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Territory, Border, Infrastructure:

Imagining and Crafting National Borderlands in Twentieth Century China

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1 Introduction

This paper was born out of conversations between a historian and a social anthropologist with a shared interest in the conceptual nexus of infrastructure, state borders and processes of territory in China's region of Xinjiang. The Dzungar Basin north of Tengri Tagh/Tianshan[1] range and the Tarim Basin south of it comprise this border region in far-west China, which the Qing Dynasty named "Xinjiang" (literally "New Frontier"). Back then, the name reflected the region's place in the expanding geography of the empire; today, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, an administrative unit established in 1955, is one of the five autonomous regions in the People's Republic of China. Because of its exposed border location, the history of being a contact zone between the Chinese empires and Inner Asia, and also because of the existing transregional and transnational linguistic, religious, and ethnic continuities, we conceptualize Xinjiang as a "crossroads space." The way we theorize space closely follows the definition of Doreen Massey (2005) who has proposed to imagine it as porous, lively, and made of intersecting social relations to elsewhere and elsewhen. Any space is thus, by definition, a crossroads. By explicitly using the term "crossroads space", we want to clearly emphasize the necessity to theoretically conceptualize space in terms of intersecting social relations. Concurrently, the term "crossroads" establishes an explicit link to Xinjiang, which has been referred to by other scholars as "Eurasian Crossroads" (Millward 2007). At this Eurasian Crossroads, different political and religious regimes, modes of identification and livelihoods, and notions of belonging have led to cross-pollination but also to tensions and violence. These tensions are now on the rise again.

Our interest in the region pertains in particular to the role that infrastructures have played in the discourses and practices of sovereignty and territory since the turn of the 19th century, first under the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and then under the Republic of China (1912-1949). Western political philosophy, which has effected the reformulation of the ideas of community and territory in China since the late 19th century, has ascribed to infrastructures a crucial role in the process of territorial integration and establishing the boundaries of the nation. However, while Chinese reformers, inspired by this philosophy have advocated the need to build a comprehensive transport system that would span the nation, the actual funding for infrastructure construction in distant regions like Xinjiang has been meager. The paper starts by sketching out this gap between the reformers' dreams of a state-encompassing transport system[2] and, on the other hand, the fragmented, patchy and piecemeal character of the actual construction work. As we demonstrate, the role of the Qing and Republican central governments in pushing forward territorial integration of northwest China through infrastructure construction was rather ambiguous. The archival material suggests that the central government's involvement in funding and designing infrastructures in Xinjiang – despite the conviction about the centrality of infrastructures to the processes of national integration – was limited. One of the aims of the present paper is thus to identify the territorializing agents in this border region. Though both Qing and Republican reformers dreamt of encom-

[1] We provide toponyms in local languages (Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz) and in Chinese only where the two differ significantly. Otherwise we only use place names in local languages. These tend to be more familiar to Western readers than their Chinese counterparts.

[2] Ferguson and Gupta (2002) discuss encompassment as an attempt to represent the state as "encompassing" and thus controlling all the localities within the state borders.

passing infrastructures, the hard financial reality of twentieth century China set clear limits to these dreams. As a result, we can observe an ongoing process of negotiation between the dreams of national integration, highly limited central funding and the provincial and local governments' attempts to patch the financial and technological gaps with resources that were available. This led to the opening of the province to Russian, and later Soviet, penetration when this promised to forge infrastructure construction, and spur the extraction of minerals and trade in the region. The material analyzed here foregrounds this somewhat paradoxical role that foreign-built infrastructures in Xinjiang played in the processes of Chinese state territorialization in the twentieth century.

