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► **To cite this version:**

Rémi Castets. ”The integration of Xinjiang to Chinese Nation State: CCP policies and discourses aimed at controlling minorities representations”. Chloé Froissart; Jérôme Doyon. The Chinese Communist Party at 100 Years, Australian University Press, pp.280-300, 2024, 978-1760466237. hal-04796973

HAL Id: hal-04796973

<https://hal.science/hal-04796973v1>

Submitted on 23 Nov 2024

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Chapter Title: The Integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese Nation-State: Controlling Minority Representations and Fighting against Political Contestation
Chapter Author(s): Rémi Castets

Book Title: The Chinese Communist Party
Book Subtitle: A 100-Year Trajectory
Book Editor(s): Jérôme Doyon, Chloé Froissart
Published by: ANU Press. (2024)
Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.13316140.19>

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The Integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese Nation- State: Controlling Minority Representations and Fighting against Political Contestation

Rémi Castets

In memory of Dru

Introduction

Since its conquest, Xinjiang has been a restive territory where the authority of the Chinese central power is subject to challenge (Lattimore [1950] 1975; Forbes 1986; Benson 1990; Millward 2007). Understanding the ins and outs of the strategies pursued by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after its takeover of power in the area is not always an easy task since its decisions can be opaque. At the same time, its secretive decision-making process often masks diverging approaches among its cadres, especially between central and local levels.¹

1 Interviews with former CCP members from the region living abroad. See also Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Chapter 1, this volume.

However, over the last three decades, the number of monographs, reports, PhD theses and scientific articles shedding light on the political history of Xinjiang have multiplied. This has fed a broader and deeper understanding of the origins of the strategic choices made by central and provincial administrations to reassert their control on the region (McMillen 1979; Teufel Dreyer 1986; Gladney 1996, 2003, 2004; Shichor 2003; Castets 2003, 2013; Zhu, Chen and Yang 2004; Millward 2007; Bovingdon 2010; Clarke 2011, 2022; Tobin 2020; Roberts 2020).

These studies on the political situation in Xinjiang make it clear that, over the past decades, the CCP has developed various strategies to cope with political opposition and ethnic minorities' demands for a less sinicising model of modernisation. These strategic changes, often linked to the evolution of the balance of power between Party factions, have unveiled CCP cadres' various sensibilities according to their ethnic or geographical origin and/or political supports/networks (McMillen 1979). However, the evolution of the balance of power between factions, and the evolution of the degree of autonomy given to local political and administrative levels, only partly explains the changing discourse and strategies mobilised since 1949.

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the mutations of the CCP's discourse and strategies deployed for controlling minority representations and fighting against political contestation in Xinjiang. Because of the opacity of CCP policies, some elements still remain unclear. However, we will try here to recontextualise those changes, relying on information provided in the academic literature, NGO reports and leaks from the Chinese administration, as well as interviews and data collected by the author over the last two decades in China, Xinjiang and among the Uyghur diaspora.

Chinese Communist Party's Production of Meaning, Nation-Building and Definition of the Right Modernisation Path

When the People's Liberation Army (PLA) took control of Xinjiang at the turn of the 1950s, the CCP cadres arrived in a territory where the Party had almost no base. In order to legitimise its rule, but also to implement its national and modernisation project, the CCP had to build and extend the scope of its new Chinese 'scientific state' – 'a political entity that seeks to

homogenise the population within its borders for administrative purposes using the latest scientific techniques and methods in the name of efficiency (Smith 1971, 231).

First, the CCP had to establish a firm military presence and a ramification of CCP cells and administrative structures that would progressively assert its control on the people's lives and minds. Actually, the region's state administration and CCP apparatus were placed under the command of a hardliner, General Wang Zhen (王震) (1949–52), after General Peng Dehuai (彭德怀) had to take on other responsibilities. Wang Zhen was replaced in the early 1950s by another military man, Wang Enmao (王恩茂) (1952–67, 1981–85). This officer, having participated in the 'peaceful liberation of the region', eventually became a fine connoisseur of the local political context and would pilot the region through a mix of attentiveness and firmness. Both Wang Zhen and Wang Enmao mobilised PLA veterans to establish CCP and state authority in the region (Shichor 2003). They played a crucial role in pacifying and building the security architecture in the region, contributing to the structuration of what would become the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (*Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan* 新疆生产建设兵团).

At the same time, to enhance its stabilisation strategy (see below), the CCP initially promoted relatively moderate policies that sought to activate/reactivate² local political relays (McMillen 1979). On the right of the local political spectrum, the (moderate) former chairman of Xinjiang Province, Burhan Shahidi, and other pro-Guomindang (GMD) political or military cadres (such as Tao Zhiyue 陶峙岳³) were rallied. On the left, an alliance was secured with the Uyghur Communist cadres linked to the former East Turkestan Republic. In that field, Saïpidin Azizov⁴ played a crucial role following the 'plane crash' that killed the ringleaders of the republic a few weeks before the arrival of PLA (McMillen 1979). However, the CCP's need for ideologised cadres was immense and pro-Soviet minority cadres were not fully reliable. Consequently, the Party had to send thousands of

2 Mao had tried to organise networks and connexions in the 1930s–40s, including by sending his brother to the area. Nevertheless, the small Maoist networks were largely dismantled after Sheng Shicai (盛世才) sided with the GMD in 1942 (Whiting and Sheng 1958).

3 He would become the first commander (1954–68) of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

4 After succeeding to Burhan Shahidi as chairman of the new autonomous region (1955–67), he will be the only Uyghur who served as Secretary of the Party in Xinjiang (1972–78). Considered a traitor by Uyghur anti-colonialists, he was a faithful follower of the Party lines of his time (McMillen 1979; Teufel Dryer 1986).

moderately skilled cadres to the area. They were supposed to be committed to its cause and had to try and win over Han⁵ or minority elements who had to be socialised with CCP values to promote and diffuse its new systems of representations among the masses (McMillen 1979).

To use the hermeneutic metaphor of ‘cable channels’ (Gladney 2004, 28–50), just as broadcasting companies provide the means to decipher their programs through a decoding system, those CCP cadres had to deliver the ‘deciphered’ version of a national history,⁶ economic relations and sociopolitical situations initially illegible or distorted by competing political forces trying to dominate the masses. Adjusted through the ‘mass line’ strategy,⁷ the CCP’s systems of interpretation, as we shall see, were destined to gather the assent of the national minorities (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族民族), with varying degrees of authority, around the following idea: the CCP was the only legitimate political force able to guide an essentialised and unitary Chinese nation thanks to a scientific system of deciphering history and social relations capable of liberating the masses: Marxist–Leninist communism. In other words, the CCP’s path of modernisation relied not only on socioeconomic teleologies aimed at freeing the masses, but also on a reinterpretation of the history of the peripheral regions aimed at integrating national minorities into the ‘motherland’ (*zuguo* 祖国).

