Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine the question of how the USSR established and maintained Soviet hegemony in Xinjiang, also known as Chinese Turkestan, and made best the local governor’s pro-Soviet administration to maximize its national interests roughly from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. In a broader sense, by studying the Soviet-Xinjiang relations during that period of time, this thesis attempts to illustrate how it is effective to transfer the Stalinist model to the areas outside the Soviet Union. It also seeks the answers as to how a centralized great power and a second country’s peripheral regions form their relationship and interact with each other.

In order to demonstrate that Moscow integrated Xinjiang into the USSR’s economic and defense systems, and took advantages of the localized Stalinism in Xinjiang to regulate its subjects and better its socialist transformation in Central Asia, this thesis is divided into five chapters to discuss related issues. Chapter one brings up the specific topic and frames the argument of this thesis. Following that, the second chapter briefly surveys Xinjiang’s geographic and historical background, and discusses both the legacies of Chinese rule in Xinjiang and unavoidable Russian influences there. Chapter three examines how the pro-Soviet governor Sheng in 1930s became obsessed with Stalinism, and how he borrowed Stalinist administrative models to legitimate his rule in Xinjiang. Moreover, the third chapter also discusses the Sino-Soviet relations in 1930s, which made the Soviet Union’s penetration in Xinjiang possible. Chapter four, the main chapter of
this thesis, analyzes the Soviet-Xinjiang relations from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s in a detailed way. It spells out how the USSR benefited from strengthening its presence in Xinjiang and keeping Xinjiang within its sphere of influences. The last chapter generalizes a conclusion and goes to the legacies of Soviet influences in Xinjiang during Sheng’s tenure.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents.
Acknowledgments

I acknowledge and express gratitude for the detailed assistance of my advisor Dr. David Hoffmann and thesis committee members Dr. Morgan Liu and Dr. Scott Levi. I also acknowledge the assistance of The Slavic Center at The Ohio State University.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Northwest China, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, is home to multiple ethnic groups, most of which are Turkic-speaking Muslims, who have settled there for centuries. Linking up China, Russia and Central Asian countries, Xinjiang has both witnessed and involved itself into a number of historical events between the former Soviet Union and China throughout the vibrant 20th century.

Both China and Russia experienced dramatic social transformation in the early 20th century. The Xinhai Revolution overthrew China’s last imperialist Dynasty, Qing, and immediately plunged Chinese society into a chaotic situation. Busy coping with varied parties and social groups vying for power, the Kuomintang Chinese government could pay very limited attention to its northwest frontier. In contrast, after the Russian October Revolution, a new socialist state, Soviet Russia, later the USSR, with new political and economic institutions and new communist ideology, came into being. Both sides’ changes profoundly shifted the geopolitical context in which Xinjiang was situated. Xinjiang’s fate from the late 1910 to the 1940s, although regularly swaying between China and the USSR, began to be increasingly driven by inescapable influences from the Soviet Union.

In this thesis, I will focus on a specific period in Xinjiang’s history, roughly from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s, when a pro-Soviet warlord, Sheng Shicai was ruling
Xinjiang. By discussing both Sheng’s adherence to Stalinism and Soviet manipulative policies towards Xinjiang, I argue that Moscow integrated Xinjiang into Soviet Union’s economy and defense system during Sheng’s tenure, establishing and sustaining Soviet hegemony over that region. Also, making well use of Sheng’s Stalinist policies in Chinese Turkestan, which was culturally bonded with Soviet Central Asia, Moscow strengthened its authority in the Soviet East, and furthered its transformation of Central Asian society. By studying the Soviet-Xinjiang interactions from the mid-1930s to the first years of the 1940s, this thesis demonstrates how it is effective to transfer the Stalinist model to the areas outside the Soviet Union; in a broad sense, it also attempts to explore the possibilities of the relations between a centralized great power and a second country’s peripheral regions.

This thesis is divided into five chapters to analyze how the Soviet Union took historical, economic, political and social advantages to maximally benefit from keeping Xinjiang within the sphere of Soviet influence. Following this introduction, chapter two will first present a brief overview of Xinjiang’s geographic and historical background. In order to provide a clear historical setting for the argument, chapter two will also survey the legacies of Chinese rule in Xinjiang and the growing impacts from the Russian Empire in the early 20th century.

A new Xinjiang governor, Sheng Shicai, took office in 1933. Attempting to marginalize the Chinese Kuomintang influence and establishing his own fiefdom there, he turned to the more powerful Soviet Union. Sheng’s intimacy with Moscow profoundly changed Xinjiang’s fate during his tenure. The third chapter will take a detailed look at
how Stalinism was grafted onto Xinjiang and how Sheng’s enthusiastic practices of Stalinism legitimized the Soviet penetration in Xinjiang. Apart from Sheng’s willingness to cooperate with Moscow and Moscow’s active response, the Soviet Union’s penetration in Xinjiang was conditioned by the Chinese government’s tacit permission in the wartime as well. Thus, chapter three will also examine the complicated Sino-Soviet relations since the mid-1930s to spell out the factors that contributed to Chinese Kuomintang Government’s allowance of the USSR’s manipulation over Xinjiang.

In chapter four, the core chapter of this thesis, I will discuss how the Soviet Union drew Xinjiang completely into its Soviet orbit and handled Xinjiang affairs in line with its national interests from three points. First, Xinjiang’s economy had been heavily depended on trade with the Soviet Union. This heavy economic dependency conceded Moscow the power to interfere with Xinjiang’s economic affairs, allowing the Soviet Union to obtain the opportunity of seizing upon natural resources and raw materials in Xinjiang. Second, with the pending war threat from Japan in the late 1930s, Moscow regularized the Soviet military presence in Xinjiang and thus incorporated Xinjiang into the USSR’s defense system. As a matter of fact, Xinjiang served as Soviet protective buffer zone, which would strategically check Japanese invasion of the Soviet East, alleviating the Red Army’s concern about fighting on the East front line. Third, the spread of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the institutionalization of Stalinism in Xinjiang constituted a favorable external environment for Moscow to administer Soviet citizens, particularly Central Asians, and fulfill its ambitious modernization-oriented domestic transformative tasks in Central Asia.
Chapter five concludes this thesis with a brief review of the ending of Soviet hegemony in Xinjiang. The year of 1941 saw Nazi Germany’s destructive attack on the USSR and some major military losses of the USSR. In the wake of the USSR’s military suffering on the Soviet-German front, the Chinese Kuomintang government facilitated the dispatch of British and in particular, American forces to Xinjiang to counterbalance Soviet influence, and pushed the Soviets out of Xinjiang in 1943. In addition, the last chapter will summarize the historical legacies of the USSR’s influence in Xinjiang during Sheng’s tenure.

Both primary and secondary sources are used in this thesis. Most primary sources are Russian-written and Chinese-written, including compilations of documents on Sino-Soviet relations, collections of documents on the Comintern, the All-Union Communist Party, and some pieces of materials on Chinese rule in Xinjiang. Secondary sources consist of various books, monographs, and journal and periodical articles, etc., written in English, Russian and Chinese. While some of the Russian and Chinese sources contain national biases, I hope that this range of sources will help interpret the historical events thoroughly, and balance the perspectives of views in different languages.
Chapter 2: Chinese Xinjiang and Russian Influence

Brief Geographic and Historical Background of Xinjiang

Xinjiang, literally translated as “new frontier”, also known as Chinese Turkestan, is situated in the northwest of China, encompassing nearly one-sixth of the country’s total area. Taking a brief tour throughout the vast territory of China, one is impressed by the northwest frontier’s distinctive cultural landscape and its unique Turkic-Muslim population, especially compared with many other interior or coastal Han-dominated provinces.

Seen from the topographic map of Xinjiang, this region, especially its southern part, is covered by massive deserts. Thanks to seasonal rivers and lakes dotted across the desert, which grant Xinjiang rich pastures and oases, the seemingly harsh land actually is habitable. This habitability allowed this region to cradle its sedentary agricultural and commercial civilization, and unique cultures.

Uyghurs, as well as some other Turkic-speaking Muslims, who are typically considered the area’s aboriginal inhabitants, moved to and settled in this region in the 9th century. Throughout Xinjiang’s history, the local Turkic groups have sporadically either established some city-based states on various scales, or formed an independent unified state. But for most of the time, the fate of Xinjiang swayed between the Turkic Khanates to the west and the east Chinese empires. The Mongols integrated Uyghurs into their
great empire in the 13th century and dispatched them to some posts of civil service. Islam took hold during Mongol rule in the 10th century, and eventually became institutionalized in the 17th century. Also around that time, the Turkicized and Islamized culture in Xinjiang came into being, substantially separating local Turkic Muslims from their Chinese neighbors, whom the Uyghur population began to inevitably and increasingly encounter. The confrontation with Chinese, after the 18th century, profoundly constructed the modern history of Xinjiang. In terms of the local Turkic-speaking Muslims’ reaction, tentative allegiance with Chinese and zealous, violent resistances to Chinese rule either coexisted, or took place alternately.