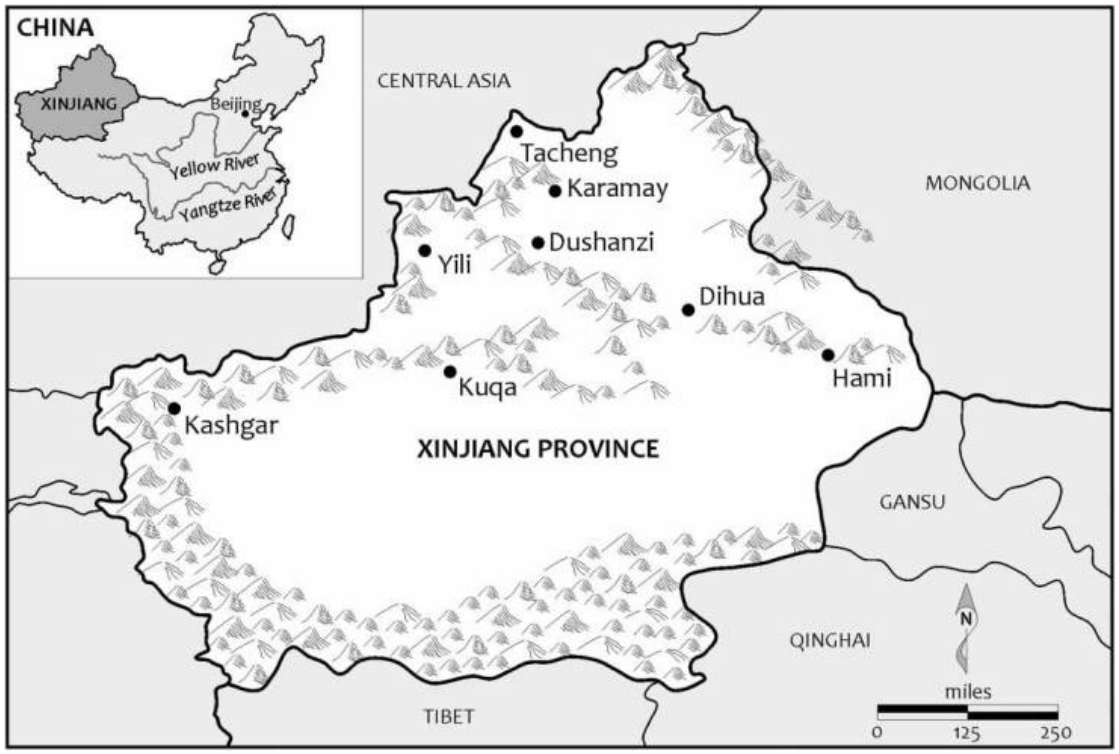
2 The Crossroads Perspective

The present paper merges the archival research on infrastructures and processes of territory with selected elements of the "Crossroads perspective" debated in the Crossroads Asia Competence Network since its establishment in 2011. The "Crossroads perspective" urges the focus on connections and interactions with the aim of questioning the idea of the world as divided into self-contained "areas." State territories are one among many types of "areas," or "bounded spaces," whose processes of "binding" must be critically analyzed in order to denaturalize them and grasp the work that has gone into their conceiving and maintenance, as well as the political agendas that have underpinned them (Elden 2010). This article, being a collaboration between a historian and a social anthropologist, implements the "Crossroads perspective" also in its design to discuss territory and infrastructures across two disciplines. The conversations that have preceded this paper revealed differences in the terminology in which we couched our research questions and research aims. For example, Judd discussed the "system" of transport infrastructures, which the Qing- and Nationalist-era plans and maps envisaged, and the gaps, fissures and paradoxes in this "system" revealed by the archival research. For Agnieszka, on the other hand, who was from the first moment of her ethnographic fieldwork confronted with the multiple ways in which roads were designed, funded, perceived and used, it was difficult to even begin thinking of infrastructures in terms of a "system" that played any straightforward role in "nation-building." Despite differences in methods, terminology and the conceptual context out of which the research questions emerged, we arrived at an understanding that there is no simple correlation between infrastructures and territorialization, their relationship being instead opaque and highly dynamic. From this rather trivial understanding, we further developed the underlying argument of this paper that this opaqueness in multi-ethnic border regions like Xinjiang differs in its "composition" from other areas, for instance the agricultural regions of inner China. To be sure, scholars have shown that this opaqueness exists there too (Flowers 2004). However, the specific socio-spatial context of border regions like Xinjiang allows for the direct involvement of foreign powers in the process of territorialization and much more substantial trans-border dynamics.

In what follows, we first focus on the dreams of encompassing infrastructure networks conceived by the Qing and Republican reformers as important elements of territorial "binding". These dreams foreground "the work of imagination" (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 5) that necessarily goes into the making of state territories. In the second part of the paper, we focus on the actual infrastructure construction popularly perceived as the central element of the "material crafting" (Ibid.) of the state territory and nation. At the same time, we point to the challenge of conceptually grasping the situation in which this material crafting is done for a different purpose by another state working with local authorities. In other words, we ask how the Russian and later Soviet interventions in material practices in Xinjiang have influenced the contours of Chinese sovereignty and the boundedness of Chinese territory.

3 Infrastructure Dreams Under the Qing and Republican Governments

In the years immediately following the Qing empire's conquest of Xinjiang in 1759, the region was largely maintained as a land apart. Indeed, well into the 19th century, advocates within the imperial court for maintaining Xinjiang as a frontier "dependency" (*fanshu*) triumphed over their counterparts who called for the region's greater integration into the Qing empire. In 1877, however, after a decade long rebellion, the Qing court reconquered Xinjiang and, seeking to more clearly bind it to the empire, officially designated it a province in 1884. By the waning years of the 19th century, a new generation of Qing modernizers, who embraced certain elements of Western influenced statecraft increasingly called for the even more aggressive integration of the empire's vast border regions.[3] These reformers were influenced by a growing awareness of what they understood to be the source of the West's so-called "wealth and power" (*fuqiang*) – including the development of arsenals, the aggressive exploitation of mineral wealth, and the reform of governmental institutions. Most importantly for this essay, they also emphasized the development of transportation infrastructure. While roads binding Xinjiang to China-proper certainly existed, the lack of a centralized transport network capable of efficiently shipping large volumes of people and goods remained a source of major concern for central government officials.[4]



Map 1: Map of Xinjiang (Cartography: Debbie Newell)

[3] For more on this process of integration in the late Qing period, see Esherick 2006, 229-259.

