

The Making of State Territory in Xinjiang: Territorialization from Within and Without

Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China is an area where processes of spatial state making can be observed with great clarity. Relatively non-Han Chinese in cultural and demographic terms, Xinjiang offers valuable insights into the processes in which space is reconfigured and endowed with a specific territorial identity. The present paper focuses on two such processes: the construction of road networks and international diplomacy. First, it explores the role of transportation networks in establishing control over a place from within the state borders. Second, it discusses the role of international diplomacy in securing recognition of the national “bounded space” from without. Due to the large distance from China’s power center, state territorialization in Xinjiang faces significant challenges. Ambiguous and transnational ethno-national loyalties of Xinjiang’s multi-ethnic population further deflect the efforts of Chinese policy makers. Due to this complexity, Xinjiang is an important and comparatively valuable case study of the processes of spatial state making.

Introduction

Xinjiang, in western and diasporic sources also referred to as East Turkestan, constitutes one-sixth of China’s entire territory (1.666.000 square km; corresponding to the territories of Germany, Spain, France and Great Britain taken together), borders eight countries (Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) and Tibet, and is connected with eastern China by a relatively narrow land corridor.¹ Xinjiang’s location and topography pose significant challenges to the geomet-

1 The data for this paper was collected during a long-term fieldwork in Xinjiang in 2011–2012. I am grateful to the Swiss National Science Foundation and UniBern Research Foundation for providing the necessary financial support. Apart from the fieldwork data I also relate here to newspaper reports on Xinjiang published in the English edition of *People’s Daily*, the official Communist Party press organ, mainly in the years 2007–2008. The two maps which I use in this article, and some text passages in the sections on road construction in Xinjiang, were previously printed in Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi: “Roads in China’s Borderlands: Interfaces of spatial representations, perceptions, practices, and knowledges”, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 50.1 (2016), pp. 118-140.

tical² expansion of state power: most of its surface is covered by sand and stone deserts and the region is additionally intersected by the alpine Tengri Tagh / Tianshan 天山³ Mountains with peaks rising up to 7.500 m. The region's capital Urumchi is separated by a 3.500 km distance from the power center in Beijing and Xinjiang's western borders even lie beyond the 4.000 km range. Moreover, Xinjiang is sparsely populated and this population is strongly multi-ethnic, with a large portion of Muslim, Turkic-languages speakers (predominantly Uyghur and Kazakh, but also Kyrgyz) who numbered in 2010 almost 11.6 million in the total of 21.8 million resident population.⁴ Political loyalties of Xinjiang's *minzu* are divided.⁵ Some Kazakhs, Kyrgyz but also Tajik do feel bound with their co-ethnics in the young Central Asian states where they constitute titular nations. The largest *minzu*, the Uyghur, although not bound to any particular Central Asian state, are often discontent with the ways the Chinese state administers Xinjiang, which they regard as their homeland. Long policy implementation channels, difficult topography, complex ethnic structure, and exposed location at the far away border are among the challenges faced by Chinese state strategists attempting to integrate Xinjiang more closely into the Chinese political, cultural and social sphere.

Although the region referred today as Xinjiang has had a long history of contacts with dynasties ruling in "China proper" through trade and political alliances, the actual visibility of Chinese state institutions and presence of the Han population throughout the vast expanses of the region was marginal until the nineteenth century. Even though Chinese historiography tends to

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- 2 John Allen: "Three spaces of power: Territory, networks, plus a topological twist in the tale of domination and authority", in: *Journal of Power* 2.2 (2009), pp. 197–212.
 - 3 The former toponym is Uyghur, the latter Chinese. I provide both Uyghur and Chinese toponyms only where the two differ significantly, otherwise I use Uyghur place names. To transliterate Uyghur toponyms I use Uyghur Computer Alphabet with the exception of some names that are better known in the West by other transliteration forms, e. g. Kashgar and Hotan.
 - 4 Stanley Toops: "Spatial Results of the 2010 Census of Xinjiang", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, San Diego, 2013, pp. 21f.
 - 5 *Minzu* is the Chinese counterpart of the Soviet 'nationality'. On differences and parallels between *minzu* and ethnic groups see Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi: "The Han *Minzu*, Fragmented Identities, and Ethnicity", in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72.4 (2013), pp. 849-871.

ascribe the “unification of Xinjiang with the motherland” to the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.E. – 220 A.D.),⁶ Millward points out that the influence of Chinese dynasties was fragmented until large-scale efforts to integrate the region administratively with other Chinese provinces were undertaken by the Manchu Qing (1644–1911).⁷ It was also the Qing who gave the two basins north and south of Tengri Tagh / Tianshan one unitary name – Xinjiang 新疆, literally the “New Frontier”. The fall of the Qing, in 1911, launched a forty-year period of power shifts and rules of governors sandwiched between Russia’s (and, later, the Soviet Union’s) attempts to expand its influence in Xinjiang from the west and the new Chinese Republican government trying to do the same from the east. In 1949, the Chinese Red Army troops under the command of general Wang Zhen 王震 (1908–1993) marched into Xinjiang to carry out its “peaceful liberation” (*heping jiefang* 和平解放) and in the course of the 1950s gradually established the Communist power base in the region.

