

Staged Development in Xinjiang

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ABSTRACT At the turn of the century, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region moved from a phase of accelerated integration by the centre, which typified the decade of the 1990s, to a phase of consolidation of the advances made during this period. The intertwined dimensions of state building and nation building embedded in the campaign to Open Up the West respond to the long-term strategic goal of placating the threat of ethno-nationalist unrest. This “staged development” of Xinjiang reflects in essence a classic process of peripheral territorial integration by the central state. Yet, the dynamics of penetration and resistance between the centre and what still remains an indigenous periphery can be expected to generate at the same time both increased sinicization and increased ethno-national unrest.

At the beginning of the 21st century the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has moved from a phase of accelerated assimilation and national territorial integration by the centre, which typified the decade of the 1990s,¹ to a phase essentially of consolidation of the advances made during this period. For Xinjiang, the campaign to Open Up the West represents less of a paradigm shift in terms of the precepts of political economy implemented by the central authorities than a convergence between the stated and unstated goals of the centre. Since most of the policies that are part of the Open Up the West campaign with regard to minority areas were already pioneered in the 1990s – in essence revolving around the comprehensive engineering of economic and social incentives to increase Han migration to Xinjiang in order further to alter the ethnic balance – the critical difference lies in the fact that these strategies and aims are now more explicitly stated and articulated.² Indeed, it would seem likely that the successful integration of Xinjiang during the 1990s contributed to the later development of some of the policies and measures now associated more widely with the campaign to Open Up the West, as

1. Nicolas Becquelin, “Xinjiang in the nineties,” *The China Journal*, No. 44 (July 2000), pp. 65–90.

2. Among Xinjiang studies see in particular Dru C. Gladney and Gardner Bovington (guest eds.), *Inner Asia* (Special Issue: Xinjiang), Vol. 2, No. 2 (2000). On territorial integration see Clifton W. Pannell and Laurence J.C. Ma, “Urban transition and interstate relations in a dynamic post-soviet borderland: the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China,” *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (1997), pp. 206–229; Witz Rafka, “Xinjiang and its Central Asia borderlands,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1998), pp. 373–407. For an anthropological approach of change in Xinjiang, see Ildiko Beller-Hann, “Locked in conflict. Parameters of Uyghur identity, in China and in the diaspora,” *Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte* (Halle), No. 2 (2001), pp. 53–66; Ildiko Beller-Hann, “Temperamental neighbours; Uyghur–Han relations in Xinjiang, northwest China” in Gunther Schlee (ed.), *Imagined Differences: Hatred and the Construction of Identity* (Hamburg: Lit, 2002), pp. 57–81; Joanne N. Smith, “Four generations of Uyghurs. The shift towards ethno-political ideologies among Xinjiang’s youth,” *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2000), pp. 195–224.

for example, methods designed to encourage migration into minority nationality areas.

The goals of increased Han migrations into borderland national minority areas, resolution of the “nationality problem” and homogenization of the Chinese nation are now directly acknowledged, whereas they were always treated as absolute political anathema before – perhaps unsurprisingly since they in essence negate the whole nationality autonomy system on which the PRC is conceptualized as a “multi-ethnic country” (*duo minzu guojia*).³ Other dimensions of the campaign to Open Up the West, especially the massive investments in infrastructure, industrial and state-environmentalism, are also of prime significance to analysing how Xinjiang is going to be shaped in the future, not least because of the high degree of dependence and supervision of Xinjiang vis-à-vis the centre, and the structure of its economy. This close relationship with central authorities is due to traditional strategic considerations, reinforced by three main elements: the projected increased dependence of the country on the XUAR’s oil and gas resources; its geopolitical position at the crossroads with Central Asia; and the context of looming ethnic unrest nurtured by the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism.⁴

The Han population is still a minority in Xinjiang, a vast territory representing one-sixth of China’s total land area, and 5,600 kilometres of international frontiers with India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, three Central Asian states, Russia and Mongolia. Even though the proportion of the Han population reached 40.6 per cent in 2000 (against 6 per cent in 1949), the southern part of Xinjiang is still 90 per cent populated by Uighurs, a Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslim population with a long history of uprising against Chinese domination. The Autonomous Region is also home to 1.2 million Kazakhs; 840,000 Hui; and half a million of other national minorities, most of them of Central Asian kinship.⁵ From an economic standpoint, Xinjiang is highly atypical among the interior and western provinces, as the only province with a GDP per capita above the national average (at the 12th position in provincial rankings).⁶

3. Significantly, the PRC’s official translation for the term *minzu* (when designating *shaoshu minzu*) has recently changed to “ethnic” in lieu of “national.” Hence, the former “Nationalities Affairs Commission” is now the “Ethnic Affairs Commission,” and the PRC is now a “multi-ethnic” country and not a “multi-national” one.

4. On 21 January 2002 the Chinese government, in an apparent attempt on the US-led post-11 September global war on terrorism, released a report on the alleged activities of purported “East Turkestan terrorists groups,” obviously in view of legitimating its crack-down on “separatist activities” in Xinjiang. The report officially put at 200 the number of incidents between 1990 and 2001, allegedly having caused 162 deaths and 440 injuries. Information Office of China’s State Council, “East Turkistan terrorist forces cannot get away with impunity,” 21 January 2002. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented on multiple occasions the broad violations of civil, political and religious rights stemming from “anti-separatism” campaigns in Xinjiang.

5. *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2002* (Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House, 2002), tables 3–5, p. 109. Hoppe Thomas, *Die ethnischen Gruppen Xinjiangs: Kulturunterschiede und interethnische Beziehungen*, Vol. 290 (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1998 (2nd edition)).

6. Wen Jun and Hu Angang, “Shaoshu minzu diqu jiakuai fazhan xin silu” (“The new thinking in accelerating the development of national minorities areas”), in Hu Angang (ed.),

The campaign to Open Up the West presents an apparent paradox in Xinjiang. On the one hand, it does not portend significant changes of the magnitude that it announces for other predominantly non-Han areas, such as the Tibet Autonomous Region.⁷ At the same time, it does suggest that change will come to Xinjiang during the next decade from the central authorities' strong strategic commitment, and actual capacity, to implement the development projected by the strategy. However, this apparent paradox disappears if Xinjiang is seen in recent historical context. The policies designed to Open Up the West represent a continuation of, not a rupture with, those of the 1990s.

In Xinjiang the 1990s had seen the gradual opening of its borders with Central Asia; a halt and reversal in the decline of the share of the Han population through the comprehensive engineering of measures spurring settler colonization into urban and rural areas; the take-off of exploitation in the oil-rich Tarim basin; and the building of key transportation infrastructure penetrating Southern Xinjiang (including a north-south highway through the Tarim Basin and a railway link to Kashgar).⁸ Moreover, it seems that the overriding consideration of the authorities nowadays is to consolidate the gains of the 1990s, in order physically and institutionally to "ram into the ground" these advances and mitigate their overall consequences.

