

ORIGINS OF THE EAST TURKESTAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Social Context and Shape of the Movement

The East Turkestan Independence Movement first began to take shape in 1933. Every historical event has its elements of chance, but how was the unprecedented East Turkestan Independence Movement able to so quickly mobilize the population, and erupt ubiquitously and simultaneously across the territory of Xinjiang? These circumstances indicate that early modern Xinjiang society harbored simmering ethnic problems.

This chapter focuses on social structure in early modern Xinjiang, analyzing the social, political and economic causes for the latent East Turkestan Independence Movement, to discover the ideological starting point for the independence movement and explore the ideological system that sustained it, as well as analyzing the organizational characteristics of the First East Turkestan Independence Movement, to reveal the nature of the movement.

2.1 Ideology of the East Turkestan Independence Movement

“East Turkestan”

As is well known, “Turkestan” signifies “Land of the Turks”: it is generally divided into East Turkestan, which falls within Chinese territories, and West Turkestan, which falls within the territories of the former Soviet Union. However, the significance of the term “East Turkestan,” which once expressed a geographical concept, is in fact unclear, both in a temporal and in a spatial sense.

The spatial ambiguity is due to the fact that the term “East Turkestan” has been used at various times in reference to southern Xinjiang (the Tarim Basin and the surrounding region), in reference to the region of eastern Xinjiang containing the Hami Basin, and even in reference to the entire territory of Xinjiang. The temporal ambiguity is based on the lack of definite hypotheses regarding the point when the term “East Turkestan” (*Xarh Turkestan*) emerged in the Uyghur language: some sources refer to Xinjiang as “East Turkestan” even prior to the in-migration of the Turkic peoples.

Although *The Life of YakooB Beg*, written by Demetrius Charles Boulger and published in London in 1878, refers to southern Xinjiang as “Eastern or Chinese Turkestan,”¹ it should be noted that *Tārīkh-i Khāmīdī* (History of Hāmīdī), written by the Uyghur historian Molla Musa Sayrami and completed in 1908, still refers to the region as “Mogulistan Yurti yaki Yette Xeher” (Mogulistan, or the Land of the Seven Cities).² Other sources show that, even in the early 1920s, the Uyghur people still did not refer to the region as “East Turkestan.” In a 1934 essay entitled “Xinjiang Legislators in the Era of the Beijing Government,” which criticizes the Uyghur parliamentarians under the Republic of China, the original Uyghur author refers to himself as a “resident of southern Xinjiang” (*nan Jiang ren* 南疆人).³ These sources demonstrate that, even among local Uyghurs, the place name “East Turkestan” was a loanword that was not accepted until the early modern era.

It was not until the 1930s that Uyghurs began broadly utilizing the term “East Turkestan”: this was likely linked to the nascent “East Turkestan Independence Movement,” which first began to take shape in that era. As related by the Japanese scholar Yasushi Shinmen, in September 1933, the leaders of the Turpan Rebellion sent a letter to the British consulate in Kashgar, describing the contemporary conditions in “East Turkestan” and “West Turkestan.”⁴ Britain in fact played what some observers called a “dishonorable role”⁵ in the rise of the East Turkestan Independence Movement: whether this is tied to the introduction of the English-language term “East Turkestan” into the Uyghur language bears further research. On November 16, 1933, the official newspaper of the government of the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, *Independence (Istqlāl)* ran the statement: “Our slogan is, ‘East Turkestan is the East Turkestan of every person

in East Turkestan.’ . . . We do not use their [Chinese] language and place names.”⁶ The term “East Turkestan” finally permeated the Uyghur language as a place name after the First East Turkestan Independence Movement. The above passage shows that the significance of the term “East Turkestan” was initially based on condemnation of ethnic oppression, as well as advocacy for national consciousness and a sense of territoriality; the emergence of this national consciousness and territoriality was undoubtedly tied to changes in the self-identity of the Uyghur people. We can see also that the significance of “East Turkestan” was ideologically linked to the early modern “Uyghur Enlightenment.”