[4] In particular, the Qing-era post road connected Beijing to the former imperial capital of Yili. From end to end, the road took 43 days of hard riding to complete. An additional, non-official route used largely by camel pullers seeking to avoid paying taxes levied on the post road spanned Outer Mongolia. This road was flat with substantial amounts of fodder for pack animals but it also took three months to complete one-way.

To a large extent, what these reformers were seeing in the West was the triumph of a bureaucratic "rationalization" of states in Western Europe in the 19th century (Weber 2001 [1905]; Habermas 1998 [1985]). These highly centralized states depended on transportation infrastructure to extend their control to distant border regions and imperial holdings in order to strengthen their oversight over populations as well as resources. Holding up the example of the West, the prominent Qing reformer Ma Jianzhong pointed to the connection between transport and the power of the state in an 1879 treatise calling for the development of an integrated transport network. "Within the last 50 years, tunnels have been bored into mountains, bridges span rivers, and seas have been crossed," he wrote. "All over the world and in each of the five continents there is not one that does not have rails, or the ruts of wheels," Ma continued. These tracks, Ma argued, helped facilitate the movement of armies, the transfer of military provisions, the shipping of famine relief, the flourishing of trade, and the abilities of the state to extract revenue and exert control (Ma 1960).[5]

The power and wealth of the state for Ma and many Qing reformers was reliant on the development of an infrastructural network that bound the nation. Debate raged between modernizers and conservatives over the influence of Western ideas, technology, and institutions. A string of military defeats and the growing influence of foreign powers in distant border regions, however, facilitated a growing consensus about the need to develop the empire's transport network. Following the collapse of the court-supported nativist Boxer uprising in 1900, modernizers and conservatives in the imperial court agreed on the need for rails, or at the very least roads, to link the empire's distant border regions. Indeed, an integrated transport network served as a potent symbol of the potential for the Qing empire's ultimate resurrection in the face of the grasping imperial powers. The calls for improvements to and expansion of the network continued until the collapse of the dynasty in 1911.[6]

While many Qing reformers were focused heavily on the development of a transport network that connected the Han heartland along the coast or in the Yangtze and Yellow River Valleys, they offered a similar call for the development of a transport network in the Qing empire's border regions. As one late Qing official in the province noted: "in 10,000 li of poor wasteland, where transportation is not convenient and where there are no funds and no population, what method do we have" to strengthen the hand of the state? He looked to the West for the answer, noting, "foreigners depend on the railroad to swallow territory and open new frontiers" (Yuan 1965, 568). The issue of transportation development was thus connected to a larger imperial process. On the one hand, infrastructure strengthened state control in border regions. On the other, the development of a transport network could also help alleviate the financial burden of the Qing empire in Central Asia by improving transport networks that would allow them to profit off of the region's lucrative natural resources.[7]

[5] While we recognize important conceptual differences between roads and rails, for Ma as well as his later counterparts in the Republic and People's Republic, there was little difference between the power of rails and the power of roads. While rails represented a higher modern ideal, both forms of transportation supported the end goal of bolstering the power of the central government.

[6] It was a potent symbol for officials and revolutionaries alike, as the Railway rights recovery movement helped undermine the legitimacy of the regime.

[7] The high cost of administration and defense in the region, coupled with its low tax revenues, meant that the Qing court had been forced to make annual shipments of silver into Xinjiang in order to keep its financial books in the black since the 18th century. For more on this burden, see Millward 1998.

Looking to the Western imperial powers and their imperial tool box, the last Qing governor of Xinjiang, Yuan Dahua, noted that Western empire builders "rely on the products of foreign lands (*waidi*) as a source of revenue for the motherland." Directly comparing Xinjiang to foreign imperial holdings, Qing officials called for a greater exploitation of the region's lucrative local products, including gold, jade, and petroleum, in order to alleviate the fiscal burden the region placed on the imperial coffers. "It is unheard of that the motherland expends its resources to support foreign lands and sits by while its local products (*wuchan*) are not managed," wrote Yuan in a call for greater state attention to Xinjiang's rich local products (Yuan 1965, 568). The construction of rails and modern roads was accompanied by new efforts to survey Xinjiang's territory, draw new maps, improve bureaucratic oversight, and more clearly categorize populations and resources.[8] The critical factor in this larger effort, Yuan wrote in a later memorial to the imperial court, was the development of a transport network binding the region to markets in China-proper. As he explained in 1910, "If we improve transportation, then within ten years we can expect [Xinjiang] to become wealthy and prosperous" (Yuan 1965, 572).