**Chinese Rule and Russian Influences in Xinjiang**

Although most state-co-opted Chinese scholars, especially historians, insist that Xinjiang has been a part of China’s territory since ancient times, Xinjiang actually hadn’t been fully taken under Chinese emperors’ rule until the mid-18th century. The last imperial Chinese dynasty, Qing, continuously dispatched troops to conquer the remote northwest region, until the region had been brought under the empire’s administration. However, local Turkic-speaking Muslims revolted against the Qing’s rule intermittently for decades.

In 1884, with a major revolt of Turkic Muslims being crushed, Xinjiang was officially incorporated into China as a province. Taking a retrospective look at the Chinese administration of Xinjiang from historiographies, most historians acknowledge

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that political coercion and pervasive military rule helped the local provincial governors consolidate power and maintain their prestige.\(^2\)

In 1911, the Chinese Xinhai Revolution overthrew China’s last imperial dynasty, the Qing, followed by the establishment of the Republic of China. All of Chinese society was experiencing dramatic changes, but in Xinjiang affairs changed very little. New provincial administrator, Yang Zengxin, replacing the previous Qing-appointed governor in 1912, actually continued the same practices as his predecessors.

Due to the instability of China’s political situation from the 1910s to the 1930s, Chinese republican government was too busy dealing with constantly emerging political crises in China proper to give some thought to Xinjiang’s situation. Being in a state of China’s neglect, Yang’s administration in Xinjiang could enjoy even more freedom to strengthen his own dictatorial reign. In order to maintain his superior authority, Yang adopted conservative policies to keep Xinjiang independent from outside, particularly China proper’s, economic, political and intellectual influences. Owen Lattimore, who once travelled to Xinjiang during Yang’s tenure, described Xinjiang as a “hermetically sealed province”.\(^3\) Yang was determined to develop Xinjiang’s infrastructure and economy, enriching Xinjiang through Xinjiang’s own resources and own enterprises. However, the governor-imposed economic isolation made it impossible to fulfill his promise. Without outside investment and an external market, Xinjiang’s industry and commerce had little opportunities to expand and flourish. Therefore, Xinjiang’s economy


drowned into a stagnant state for a long time and correspondingly, local Muslims’ living standards deteriorated during Yang’s tenure.

As for the domestic political sphere, Yang proactively employed political coercion and extensive military rule to curb rebellions led by some local Muslim leaders, aiming to challenge the authority of the Chinese governor. Every time local Muslim groups were about to rise up in revolts against the Han governor’s rule, the governmental troops would soon show up and put down any burgeoning insurrections, containing the spread of local rebellious sentiments.

As Chinese historian Pengxi Zhu indicates, there were two features in Xinjiang from the early 1910s through the 1930s. First, Yang maintained a surface stability in Xinjiang society, which means that there were no large-scale ethnic frictions or unmanageable violent internal conflicts. But local Muslims’ accumulated discontent with the deterioration of their living standard and their deep antagonism towards the Chinese rule, lurking underneath the veneer of stability, would eventually burst into uncontrollable massive uprisings later. Second, although Yang was keen to keep external influences at bay, he couldn’t hold back the increasing influences from Russia penetrating Xinjiang. The nuanced relation with Russia, later the Soviet Union, consistently raised tricky questions to Xinjiang’s governors.

Geographically, given the region’s proximity of Russia Empire and the Soviet Union, Xinjiang’s fate could hardly escape from Russian influences. In the 19th century,

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5 Zhu, Peiming, Xinjiang Geming Shi (Urumqi: Xinjiang Renmin Press, 1993), 68-70.
the expansive Russian Empire had considered Xinjiang to be the crucial area for potential Russian absorption. Although Xinjiang escaped complete absorption, Russia never meant to loosen its ties with Xinjiang and always kept an eye on this region, making sure that Xinjiang’s situation wouldn’t go beyond Russia’s control.⁶ In strategic terms, Russia highly valued Xinjiang’s natural resources and raw materials, which were in demand by Russian Turkestan’s construction and economic development. Also, Xinjiang served as the massive transitional zone between Russia and China proper, by maneuvering which Russia might overlook and flexibly deal with the unpredictable affairs in Eastern Asia. Even before the stormy 1917 Revolution, imperialist Russia, being inextricably involved in World War I, still planned to build telegraph lines in Xinjiang, promoting its communications with outside, particularly with Russia.⁷

By the time the October Revolution broke out, Russia’s fixed policies to strengthen the tie with Xinjiang indeed brought this region much closer to the Russian sphere, particularly institutionalizing the Russia’s massive economic influences in Xinjiang.

Despite the Xinjiang government’s discouraging attitude towards foreign trade during Yang’s tenure, Russian-Xinjiang mutual trade in tea, precious metals, furs and daily household goods almost quadrupled from R800,000 in the late 1880s to R3,000,000 in the year of 1916.⁸ It was convenient to do business with Russia, for it only took a few days for Russian good to reach Xinjiang from Russian Turkestan. In contrast, due to

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⁶ According to Share, Britain threatened that Russia’s annexation of Xinjiang would cause a war between Britain and Russia, repelling Russia’s act.
⁸ Ibid., 394.
Xinjiang’s remoteness from the Chinese economic centers, Chinese goods usually reached Xinjiang after a three-month journey. Therefore, Xinjiang’s exchange of its raw materials for Russian manufactured goods played a considerable role in the Xinjiang economy.\(^9\)

In addition, Xinjiang’s economic dependency on trade with Russia inevitably resulted in Xinjiang society’s susceptibility to any change of Russian internal affairs. For example, as the political situation deteriorated in Russia after 1915, trade between Russia and Xinjiang correspondingly declined. Xinjiang’s goods, such as cotton and precious metals suddenly found no ready market, and Russian cloth, sugar and other consumer goods were falling into short supply. With the large drop in the value of the ruble, which dragged the Xinjiang teal with it, serious inflation went unchecked in Xinjiang. Shrinking economic activities and inflation left local people in increasingly dire economic strait.\(^10\)

The precarious economic situation contributed to local social and political destabilization, challenging the governor’s ability to keep order in Xinjiang’s everyday life.

Russia’s Xinjiang policy was inherited by the Soviet Union later. Maintaining Xinjiang’s economic dependency on the Soviet Union set the tone for Stalin’s strategy to manage the Soviet-Xinjiang relation in the 1930s. As spelled out in chapter four, through the economic leverage, Stalin would further influence and intervene with other Xinjiang local affairs.

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\(^9\) Millward, Eurasian Crossroad: A History of Xinjiang, 186.
Chapter 3: China and Sheng Shicai’s Stalinist Xinjiang

Sheng Shicai and His Stalinism in Xinjiang

Thanks to Yang’s iron-fisted rule, Xinjiang appeared calm during his tenure. But the calm was just on the surface. The accumulated dissatisfaction with Yang’s oppressive administration, with his successor’s misrule, and with the sprouting Turkic nationalism, eventually erupted, plunging the early 1930s’ Xinjiang into an abyss of rebellions and inter-ethnic bloodletting.

The chaotic situation of the 1930s in Xinjiang prompted the appointment of a new governor from Nanjing, Sheng Shicai. Sheng’s debut signified his repressive and bloody rule in Xinjiang for ensuing years. In the early 1930s, he made short work of rebellious forces, making himself the “omnipotent” leader in Xinjiang. What Sheng later established in Xinjiang was a pro-Soviet realm. Furthermore, taking an overall look at Sheng’s dictatorial rule and his policies in Xinjiang, one can hardly ignore the intriguing parallels between Sheng’s reign and Soviet Stalinism.

Focusing on Sheng’s administration in Xinjiang, as well as the specific domestic and international political, social and economic conditions in his period, this section will access Sheng’s motives for adoption of Stalinism and analyze how Sheng’s reign foreshadowed and legitimated the Soviet full-scale penetration in Xinjiang.
First, Sheng inherited the former Xinjiang governor’s mentality of warlord, only putting more effort forth than his predecessors to hold Xinjiang as his own fiefdom. He endeavored to minimize the association with Chinese Kuomintang government, which, at that time, was gradually recovering from the 1920s’ incessant fighting among warlords, and began to effectively wield political authority over China. Given that Xinjiang only bordered China proper and the Soviet Union, it’s very natural for Sheng to turn to the Soviet Union for keeping his fiefdom from being incorporated into Chiang Kai-shek’s centralized political and economic domination.