The Early Modern “Uyghur Enlightenment” and “Pan-Turkism”

The 1880s witnessed the rapid expansion of trade between the Uyghur communities and Russia (Tatar merchants, to be specific): following the suppression of the Yaqub Beg regime, the Qing Dynasty had founded the province of Xinjiang and granted special trading privileges to Russian merchants, including complete exemption from taxes in the region of Xinjiang, as well as permission to “exchange goods” and “pay debts in kind with sundry goods,” leading to the rise of an industrial capitalist class of *bāy* (the “wealthy”), who enriched themselves through industry as well as, and especially, trade.⁷ At the same time, as exchanges between the Uyghurs and the outside world, particularly foreign states, gradually increased, Uyghur society quietly birthed an early modern cultural enlightenment.

The Uyghur Enlightenment was a movement centering on a “new class of intelligentsia” who were “beginning to have a profound sense of crisis regarding their own ethnic identity,” as well as “certain religious figures” who launched a new-style, universal school education movement (known as *usul ul-jadid*, or “new method,” also referred to as Jadidism)—aside from Islamic education, these schools also taught history, geography, mathematics, chemistry, and other modern sciences.⁸ The economic backers for this movement were the wealthy industrialists of the new Uyghur capitalist class, the *bāy*.

The Uyghur Enlightenment first arose in the Kashgar region, the cultural and economic center of Uyghur society in the southern Tianshan Mountains. According to the recollections of a Uyghur elder, the famous industrialist brothers Husayn Musabayow and Bawadun Musabayow

sponsored the establishment of Uyghur society's first Jadidist school in 1883, at Iksak Township in Atush County, 20 kilometers north of the city of Kashgar. The Uyghur Enlightenment reached its peak in the 1910s. In one example, the well-known *akhund* Abdukadir Damulla, who went on pilgrimage to Mecca and passed through Ottoman Turkey to return to Kashgar, founded the first Jadidist school in the city of Kashgar in 1912.⁹ During this period, Jadidist schools were founded in Ili, Turpan, Qitai (Guchung), Hami (Kumul), Kucha, Aksu and other Uyghur cities.¹⁰

According to many Uyghur scholarly sources, as well as recollections by the older generation of Uyghurs, the most noteworthy aspects of the Uyghur Enlightenment were the popular trends of "studying abroad" and "inviting foreign teachers." In point of fact, the foreign countries involved in these trends were essentially limited to Ottoman Turkey and Russia. It should also be noted that the Uyghurs' experiences in studying "abroad" were fairly limited. The Uyghurs who traveled to study in Russia were not exposed to the influence of the proletarian revolution in Russia's urban centers; instead, they were concentrated in the city of Kazan, today the capital of the Tatarstan region of Russia, and the teachers invited to Xinjiang were also Tatars from Kazan.

Since most of the instructors initially hired to teach at the Jadidist school in Iksak had a background at traditional religious schools and were unable to meet the requirements of a Jadidist education, the Musabayow brothers decided to send seven young Uyghurs to study abroad in the city of Kazan, with which they had trade relations. When these figures returned to Iksak, they broadened the scope of education at the school, and redesigned the teaching content based on the curricula of schools in Kazan and Istanbul in Ottoman Turkey. By 1892, the Musabayow brothers had reportedly sent more than 50 individuals to study in Russia and Ottoman Turkey. The Musabayow family paid for the entire cost of these trips out of pocket.¹²

Yamauchi Masayuki, a Japanese scholar well-known for his research on Islamic studies and ethnic issues in the former Soviet Union, notes that: "In 19th and early 20th-century Tatar society, reforms to school education were a matter of life or death." Due to these reforms, "After the Revolution of 1905, [Kazan] became the center of Muslim politics and culture, and it played a role in the Islamic world in no way secondary to that of Istanbul,

Cairo, or Beirut.”¹³ This has important significance in understanding the nature of the early modern Uyghur Enlightenment. The Uyghurs’ efforts to deepen their connections to Tatar society were based on their shared identity as “subjugated ethnic groups” seeking a way forward for their people. The Tatars, who had achieved a measure of success in this respect, therefore served as a ready-made role model for the Uyghur people.

