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**The Power of Infrastructure? Transportation networks and the making of state territory in northwest China**

**Abstract:**

The expansion of transportation networks in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China since the year 2000 has been impressive. The total length of roads increased from about thirty thousand kilometers in 1999 to more than 146,000 km in 2008. Moreover, many kilometers of existing roads were enhanced and asphalted. The first question that pops up when reading Xinjiang road maps is what kind of circulation these new transportation networks aim to facilitate. Roadside slogans attempt to convince the travelers that "If we want wealth to arrive at our doorstep, we must build roads first." The increased circulation of capital, labor, and marketable goods is expected to raise living standards and enhance economic performance of the region. However, looking at where and which roads are built, it remains rather unclear whose economic situation they are meant to improve and what kind of economic performance they will increase. Observations of the presence and absence of different groups of people on roads further confuse the seemingly straightforward developmentalist rhetoric of the state. Rather economy appears to be intertwined with other concerns in ways difficult to discern. In multi-ethnic border regions like Xinjiang, the role of road networks in the construction of the imaginary "bounded space" of the Chinese state appears as crucial. Roads facilitate the circulation of state power and help establish the state as part of mundane practices of mobility. At the same time, though expanding transportation networks do represent the state's capacity to impose its vision of spatiality, my research material demonstrates that they are as likely to reveal the state's uncertainty and fissures in its spatial representations.

VORTRÄGE

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