Second, being different from his conservative predecessors, most of whom viewed safeguarding the region’s political stability as priority, Sheng’s ambition was to develop Xinjiang’s economy, and to bring tangible prosperity to Xinjiang. After Sheng’s assumption of power, one essential duty he declared that the provincial government had was to construct a “New Xinjiang”.\(^{11}\) Sheng’s vision of “New Xinjiang” was shaped by his understanding of Stalin’s striking achievements of building socialism in the USSR. Sheng was impressed and inspired not only by how effectively Stalin industrialized the relatively backward country, but also by the USSR’s dedication to the mission of civilizing its subjects and acculturating the society.\(^{12}\) Sheng was well receiving Stalin’s message that “backward Russia would soon become ‘Soviet America’”, as Stalin hoped.\(^{13}\)

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12 Dajun Zhang, Xinjiang Fengbao Qishi Nian. (Taipei: Lanxì Press, 1980), 971. Also see Barmin, SSSR i Sintsian, 1918-1941 (Barnaul: Izdatel’stvo Barnaul’skogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta, 1999), 70.
In order to materialize his ambitions, Sheng carried out a series of positive reforms, which did to some degree promote the modernization in Xinjiang, including the constructions of schools, the establishment of modern medical services, and the creation of an environment friendly to trade and business, etc.¹⁴ Needless to say, Sheng needed the Soviet market, to which Xinjiang exported the raw materials as the important means to gain the governmental fiscal revenues. Also, Sheng needed direct economic aid from the USSR. He negotiated two loans totaling 7.5 million gold rubles to instantly construct and renovate Xinjiang’s backward infrastructure. In doing so, as James Millward points out, Sheng all but mortgaged his government and Xinjiang to Stalin.¹⁵

Furthermore, Sheng introduced the Stalinist planned economy into his economic programs in Xinjiang. Being surprised by the Soviet Union’s remarkable economic growth during the Great Depression while the capitalist world was struggling, Sheng became obsessed with the Stalinist industrialization and wanted to witness Xinjiang’s breakthrough in economic development, particularly industrial development.¹⁶ Sheng’s borrowing of Stalinism in the economic sphere paved the way for the influx of Soviet experts, economic advisors, and engineers, who, instead of helping fulfill the tasks of economic construction in Xinjiang, would take control over Xinjiang’s economic arteries.

Third, being vigilant towards any potential rivals, especially local Turkic Muslim leaders, Sheng intentionally kept all the militaries directly under his control. His troops “secured” all the politically sensitive and rebellion-prone areas. In addition, Sheng wove

an elaborate network of intelligence and inaugurated a notorious secret police, which was modeled on Stalin’s NKVD. Resorting to it, Sheng purged local Turkic forces and some Chinese Muslim intelligentsia, who were suspected of nationalistic leanings.17

Because Sheng’s secret police was just in its fledgling stage then and his Han Chinese troops were still short-staffed to cope with constantly emerging Turkic nationalists’ revolts, he eventually invited the Soviet NKVD to participate in incarceration and elimination of Turkic Muslim rebels. Sheng subdued the Turkic Muslim rebellions in varied scales also with the help of the Soviet troops, killing about 50,000 rebels in total.18

In general, from ascending the throne of Xinjiang King to consolidating his power, Sheng was undoubtedly beholden to Soviet military assistance. Encountering the burgeoning antagonistic sentiments from the Turkic nationalistic groups and increasing military threats, Sheng frequently turned to Soviet military aid. Sheng’s incessant calling for Soviet military intervention imperceptibly institutionalized the presence of the Soviet Armies in Xinjiang. Later in the late 1930s, when Stalin informed Sheng that a self-contained task force was to be indefinitely stationed at one of Xinjiang’s strategic locations, Sheng would find it hard to come up with excuses for refusing the unjustified request.

Fourth, Sheng applied a series of Soviet political techniques, rhetoric and categories to his ethnic policies in Xinjiang. Under Soviet influence, Sheng recognized fourteen ethnic categories in Xinjiang. By categorically grouping those Turkic Muslims, Sheng

\[\text{17 Millward, Eurasian Crossroad: A History of Xinjiang, 208-209.}\]
\[\text{18 Millward, Eurasian Crossroad: A History of Xinjiang, 209; Cai, 170.}\]
could first, scatter the Turkic nationalists and deal with them individually; second, play those vying ethnic groups off against each other. Sheng’s ethnic-categorization strategy was in part derived from the Soviet Union’s nation-making policy in Central Asia, which helped reduce the possibility of Muslims’ uniting for common goals.

Apart from grouping and categorizing local Turkic Muslims, Sheng even further divided and re-grouped the whole Xinjiang society as several classes, in accordance with the Soviet criterion of social stratification. The policy allowed Sheng to change his rhetoric, ascribing the ethnic tensions, mainly between Han administrators and local Turkic Muslims, to class struggle. Thus, the Sheng’s rhetoric of class-conflict to some extent legitimated his brutal repression of local Turkic nationalists’ antagonistic movement. Taking advantage of the Stalinist discourses, Sheng’s ruling apparatus might punish or execute the rebellious and disobedient Turkic Muslims more scrupulously on the charge of “being exploiters of the people” and “traitors”.

From 1934 to 1942, standing by the Soviet side, Sheng’s administration in Xinjiang in essence kept the Chinese central government’s influence at bay. Sheng was just nominally subordinated to the Kuomintang government. Nanjing, the capital city of China at that time, actually exercised no real power in Xinjiang. Support from the Soviet Union and Sheng’s wholehearted embrace of Stalinism favored his arbitrary rule in his own fiefdom, Xinjiang.

However, there is no such thing as a free lunch. The price of Sheng’s supremacy in his territory was that the Soviet Union almost completely dominated Xinjiang, both

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But the author doesn’t provide concrete example to show what classes Sheng defined at that time.
politically and economically, and the tremendously benefitted from its support of Sheng. Since the late 1930s, Sheng’s Xinjiang, had become a Soviet satellite, or as some Chinese scholars indicate, an obedient Soviet puppet.\(^{20}\)

**Chinese KMT Government’s Silence on the presence of the USSR in Xinjiang**

The Sino-Russian, later Sino-Soviet relations in the 1920s and 1930s created the conditions, upon which local governor Sheng could rid Xinjiang of Chinese Kuomintang administration’s interference, and tentatively seek alliance with the Soviet Union. Also against the background of the 1930s’ Sino-Soviet relations, Republican China kept being “blind” to the increasing Soviet influence in Xinjiang, and almost staying hands off. This section will go over the Sino-Soviet relations before the 1940s, and examine the important factors that enabled the Soviet Union to penetrate Xinjiang unchecked.

In the early 1920s, the newly established Bolshevik regime, having defeated the anti-Bolshevik forces and survived the Civil War, viewed the world affairs in accordance with their utopian revolutionary thinking. In other words, the Soviet state’s domestic and foreign policies revolved mainly around the World Socialist Revolution idea. The Russian revolution was considered linked to the progress of world revolution, which would overthrow and destruct imperialism, helping the fledgling Soviet state get out of the internationally isolated situation. However, a series of socialist revolutions in Europe, encouraged by the Comintern leaders in Moscow, were eventually defeated. With the failure of German Communists’ revolution, the Bolshevik’s hopes of revolutions in the

\(^{20}\) Dazheng Ma, Xinjiang Shijian (Urumqi: Xinjiang Renmin Press, 2006), 355.
more developed European countries were shattered.\(^{21}\) Along with its rhetoric shift to “building socialism in one country,” Soviet Russia actually paid more attention to the revolutionary movements in some colonial and semi-colonial countries, attempting to apply its experience to their revolutions.\(^{22}\) China was among them.

According to a note sent from the RSFSR People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to its Chinese counterpart in 1920, the Soviet government claimed that it had no special state interest compared to the bourgeois governments.\(^{23}\) Therefore, it abrogated treaties signed between Tsarist Russia and China, which had been considered unequal by the Chinese, and returned to Chinese people some territories seized by the Tsarist government.\(^{24}\) By doing so, the Soviet state showed its willingness to develop and improve the relations with Chinese government. However, throughout the 1920s, formalization of the diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and China didn’t go that smoothly. Several issues in the 1920s impeded the establishment and improvement of the Sino-Soviet relations, such as Soviet Russia’s control over the Chinese Eastern Railway\(^{25}\), the issue of independence of Mongolia\(^{26}\), and most importantly, the ideological disparity between the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) Government and the Communist USSR. The Nationalist Party of China (KMT) shared certain level of anti-

\(^{21}\) Fitzpatrick, 95. 
\(^{22}\) VKP(B), Komintern i Natsional’no-Revoliutsionnnoye Dvizheniye v Kitaye (Moscow: AO ‘Buklet’, 1994), 212. 
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 219. 
\(^{25}\) Although the Soviet state distanced itself far from the Tsarist imperialist foreign policies, some of the historically controversial issues in the Sino-Russian relations remained unresolved. For example, Moscow declined to answer Chinese government’s request of fully returning the Russian-controlled Chinese Eastern Railroad to China.\(^{25}\) Thus the Chinese side interpreted the Soviet attitude as an infringement of China’s territorial integrity, which reminded them of the Tsarist Russia’s policies. 
\(^{26}\) The Soviet Union recognized the Mongolian People’s Republic as a part of the Chinese Republic, but the Soviet Government also acknowledged that Mongolia was not administrated by China in domestic affairs and could formulate its own foreign policies independently. (Sovetsko-Kitaiskiye Otnosheniya, 1959) From the Chinese point of view, the Soviet acquiescence in Mongolia’s independence went counter to China’s national interests.
Soviet sentiment with the Western powers, particularly Britain, USA and France, on which Chinese economic interests mainly rested. As the Western powers did, the political elite in Chinese KMT government also fretted about the spread of Communism, and especially the stunning growth of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Since the late 1920s, some constantly emerged military frictions between Japan and China in North China indicated that the Japanese invasion of China was looming large. Later in the year of 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, and the underprepared KMT government was passively dragged into the war.