As the only independent state ruled by a Turkic people, Ottoman Turkey also played an important role in the Uyghur Enlightenment. The Jadidist schools in southern Xinjiang engaged a number of Turkish teachers; this is corroborated by many Uyghur memoirs. The Uyghurs who studied abroad in Ottoman Turkey were also extremely active in the Enlightenment.¹⁴ To improve the quality of education at his school, Bawadun Musabayow invited Ababakil, Ahmet Kamal, Abudu Rahim, Mukal and other Turkish figures to teach at the school. After Ababakil returned to his home country in 1905, Ahmet Kamal became a central figure. At the request of Bawadun Musabayow, Ahmet Kamal founded Uyghur society’s first normal school for teachers at Iksak in 1907.¹⁵ However, other accounts state that Ahmet Kamal did not arrive in the Kashgar region until March 1913, at the invitation of the Musabayow family. At the time, there had been plans to found a normal school in the city of Kashgar, but due to opposition by conservative forces, the school was moved to Iksak, and opened its doors on April 19, 1913.¹⁶

At the normal school in Iksak, Ahmet Kamal taught students that the sultan of the Ottoman Empire was their true leader; he also taught them to sing Turkish marches, and the content of his lessons showed a strong inclination toward pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Kamal’s actions were informed by the rise of the First World War: he hoped to arouse the “Turkic” consciousness of the local Uyghur population through his teachings, and inspire in them a sense of responsibility as “Turkish compatriots” to support the Ottoman Empire as the “leader of the global Islamic alliance.”¹⁷ Mas’ut Sabri of



The city of Kashgar in the 1930s

Ili, who studied abroad in Ottoman Turkey, also taught his students at the Jadidist school that, “Our ancestors are Turks.”¹⁸

The ideological origins of the Uyghur Enlightenment can undeniably be traced back to both Ottoman Turkey and Kazan Tatar society: “The Tatar Turks and Ottoman Turkey both served as wellsprings of early modern Turkic nationalism.”¹⁹ Here, “early modern Turkic nationalism” is another term for “pan-Turkism.” The version of pan-Turkism that arose in Tatar society sought to strengthen the unity of the Turkic peoples, so that the “subjugated” Turkish ethnic groups could continue to survive and develop within early modern international society.²⁰ Many Uyghurs adopted pan-Islamism and became strongly influenced by pan-Turkism after experiencing exchanges with these two regions.

When the First East Turkestan Independence Movement arose in 1933, teachers at the Jadidist schools in Atush who had studied abroad in Turkey mobilized their students to support the movement.²¹ These circumstances demonstrate the web of connections between the Uyghur intellectuals who traveled to Ottoman Turkey, the Uyghur Enlightenment, and the East Turkestan Independence Movement. In particular, many of the principal actors in the Uyghur Enlightenment later became the leaders of the East Turkestan Independence Movement, revealing the ideological ties between the two movements.

2.2 The First Independence Movement

Origins of the Independence Movement

The “Kumul Rebellion” (referred to in Chinese as the *Hami qi yi* 哈密起義 or “Hami Rebellion”) of March 1931 set the scene for the First East Turkestan Independence Movement. The fuse for the Kumul Rebellion was the proposal by Jin Shuren, then the warlord governor of the Xinjiang provincial government, to “abolish hereditary chieftancy and institute centralized governance” (*gaitu guiliu* 改土歸流), for the sake of expanding his own power. This move signaled the removal of the hereditary Kumulik Uyghur “princes” (*wang* 王) of the semi-autonomous Kumul Khanate formerly appointed by the Qing government, channeling the Uyghur farmers under the jurisdiction of the khanate into local administrative districts under the

governance of regular bureaucrats. The Uyghur farmers had previously staged two uprisings seeking the abolishment of the Kumul Khanate (also referred to as the *Hami wangzhi* 哈密王制 or “Hami Principality”), thus Jin Shuren’s actions initially seemed to be aligned with the farmers’ demands. However, the reforms did not simply result in a loss of political privileges for the people connected to the khanate: the government also sent in troops to squeeze the local populace, while rising Han Chinese immigration threatened the stability of ordinary Uyghur farmers,²² thus inciting universal discontent amongst the Uyghur elite as well as the general population.