In accordance with democratic centralism (*minzhu jizhongzhi* 民主集中制),⁸ the production of meaning on key issues such as class struggle and nation-building but also the control of the state and its monopoly of legitimate violence were to be the prerogatives of the Party. The Party set the political line. In other words, it mobilised a teleology that no one was allowed to question. Given this mission, in contrast to liberal democracies that do not fundamentally challenge the capitalist system, the Party’s relationship to alternative ideologies and thoughts implied a strong security dimension in order to avoid any ‘backsliding’. This certainty that there is no other way forward stemmed from the assumption that ‘scientific socialism’/ Marxism was not an ideology but a scientific framework for uncovering the march of history. As mentioned above, the Party was the bearer of a system of deciphering social, economic and political facts that would restore a ‘truth’ that it alone had the means to distil. The Party, by virtue of its

5 In this context, former cadres or allies of the GMD or demobilised soldiers of the Nationalist army.

6 On this issue, see Vanessa Frangville, Chapter 13, this volume.

7 On this issue, see Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Chapter 1, this volume.

8 Ibid.

capacity to mobilise the analytical prism of historical materialism, held a sort of monopoly on the production of ‘truth’, and through the objectives set by the Politburo in particular, it also held a monopoly on defining the margins of interpretations and arrangements that should be made to fit with the context.

In other words, as the agent of class struggle, the CCP saw itself as the spearhead of a nation that it alone was entitled to define and protect. Mobilising a policy of national categorisation derived from that of Moscow, the Party became the guardian of an indivisible unitary Chinese nation with the mission of embracing the populations that had emerged from the multiethnic Qing Empire. This multiethnic but unitary national model (*tongyi duo minzu de guojia* 统一多民族国家) was accompanied by a theoretical recognition of the particularities of these populations, a system of autonomy (however bogus, as we will see later in this chapter), and a series of material and statutory benefits.⁹ Recognising the particularities of national groups, the Chinese nationalities policy aimed to get them to accept identities and histories that justified their belonging to the ‘motherland’ in exchange for material and symbolic benefits. In Xinjiang, as in the rest of China, to serve its ideological goals and manufacture consent, the Party at the same time pushed forward its egalitarian, progressive project and the dismantling of ‘feudal’ and capitalist systems of economic domination in response to the frustrations or aspirations of some left-wing elites and the most impoverished masses.

However, the CCP found Xinjiang to be a territory where systems of representation antagonistic or difficult to reconcile with Communist ideology and the Chinese nation had taken root among the masses and elites. The attachment to local interpretations of Islam and their accompanying principles and value systems complicated matters. The supporters of the traditional Islamic order¹⁰ as well as supporters of a reformist Islam, despite their division and lack of political structuring, defended alternative value systems and sociopolitical orders (Castets 2013).

In addition, during the first half of the twentieth century, the region witnessed the structuring of two rival anti-colonial ideological nebulae that gradually spread their systems of representation and their project of national

9 National minorities were given quota points for easier access to university, were entitled to one more child under the one-child policy and so on.

10 Particularly relevant to the Sufi world.

construction among the elites. The spread of Jadid/Pan-Turkist reformism (Forbes 1986; Hamada 1990; Klimeš 2015) as well as the development of pro-Soviet anti-colonial Communist circles (Lattimore [1950] 1975; Whiting and Sheng 1958; Benson 1990; Wang 1999; Brophy 2016) were likely to weaken the CCP's projects and Chinese sovereignty. The first, viscerally anti-Communist, promoted a discourse on the modernisation of local societies and the nation that inscribed them with a Turkic and Islamic character outside of Chineseness. The second circle was mainly established in the territory of the former Republic of East Turkestan and in the north. It was nourished by Marxist–Leninist thought disseminated by Stalin's USSR (Wang 1999; Brophy 2016). However, for many of Turkic-speaking militants, their Marxist ideological background was backed up by an anti-colonial perspective feeding defiance towards the Chinese nation-state.

Even if the local anti-Chinese political forces were ideologically divided and were not in a position to threaten the PLA militarily, the entrenchment of the systems of representation that they promoted or defended was likely to fuel defiance of the CCP's policies and national model. In the same way, the entrenchment in the society of their ideological systems and of the systems of representations they mobilised rendered part of the population impervious to the Party's discourse and ideology.¹¹ In other words, these forces and the systems of representation they relied on weakened the legitimacy of the Party and the acceptance of its modernisation project.

Faced with the persistence of this more or less vigorous defiance fed by the verticality and sinicising dimension of centre–periphery relations in the Chinese Communist state, the Party used various strategies to impose its model of modernisation and the integration of minorities into the Chinese nation. In spite of fundamental changes in the management of minority issues and the perspectives and goals of policymaking in Xinjiang, the last decades of CCP rule have been marked by a more or less exacerbated security approach to alternative opinions and thought against the backdrop of the fundamental question of defining the degree and spectrum of control of representations that are supposed to guarantee national cohesion in Xinjiang.

11 Following Andrew Vincent (2010, 18), we will consider here ideologies as:

bodies of concepts, values, and symbols which incorporate conception of human nature and thus indicate what is possible and impossible for humans to achieve; critical reflections on the nature of human interaction; the values which humans ought either to reject or aspire to; and the correct technical arrangements for social, economic, and political life which will meet the needs and interests of human beings.

Strategies for Countering Political Forces and Alternative Systems of Representation in Maoist China

A key issue for the CCP was to legitimise itself and to accelerate Xinjiang's integration into the Chinese nation through ideological work and the diffusion of a new interpretation of local history. CCP cadres had to deploy propaganda work to familiarise CCP recruits and the masses with those systems of representation. As in the rest of China, the Party took control of school curricula and the media, and ensured the establishment of associations to monitor religious communities, such as the Islamic Association of China (*Zhongguo Yisilanjiao xiehui* 中国伊斯兰教协会) (IAC).¹² In other words, the CCP started propagating interpretations of history linking the destiny of the minorities to the Chinese nation while simultaneously discrediting historical figures, anti-Communist politicians, and readings of Islam that went against the Party's modernisation and nation-building efforts. Historical actors and events were viewed through a prism analysing their 'separatist/loyalist' and 'feudal/modernist' dimension. This approach to history led to a denunciation of separatist figures and anyone who upheld the 'reactionary order' (Qi and Qian 2004; Zhang 1997).

Concerning the fight against potentially hostile political forces, the as yet fragile CCP initially targeted the most antagonistic elites, in other words the Jadids and the most anti-Communist Islamic elites. Jadid Pan-Turkists¹³ had made the pragmatic choice of allying themselves with the GMD (Forbes 1986) to avoid the region falling under Communist rule. To avoid execution or jail, many Jadid militants (Mohammad Emin Bughra, Isa Yusuf Alptekin) went into exile. However, in southern Xinjiang, the establishment of Communist authority was made more complicated by the religious ties between religious leaders¹⁴ and their followers, as well as by the entrenchment of anti-colonial Jadid reformism among the intellectual and economic elites. The CCP was counting on its redistributive and egalitarian project to gain

12 Created in May 1953, a local branch was set up in Xinjiang in 1956 as part of a strategy to coopt Muslim figures who would simultaneously supervise clerics and transmit CCP policies. Nevertheless, due to the anti-religious movements that began in 1958, the IAC's activity was reduced and it was completely disbanded at the start of the Cultural Revolution, when the Party took over responsibility for religious affairs.