As China proceeded to fight against Japanese encroachment of its territorial integrity, the Chinese KMT government realized that external military and technical assistance were in need for the armed struggle against Japan. Besides negotiating with the United States and the British Empire, Chiang Kai-shek particularly placed hopes on Soviet cooperation. Since 1931, the Chinese KMT government consistently persuaded the Soviet Union to forge a Sino-Soviet alliance and to provide China with tangible assistance for military defeat of Japan.

China, which then was desperately demanding Soviet support and cooperation, eagerly waited for Soviet responses to its pursuit of assistance. In contrast, the Soviet Union took action usually one step behind Chinese expectation. In other words, Moscow was less enthusiastic about getting involved in the Sino-Japanese conflicts. The Soviet Union’s reluctant attitude towards involvement into the Sino-Japanese conflicts might be well illustrated by following cases. First of all, given the geographic proximity, Japanese occupation of Manchuria also posed a threat to the security of the Soviet Union’s Far
Eastern territory, as well as of Siberia. However, the Soviet Union stuck to the non-interference principle in the Sino-Japanese conflicts in 1931, only its official newspaper *Pravda* verbally condemning the Japanese military intervention. In addition, the Soviet Union sold its rights in the Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria to Japan in 1935, in exchange for an expedient peace with Japan. In 1937, the Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed, which indicated the Sino-Soviet alliance’s realization after long-time negotiation. The Soviets did provide generous aid to China, but the support very seldom went as far as the Chinese government hoped. Even after the 1939’s Soviet-Japanese border battle of Khalkhin Gol, the Soviet Union chose not to enter into the war directly against Japan. It instead held a peace talk on neutrality-pact with Japan, attempting to avoid being mired on both European and Asian fronts of war.

Generally speaking, throughout the 1930s, the Japanese invasion of China tipped the nuanced balance in the Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviet Union gained the initiative in the Sino-Soviet dialogue, and enjoyed more flexibility in dealing with the Soviet-Japanese-Chinese triangular relations. In contrast, China possessed very few bargaining chips over its fate in the complicated triangle.

Placed within this context of international relations, the question “why KMT government turned ‘blind’ to the Soviet Union’s exclusive influence in Xinjiang” will be relatively easily answered. Both the local governor’s adherence to Stalinism and the USSR’s unparalleled domination of Xinjiang actually reflected, and also were realized by 1930s specific wartime environment. Below are three main factors that explicate China’s non-opposing attitude towards the close Xinjiang-Soviet relations.
First, as the northwest supply route, via which the Soviet military aid, including machines, guns, aircrafts, tanks, lots of pieces of artillery, etc., reached China and was put in use, Xinjiang was playing an important role in China’s anti-Japanese war effort. Since the Chinese Eastern Railway was sold to Japan in 1935, Xinjiang had actually become the main overland for Soviet aid to China. Besides, Xinjiang was the major corridor for the frequent movements of diplomatic and advisory personnel between China and the Soviet Union. Although a large number of rightist nationalists in the KMT government suggested that the Soviets’ overwhelming presence in Xinjiang challenged Chinese sovereignty over the province, Chiang Kai-shek didn’t want to take risk of getting on Stalin’s nerves, which might result in irreparable damage on the normalization of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Acknowledging the Soviet Union’s power in Xinjiang was one of the prerequisites for further the Sino-Soviet wartime cooperative relations.

Even in some cases, China’s growing dependency upon Soviet military assistance during the wartime disposed the KMT government to welcome the Soviets’ omnipresence in Xinjiang. As Japan’s full-scale invasion of China was approaching in the mid-1930s, the size of Chiang Kai-shek’s demands for Soviet aid steadily and quickly grew. Importing weapons from the Soviet Union could barely meet Chinese wartime needs, in particular that of strengthening the Chinese air force. Chiang Kai-shek involved his officials in detailed negotiations with the Soviet Union, and requested more immediate technological assistance from the USSR. Stalin eventually consented to help China build an aircraft factory after long-time mutual discussions. The KMT government

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28 Ibid., 211.
tried to persuade Moscow to establish the plant around Lanzhou, which was located in the geometric center of China’s territory, but Moscow insisted on a site outside of Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital city.\textsuperscript{29} Chiang finally yielded. Since mid-1930s, the Chinese KMT government compromised on various Xinjiang-related issues, in exchange for an open road connecting with Soviet aid.

Second, being the frontier area, inhabited mostly by ethnic minorities and rife with anti-Chinese nationalistic sentiments, Xinjiang in the 1930s frequently reminded the KMT government of Mongolia, which de facto just separated from Chinese administration. Alerted by the parallels between Xinjiang and Mongolia, the Chinese KMT government was afraid that Xinjiang might take the road of Mongolia’s independence. The Chinese government was initially concerned about Soviet interests in Xinjiang and its most preached national self-determination tenet, which, as some of the KMT nationalists interpreted, might push the Soviet Union to implement similar policies in dealing with Xinjiang Turkic Muslims’ desire of independence. However, rather than agitating the KMT government, Moscow reassured Chiang Kai-shek that the Soviet Union would always recognize Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang. In practice, the Soviet Union did requested approval of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in accordance with the diplomatic terms before sending its diplomatic personnel to Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{30} As matter of fact, the Soviet Union’s compliance with the diplomatic norms and its respect for Chinese


sovereignty not only soothed the Chinese mind, but also justified its expanding authority over Xinjiang affairs.

As for the Turkic-speaking people’s desire of independence in Xinjiang, interestingly, the Soviet presence in effect facilitated the repression of local Turkic rebellious nationalism. Besides, Soviet technique of subjugation of the separatism was employed by the Chinese provincial governors to keep Xinjiang Muslims’ separatism under control. (This question is discussed in detail in the section on Sheng Shicai’s Stalinism in Xinjiang.)

According to Chinese scholar Hu Shi’s source, Chiang Kai-shek’s obliviousness of the Soviets’ penetration in Xinjiang was also influenced by some theories of his ambassador to the USSR, Jiang Tingfu. The ambassador drew analogy between China’s relation to Xinjiang and Britain’s relation to Canada. Both Xinjiang and Canada were next to powerful neighbors and far from the mother countries having sovereignty over them. In such conditions, as the ambassador indicated, if the mother country opposed the close relations between the faraway province and the powerful neighbor, it would create great danger of driving the province even more into the orbit of its neighbor.31 The ambassador Jiang’s words proved revelatory. Having Xinjiang in-between with leaning towards the Soviet side, and maintaining equilibrium in the Sino-Soviet relations realistically prevented Xinjiang from being independent or going unmanageably far away from China. The USSR needed China to continue fighting Japan, which would make Japanese armies less able to march against Soviet territory, so Moscow wouldn’t

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31 Shi Hu. Hu Shi Laiwang Shuxin Xuan (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), 245-246
Also see: Garver, 155.
unreasonably challenge Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang. Correspondingly, it was wise for the exhausted China to put up with the Soviet Union’s permeation in Xinjiang.

Third, and perhaps the most importantly, in the 1930s, Xinjiang became one of the battlefields, where the manifest contest between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party over China’s future path took place and intensified. The Chinese KMT government had to contain Chinese Communists’ rising influence in Xinjiang, resorting to the Soviet Union’s predominance there.

Over the course of the 1920s, the discernible popularity of Communism and the steady development of the ideologically rival CCP had long been the KMT’s primary concern over its domestic affairs. As discussed above, the Soviet Union’s communist ideology and its export of proletarian revolution had been standing in the way of improvement of the Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviet Union formulated its Chinese policies and developed the relations with China at two levels. At the state level, the Soviet Union sought strategic alliance with Chinese government, which was dominated by the Kuomintang. Making approach to Republican China illustrated the Soviet Union’s geopolitical concern, particularly about maintaining security in its vast Far East territory. In addition to the state level, the Communist Soviet Union also used the party-to-party channel to facilitate its involvement in various anti-imperialist revolutionary activities in China. At the party level, the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) provided generous financial and military supports to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Even some of the Soviet military advisors, who were dispatched to China through the state-to-state channel, plainly showed their affection more for the local
Communists.\textsuperscript{32} Needless to say, the Soviet Union’s duplicity in the Sino-Soviet relations, as well as its partiality towards CCP, embarrassed the KMT a lot.

As the KMT predicted, Mao and his CCP coveted Xinjiang for a long time. The Communists planned on turning the province into a possible base for upcoming Chinese proletarian revolution under Soviet patronage.\textsuperscript{33} However, instead of lending a hand to the CCP, Stalin intentionally curbed CCP’s penetration in Xinjiang. The Soviet leader believed that the CCP influence in Xinjiang should be kept to a minimum, along with that of the KMT.\textsuperscript{34} In Stalin’s eyes, Mao and his CCP followers were patriotic Communists. Therefore, their interest in Xinjiang were more focusing on bringing the frontier area back into its CCP-led motherland in the future, rather than incorporating Xinjiang into the world revolutionary trends. If the Soviet Union freed up room to let the CCP influence take hold there, Xinjiang might lessen their subservience to Moscow, which obviously threatened to be disadvantageous for the USSR.\textsuperscript{35} In that way, the Soviet Union attempted to turn Xinjiang into a third political force in China, detached from the KMT and the CCP, making the Soviet interests protected.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus, from the KMT perspective, Moscow’s direct control over Xinjiang at least helped check the permeation of Mao and his Communists’ influence, which might prevail over an area that was so remote from China proper that the KMT’s hands was hardly reaching out to. The compromising option of having Soviet Union holding Xinjiang

\textsuperscript{32} For the Soviet attitude see VKP(B), Komintern i Natsional’no-Revolutsionnoye Dvizhenie v Kitaye, Vol.2, 723-729.

