

INTRODUCTION

On July 5, 2009, Urumqi, the capital city of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, was shocked by violent civil unrest, triggered by a deadly brawl at a toy factory in faraway Guangdong Province during which at least two Uyghurs were murdered by a Han Chinese mob. Infuriated by the lack of a police response, hundreds of Uyghur protesters converged upon Urumqi's central market square. The initially peaceful protest took a violent turn as protesters began attacking Han Chinese passers-by, as well as Hui Muslims and other minorities with Han features, clubbing and stoning them to death. According to Chinese government statistics, 197 people were killed during the riots, including 134 unarmed Han Chinese, 11 Hui Muslims, and 1 Manchu; nearly 2,000 people were wounded. More than 1,000 Uyghur suspects were arrested in the following days, and several were later sentenced to execution. Although official sources claimed that "these grave and violent crimes of assault, looting and arson were meticulously planned and organized by a 'trifecta' of domestic and international groups," there is no doubt that these events were triggered by widespread inter-ethnic hatred. The brutality of the riots left many wondering how such events could occur against the backdrop of China's meteoric rise in the early 21st century, and prompted many to ponder the following chain of questions: Were the Chinese government's minority policies problematic? If not, why would the Xinjiang region's Uyghur inhabitants bear such enmity toward their Han Chinese neighbors, with whom they normally coexisted peacefully? If so, what were the key problems, and how could they be resolved?

The cities of Kashgar and Ghulja (Yining) had in fact previously been witness to similar incidents provoked by racial hatred. On October 30, 1981, a Han Chinese shop clerk in Kashgar entered into a dispute with a Uyghur farmer and beat him to death with a hunting rifle off the store shelf. Uyghur protesters stormed the city, attacking Han civilians; 2 people were killed on the scene, and 262 were wounded. In 1997, riots spread across Ghulja between February 5 and 7 in response to rumors that a number of Uyghur religious worshippers had been arrested by the Chinese government during Ramadan; 7 Han Chinese civilians were killed during the riots, and a number of protesters were killed or wounded as the crowds were dispersed by police. These two incidents are both similar in nature to the 2009 Urumqi riots, though dissimilar in scale. This congruence suggests that the events in Urumqi were in many ways linked to the circumstances of Uyghur communities in other regions of Xinjiang, including the southern region where Kashgar is located. Thus, in order to truly understand the nature of the Urumqi riots, we must also first explore the motivations behind the incidents that occurred in Kashgar and Ghulja.

The reason is in fact quite simple: Kashgar and Ghulja historically served as the birthplace and base of operations for the first and second East Turkestan independence movements respectively. To understand the ethnic tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Xinjiang today, we must start by understanding the nature of the East Turkestan independence movement.

The aim of the East Turkestan independence movement was to establish a Uyghur nation-state in Xinjiang. The First East Turkestan Independence Movement began in Kashgar in southern Xinjiang in 1933, and the “Islamic Republic of East Turkestan” was founded in Kashgar on November 12 in the same year. However, the Islamic Republic collapsed a mere 85 days after its founding, before its government and system of state power could be fully formed. The independence movement experienced a resurgence in 1944, and the “East Turkestan Republic” was established on November 12 of that year in the city of Ghulja (Yining) in northern Xinjiang. Compared to the first movement, the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement was of broader scale and longer duration; it played a part in the global war against fascism, and impacted the post-war reconstruction of the international order. However, the movement was dependent on the support of the Soviet

Union to escape the yoke of the Chinese Nationalist government, which was then in power, and its proponents ultimately bowed to Soviet pressure to abandon their calls for independence. The movement was later subsumed under the banner of the Chinese Communist Party, and in the post-1949 era, it was referred to in China as the “Three Districts Revolution.”¹ However, this appellation is based solely on the movement’s final outcome, and does not reflect either its origins or its nature.