Xinjiang in the People’s Republic of China

In 1949, the non-Han people constituted almost 94% of the region’s population⁸ and were politically suspended between loyalty to the Soviet Union, Communist China and forms of local independence. Integrating Xinjiang into the Chinese national community and Chinese territory has since been a complex process that included changes not only in the administrative apparatus, land ownership and military, but also in historiography, education, as well as in the notions of national community, borders, belonging and divi-

6 The *People’s Daily* offers an example of this discourse stating that Han Chinese were one of the earliest people to settle down in Xinjiang and that since 60 B.C.E. “the inflow of the Han people to Xinjiang, including officials, soldiers and merchants, had never stopped”. Since then, the *People’s Daily* argues, Xinjiang has been an “inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation” (*People’s Daily Online* 23.10.2007).

7 James A. Millward: *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

8 Xinjiang Weiwu’er Zizhiqu Chengli 50 Zhounian Chouweihui Bangongshi 新疆维吾尔自治区成立 50 周年筹委会办公室 and Xinjiang Weiwu’er Zizhiqu Tongjiju 新疆维吾尔自治区统计局 (eds.): *Xinjiang wushi nian 1955–2005* 新疆五十年 1955–2005 (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2005), p. 205.

sions. From the early years on, the Chinese government tackled the state-making project in Xinjiang with great zeal. The establishment of the Communist power base was accompanied by the Democratic Reform in which land was gradually confiscated and collectivized.⁹ During the reform, the class of “local despots” (*eba* 恶霸) – landlords and wealthy herders – was gradually disposed of. Mass demobilization of between 90.000 and 110.000 soldiers¹⁰ of the People’s Liberation Army and the Guomindang Army present in the region accompanied the nationalization of land and property.¹¹ In 1954, an institution of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Xinjiang Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan 新疆生产建设兵团, hereafter Bingtuan) was established to manage the demobilized soldiers. Over the next years it grew to become a “powerful colonizing force, reclaiming land to settle new immigrants from interior parts of China; securing the territory with a string of cities, farm complexes and industries; attracting demobilized soldiers to settle in Xinjiang; and consolidating territorial control”.¹² Through recruitment of personnel outside of Xinjiang the Bingtuan grew rapidly from 311.470 employees in 1957 to 1.5 million in 1966, and to

9 In Xinjiang, the collectivization of land proceeded slower than in other regions and as late as 1952 the Central Committee urged local authorities not to carry out the Reform on religious land (mosques and lamaseries) and in pastoral areas. The fear of the government that collectivization might cause serious resistance on the part of not only religious leaders but also the local population was substantial. Compare Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi and Zhonggong Xinjiang Weiwu’er Zizhiqu Weiyuanhui 中共中央文献研究室、中共新疆维吾尔自治区委员会 (eds.): *Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian* 1949–2010 新疆工作文献选编 1949–2010 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010), p. 81.

10 Accounts differ, compare Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi: *Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian*, p. 91; Millward: *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 251; James D. Seymour: “Xinjiang’s Production and Construction Corps, and the Sinification of Eastern Turkestan”, in: *Inner Asia* 2 (2000), p. 173; and Li Jie 李洁: *Xinjiang Nanjiang diqu Hanzu yimin ji minzu guanxi yanjiu – Yi Akesu diqu Baicheng xian nongcun Hanzu yimin ji minzu guanxi wei li* 新疆南疆地区汉族移民及民族关系研究 – 以阿克苏地区拜城县农村汉族移民及民族关系为例 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2010), p. 44.

11 Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi: *Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian*, p. 91.

12 Nicolas Becquelin: “Staged Development in Xinjiang”, in: *The China Quarterly* 178 (2004), p. 367.

2.3 million in 1974.¹³ In 2004, the Bingtuan could officially boast a population of 2.56 million¹⁴ which is until today predominantly of Han *minzu*.¹⁵

The establishment of basic administrative structures, the implementation of the Democratic Reform, the establishment of the Bingtuan, the launching of large-scale Han immigration and settlement, road construction, and the securing of water access were among the first activities of the Communist government in Xinjiang. Also, telegraph lines were set up throughout the region and in 1951 the currency was unified. Gradually also pre-Communist cadres were replaced in local governments by new Communist cadres, often coming from eastern China.

Still, although all these projects already immensely transformed the region in the first decade of Communist rule, integrating Xinjiang and its population into the Chinese nation and into the imaginary “bounded space” of the Chinese state have remained on-going processes. In this paper I focus on the latter and analyze two spatial technologies employed by the Chinese state to enhance Xinjiang’s spatial integration with the rest of the Chinese state territory. Prior to that, I briefly discuss the theories with which I attempt to grasp this process of state territorialization.

Territory and Territorialization – Theoretical Underpinnings

David Storey¹⁶ proposes to conceptualize territory as a bounded space attributed with social meaning. However, the notion of state territory as “bounded space” has been extensively challenged by scholars from the fields

13 Xinjiang Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 新疆生产建设兵团实质编纂委员会(ed.): *Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan fazhan shi* 新疆生产建设兵团发展史 (*Developmental History of Xinjiang Production and Construction Group*) (Wujiaqu: Shengchan jianshe bingtuan chubanshe, 2011), pp. 92, 203, 231.

