption of the name after centuries of disuse and as a result of government policies strikes some as *prima facie* evidence of national invention (Gladney 1990; Rudelson 1997). Several scholars have subsequently challenged this argument, however, providing evidence that the name had already been in wide use by Turks in the late nineteenth century (Brophy 2005; Nābijan Tursun 2008).<sup>13</sup> Historiographic problems notwithstanding, many Uyghur nationalists believe that the Uyghur nation emerged very early in history and that it has remained distinct from the Chinese nation ever since. As the Web site of the World Uyghur Congress puts it, "East Turkistan's people are not Chinese; they are Turks of Central Asia" (World Uyghur Congress 2006a).

If Uyghur nationalists had to overcome (and thus conceal) a number of gaps and significant changes of place, religion, and political stance in the story of Uyghur "national becoming," Chinese historians confronted a similar challenge. They, too, had to assign Uyghurs a clear date of ethnogenesis and a continuous existence since that date,<sup>14</sup> and they also needed to demonstrate that Uyghurs' history was a component part of the history of the multinational "Chinese nation" (*zhonghua minzu*). To accomplish this, they adopted two strategies. First, they applied the frame of class analysis in interpreting the past, insisting that in all periods the affinities of all exploited peoples, regardless of language and culture, were stronger than those of any one group for its corresponding exploiting class—within the boundaries of the "Chinese nation," of course.<sup>15</sup> Second, in order to manage countervailing evidence, they developed the notion of "main currents" and "countercurrents" in history. The "unification" of many peoples under the rule of powerful dynasties and harmonious relations among the laboring ranks of those peoples were the main currents of Chinese history. Internecine battles among peoples they labeled *countercurrents*.<sup>16</sup> Official Chinese histories of the Uyghurs used these narrative strategies to prove that Uyghurs had been part of China's "great family of *minzu*" from the moment of their emergence and never ceased to be so (Liu Zhixiao 1985, 1986; "Weiwu'erzu jianshi" bianxiezu 1991). In asserting that Uyghurs had never separated from the "Chinese nation" in the past, they sought to demonstrate that they *could* never do so in the future.

The second important historical question was, what was the land of Xinjiang? Was it the western part of China? The eastern part of Turkestan? The center of something else? Chinese historians have taken the first position; Uyghurs, the second or third. The first premise of Chinese nationalist historiography, as discussed earlier, is that all dynasties and the lands they ruled were "China."<sup>17</sup> In exact parallel with the gathering and splitting of peoples, historians made the conquest of large territories by powerful dynasties the main current of history, whereas shrunken states ruling only part of the Central Plains belonged to historical countercurrents. The claim of official Chinese histories that Xinjiang has been part of China since ancient times creates serious problems, in that many dynasties did not rule even a part of that region. Chinese historians have resolved the difficulty by regarding diplomatic relations with states in the region, tribute missions originating there, marital alliances with princes and princesses hailing from the Tarim Basin, and encampments of Chinese soldiers or merchants all as proof that each successive dynasty did in fact rule Xinjiang (Xinjiang shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo 1987; XUAR jiaoyu weiyuanhui gaoxiao lishi jiaocai bianxiezu 1992).<sup>18</sup>

There were and remain Turks who identify what is now Xinjiang as the eastern part of Turkestan. Muḥammād Imin Bughra, an Islamic scholar in Xinjiang's southern city of Khotān, founded there the Committee for National Revolution in 1932 and helped establish the short-lived first Eastern Turkestan Republic (1933–1934) in southern Xinjiang (Forbes 1986:83–89; Millward 2007:201–6). The organization has been described as both "Uyghur nationalist" and "Turk nationalist," but Muḥammād Imin's later writings and actions showed him to be inclined toward the latter. He hoped to free Uyghurs from Chinese control as a first step toward establishing a broader Turkic state (Forbes 1986:83–84).<sup>19</sup> A decade later he became close to the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek and served along with Isa Yusuf Alptekin as a delegate in the Constituent Assembly in Chongqing. While there, the two managed to publish a series of articles asserting that Uyghurs, Qazaqs, and others were part of a more embracing "Turkic" (Tujue) nation that Chinese governors sought to subjugate by dividing it into smaller groups and sowing discord among them (Bovingdon 2001). Muḥammād Imin and Alptekin fled Xinjiang in 1949 and later settled in Turkey, where both wrote books, edited journals, and gave speeches identifying their former home as Eastern Turkestan and calling on Muslims and Turks to support its liberation (I. Alptekin 1981; Bughra 1946; Landau 1995:118, 124–25, 150).<sup>20</sup> There was and remains manifest support among Pan-Turkists in Turkey for the cause of an independent "Eastern Turkestan," and quite a few Uyghurs in the diaspora refer to their homeland by that name. Many of those who do so, however, are prompted not by Pan-Turkism but by a recognition that given

