SINKIANG AND SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

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In the arc of Inner Asia linking Russia and China, Sinkiang occupies an important position. Over the past century, it has spawned recurring anti-Chinese rebellions among its predominantly Moslem peoples. On occasion, Sino-Russian co-operation repressed revolt, as the two nations pursued their common interest as colonial rulers of Central Asia. More frequently, however, Russian influence benefited from these revolts, to the detriment of Chinese power. In addition, Russian trade concessions during the nineteenth century and mineral exploitation in the twentieth century provided material incentive for penetration of China's largest province.

Since 1917, however, a third form of international rivalry has supplemented these two traditional aspects. The Bolshevik impact upon Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uighur, and Tadzhik peoples on the Soviet side of the political frontier has threatened long established nomadic and oasis societies across the border, with whom these peoples have an identity of ethnic and cultural interests.

Thus Sinkiang permits a dual focus. First, it may be examined as a point of tension or harmony in Sino-Soviet relations. Yet this is neither the most important nor the most interesting approach to the area. Not only is there little evidence out of Sinkiang which is pertinent to so complicated and so sensitive a political problem as the Moscow-Peking axis. The basic forces at work upon the alliance are far removed from

these thinly populated borderlands, of marginal strategic and economic importance. But in addition, pre-occupation with this approach obscures a second, more fruitful aspect , namely, the relevance of developments in Sinkiang for the long chain of Inner Asian peoples, reaching from the Mongols in the northeast to the Kurds in the West.

Yet these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, as I hope to show today. Perhaps the understandable American interest in the Sino-Soviet aspects per se can be broadened to include the more basic question concerning the consequences of communism in Russia and China for the traditional societies of Central Asia. If this paper poses more questions than it can answer, I can only plead the inadequate number of persons presently studying these phenomena, and hope that these questions will stimulate further research in this area.

AS AN AREA OF SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT

In the balance-sheet of Sino-Soviet relations, Sinkiang scarcely warrants an entry so far as the conflict side of the ledger is concerned. The boundary with Russia is fixed, and there is no reason to assume the Chinese Communist nourish irredentist hopes of recovering the so-called "lost territories," lost to Tsarist expansionism and championed by Chiang Kai-shek.[1]

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[1]Chiang Kai-shek, China's Destiny, New York, Roy Publishers, 1947, p. 34; Hou Ming-chiu, Chen Erh-shiu, and Lu Chen, General Geography of China (in Chinese), 1946, as cited in G.B. Cressey, Land of the 500 Million, New York, McGraw-Hill, p. 39.

True, Chinese maps show the Outer Mongolian boundary as "undelimited" while Mongolian and Soviet maps draw it as firmly established. Moreover, the roughed-in Chinese version varies markedly from the line drawn on the other charts.[2] Whether these cartographic differences reflect actual disagreement, and whether such disagreement will affect the three-cornered Soviet-Mongol-Chinese relationship remains to be seen. Given the minimal importance of the territory in question, in terms of strategic, economic, and status considerations, it is unlikely it will play any role comparable to the volatile Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese border disputes.

Historical references to past disputes along the border seem irrelevant for prospective developments. First, the ideological framework of the Sino-Soviet alliance has substantially affected the foundations of Russo-Chinese relations. Second, and perhaps more important, the establishment of communist rule on both sides of the frontier has settled the

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[2]I am indebted to Mr. Theodore Shabad for the most recent verification of this information. Chinese Communist maps invariably carry the notation, "Drawn after the Atlas of China published by the Shun Pao of Shanghai before the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression;" see, for instance, Wang Chun-heng, A Simple Geography of China, Peking, 1958. These maps, have, however, served as the basis for Chinese Communist claims against India and Burma.

nomadic peoples in fixed residence, eliminating the wandering of armed groups along an unmarked frontier. The local incidents of the nineteen-forties, for instance, stemmed as much from Kazakh foraging as from Mongol-Chinese border tensions. This illustrates how the problem of Sino-Soviet relations can lead us to the larger question of Inner Asian peoples, and their development under the communist order.