\textsuperscript{33} Voskirensenski, Alexei D., Russia and China: A Theory of Inter-State Relations (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 150.

\textsuperscript{34} Garver, 157; Whiting, 55.

\textsuperscript{35} Whiting, Allen S., Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot? (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1958), 55-56

\textsuperscript{36} Garver, 158.
proved temporarily workable. With the KMT government’s endorsement, Xinjiang finally strode out of the sphere of Chinese intervention, approaching his Soviet neighbor.
Chapter 4: Xinjiang in the Orbit of the Soviet Union from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s

Sheng Shicai’s strategy of inviting Soviet influence might have helped him deter Kuomintang government’s interference, but in the long run, it turned out that this Soviet orientation was a better deal for the Soviet Union than for him.

From the early 1930s to the early 1940s, Sheng’s pro-Soviet stance brought tremendous advantages to the USSR. Correspondingly, the Soviet Union made good use of those advantages to have Xinjiang maximally serve its state interests. This chapter will examine how the Soviet Union maximized its state interests in Xinjiang during Sheng’s tenure based on three facets.

First of all, a closer Soviet-Xinjiang relation indicated a tighter economic bond between the two. At the practical level, both Sheng and Stalin realized the necessity of increasing bilateral trade between the two sides during the 1930s. For Sheng, the institutionalized mutual trade activated local economy, brought profits, and lifted his subjects’ living standard, which did promote local economic betterment. As for the Soviet Union, Moscow actually had had more in mind than just financially benefitting from the mutual trade. It would be proven that in the long run, the role the Soviet Union played in the Soviet-Xinjiang mutual trade gradually transferred from that of a business partner to
that of a resource exploiter. The USSR turned out to be the real beneficiary of the Soviet-Xinjiang economic association and Sheng’s economic policies.

Right after being appointed as governor, Sheng implemented a series of new policies, aiming at boosting the development of business and bilateral trade with the Soviet Union, and eventually generating growth in the local economy. One of his active economic policies was the establishment of a specialized organization to manage the Soviet-Xinjiang commercial trade. With consideration and support directly from Sheng, the organization of commerce functionally strengthened economic cooperation with the Soviet Union. According to the statistics, both sides’ exports increased startlingly from the late 1930s to the 1940s. The Soviets traded in clothing, sugar, mechanical products, and some oil products, while Xinjiang generally exported raw materials, such as wool, hides, pelts, and so on. Russian goods in plentiful supply and at reasonable prices began to flood local markets, and cargos of Xinjiang goods also incessantly arrived in Soviet Central Asia.

Xinjiang was enjoying the profits and visible prosperity brought by trade with the Soviet Union. In the meantime, Moscow also welcomed the booming bilateral trade with its neighbor. The Soviet Union was happy to conserve hard currency by marketing its relatively dated technology, which proved to be difficult to sell somewhere industrially advanced. Moreover, increasing trade with Xinjiang in some sense contributed to reducing Moscow’s pressure of administration in Central Asia. As the early 1930s’

famine, which severely ailed the whole Soviet state, was lingering, even some important Soviet cities in Central Asia, such as Tashkent and Samarkand, still experienced acute shortage of consumer goods and food during the mid and late 1930s. Thus, steady import of agricultural products from Xinjiang helped feed the starving Central Asians in a timely manner. Although few sources show to what extent the agricultural products from Xinjiang helped settle the basic bread-and-butter issue in Central Asia, particularly in the adjacent Kazakhstan, which was one of the mostly afflicted areas by the famine, it is known that food import was highly valued by Soviet Central Asian leaders. According to Zhou, the Soviet commercial representatives put the issue of agricultural goods’ trade at the top of the agendas during their negotiations with Xinjiang officials in the mid-1930s. In this way, it would be logical to speculate that trade with Xinjiang played a positive role in maintaining Soviet Central Asian social stability.

Like a win-win game, the upgraded Soviet-Xinjiang trade benefitted each other. However, the major economic goal of the USSR was much more than just gaining from large-scale business. As historian Allen Whiting stated, Moscow’s goal was exploitation of Xinjiang’s resources.

As discussed in chapter 3, both Stalin and Sheng endeavored to minimize their association with the Chinese KMT government and the twisted Chinese domestic affairs. Given that Xinjiang only bordered interior China and the USSR, its geographic location granted the Soviets the privilege to almost completely monopolize the external trade of

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40 Whiting, 65.
Xinjiang. The fact that the USSR became the only effectual market for Xinjiang’s massive exports consequently provided the USSR a valuable opportunity to wield some broader economic influence on Xinjiang.

Besides, some local Muslims in Xinjiang, particularly those living near north Xinjiang’s Sino-Soviet border areas, regularly sold their consumer products to the Soviet Central Asians in the cross-border black market-type bazaars. The small-scale economic activities provided local Muslims a means to earn some extra money and gain a better living standard. Those unofficial and flexible businesses, which financially benefited the masses, to some extent, played a role of placebo, distracting their attention from the antagonist nationalism and lessening their enmity against the Han Chinese administration. Because of that, Sheng tacitly encouraged this kind of cross-border businesses. Sheng welcomed it, but the Soviet attitude towards the cross-border business was amorphous. If the Soviet administrators took strict measures to tentatively close down those bazaars, it would soon inflict damage on local Muslims’ economic interests and probably cause their dissatisfaction, which might further bring about political destabilization to Xinjiang society. Thus, Soviet’s policy towards the Soviet-Xinjiang non-governmental economic exchange could either help some local people keep favorable economic conditions, which allowed Sheng to worry less about maintaining social order, or impose more administrative pressure on him.

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41 Wartime China’s drastic economic stagnation and economic decline is supposed to be taken into consideration as well. The economic condition of China proper in the late 1930s was dragged by China’s engagement with Japan’s invasion. Therefore Sheng actually didn’t see it possible to do trade with China proper.
42 Hong Zhou, 258.
44 Hong Zhou, 259.
From both the macroeconomic perspective and the microeconomic perspective, Xinjiang had become more and more dependent on the trade with its Soviet neighbor. This one-way economic dependency would inevitably lead the USSR to have an upper hand in the Soviet-Xinjiang relations. In contrast, Sheng’s Xinjiang correspondingly became passive and vulnerable. Any major change in Soviet policy towards Soviet-Xinjiang economic relation might cause fluctuations in Xinjiang’s economic situation and public responses.

Xinjiang’s increasing economic dependency on the Soviet-Xinjiang trade strengthened the USSR’s critical role in affecting Xinjiang’s economic situation and having a considerable impact on Sheng’s handling of local social order. What’s more, Sheng’s obsession with applying the Stalinism to Xinjiang domestic economic development, i.e., the highly centralized administrative planning of economy, giving priority to some heavy industries, etc., justified the Soviet Union’s full-scale interference in Xinjiang’s economic activities. In the late 1930s, the tendency came along that the Soviet Union was proceeding to take control over the rich resources in Xinjiang and incorporate Xinjiang’s economic production into the Soviet economic plan.

In today’s China, the state propaganda constantly emphasizes Xinjiang’s economically strategic importance, because this massive area has very good mineralization conditions and a large gross amount of resources. Underneath Xinjiang’s basin and deserts are plenty of petroleum, natural gas, coal, gold, tin, copper, zinc, etc. Needless to say, given the ongoing rapid industrialization projects throughout the country, the USSR also coveted Xinjiang’s resources in the 1930s.
At that time, very few economists or experts in Xinjiang, or even in China, were familiar with the rules of the Stalinist planned economy. Therefore, Sheng opened the door to a large number of Soviet engineers, experts, and economic advisors, whom Sheng asked to assist Xinjiang in its economic constructions.\(^{45}\) In 1934, Soviet geologists began surveys of the province right after Sheng’s calling for Soviet economic instruction.\(^{46}\) Following that, groups of engineers, technicians and other personnel were sent to Xinjiang in droves, claiming that “dispatching personnel to China, including to Xinjiang, to provide assistance on resources exploration was parts of the Soviet Union’s duty, based on the terms of the Sino-Soviet alliance”.\(^{47}\) With help of Soviet experts and technology, very soon new resources were found and exploited one by one. The Dushanzi Oil Fields, later in Communist China known as the cradle of West China’s petroleum industry, was actually first opened by Soviet engineers in 1936.\(^{48}\)

Those movements signified that the USSR started to extensively participate in, as well as interfere with exploitation of Xinjiang’s rich resources. Sheng’s welcoming policy allowed the Soviet Union to obtain valuable concessions to Xinjiang’s gold, tungsten, manganese, tin, uranium and other minerals. Experts from the Soviet Union soon began mining and exporting those resources. According to Whiting, in the oil fields, as well as in other resources-exploiting workplaces, key positions were almost all taken by Soviet personnel. Local Xinjiang people were just recruited as ordinary workers.\(^{49}\)


\(^{46}\) Whiting, 65.