The ideas of the East Turkestan independence movement still survive today in the Xinjiang region, despite the passage of more than eighty years since it first came into being. For self-evident reasons, the independence movement went underground during the Mao Zedong era, but the idea of independence for East Turkestan has experienced a revival since the 1980s, against the backdrop of China’s overcorrection of policies from the Mao era, the rise of a global Islamic renaissance, as well as the liberation of the Central Asian countries following the failure of perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The ideas of the East Turkestan independence movement have steadily gained in momentum. In October 1989, the Uyghur author Turgun Almas published a book entitled *The Uyghur People* (Uygurlar), in which he proposed the radical theory that the Uyghur people have been living nears the oases of the Tarim Basin for eight thousand years.²

The East Turkestan independence movement is not only the tie that binds modern Uyghur history from the 20th century onward; it is also a crucial page in the history of China in the modern and contemporary eras. Faithfully reconstructing the true circumstances of the East Turkestan independence movement and, in particular, accurately understanding and evaluating the nature of the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement can help provide insights into the simmering ethnic tensions that have given rise to events such as the 2009 Urumqi riots, and could also have profound significance in the efforts to chart China’s future as a multi-ethnic state. Regrettably, few studies on the East Turkestan independence movement have been published.

Works that make relatively detailed references to the first and second East Turkestan independence movements include *A Concise History of Xinjiang* (Xinjiang jianshi), Volume 3, published by the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences; *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A*

Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911–1949 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), by Andrew D. W. Forbes; and *Seventy Years of Upheaval in Xinjiang* (Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian) (Taipei: Lanxi chuban youxian gongsi, 1980), by the Taiwanese author Zhang Dajun. However, these works all describe the movement from the perspective of the political history of China and Xinjiang, and do not explore the East Turkestan independence movement itself in any great depth.

In the author's view, the monograph *Seventy Years of Upheaval in Xin-jiang* provides the most detailed narrative of Xinjiang's political history in the early modern era. It is based on a previous work by Zhang Dajun published in 1954, entitled *Overview of the Last Forty Years of Upheaval in Xinjiang* (Xinjiang jin sishi nian bianluan jilüe) (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongyingshe, 1954), so it addresses more attention to the two East Turkestan independence movements of the 1930s and 1940s. The Japanese author Nakada Yoshinobu also published an article which could be described as a revised summary of Zhang Dajun's *Overview of the Last Forty Years of Upheaval in Xinjiang*, entitled "The I-Ning Affair and the National Movement in Sinkiang" (Inei jihen to Shinkyō no minzoku undo).³ However, Zhang Dajun, who served as a deputy regiment commander in the Chinese Nationalist army in 1945, had no means of discovering the political developments which underpinned the East Turkestan Republic; his narrative of the facts is therefore unavoidably error-ridden, and his analysis of the nature of the events is highly colored by emotional factors.

In 1990, Linda K. Benson published *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944–1949* (Armonk, London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990) in the United States. This work was praised at the time as "the sole scholarly work in the world to date that discusses the Three Districts Revolution."⁴ However, its content on the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement and the political mechanisms of the East Turkestan Republic was limited to a few scanty pages in Chapter 4, "The Establishment of the East Turkestan Republic" (*The Ili Rebellion*, pp. 42–66), still focusing primarily on the political and military countermeasures taken by the Nationalist government and the provincial authorities in Xinjiang. Benson was aware of the limitations of her work: in 1991, she requested an interview with the son of Ahmatjan Kasimi, the then-deceased leader of the East Turkestan Republic in its later stages, but the request was denied.

In the 1990s and thereafter, a number of works on Xinjiang in the modern era were published in mainland China, including: Bai Zhensheng and Koibuchi Shin'ichi (eds.), *Outline of Xinjiang's Modern Sociopolitical History* (Xinjiang xiandai zhengzhi shehui shilüe) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1992); Xinjiang Three Districts Revolution History Editing Committee, *History of the Xinjiang Three Districts Revolution* (Xinjiang san qu geming shi) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1998); Huang Jianhua, *A Study of Nationalist Government Policies on Xinjiang* (Guomindang zhengfu de Xinjiang zhengce yanjiu) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2003); Miao Pusheng and Tian Weijiang (eds.), *Historical Survey of Xinjiang* (Xinjiang shigang) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2004); Li Sheng (ed.), *The History and Current Conditions of Xinjiang, China* (Zhongguo Xinjiang lishi yu xianzhuang) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), and so on. Although these works are chiefly characterized as historical overviews, two served as important references with respect to the historical sources and research methods used in this book. The first is the *History of the Xinjiang Three Districts Revolution*, which minutely plots out the course of the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement; however, because the movement is viewed through the lens of the revolutionary conception of history, a number of issues are not fully explored. The second is *The History and Current Conditions of Xinjiang, China* by Li Sheng; although this work is also a survey history, Chapter 3, which discusses the history of Xinjiang prior to the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement, and Chapters 4 and 5, which narrate the course of the movement, offer a great deal of useful information; its references to the existence of Russian-language archives are particularly invaluable. Regrettably, perhaps owing to political considerations, Russia later refused to authorize the release of the archival materials, and even today, the scholars who reviewed these materials are still unable to provide detailed descriptions of their contents, which remain an unfathomable mystery.