If traditional concern over territorial sovereignty seems anachronistic within the ideological framework of the Sino-Soviet alliance, the same should be true of "economic imperialism," as it has been called. Yet the hard bargain Stalin drove with Sheng Shih-ts'ai in 1940, winning extensive mining concessions, was paralleled by his 1950 agreements with Mao Tse-tung, establishing joint Sino-Soviet stock companies in oil and non-ferrous metals, operative for thirty years. Perhaps this manifestation of "great-nation chauvinism" was as embarrassing to Stalin's associates as to his Chinese comrades, for the concessions were liquidated following agreements concluded in October 1954, when Khrushchev and Bulganin visited Peking. While payment for Soviet shares is to be made from local production, Soviet control as such seems to have disappeared from Sinkiang's economic activity. As with the territorial question along the Mongolian border, the marginal utility of Sinkiang's resources seems so unpromising for Russian needs in its Central Asian republics, especially when balanced against alternative sources of supply, as to make expendable the concessions. The

loss was undoubtedly more than offset by the consequent gain in Sino-Soviet political relations.

Manipulation of nationality tensions, the third point of possible Sino-Soviet conflict, may warrant attention in Sinkiang, but not in the form in which it occurred during the pre-1949 period. Among the charges levelled at "local nationalists" purged from governmental and Party leadership in 1958-59 were repeated allusions to "poisoning Sino-Soviet relations." Rarely was this term explained, at least in the available materials. In one instance, dissidents were accused of having compared Han, or Chinese, cadres unfavorably with those from Russia.[3] Wang Eh-mao, first secretary of the Sinkiang Chinese Communist Party, denied such distinctions were valid since the Chinese and Russian peoples and states were in such close friendship, opposition to one was automatically opposition to the other. Variants on the theme tell of demands for a Uighur Republic within a federal state, on the model of the Kazakh Republic in the U.S.S.R.

To be sure, some memories may go back to the Soviet-sponsored Ili revolt, and its subsequent flourishing until Chinese Communist "liberation" of Sinkiang in 1949, after which the region lost all semblance of autonomy. Its phoenix-like

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[3] Ili Jih Pao, July 3, 1958, quoting Wang En-mao, first secretary of the Sinkiang Chinese Communist Party, reporting the conclusions of the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region party committee plenary conference.

reincarnation in November 1954 as the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Chou was a pale shadow of the so-called "East Turkestan Republic." Significantly, this area suffered the heaviest purge of "local nationalists," as reported in the Sinkiang press.[4] Its propinquity with Kazakhstan makes it a likely source of Soviet influence.

Yet such influence surely must be passive, whatever its past active role may have been. It is doubtful that Chinese Communist controls are vulnerable to clandestine penetration by Soviet agents in Sinkiang, even were Moscow to engage in such unlikely, hazardous ventures. Furthermore, Russian leaders seem no less sensitive than their Chinese comrades over the dangers of "local nationalism," with its possible flowering into "pan-Islamic" and "pan-Turki" movements. In fact, Kommunist, in September 1959, inveighed against those who held that "in Kazakhstan only such persons should work in responsible posts who knew the Kazakh language," against the virgin lands opponents who "feared the participation in their affairs of representatives of other friendly republics" and against those who attack the "pollution of language with foreign word."[5] Also, in 1959, Soviet shakeups in the Turkmen, Uzbek,

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[4]In 1957-58, those purged included the head and deputy head of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Chou, the President of the People's Court in the chou, and the vice-director of propaganda for the Ili CCP committee.

[5]N. Dzhandil'din, "Some Problems of International Education," Kommunist, No. 13, September 1959; see also Central Asian Review, vol. VII, No. 4, 1959, pp. 335-40 for summary and commentary on this article.

Azerbaijanian, and Tadzhik republics publicly accused demoted officials of "local nationalism," albeit in varying degree, with the most detailed charges occuring in Turkmenistan.

Thus while Soviet nationality policy may be an embarrassment to China because of the federative as opposed to the unitary principles on which the two regimes are respectively based, Soviet nationality practice complements that of China in its check upon genuine nationality power. This suggests that the problem more appropriately falls into our later discussion of Sinkiang's relevance to the question of communism and nationality in Inner Asia.

