



Introduction

This timeline gives an overview of major events in the 20th century that shaped the politics of Xinjiang.

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17th to 18th Centuries

A Sufi lineage gains control of what is now southern Xinjiang. A conflict between branches of the lineage leads one to secure their dominance by becoming vassals of the powerful Zunghar Mongol empire based in northern Xinjiang.

1759

After nearly a century of war with the Zunghars, the Qing dynasty establishes control over the region that comprises modern-day Xinjiang. From this time onward, the region was often referred to as “Xinjiang,” which literally meant “new territory.”

1762

The Qing establishes a military administration for the region. A general oversees indirect rule, while the government is conducted mainly by local Turkic and Mongol officials.

1820s

Jahangir, a member of the Sufi lineage that had once ruled Xinjiang, leads a series of incursions into the region in an attempt to regain control. The incident leads the Qing to play a more active military role in Xinjiang.

6 June 1864

The so-called “Muslim uprisings” break out in the oasis of Kucha. Following years of dissatisfaction with new taxes, as well as a rumor that the military administration was planning to massacre Muslims, Muslims attacked Qing garrisons and non-Muslims.

1864–1868

The uprisings swiftly spread across the region, as regional Muslim groups compete to establish legitimate control.

1865–1867

The neighbouring Khanate of Khoqand takes advantage of the situation and sends a military officer named Yaqub Beg (1820–1877) to conquer Kashgar. He instead forms an independent state that comes to rule most of the region. The Ottoman, British, and Russian empires all compete for influence over the state, which also negotiates with the Qing.

1876–1878

The Hunan-based Hunan Army reconquers the region, along with other military forces.

1877–1884

Xinjiang’s “reconstruction” under the Hunan Army resettles

tens of thousands of displaced people and new Chinese
◀ settlers and establishes a regime of cultural assimilation.

1884–

The region is formally established as a province on the
model of provinces in China proper. ▶

1912

The newly proclaimed Republic of China inherits Xinjiang
after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. However, the
governor Yang Zengxin (in office 1912–1928) is a
monarchist who rules in the imperial style. He consolidates
◀ his rule gradually and often brutally.

1928

Yang is assassinated and replaced by his deputy Jin
Shuren. Jin attempts to rule more directly, leading to
widespread discontent. ▶

1932–1933

The rebellion spreads westward through Turpan, and then
all the way to Kashgar and Khotan, as local Muslim leaders
see an opportunity for independence. ▶

12 November 1933

First East Turkestan Republic founded at Kashgar. This
short-lived state brought together the interests of several
factions, including both Turkish nationalists and Islamists,
◀ from Xinjiang's various oases.

16 April 1934

Attacks by Soviet-backed Hui and Chinese forces, as well as the realignment of some of the rebel leaders, lead to the disestablishment of the Republic. Its leaders flee into exile or join the new government.

1934–1944

The warlord Sheng Shicai (1895–1970) rules Xinjiang mainly as a puppet of the Soviet Union, but nominally part of the Republic of China. His government begins as a coalition of Soviet advisers, local Turks, and Republic of China officials.

1937–1938

Sheng orders a purge of intellectuals, following Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union. His government imprisons or murders many Uyghur, Kazakh, and other autochthonous intellectuals and political figures.

1942–1944

Sheng flip-flops between supporting the Soviet Union and the Republic of China, with disastrous consequences for the region's economy.

Autumn 1944

Hardship leads Kazakhs in North Xinjiang to rebel. Soon, Soviet aid and reinforcements lead them to seize control of the Ili, Tarbaghatai, and Altai regions.

12 November 1944

Second East Turkestan Republic founded. Modern Chinese history remembers the republic as the "Three Districts Revolution." It fights a bitter war against the Nationalist army of the Republic of China through the summer of 1945.

1946

New governor Zhang Zhizhong forms a shaky coalition government for the region with Uyghur leaders formerly based in Nationalist Chongqing and with the Soviet-oriented leadership of the Republic. Zhang is remembered as a more

competent governor who wondered why Chinese governed the province and had not given control to the people of Xinjiang.”

27 June 1946

The Second East Turkestan Republic is formally disestablished and absorbed into Xinjiang province, although its leadership maintains control of this region.

May 1947

The Uyghur intellectual, anti-Soviet, and Turkic nationalist Masud Sabri becomes Xinjiang's first non-Chinese governor in modern times.

July 1949

Several political leaders from northern Xinjiang board a plane for Beijing to negotiate with Mao Zedong. The plane crashes mysteriously. A separate delegation meanwhile proceeds to Beijing and vocally supports joining the Communists.

25 September 1949

Xinjiang's military and government surrender to the People's Liberation Army, and the region becomes a province in the People's Republic of China. The new government describes this event as peaceful liberation.

1954

The founding of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), also known as the Bingtuan 兵团 or “The Corps.” This paramilitary and development organization comes to form a state within a state in Xinjiang.

1 October 1955

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is established replacing the province. According to the first national census in 1953, Uyghurs make-up more than 70 percent of the population.

April 1962

Yi-Ta Incident leads to 60,000 Kazakhs and Uyghurs fleeing from Xinjiang into the Soviet Union. The XPCC dispatches more than 17,000 officials and workers to Ili and Tacheng to maintain public order.

1975

As a result of the disruption caused by the Cultural Revolution, the XPCC is dissolved.

December 1981

The XPCC is reestablished to counter “separatists, religious extremists and terrorists” in the border areas due to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.

April 1990

The Baren Township Riots begin which kill 23 and wound another 21. In July 1990 Chinese authorities announce the arrest of 7,900 people for “criminal activities of ethnic splittists and other criminal offenders.”

1996

The first “Strike Hard” campaign is initiated specifically targeting “splittism and illegal religious activities.”

February 1997

A series of protests in the northwestern Xinjiang city of Yining result in multiple deaths (9 by official account, around 100 by dissident accounts). This leads to the imposition of a two-week-long curfew and the arrest of over 1,600 people according to dissident sources.

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