the presence of several Turkic-speaking peoples in Xinjiang, it cannot be defined as exclusively Uyghur.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, many Uyghur nationalists have rejected the depiction of Xinjiang as either the western edge of China or the eastern edge of the Turkic world, instead identifying it as a center in its own right. Scholars of nationalism will not be at all surprised to learn this; after all, the nation—and the national territory—must be the center of any persuasive national story. Thus in his famous history *Uyghurlar* (*The Uyghurs*), the poet and historian Turghun Almas insisted that the “Uyghur homeland” was Central Asia and characterized the Tarim Basin as the “golden cradle” of culture in the region, as well as one of the world’s few such cultural founts (Bovingdon and Nebijan Tursun 2004; Turghun Almas 1989).<sup>22</sup> Many Uyghurs in Xinjiang regard the region as belonging uniquely to them, particularly after Qazaqs, Qirghiz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks all gained recognition in 1991 as proprietors of states bearing their ethnonyms. For the same reason, some Uyghurs in the diaspora, particularly those in Central Asia, have insisted the region be called Uyghurstan.<sup>23</sup>

The third question concerns the relationship between the people of Xinjiang and the land. Several Uyghur nationalist historians, including Turghun Almas, insisted that Uyghurs were indigenous to the territory, inhabiting it for all their claimed six thousand years (Qurban Wäli 1988; Turghun Almas 1986, 1989). The view that Uyghurs were autochthonous in Xinjiang is widely if quietly shared by many Uyghurs inside the region and is more or less universal in the Uyghur diaspora. Some have made the still more sweeping, and clearly insupportable, claim that Uyghurs were the *sole* indigenes—in other words, that all other peoples later found in the territory were immigrants to a place already belonging to them.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese historians have explicitly denied this claim. All the official histories of Uyghurs and of Xinjiang published in China since 1949 state flatly that the territory was multicultural (and multi-*minzu*) from prehistorical times. They couple this argument with detailed retellings of the story of the Uyghur Empire in Mongolia and the subsequent exodus, endlessly underscoring the point that Uyghurs were “late” arrivals in Xinjiang, entering only in the ninth century.<sup>25</sup> Recent Chinese histories have boldly added that Hans were among the first inhabitants of the region and in fact arrived long before Uyghurs (He Jihong 1996; Ji Dachun 1993:149, 606).<sup>26</sup> A recent journalistic piece announced that Hans “have been settled in Xinjiang for over 2000 years, preceding not only the Mongols, Qazaqs, Uzbeks, Manchus, Hui and Xibo, but also the western migration of the Hui [Uyghurs]” (China Radio International 2006). Such arguments are clearly intended to simultaneously defeat Uyghur assertions of indigeneity and establish China’s claim to the

region through its prior occupation by Hans. In turn, these assertions rest on the intertwined assumptions that Hans existed as *Hans* two millennia ago and that they represented “China.” In fact, as Zhao Suisheng argues, the idea of Han ethnolinguistic identity, like that of the Chinese nation, dates only to the late nineteenth century (Zhao 2004:21–22; see also Chow 1997).<sup>27</sup>