From the 1880s to the early 20th century, whether or not they were located tangibly on the ground or only as lines on a map, roads and rails retained a symbolic power for advocates for modernization. Drawing on the examples from the West, by the waning years of the dynasty, the Qing court and large swaths of the ruling elite believed that the efforts to at least attempt to construct an integrated transport network was simply what strong, modern states do. The dispatch of surveying teams, the drawing of maps, and the development of detailed construction plans were proof of the state's ambitions to exert its sovereignty and extend its control over territory and peoples.[9] In a 1906 memorial to the court, an imperial censor called for the extension of rails to Xinjiang's western border town of Yili (XSKLY 2003). The next year, the Ministry of the Post drew up an ambitious plan that envisioned two rail links connecting Xinjiang to China proper: one that began in the town of Guihua (modern day Hohhot) in Inner Mongolia and crossed Outer Mongolia along the camel caravan trails and entering Xinjiang from the north, and a second line that extended from Xi'an through Gansu and the Jade Gate, entering Xinjiang from the east (Cai 2006, 374). The plans were supported by provincial officials eager to strengthen political connections to the Qing heartland while also improving access to markets in the east.

These plans were thwarted, however, by a constricting capital crunch that tied the hands of ambitious imperial planners. In this fiscal environment, the imperial court focused its priorities away from the integration of distant peripheries like Xinjiang. In an effort to pay for the rail line, which would cost a massive 140 million ounces of silver, the Qing Ministry of the Post called for the taking on of a massive foreign loan. Facing the prospect of a burdensome financial obligation that would potentially hang around their necks for decades, Qing officials in the northwest aggressively protested the plan. This very vocal resistance alongside the

[8] In 1884, Xinjiang was officially established as a province of the empire; Qing officials established the prefectural-county (*jun-xian*) system of local governance. These efforts were paralleled by new campaigns to map Xinjiang's territory, conduct censuses, and identify potentially lucrative resources. More generally, many of the so-called New Policies unveiled in the first decade of the 20th century were explicitly intended to centralize the court's power over the realm.

[9] Lin Hsiao-ting argues that the government of the Republic of China was unwilling to undertake this effort in Tibet and instead simply retained an "imagined sovereignty" not backed up with anything more than rhetoric. A similar case can be made for Xinjiang in the Qing, Republican and even the early People's Republic. See Lin 2006, 13.

eventual collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 ensured that the plan was scrapped.[10] The larger desire for an integrated transport network, however, endured.

The desire by modernizing reformers to promote integration by facilitating the development of a new, modern transport network survived the Qing dynasty's collapse. Indeed, the new Republic was founded by Han revolutionaries like Sun Yatsen who believed that they had been called upon to rectify the backward-facing weaknesses of the Manchu Qing court (Strand 1998). Intent on reversing this weakness Sun turned to the drafting table and began drawing up ambitious plans for a rail line that would transform the new Republic. In a June 25, 1912 article published in the *Minli Bao*, Sun Yatsen, then working as an advisor to new President Yuan Shikai, laid out the framework for a grand 67,000 mile rail network that would connect the nation from border to border and accomplish what the Qing dynasty could not: binding all of the empire's former frontier regions by rail, from Mongolia and Manchuria in the north, to Yunnan, western Sichuan and Tibet in the southwest (Chang and Gordon 1991, 51).[11]

According to Sun's ambitious plan, Xinjiang would be connected to the Republic with two main trunk lines: one that crossed the towering Tibetan plateau, binding Xinjiang from the south, and another that spanned the Gobi Desert connecting the province from the north. While competing investment priorities ensured that Sun's vision did not become reality, the desire for an integrated transport network simmered throughout the Republican period. In 1921, Sun sought to shore up the legitimacy of his Nationalist Party by unveiling a second, even more ambitious plan, calling for a massive 100,000-mile rail network (Sun 1953 [1922], 22). The larger goal of various regimes of constructing the infrastructure needed to bind Xinjiang to China's political and economic capitals prompted the dispatching of various surveying teams to the province in the 1920s. These expeditions crisscrossed the roads and pack trails of northern China, seeking the easiest and most inexpensive routes that could bind Xinjiang to the Republic.

Like their Qing counterparts, Republican officials balked at the massive price tag associated with the construction of transportation infrastructure binding Xinjiang to Inner China. Sun counted on the materialization of investors who, eager to profit from the line, which would ferry lucrative resources back to China-proper, would step up to fund its construction (Sun 1953 [1922], 24). In the end, however, the investors never materialized and without support from the central government, the plans remained confined to libraries and reading rooms. Advocates lamented what they saw as a short-sighted perspective of penny-pinching Republican planners. Referring to an integrated transport network as the "medicine" that would cure China's fiscal "illness," one official argued in 1918: "how can [central government officials] be unwilling to take this medicine, unless they desire to walk the road that only leads to death?" (Lin 1930, 394).