13 A reformist movement aimed at importing modernity into Turkic-speaking societies to avoid their acculturation and eventually led to the end of colonial rule in the areas concerned.

14 Mostly Sufis.

the support of the poorest Uyghur peasants. However, this project required undermining a strong attachment to Islam and the influence of the most anti-Communist fringes of Uyghur society (i.e. the landowners, the Islamic elites, the traders, etc.). The more remote, restive oases of the Tarim Basin were not part of a multiethnic world like the north or east of Xinjiang, and the people were mindful of what had happened in neighbouring Soviet Central Asia two decades prior. The fear of experiencing the same repression and of living in a de-Islamised and collectivised order were strong tools for mobilisation.

Between 1950 and 1952, in the context of the campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries and the three- and five-antis campaigns, and later in the context of agrarian reform, dominant classes and former anti-Communist militants were targeted. With the Agrarian Reform Law of June 1950, followed by collectivisation in the mid-1950s, land was redistributed and later nationalised. At the same time, the elites' economic power and the ties of dependence that bound the masses to them were gradually eroded. However, the lack of knowledge of local culture and the clumsy zeal of many Han Party cadres frequently led them to offend the population. They sometimes alienated the support of the masses on whom they could have relied to bring down the power of the traditional and capitalist anti-Communist elites. Southern Xinjiang was thus riven by insurrectionary movements, particularly in the region between Kashgar and Khotan. They brought together Jadid cadres, landowners and certain Sufi networks before being gradually eradicated in the second half of the 1950s at the turn of the Great Leap Forward (Zhang 1997, 266–7; Castets 2013, 313–18).

At the same time, the state banned religious institutions from withholding taxes and progressively eliminated the economic power of the Islamic elites and landlords through the same measures aimed at redistributing property inheritance. A law to reform the management of the national minorities' religions came into force in 1958. It confirmed the dismantling of the system of autonomous mosques and of mortmain properties possessed by the clergy (Zhu, Chen and Hong 2004, 55–65). Having lost some of their sources of income, the religious elites lost their economic power and thereby their influence over persons whose income depended upon them. In turn, these elites became dependent on the benefits distributed by a Chinese state that only compensated the most conciliatory clerics.

In the north and east, insurrections launched by the Kazakh Osman Batur and the Uyghur Yulbar Khan were quickly crushed in the early 1950s. There, the CCP could rely on a larger Han presence¹⁵ and political allies. In the north, the CCP had to rely on the former pro-Soviet cadres of the Republic of East Turkestan who had recently been rallied thanks to pressure from the USSR. The pro-Soviet Communist circles of the Association for the Defence of Peace and Democracy in Xinjiang, the former sole party of the East Turkestan Republic (1944–49), remained powerful; in the summer of 1950, it still had more than 77,000 members. However, the CCP was rightly suspicious of them. Among the Turkic-speaking members of the Union, the Communist systems of representation covered up the anti-colonial and anti-Chinese sentiment that was ready to resurface. Many were deeply pro-Soviet, and distrust of the Chinese was widespread.

The province of Xinjiang was transformed into an autonomous region in 1955 partly to meet their aspirations. However, the largely symbolic autonomy fell far short of the genuine political autonomy or federal republic that many had hoped for.¹⁶ In spite of a theoretical recognition of the particularities of these populations and a series of material and statutory advantages, the shortcomings of this system prevented the transcription of numerous aspirations of Uyghur society, as well as the questioning of policies that were massively rejected, the most resented undoubtedly being the colonisation of the region and control of the local Party organisation by cadres from the centre. In addition, the Uyghurs, who were still the majority at the beginning of the 1950s, felt that the Party was playing other minorities against them through its policy of cooption and administrative division of the region.¹⁷

In short, disappointed by the limits of the Chinese system of autonomy, some took advantage of the Hundred Flowers Movement (*baihua yundong* 百花运动) to denounce Han chauvinism (*dahan zhuayi* 大汉注意) and to voice their disappointment. In the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement (*fanyoupai yundong* 反右派运动) that followed the Hundred Flowers

15 Around 7 per cent of the regional population according 1953 Census.

16 It is true that the chairmen of the People's Government, autonomous prefectures and autonomous townships of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region were often members of the nationality of the administrative unit in question. But, as in the rest of China, these autonomous political institutions were subject to CCP control. Up to now, the most important Party positions in the autonomous regions have been held by Han nationals loyal to Beijing.

17 Interviews in the early 2000s with former Uyghur intellectuals who had fled to the diaspora (Kazakhstan).

Movement, critical pro-Soviet cadres were subject to repression. By the end of 1957, more than 2,700 Party cadres were sent to the countryside as part of the Rectification Movement (McMillen 1979, 90) as a massive campaign against local nationalism (*difang minzuzhuyi* 地方民族主义) was launched between December 1957 and April 1958. The exodus to the USSR or withdrawal of these cadres from political life accelerated as the Sino-Soviet conflict and the Cultural Revolution worsened during the 1960s. Any political affinity with the Soviets could lead to serious problems. Moreover, at this time, Sino-Soviet tensions led the Party to be vigilant against any destabilising intent. Members of pro-Soviet circles participated in a secret network supported by the KGB, the People's Party of East Turkestan (PPTO) (*Shärkiy Türkistan Xälq Partiyisi*). The PPTO attempted to mobilise Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking population and cadres in preparation for a general insurrection against Beijing. It is said to have instigated various local uprisings and engaged in guerrilla acts (sabotage, skirmishes with the Chinese police and army, etc.) (Zhang 1997, 267–71). However, it was gradually weakened by the arrest of its leaders and by the end of Soviet support as tensions with China waned.

During the 1950s, the collectivisation drive pushed along by the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) fundamentally altered modes of life and favoured the immersion of minorities in the Party's new systems of representation. Madrasas and places of worship were closed down one after the other.¹⁸ Islam henceforth became excluded from life within the people's communes (*renmin gongshe* 人民公社). Despite a relative reprieve after the Great Leap Forward in some areas of Xinjiang, repression increased with the launch of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. While cadres considered to be too pragmatic were evicted from CCP or PLA top positions in the region (such as Wang Zhen or Tao Zhiyue) (Teufel Dreyer 1986), radical Maoists or opportunist cadres endorsed the eradication of religion and the rapid assimilation of the national minorities.¹⁹ This repression reached its height during the campaign against the 'Four Olds' (*po si jiu* 破四旧).²⁰ Promotion of atheism, the banning of Islam and cultural assimilation became the rule. Along with figures suspected of 'local nationalism', many clerics, Shaykhs, Ishans and their disciples were sent to work camps, decimating the elite of the Turkic-speaking population. At the same time, the legitimacy of the

18 Interviews with Uyghur clerics who fled abroad in the 1990s (Turkey, 2007).

19 On the issue of cadres' pragmatism, see Jérôme Doyon and Long Yang, Chapter 5, this volume.

20 That is to say, 'old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits'.

Party had been weakened by the disastrous image of bullying and excesses generated by the harshest periods of the Cultural Revolution (McMillen 1979, 181–307).