One final point of possible conflict must be considered because of its recurrence in Western speculation on Sino-Soviet relations, namely, population pressure. Completion of the trans-Sinkiang railroad next year is certain to prompt further speculation of this sort. Undoubtedly the railroad will facilitate Chinese colonization of this, the most thinly populated province in China other than Tibet. Extensive irrigation and soil reclamation projects may expand agricultural output. Together with the industrial growth made possible by Sinkiang's mineral resources, and the eventual use of atomic energy for power and construction purposes, the area may support several times its present six million persons. Yet the adjacent Soviet republics already boast a combined populace of 13 million, with a growth paralleling that of Sinkiang consequent from virgin land programs, greater exploitation of mineral resources,

and an expanding industrial economy. Nor is the general region one of migratory peoples, shifting according to the vicissitudes of climate and of neighboring political pressures. Once again, the answer to such speculation lies not so much in analysis of Sino-Soviet relations per se as in the broader socio-economic developments in the area on both sides of the frontier.

AS AN AREA OF SINO-SOVIET CO-OPERATION

Turning from evidence of conflict to that of co-operation, Sinkiang still ranks small in the overall picture of Sino-Soviet relations. Indeed, given its location and its lack of development, the area seems to have received surprisingly little attention as a recipient of Soviet assistance. Perhaps the Russian role is underplayed in Chinese Communist sources. Whatever the reason, the net impression is one of Soviet participation in geological surveys, in planning for the railroad, in irrigation control schemes, and in agro-technology, such as improving seed strains and pest control. Material assistance, however, is rarely mentioned and of marginal importance when described. Thus accounts of industrial construction and mine developments stress the degree to which Chinese manpower, almost exclusively militarily, utilizes local materials. The bulk of refining equipment at the Tushantze center represents Soviet investment of the 1940's. The major project, the railroad, is exclusively Chinese in construction, except for the relatively-short spur in Kazakhstan linking its Turk-Sib

terminus of Aktogai with the Sinkiang border. This was completed in 1959, although by 1960 the Chinese side was operative only to Hami, or slightly more than half-way along the total distance of 1400 miles.

In educational and cultural affairs, too, one would hardly suspect from the Chinese and Russian press that the Sino-Soviet border cut through a region where thousands of ethnically related peoples are separated by little more than a political frontier. Occasional references to visits across the border of sports groups or of youth delegations contrast with the high level of personal exchanges flowing between Peking and Moscow. Curiously, it was not until August 1956 that Peking finally and formally decided upon the Cyrillic alphabet for the Uighur, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Uzbek, and Tatar peoples of Sinkiang, despite ready availability of Soviet materials for these languages in Cyrillic since the Chinese Communist victory in 1949.

At that time, the move was argued in terms of "the rich experiences gained by the Soviet Union and our brotherly nationalities in the reform of national languages, and in linguistic development." [6] Appropriately enough, the decision was unveiled at a conference attended by Soviet linguistics experts. Without fanfare, this 1956 decision was reversed three years later. In December 1959, Sinkiang authorities

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[6] Sinkiang Jih Pao, August 16, 1956, Union Research Service, Hong Kong, Vol. V, No. 25, December 25, 1956.

announced that the Uighur and Kazakh languages would be transcribed in the Latin alphabet, on the so-called Han phoneticization plan adopted for the rest of China.[7] Although editorials lauded this move as linguistically preferable to the old Arabic script, no reference was made to the presumed inadequacies of Cyrillic. In view of the purges against "local nationalists" during the interim, it would appear that the 1956 decision may have facilitated communication across the border with fellow "nationalists" in Kazakhstan. If implemented, as pledged, over the next three to five years, this will place a formidible barrier between ethnically related peoples heretofore separated by only a political frontier.