Uyghur intellectuals are aware that demonstrating indigeneity in Xinjiang might be one of their only resources for contesting Beijing’s actual political control of the region, which has not been legally challenged by any foreign state or international organization since 1949. It is precisely for this reason that Beijing has adamantly refused to recognize any “minority *minzu*” in China as indigenous, fearing that international organizations might codify rights for indigenous peoples that it does not consider “appropriate” for those non-Hans (Hannum 1988:655–56, quoted in Cornwell and Primeau 1995:n. 77). Party officials’ recognition that history is a bulwark (or threat) to China’s rule over Xinjiang can be discerned from the construction of the most significant documents on the region prepared for international consumption since 2002. Both the State Council’s brief on “Eastern Turkestan terrorism” (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2002), and its white paper touting the virtues of Xinjiang’s system of governance (Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi 2003) begin with lengthy—and carefully manipulated—historical summaries.<sup>28</sup>

The fourth question concerns the relationship between the imperial heartland and the periphery following the Qing conquest. Was the relationship between country and province or between empire and colony? The importance of the answer to this question lies in the relationship between the pair of binaries discussed in the introduction: nation-state versus empire and sovereignty versus self-determination. For if Xinjiang was simply a province in a nation-state from the Qing period on, then its status must be governed by the principle of sovereignty and the emphasis on territorial integrity in international law. But if the Qing conquest and rule of Xinjiang prove to have been colonial and if that relationship was not materially altered in the Republican period, then Uyghurs would have a correspondingly stronger case for independence from China today.

## QING CONQUEST

Despite contemporary Chinese claims, it was only with the Qing conquest of Xinjiang in the mid-eighteenth century that the territory was firmly bound to a Central Plains state. The conquest began not as a land grab but as a punitive expedition against the Zunghars, whom three successive Qing emperors had tried to crush. The conquest was sanguinary and ruthless: under the orders of Emperor Qianlong,

the Qing troops were not to stop until they had killed or routed nearly the entire population of Zungharia (Perdue 2005a).

Having won the campaign, the Manchu emperor and his administrators found themselves in charge of an enormous territory. The northern part had largely been depopulated by the bloodbath, and the southern region was a distinct unit often ruled indirectly by nomads in the northern region who supported themselves on the agricultural wealth of the oasis towns but were content to leave administration to the locals. Qing rulers elected to continue the practice of indirect rule, giving the top military and political posts to Manchus and Chinese but leaving the daily administration of local affairs around the Tarim Basin in the hands of the *begs*, or Turkic notables. Under Qing control, Xinjiang remained distinct from China proper and was frankly ruled as a colony. The imperial administration hoped that the colony could eventually be made to pay for itself (Millward 1998:76–112, 153; Millward and Perdue 2004:57–58).

This proved a vain hope. Sustaining the garrisons and officials controlling the region proved to be expensive and was beset by numerous challenges. Turkeys rose repeatedly against Qing rule, most notably in the late 1820s and 1830s and again in the mid-1860s. In 1820 the literatus Gong Zizhen memorialized the emperor by urging that the colony be transformed into a province. Gong argued that by opening the region to immigration, the state could serve two goals at once: it could relieve the population pressures on the heartland provinces, and it could stabilize the volatile border region by colonizing it with industrious, tractable farmers. The emperor ignored the first of Gong's proposals but found the second sensible in the wake of the Turki uprisings, and so the immigration of Chinese increased (Millward 1998:241–46). In the 1860s, an uprising by the Chinese Muslims of Gansu cut off Xinjiang from China proper and facilitated the emergence of an independent state in Xinjiang (1864–1877) led by Ya'qub Beg, a canny operator from Kokand who styled himself as emir and began diplomatic negotiations with the Russian, British, and Ottoman empires (Kim 2004). Russian generals in Central Asia took advantage of the state's weak control of northern Xinjiang to conquer a strategically crucial chunk of the Ili Valley region, which they managed to hold for a decade, from 1871 to 1881.