14 Xinjiang Weiwu'er Zizhiqu: *Xinjiang wushi nian*, p. 601.

15 Following the Cultural Revolution, the Corps was officially dissolved due to extreme mismanagement. However, upon the intervention of general Wang Zhen, the organization was revived in 1981 and its role in the region was defined as indispensable for social stability. See Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi: *Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian*, pp. 254f.

16 David Storey: *Territory: The claiming of space* (Harlow et al.: Prentice Hall, 2001), p. 1.

of border studies¹⁷ as well as transnationalism studies.¹⁸ These scholars have demonstrated that the boundedness of this particular space has more to do with imageries and territorial technologies employed by the states in order to create, in the words of Ferguson and Gupta,¹⁹ “verticality”, the representation of state as being “above” the society, and “encompassment”, the representation of state as encompassing all its localities. Moreover, these studies have shown that spatial practices and imageries, especially of border populations, are often very different from those elaborated by the states. Based on their studies in southwestern China, Dean²⁰ and Sturgeon²¹ demonstrate that within the state territory different forms of territorial sovereignty and territorializing actors exist. Despite its conceived nature, territory cannot be reduced to a representation, either. Instead, in this essay I pursue Elden’s²² line of investigation in which he suggests that territory is a way of thinking about space that gradually became possible with the development of cartographic, measuring and controlling techniques. This development

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- 17 Robert R. Alvarez, Jr.: “The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands”, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), pp. 447–470; Anssi Paasi: *Territories, boundaries and consciousness: The changing geographies of the Finnish-Russian border* (Chichester et al.: John Wiley, 1996); Michiel Baud, Willem van Schendel: “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands”, in: *Journal of World History* 8.2 (1997), pp. 211–242; Janet C. Sturgeon: “Border Practices, Boundaries, and the Control of Resource Access: A Case of China, Thailand and Burma”, in: *Development and Change* 35.3 (2004), pp. 463–484; Karin Dean: “Spaces and Territorialities on the Sino-Burmese Boundary: China, Burma and the Kachin”, in: *Political Geography* 24 (2005), pp. 808–830.
- 18 Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, Cristina Szanton-Blanc: *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994); Aihwa Ong, Donald M. Nonini: *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997); Nina Glick Schiller, Georges E. Fouron: “Terrains of blood and nation: Haitian transnational social fields”, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2.2 (1999), pp. 340–366; Arjun Appadurai: “Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology”, in: Steven Vertovec, Robin Cohen (eds.): *Migration, diasporas and transnationalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1999), pp. 463–484.
- 19 James Ferguson, Akhil Gupta: “Spatializing states: toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality”, in: *American Ethnologist* 29.4 (2002), pp. 981–1002.
- 20 Dean: “Spaces and territorialities”.
- 21 Sturgeon: “Border Practices”.
- 22 Stuart Elden: “Land, terrain, territory”, in: *Progress in Human Geography* 34.6 (2010), pp. 799–817.

“made possible by emergent political techniques allows us to understand territory as a distinctive mode of social/spatial organization”.²³ A historically contingent category, “territory can be understood as a political technology: it comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain.”²⁴ These techniques comprise boundary delineation, border checkpoints, mapping, construction of national transportation networks, and many more. Territory is also enforced by state projects which conceive it as a unitary political space, unitary judicial space, and, most importantly, as the homeland of a nation. Hence, although the meaning and understanding of national territory and boundaries have definitely changed with the growing transnational mobility and rising transnational governance, the importance of territory and territorial ideologies remain strong.²⁵

In this essay I sometimes use the term “territorialization” to emphasize that state territory is a process. In the sections below, I focus on two components of this process. The first one refers to the enforcement of the idea of bounded and coherent state space in China’s borderlands through the construction of transportation networks. From the perspective of the geometric workings of state power, these networks are indispensable to establish access and facilitate the circulation of state power. This is the “territorialization from within”. The second strategy refers to the reinforcement of “boundedness” of Chinese state territory by securing international recognition of Xinjiang as an uncontested part of this territory. The latter, which engages international diplomacy, I refer to as “territorialization from without”.

23 Elden: “Land, terrain, territory”, p. 810.

24 Elden: “Land, terrain, territory”, pp. 811f.

25 David Newman: “Geopolitics Renaissance: Territory, Sovereignty and the World Political Map”, in: David Newman (ed.): *Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity* (London, Portland: Frank Cass, 1999), p. 5; Martin Jones, Rhys Jones, Michael Woods: *An Introduction to political geography: Space, place and politics* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 28.