There are undoubtedly different degrees in this consolidation template. However, solving the issues of the newly settled population, cushioning the impact of rapid urbanization, mitigating the critical environmental crisis and ensuring the long-term soundness of a greatly expanded Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC) – the agency with 2.48 million people which has acted as the chief vehicle of the colonization of this borderland – appear to be the prime focus of actual policies conducted in Xinjiang, more than setting off entirely new processes of accelerated territorial incorporation. It is precisely here that the campaign to Open Up the West becomes important, functioning as a conduit for consolidation policies: from many aspects the success of the campaign in fortifying Chinese control of Xinjiang will affect whether centripetal forces or centrifugal ones will predominate in the next quarter of the century.⁹

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Xibu da kaifa xin zhanlüe (The New Strategy of the Opening Up of the West) (Beijing: Zhongguo jihua chubanshe, 2001), table 8.17, p. 295.

7. Tibetan Information Network, *China's Great Leap West* (November 2000) provides an accurate analysis of how the campaign to Open Up the West represents a paradigm shift in the PRC's Tibetan policies. See also Susette Cooke "Great western development in the Tibet Autonomous Region: merging Tibetan culture into the Chinese economic fast-lane," in *Provincial China*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (December 2003).

8. See Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the nineties."

9. The current Open Up the West policy has indisputably strong historical resonance with the Qing dynasty's efforts, towards "the Domestication of Empire," to use James A. Millward's formulation. As he recounts: "By 1831, the court opted for intensified Chinese colonization, lifting restrictions on Han settlement in the Tarim Basin, allowing merchants and homesteaders to settle permanently in the Southern March, and establishing state farms

A Centre–Periphery Approach

The problematic of this article comes from the family of comparative political development studies and examines precisely where and how change occurs during the intertwined processes of state building and nation building, both of which lie at the core of the strategy to Open Up the West.¹⁰ Methodologically the article re-emphasizes the importance of analyses considered with relations between centre and periphery, by focusing on the process of penetration and integration of the periphery (in this case the autonomous region) by the centre (the institutions, agents and norms of central state power). The centre–periphery framework, as an analytical tool which concentrates on the spatial dimensions of political processes, appears both pertinent and fruitful in analysing present-day Xinjiang, as the autonomous region displays very clear-cut characteristics of a borderland and frontier zone.¹¹

The term “staged development” is used to account for the manifold dimensions of the campaign to Open Up the West and their intertwine-ment with Xinjiang policies. In particular, it is used to emphasize the meaning of a temporally phased development strategy (by stages) as well as the importance of its theatrical aspect: the building of a new “theatrical stage,” a horizon of untold riches which merely wait to be untapped, as well as the elaborate orchestration of symbols associated with this push westward, designed to foster nation building and, last but not least, bestow renewed legitimacy to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule.

The first part of this article examines the economic objectives and tangible aspects of the campaign and their implementation by the Xinjiang party-state and the XPCC, with an emphasis on how these processes intersect with past and present settler colonization in developing the state. In the second part, the focus shifts to the local ethnic population, where processes of nation building are considered from the perspective of the

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worked by Han soldiers and their families in western Altishahr. ... The dynasty had crossed an important divide in its imperial policy, one presaging a greatly refigured conception of empire.” James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 235. For other useful parallels pertaining to agricultural policies, see Dorothy V. Borei, “Beyond the Great Wall: agricultural development in northern Xinjiang, 1760–1820,” in Jane Kate Leonard and John R. Watt (eds.), *To Achieve Security and Wealth: The Qing Imperial State and the Economy 1644–1911* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 1992), pp. 21–46. However, historical parallels have their limits. As another historian of the region cautions: “In its relations with the Western Regions, or modern Xinjiang, in particular, [China’s imperial past] carries on in modern guise some of the policies of the Qing dynasty, but never exactly repeats them.” Peter C. Perdue, “Bringing Xinjiang into the fold: the Ming–Qing era,” in Francois Godement (ed.), *China and its Western Frontier* (Paris: Ifri, August 2002), p. 81.

10. See the seminal works of, *inter alia* Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Lucian Pye, *Aspects of Political Development* (New York: Knopf, 1967); Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). On the spatial dimensions of political processes see Saul B. Cohen and L. D. Rosenthal, “A geographical model of political systems analysis,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 5–31.

11. See Pannell and Ma, “Urban transition and interstate relations,” pp. 206–207.

local problems in the implementation of national minorities policy that emerge in the campaign to Open Up the West. Finally, the article discusses whether this “staged development” strategy is likely to placate the attested rise of ethno-nationalism in the region, fulfilling the ultimate strategic objectives of the central authorities.

State Building

Although in the strategy to Open Up the West the national goals of integration and state building supersede the purely economic ones of local endogenous growth, the question of how to look at the very substantial infrastructural and economic objectives that it entails in Xinjiang is still critical. Xinjiang remains highly dependant on central government coffers both in budgetary terms and because its industrial structure is overwhelmingly state-owned.¹² Moreover, as a strategic area in the national “economic chessboard,” the development of Xinjiang ultimately has relevance to the economic development of the PRC as a whole.

Xinjiang’s economic structure fits the picture of a peripheral area, whose main function is to supply the core with raw resources and industrial products, while most of its manufactured needs are imported from the more developed parts of the country. Heavy industry represented almost two-thirds of the XUAR’s GDP, and over 80 per cent of its industrial assets are under the management of state-owned enterprises (SOEs).¹³ Oil and gas exploitation represents almost half of Xinjiang’s fiscal revenues.¹⁴ Foreign direct investment (FDI) remains one of the lowest in the PRC (US\$43.3 million in 2002), while two-thirds of the XUAR budget is supported by the central government (in 2002, the deficit rose to 23.2 billion *yuan*, out of a budget of 36.6 billion) in addition to the various fiscal transfer mechanisms in place (such as poverty alleviation funds, price subsidies, specific subventions).¹⁵

The strategic status of Xinjiang and the potential for ethnic unrest translates into a higher degree of control by the central authorities than in other provincial-level units. Decision-making is concentrated in the centrally appointed Party structure, and in Beijing. Two additional factors contribute to this configuration: the role of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, directly under the State Council and virtually independent from the Xinjiang Autonomous Region’s government; and the

12. Xinjiang has enjoyed one of the highest rates of fiscal transfer per capita of all Chinese provinces. See Zhou Qingsheng, “Interprovincial resource transfers in China, 1952–1990,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 571–586. For transfer in the 1990s, see Christine Wong, “The fiscal system since 1994: a reform assessment,” paper presented at the International Conference “Centre–Periphery Relations in China,” The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 24–25 March 2000, Hong Kong.

13. Xinjiang Statistical Bureau, “2002 nian Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhiqu guomin jingji he shehui fazhan tongji gongbao” (“2002 statistical communique of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region”), 4 April 2002. China Statistical Bureau, *China Statistical Yearbook 1996* (Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House, 1996), table 9–1, p. 345 places Xinjiang second in terms of national inter-provincial ranking.