From the 1910s throughout the late 1920s, little progress was made on the development of an integrated national road network. Fiscal problems, the lack of a strong central government, and the power of regional warlords undermined efforts to construct such a network. In Xinjiang, even after the founding of the Nationalist Government in Nanjing in 1927, cen-

[10] "Xinjaing xunfu Yuan Dahua zou chouxiu dongxi tielu yi gu quanju zhe, you qing zecheng bu chen jiekuan xiulu pianan" (No date), Lufu Memorial Collection: 03-7146-043 (First Historical Archives, Beijing, P.R.C.). The Shaanxi-Gansu governor general passionately dismissed the idea of burdening frontier provinces with the obligation of repaying a foreign loan, declaring it was an "opinion based on ignorance" (Chang Geng memorial [XT 2 11/8], 367-378).

[11] In his work, Strand (1998) points out that Sun Yatsen's seemingly impossible vision had an importance that extended well beyond its practicality. Sun's plans, he suggests, are part of a broader vision for China, even if not a short-term policy goal.

tral government planners did little more than simply offer provincial officials the opportunity to take on crushing foreign loans to pay for the development of road networks. In the early 1930s, the provincial governor of Xinjiang Jin Shuren, working with his counterpart in Inner Mongolia, unveiled a 3 million yuan road development plan that would bind Xinjiang to China-proper. After presenting it to the government in the national capital of Nanjing, China's Ministry of Railroads replied: "because the finances of the central government are impoverished, we ask that the costs of the road be covered by those provinces through which the road travels." Facing an even more pressing financial situation, Jin Shuren bitterly responded "we ask that the Ministry draw up a concrete plan for how to do this" (XJBW 1992, 23).

The outbreak of the war with Japan in 1937 and the gradual expansion of the Japanese occupation to the Chinese coast and southeast Asia helped seal off China's oversea transport connections to the outside world. This new situation helped place Xinjiang in a position of greater prominence for Republican planners, as they saw the region as the main potential transport conduit binding the Republic to the outside world. Officials in the wartime capital of Chongqing hoped that the line could help ferry Lend-Lease aid to China. Under the plan, goods would be shipped to ports in British India, shipped by train to Persia, driven to a rail depot on the Soviet Union's Trans-Caspian line and then, drawing on the Soviet rail network be transported to Xinjiang.

Throughout 1942 and 1943, Chinese surveying teams blanketed Xinjiang, looking to develop a transport network binding the region to China-proper. The ambitious plans called for the development of a 3,500 km northwestern line to be integrated into a larger 5,840 km network binding the province to swaths of unoccupied "Free China." According to a report from the Ministry of Transport, the rail network could be completed in no less than ten years. The final phase of construction would be completed in 1953, when the line connecting eastern Gansu province and Tacheng would be opened to traffic (Ma, Lin and Chen 2009, 220). For provincial leaders accustomed to Xinjiang operating as essentially a "backdoor" to China, the new interest in the region came as a bit of a surprise. As Sheng Shicai, the provincial governor in the 1930s and 1940s remembered, "So sudden was the transformation; we felt that Xinjiang had become the front door of China" (Whiting and Sheng 1958, 155).

In the end, however, the financial constraints of wartime largely tied central government officials' hands. Indeed, planners in the wartime period did not even try to come up with a funding scheme for the massive northwestern highway. Wringing their hands over the massive price tag for the construction of the 3,500 km northwestern line, the plans which called for construction to stretch over the subsequent decade, planners in the wartime capital of Chongqing in 1943 only calculated the costs for the first year of construction. The total for this first year amounted to a staggering 657 million Chinese yuan, an amount that included a massive 444 million for only the lines crossing southern Xinjiang. Inside of the province, aside from a meager investment from the Ministry of Transport, the investment in roads, warehouses, gas depots and rest areas were to be largely shouldered by the provincial government.[12] In the end, worried about the potential for a growing American presence in Soviet Central Asia and the potential that the Soviet rail network would be overburdened with allied shipments to China and would thereby displace shipments to the Soviet Union, Stalin refused to allow trans-shipping through Soviet territory. This refusal effectively ended Xin-

[12] The question of the division of financial labor was an on-going concern for officials and debates and recriminations over just how much Xinjiang should foot the bill for this network was constantly being debated. Xinjiang, Hami, Xingxingxia, Lanzhou Cangku (MG 31, 7/23) File: 003-010501-0010 (Academica Historica (Guoshiguan) Archive, Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C.), 5.

jiang's status as China's front door and the infrastructural development plans were tabled. Despite the on-going rhetoric from planners in the national capital about the need to build a comprehensive road network that bound China from the east coast to the far west, very little was actually constructed. Well into the 1950s, not only was there no railroad binding Xinjiang to political and economic capitals in eastern and central China, but the region lacked even an integrated network of paved roads capable of accommodating trucks. Xinjiang was not unique in this. Indeed, aside from Manchuria, which benefitted from Japanese investment in the region in the 1930s, many of the Republic's border regions lacked the infrastructure that would bind them to China-proper.[13] In 1949, 130,000 km of auto roads crisscrossed the Republic of China. Despite being China's largest single province and more than 17 percent of its total territory, the high cost of constructing roads and the competing priorities for planners in the national capital meant that less than 5 percent or only around 6,000 km of China's total roads were located in Xinjiang (XJBW 1992, 1).