The scarcity of prior research on this subject, and in particular the lack of studies from an ethnonational perspective or from the perspective of the movement's political mechanisms, is due first to the lack of sources, and secondly to the diversity of those sources that are available. For a truly thorough study, it is necessary to address sources in a wide variety of languages, including Chinese, Uyghur, Kazakh, Russian, English, and

Japanese, a prospect which deters many scholars. In the course of writing this book, I reviewed hundreds of important sources, including the official documents of the East Turkestan Republic in the period from 1944 to 1946, the constitutions of the “East Turkestan Revolutionary Youth League” and the “East Turkestan Revolutionary Party,” as well as speeches, essays and letters by leading figures in the East Turkestan Republic. I also read the memoirs and diaries of Sheng Shicai and Wu Zhongxin, the former governors of Xinjiang, and collected a number of memoirs written in Uyghur, Kazakh and Chinese by figures involved in the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement. Other sources included Japanese and American diplomatic documents related to Xinjiang. I was also fortunate to have the opportunity to interview a number of Uyghur, Kazakh and Sibe figures with special ties to the leadership of the East Turkestan Republic in that period. These collections served as the fundamental source materials for this book.

This book primarily relied on the first-hand sources described above in attempting to reconstruct the East Turkestan independence movement and the political evolution of the East Turkestan Republic from four perspectives: social structure in Xinjiang and within the region’s Turkic-Islamic communities; the origins and evolution of the idea of national revolution; the principles underpinning the internal coherence of the East Turkestan independence movement, and power structures in the East Turkestan Republic; and international relations and politics surrounding the Xinjiang region. These perspectives served as the foundation in exploring the nature of the East Turkestan independence movement.

In terms of its content, this book can be divided into five sections. **Chapters 1 and 2** provide context for the social transitions in the pre-modern and early modern eras, examining the characteristics, successes and failings of the Qing Dynasty’s policies on Xinjiang during the era of traditional rule; the grim international situation faced by Xinjiang during its period of transition; the social status of Islam in Uyghur communities, and its changing circumstances; the influence of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism in early modern Uyghur society; and social structure in Xinjiang and within Uyghur communities, to analyze and explore the motivations that propelled the rise of the East Turkestan independence movement. **Chapters 3 and 4** analyze politics and ethnic minority policies under the

regime of the Han ruler Sheng Shicai, revealing how he was able to suppress the First East Turkestan Independence Movement and the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, at the cost of ultimately exacerbating ethnic conflict in the region. **Chapters 5, 6 and 7** seek to reconstruct the events behind the rise of the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement, the founding of the East Turkestan Republic, and the expansion of the republic's sphere of influence in each of its three districts, to serve as a basis for exploring the characteristics of power structures in the East Turkestan Republic. **Chapters 8 and 9** reconstruct the political developments behind the Xinjiang Peace Talks and the fall of the East Turkestan Republic, exploring the underlying causes for the republic's collapse from the external perspective of international politics, as well as the internal perspective of the inherent contradictions within the national movement. **Chapter 10**, which serves as the conclusion to this book, analyzes the nature of the East Turkestan Republic from the perspective of its political systems, social structure, inter-ethnic relations, and economic conditions, and explores the significance of the Second East Turkestan Independence Movement and the East Turkestan Republic in the history of the Uyghur people, the Xinjiang region, and early modern China.