*The Making of State Territory “from Within” –
Transportation Networks*

Road Construction in Xinjiang between 1949 and 2000

In 1949, when the PRC was established, Xinjiang had one dirt road in the north, built in 1928 to the Soviet border at Tarbaghatai / Tacheng 塔城, and some rudimentary dirt tracks in the north and south that were impassable for weeks in the summer months due to landslides and melt-water from the glaciers in the neighboring Tengri Tagh / Tianshan mountains. Lattimore has convincingly argued that the improvement of transportation networks which would speed up internal communication within the region was not a priority for the Chinese Republican government in the first half of the twentieth century. Rather, it feared that an effective transportation network could further facilitate the expansion of Soviet influence in Xinjiang, which was substantial at that time.²⁶ The situation partly changed after the “liberation” of Xinjiang by the Red Army in 1949.

General Wang Zhen, the Commander-in-Chief of the Communist forces in Xinjiang, on various occasions emphasized the crucial importance of road construction to “conducting military operations, establishing sovereignty and international trade”.²⁷ Roads not only served to delineate the state territory and decrease distances to regional and national power centers, but also facilitated the mobility of officials, taxmen, educators and army, and the circulation of school curricula and new ideas of government.

Although road building in Xinjiang was launched on a large scale early in the 1950s, roads constructed before the economic liberalization of the late 1970s were mostly of very poor quality. In these early years not only were financial means scarce, also the technology was insufficiently developed to construct roads in this difficult terrain. *The History of Xinjiang Roads* states that in 1949 there were 3.361 km of usable roads.²⁸ This number grew to

26 Owen D. Lattimore: *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers 1928–1958* (Paris, La Haye: Mouton and Co, 1962).

27 Xinjiang Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 新疆交通实质编纂委员会: *Xinjiang gonglu shi: Xiandai gonglu* 新疆公路史: 现代公路 (Beijing: Renmin jiaotong chubanshe, 1998), p. 1.

28 Xinjiang Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui: *Xinjiang gonglu shi*, p. 1.

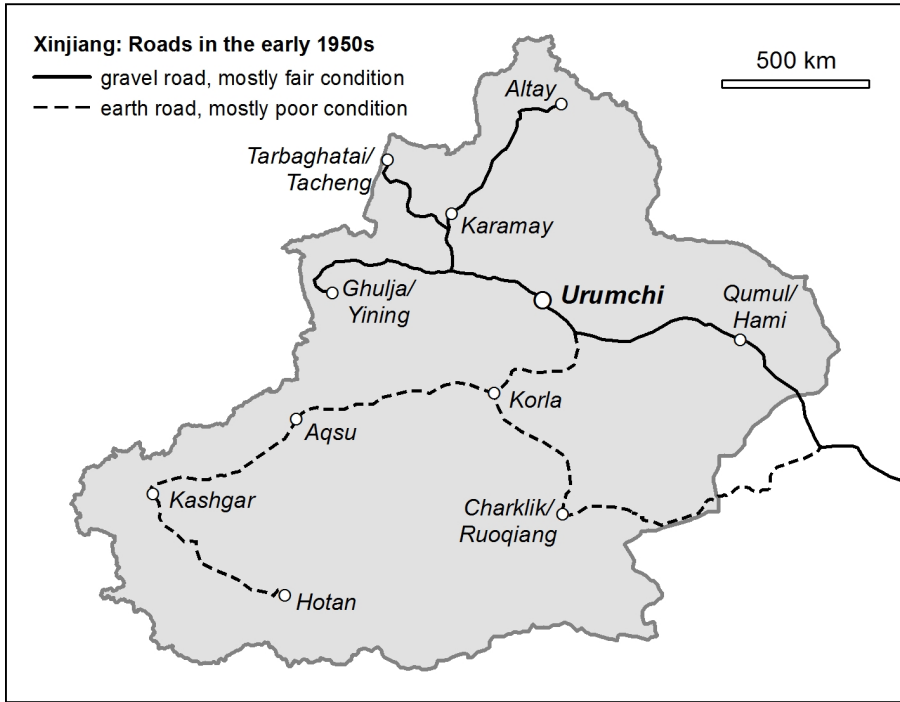


Fig. 1: Roads in Xinjiang in the 1950s²⁹

6.065 km in 1952. Road construction continued on the wave of popular mobilization and by the end of 1957 Xinjiang nominally had more than 14,000 km of roads. Collectivization launched in Xinjiang in 1958 was to realize a further highly ambitious aim represented by the slogan “Make all communes accessible on roads, make all mines accessible by motor vehicles” (社社通公路, 矿矿通汽车).³⁰ Of the 13,902 km roads built between 1956 and 1960, 85% were simple dirt tracks of extremely low quality. They lacked bridges, were not weather resistant and only seasonally open for traffic. With the moderate political phase of “adjustment” under Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇

29 The map is based on Xinjiang Weiwu'er Zizhiqu Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 新疆维吾尔自治区交通实质编纂委员会: *Xinjiang gonglu jiaotong shi: Jindai gonglu, jindai gonglu yunshu* 新疆公路交通史: 近代公路近代公路运输 (Beijing: Renmin jiaotong chubanshe, 1992), pp. 80f.

30 Xinjiang Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui: *Xinjiang gonglu shi*, pp. 2f.

(1898–1969) and Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997) in the early 1960s, the Xinjiang Transportation Bureau began to professionalize road construction and the emphasis was re-directed towards the maintenance of the existing network rather than the construction of new roads. At the end of the moderate phase, in 1965, Xinjiang had 22.675 km of roads of which 368 km were asphalted.