Throughout the Republican period (1912-1949), central government officials proved largely unwilling to do any more than pay lip service to the development of a road or rail network that extended out to Xinjiang. On the one hand, this was a product of regional politics, as the provincial governor Yang Zengxin who ruled Xinjiang from the 1912 until his death in 1927, embraced an isolationist policy intended to hold Xinjiang back from the swirling vortex of political allegiances and power struggles of warlord-era China by seeking to seal the erstwhile province. On the other hand, however, it was a conscious choice made by Republican-era state planners. Indeed, the years after the Northern Expedition against China's warlords and the exertion of central government control by Chiang Kaishek's Nationalist (Guomindang) Party in 1927, were witness to an unprecedented campaign of state building in eastern and central China. The new governor in Xinjiang, Jin Shuren, responded positively to these developments and, reversing the policies of his predecessor, reached out to the new government in Nanjing to facilitate the integration of this wayward Chinese province. As noted above, these overtures were rejected, using financial constrictions as pretext. The wartime government made a similar choice in 1942, as they chose to concentrate their energies on the development of China's southwest at the expense of the northwest.

The American treasure hunter Langdon Warner described the road across North China in the early 1920s as one of unrelenting hardship, emphasizing the overland journey as "rains and seas of mud at first – then droughts and bitter desert cold" (Warner 1926, 1). But arguably the most striking characteristic is the vast gap that existed between the ambitious plans laid out by state planners in Beijing, Nanjing, and Chongqing and the piecemeal reality of the roads constructed during this period. These plans never existed beyond the paper they were printed upon and those highway networks that were built did little to resemble the rosy plans drawn up at the various Qing and Republican capitals. Indeed, there was no semblance of an integrated transport network either connecting Xinjiang to inner China or binding Xinjiang internally by the end of the Republican period. Instead, the construction of Xinjiang's infrastructural network in the first half of the 20th century was spearheaded by a motley network of provincial leaders, foreign powers, and local officials.

[13] Mao (1956) noted that 70 percent of industry was concentrated along China's coast.

4 Russian and Soviet Intervention in Republican Territorial Dreams

In stark contrast to central government officials in Nanjing and Chongqing, who proved largely unwilling to do more than pay lip service to the development of a road or rail network, foreign powers and the Russian empire and Soviet Union in particular, played a much more forward role in shaping the region's transport infrastructure. Following the expansion of their empire into Central Asia in the 1860s, Russian officials and merchants began to hear rumors about Xinjiang's lucrative resource wealth, from stories about gold nuggets dug out of river banks that were the size of a horse's hoof to reports about places in Xinjiang's arid northern steppe where raw petroleum bubbled out of the ground. The rumors prompted an outflow of Russian explorers, travelers, and geologists to Xinjiang in the latter half of the 19th century, and helped spawn an enduring interest in the region's resources, whether it was gold, furs, petroleum, or rare earth minerals.

Map 2: Soviet Rail Network after 1928 (Cartography: Debbie Newell)

The ambitions of Russian and, after 1917, Soviet officials to stake their own claims to Xinjiang's resources were supported by the development of an extensive rail network in Central Asia. By the early 20th century, the Trans-Siberian Rail line ran north of the province while the Trans-Caspian Rail line was extended to the town of Andijan located in the Ferghana Valley, just west from southern Xinjiang. The strength of the Russian rail network proved to be a

formidable challenge to Qing and later Republican officials. As one late Qing officials agonized, "Xinjiang is besieged by Russian railroads to the north and to the west" (Zhang and Gu 1988, 73). The comparative strength of the Russian rail network in the early 20th century helped facilitate a tidal wave of Russian manufactured goods into local markets, a vast influx of Russian merchants, and a growing aggressiveness by Russian consular officials stationed in the region. The prominence of the Soviet Union in the 1920s was only facilitated by the construction of a new rail line that connected the Trans-Caspian and Trans-Siberian lines. The Turk-Sib line, as it was known, was completed in 1928 and almost immediately appeared poised to directly threaten Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang. Chinese consular officials stationed in the Soviet Union worried that the region's economy would "be completely monopolized by Soviet Russia" and, hinting at the potential for a Soviet annexation of Xinjiang, darkly pointed out that "afterwards disasters will surely multiply."[14]

The centrality of the Soviet Union in Xinjiang's economy surely posed a threat to Chinese sovereignty in Xinjiang. But as far as officials in the province's capital of Dihua, who lacked all but the most meager connections to China in the 1920s, were concerned, the Soviet presence was also an opportunity. When provincial officials faced the simultaneous challenges of an uprising among indigenous Uyghurs as well as a fiscal and political crisis in the late 1920s, they sought to consolidate their political connections to the Soviet Union. In exchange for financial aid and military support, the provincial governor opened the door to Soviet technicians and economic planners who were eager to stake legal claims to the province's lucrative natural resources. A series of agreements signed between the provincial government and the Soviet Union in 1931 and 1933 helped institutionalize Soviet claims to Xinjiang's natural resources. At first, the agreements were kept secret from the national government in Nanjing. Later, when Chiang Kaishek found out about the agreements, he condemned them in the strongest terms. But provincial officials, who were in desperate need of military aid and financial capital that was not forthcoming from China, largely downplayed Chiang's concerns and indeed strengthened their connections to the Soviet Union. Relying on old reports from the early 1900s and focusing their efforts on resources capable of being cheaply and easily extracted and shipped back to the Soviet Union via rail, Soviet planners concentrated on a handful of sites located in the northern slopes of the Tengri Tagh/Tianshan and Altay Mountain ranges.