Both Ya'qub Beg's emirate and the Russian incursion contributed to a major crisis in the Qing administration. While the Qing general Zuo Zongtang was battling the Gansu uprising, Japan invaded Taiwan in 1874, an event compounding the shock from the Qing's devastating losses in the Opium Wars. Facing military challenges at opposite ends of the empire, the emperor and his advisers felt incapable of responding effectively to both and uncertain which was the more important. Xinjiang

had consistently been a drain on Qing resources and was proving increasingly difficult to defend (Borei 1991). Maritime administrator Li Hongzhang argued that the coastal threat was more pressing and urged the Qing to abandon Xinjiang in order to marshal resources for a naval response. General Zuo, influenced by Gong Zizhen's earlier writings, asserted, on the contrary, that the inland threat mattered more, since Xinjiang was the bulwark protecting Mongolia and Mongolia, in turn, was the buffer protecting the capital. In the end Zuo was victorious in the "great policy debate" and won permission to launch a very expensive campaign to crush Ya'qub Beg's emirate and reconquer Xinjiang for the Qing, which he did by 1877. Only in 1884, after a Qing diplomat induced St. Petersburg to give up the land in Ili—without which the region would have been indefensible—did the emperor finally act on Gong's suggestion of sixty years earlier and transform the colony of Xinjiang into a province (Hsu 1964–1965, 1965; Wright 1994:660–61).

Three features of the Qing conquest and subsequent administration of Xinjiang are important. First, the acquisition of territory was a by-product of the emperor's attempt to rid himself of a troublesome foe. During the military campaign, there was not a word about "unification" or "reunification"; it was later Qing historians who painted the conquest as a fulfillment of imperial destiny, a legacy left by the Han and Tang dynasties but overtopped by the Manchus (Perdue 2003a:500–501, 509).<sup>29</sup> Second, the Qing imperial house regarded Xinjiang as a colony and saw its Muslim inhabitants as a discrete population in an empire of culturally distinct parts (Millward 1998:197–203; see also Crossley 1999). Third, far from thinking of it as an "inseparable" part of the empire, on numerous occasions both the imperial house and much of the Qing policy elite seriously contemplated abandoning the colony before finally deciding to make it a province. Both the events in Xinjiang during the Qing period and the Qing Empire itself ill fit the national frame that was later imposed on them (see, e.g., Escherick 2006).

#### CHINESE NATIONALISM: TALK OF THE NATION

These difficulties did not stop people from trying to stretch a Chinese national skin over the Qing imperial body (Anderson 1991:86). It is generally agreed that Chinese nationalism emerged in the late nineteenth century, though as in the case of nationalisms everywhere in the world, its progenitors set the movement in motion by invoking a hoary history of the "Chinese nation." They felt called to the task by the widespread perception that the Qing was on the verge of collapse and that its territory might be carved up "like a melon." The wholly unexpected naval defeat by Japan in 1894 incited near panic. The birth of Chinese nationalism saw the odd

conjunction of announcements that the Chinese nation was awakening and dire warnings that it might soon disappear from the earth (Zhao 2004:17).

There were two principal and conflicting strands of Chinese nationalism in the 1890s, exemplified in the work of near contemporaries Zhang Binglin and Liang Qichao. The distinguished literatus Zhang Binglin envisioned a Chinese nation that was both racially and culturally unified. He argued that its members could rescue the nation from its crisis only by jettisoning non-Hans and, with them, all the territory that had not been part of the Ming (Zhao 2004:66). His rationale was that mutually hostile groups would not consent to stay together. Zhang bitterly hated the Manchus and, during a stay in Japan, had himself photographed in Ming-era garb (punishable by death in the Qing) to indicate his absolute rejection of the Qing dynasty. He acknowledged in his writings that the Muslims of Xinjiang felt toward Hans precisely the antipathy Hans felt toward Manchus (Zhang Binglin 1907:18; cited in Perdue 2005b:189; see also Gasster 1969:206). There is little doubt that he expected Xinjiang to separate from a future "purified" China, although he also apparently believed that it might ultimately be reabsorbed, since it did not "belong to anyone else."<sup>30</sup> Liang Qichao, also an accomplished and very influential literatus, shared Zhang's belief that race defined the nation but asserted it could be culturally plural. Liang saw all the various peoples of the Qing as belonging to the "yellow race" and differing only in culture. He was led to envision a culturally heterogeneous nation by the practical concern that abandoning territory would weaken the state still further. Liang rejected anti-Manchuism and advocated a "broad nationalism" (*da minzu zhuyi*) that would awaken a sense of belonging to "China" in all the peoples of the Qing Empire (Chow 1997:42; Esherick 2006:235; Fitzgerald 1996a:86–87).<sup>31</sup>