14. Xinjiang Statistical Bureau, “2002 statistical communique.”

15. *Ibid.*

extremely limited power granted to national minorities, in particular Uighurs, in the government and the Party – even compared to other national minority areas of China.¹⁶ The higher dependence, however, plays in both directions as Xinjiang leaders dispatched from the centre enjoy a closer relationship with Beijing. This explains in part why Xinjiang has been able to lobby successfully for major infrastructure projects and be granted a “leading position” in the implementation of the campaign to Open Up the West.

Infrastructure and key projects. The unveiling of the strategy to Open Up the West in late 1999 was greeted with particular enthusiasm by the autonomous region’s authorities, who stressed optimistically that Xinjiang was its “most important” component.¹⁷ “The main central leaders have clearly pointed out that the top priority should be given to Xinjiang during the western development,” stated the chairman of the XUAR.¹⁸ Moreover, the campaign to Open Up the West clearly echoed the modus operandi of regional development policy in the call to “Open Up the North-west” initiated in 1992, which had been instrumental in the rapid and sustained economic growth of Xinjiang in the 1990s (delivering growth of more than 10 per cent per year on average).¹⁹

A few months after receiving the instructions issued by the “Small leading group on the development of the western regions,” headed by Zhu Rongji with Wen Jiabao as deputy head (March 2000), the XUAR Planning Commission issued its first programmatic document (July 2000), which listed the key projects that would be included in the Tenth Five-year Plan (2001–2005).²⁰ In August, a joint conference between the State Council Development Research Centre and the Xinjiang government was held in Urumqi on “The Opening Up of the West and Xinjiang’s economic development.” A compendium of over 30 documents contributed by the different departments of the Xinjiang government was assembled and published as a volume, covering all aspects from finances to industrial restructuring, foreign trade and tourism.²¹ After this initial phase, the campaign rapidly became omnipresent in Xinjiang, to be reinforced by the announcement of the content of the Tenth Five-year

16. Xinjiang has not witnessed a similar phenomenon of minority-political and governmental elite as identified in the case of Tibet. See for instance Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (eds.), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994). An analysis of the Party apparatus of Xinjiang at the prefecture, municipal and county levels (124 administrative/territorial units in total) reveals that all first Party secretaries are Han. Computed from *Xinjiang nianjian 2000 (Xinjiang Yearbook 2000)* (Urumqi: Xinjiang People’s Press, 2000).

17. Xinjiang Planning Committee, “Xibu da kaifa – Xinjiang kaifa guihua silu” (“The Opening Up of the West, indications on the plan for the opening of Xinjiang”), 20 July 2000.

18. *Wen wei po* [Wenhui bao] (Hong Kong), 12 March 2001 in FBIS-CHI-2001–0312, 13 March 2001.

19. Statistical Information Network of Xinjiang (Xinjiang tongji xinxi), <http://www.xj.stats.gov.cn/>.

20. Xinjiang Planning Committee, “The Opening Up of the West.”

21. Ji Zongyi and Li Zhouwei (eds.), *Xibu da kaifa yu Xinjiang jingji fazhan zhanlüe (The Opening Up of the West and Xinjiang’s Economic Development Strategy)* (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2001).

Plan and the State Council's second document on the Opening Up of the West, in December 2001.²²

The elevation of Xinjiang Party secretary Wang Lequan to the Politburo at the 16th Party Congress in 2002 was thus extremely significant, as it reflected at the same time the general importance of Xinjiang in the campaign to Open Up the West and the even more direct control of Beijing over Xinjiang affairs.²³ Wang reflected after his nomination that "the strategy of the central authorities ... has emphasized very clearly that among the 12 provinces, municipalities and regions in the west, Xinjiang is the top priority."²⁴

The logic behind the campaign to Open Up the West in Xinjiang was one of development by chronological stages: "the development of Xinjiang is a long-term task," wrote the Planning Committee, "it is necessary to implement the measures step by step, dividing them by stages."²⁵ It announced investments of 900 billion *yuan* (US\$108 billion) over the next ten years, unveiling ambitious plans to develop transportation, including a rail link to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; massive water conservancy projects to "recover" 50 billion cubic-metres of water; the comprehensive restoration of the Tarim River (the principal source of water for the northern Tarim Basin); and extensive oil and gas exploitation.²⁶ The Tenth Five-year Plan, in turn, announced investment of 420 billion *yuan* (US\$51 billion) in fixed assets, with 100 billion *yuan* used to build 70 key projects in the areas of infrastructure, environment and key industries.²⁷ The development drive represents a very substantial increase over the previous Five-year Plan (1996–2000) which amounted to 254 billion *yuan*.²⁸ By far the two most critical projects designated as part of Xinjiang's campaign to Open Up the West are the west to east natural gas pipeline and the comprehensive rehabilitation of the Tarim River.

The west to east pipeline. The west to east natural gas pipeline, a massive US\$15 billion project, stretching 4,200 kilometres from Lunnan

22. Office of the State Council General Office, "Opinions of the State Council Office for the development of the west region on the implementation of certain policy measures for the large-scale development of the west region," 20 December 2001, in FBIS-CHI-2002-0719, 27 August 2002.

23. Wang Lequan, born in 1944 in Shandong, rose to the position of vice-governor of Shandong before being sent in 1991 in Xinjiang as vice-Party secretary, probably with the understanding that he was going to be Party secretary after a transition period, which he did in 1995.

24. *Xinjiang ribao* (*Xinjiang Daily*), 17 November 2002 in FBIS-CHI-2002-1212, 2 January 2003. Despite his elevation, Wang Lequan did not appear to have retreated from the direct management of Xinjiang. *Xinjiang ribao*, 17 November 2002 in FBIS-CHI-2002-1212, 2 January 2003.

25. Xinjiang Planning Committee, "The Opening Up of the West."

26. *Ibid.*

27. "Xinjiang outlines development plans for Tenth Five-year Plan," Xinhua, 25 September 2000. Nearly 60% of the investment would come from the central government and state-owned enterprises. Xinhua, 21 January 2002.

28. *Ibid.*

in the Tarim Basin to Shanghai,²⁹ conceivably represents the most significant project in China's quest for long-term energy security.³⁰ As China is a fast growing economy with one of the biggest populations in the world, its consumption is now second only to the United States and Japan. It has become a net importer of petroleum products since 1993 and of crude oil since 1996. Demand for oil is expected to grow by 6 per cent annually to 300 million tons in 2010.³¹ The reliance on imports rose by 15 per cent in 2002 (71 million tons), heightening concerns that the Chinese economy was now living under the threat of fluctuating oil prices.³²

The Tarim Basin, which was opened to foreign investment for exploration in 1994, is the country's fourth largest oil producing area with a combined capacity of 20 million tons per year.³³ By 2005, the authorities estimate that gas production will reach 18 billion cubic metres with 15 billion cubic metres transported to the east via the new pipeline. The capacity is expected to grow to 30 billion cubic metres produced and 20 billion cubic metres transported by 2010.³⁴ Indeed, there is little doubt that Xinjiang, with proven reserves of petroleum of over 2.5 billion tons and 700 billion cubic metres of natural gas,³⁵ will become in the future "the energy base of the country for the 21st century."³⁶ Beijing seems to be engaged in ensuring energy is redirected from Central Asia towards Xinjiang and China, with the future construction of a pipeline extending from the Caspian Sea to Xinjiang.³⁷

The rehabilitation of the Tarim River. The second major project in Xinjiang's Opening Up of the West is the restoration of the Tarim River lower reaches, which have dried up over the past decade because of unfettered urbanization as well as extensive irrigation and reclamation activities, mostly conducted by the XPCC.³⁸ This massive programme

29. Wang Yichao, "The three giants of China's natural gas sector," *Caijing Magazine*, 20 May 2002.

30. A reliable summary of the issues involved is to be found in International Energy Agency, *China's Worldwide Quest for Energy Security* (La Hague, 2000).