It is arguable that the Kumul Rebellion carried “anti-Han” overtones from its inception: the rebels sought to massacre all Han immigrants who had settled down in the region. Participants in the uprising noted in their memoirs that the leaders of the rebellion were all figures connected to the old khanate: the fact that two different social classes with divergent objectives were able to unite in a struggle against the Han Chinese demonstrates that ethnic conflict was a more salient and more compelling force than internecine class antagonism within contemporary Uyghur society.²³

Amidst the surging ethnic movement of the Uyghur peoples in the 1930s, from the earliest Kumul Rebellion to the movement’s gradual spread into the southern Tianshan Mountains, the term “East Turkestan” never made an appearance. As noted above, the Kumul or Hami region was at times not even included in the concept of “East Turkestan.” This region was situated between the Chinese interior and the Uyghur communities of southern Xinjiang, and its geographical location allowed for frequent exchanges with the interior Chinese provinces; the region also undoubtedly experienced a higher influx of Han Chinese immigrants in comparison to other areas.²⁴ Given this historical and social context, the extent to which the contemporary Uyghur residents of the Kumul region subscribed to the concept of “East Turkestan” is questionable.

However, in comparison with the Kumul region, southern Xinjiang was essentially populated by homogeneous Uyghur communities. Proponents of the movement held that, “Turkestan is the birthplace of the Turks, and must naturally become the land of the Turks,”²⁵ and declared that the Han Chinese “who have contaminated our land for many long years” would be “driven back to their old homes.” These fiery slogans of independence demonstrate that the rise of the East Turkestan Independence Movement

was linked to a strong sense of territoriality among some Uyghurs.²⁶ It is clear that the fundamental aims of the East Turkestan Independence Movement were to “overthrow China’s rule” and strive to “liberate ethnic territories,” while the movement’s most essential characteristic involved attacking and purging everything that symbolized “China.”

Organizational Characteristics of the Movement

The First East Turkestan Independence Movement succumbed not to enemy invasion, but rather to conflict among the movement’s elite. In May 1934, Hoja Niyaz, the president of the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, reached an agreement with the government of Xinjiang Province to detain and hand over Prime Minister Sabit (Sawut) Damulla as well as the republic’s Minister for Judicial Affairs, leading to the collapse of the Islamic Republic before the provincial government forces even reached Kashgar. In this sense, it was Hoja Niyaz who buried the First East Turkestan Independence Movement.

It is worth noting that, although Hoja Niyaz and Sabit Damulla were both heads of state in the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, they in fact commanded two different factions. As the leader of the Kumul Rebellion, Hoja Niyaz led forces composed of rebels from the Kumul and Turpan regions in eastern Xinjiang, who had gradually retreated westward toward Kashgar, while Sabit Damulla headed a nationalist group that had been active in the region between Hotan in the southern Tarim Basin and Kashgar, with the aim of establishing an independent ethnic regime. Sabit Damulla was in fact the spiritual leader of the First East Turkestan Independence Movement.

Since both factions featured residents of the Turpan region as well as Islamic religious figures, they cannot be fully differentiated on either a regional or a religious basis. Sabit Damulla was born in Atush in the Kashgar region; he was a religious figure as well as a Uyghur intellectual, having studied abroad in Turkey and “received a modern education and a political baptism.”²⁷ Many of his followers were reported to be “youths who had studied abroad in foreign countries.”²⁸ Damulla’s faction therefore arguably centered on a core group of Uyghur intellectuals with modern education. The role of Uyghur intellectuals as proponents and participants was the first important organizational characteristic of the East Turkestan

Independence Movement; it also reflects the lineal relationship between the independence movement and the Uyghur Enlightenment of the early modern era.