Again, the evidence seems more pertinent to an inquiry directed at the cohesive or divisive forces at work among Central Asian peoples, than to similar forces in the Moscow-Peking axis. What economic interchange occurs across the border, and under what controls? How do studies in the Oriental Department of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences relate to Sinkiang? What sharing of educational or cultural materials occurs along this frontier? Do student exchanges occur in the immediate area, or do they flow in opposite directions to Peking and Moscow? Beyond our general awareness of differences in the constitutional structures of the Soviet Union and China, what

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[7] Sinkiang Jih Pao, December 17, 1959, In Survey of the China Mainland Press, No. 2182.

specific institutional differences occur, and with what affect on nationality groups on both sides of the border? How are these explained by the respective ruling elites?

These questions force us to change our point of departure, from research geared to assess the role of Sinkiang in Sino-Soviet relations, to research designed to assess the impact of communism on the peoples of Central Asia. With the Chinese and the Mongolian experiences at hand, it is no longer necessary to approach the question solely on the basis of Soviet materials. Instead genuine comparisons may be made so as to strengthen or modify hypotheses heretofore limited by the narrow base of evidence.

AS AN AREA OF SUB-CULTURES

Indeed, what we have to examine is a vast belt of sub-cultures, linked by interrelated ethnic and cultural patterns inherited from centuries of development, but with some links being broken, others reshaped, and new ones created by several decades of communization. While in theory this communization should forge one single culture out of the past pattern of diversity, in practice it both unifies and diversifies. The conceptual unity of values being pressed upon these peoples from Moscow, Ulan Bator, and Peking co-exists with marked differences in specific policies adopted by the three governments.

Granted that such differences are explained within the Marxist frame of reference as being dictated by differences in the respective stages of economic development as well as by differences theoretical justification, these differences have consequences for the peoples involved. They will affect their cultural cohesiveness, their standards of living, their attitudes toward local as well as central administration, and their expression of satisfaction or discontent on these points will in turn affect the policies of the ruling groups. The sum total of interaction is relevant not only to an understanding of Inner Asian developments inside the communist bloc, but to the way in which that bloc may affect related peoples on its periphery, in South Asia and the Middle East. This suggests a three-dimensional dynamics of development: (1) between the local nationality and its ruling group, of identical natinnality only in the case of Mongolia; (2) between the local nationality in one communist country and its counterpart in the adjacent communist state; and (3) between the nationality area, including both ruling and ruled groups, and adjacent, related peoples in non-communist states.

To illustrate, let us examine the implications of this approach for the hypothesis of communism as a positive force of attraction for underdeveloped peoples who see its modernizing impact on similar peoples in the Soviet Union. Among American scholars of Inner Asian developments, this hypothesis has won the most attention from Professor Owen Lattimore. His historical

appreciation of intercultural exchange and his anticipation of the sensed need for modernization among underdeveloped societies led to postulation of the "spillover" effects (the term is my own) of communism for Sinkiang, and of the "voluntary satellite" (the term is his) phenomenon in the case of Outer Mongolia.[8]

Time prevents us from examining more than Sinkiang, and this, of necessity, must be schematic. Yet the exercise may be suggestive of the utility of relating case-study research to refinable hypotheses which ultimately may contribute to a theory of political development.

How has the Soviet system influenced developments in Sinkiang? We have three different periods to examine. First, from 1933 to 1942, Sheng Shih-ts'ai administered Sinkiang as a Soviet satellite, while remaining nominally under the direction of the Republic of China. Secondly, from 1944 to 1949, the Ili rebels controlled a large area in the northwestern portion of the province, with Soviet support. Third, of course, is the past decade of Chinese Communist rule, frankly emulating Soviet practice.

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[8]Owen Lattimore, Pivot of Asia; Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia, Boston, Little Brown 1959; and Nationalism and Revolution in Mongolia, New York Oxford University Press, 1955.

One variable differentiating the three periods is the mode of entry for Soviet policies. Sheng began with little local support beyond that engendered by his limited accommodation to traditional pressure for the displacement of Chinese administration with local nationals. His adulterated versions of Soviet-directed policies, however, led to widespread dissemination of Soviet nationality theories as well as propagation of concepts concerning "imperialistic capitalism." Explicitly the Soviet Union was extolled, while implicitly the Republic of China was denigrated.[9] Sheng built no cohesive corps of cadres, however, to provide ongoing Marxist direction for Sinkiang. Instead, he repeatedly purged rising local nationality figures and based his administration on Soviet advisors, supplemented in later years by Chinese Communists.