31. *Ibid.*

32. "China braces for energy," *South China Morning Post*, 17 February 2003.

33. "Exxon, Shell, Gaxprom buy 15% each in China pipeline (update 2)," *Bloomberg*, 1 July 2002.

34. Wang Yichao, "The three giants of China's natural gas sector."

35. "Xinjiang to become China's biggest petroleum, gas producer," *Renmin ribao* (internet version), 22 February 2001.

36. "Xinjiang's 'black and white' strategy boosts economy, living standards," *Xinhua*, 4 February 2002.

37. Although the economic viability of the pipeline is still far away, China has taken increasing participation in oil fields in Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea. Initial work in the construction of a 3,000-kilometre pipeline linking Kazakhstan to Xinjiang is scheduled to start by mid-2004.

38. *Renmin ribao* provided the following unusually straightforward explanation of the cause of the Tarim riverbed desertification: "After the founding of PRC in 1949, throngs of immigrants swarmed to the 2,300-metre Tarim River Valley for reclamation. They built more than 200 dykes for farmland irrigation, at an annual water consumption of over 6bn cubic metres; as a result, the annual water volume on the downstream of the Tarim River has dropped to 2bn cubic metres. After the Daxihaizi Reservoir was constructed in the 1970s, the 300 km river course between the reservoir and the Taitema Lake dried up entirely, and large areas of the poplar trees along the Tarim River Valley had withered away." "Xinjiang to revive Lop Nur by water diversion," *Renmin ribao* (internet version), 20 January 2001.

will with the assistance of the World Bank supposedly “divert water from north to south” and “restore water to the 240 km dried-up river bed.”³⁹ In line with the paramount goals of settler colonization, even before the start of the project, the government was already considering the establishment of a new town, “more modern and industrial” in the Lop Nor area (China’s ex-nuclear test site), where the Tarim River ended in the past until overuse stopped its flow upstream.⁴⁰

The Tarim River project exemplifies the campaign to Open Up the West’s chosen approach of “state environmentalism” where ecological sustainability is essentially carried out through large top-down projects designed to “rejuvenate” the environment (another such programme is the establishment of a “Green Great Wall” from Xinjiang to Heilongjiang to stop desertification and sand storms).⁴¹ Likewise, the vocabulary used by the Xinjiang authorities is still reminiscent of a “war against nature” where sustainability is ultimately seen as combat between man and nature, a rhetoric that is all the more significant in the pioneering context of the opening up of the borderland.⁴²

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. Xinjiang’s continued status as a borderland and periphery, dominated by settler colonization, is embodied in the role of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. XPCC has 2.48 million people, of whom one million are workers and staff, in an agency directly under the control of the State Council, with its own jurisdiction over economic, commercial and financial activities.⁴³ The “historical mission” of the Corps is to “reclaim land and garrison the frontier”: to populate the long and porous borders of Xinjiang as well as the strategic transportation axis of the province with a Han population engaged in economic activities in times of peace, but which can be mobilized in case of military emergency. After the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the new Central Asian republics bordering Xinjiang, the primary mission of the Corps shifted from protecting from an external threat to an “internal” one: ethno-nationalist unrest.

39. *China News Service*, 2 March 2001 in BBC Monitoring, “State Council approves plan to control Xinjiang’s Tarim River Valley,” 4 March 2001. In the 1990s, the World Bank had lent money the other way for large-scale irrigation programmes in the Tarim area, a proportion of it ending up in Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps projects.

40. Xinhua, 19 January 2002 in FBIS-CHI-2002-0119, 22 January 2002.

41. For a discussion on the lack of proper assessments in the design of state environmental programmes, see for instance He Qinglian, “Xibu da kaifa de huanjing yousi” (“The environmental concerns of the opening up of the west”), *China News Digest*, 24–30 August 2001, item 2.

42. See Judith Shapiro, *Mao’s War against Nature. Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

43. The Xinjiang PCC was established in 1957 by the demobilized Kuomintang and PLA troops, in the historical tradition of the peasant soldiers of the Ming dynasty. The PCC was disbanded after the Cultural Revolution, and reinstated by Deng Xiaoping, under the advice of Wang Zhen in 1980. Donald H. McMillen, “Xinjiang and the Production and Construction Corps: a Han organization in a non-Han region,” *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 6 (1981), pp. 65–96. James Seymour, “Xinjiang’s Production and Construction Corps, and the sinification of Eastern Turkestan,” *Inner Asia* (special issue: Xinjiang), Vol. 2, No. 2 (2000), pp. 171–193.

The Corps has over 16 million *mu* of farmland, about a third of Xinjiang's arable land; and a total population which is 12.9 per cent of the autonomous region. Overwhelmingly Han (88 per cent) it accounts for approximately one out of three Han registered in Xinjiang and 13.2 per cent of the autonomous region's GDP.⁴⁴ It functions as a Party organization, and its entire leadership structure and bureaucracy is composed of Party members, with an overwhelming majority coming from the military. Organized along military lines in 14 divisions, the Corps manages 174 agricultural and animal husbandry regiment farms, and 427 industrial, transport and commercial enterprises.⁴⁵ It operates its own judicial system (complete with justice departments, courts and prisons) and manages most of the labour camps of the region.⁴⁶

From a centre-periphery perspective the Corps functions as a direct vector of the centre: by virtue of being directly placed under the management of the State Council, it bypasses the proxy of the Xinjiang regional government and the PRC standard territorial-administrative structures to offer direct access wherever the Corps units are implanted. During the 1990s, the Corps was considerably strengthened, reversing decline, with the encouragement of new migrants, the expansion of its domain and activities, and the reinforcement of its institutional powers.⁴⁷ Still, it is not without deep-rooted problems. In a sense, it can be likened to a giant state-owned enterprise (SOE), with all the problems that plague that kind of enterprise: poor productivity and competitiveness, an ageing workforce, and mounting pension problems. It is vastly unprofitable and financially dependent on the central government budget, even though its economic activities generate considerable revenue and some of its units are even profitable. Budgetary data are scarce, but evidence indicates that over 80 per cent of the budget of the Corps comes from central government funds.⁴⁸

The Corps serves as a powerful colonizing force, reclaiming land to settle new immigrants from interior parts of China; securing the territory with a string of cities, farm complexes and industries; attracting demobilized soldiers to settle in Xinjiang; and consolidating territorial control – all of which are elements closely associated with the objectives of the campaign to Open Up the West. From the outset of the campaign, the XPCC has been vested with an important role. As the prominent scholar and government adviser on minority areas Ma Rong stressed:⁴⁹

44. *Xinjiang ribao*, 23 July 2002 in FBIS-CHI-2002-0807, 15 August 2002).