Sabit Damulla, who is referred to as the father of the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, once candidly acknowledged in a letter to an Indian Islamic youth organization that Uyghur society had fallen far behind international society.²⁹ The Islamic Republic of East Turkestan was organized in the form of a republic, and operated under a directorial system of governance: these positions were inscribed in the “Founding Principles” of East Turkestan, which was formally established on November 12, 1933, in Kashgar.³⁰ However, the new republic’s “Founding Principles” also stated that: “Persons undertaking government duties must be conversant with the Quran and with modern science,”³¹ demonstrating that the so-called “Islamic Republic” did not seek to institute secularism. The “Founding Principles” also show that, in terms of its political ideology, while the First East Turkestan Independence Movement advocated an end to ethnic oppression at the hands of Han Chinese dictators along with separation from China, it also promoted the modernization of Uyghur society. This again marks the Independence Movement as the ideological heir to the Uyghur Enlightenment.

Inspired by the Kumul Rebellion, southern Xinjiang erupted in a series of uprisings. Religious figures played a clear role in forwarding these uprisings, and the concept of “Islamic *jihad*” had an inspiring effect on the rebels. One figure who served at a command post for the rebellions recalled that, during the “Turpan Rebellion,” everyone from the commanding personnel to the ordinary rebels was filled with religious fervor.³² Sabit Damulla reportedly utilized the theory of “Islamic *jihad*” to mobilize Uyghurs in the Hotan region prior to the “Hotan Uprising.”³³ The injunction to “carefully abide by the Quran” was also explicitly written into the “Founding Principles” of the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan.³⁴ Though its time was short, it was the association with Islam that led the rebel forces in different regions to briefly unite under the “republic”; this is an undeniable fact.

The efforts of the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan to achieve unity through the rallying cry of “Islamic *jihad*” were informed by the fact that the participants in the uprisings stemmed from different social classes and different regions: although they were able to find common ground in

opposing ethnic oppression, rebels of different socioeconomic classes diverged sharply in terms of their motivations and their objectives. Since most of the inhabitants of a given region were engaged in the natural economy of self-sufficient oasis agriculture, conflicts over oases had given rise to a deep-seated sense of territorialism within Uyghur communities.³⁵ In addition, the fingerprints of Uzbek figures from the Soviet Union and Afghanistan could also be discerned in many of the local uprisings. Calling upon the “righteous cause” of “Islamic *jihad*” was therefore necessary to achieve complete cohesion in the political unification of diverse interest groups from different regions and different social classes; this was entirely a reflection of the practical circumstances of contemporary Uyghur society. Popular mobilization in the name of Islam was the second important organizational characteristic of the East Turkestan Independence Movement. The organizers of the First East Turkestan Independence Movement, as well as its successor movements, used “Islamic *jihad*” as a rallying cry to mobilize mass participation, treating Islam as a conduit to unify the various political forces participating in the independence movements.

2.3 Ethnic Oppression in Xinjiang

Political Inequality

The progression from the Uyghur Enlightenment to the East Turkestan Independence Movement shows that a sense of ethnic crisis among Uyghur intellectuals, who had been exposed to the influence of modern international thought as well as pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, was the primary motivating force for the germination of the independence movements. This sense of ethnic crisis stemmed from contemporary social conditions in Xinjiang, and the ethnic oppression experienced by Xinjiang communities in the first half of the 20th century was the most direct cause for the rise of the East Turkestan Independence Movement.

Hai Weiliang defines the relationship between Uyghur communities and the central government prior to the latter half of the 19th century as “the relationship of a tributary state and a suzerain.”³⁶ This definition is not entirely apt, but there is no doubt that the Qing government granted a certain degree of autonomy to Uyghur communities. However, after the

Qing Dynasty recaptured the territory of Xinjiang, and particularly after it founded the province of “Xinjiang” in 1884, the Uyghurs’ unique bureaucratic system—the “beg” system—was abolished, and the Uyghur population was absorbed under the direct administration of the central government. Thereafter, a large influx of Han Chinese bureaucrats, immigrants, and other figures began flowing into Xinjiang, including the Uyghur region.³⁷