Sun Yat-sen, a humble Cantonese farmer's son who emigrated to Hawaii as a youth and later studied medicine in Hong Kong, could not claim the intellectual distinction of either Zhang or Liang, but he was a far more astute politician. Radicalized by the mid-1890s, he shared Zhang's fiery anti-Manchuism and staged an abortive revolt in 1895, as a consequence of which he had to flee to Japan. When the Wuchang uprising brought down the Qing dynasty in 1911, Sun was on a fundraising trip in the United States, yet he was subsequently credited with leading the Republican revolution and dubbed the "father of the Republic." After returning to China to serve as the first president, Sun soon recognized the incompatibility between anti-Manchuism and the desire to keep all Qing territories, and he adopted the kind of "broad nationalism" that Liang Qichao had advocated (Zhao 2004:22). In 1919 he urged that Hans "sacrifice the separate nationality, history, and identity that they are so proud of and merge in all sincerity with the Manchus,

Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans" (Sun Yat-sen [Sun Zhongshan] 1919/1994:225). In his famous series of lectures, the *Sanmin zhuyi* (Three Principles of the People), Sun imagined that while European nations had been forged in violence, the Chinese nation had grown peacefully through the immense attractive power of its culture, thereby neatly erasing the history of conquest that had made the Qing (Sun Wen [Sun Zhongshan] 1985). Sun's Three Principles became the official doctrine of the GMD, or Nationalist Party, and despite their obvious historiographic inaccuracy, his lectures were published as a book and widely disseminated. Chiang Kai-shek, Sun's successor as head of the GMD, proposed an even more fantastic ethnological theory in his *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* (*China's Fate*): the various peoples in China came from a single racial stock, and their cultural differences stemmed entirely from regional disparities in soil and water (Jiang Zhongzheng [Chiang Kai-shek] 1943/1962). The doctrines of Sun and Chiang were transparently intended to deny that any of the peoples ruled by the republic had a right to secede.<sup>32</sup> If Xinjiang had become a province and the Qing had turned into the Chinese nation, Xinjiang and its peoples must necessarily remain part of that nation.

#### XINJIANG IN THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD: COLONIAL RULE IN NATIONAL GUISE

As is widely known, between 1917 and 1927, the rule of China's various regions devolved on a number of warlords.<sup>33</sup> Chiang eliminated most of them during his Northern Expedition and recentralized authority in Nanjing by 1927. Yet Xinjiang remained largely beyond the reach of that central authority until well into the 1940s.<sup>34</sup> The province's first governor after 1911, Yang Zengxin, maintained autocratic control untrammelled by Beijing from 1911 until his death in 1928. Having installed a network of relatives and associates in various administrative positions and enacted policies intended to "isolate, divide, and maintain in enforced ignorance" the peoples of the region, keeping the single key to the only telegraph office in Dihua (Ürümqi) in his own pocket, Yang ruled the province as a virtual feudatory kingdom.<sup>35</sup> He responded to political uprisings with unflinching brutality, once famously ordering rebellious underlings to be beheaded at a banquet, and reportedly ran Xinjiang's economy "largely for his own benefit" (Forbes 1986:13–15, 29). Yang's successor, Jin Shuren, was no more sensitive, though considerably less adroit politically. Jin reportedly had people executed for injudicious remarks made in ordinary conversation and emulated his predecessor in seeking to exclude all external influences, whether from Nanjing or Central Asia. When the king of the still-autonomous khanate of Qumul died in 1930, Jin moved to eliminate the khanate and open the region to Han immigration. Even more provocatively, he forced

Turks off their land to make room for the immigrants and exempted the latter from land taxes, which the displaced Turks were still obliged to pay, even though they had been displaced to much poorer land. It is not surprising that in the 1930s, Turks in several parts of Xinjiang rebelled against the misrule of Jin and his regional subordinates (Forbes 1986:38–62).<sup>36</sup> The most successful of the uprisings established the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR, 1933–1934) in the south. Although the short-lived republic was a fully elaborated state, with a flag, currency, and government, it failed to win diplomatic recognition from either Middle Eastern states or Britain, which had a firm policy of supporting the Nanjing government. The Soviet Union offered military assistance to Jin Shuren's de facto successor, Sheng Shicai, but in the end it was a Hui warlord from Gansu, Ma Zhongying, who crushed the republic (Forbes 1986:112–27; Millward 2007:200–206).