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 165.

\(^{49}\) Whiting, 68.
Also, Sheng’s provisions offered the Soviet Union particular favorable terms. The exports of Xinjiang produce were to be duty free.\(^{50}\)

By dispatching those economic advisors and engineers to Xinjiang, probing Xinjiang resources, and setting up working fields, Stalin’s Soviet Union successfully and expansively manipulated Xinjiang’s economy, and monopolized Xinjiang’s resources. Xinjiang’s resources and raw materials were moving in the direction of supplementing the construction of communism in the Soviet Union.

However, exploiting mineral resources and raw materials from Xinjiang was far from the Soviet Union’s whole scheme in Xinjiang. In fact, taking control of local economic arteries catered to, and foreshadowed the Soviets’ intention to further intervene with other social and political affairs in Xinjiang.

In Andrew Forbes’s monograph Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia, he recites words from one Soviet official, who was taking charge of supplying arms to Xinjiang in 1935. “Soviet advisors, who actually exercised the authority of ministers, were placed the Xinjiang governor’s elbow; Xinjiang was soon a Soviet colony in all but name.”\(^{51}\)

The Soviet-Xinjiang interaction evolved gradually from a bilateral conversation into a Soviet monolog. The USSR maximized its capacity of exploiting its “colony”, in accordance with its national interest. The following exemplary event can illustrate this point.

\(^{50}\) Meng, 313.  
\(^{51}\) Forbes, 136.
Going back to the year of 1934 and 1937, Stalin’s delegates twice contacted Sheng Shicai to discuss the newly proposed Tin Mine Agreement in Xinjiang. The Tin Mine Agreement prescribed that “the Soviet Union has the exclusive rights to prospection, investigation and exploitation of tin and its ancillary minerals within Xinjiang.”52 The Tin Mine Agreement in essence was an exploitative treaty, which reflected Xinjiang’s economically colonial status. In the Chinese scholar Wang Lixiong’s view, this Soviet-drafted agreement, not only meant establishing Soviet monopoly over Xinjiang’s resources, but also signaled that the Soviets had begun to interfere with Xinjiang’s foreign affairs. The USSR’s attitude regarding Xinjiang’s resources implied that other non-Soviets’ influences in Xinjiang affairs would be unwelcomed. For example, the Soviets forced the closure of the Swedish missions at Kashgar city in 1937. (Forbes 1986, 147) In order to drive out British competition in Xinjiang, trade with India was banned in 1938, and Moscow also introduced an anti-British trade embargo around the same time.53

In his work, Forbes quotes Sheng Shicai’s own account, saying that “the text had been drawn without prior consultation with the Xinjiang authorities” and “it was totally unacceptable”.54 Despite the Soviets’ overt arbitrariness and Sheng’s repeated expressions of dissatisfaction, Sheng eventually signed the agreement in November, 1940. Subordinating to the Soviets’ domination, Sheng had no choice but to acknowledge that Xinjiang had become a de facto economic appendage of the Soviet Union till then.

53 Wang, 301; Whiting 65.
54 Forbes, 149.
Second, apart from gaining immense economic profits from monopolizing Xinjiang’s resources, Moscow had his finger in other pies at the same time. In fact, Soviet strategy to step in Xinjiang’s territorial integrity incorporated Xinjiang into the Soviet defense system in the year of 1937, which secured the USSR’s absolute authority in Xinjiang, and concurrently kept the Japanese military threat towards Soviet Central Asia and Siberia at bay.

Some Chinese scholars view Sheng’s final signing the 1940 Tin Mine Agreement as a watershed, marking that Xinjiang was economically annexed by the Soviet Union. According to historiographies, before the Soviet economically annexed Xinjiang in line with its national interests, a series of 1937’s episodes indicates that the integration of Xinjiang into the Soviet Central Asia at large began even earlier.

However Sheng Shicai’s reform brought relative prosperity to local communities, as a matter of fact, Xinjiang’s local Turkie-speaking Muslims never stopped demonstrating their discontent and anti-Han Chinese sentiment in a violent and bellicose way. In 1937, a respected Uyghur commander-in-chief blurted out his resentment at increased Han Chinese influence in Xinjiang army. His public display of anger later resulted in Sheng’s denunciation. Echoing the commander’s ire, a group of Uyghur rebels in south Xinjiang rose against the Chinese authorities, which soon developed into a large-scale rebellion. The rebellion sparked another wave of uprisings up in north Xinjiang, deeply shocked and irritated the governor. More importantly, this time the Uyghurs, as well as other

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55 Wang, 301-02; Ma, 317.
Turkic Muslims, incorporated the fledgling anti-Soviet inclination into the broader anti-Han Chinese feelings.56

Fearing that the situation might go out of control, Sheng promptly massed his troops to cope with the widespread revolts. In the meantime, he called Moscow for military aid to crush the uprisings. Thanks to Soviet military aid, the revolt was soon subdued. On the one hand, the subjugation did help Sheng remove the hindrance to his building authority and supremacy. Before Chiang Kai-shek removed him from the Xinjiang governor position in 1944, never had any a similar rebellion or revolt took place in Xinjiang. On the other hand, the Soviet “generous” military assistance in the 1937’s incident legitimate the regular presence of the Red Army’s presence in Xinjiang, which in essence proclaimed that the Soviet Union was to possess the sovereignty over Sheng’s Xinjiang.

Right after subduing the 1937’s Uyghur revolt, the Soviet Consul-General in Urumqi informed Sheng that “a self-contained task force was to be stationed at the strategic oasis of Kumul, on the main trunk road between Xinjiang and China proper.”57 Thus, Sheng yielded and accepted the exploitative 1940 Tin Mine Agreement partly because Xinjiang was already occupied by Soviet troops.

Chinese and Russian scholars typically ascribed three motives to the Soviet “seizure” of Kumul in 1937. Given the Kumul’s geographic position as natural stronghold linking Xinjiang with the massive Han-inhabited China proper, first of all, the Soviet intended to keep the Chinese influence at bay via securing the buffer state. As pointed out in chapter

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3, both the KMT and the CCP were considered threatening the USSR’s advantages in Xinjiang. Of course, this was not the most pressing motive, because the Republic of China was not powerful enough in the 1930s to permit Chiang Kai-shek to consider ousting the Soviet Union from Xinjiang.

Second, Kumul was one of the centers, which oversaw the particularly abundant resources in north Xinjiang. The Soviet Red Army in effect locked up those natural resources in advance, which were desperately in demand for the Soviet rapid industrialization taking place in the Soviet Union.

Last but not least, the Soviet government was concerned about Japan’s impending full-scale invasion of China. Over the summer of 1937, although the war had not been declared by either Japan or China, the Japanese force astoundingly overran most of north China. Moscow once seriously believed that if China continued to fight against Japan, Japanese armies would be less able to march against Siberia and Central Asia. 58 However, the speed of the Japanese advance deeply alarmed the Soviet leadership, who determined to come to China’s aid to halt the Japanese war machine before it could threaten the Soviet Union’s inner Asian frontiers. Given that the Japanese kept pushing the frontline forward to the northwest direction, both China and the Soviet Union worried that Japan might crave Xinjiang’s rich resources to resupply its war effort. 59 The increasing presence of Soviet Red Army in Kumul would in effect suffocate Japan’s further advance, preventing the Soviet territory from being dragged into war with Japan.

58 Valerii A Barmin, SSSR i Sintsian, 1918-1941 (Barnaul: Izdatel'stvo Barnaul'skogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta, 1999), 174.
In the late 1930s, the Soviet Red Army stationed in Kumul and its increasing presence later in Xinjiang demonstrated that the Soviet Union had virtually become Xinjiang’s suzerain. The USSR substantially marginalized influences from the Kuomintang Chinese government and other foreign powers’ intervention. Correspondingly, de facto being a part of Soviet Central Asia, Xinjiang not only served the Chinese KMT government as the supply route for receiving Soviet aid, but also assumed responsibility for guarding the massive Central Asia and Siberia from Japan’s impending invasive threats.

Third, taking the demographic/ethnographic association between Xinjiang and Soviet Central Asia into consideration, I will argue that the USSR’s penetration and domination in Xinjiang allowed Moscow to regulate its Diaspora people more effectively, in concert with its own domestic policies. Furthermore, considering Xinjiang Muslims and Soviet Central Asians’ fraternal associations, Sheng Shicai government’s enthusiastic practice of Stalinism in Xinjiang, which echoed with the Soviet radical projects of modernizing Central Asia, reversibly created a fitting external environment for better implementation of some Soviet policies in Central Asia.