According to a 1928 national survey by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of China, at the time, Xinjiang had a total population of 2,551,741; Uyghurs comprised 70% of the population, while the Han Chinese population represented less than 10%.³⁸ However, the Uyghur population may have been even larger in actuality. The estimates by Japanese scholar Hori Sunao place the total Uyghur population at 2,941,000 in 1940. Extrapolating from the figures provided by Hori, the Han Chinese population at that time would have only been around 234,715.³⁹ Regardless of whether or not these calculations are accurate, it is an incontestable fact that the Han Chinese population in Xinjiang was extremely small in that era. Yet many of these Han Chinese inhabitants were bureaucrats, soldiers and merchants, who maintained a tight grasp on real political, military and economic power in Xinjiang.⁴⁰

During the era of the Republic of China, political power in Xinjiang was concentrated in the hands of the Han Chinese: this is clear from the contemporary administrative structure and the ethnic composition of officials. From the founding of the Republic of China in 1911 to the mid-1940s, a series of warlords and dictators of Han Chinese background had ruled over Xinjiang, concurrently serving as the chief administrator (provincial governor) and the highest-ranking military officer (governor-general), and espousing “closed-door” policies. The senior officials of the organs of the provincial government (including the Department of Civil Affairs, Department of Finance, Department of Education, Department of Works, and the Foreign Affairs Office) were also all of Han Chinese ethnicity.⁴¹ Having been converted into a “utopia” that was almost wholly isolated from the central government and the interior provinces,⁴² turnover of Xinjiang’s highest-ranking leaders was achieved only by means of assassinations and regime changes. Yet the Uyghur people were unable to play any kind of role amidst this farce of rapidly changing regimes.

Within the local administrative system (comprising 8 administrative districts and 59 counties), people of local ethnic background were similarly nowhere to be seen. In southern Xinjiang, although Uyghurs represented nearly 95% of the local resident population,⁴³ the period from 1912–1922 witnessed only one figure of Uyghur background amongst the senior administrators and county magistrates.⁴⁴ “Who has the right to say that a people should be subject to wicked oppression by a minority? Who can admit that a people should not struggle for its survival? From the vantage point of the entire Republic of China, in the spirit of Mr. Sun Yat-sen’s Three People’s Principles for founding the state, there are no advantages to Xinjiang separating itself from China and seeking independence for the people of Xinjiang, yet the facts tell us, we cannot begrudge this to the people of Xinjiang.” As noted in the passage above, by two intellectuals recalling the course of the First East Turkestan Independence Movement, in analyzing the causes for the rise of the independence movement, the political inequality between ethnic groups in that era cannot be overlooked.⁴⁵ According to the essay “Xinjiang Legislators in the Era of the Beijing Government,” cited above, among the 20 parliamentarians elected in Xinjiang in 1921, only 3 were Uyghurs; moreover, they were all puppets hand-picked by the Provincial Governor Yang Zengxin, and their ability to represent the Uyghurs’ interests and wield any personal political power was naturally viewed as suspect by the local Uyghur populace.⁴⁶ Even more surprisingly, the 40 parliamentary representatives elected in Xinjiang in 1915 did not include a single person of Uyghur ethnicity.⁴⁷ These facts illustrate how the Uyghurs, despite being the majority ethnic group in the region, were completely excluded from legislative bodies and the policy-making process in contemporary Xinjiang society.

Economic Extortion and Policies for Cultural Assimilation

However, the Han Chinese elite who wielded political hegemony in the region of Xinjiang did not play any active role in local socioeconomic development. During the Republican era, economic conditions in Xinjiang experienced little change in comparison with the late Qing era: the region saw no advancements in modern industry and transportation,⁴⁸ and depended on foreign imports for the vast majority of manufactured goods.⁴⁹ A Uyghur intellectual offered the following critique of the ruling authorities

in 1921: "Upon entering the Republican age, the biggest change in Xinjiang was writing such-and-such year, such-and-such month of the Republic of China in letters, and even that, we Uyghurs learned from the Han Chinese."⁵⁰