In order to facilitate the outflow of raw materials, Soviet planners, working closely with their counterparts in the provincial government, drew up extensive plans for a regional road network that connected the erstwhile Chinese province to the Soviet transport network. These planners drew up a 4 million-ruble plan for a network of road connections that extended from the Turk-Sib rail line in Soviet territory to three main border crossings in northern Xinjiang. In addition, eager to facilitate the extraction of resources, they carefully detailed planning reports and geological maps. Soviet advisers to the provincial government also helped draw up the outlines of a road network in Xinjiang that spanned the province with a particular focus on roads connecting the provincial capital of Dihua with various cities along the border. Unlike the plans from the Republic of China, however, these plans were supported by real money and assistance. In the initial 1933 agreement in which the Soviet Union provided provincial officials with a 5 million ruble loan at 4 percent interest, Soviet officials ex-

14 "Su'e Shixing Jianzhushang Xitielushi cheng song Sulian Jiaotongbuzhang zhi Baogao ji Luxian Tushi" (MG 16, 4th month), Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collection: 03-17-059-02-001, Academia Sinica, Institute of Modern History Archive, Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C.

tracted promises that more than half of the total amount of the loan – 2.8 million – be used to develop internal transportation infrastructure.[15]

The Soviet blueprints were not simply imposed upon provincial officials. Rather, officials in the governor's office in Dihua were active participants in the process of developing a new, paved road network that would transform Xinjiang's economic and political relationship to the Soviet Union, Central Asia, and ultimately to China. Soviet officials played an aggressive role in developing a handful of trunk lines connecting Xinjiang to the Soviet rail network as well as branch lines connecting important resource sites to major provincial highways. In particular, planners prioritized the development of a road connecting Dihua to the Khorgos border crossing located near the Xinjiang town of Yili, and dispatched a joint Soviet-Xinjiang road building team, led by Soviet technicians to undertake construction.[16] But the potential benefit of ferrying lucrative resources to the Soviet Union prompted the provincial governor, working with Soviet advisers, to unveil a larger road network that bound all corners of the province to Soviet border crossings. Operating with a Soviet-style five year plan in mind, the provincial governor Sheng Shicai prioritized the development of a road network in the first "three year plan" (1937-1940). To carry out the 160 million provincial tael plan, the provincial government farmed out the cost of construction to local officials, who in turn passed the cost onto merchants who were required to contribute money, food, and materials, as well as to local peasants who were drafted as corvee labor to work on road construction gangs.[17]

Despite the prominence of the Soviet position in northern Xinjiang throughout the 1930s and, aside from a brief Chinese resurgence from 1942-1944, in the early 1940s, Xinjiang remained officially a province of the Chinese Republic. But the infrastructural connections built in the region told a different, more complex story. In 1949, when the Nationalist regime collapsed, there were only seven meager roads that could accommodate trucks. Reflecting the larger priorities of the Soviet Union, of these, six were located north of the Tengri Tagh/Tianshan Mountain range in areas prioritized for resource extraction by Soviet planners (XJBW 1992, 21). In most cases, the roads binding Xinjiang to Soviet border crossings were better and more comprehensive than those binding the province to China. The founding of the People's Republic did little to fundamentally change this dynamic. The fact was that the new government in Beijing, like their predecessors in Nanjing, was unable to invest substantial amounts of resources into new, comprehensive road networks binding this region to inner China. Throughout most of the 1950s, state planners concentrated their funds on building and repairing the roads binding northern Xinjiang to the Soviet Union. Under China's first five year plan (1953-1957), the central government agreed to invest over 3 million yuan in the construction and repair of the Koktokay/Fuyun-Jeminay border crossing highway, the Dihua-Khorgos border crossing highway, and the Kashgar-Torugart border crossing highway. The central government funds paled in comparison to the more than 16 million yuan provided by provincial and local-level government for the construction and

[15] "Liangong (bu) zhongyang zhengzhiju huiyi di 11 hao jilu: chongjian Xinjiang jingji" (August 5, 1934) [from the Russian Center of Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History] in Shen 2012, 37-39

[16] "Agreement" (no date) [Russian State Archive on the Economy (RGAE)] Document 7590 (Moscow, Russian Federation), 726.