1980s: Opening New Spaces of Freedom and an Informal Process of Conflict Mediation

After the dark years of the Cultural Revolution, in the 1980s, the Party, at the initiative of reformist cadres such as Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦), reviewed its policy on minorities in order to regain a certain legitimacy (Clarke 2011, 72–91). This change of line gave hope to anti-colonial circles. Hu Yaobang's visit²¹ to Tibet at the beginning of the 1980s was followed by reforms. In 1982, through the revision of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Constitution, and in 1984, through the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy²² (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzu quyu zizhi fa* 中华人民共和国民族区域自治法), the Chinese state signalled that it would make the system of autonomy more effective, particularly in the cultural, educational and economic fields in areas inhabited by minorities.²³ While economic reform and economic development were seen as essential tools for the resolution of ethnic tensions, the reformists around Deng Xiaoping chose at the same time to reopen spaces for cultural (art. 10, 37, 38) and religious freedom (art. 11), as stated in the Law of the PRC on Regional National Autonomy. Without abandoning the repression of ideas or activities that questioned Chinese sovereignty, the authorities chose to build trust and cohesion through cooption. Han and minority intellectuals sympathetic to the Party's cause continued to distil its discourse on society and the nation, but, as censorship was relaxed, alternative discourses could once again be expressed in the social sphere and even published as long as they did not engage in direct confrontation with the Party (Clarke 2011, 79–91).

At the same time, with de-collectivisation and the disappearance of the people's communes, control was less easy, and the Party had to find new relays to prevent the masses from straying too far from the path it

21 Hu Yaobang visited Xinjiang three times: 1983, 1985 and 1986.

22 Amended in 2001.

23 Chapters 1 and 3 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy, 1984.

had traced. The Party, in this case the autonomous region's general Party secretary, Wang Enmao, resumed a united front policy: in short, rallying actors outside the Party in order to achieve the CCP's political goals. Purged cadres were rehabilitated while some of the Han people sent to the region during the Cultural Revolution were authorised to return to inland China. The Party incorporated or called upon individuals to serve as its relays, for example in religious associations. These minority cadres were sometimes recruited in spite of their political past and sometimes even in spite of their actual degree of loyalty to the Party. Apart from careerists, some believed that greater autonomy could be achieved by reforming the Party from within. In a way, the indulgence and even collaboration of some of those local cadres with the regenerating anti-colonial forces contributed to expanding the space for alternative ideas and political action. However, these minority cadres and intellectuals also acted as mediators when conflicts with the state emerged (Castets 2013, 205–54, 308–36). They were the vectors of the subjectivity of the local populations, allowing a better understanding of the Party and easing bursts of tension.

In a territory in which most minorities were Muslim, the Party also relied on the Islamic Association of China. The IAC's activities were reaffirmed by the Party Central Committee on 31 March 1982. While the new constitution solemnly declared freedom of religious belief²⁴ without abandoning the promotion of atheism, the Central Committee in its Document 19 of 1982 developed a framework regulating relations between the state and religion after the long period of trouble:

The basic task of these patriotic religious organisations is to assist the Party and the government to implement the policy of freedom of religious belief, to help the broad mass of religious believers and persons in religious circles to continually raise their patriotic and socialist awareness, to represent the lawful rights and interest of religious circles, to organise normal religious activities, and to manage religious affairs well. All patriotic religious organisations should follow the Party's and government's leadership. Party and government cadres in turn should become adept in supporting and helping religious organisations to solve their own problems.²⁵

24 Article 35 of the 1982 constitution.

25 For an entire translation of the document, see MacInnis (1989, 8–26).

According to the official rhetoric, the IAC thus acted as a ‘bridge’ (*qiaoliang* 桥梁) and as a ‘link’ (*niudai* 纽带) with the Muslim communities (Zhang, Li and Wang 2008; Doyon 2014). The IAC was supposed to transmit the religious policies of the Party and, at the same time, represent the Muslim masses. Its revival was part of a series of reforms intended to forge channels of dialogue between Muslims and the state. It also contributed to the creation of a climate of confidence and trust. However, the Party’s trust was not boundless. In Document 19, the Central Committee stipulated that places of worship were to remain under the dual supervision of the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB, *Zongjiao shiwu ju* 宗教事务局) and the religious associations in charge of running them. Thus, through the RAB, the state maintained the direct right to oversee places of worship. However, without a precise legal codification of what constituted illegal religious activities, certain clerics were able to mobilise networks at various levels, bypassing the instructions of the administration. In some areas, RAB surveillance could be lax in order to avoid problems outside periods of tensions, while in other situations their zeal could exacerbate tensions.²⁶

1990s–2000s: Increased Surveillance, Repression and the Introduction of Legal Measures to Regulate Society

After the waves of anti-colonial student protests in 1985 and 1988 and then the protests against the book *Sexual Customs* (*xing fengsu* 性风俗),²⁷ which again degenerated into anti-colonial protests in May 1989 (Castets 2013, 221–8), the conservative faction of the CCP, which had taken over the reins of power in Beijing, called for control over the region to be strengthened. Conservatives believed that the looser control that had prevailed during the previous decade had allowed the restructuring of opposition forces and led society to retreat from the principles and values advocated by the Party. A report from Xinjiang Social Academy Research group on Pan-Turkism

²⁶ Interviews with Uyghur clerics who fled abroad in the 1990s (Turkey, 2007).

²⁷ The book contained blasphemous statements dealing with the sexual habits of Chinese Muslims. Demonstrations involving religious leaders and members of the main Muslim national minorities were organised throughout the country (Beijing, Xining, Xian, Kunming, etc.). The Party addressed the demands of protestors in China proper, but in Urumqi, protesters attacked official buildings and shouted anti-colonial slogans, resulting in multiple arrests and convictions.

and Pan-Islamism diffusion and countermeasures (反伊斯兰主义反突厥主义在新疆的转播及对策研究)²⁸ is indicative of the Party's concerns in the 1990s:

In some places of southern Xinjiang, religious activities have reached a fever peak and a small number of ethnic separatists under the banner of religion are spreading separatism and fighting for ideological strongholds, seizing grassroots political power and the younger generation, and openly interfering with administration, the judicial system, and marriage. (Zhang 1997, 274)

The strategy of relying on mediators proved to be ineffective or even dangerous due to some cadres' lack of loyalty to the Party or insufficient ideological conviction. For example, the religious practices of some Party members raised concerns that the Party might become ideologically infiltrated and its ideological line distorted. The concerns of the Party leadership were confirmed by the outbreak of an aborted jihad that mobilised security forces and the army for a few days in the Akto district near Kashgar in April 1990. It was launched by talips²⁹ from an underground network called the East Turkestan Islamic Party (PITO) (*Shärkiy Türkistan Xälq Partiyisi*) (Zhang 1997, 271–3; Castets 2013, 321–8). The event was indicative of the complacency of some members of the CCP and patriotic organisations such as the IAC. In this case, a large proportion of PITO members came through the madrasas that Ablikim Makhsun Damolla had set up in the Karghilik oasis. This literate cleric, a supporter of the reformist current of Uyghur Islam, was also known to have been one of the protagonists of the uprisings against the Party in the 1950s in southern Xinjiang. However, after spending 20 years in custody, he had become vice-president of the regional branch of the IAC (Castets 2013, 275–7).