During the era of the Qing Dynasty, the central government had annually disbursed around 3 million taels in funding or "interprovincial assistance" (*xiexiang* 協餉) to the Xinjiang provincial government.⁵¹ However, in the Republican era, even this type of funding was discontinued. In response to a severe financial crisis, the first provincial governor of Xinjiang, Yang Zengxin, adopted measures for increased taxes, paper rationing, revitalization of industry and commerce, wasteland reclamation, and so on.⁵² However, Yang's "revitalization" of industry and commerce achieved little to no results,⁵³ and he ultimately resorted to extortion of the local populace to mitigate the crisis. Between 1912 and 1915, Xinjiang issued 6,232,800 taels of paper currency not backed by reserves.⁵⁴ In comparison with 1884, the year the province was founded, by 1915, agricultural taxes in Xinjiang had risen sharply: taxes on wheat had increased by a factor of 2–3, and taxes on corn had increased by a factor of 2–5, while taxes on grass fodder had soared by a factor of 19.⁵⁵

Local bureaucrats abusing their privileges to plunder the Uyghur inhabitants was a common occurrence.⁵⁶ The surprising phenomenon of ministers of the provincial government seeking demotions to the level of county magistrate was a reflection of the opportunities such direct administrative positions offered for exploitation of the populace.⁵⁷ The memoirs of bureaucrats from that era record many strategies for pillaging via taxation.⁵⁸ County magistrate positions in Kucha, Aksu, Yarkent, Kargilik, and other regions in southern Xinjiang with a high concentration of Uyghurs were regarded as particularly "lucrative positions" (*feique* 肥缺). It is therefore easy to imagine the scale on which Han Chinese bureaucrats plundered the local Uyghur population.

Until 1933, the Xinjiang provincial government had enforced a policy mandating that Uyghurs receive an education at Chinese-language schools (academies). The original purpose of this policy, dating back to the Qing Dynasty, was to induce Uyghurs to abandon their traditional customs and instead adopt Chinese customs; the policy thus carried an implicit bias against Uyghur culture.⁵⁹ Such ethnically biased policies encouraged a sense

of ethnic superiority amongst the Han Chinese inhabitants of Xinjiang. A 1930s report on Xinjiang by an observer from the Soviet Union notes that, even after living in a Uyghur region for 50 years, one Han Chinese elder was completely unable to speak the Uyghur language.⁶⁰ The Han Chinese residents of Xinjiang also disdained the Islamic taboo on idolatry, building Buddhist temples, Confucian temples, and shrines to General Guan Yu in the seat of every county government, and carving out their own ethnic communities within Uyghur territories.⁶¹

The acute ethnic discrimination and oppression that informed every sphere, from politics and the economy to culture and society, naturally gave rise to ethnic hatred for the Han Chinese amongst the Uyghur inhabitants. Many Uyghurs “feel that the Han bureaucrats who rule over them know only the demons of exploitation and butchery, and that the Han people are all demons too.”⁶² The Uyghurs’ ethnic enmity toward the Han Chinese thus took shape as the primary source of social conflict in contemporary Xinjiang.

2.4 Xinjiang’s Dual Social Structure and the Public Administrative System for Uyghur Communities

The Dual Structure of Regional and Ethnic Communities

Many of the counties in southern Xinjiang were established around an oasis. The county magistrate held supreme authority over taxation, the construction of cities and roads, the police and public security forces, the judicial system, and so on.⁶³ However, the contemporary system of bureaucratic appointments by the provincial government only extended as far as the county level. County governments thus became the link between the national bureaucratic system and Uyghur communities, while relying on local Uyghur figures for administrative operations and public management below the county level. The local public administrative system for Uyghur communities was further divided into grassroots-level administrative organizations, water management organizations, religious tribunals, and so on.

Given that only around 3,000 Han Chinese had migrated into southern Xinjiang during this time period,⁶⁴ we can speculate that the traditional structure of Uyghur society had not yet suffered much erosion. However,