[17] A provincial official in 1936 overheard a conversation as his group took shelter from a summer rain storm in a small village in which a peasant complained that, "road construction is a huge obligation, it occupies our fields and irrigation canals, and in the spring planting and fall harvesting season the Highway Office comes to grab peasants for laborers." No title (July 24, 1936) Republican Collection: file number 2-7-105 (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Archives, Urumqi, PRC), 47-53.

maintenance of Xinjiang's road network (XJBW 1992, 18-20). The completion of the Lanzhou-Xinjiang rail line in 1962, and worsening of the Sino-Soviet split in the same period with the subsequent closing of the border crossings into the Soviet Union in 1965 facilitated the orientation of Xinjiang's infrastructure away from the Soviet plans developed in the 1930s and 1940s.

While provincial officials working with their local counterparts worked to develop Xinjiang's transport network throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, it retained much of its patchy, uneven quality. State planners sketched out comprehensive plans, and sweeping rhetoric continued to hold up an idealized vision of a comprehensive transport network binding the state and the nation from west to east but, for the most part, planners in Beijing were unwilling to invest its precious resources in the realization of plans. Instead, they built up these visions upon the road networks supported by officials in the Soviet Union, and pieced together by provincial officials leaning on the coercive abilities of their local counterparts. The vision reproduced in planning reports, school text books and maps distributed in schools were the product of careful negotiation between the state, local officials, and their foreign counterparts.

5 Conclusion

The making of state territories and other "areas"[18] is always a merger of "the work of imagination" and the "material crafting" (Navaro-Yashin 2012, 5). Anssi Paasi (1999, 69) argues that state territories should thus be analyzed as processes of spatial socialization and territorialization of meaning which occur through education, politics, administration and governance. In addition to the discursive making of territories, states also typically attempt to etch their sovereignty in the landscape through infrastructures, and mark the extent of this sovereignty by border checkpoints, wires, and other visible border markers. Such attempts at imposing clear-cut national divides onto transborder ethnic, religious and economic geographies remain contested along many Asian borders until today; other spatialities, with their distinct materialities, exist parallel to these states' attempts (Lattimore 1968; Davis 2003; Dean 2005; Reeves 2014). Processes of lobbying and negotiation between border populations, border elites and state institutions (Baud and van Schendel 1997; Sturgeon 2004; Guyot-Réchard 2016) further foreground the huge amount of work that is necessarily part of territory and border making.

Within the borders, territorial states typically attempt to establish a certain degree of connectivity through, mostly, expansion of transportation networks believed to be in a direct correlation to the process of national integration, territorialization and the establishment of legibility (Scott 1998). This correlation is in social practice much more opaque and thus has to be questioned (Harvey 2005; Kernaghan 2012; Joniak-Lüthi 2016). Furthermore, the present paper argues that the border context has a significant influence on what constitutes this opaqueness. Our focus on Qing and Republican plans and attempts to territorialize the border region of Xinjiang through infrastructure reveals, for example, that the infrastructures actually built had a diametrically different spatiality than the one desired by the Qing and Republican planners. It was Russia – and Soviet Union – oriented and thus contested the very project of Qing and Republican territorialization of the border. Moreover, the archival material analyzed here demonstrates that the patchy connectivity in northern Xinjiang, and the setting up of Chinese Communist administration there after 1949 have been to a great degree pre-determined by these infrastructures designed and partially built by Russia and the Soviet Union. As provincial officials and their local counterparts worked to develop Xinjiang's transport network throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, it retained much of its uneven quality as it was pieced together from the materiality of the Soviet presence in the region and the meager central investment from Beijing. The process unveils a paradoxical relationship between the Qing and Republican reformers' dreams of comprehensive transport networks, and the actual crafting of these networks, which, to a great degree, was shouldered by Russia and the Soviet Union seeking access to Xinjiang's resources with the consent of provincial authorities. This draws attention to the opaqueness of the very idea of borders and territory in Xinjiang in the first half of the 20th century, multiplicity of territorializing agents involved, and the relative invisibility of the central government in funding and technical support. While in inner China an involvement of a foreign state in infrastructure construction would be unlikely, in Xinjiang, the vacuum created by the absence of central

[18] For example, Willem van Schendel (2002) points out that the rise of "areas" of focused academic knowledge production such as "Southeast Asia" or "East Asia" would not have been possible without a parallel establishment of the academic and political institutions which have supported their reproduction.

funding was filled by the Russian and Soviet regimes, which, following their own agendas, determined the location of major transport routes. This, in turn had long-term effects for Xinjiang's administration and the establishment of Chinese sovereignty over this region.
While the reformers sketched out comprehensive plans, and sweeping rhetoric continued to hold up an idealized vision of encompassing infrastructure networks binding the state and the nation from west to east, for the most part, economic officials in Chinese capitals were largely unwilling to invest precious resources in the realization of these plans. High price tags and different priorities effectively undercut the abilities and willingness of the Chinese state to construct an integrated transport network. The analysis of the Russian and Soviet intervention in material practices in the region makes visible the multiple, un-orchestrated, and often contradictory forces which shaped the contours of the Chinese administration of Xinjiang in the twentieth century.

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