When Sheng Shicai promoted his reform and encouraged residents to do business in the 1930s, his Soviet neighbor was engaged in the top-down imposed socialist experiment of Collectivization. In 1937, the coercive Collectivization was coming to a close. Needless to say, the collectivization met massive resistance from those former nomads in Kazakhstan, where previously the major agriculture was herding. The Soviet state confiscated a stunning number of livestock, leaving the nomads starving and dying.
Against this background, flocks of Kazakh people from the Soviet Central Asia fled to Xinjiang, asking their Kazakh compatriots in China for assistance and accommodations.\textsuperscript{60}

According to the Soviet statistics, the Kazakh population of the USSR, “declined by approximately one-third between the late 1920s and the late 1930s”\textsuperscript{61} Except for those who starved to death during that rough time, a mass of Kazakh people who fled across the Sino-Soviet border to Xinjiang accounted for the shrinking of the Kazakh population. The USSR also lost a great deal of livestock with the refugees, which irritated both Kazakhstani political elite and Moscow.

The northern part of Xinjiang, spanning from the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan frontier almost to the city Kumul, was home to nomadic Kazakh people for centuries. Thanks to the state-created and officially recognized bond of Kazakh people between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan, those Diaspora Kazakh people from Kazakhstan settled down and made a living with their livestock in North Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{62}

After the subjugation of the 1937 rebellion, Sheng Shicai immediately launched a relentless Great-Terror-like campaign of political repression and persecution throughout Xinjiang. Sheng’s goal, similar to Stalin’s Great Purge, was primarily to eliminate the dissent. Those, who upheld the anti-Han or anti-Chinese nationalist banners primarily fell victim to this political movement. Needless to say, Uyghur people, especially those living

\textsuperscript{60} As one of the Soviet influences in Xinjiang, Sheng adopted Soviet categories of nationality. He applied the Soviet principles of nation-categorization to Xinjiang’s inhabitants, recognizing fourteen ethnic groups in Xinjiang, including Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, etc. See Millward, 208.


\textsuperscript{62} Considering the Soviet state’s restriction of population movement, there might be a relatively small number of Kazakhs fleeing to Xinjiang at that time. see Barmin, \textit{SSSR i Sintsian}, 1918-1941 (Barnaul: Izdatel’stvo Barnaul’skogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta, 1999), p. 174.
in the rebellious south, were under direct threat. However, the Kazakhs in the north were
caught in the purges as well. Sheng accused the suspicious Kazakh people of being
accomplices in the “Fascist-Trotsky” rebellious conspiracy of 1937, a term he borrowed
from the Stalinist rhetoric. Apart from utilizing the Soviet rhetoric of persecution, Sheng
even directly drew military support from the Soviet military to crush the suspicious rebels
in the Kazakh-inhabited north. A Chinese historian Erhao Bao points out in his research
that the Soviet Union’s distrustful Stalinist mentality deeply influenced Sheng’s policy
making.63 Although there is no easy way of calculating the number, undoubtedly some
innocent Kazakhs were wrongly killed by Sheng’s Soviet-backed purge.64

During the Great Terror, Central Asia was seriously touched by the Stalinist
terrorism. Political terrorism was then intertwined with anti-religious movements in the
Soviet East. According to Shoshana Keller, under the anticlerical banner, many former
religious figures, political elites, intellectuals, as well as some ordinary people in Central
Asia, were arrested, accused of “enemies of the people”, and executed.65 Those
Kazakhstani refugees, who were scared by the political terrorism, overcame hardship and
finally fled to Xinjiang, might have dreamed of a relatively peaceful life outside the
USSR. However, Sheng’s bloodletting repression of local rebellious Turkic Muslims in
the late 1930s was almost a duplication of Stalin’s Great Terror. While local people in
Xinjiang experienced political terrorism, the Diaspora Kazakhs, or Diaspora Soviet
Central Asians at large, still had to face a continuation of the Soviet Terror.

64 Ibid., 204-05.
65 “Sheng Shicai was apt to be holding distrustful attitude towards the Muslim immigrants. He sometimes thought those
immigrants sought to join some subversive activities in Xinjiang.”
66 Shoshana Keller, To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941 (Westport,
In fact, what the Diaspora Central Asians had to face in the Chinese Turkestan was more than just the visible Xinjiang version of Great Terror. During the heyday of the USSR’s Great Purge, Sheng introduced the Marxist term “class” and some of the Stalinist concepts, such as “(Xinjiang) people’s enemy” to Xinjiang around 1936. Sheng’s strategy was to legitimate his brutal repression and punishment of local Muslim nationalists / separatists, resorting to the inculpable “class-conflicts” rhetoric. For the Soviet Union, Sheng’s adoption of the Marxist “class struggle” theory ensured the ideological coherence from Soviet Central Asia to Xinjiang, regardless of the Sino-Soviet border. Also in 1937, Sheng intensively arrested some dissident-leaning wealthy people and confiscated their property to pay Soviet loans, accusing them of being “class enemies” in Xinjiang. Sheng’s practice of political terrorism localized the Stalinism in Xinjiang. Considering the historical trends within the Soviet Union during the late 1930s, the overwhelming Stalinism and the extending Soviet ideology in Chinese Turkestan imperceptibly prevented diaspora Central Asians, as well as other Soviet citizens there, from being ideologically deviant.

By ideological penetration and localization, the Soviet state apparatus managed to govern its Diaspora people in line with its internal norms under an external circumstance. In other words, the Soviet Union efficaciously ran its state apparatus beyond the territorial limitation.

A question might be raised regarding the extension of the Soviet Union’s state power in Xinjiang: what if the Central Asians in Xinjiang further migrated to China proper? If

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Diaspora Central Asians didn’t stay in Xinjiang, the Soviet Union’s hands could hardly reach out to them. In fact, very few Chinese Turkic Muslims moved out of Xinjiang, let alone Soviet Central Asians. First of all, the fundamental language barrier stopped the Turkic Muslims from migrating to China proper. Second, it would be extremely uncomfortable for Muslims to live within the Han Chinese-occupied non-Muslim communities. Some of Han Chinese habits were viewed unacceptable and offensive by the Turkic Muslims, such as eating pork and drinking alcohol. Therefore, the diaspora Kazakhs, as well as other Central Asians, remained in Xinjiang’s vast land.

The juxtaposition of the Stalinist political terrorism and Marxist-Leninism during the 1930s in both the USSR and Xinjiang linked up the two regions, people in two sides facing the identical repressive atmosphere. My argument that Moscow managed to efficaciously regulate its subjects in the East through drawing Xinjiang into the Soviet orbit can be also illustrated by two other points.

First, the Xinjiang governor’s mimicry of Soviet political and administrative techniques in Xinjiang critically correlated with Moscow’s blueprint in Central Asia, rendering the latter more practical in the course of transforming Central Asia.

Sheng’s Xinjiang shared many things in common with Soviet Central Asia. Both the two regions were inhabited mainly by various groups of Turkic Muslims, which were considered culturally backward by the majority people of the motherlands. They were both located far away from the political center. What’s more, deep-rooted ethnic/national conflicts, be it conspicuous or imperceptible, still existed. Unremitting antagonism to the
ruling Chinese authorities, or, generally Han Chinese, constituted a threat to Xinjiang’s societal stabilization, and challenged legitimacy of Sheng’s administration.

Attempting to appease the Muslim masses and harmonize the society, Sheng modeled his nationality policy after that of the Soviet Union. It included recognition of ethnic categories in Xinjiang in accordance with the Soviet nationalities’ criteria, encouragement of using native languages, and promotion of diverse ethnic cultures, etc.\(^68\) Sheng’s policy, on the one hand, slightly relieved his administration of concern about Muslims forging united pan-Turkic rebellious groups. On the other hand, it favored Moscow’s further institutionalization of its imposed Central Asians’ national identities. Being historically integrated as a part of the broader Central Asia, Xinjiang saw the constant flows of people within the inner Asian area for many centuries.\(^69\) Given that native people in Xinjiang and in Soviet Central Asia had been historically tightly bonded, the USSR’s transformation of Central Asia, including creation of titular nations, border delimitation of new national republics, recognition of national cultural heritages, and so on, would not be fully fulfilled, if Xinjiang remained ethnically unanimous. Thus, re-grouping local Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang as equivalent to the USSR’s categories of Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, etc., correlated with and complemented the effect of the Soviet Union’s nation-making project in Central Asia.

Second, everyday life in Sheng’s Stalinist Xinjiang paralleled some of the ongoing societal trends in Central Asia during the 1930s. Sheng took Moscow’s administrative experience as his reference. Likewise, the trajectory of political, economic, social life in


\(^{69}\) Barmin, 61.
Xinjiang served as Moscow’s reference, which might justify the Soviet Union’s reign, or calibrate the effectiveness of Soviet communist transformation of Central Asia.

An illustrative example is Xinjiang’s positive role in Soviet project of transforming Central Asian old society’s silhouette. The Soviet Union made good use of the modernizing practices in its Chinese enclave, Xinjiang, to set examples for its own backward Central Asians. A case referred to in both English and Chinese sources is that in the 1930s, Muslim women in Xinjiang were encouraged to appear in public unveiled.\(^70\) In addition, Sheng’s government also encourage women, particular those living in some major towns, to emancipate themselves from chores and get involved more in social and broader economic activities.\(^71\) In this way, the Soviet Union was able to expect more positive responses to its revolutionary transformation of Muslim women’s role in its own territory.