45. *Ibid.*

46. James D. Seymour and Richard Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts: Prison and Labor Reform Camps in China* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), esp. pp. 44–127.

47. Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the nineties," pp. 84–85.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Ma Rong had conducted a comprehensive study of the XPCC in 1997, when the central government ordered detailed studies on the situation in Xinjiang, alerted by the February uprising in the border town of Yining. For accounts of the uprising and the subsequent repression, see Amnesty International, "People's Republic of China: no justice for the victims of the 1997 crackdown in Gulja (Yining)," 4 February 2003.

The question of whether the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps can maintain stability and development influences the whole of Xinjiang. We believe that the future of the Corps is the most fundamental question regarding the stability and development of Xinjiang.⁵⁰

During the campaign to Open Up the West the Corps is to concentrate on the development of three municipalities promoted to the city (*shi*) level by the state (Ala'er, Tumusuke and Wujiaqu in northern Xinjiang); as well as the expansion of the Shihezi municipal area, the historical stronghold and headquarters of the *bingtuan*.⁵¹ The Corps is also a key player in the Tarim River rehabilitation project, and increasingly involved in construction, infrastructure, and mechanical and industrial service to the oil industry.

These policies aim to harness the national goals of migrant settlement into an economic strategy that draws on market economy mechanisms, and mark a departure from the previous period in which the focus was the sheer expansion of the Corps presence in Xinjiang.

Settler colonization. Settler colonization was at the core of the policies designed by the centre in the early 1990s. The sinicization of Xinjiang was seen as the ultimate solution for long-term stability of this borderland, now neighbouring three of the new independent Central Asian states.⁵² The policy was almost entirely covert, and up to the announcement of the campaign to Open Up the West the Chinese authorities had always denied charges of engineering state-sponsored population transfers and continuously underplayed the increased rate of the Han Chinese population settlement in minority areas, often by attributing it to "seasonal migrants."

In the case of Xinjiang, inconsistencies in the region's demographic data, published annually in statistical yearbooks or appearing in scientific articles, as well as empirical observation in the field, confirmed that the extent of Han migration was largely understated. As late as September 2000, Xinjiang's chairman Abulahat Abdurixit was maintaining that demographic increases in Xinjiang "mainly came from the ethnic population."⁵³ The publication of the results of the 2000 National Census shed some light on the scale of the influx of new Han settlers into Xinjiang. Even though very little data on Xinjiang have been released to date, they

50. Pan Naigu and Ma Rong, *Zhongguo xibu bianqu fazhan moshi yanjiu (Study of the Development Model of China's Western Borderlands)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 7.

51. "Shihezi City, the Greater Shihezi Reclamation Area, and the Shihezi National-Level Economic and Technological Development Zone are designated as key projects for Xinjiang and China's western regions at large," *China News Service*, 16 March 2003 in FBIS-CHI-2003-0316, 16 March 2003. "Three new cities established in Xinjiang," *People's Daily Online*, 19 January 2004.

52. Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the nineties."

53. "Moslem province free of race problems, China says," *DPA*, 26 September 2000.

show that probably between one and two million Han migrants have settled in Xinjiang over the past decade.⁵⁴

The census reveals that between 1990 and 2000, the Han population grew by almost a third (31.6 per cent), twice the growth rate of the ethnic population (15.9 per cent). At 7.49 million, the Han population now stands at 40.6 per cent of the regional total, a net gain of 3 per cent over 1990 (37.6 per cent).⁵⁵ Considering that minorities in Xinjiang have a much higher natural growth rate than the Han population, and taking into account the phenomenon of “return migrations” of retired Han personnel going back to their native provinces, these figures undoubtedly confirm the scale of vast in-migrations, which not only stopped the demographical trend of the 1980s (between 1980 and 1990, the share of the Han population had decreased from 41.6 per cent to 37.6 per cent), but reversed it dramatically. As a result, the ethnic minorities’ share for the first time in the history of Xinjiang went below 60 per cent (59.4 per cent) despite an overall increase of 1.5 million people during the decade.⁵⁶

The Corps played an important role in this reversal as it ended the decade with a population of 2.18 million Han under its jurisdiction (88 per cent of the 2.48 million strong organization) a net growth of 290,000 individuals.⁵⁷ The census also registered a population of 790,000 people “without a permanent place of residence.” This would seem to suggest a large number of Han migrant workers, some of whom could be expected to settle in Xinjiang in the future.⁵⁸ An unusual article by Xinhua released at the time of the release of the Xinjiang census data precisely acknowledged that “the augmentation of the floating population was a very important factor in explaining the comparatively high population rise in Xinjiang.”⁵⁹ Xinjiang topped all provincial-level administrations for population growth over the decade, at plus 27 per cent.⁶⁰

Population growth alone explains why Xinjiang, under the campaign to Open Up the West, has entered a phase of consolidation, in order to tackle the long-term consequences of such a rapid increase. First, there has been a progressive reduction in the hefty subvention for cotton

54. The official statistics based on the 1990 census projected that by 2000 the Han population would stand at 6.37 million – 1.12 million less than the number revealed by the 2000 census. *Kua shiji de Zhongguo renkou – Xinjiang fence (The Population of China Towards the 21st Century: Xinjiang Volume)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1994), table 13–7, p. 418.

55. The *Statistical Yearbook* had put the 2000 Han population figure considerably lower, at 6.87 million, or 38.7% of the regional total, over 2% lower than revealed by the Census. *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2001*, table 3–5, p. 109.

56. *Xinjiang ribao*, 3 April 2001 in FBIS-CHI-2001-0517, 18 July 2001.

57. Xinhua, “Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan shouci renkou bucha jiexiao” (“Publication of the first demographic census of the XPCC”), 6 June 2001. *Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp Statistical Yearbook 2002*, table 3–4, p. 53. This growth is particularly remarkable considering that up to 100,000 members leave, or retire from, the Corps annually.

58. This number probably includes workers from the Tarim oilfields and cadres temporarily dispatched to Xinjiang.

59. Xinhua Net “Renkou zeng fuda – liudong shi zhuyin” (“Great rise in population: migration is the main factor”), 3 April 2001.

60. *Ibid.*

growing (a major mechanism for the attraction of new settlers)⁶¹; secondly, the authorities have initiated a programme to incorporate formally the sojourners in the cities, in order to grant them access to public goods and services⁶²; thirdly, the government appears now to realize the unsustainability of rapidly diminishing water resource levels, which have dramatically plunged under the combined impact of large-scale reclamation and cotton cultivation, rapid urbanization, and the expansion of the oil industry.⁶³

Apart from the reversal of cotton policies, which is specific to Xinjiang, most of the measures associated with these policies of change echo the national policies set forth within the campaign to Open Up the West with its overall macro-economic blueprint of massive urbanization, and the creation of a strong domestic metropolitan market. If this hypothesis is correct, the region can be expected to continue to absorb migration from other provinces, although at a sensibly lower rate than during the 1990s. This growth will also be more concentrated in the cities, the process of accelerated urbanization and the extension of the urban network resulting both from the population gains of the 1990s and the incoming waves of migrants.