In 1966 the region, like the rest of China, descended into the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), which made the continuation of many construction projects difficult. Still, about five thousand kilometers of roads were asphalted during this decade and some key bridges were constructed. Nonetheless, the unitary national system of road classification, introduced in 1978, revealed the extremely poor condition of Xinjiang's road network: out of its more than 20.000 km roads, about half were of substandard quality (*dengwai gonglu* 等外公路) and another 8.000 were classified as either third- or fourth-class roads.³¹ In the aftermath, the central government decided to focus its financial support on building a “trunk-road network” (*ganxian gonglu* 干线公路) that included key north-south and east-west connections but also access roads to oil fields and mines. Although some of these roads were then asphalted, asphalt coating typically lasted only between two and five years due to, among others, high underground water levels, high soil mineralization, and moving sands.³² In the second half of the 1980s, road construction became professionalized and systematized which brought about the eventual completion of the China-Pakistan highway after 34 years of construction and of the defense road through central Tengri Tagh / Tianshan initiated in 1974.³³ Also the strategically critical road between Xinjiang, the contested territory of Aksai Qin and Tibet was upgraded. The enhanced “cross-shape transportation backbone” (*shizi guodao ganxian wei gujia* 十字国道干线为骨架)³⁴ was to radiate from the regional capital of Urumchi in order to enforce its significance as a new power center and counterbalance the Uyghur power centers in Kashgar and Ghulja/Yili.

31 Xinjiang Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui: *Xinjiang gonglu shi*, p. 5.

32 Xinjiang Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui: *Xinjiang gonglu shi*, p. 223.

33 Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi: *Xinjiang gongzuo wenxian xuanbian*, pp. 241–243.

34 Xinjiang Jiaotong Shizhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui: *Xinjiang gonglu shi*, p. 6.

Although significant expansion of road networks occurred in the decades between 1949 and 2000, as recent as the late 1980s, a journey from Urumchi to the city of Hotan in southern Xinjiang could still take about two weeks. The topography of the region with the alpine Tengri Tagh / Tianshan in the center, the huge Taklamakan Desert south of it and the stony deserts of the Dzungar Basin north of the mountains, coupled with insufficient technology, have for a long time effectively hindered the geometrical advancement of territorializing state power especially into the region of southern Xinjiang.

Road Construction and Territorialization after 2000

The Open up the West Program (*Xibu da kaifa* 西部大开发) which was launched in 2000 marks a significant shift in that process. New funding schemes and progress in the technological domain resulted in a massive road construction boom which, based on accounts of local inhabitants, further intensified after the year 2005. All over Xinjiang winding alleys are currently being replaced with paved roads and streets up to 70 m wide, responding to the growing population pressure which results from industrialization and Han immigration.³⁵ In terms of state territorialization, this construction boom creates new forms of regional connectivity, draws previously distant places closer together and facilitates flows of some people, goods, capital, and specific ideas of government, territory and national belonging. Since it is impossible to keep track of all the road construction projects in Xinjiang that have been realized since 2000, in the section below I focus on main projects that affected the political geography of southern Xinjiang where I conducted fieldwork.

Currently, the only fast connection between northern and southern Xinjiang is the southern branch of the national G30 expressway, completed through the mountains from Urumchi to Korla in 2010 and now under construction towards Kashgar in the west.³⁶ Limited connections between northern and southern Xinjiang are one of the reasons why the two regions have remained significantly different, for instance in terms of demographic

35 Ümüt Halik: *Stadt begrünung im ariden Milieu. Das Beispiel der Oasenstädte des südlichen Xinjiang*, *VR China* (Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, 2003), pp. 70, 85.

36 There is also a north-south railway line, constructed in the late 1990s that cuts through Tengri Tagh / Tianshan. However, trains are rare and significantly slower than long-distance coaches.

composition. While northern Xinjiang is clearly Han-dominated, southern Xinjiang – until recently very poorly connected with eastern China – remains predominantly Uyghur, except for the Bayangol District with its oil industry.³⁷ The G30 expressway and two other roads across Tengri Tagh / Tianshan are meant to better integrate northern and southern Xinjiang and facilitate the circulation of people, capital, and state power between the two regions. The partial enhancement of the defense road through the central Tengri Tagh massif (550 km) was accomplished in 2012. Yet, because the road climbs up to the altitude of about 3.000 m, its accessibility in winter is limited. A third north-south link will connect the city of Ghulja / Yining 伊宁 in northern Xinjiang and Aqsu in the south. It will reduce the travel time between Ghulja and Aqsu from about 24 to seven hours. The construction works were scheduled to begin in 2014.³⁸

The lack of fast communication networks and the difficult topography, especially the vast Taklamakan Desert, have been among the most serious obstacles to the expansion of territorializing state power, especially in the far south of the region. For instance, during my visit to the town of Yärkän / Shache 莎车 on the southern rim of Taklamakan, in 2012, I observed that the clocks in some city schools were set on Xinjiang time and not on the otherwise mandatory Beijing time.³⁹ Moreover, toponyms, especially street names and names of tourist attractions that elsewhere have become increasingly Sinicized in the past years, are still predominantly of Uyghur origin in the far south. Yet, the modernization of roads continues and the number of roads across the Taklamakan Desert grows.