The Ili rebels, in contrast, united Kazakh and Uighur in an anti-Chinese movement which received arms and manpower from Soviet sources, both within Sinkiang and from across the border. A logical outcome of Sheng's nationality program, the rebellion seemed also to exemplify the "spillover" effect of Soviet nationality policy, an effect which Soviet officials apparently encouraged actively. We know considerably less about the internal workings of this group, but there is no question of the role played by advisers from the Soviet Union, both Russian and Kazakh. No evidence has been found of Chinese Communist activity among the rebels.

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[9]Allen S. Whiting and Sheng Shih-ts'ai Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot? East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1958

In the present situation, a third variant occurs with Sinkiang controlled directly from the center in Peking. Basic decisions are Chinese Communist, but they are implemented through local Uighur, Kazakh, and other nationality representatives. Soviet advisers seem to have disappeared completely from the scene, except for non-political activities in the realm of technical assistance.

This gives us more than four decades of Soviet activity across the border and almost three decades of Soviet influence within Sinkiang. Despite the variations on the conditions under which that influence entered the area, one phenomenon remains constant: the local interest in the Soviet model has been primarily, if not exclusively, in its promise of self-rule. In contrast with the repeated references to Soviet political practices, there has been little concern shown for Soviet economic practices, despite the central role of the latter in the Soviet Union.

Not only has there been little indigenous support for Soviet concepts of economic revolution. This is paralleled by deep seated resistance to economic change, even though industrialization is both the symbol of and a means to modernization. Now modernization is an attractive goal, but its components are not always given identical weight by the local peoples as compared with their communist leaders. When it is defined in terms of improvements in literacy, health, and material well-being, it wins a widespread response. This was true for

Sheng's program, for the Ili rebels, and for the present regime. If, however, it involves basic changes in soci-economic institutions, it seems to win few local recruits.

In measuring the acceptance or rejection of specific policies, we must approach the evidence in the communist press cautiously. We have no way of checking the selectivity of reports in this press, either with respect to "local nationalists" and "bourgeois counter-revolutionaries," or to their "anti-rightist" and "stalwart progressive" opponents. The alternation of emphasis against "great Han chauvinism" one year and "local nationalism" the next, apparently on the basis of nationwide directives from Peking, cautions against taking press reports at face value.

The consistency of detailed charges, however, the specific targets of purge, and the relative role of local as compared with central government administrators, do furnish some basis for judgement and for further research. Reviewing the past decade, it would appear that the policies of Peking in Sinkiang have failed to benefit from the exemplary influence of the Soviet Union or from past Soviet influence in the province. In fact, the selective impact of that influence whereby "nationalist in form" won attention to the exclusion of "socialist in content" may have made the Soviet-sponsored Ili regime unacceptable to Peking. While it is true that the group may have been suspect precisely because of its Soviet support, its exclusive emphasis upon political problems made it not only

an anti-Chinese force but also a status quo force in the economic realm. Thus instead of its being spotlighted as the first success of "New China's" response to nationality tensions, the group was purged, stripped of its local prerogatives, and only four years later reinstated as an autonomous area with new leadership. After four years in power, these leaders in turn were purged for having resisted Peking's policies.

Elsewhere, from 1950 to 1954 armed Kazakh uprisings pin-pricked the People's Liberation Armies. In 1957, "local nationalists" publicly criticized the agricultural co-operatives and denied the PLA economic activities were beneficial to the people of Sinkiang. In 1958, "frantic attacks" against the communes triggered a new wave of Party expulsions and propaganda campaigns, while scattered evidence suggested local armed uprisings in 1959. Among the catalogue of complaints voiced by local opponents of the regime, economic measures, such as the massive agricultural projects of the PLA forces, receive equal weight as points of criticism as to the political questions of local cadres, language usage, and autonomy. True, Sinkiang's "great leap forward" seems to have been irreversible. According to the Chinese press, 96.6 per cent of the population has been organized into 451 communes, boasting some 30,000 public dining-halls.[10] Thousands of families are reportedly