Outcomes and problems. Notwithstanding that the campaign to Open Up the West is still in its initial phase and that it is too early to measure its full impact on the future development of Xinjiang, preliminary examination indicates that infrastructure building has progressed rapidly. The central government reported in early 2003 having effectively invested more than 70 billion *yuan* (US\$8.36 billion) in building highways, power plants, dams and telecommunications facilities in Xinjiang.⁶⁴ Fixed asset investment in road transportation reached 10 billion *yuan* (US\$1.2 billion), a historic high,⁶⁵ and 10.7 billion *yuan* (US\$1.29 billion) had reportedly been invested in “pollution control and comprehensive treat-

61. Cotton production declined in 2002, after a decade of uninterrupted growth. Xinjiang Statistical Bureau, “2002 statistical communique of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.”

62. This is mainly conducted through household registration, with different schemes put in place since 1999, ranging from outright transfer, to the possibility of holding two household registrations, granting temporary residents the same status as permanent residents.

63. A case in point was the report of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, in the State Council Report to the 16th CPC National Congress. Under the section “Irrational use of Water Resources,” the report stated: “In large and medium irrigation areas, there is secondary saline soil due to improper irrigation and the rise of the underground water level. Wanton reclamation, grazing, cutting firewood, or excavation in areas between farming and pastoral land causes deterioration of land or even desertification. Irrational cultivation of crops and the farming system in agricultural land may lead to worsening of land and even desertification.” Qian Zhengying, “Report on results of strategic research on water resources allocation, ecological building and sustainable development in north-west regions (excerpts),” *Xinhua*, 26 February 2003 in FBIS-CHI-2003-0226, 25 March 2003. Desertification experts at the Chinese Academy of Forestry have long worried privately about the damage caused by the Corps’ large-scale reclamation programmes and no-holds barred population growth in Xinjiang.

64. “Xinjiang reports progress in infrastructure construction,” *Renmin ribao*, 30 March 2003.

65. *Xinhua*, 15 March 2003.

ment of the Tarim River.”⁶⁶ Provincial GDP growth in 2002 remained high (8.2 per cent per annum), even though rural–urban disparities continued to increase, as the annual urban GDP per capita progressed by 14.3 per cent (7,300 *yuan*), compared to 8.8 per cent in rural areas (1,861 *yuan*).⁶⁷ So far, it seems that the large-scale investments promised have effectively reached the autonomous region. The rapid pace of modernization and territorial integration are immediately observable by anyone travelling in urban or rural areas of Xinjiang. Yet crucial questions concerning the sustainability of this developmental approach remain.

In the first place, the XUAR does not seem much sounder economically now than it was before. It still has a minimal amount of FDI, strong dependence on the extraction of natural resources, and low prevalence of market-mechanisms in its key areas of production, resulting in a lack of competitiveness which will be heightened by China’s membership in the WTO. Its foreign trade structure reflects that Xinjiang is basically a transit point, not an emerging regional economic centre. Admittedly, foreign trade reached US\$2.34 billion at the end of 2002, almost double the 1999 figures (US\$1.76 billion)⁶⁸ but the real economic benefits are far from clear: a large proportion is actually politically motivated barter-trade between China and its central Asian neighbours (Kazakhstan accounts for half of the volume) and Xinjiang’s “exports” are essentially manufactured goods produced in the coastal areas. Given that the GDP of the Central Asian states has contracted by almost half since gaining independence, Xinjiang’s foreign trade potential seems to have plateau-ed after a few years of rapid growth, notwithstanding the claims of official statistics.

Secondly, it remains unclear whether Xinjiang’s overall development strategy will be ecologically sustainable in the long term. Future demographic pressure coming from an expected upsurge of the minority population (half of it today is below the age of 14)⁶⁹ combined with intensified urbanization, oil exploitation and further land reclamations might cause irreversible damage to the environment, threatening the very possibility of human settlement in many areas.⁷⁰

66. “Congress highlights western China’s development,” *People’s Daily* (English version), 13 November 2002.

67. Xinjiang Statistical Bureau, “2002 statistical communique.”

68. “Xinjiang reports progress in infrastructure construction,” *Renmin ribao*, 30 March 2003.

69. The authorities estimate that by 2015, the total population will reach 23.47 million (an annual growth of 340,000). *People’s Daily Online*, “Xinjiang sees annual population growth of 340,000,” 9 June 2000.

70. Only about 4.3% of Xinjiang’s land area is fit for human habitation, and population density is already extremely high, at 249 per square kilometre. *People’s Daily Online*, “Xinjiang sees annual population growth of 340,000,” 9 June 2000. In addition to the Tarim river crisis and increased desertification, recent evolutions include the complete drying-up of the river which used to flow through the capital Urumqi, and the shrinking of the Ebonur lake (23 square kilometers per year) downstream of the industrial centre of Bole (northern Xinjiang). The impact of Chinese water works on transnational rivers flowing to Central Asia is of mounting concern for its neighbours. “Traffic flows where river once did,” *South China Morning Post*, 19 July 2002.

Thirdly, the socio-economic development of ethnic minorities continues to fall behind on all indicators: southern Xinjiang (with a 95 per cent non-Han population) has an average per capita income half the provincial average.⁷¹ In the more prosperous eastern Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, bordering Kazakhstan, 98 per cent of the officially designed “poor” population are non-Han. Rural under-employment is acute, accompanied by a diminution of the cultivable area per capita. Earlier surveys have showed that about one-third of the Uighur population is underemployed, and in certain districts, up to 45 per cent of the population registered have actually left to find work elsewhere.⁷² If this pattern of rural migrations is not substantially different from the situation observed in the rest of China,⁷³ the problems Uighurs face in finding jobs in the cities are incomparably higher, generating a growing urban underclass in the cities’ suburbs. The campaign to Open Up the West, serving primarily as a vehicle for the interests of the state, gives no sign of altering this discriminative pattern.

Nation Building

Although the use of the concept of “nation building” calls for extreme methodological prudence,⁷⁴ a number of rhetorical devices in the framework of the campaign to Open Up the West would seem to allude to nation-building perspectives: the theme of “manifest destiny”; the civilizing imperative; the rich resources lying untapped that “wait” for the spiritual impulse of the “Chinese nation” for their exploitation; and the ambition of the Chinese nation to “stand up” in the international environment.⁷⁵

A paradigm shift in national minorities doctrine. If these themes are not entirely new in the history of the PRC, a distinctive feature of the nation-building effort embedded in the campaign to Open Up the West is that it has prompted a paradigm shift in the minority nationalities policies of the Chinese Communist Party. As amply discussed by scholars of minority issues, an insurmountable internal contradiction lies in the foundations of the PRC nationality system: the autonomy of minority areas and the development of “national characteristics” will ultimately

71. *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2002*.