37 Toops: “Spatial Results”, p. 21.

38 Fieldwork data from Aqsu, September 2011.

39 Unlike other countries, such as Canada, the USA, or Russia, whose territories are divided into time zones that correlate with the actual sun time, the whole territory of China is officially one time zone. Beijing time officially applies in the whole country unitarily. Most state institutions in Xinjiang (including schools, banks, government offices) use Beijing time, which is two hours ahead of Xinjiang time. While this is a commonplace in northern Xinjiang, in the south, Xinjiang time has not been entirely banned from such institutions yet. In the private sphere, Uyghur tend to use Xinjiang time whereas Han use Beijing time. Although there are numerous exceptions from this rule, the use of Xinjiang time by the Uyghur is a strong identity marker. Compare Joniak-Lüthi: “Roads in China’s Borderlands”, p. 128.

The earliest road, located at the eastern rim of the desert, was upgraded in 2005, reducing the bus journey from Charklik to Korla (442 km) from two days to the current six to seven hours. The second desert highway between Bugur / Luntai 轮台 in the north to Niya / Minfeng 民丰 in the south (almost 600 km) was constructed in the 1990s to establish access to oil extraction sites in the desert. The third and fastest connection across the desert is the new highway constructed in 2009 between the cities of Aqsu and Hotan (550 km). The new highway reduced the traveling time between the relatively Sinicized city of Aqsu, the Bingtuan town of Aral, and the Uyghur-dominated city of Hotan from at least 15 hours to less than eight hours. All the desert highways greatly facilitate the influx of Han investors, teachers, migrants, as well as government and Party cadres into the far south which, until recently, was among the least accessible and most Uyghur-dominated parts of Xinjiang.⁴⁰ Alongside the cross-desert highways, border roads, including the road into Tibet along the Indian border, the road between Aqsu and Artush along the Kyrgyz border, and the China-Pakistan highway, were also enhanced since 2000.

As Rudelson⁴¹ and Mostowlansky⁴² pertinently point out, southern Xinjiang for many centuries had been much better connected with Central Asia in the west than with the Chinese empires in the east. In order to alter this westward orientation and, instead, accelerate integration with the Chinese provinces in the east, substantial efforts were invested in the past decade in the renovation of the 1,700 km long highway along the southern rim of the Taklamakan. This road extends further eastwards into Qinghai Province and connects with the Tibet railway in Golmud.⁴³ This newly enhanced eastward line facilitates the out-shipment of southern Xinjiang's natural resources (oil, natural gas, coal, and jade, in particular), as well as cotton, nuts and fruit (dates, grapes, melons, pears, and apples). Following the same roads in the opposite direction, Han immigrants as well as products manufactured in

40 Hotan has also been reached by the railway in June 2011.

41 Justin Rudelson: *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

42 Till Mostowlansky: "Making Kyrgyz spaces: Local history as spatial practice in Murghab (Tajikistan)", in: *Central Asian Survey* 31.3 (2012), pp. 251–264.

43 Also international connections into Central Asia gain in importance, although border checkpoints with Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are only seasonally accessible.

eastern China are conveniently entering southern Xinjiang without having to take the extra loop via Qumul / Hami 哈密 and Turpan in the north.