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[10] Sinkiang Jih Pao, November 25, 1959 in Survey of the China Mainland Press, American Consulate General, Hong Kong, No. 2167; and Saifudin, "Sinkiang's Great Achievements in Agriculture in Ten Years," Chung Kuo Nung Pao (Chinese Agriculture), No. 19, October 8, 1959 in Extracts From China Mainland Magazines, American Consulate General, Hong Kong, No. 193.

occupying new dwellings in these communes, and some sixty per cent of Sinkiang's herdsmen "have settled down in new houses or fixed encampments."[11]

Yet is this the "spillover effect" of Soviet influence or is it an enforced policy dictated from Peking? We do not know the exact size of the armies based in Sinkiang, but we do know that they are overwhelmingly Chinese in composition, They directly administer thirty per cent of the arable land, and till twenty per cent of the sown area.[12] Given the scope of PLA projects, this must be a sizeable armed force, far from the invasion routes of "imperialist and Chiang Kai-shek agents." Ostensibly the PLA functions as an economic unit in Sinkiang, supplying needed manpower for soil conservation, irrigation, reforestation, mining, and crop production, principally cotton and grain. Its "pacification" duties in general, however, and its publicized role in tidying up" the communes in particular, suggest that while Sinkiang may not be a "police state," it may well be termed a "garrison state."

What of the "voluntary satellite" concept? Does a local elite foster economic progress but rely on outside power as a necessary protective support against vested interest opposition? However relevant this model may have been for Outer Mongolia, it seems inapplicable to Sinkiang. The only local elite which

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11. New China News Agency via Radio Peking, January 6, 1960.

12. Saifudin, op. cit.

might have played this role emerged in the original Ili regime, but the group disappeared soon after "liberation." The two Turki figureheads, Burhan and Saifuddin, neither comprise an "elite" in themselves nor hold critical positions of power in the Party, the government, or the army. They seem to be little more than Turki dressing on the Peking duck. At lower levels, the majority of Party members are still Chinese, although Chinese comprise less than a fifth of the total Sinkiang populace.[13]

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[13]According to Saifudin, "Ten Years of Progress in the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region," Jen Min Jih Pao, October 25, 1959, in SCMP, No. 2140, 8,892 Communist Party branches in Sinkiang contained 130,000 members, of whom 47.3 per cent were "local nationality representatives." In addition, 10,280 Young Communist League branches with 220,000 members, contained "over fifty per cent local nationality representatives." Because of heavy migration from China proper, population figures are unreliable, based largely upon the 1953 census. For instance, Theodore Shabad, China's Changing Map, New York, Praeger, 1956, gives the population of the Ili chou as 770,000 "of whom the Kazakhs are a bare majority." However, Jen Min-Jih Pao, June 21, 1959, in SCMP, No. 2050, credits the Ili area with "over 800,000 population," of whom the Kazakhs number only 43.4 per cent. The generally accepted figure for the total population of the region is six million, but no recent figures for the Chinese portion have been found. See The New York Times, December 27, 1959, quoting Jen Min-Jih Pao, to the effect that 100,000 Chinese had migrated to Sinkiang during six months.

More detailed examination is necessary if we are to ascertain the determining variables which distinguish the Mongol from the Sinkiang developments. Is the absence of a native intelligentsia a factor in the differing emphasis upon economic reform in Sinkiang, as compared with Outer Mongolia? Do nationality divisions in Sinkiang render political autonomy attractive primarily as a negative device for keeping other groups out of the locality, whether they be Kazakh or Chinese, rather than a positive device for coalescing ethnically related groups in a step toward development of a modern society?

These reflections are not offered as final conclusions derived from exhaustive research, but rather as illustrations of the use to which materials on Sinkiang may be put, not only within the framework of Chinese and non-Chinese relations in the People's Republic, much less within the framework of Sino-Soviet relations, but hopefully within the larger expanse of cultural interaction in Inner Asia.