Moreover, at the time, the reopening of the borders between Xinjiang and neighbouring Muslim territories and the political events that shook Central Asia aroused the Party's vigilance. For some, the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan showed that hardened Muslim fighters could drive the army of a Communist empire, however powerful, from their territory. The fall of Communist totalitarianism in Europe, the collapse of the USSR and the independence of the Central Asian Republics galvanised an anti-colonial

28 This book, for internal use in Party and administration circles, is a collection of chapters bringing together the analysis of researchers and internal sources on the history of modern and pre-modern political opposition in Xinjiang from the Party's perspective.

29 Students in religion.

and pro-democracy sentiment that took advantage of the looser political climate of the 1980s to find expression in Xinjiang. After 1991, the militant circles mentioned above, and even some of the masses, saw the emergence of national states that included other major Turkic peoples of Central Asia as legitimising their independence aspirations.

In addition, the Uyghur diasporas in Central Asia and Turkey were reconnecting to Xinjiang. They were home to militant nationalist circles (Castets 2011) that were taking advantage of the reopening of the region to forge links, in particular the policies to open up Xinjiang to trade with Central Asia (Clarke 2011, 98–122). Thus, at the turn of the 1990s, while the majority of organisations in the Uyghur diaspora in the West began to unite around lobbying for the protection of the fundamental rights of Uyghurs, in Xinjiang, small groups with a sometimes short-life expectancy adopted more radical modes of action. In the early 1990s, while hopes for a greater autonomy vanished, violence rose in an attempt to destabilise China's sovereignty and alert the international community. Sabotage, arson, attacks on police barracks and military bases, the assassination of Han officials and Uyghur collaborators and bomb attacks revealed that radicalised anti-colonialist and Islamist elements were veering towards a terrorist strategy (Castets 2013, 229–40, 321–37).

In response to this situation, the Party gradually re-established tight control of the population based on several instructions and 'strike-hard' (*yanda* 严打) campaigns³⁰ aimed at targeting national splittism (*minzu fenlie* 民族分裂). At a special meeting on maintaining security in Xinjiang in 1996, the Politburo resurrected several priorities to re-establish firm control over the region and its minorities (CCP Central Committee Document 1996).³¹

First, although the issue was already mentioned in Document 19 and in the preamble of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, the Party was making a priority of effectively reinforcing ideological homogeneity between the leading circles and the base in Xinjiang and to rely on reliable Party cadres:

30 This increasingly repressive approach would be embodied during his terms by the XUAR's new CCP secretary Wang Lequan (王乐泉) (1994–2010).

31 'Document No. 7 of the Politburo of the Central Committee from the meeting on Maintaining Stability in Xinjiang' (关于维护新疆稳定的会以纪要 中央政治局委员会7号文件), Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Document Central, 19 March 1996, trans. Turdi Ghoja. The minutes of this meeting are better known as 'Secret Document No 7'.

On every level, Party committees and the people's government and concerned branches have to adhere to Deng Xiaoping's theory of building Chinese-style socialism and the Party's basic principles and guiding policy. On every level, Party and government leaders need to create a responsible order in defending ethnic unity and social stability and perfecting it while holding high the banner of defending ethnic unity and respect of the law with great political sensitivity and pride, unifying to the greatest level the cadres and people of every nationality and depending on them to alienate as much as possible the very small number of ethnic separatists and criminals who commit serious crimes, and strike hard against them, thus reinforcing the work of defending stability in all fields ... The chairmen of village Party branches and the heads of neighbourhood districts have to be chosen carefully ... At the same time, take real measures to train a large number of Han cadres who love Xinjiang and who will adhere to the Party's basic theories, principles, and guiding policies to correctly implement the Party's ethnic and religious policies and relocate them to Xinjiang.³²

According to the Politburo Standing Committee, regional authorities also had to 'stabilise the ideological and cultural stronghold against separatism through strong propaganda' addressing 'the Party's ethnic and religious policies, laws and decrees ... and patriotic and socialist ideas'. This implied, for example in the field of religion belief, that Communist Party members and cadres should be Marxist materialists, and therefore should not be allowed to believe in and practice religion. The Politburo also underlined the necessity of 'implementing comprehensively and correctly the Party's ethnic and religious policies' through the strengthening of 'legal control of ethnic and religious affairs'. This recommendation confirmed another major trend.

Between the end of the 1980s and the 1990s, regional authorities, with support from the central government, started paving the way for a system of judicial control designed to define the spectrum of discourses and religious activities that were tolerated. This framework aimed in particular to characterise as unlawful any activities and discourses that were detrimental to the modernisation model and the national construction efforts of the Party. This move was also supposed to provide a framework for the administrative bodies in charge of implementing these new rules.

32 Ibid.

The juridisation (*fazhibhua* 法制化) in this respect indicates the basic trend. During the Maoist period, the state relied on cadres and activists to launch rectification campaigns. Until then, there was no real legislation in this area: the degree of state control over society was primarily determined by the political directives of the CCP Politburo. In an attempt to counteract the rise of subversive discourse in Islamic circles, the government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region issued, from the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards, a series of religious regulations targeting several aspects of religious practice and organisation in the area. A wider framework was established in 1994 through the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Regulations on Religious Affairs (*Xinjiang weiwuer zizhi qu zongjiao shiwu guanli tiaolie* 新疆维吾尔自治区宗教事务管理条例). From that time onward, religious regulations were constantly widened and tightened (Castets 2015). The registration of places of worship was implemented, and religious activities within them were monitored with increasing strictness. While Xinjiang served as a kind of laboratory for experimenting with these measures, national and regional regulations were to follow over the years. Little by little, imams were purged and placed under close control of the Religious Affairs bureaus, which strictly relayed the instructions of the State Administration of Religious Affairs. While religious influence was closely monitored, or even proscribed in the administration and the school system, the teaching of Islam was placed under the close control of the Party with a view to transforming the new generation of imams into faithful relays of Party ideology. This work of regulating the spectrum of religious activities was supported by a takeover of the religious education systems. With regard to the teaching of Islam, the new legislation outlawed underground Koranic schools/classes (*siban jingwen xuexiao / ban* 私办经文学校/班). They were closed down one after the other, and those that continued illegally were severely punished from the 1990s onwards. Imams were no longer allowed to give ‘catechism’ classes without authorisation. To be accredited, young imams had to graduate from official Islamic Institutes (*Yisilanjiao jingxuexiao* 伊斯兰教经学校).

This move went hand in hand with a relative marginalisation of the IAC in the monitoring and regulation of religious life. The Party decided to rely on administrative structures it could control more directly (Castets 2015). However, the management of religious issues and ethnic affairs was still taking place in a complex ecosystem whose balances could vary locally

according to the networks, zeal or reluctance of the parties involved.³³ The few testimonies we collected³⁴ seemed to indicate different configurations, depending on the charisma and networks of religious personnel and the attitude of the local government or administration. Other elements were indicative of this short-circuiting of the IAC and increasingly close surveillance of the administration. The fact that the IAC branches in some of Xinjiang's sensitive oases operated on a shoestring budget, or that their offices were integrated squarely into the CCP's United Front Work Department or the RAB, was also revealing (Zhang, Li and Wang 2008).