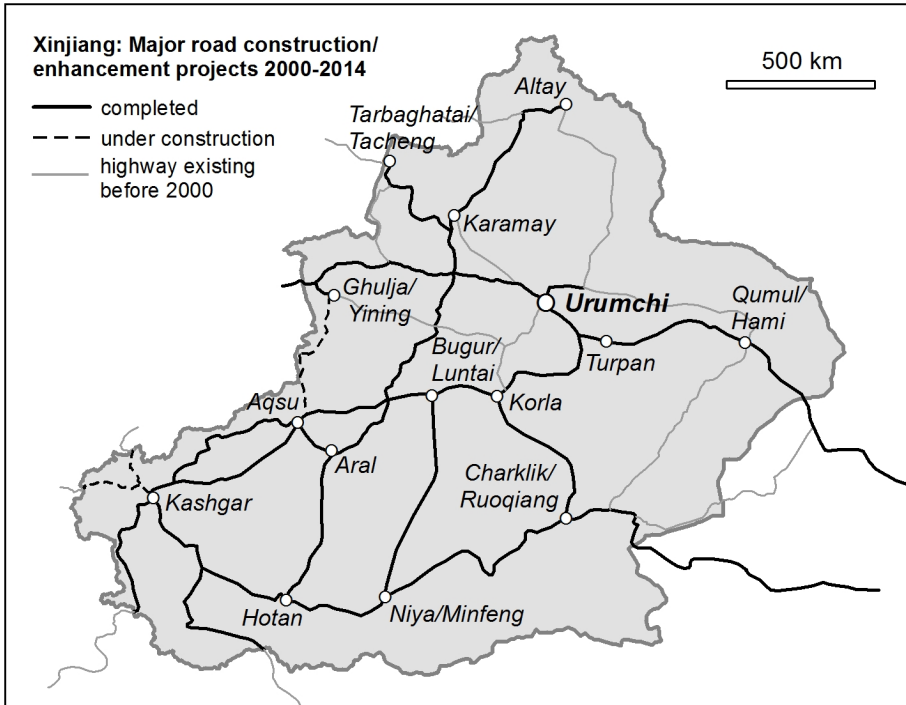


Fig. 2: Road networks in 2012⁴⁴

Huge distances, topography and insufficient technology have been among the main factors that for decades have obstructed the construction of effective road networks, especially in southern Xinjiang. Though this is rapidly changing now, the markers of spatial integration suggest that the territorializing efforts in southern Xinjiang have been less successful than in northern Xinjiang. This is visible in the prevalence of Uyghur toponyms (e. g., street names) in southern Xinjiang cities, the Uyghur-dominated population, the

44 Map based on Tu Qiang 图强 (ed.): *Xinbian Xinjiang Weiwu'er Zizhiqu Gonglu Licheng Dituce* 新编新疆维吾尔自治区公路里程地图册 (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, Cehui chubanshe, 2010), pp. 4f.

small size of immigrant Han population, and the still popular use of Uyghur language in government structures.

The total length of Xinjiang roads increased from more than 30.000 km, in 1999, to more than 146.000 km, in 2008.⁴⁵ Although the dominant rhetoric of the Open Up the West Program discusses the necessity to expand transportation networks in the vocabulary of economic and social development, the territorializing scheme of the program is evident. As Ferguson⁴⁶ compellingly demonstrates, although roads are often rhetorically framed as instruments of “development”, particularly in borderlands, multi-ethnic areas and in young states their function as access channels for state power remains crucial.⁴⁷ Though road networks are only one of many ways in which the states “etch” their presence onto the landscape,⁴⁸ the current road construction boom in Xinjiang significantly reconfigures the region spatially, enforces specific ideas of spatial belonging and connectivity and, conversely, also creates new notions of borders and separations.

*The Making of State Territory “from Without” –
Recognition by the International Community*

The gradual opening of China, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in 1991, significantly redefined the role of borders in Xinjiang: from strictly guarded divides to (still strictly guarded) promising interfaces. The shift in the international situation and in the understanding of Xinjiang’s international borders necessarily introduced a change in territorial technologies. While the tense relationship with the Soviet Union meant that borders were primarily understood as heavily milita-

45 The number from 2008 includes for the first time also village roads; see Huihuang Xinjiang Bianweihui 辉煌新疆编委会 (ed.): *Huihuang Xinjiang: Xin Zhongguo chengli 60 nian Xinjiang fazhan licheng* 辉煌新疆: 新中国成立 60 年新疆发展历程 (Wulumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2009), pp. 444f.

46 James Ferguson: *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

47 On the topic of politics and development in Xinjiang see also Becquelin: “Staged Development”.

48 Allen: “Three spaces of power”, pp. 197–212.

rized zones, the rise of the new Central Asian states partially changed this understanding. The borders also became interfaces for expanding Chinese influence in Central Asia, gaining new markets, and spurring Xinjiang's economic development through cross-border trade. Currently they also function as important gateways for the import of raw materials.

Although relatively open borders are indispensable for improving Xinjiang's economic performance and for securing the supply of resources for the Chinese economy, they also lead to a much higher degree of cross-border circulation of people, goods, and ideas, which complicate state-conceived spatial divisions and connections. Roberts⁴⁹ argues that the gradual opening of Xinjiang's borders has had two contradictory effects: on the one hand, it increased the influence of China in Central Asia, giving rise to fears of region's Sinicization; on the other hand, more open borders renewed the historical ties between Xinjiang and the rest of Central Asia, ties which may impinge on China's designs in the region.⁵⁰

Already in the 1950s, Owen Lattimore⁵¹ observed that Inner Asian border populations set up a nexus of social contacts and economic alliances that made them into trans-border communities. Also today trans-border networks and loyalties of Xinjiang's multi-ethnic population produce a blurred and inexplicit picture of border spaces and identities. This situation demands territorial technologies that extend beyond the borders of the Chinese state in order to be effective. Thus, China, similarly to other territorial states, attempts to regulate and control border populations by engaging in cultural and political projects in which they "vie for hegemony in relations with other nation-states, with their citizens and 'aliens'".⁵² In the analysis of territorial technologies of the state, these transnational projects must necessarily be

49 Sean R. Roberts: "A 'Land of Borderlands': Implications of Xinjiang's Trans-border Interactions", in: S. Frederick Starr (ed.): *Xinjiang. China's Muslim Borderland* (New York, London: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 235.

50 Dru C. Gladney: "The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978–2001", in: S. Frederick Starr (ed.): *Xinjiang. China's Muslim Borderland* (New York, London: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 118.