72. Jiang Liyun, “Xinjiang Weiwu’erzu nongmin de renkou liudong” (“The Uighur floating population of Xinjiang”), *Xibei minzu yanjiu (North-west Nationalities Studies)*, No. 1 (1998), pp. 91–99.

73. See Rachel Murphy, *How Migrant Labor is Changing China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

74. See for instance Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity: Ethnonationalism in Comparative Perspective* (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1993).

75. See David Goodman’s “Introduction” in this volume.

result in their assimilation.⁷⁶ Although autonomy is largely fictional in terms of political power, the system has nevertheless generated or strengthened the ethno-national consciousness of the “nationalities” recognized by the state.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the state’s nationalities theory remained fundamentally unchanged, and hardly departed from petrified Marxist phraseology. The only notable addition at this time was that the economic disparities between minority areas and the developed areas became the legitimate identified cause of sustained “problems” and “contradictions” (especially in Xinjiang and Tibet).⁷⁷ Most of the propaganda work therefore revolved around the argument that economic development would naturally resolve these problems, and that once minorities enjoyed higher standards of living, they would abandon their ethno-nationalist aspirations. However, in Xinjiang, this doctrinal principle proved increasingly unsustainable. On the one hand, the selective introduction of market mechanisms in the local economy was clearly engineered to favour the Han segment of the population and entice migrations to the region. On the other, the increased institutional discrimination eroded the real, if limited, preferential rights given to the minorities (such as statutory bureaucratic positions of prestige, places at schools and university, employment in the state sector). This growingly glaring contradiction had a direct impact on the long-term stability of Xinjiang, as it deprived the local indigenous bureaucracy of arguments to counter the Uighur population’s feeling of being increasingly colonized, ultimately eroding this indispensable mediating echelon of the state apparatus.⁷⁸

In June 2000, the publication of a landmark article by the head of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Li Dezhu, in *Qiushi* (*Seeking Truth*) the authoritative journal of the CCP on doctrinal issues, signalled a radical alteration of nationality policies, probably initiated by the Central Committee Nationality Work Conference held the previous year. “Everything is fresh in turn-of-the-century China,” wrote Li Dezhu, “and implementation of the campaign to Open Up the West has enabled our nationality work to enter a new historical era.”⁷⁹ The article explicitly acknowledged that the state was now aiming at fostering increased migrations to

76. June T. Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions, Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the PRC* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Colin Mackerras, *China’s Minorities, Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

77. Nicolas Becquelin, “Trouble on the marches: interethnic tensions and endemic poverty in the national minority areas,” *China Perspectives*, No. 10 (March–April 1997).

78. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that it was during the 1990s that indigenous Uighur cadres have become the prime target of ethno-nationalist Uighur groups. At the same time, the authorities started to allocate a growing number of Han cadres at the local level. On the indispensable, if only symbolically, function of the mediating indigenous bureaucracy, see Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

79. Li Dezhu, “Xibu da kaifa yu minzu wenti” (“The Opening of the West and China’s nationality problem”), *Qiushi* (*Seeking Truth*), 1 June 2000).

national minorities areas (“the peacock flying west”) in order to dilute the ethnic populations in the border areas (a process termed *ningjuhua* – homogenization) and strengthen national unity. Perhaps even more significantly, the document warned that inter-ethnic conflicts were likely to be heightened by this process:

In keeping with the increased population flow of the various ethnic groups, there will be some changes in the proportions of the nationalities. There will also be some conflicts and clashes in their contacts. If this is not handled well, it will have a deleterious effect on national unity and social stability, and should draw a high level of attention.⁸⁰

This change in the articulation of the CCP’s doctrine on national minorities cannot be overstated. Tibet and Xinjiang scholars have long noted that hint of increased Han migrations was an absolute political anathema, the authorities always denying forcefully what was plainly apparent to any casual observer, and a strict censorship being imposed on academic studies and statistical data on the issue.

Li Dezhu’s landmark article read as a programmatic document, a disclosure of the “real” objectives of the campaign to Open Up the West, as opposed to the rhetoric of “common prosperity” which had prevailed until then. But it also signalled closure: as the long-sought objective of seamless integration of minority nationalities into the “Chinese nation” draws near, history has entered an end-game, and there is no necessity to proceed with caution and coded double-speak any more. This shift is thus essentially a narrowing between the unstated and the stated goals of policies regarding minority nationality areas. It reflects the new-found confidence that the party-state now has sufficient control and power to take any counter-measure needed.

The candid acknowledgement that accelerated integration will in all probability generate ethnic strife goes against everything previously said on how economic development would bridge the differences between the Han and the national minorities. In Xinjiang, this doctrinal change led to the acknowledgement by the Xinjiang Party secretary that economic development would not be sufficient to placate separatism in Xinjiang:

Currently, there is a belief that the first priority for Xinjiang is to develop its economy. These people believe that after Xinjiang’s economy develops, people’s living standards will improve so the issue of stability will be resolved naturally. This belief is wrong and dangerous. Economic development cannot eliminate separatists and cannot prevent them from separating from the motherland and seeking independence.⁸¹

This statement signalled a real paradigm shift to the Xinjiang party-state apparatus, contradicting the entire rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s. From

80. *Ibid.*

81. *AFP*, 19 January 2003, quoting *China News Service*. FBIS-CHI-2003-0119, 21 January 2003.

the national minorities' vantage point, the inner distrust and unevenness of the playing-field had long been evident, as any manifestation of cultural identity was immediately interpreted as intended to foster "separatism" and criminalized.⁸²

A 2001 high-level investigation report of the Xinjiang CCP Committee is worth quoting at some length for its exceptional disclosure of the deterioration of the position of ethnic groups under the retreat of the state-command economy and the introduction of market forces:

The strategy of "choosing from both sides" [Han and national minorities] in hiring has been more and more challenged following the establishment and perfecting of the market economic system. ...

The power of intervention of the government has continuously decreased, and the difficulties of finding a job for the minority labourers have become bigger and bigger, especially in contracted farm work and non-public industrial work; and implementing equal opportunities measures have become less and less practicable.⁸³

Future prospects are also jeopardized by a comparative degradation in education:

All graduates [in Xinjiang] face job affectation difficulties. But compared to Han graduates, it is harder for minority graduates to find work. Moreover, in recent years, schooling fees for higher and university education have gone up by a big margin, making it more and more difficult for minority candidates to attend.⁸⁴

These conclusions indicate that the Party leadership is well aware that policies conducted over the past decade have actually increased the marginalization of ethnic minorities, in manifest contradiction to all official statements underscoring vast improvements in minorities' living standards and statutory rights.⁸⁵ One way in which the campaign to Open Up the West aims to avoid this marginalization is by concentrating on shifting education to Modern Standard Chinese, a policy that serves both the employability of national minorities and their ultimate acculturation.

82. The absence of distinction between peaceful and violent actions is the foremost characteristic of the crackdown on "separatism" in Xinjiang. A template article by the vice-director of the office of the XUAR People's Congress states for instance: "Xinjiang independence elements have changed their combat tactics since the September 11 incident ... They have focused on attacking China on the ideological front instead of using their former frequent practice of engaging in violent terrorist operations." *China News Agency*, 13 March 2002 in FBIS-CHI-2002-0313, 25 March 2002.