Sheng Shicai then ruled Xinjiang, largely as a Soviet puppet, through 1944. While his reversal of Jin's pro-immigration policy and initiatives to build roads and schools seemed to suggest that he would be more responsive to the population's wishes, he proved to be just as corrupt and nearly as brutal as Yang and Jin. While governor, he reportedly imprisoned some 100,000 people, most of them Turks. During his tenure, Huis from Gansu founded a more or less independent polity in the southern Tarim Basin (1934–1937), and former participants in the first ETR revolted again in 1937. Once more, the Russians assisted Sheng militarily, incensed at the staunchly anti-Soviet doctrine of ETR members, and, after helping crush the uprising, Moscow deployed Russian troops in several Xinjiang cities. By the late 1930s the province had become economically and politically a dependent of the Soviet Union. In 1942 Sheng decided to break with the Soviets and go over to the GMD, before thinking better of his decision and trying to reverse it in 1944, at which point Nationalist leaders unceremoniously relieved him of his position and installed the Chiang loyalist Wu Zhongxin (Forbes 1986:148, 152, 161, and chap. 5 passim; Millward 2007:213).

An unabashed Han chauvinist like his mentor Chiang Kai-shek, Wu followed the example of Jin Shuren in opening Xinjiang to Han immigration. The Chinese government supplied funds to finance the migration, which was clearly aimed at “permanently altering the ethnic balance” in the province and predictably angered Turks. The combination of renewed Han immigration, economic chaos, and official corruption turned most of the Turkic population against Wu's government (Forbes 1986:163–69). At this point, Uyghurs, Qazaqs, and others established the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) in what had been Xinjiang's three northwestern districts. From 1944 until 1949 the ETR maintained an independent government in Ghulja, though scholars disagree on the degree of Soviet involvement and whether

anti-Chinese or socialist elements played a stronger role in the government (Ben-son 1990; Forbes 1986; Millward 2004:chap. 5; Wang 1999).

In August 1945 the Nationalists dispatched General Zhang Zhizhong to negotiate with the ETR government, and with Soviet encouragement, the latter agreed to negotiations. Within a year, the two sides had formed a coalition government in Ürümqi with representatives from Ghulja. A year later in 1947 the coalition had frayed considerably, and Turks staged several large demonstrations in the widely separated cities of Ghulja, Dihua (Ürümqi), and Kashgar. In that year, Zhang traveled around Xinjiang making speeches and seeking common ground with locals. Strikingly, in his speeches, he regularly compared Xinjiang with British India and the former American colony of the Philippines, recognizing that there was a global “tide of decolonization,” and acknowledged that Xinjiang, too, might someday become independent. Nonetheless, he often expressed doubts that the region could achieve *true* independence, fearing that instead it would fall under the control of another state, understood to be the Soviet Union (Bowington 2001; Forbes 1986:207–9; Millward 2007:216–18; Zhang 1947).<sup>37</sup>

This was not the last time a GMD official openly spoke of the possibility that Xinjiang might become independent. In 1947, Wu Qiyu, an adviser to the Nationalist Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote an article analyzing the “Xinjiang problem” for the new journal *Tianwen tai* (*The Observatory*).<sup>38</sup> In the article he posed the question of whether China should abandon the unruly province. Both his entering this question in 1947 and some of his reasons are of interest to us here. First, as had Zhang Binglin before him, Wu represented Xinjiang as being outside the territory of China, writing that “the roads going from China's territory [*Zhongguo lingtu*] to Xinjiang” were very poor and far inferior to those from India and the Soviet Union. Second, he estimated that garrisoning the soldiers required to bring the restive province under control would consume vast resources and still necessitate buying off local leaders. Betraying his low opinion of non-Hans, Wu likened such a course to “exhausting the Central Plains to serve the four barbarian tribes” (*pi bi zhongyuan yi shi si yi*). As Zhang Zhizhong had done, Wu acknowledged a global trend that seemed to favor Xinjiang's separation from China:

Given the tide of national self-determination (*minzu zijue*) in today's world, we seemingly have reason to let go of Xinjiang. After all, Britain has already let go of Ireland [so he thought] and India. America has given up the Philippines. What, then, is wrong with our dispensing with Xinjiang? Especially considering we've already given up Outer Mongolia. (Wu 1947:6)

Wu's explanation of the difference between Xinjiang and the other colonies will be eerily familiar to students of colonial rhetoric: India and the Philippines "had undergone years of training by Britain and the U.S., and were therefore eminently qualified for independence." The various peoples of "our" Xinjiang, by contrast, "were very far from qualified" (Wu 1947:7). The tropes of "training" and "political maturation," basic components of the European *mission civilisatrice*, had been deployed by Britain, the United States, and France to stave off decolonization in the face of popular pressures. Beyond the question of Xinjiang's people's lack of qualifications for independence, Wu decided that China could not abandon Xinjiang, for the same reason that Zuo Zongtang had stated seventy years earlier: To do so would leave the heartland vulnerable to attack.

Wu's and Zhang Zhizhong's reasoning was manifestly far from that of nationalist historians. Instead, it echoed, by turns, the pragmatic calculations of Gong Zizhen, the impatient fiscal and military conservatism of Li Hongzhang, or the ethnocultural realism of Zhang Binglin. In comparing Xinjiang with India and the Philippines, they made plain that they considered it a colonial possession and therefore a candidate for self-determination as part of the global tide of decolonizations. Such talk ceased immediately with the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

■

Uyghur and Chinese nationalists have staked competing territorial and political claims by answering these four historical questions very differently. The former rest their case on the assertions that Uyghurs have existed as a people for millennia, that Xinjiang was not historically part of China but instead the seat of several Uyghur states, and that Uyghurs were indigenous to the region, whereas Hans were not. They underscore the violent conquest and colonial rule of Xinjiang under the Qing and argue that Republican rule was similarly colonial. They point to the emergence of three independent states in the region between 1864 and 1949 as evidence that locals did not wish to be ruled by Manchus or Hans. They also invoke both colonial rule and the independent states in support of their right to self-determination. Chinese nationalists have countered Uyghur claims by postulating, first, that Uyghurs were historically part of the "Chinese nation" and that Xinjiang was part of a transhistorical "China" from earliest times and, second, that the Hans were early inhabitants and the Uyghurs were later immigrants to the region. By separately binding Uyghurs to the Chinese nation and Xinjiang to China, they sought to dismiss Uyghurs' assertions of an independent relationship with the land. I believe that several of the claims on both sides founder on the

historical evidence. The charge that Qing Xinjiang was a colony and the implications of that charge are not so easily dismissed.

If officials and authors could casually refer to Xinjiang as a colony in public before the revolution, Chinese historians after 1949 would busy themselves erasing any such reference. They tried to obscure the Qing's having been an empire by emphasizing that it was the victim of other imperialist powers, such as Russia and Britain. Second, by reframing the Qing as "China," they could depict its conquest of Xinjiang as the "reunion" of the nation with a long-alienated part. They worked tirelessly to strengthen the Chinese "national narrative" and undermine Uyghurs' counternarrative. Their colleagues in the field of "minzu theory" (*minzu lilun*) grappled with the problem of self-determination, not only because the continuing spate of decolonizations in Africa (often enjoying Chinese moral and military support) demonstrated the continuing vitality of the principle, but also because Lenin had argued forcefully that all Marxists were obligated to recognize an absolute right of national self-determination (Lenin 1914/1975).<sup>39</sup> Finally, they worked for decades to make a persuasive case that the Chinese Communist Party's rejection of Lenin's principle of self-determination was doctrinally sound and to provide theoretical justifications for the system of "minzu regional autonomy" (*minzu qiyu zizhi*) that Beijing established instead in Xinjiang and other peripheral territories.