In other words, Sheng’s Xinjiang did to some degree materialized Moscow’s rhetoric of modernizing the backward Soviet East. Xinjiang’s anti-religious activities exactly paralleled the Soviet modernization-oriented anti-religious campaign. Some delegations coming from Central Asia particularly went to Urumqi to learn Sheng’s modernizing program and his atheistic propaganda.\(^72\) Central Asian leaders also regularly organized personnel exchanging programs, inviting Xinjiang’s Muslims to Tashkent and Bishkek, and showcased achievements of communist transformation in Central Asian republics.\(^73\)

\(^{70}\) Wuguo Chen, Xinjiang Wangshi (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Press, 2006), 76-77.
\(^{71}\) Forbes 1986, 137
\(^{72}\) Barmin, SSSR i Sintsian, 1918-1941 (Barnaul: Izdatel’stvo Barnaul’skogo Gosudarstvennego Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta, 1999), 127.
Those kinds of mutual communications between Xinjiang and Soviet Central Asia
promoted Central Asians’ understanding of modernization, also calibrating the level of
each side’s ongoing modernization.

Keeping Sheng’s Xinjiang politically and ideologically congruent with Stalinism, the
Soviet Union found a pragmatic way to both effectively govern its people in its foreign
satellite province, and more importantly, construct a favorable external environment to
facilitate its ambitious socialist transformation in Central Asia.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Being one of the most controversial periods throughout the history of 20th century Sino-Soviet relations, Sheng Shicai’s ten-year administration in Xinjiang has been the focus of discussions in Chinese, Russian and English academic works. Based on both primary and secondary sources, written in Chinese, Russian and English, this thesis seeks the answers as to first, how the Chinese frontier province Xinjiang diminished the influence from its Chinese “motherland”; second, how and why Moscow valued this region and drew Xinjiang into the orbit of the USSR from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s by taking advantages of the pro-Soviet governor and his localization of the Stalinism.

Given that the weak Chinese regime during the 1930s was too exhausted to give much attention to its remote province Xinjiang, the warlord provincial governor saw the opportunity to get rid of Chinese influence and establish his own fiefdom there by inviting Soviet supports and utilizing Soviet administrative techniques. Sheng’s introduction of Stalinism to Xinjiang did fix his superior authority in his domain. On the one hand, his rule marked significant growth of local economy; his advocacy of business with the USSR and his promotion of industrialization brought tangible benefits to the region. He attempted to modernize Xinjiang society and civilize his subjects, which resonated with the commonplace trend of social modernization in the Soviet Union, as
well as in Europe. On the other hand, Sheng adopted hardline policies to quash local Turkic Muslims’ revolts, which might even slightly threaten his reign, and legitimized his brutal repression with recourse to Soviet rhetoric and techniques, such as denunciation of “class enemies”.

As for the Soviet Union, the pervasion of localized Stalinism in Xinjiang paved the way for the USSR’s multi-faceted penetration, which eventually led Chinese Turkestan to the Soviet sphere of influence. Moscow gained an upper hand in both the Sino-Soviet relations and the Soviet-Xinjiang relations from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. The Soviet Union primarily maneuvered Xinjiang’s heavy economic and military dependency on the Soviet-Xinjiang trade to exert its influence on local affairs, and furthermore tried to have Xinjiang’s resources at its disposal. The Tin-Mine Agreement signed in 1940 by Sheng and Moscow, which granted Soviet exclusive rights to utilize Xinjiang’s resources, signaled that Moscow integrated Xinjiang into its own economy. Apart from the dominant role the Soviet Union played in Xinjiang’s economic sphere, Moscow also institutionalized Soviet military presence in Xinjiang and incorporated Xinjiang into its system of territorial security. Sheng’s invitation of Soviet military assistance to help maintain social order justified the presence of Red Army in Chinese Turkestan. The vast land of Xinjiang, as a buffer zone, prevented Soviet Central Asia from being attacked by Japanese forces unprepared. Moreover, given the cultural and historical association of Soviet Central Asia and Chinese Turkestan, by keeping Xinjiang ideologically and politically congruent with the Soviet norms, the USSR might regulate its Diaspora citizens more efficaciously. In practical terms, Sheng’s promotion and adoption of Soviet
national categories in Xinjiang simultaneously helped Moscow ingrain the national concepts upon Central Asians at large. The ongoing modernization and secularization programs in Xinjiang in the late 1930s also responded to Moscow’s determined socialist transformation within its own territory, creating a homogenized external environment for better implementing Soviet policies in Central Asia.

The trend that the effective authority of the Chinese KMT government over Xinjiang was minimal while that of Moscow gradually became overwhelming lasted, until the Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union dramatically changed the backdrop of Sino-Soviet relations. Since 1941, Hitler’s armies had penetrated deeper into Soviet territory. By November of 1941 German forces had brought Leningrad under siege and had thrust far into Ukraine. The winter of 1941 and the summer of 1942 marked the nadir of Soviet fortunes in the war with Nazi Germany. The over-strained Soviet government had to suspend the shipments of military aid to China. In the eyes of outsiders, including Chinese political elite, the Soviet government came face to face with the prospect of military defeats on the Soviet-German front line. Matter-of-factly, the USSR could hardly care about the East and sustain its influence Xinjiang in 1941. In contrast with Moscow’s dark situation, the beginning of the war between Japan and the United States in 1941 allowed the Chinese KMT government to have a respite from the exhausting fighting against Japan, and correspondingly, to act more boldly in Xinjiang. In Moscow’s darkest moment of 1942, Chiang Kai-shek decided to use the Soviet Union’s crisis to eradicate the Soviet position in Xinjiang. With British and American military

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supports, the Chinese KMT government successfully drove out Soviet influence in Xinjiang. Sheng, who at that time also doubted that the invincible Red Army and the unshakable Soviet Union would tough it out in the war, was soon politically marginalized and stripped of prestige in Xinjiang by the Central government of China. By the time Moscow was able to look eastward once again in the summer of 1943, the status quo was altogether different from that of two years earlier.

The Chinese recovery of Xinjiang weakened Soviet links with Chinese Turkestan and led to the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations during 1943-1944. The expulsion of Soviet personnel from Xinjiang and the reduction of Soviet prestige there brought about tensions between China and the USSR, which subsequently created difficulties for Chinese efforts to secure Soviet support during the last two years of Second World War. As Garver interprets it, the termination of Soviet aid, plus the Japanese occupation of Burma in 1942, cut off China’s important international supply lines, rendering the last years’ wartime situation much thornier for China. However, given that China had already secured sympathy and material support from other great powers, such as Britain and America, the effect of this Soviet blockage should not be over-emphasized here.

Perhaps the more consequential legacy of Soviet penetration should be seen as the Soviet Union’s involvement in local Turkic-speaking Muslims’ large-scale rebellion against Chinese rule in Xinjiang. The excesses of the Sheng regime aggravated the strained national relations between Chinese and local Muslims, sowing the seeds for some looming Muslim nationalistic revolt. The fact that the Xinjiang border with the

76 Ibid., 187.
Soviet Union had been closed in late 1942 exacerbated anti-Chinese complaints, because the majority of the USSR-oriented businesses were severely hampered, leading to dramatic economic decline in Xinjiang. The long-oppressed antagonism towards Chinese rule was first ignited in north Xinjiang’s Kazakh and Uyghur communities in 1944 and rapidly evolved into a chaotic rebellion. In 1944-1945, Moscow attempted to reassert its influence in Xinjiang by supporting the rebellion of Turkic people. Although it would be an exaggeration to interpret the Soviets’ intrigue as the principal cause of the rebellion, which actually some of Chinese sources do, the USSR was, to a considerable degree, the primary source of arms used by the rebellious armies to fight the Chinese.

Also, the rebellion could not have expanded without the tacit consent and covert operations of aid from the USSR. Moscow did not want to give up its state interests, which were once deeply entrenched in Xinjiang. The USSR’s tacit and supportive attitude towards the Turkic rebellion could be viewed as the extension of its struggle against Chinese interference in Xinjiang and its efforts to maintain influence in Chinese Central Asia. This Soviet trend continued throughout the mid and late 1940s.

In the long run, Soviet influence in Xinjiang from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s saw its effect and legacies later after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, i.e. Mao’s Communist China. Mao’s administration had more completely imitated and applied the Stalinist model to Xinjiang since 1949: Marxist-Leninism was propagated

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78 Ibid., 39.
Also see Voskiressenski, Alexei D, Russia and China: A Theory of Inter-State Relations (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 151.
everywhere; a series of anti-religious campaigns were launched; the categorization of ethnicity was kept; education of the “backward” people in frontier province, as well as emancipation of Muslim women, was highly promoted as parts of broader socialist modernization project in Xinjiang, etc. Thanks to this region’s immersion in Soviet influence and Stalinism during Sheng’s time, which paved the way for communism taking hold there, Mao’s socialist transformation in Xinjiang went more smoothly even than some Chinese interior provinces. Xinjiang was one of the successful examples of Mao’s socialist transformation. In 1956 Xinjiang was established as Communist China’s second autonomous region for minority, which in fact was modeled on the structures of Soviet republics. By then Xinjiang had been thoroughly sovietized and essentially become Chinese equivalent counterpart of Central Asia.
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