The Politburo document also recommended drastically reinforcing the public security and national security apparatus and 'fully utilising their functions in fighting separatism and sabotage activities'. By then it was already encouraging the creation of systematic records of 'unpatriotic elements'. Another preoccupation of the Party was to wield diplomatic actions and other means to deactivate Uyghur ethnic separatist organisations operating abroad, especially in Central Asia, Turkey and the West, a policy that has been fruitful mainly in Central Asia (Castets 2011).

After the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, a major inflection occurred in the lexicon and the international dimension of the struggle against the Uyghur political opposition (Clarke 2008). China decided to capitalise on the capture of elements of the East Turkistan Islamic Party by US forces in the Af-Pak area after the fall of the Taliban to try to insert the fight against the Uyghur political opposition into the fight against international jihadism. From the 1980s onwards, separatism had become an increasingly decried evil in the discourse of Party cadres. However, from the early 2000s, opponents or critics in Xinjiang were quite systematically assimilated into the 'three forces' (*san gu shili* 三股势力): terrorism, separatism and (religious) extremism. This repackaging defended the idea that Uyghur non-violent anti-colonial nationalist circles, non-violent Islamists and Salafi jihadists formed a sort of nebula with vague outlines, called East Turkistan (*dongtu* 东突). In short, this new terminology assimilating distinct political networks made it possible to lump them together and to legitimise, in the name of the fight against terrorism, the repression of any form of challenge to the authority of the CCP.

33 About how these processes unfolded differently outside Xinjiang, see for example Jérôme Doyon's work on the Nanjing region (Doyon 2014).

34 Interviews conducted in the diaspora between 2003 and 2008.

The Turning Point of the 2010s: The Projection of Xinjiang into the Ultra- Controlled Society of the ‘Chinese Dream’ (中国梦)

As we have seen above, from the 1990s onwards, the Party returned to a logic of social control, based on recurrent security campaigns and on a legal framework that was to be constantly reinforced and implemented. At the same time, it relied on an accelerated economic growth boosted by transfers from the central state and investments by public companies in infrastructure, the exploitation of natural resources and tourism (Shan and Wei 2010). The economic opening up of the region, towards Central Asia in particular, was deepened with growing interconnection in transport networks (road, rail, hydrocarbons, etc.) to stimulate trade and attract investment. The Xinjiang region has also been one of the areas favoured by the Great Western Development Plan, the main objective of which is to speed the growth of the provinces concerned through public investment and the attraction of foreign direct investment.

Thus, the low-intensity terrorism that emerged in the 1990s almost completely disappeared (Castets 2003, 2013, 318–36). Despite occasional large-scale outbreaks of rioting, such as in Khotan and Ghulja (Yining) in 1995 and 1997, the political situation was quite stabilised by the end of the 1990s; however, it deteriorated again from the end of the decade. In the months leading up to the Beijing Olympics, the Turkestan Islamic Party, which at that time belonged to an Al-Qaeda affiliates network in Waziristan, began to threaten the Chinese authorities. By the late 2000s, the measures mentioned above had destroyed the ability of minority Party members, intellectuals or imams to mediate in conflicts or tensions (Castets 2015). While the sinicisation of the school system in particular was increasingly presented as a corollary of modernisation and economic development (Tobin 2020, 59–86), previously isolated incidents began multiplying as levels of control and repression rose further following the riots in the regional capital, Urumqi, in July 2009. In southern Xinjiang, attacks and violence carried out by young people denouncing colonial policies started shaking the Uyghur majority areas (Julienne 2021, 166–92). The constant tightening of control, the sanctioning of an ever-broader range of opinions,

and the zeal and even abuses of certain Han officials who felt protected by a hierarchy under pressure from the central government to stabilise the region started feeding a vicious circle.

In July 2009, demonstrations by the Uyghur population to demand more equality and consideration from the authorities degenerated in the regional capital in the face of repression. Hans were targeted before retaliating in turn. The riots officially claimed 197 lives, three-quarters of whom were Hans. Arrests were massive; some people disappeared, and dozens of Uyghurs were sentenced to death. The internet was cut off for several months, video surveillance became widespread and Xinjiang became a testing ground for various technological surveillance devices.³⁵

A few months after those events, in May 2010, the first Xinjiang work conference (a joint conference of the CCP Central Committee and PRC State Council) was held. The group of leaders³⁶ participating in the conference decided to deepen economic support from the central government and other provinces while continuing policies aimed at maintaining stability and fighting against ethnic separatism. Among those policies, the Partner Assistance Programme was to provide increased personnel and financial support from 19 provinces and cities from the rest of China. Another decision was to modify the implementation of taxes on natural resources and to reallocate them to the regional government as a means of boosting government investment.³⁷ One major decision of the group was to reallocate some of these funds to improve living standards in the poorest minority areas, while the regional government was to develop vocational training and new jobs benefiting minorities (Shan and Wei 2010, 63–4).

However, minorities felt more than ever the weight of Chinese state control and repression. While the sinicisation of the school system was accelerating (Zhang and McGhee 2014, 32–9), a portion of the youth and of the wider Uyghur population felt increasingly alienated, and also frustrated on a daily basis by restrictions on freedoms and the abuses of a security apparatus under pressure to obtain results. The administration was pushed after 2009 to identify and eradicate the ‘three forces’ and to sanction more widely any

35 For a more detailed analysis of the event and its aftermath, see Tobin (2020, 114–38).

36 Among these were President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) and Vice-President Xi Jinping (习近平).

37 Investment in fixed assets was to increase drastically through this system during the 2011–15 Five-Year Plan (Shan and Weng 2010, 63; Zhang and McGhee 2014, 28–32). This adjustment went hand in hand with hardliner Wang Lequan's departure as Xinjiang Party secretary and the arrival of Zhang Chunxian (张春贤), a cadre mostly focused on developmental and social issues.

unpatriotic behaviour.³⁸ The general situation, but also police malpractice and administration intransigence, fuelled in return growing frustrations within society, and premeditated and unpremeditated acts of violence proliferated. Together, the rejection of the Chinese state's verticality, abuses and brutally sinicising model of modernisation exacerbated despair and fuelled increasing acts of violence and attacks in the south. Whereas between 2008 and 2012, casualties of what the authorities described as terrorist acts³⁹ did not exceed a few dozen per year, they numbered several hundred in 2014. Several violent actions were aimed at striking Chinese and foreign public opinion and media. These included a vehicle-ramming attack on Tiananmen Square in autumn 2013, a knife attack at the Kunming railway station in March 2013 and the spring 2014 attacks in Urumqi. While smaller-scale attacks took place in the following months, 2014 was a black year for China, with more than 300 victims of 'terrorism' compared to a handful of victims each year in the 2000s according to official figures (Julienne 2018, 82).