51 Owen D. Lattimore: "The Frontier in History", in: Robert Manners, David Kaplan (eds.): *Theory in Anthropology. A Sourcebook* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968 [1956]), pp. 374–386.

52 Michael Kearney: "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism", in: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), p. 548.

reflected on. Territorialization “from within”, as discussed above on the example of transportation infrastructure, is of major importance in the geometrical construction of territorial “boundedness”. However, in border regions such as Xinjiang, territorialization “from without” that ensures recognition of Chinese state territory by the international neighbors, is as crucial a component of effective territorial technologies.

The re-opening of Xinjiang’s borders since the mid-1980s undoubtedly renewed the ties between the non-Han inhabitants of Xinjiang and the ethno-national groups in Central Asia and beyond. Many of Xinjiang’s Uyghur, Kazakh, and also Kyrgyz orientate themselves culturally westwards rather than eastwards. They also often and eagerly discuss linguistic, religious, and social continuities between Xinjiang and post-Soviet Central Asia. While this reconnection has occurred, reports on Xinjiang in the English-language edition of the *People’s Daily Online*,⁵³ the Communist Party press organ, demonstrate that the Chinese state institutions invest great efforts in controlling and steering the way this reconnection proceeds. While the efficacy of these efforts is open to discussion, it is clear that the opening of borders has been accompanied by an intensive diplomatic campaign of the Chinese government in Central Asia in order to determine the ways in which Xinjiang reintegrates in the region and to secure the international recognition of Xinjiang as forming a part of the Chinese nation and state. The regional reintegration of Xinjiang is meticulously registered in the *People’s Daily’s* numerous articles on the opening of border trade points,⁵⁴ regular railway connections with Kazakhstan,⁵⁵ new airports and flight connections,⁵⁶ highways connecting Xinjiang and the Central Asian states,⁵⁷ joint meetings of Central Asian politicians in Urumchi,⁵⁸ and mutual cross-border visits of government officials at various levels.⁵⁹ Moreover, stories about the “de-

53 *People’s Daily Online (PDO)*, www.peopledaily.com.cn.

54 *PDO*, 13.02.2006.

55 *PDO*, 27.01.2008.

56 *PDO*, 02.04.2008.

57 *PDO*, 26.09.2007.

58 *PDO*, 12.04.2006.

59 *PDO*, 20.11.2008.

frosting borders” and the demilitarization of the border belt are being related.⁶⁰

Since 1991, the Chinese state has propagated a policy of “mutual benefit” towards post-Soviet Central Asia and has worked to establish an international network of cooperation and loyalty in the region. The most significant move to secure the non-intermingling of Xinjiang’s neighbors in Xinjiang affairs, was the establishment of the Shanghai Five in 1996. The organization brought together China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and was established as a regional platform for managing military, border, and security issues. In June 2001, the Shanghai Five was transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) but security issues have remained its primary focus.⁶¹ At the SCO founding meeting, in 2001, the “Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism” was released. In August 2007, the SCO member states further concluded the “Treaty on Long-Term Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation”. Though the scope of this cooperation should not be overestimated, through SCO China has, to a significant degree, succeeded in isolating organized Uyghur movements in the young Central Asian states in terms of official policies of the involved states, and also reinforced the political and territorial *status quo*.

Concluding Remarks

Xinjiang, a border region rather poorly spatially integrated with other Chinese provinces in the east and inhabited by a multi-ethnic population, is a place where technologies of territory can be observed with great clarity. The present essay analyzes two such technologies: one that works within the region and the other one that targets Xinjiang’s international neighbors. The former, the rapidly expanding regional and trans-regional road networks, spatially reconfigure the region. They decrease the sense of distance and increase, even though selectively, domestic mobility. The road networks also “draw” Xinjiang eastwards, integrating it better with other Chinese provinces and facilitating mobility of people between Xinjiang and the rest of China,

60 PDO, 03.10.2007.

61 See PDO, 17.08.2007.

as manifested in the huge fluctuation of Han migrant workers in Xinjiang throughout the year. Still, this territorialization “from within” clearly does not suffice in the current period of increased connections between Xinjiang and the rest of Central Asia. Having recognized this challenge, the Chinese state has engaged in an intensive diplomatic campaign beyond China’s borders to internationally establish Xinjiang and its inhabitants as part of the Chinese “bounded space” and the Chinese national community. As Xinjiang has reconnected with post-Soviet Central Asia, Chinese diplomacy has worked intensively to secure the recognition of Chinese national interests in this process.

The present paper focuses on territorial technologies of the state. There is, unfortunately, no place here to explore how these technologies are negotiated by the various ethnicities in Xinjiang and what side effects the territorializing attempts of the state generate. For example, the expanding road networks and the opening of borders have important effects on Uyghur identity processes, which are only marginally controllable by the state. Elsewhere I also discuss how roads are used in ways which reveal the porosity of the territorializing state power.⁶² Hence, while state territorialization is a powerful spatial process which dramatically transforms Xinjiang, negotiations of this process by individual and collective actors have important influence on its implementation and thus on the efficacy of state policies.

62 Joniak-Lüthi: “Roads in China’s Borderlands”, pp. 118-140.