83. Study Group of the Xinjiang CCP Committee, "Guanyu zhengque renshi he chuli xingshi xia Xinjiang minzu wenti de diaocha baogao" ("Investigative report on correctly apprehending and resolving Xinjiang's nationality problems under the new situation"), February 2001. Reproduced in *Makesizhuyi yu xianshi (Marxism and Actuality)* (February 2001), pp. 34–38.

84. *Ibid.*

85. Statutory provisions on minority rights are in any case seldom significant in socio-economic terms. As Friedrich A. Von Hayek wrote in 1944: "It has been shown there that it is possible to pursue a policy of ruthless discrimination against national minorities by the use of recognised instruments of economic policy, without ever infringing the letter of the statutory protection of minority rights." Friedrich August von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 2001, first ed. 1944), p. 90.

Linguistic policies. The emphasis given to linguistic assimilation within Open Up the West policies in Xinjiang is clearly an attempt to homogenize the culture and identity of citizens, as well as to ensure the dominance of the Chinese language. Modern Standard Chinese was already indispensable in all higher education institutions, notwithstanding the various legal dispositions stipulating that autonomous (minority nationality) areas are free to organize their curriculum in their own language. A non-systematic policy of progressively supplanting indigenous languages at the primary level had also been observed. What the Open Up the West strategy seems to institute though, is the systematization of this process, as well as the allocation of important financial means to do so.

A string of decisions has accelerated the shift to an all-Chinese education in the autonomous region, culminating in March 2002 with the introduction of Chinese from the third year in primary schools and the decision to teach almost all courses in Chinese at Xinjiang University and other institutions of higher learning.⁸⁶ There is certainly a view among officials that minority languages are somewhat inferior to Chinese. Party Secretary Wang Lequan justified the decision by the necessity to “improve the quality of ethnic minorities” because indigenous languages were “out of step with the 21st century.”⁸⁷ Scholars have observed that the language policy currently implemented “implicitly categorizes the Uyghur language as disloyal.”⁸⁸ Local populations consider this shift towards a Chinese education with ambivalent feelings: on the one hand, they resent the fact that their children have to learn Chinese, which comes with a strong governmental message. On the other, many parents recognize that the ability to speak Chinese increases the chances of receiving a better education and can be a considerable advantage in the labour market.

Placating Ethno-nationalism

In assessing the long-term impact of the campaign to Open Up the West, the ultimate question rests with whether the development of Xinjiang will succeed in placating ethno-nationalism. This complex question can be approached from two angles. In the first place, both the fluidity of social processes in a transitional economy and the importance

86. “China orders end to instruction in Uyghur at top Xinjiang University,” *AFP*, 28 May 2002.

87. Wang Lequan explained: “The languages of the minority nationalities have very small capacities and do not contain many of the expressions in modern science and technology, which makes education in these concepts impossible. This is out of step with the 21st century. This is why the Chinese language is now used as the medium of instruction from the third grade in primary school in Xinjiang, to overcome the language barrier and obstacles to development. This way, the quality of the Uyghur youth will not be poorer than that of their Han peers when they grow up.” *Wen wei po* (Hong Kong), 2 August 2002 in FBIS-CHI-2002-0307, 3 August 2002.

88. Michael Dillon, “Uyghur language and culture under threat in Xinjiang,” *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 14 August 2002.

of symbolic negotiations between state and society caution strongly against giving an essentialist answer: the acculturation of elite groups in the urban environment, as observed in Xinjiang,⁸⁹ does not guarantee that economic prosperity will necessarily overcome any problems of ethno-national identity. Besides, as Connor has demonstrated in his study of post-soviet Central Asia, ethno-national claims can resurface long after they appeared only marginally important with replacement by other factors such as economic development or the emergence of supranational elites.⁹⁰

Secondly, as Gladney and others have suggested, a critical factor for understanding the positioning of ethnic groups vis-à-vis the Chinese state (and therefore, their “loyalty” to it) is the geographic-symbolic location of political, cultural, economic and religious centres on which these groups are based.⁹¹ Most Uighurs centre their idea of the state away from Beijing, either in an independent East Turkestan, or in a pan-ethnic Central Asian caliphate. Similarly, the religious centres are clearly Islamic, located in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan. The cultural centres are also clearly of Turkish and Central Asian nature, even though in those two regions Chinese Uighurs are today considered to be the holders of the “traditions” because they have been less acculturated than the citizens of the former Soviet Union.⁹² Likewise, Kazakhs and other Central Asian ethnic groups centre their idea of the state on the eponymous countries across the borders.

This point is important in shedding light on why the “inescapability argument” (the unstoppable advance of the “Chinese juggernaut”) often advanced in Western diplomatic and policy circles is unhelpful for understanding the underpinning processes whose interplay commands change in Xinjiang. According to this argument, the progression of the “juggernaut,” with all its economic, political and cultural might, into peripheral territory ultimately makes irrelevant the consideration of how indigenous groups may react or resist because, given the initial balance of power, the outcome is clear from the outset. The concept of alternate centres highlights why, in the case of ethnic groups who construe their primary self-identification outside the Chinese state, assimilation (and thus political loyalty to Beijing) will never be either complete or irreversible. Ethno-national movements have dynamics of their own, which have

89. See Joanne N. Smith, “Four generations of Uyghurs. The shift towards ethno-political ideologies among Xinjiang’s Youth,” *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2002), pp. 195–224; Joanne N. Smith, “Making culture matter: symbolic, spatial, and social boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese,” *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2002), pp. 153–174.

90. See Walker Connor, “Soviet policies toward the non-Russian peoples in theoretic and historic perspective: what Gorbachev inherited,” in Alexander J. Motyl (ed.), *The Post-Soviet Nations: Perspectives on the Demise of the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 30–49; Edward Allworth (ed.), *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

91. Dru C. Gladney (ed.), *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey & the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

92. See Beller-Hann, “Locked in conflict”; Sean Roberts, “Negotiating locality, Islam and national culture in a changing borderland. The revival of the *mashrap* ritual among young Uyghur men in the Ili Valley,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1998).

the potential to override obstacles set up by the dominating power. In the context of Xinjiang, radical Islam, with multiple centres in the immediate vicinity (Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Ferghana valley) and a proven history of influence in Xinjiang, is an obvious magnet for ethno-national aspirations in the near future, notwithstanding the historical characteristics of non-radical traditional Islam in the region.

The “staged development” of Xinjiang – both in sequential and symbolic terms – that is orchestrated by the campaign to Open Up the West reflects in essence a classic process of consolidation by the central state.⁹³ Yet, the dynamics of penetration and resistance between the centre and what still remains a periphery populated by indigenous peoples can be expected to generate at the same time increased sinicization and increased ethno-national unrest in the future.

93. In Durkheim’s words, a process where “the central state ... progressively expands on all the surface of the territory an increasingly tight and complex network of ramifications that substitutes itself to the preexistent local organs or assimilate them.” Emile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 2000, first ed. 1893), p. 200.