President Xi Jinping, visiting Xinjiang at the time of the 2014 attacks, promised to eradicate the terrorist threat at its roots and, more broadly, to ensure the stability of the region.⁴⁰ A second Central Xinjiang Work Conference was held in May 2014 to solve the problem. The issue of addressing the question of national minorities through economic development and measures for improving minority living standards became overshadowed by a security prism aimed at annihilating any opposition to CCP rule through unprecedented surveillance, control and coercion over Xinjiang's minorities. A new Special Strike-Hard against Violent Terrorism Campaign (*yanli da ji baoli kongbu huodong zhuanxiang xingdong* 严厉打击暴力恐怖活动专项行动) opened the way to a vast policy of categorisation of individuals as 'trustworthy', 'average' or 'untrustworthy'.⁴¹ It also launched a hunt inside Party and administrative organs against 'two-faced' cadres who had criticised Party policies (*liangmian ren* 两面人).⁴²

38 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses": China's Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang's Muslims, 9 September 2018, www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs.

39 Not all acts defined as terrorism in China are covered by anti-terrorist legislation in the West.

40 For a wider view of Xi Jinping's discourse following the 2014 events, see Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, "Absolutely No Mercy": Leaked Files Exposed How China Organized Mass Detention Among Muslims, *New York Times*, 16 November 2019, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html.

41 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses".

42 Heike Holberg, 'Xi Jinping and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of "Two-Faced Individuals"', *China Trends*, 7, October 2020, www.institutmontaigne.org/en/publications/china-trends-7-shrinking-margins-debate.

This turn to a zero-tolerance attitude was affirmed at a time when China's president had begun to reorganise the bodies in charge of minority issues, religious issues and the fight against terrorism. The aim was to rationalise their organisation by placing them under closer supervision of the Party and the circles of power affiliated with the president (Kam and Clarke 2021, 630–2).⁴³ The management of national minorities and religious affairs, formerly in the hands of various administrations but also of the so-called 'representative' patriotic associations, was to some extent questioned. They were not considered reliable enough, even if in official discourse they were still considered the CCP's main partners. The supervision of these tasks had been entrusted to the Party's United Front Work Department (UFWD),⁴⁴ itself more than ever in resonance with the president's lines after being placed under the control of his allies (Zhao and Leibold 2019, 41; Kam and Clarke 2021, 630–2). Thus, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the State Administration for Religious Affairs Commission and, a fortiori, the IAC were now effectively bypassed/short-circuited by Party organs such as the UFWD (Doyon 2018) and the National Security Commission created in late 2013. The establishment of a dedicated Xinjiang office within the UFWD in 2017 under the supervision of security officials indicated the intention to handle Xinjiang policy through a security perspective (Kam and Clarke 2021).

In addition, increasingly narrow legal frameworks continue to be refined to combat what the Chinese authorities label as 'terrorism' and 'extremism' and, more broadly, all opinions and political or religious thinking that does not fit within the Party lines. In November 2014, the Assembly of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region passed a new law updating the 1994 regional religious regulations. One of the main threats identified by this new regional law was religious extremism.⁴⁵ The law provided an extended frame for extremism's juridical characterisation as well as sanctions to eliminate 'extremist' content that could circulate via new media such as the internet or social media. In December 2015, the National People's Congress passed China's first antiterrorism law (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fankongbuzhuyi*

43 Max Oitdmann, 'The Xi Jinping Cohort and the Chinafication of Religion', *Berkeley Forum*, 16 March 2020, berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-xi-jinping-cohort-and-the-chinafication-of-religion.

44 See Emmanuel Jourda, Chapter 6, this volume.

45 The latter is defined as 'activities or comments that twist the doctrines of a religion and promote thoughts of extremism, violence and hatred'. See 'Religious Extremism Law Imposes New Restrictions on China's Uyghurs', *Radio Free Asia*, 12 October 2014, www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/religious-extremism-law-12102014160359.html?searchterm:utf8:ustring=extremism+xinjiang.

fa 中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法). This law, which came into force in 2016, gives an extensive definition of terrorism, criminalising a large range of activities. It is also aimed at coordinating the political, economic, legal, cultural, educational, diplomatic and military struggle against ‘terrorist activities’ through the establishment at different administrative levels of ‘counterterrorism work steering agencies’ (*fankongbuzhuyi lingdao jigou* 反恐怖主义工作领导小组), the fight against ‘terrorist activities’ being supervised at the national level by the National Counter-Terrorism Working and Coordinating Small Group (*Guojia fankongbu gongzuo lingdao xiaozu* 国家反恐怖工作领导小组) (Julienne 2021, 199–204). Those structures can rely on the information provided by the National Counterterrorism Intelligence Centre (*Guojia fankongbuzhuyi zhongxin* 国家反恐怖主义情报中心). This national centre’s goal is to rationalise the collection and use of information in order to better anticipate and strengthen the efficiency of the counterterrorism apparatus.

The frame provided by these new sets of laws, new bodies and reorganisations, and the use of traditional and high-tech tools of surveillance has generated a kind of Orwellian world. The strengthening of police forces has played a crucial role in increasing security, surveillance and data collection. One main policy in this field in 2014 was the establishment of public security offices in every village or hamlet in the region, using regular and auxiliary staff. Special police forces and anti-riot equipment has been strengthened, and police recruitment reached a peak⁴⁶ after Chen Quanguo (陈全国) replaced Zhang Chunxian as Xinjiang’s Party secretary. This tendency is also revealed by the explosion in security budgets.⁴⁷ While the security situation was deteriorating in 2013, Zhang Chunxian’s ‘*fang hui ju* 访惠聚’ (visit, benefit, gather) program was presented as the reinvigoration of the Maoist practice of the ‘mass line’.⁴⁸ Two hundred thousand Party cadres and administrators were sent to visit mostly Uyghur families in southern Xinjiang, sometimes staying for several days to interview adults and children in order to provide patriotic education and identify disloyal

46 Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, ‘Xinjiang’s Rapidly Evolving Security State’, *Jamestown Foundation*, 14 March 2017, jamestown.org/program/xinjiangs-rapidly-evolving-security-state/.

47 Adrian Zenz, ‘Domestic Security Budgets Reveal Scope of China’s Actions in Xinjiang’, *New Lens*, 14 November 2018, international.thenewslens.com/article/108116.

48 This trend is visible in Hong Kong too: see Samson Yuen and Edmund Cheng, Chapter 15, this volume.

subjects.⁴⁹ In October 2016, the initiative was expanded through the Becoming Family Campaign mobilising more than 1 million cadres visiting mainly families in rural areas (Grose and Leibold 2022).

One main feature of surveillance in Xinjiang and in China generally is the massive use of technology. Various devices and practices are commonly mobilised. Internet and phone telecommunications are massively monitored. Smartphones and computers are subject to verification and data can even be siphoned off by the police at any time at the multiple checkpoints that dot the roads or through wi-fi sniffers.⁵⁰ As in the rest of China today, a vast video surveillance system with facial recognition has been developed since 2009, while QR codes are affixed to the entrances of houses to better access the data of those who live there. Vehicles are fitted with GPS systems to make them trackable, and automatic number plate recognition systems scan vehicles on the road. A vast regional health campaign has already registered the DNA of the population. This campaign goes hand in hand with retinal scans, fingerprinting and even voice recordings.⁵¹ This level of mass surveillance reveals another change in China's security philosophy. It is no longer only a question of monitoring society and punishing harshly those who do wrong. The new devices are part of a logic of constant control and even predictive mass control against 'extremism'. The most advanced data collection and cross-referencing system is undoubtedly the famous 'Integrated Joint Operations Platform' (*yitihua lianhe zuozhan pingtai* 一体化联合作战平台).⁵² Developed by a subsidiary of the China Electronics Technology Group Corporation, its fine-mesh surveillance net aims to capture all seeds of dissent before they take root while at the same time flushing out 'two-faced' individuals⁵³ – that is, those who hide their true political views. The system is able to analyse a considerable amount of data according to a grid of arbitrary criteria⁵⁴ making it possible to flag 'unusual' behaviour and to classify individuals according to the degree of supposed risk they present.

49 Human Rights Watch, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses".

50 Human Rights Watch, 'China's Algorithms of Repression Reverse Engineering a Xinjiang Police Mass Surveillance App', May 2019, www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0519_web5.pdf.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 On this notion, see Jérôme Doyon and Long Yang, Chapter 5, this volume.

54 Such as 'Reciting the Quran', 'Wearing religious clothing or having a long beard', 'Having more children than allowed by family planning policy', 'Having returned from abroad', 'Acting suspiciously', 'Having complex social ties or unstable thoughts', 'Having improper [sexual] relations', 'Using suspicious software'. See Human Rights Watch, 'China's Algorithms of Repression'.

In this perspective, once refractory people and, more generally, people supposedly exposed to extremist thought are identified by these surveillance devices, they are to be treated within a vast re-education system designed to fight against ‘extremism’ in Xinjiang. This system was developed from the extrajudicial ‘transformation through education work’ (*jiaoyu zhuanhua gongzuo* 教育转化工作) system developed in China in the 1990s to re-educate followers of the Falun Gong sect. The system was reinigorated in Xinjiang under Zhang Chunxian’s guidance in 2014 and was considerably expanded when Chen Quanguo became the CCP secretary for Xinjiang in 2016 (Grose and Leibold 2022). According to Adrian Zenz’s analysis of satellite data and government contracts, more than 10 per cent of the Uyghur population is believed to have passed through the system (Zenz 2018; Zhao and Leibold 2019). The re-education system in Xinjiang employs a vast network of education/re-education/de-extremification devices and structures aimed at reforming minds in order to build a society of loyal citizens sharing common views, beliefs and values with the Party. Those devices range from patriotic education classes to infrastructure meant to mobilise processes of re-education adapted to their degree of ‘radicalisation’ and ‘dangerousness’ (Grose and Leibold 2022). Following criticism by international human rights organisations and Uyghur diasporic organisations, a new set of regulations revised in 2018 (*Xinjiang weiwuer zizhiqu jiduanhua tiaolie* 新疆维吾尔自治区极端化条例) provide a kind of legal framework to justify the re-education system, presenting a portion of it as vocational boarding schools.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Since the ‘peaceful liberation of Xinjiang’, the CCP, relying in particular on state structures, as well as united front and mass organisations, has waged a struggle that is still ongoing to eradicate anti-colonial political forces and any form of expression questioning the verticality of centre–periphery relations in China.

55 ‘Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang’, State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 17 August 2019, english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201908/17/content_WS5d57573cc6d0c6695ff7ed6c.html#:~:text=The%20vocational%20education%20and%20training,influence%20of%20religious%20extremist%20teachings.

To eliminate intellectuals, activists or discourses defending alternative ideological or value systems, but also to take control of representations to legitimise the appropriation of its own ideological representation systems, the Party has implemented a range of strategies over the last few decades. They include counter-insurgency; united front work;⁵⁶ mass mobilisations and mass line campaigns; re-education; juridical definitions of unpatriotic activities and attitudes; and, now, counterterrorism and mass surveillance mobilising information communications technology. The discourse on threats (securitisation) has also greatly evolved. The Party legitimised its strategies of eliminating competing political forces and ideas through a discourse of threat that, depending on the period, assimilated the enemy in Xinjiang into the major threats identified by the Politburo Standing Committee. In other words, local securitisation discourse has been subjected to the national discourse on threats in spite of the specificities of local political configurations. Over the years, an evolving, and often broad, lexical field has qualified the underground political opposition, the proponents of alternative ideologies and even critical elements within the Party. Initially, the terms ‘feudal’ or ‘counter-revolutionary’ forces were used; however, in the second half of the 1950s, these terms expanded to ‘rightists’ or ‘local nationalists’, and then, during the 1960s–70s, included (pro-Soviet) ‘revisionists’ to denounce disloyal elements of the Party. At the turn of the 1990s and the implementation of the ‘three forces’ (*sangu shili* 三股势力) rhetoric, counter-revolutionaries and local nationalists became ‘terrorists’ or ‘extremists’ – notions that have been placed in the second half of the 2010s under the seal of counterterrorism, de-extremification and re-education.

As a defender of a non-negotiable national model, the Party has rejected the identification of possible colonial issues. It has also rejected any further political autonomy or the implementation of a modernisation model that is less sinicising and more respectful of the sociocultural aspirations of minorities. Under Xi Jinping’s guidance, it promotes, on the contrary, an accelerated ‘Chinafication’ (*zhongguohua* 中国化) of their culture and religion.⁵⁷

56 On the history of the notion, see Emmanuel Jourda, Chapter 6, this volume. On the evolving practices of the united front work, see Samson Yuen and Edmund Cheng, Chapter 15, this volume.

57 This process should lead to the ‘creation of a new supra-ethnic identity animated by the loyalty to the PRC state and the messianic world-historical mission of the CCP’. See Oitdmann, ‘The Xi Jinping Cohort’.

For the Party, the causes of protest and violence in Xinjiang cannot be associated with its model of modernisation but are linked to the spread of subversive ideas, ‘ideological viruses’ distorting an idealised social reality and instilled by malevolent external political forces. In short, the Party has chosen to reject any dialogue on the redefinition of its policies in Xinjiang and pathologises alternative thinking (Grose and Leibold 2022).

Now, at the time of the ‘Chinese Dream’, Xi Jinping’s Party promotes a social order that, through social credit and the devices mentioned above, is intended to ensure the security of the population, increase its moral quality (*suzhi* 素质) and homogenise its representations to structure a stronger nation-state.

In other words, what Xinjiang is going through is nothing more than a litmus test revealing an increasingly securitarian drift and the building of a new high-tech form of ‘scientific state’ (Smith 1971). This new tentacular state control, unlimited by the democratic right of citizen scrutiny, rule of law or the separation of powers, capitalises on technologies and a pool of high-tech, state-supported companies that could proliferate abroad through Chinese cooperation with other authoritarian states. This scientific state, increasingly ‘total’ in its aspirations, would, according to its supporters in the Party, surpass Western liberal states weakened by values and systems of homogenisation and control that are too lax and too protective of individual rights, leading them towards long-term decline.

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