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Photo Essay

The Relics of Empire: Resource Extraction and the Making of Modern Xinjiang

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Drilling rigs, roads, open-pit mines, and refinery equipment, among a vast assortment of other relics, lie scattered across the northern half of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The objects are the material detritus left behind by agents of the Soviet Union who sought a claim to the resource wealth of this Chinese border region in the early twentieth century. Examined together, these relics help lay bare a critical but largely overlooked connection between natural resources, foreign investment, and the formation of the modern Chinese state in Xinjiang.

In my recently published book, *Natural Resources and the New Frontier: Constructing Modern China's Borderlands* (2018), I reveal the material power of the Russian and later Soviet efforts to stake claims to various resources in Xinjiang, including gold, wool, petroleum, camel hair, and rare nonferrous metals, among others. In this book, I suggest that if one wants to understand modern Xinjiang, whether it is the economic inequalities in the region, the strength of the Chinese state, or the expansion of ethno-cultural tensions, one must first understand the long-term material resonances of these resource-extraction campaigns. The images in this photos essay, taken during a 2016 trip to Xinjiang, highlight the objects left behind by Soviet geologists, mining technicians, and state planners. More than an inventory, these photos reveal the ongoing, material power of the relics and how they continue to shape the region today.

Since the late nineteenth century, foreign powers have played a critical role in shaping the contours of modern Xinjiang. Their presence in the region was marked by competition and struggle between the British and Russian empires, the Soviet Union, and a series of China-based regimes, each eager for control over Xinjiang, its markets,

and its lucrative local products.¹ To understand the enduring resonances of this struggle, we must dig beneath the sloganeering of imperial and national discourse and excavate the material legacies of the various efforts to claim Xinjiang's resources. The surveys, deep drills, refining equipment, roads, wharves, and buildings constructed by multiple actors to acquire the region's rich natural resources served as the blueprints and the material foundation upon which modern Xinjiang continues to rest.

These relics served as the cornerstone for a larger Chinese state-building effort in Xinjiang, as the region's first resource maps, first modern road network, and important institutions of state were developed in the twentieth century to help facilitate and protect the extraction of valuable resources. Yet, scholars have largely overlooked the centrality of resource extraction in shaping modern Xinjiang. The ethno-cultural tensions and periodic violence between Turkic-Muslim Uyghurs and Han Chinese that has escalated dramatically over the past two decades has made a powerful impact on the scholarship on the region. In recent years, much of the research on modern Xinjiang has centered on understanding the formation of ethno-cultural identities, debates surrounding ethnicity, and China's twentieth-century ethnic policies.² This body of literature has been critical in countering the hegemony of a linear, China-centered narrative that seeks to assert Xinjiang's ancient connections to the Chinese state.³ It tells us little, however, about the socioeconomic and political infrastructure that continues to undergird Chinese state policy in the region.

This infrastructure, laid by various state and non-state actors seeking their own claims to Xinjiang's resource wealth, has exacerbated the conditions for ethno-cultural unrest, periodic violence, and an increasingly aggressive state apparatus that, as of today, has detained as many as one million Uyghurs and other indigenous Turkic Muslims in a network of reeducation camps in the region (Zenz 2018). The material-centered perspective revealed in my book and highlighted in this photo essay centralizes the drilling rigs, refining equipment, and roads constructed to extract profit from Xinjiang's rich resource wealth. This perspective offers new insights into Xinjiang's relationship to the Chinese state, the nature of Chinese state power and authority, and the changing ways in which leaders see China's relationship to Eurasia and beyond.

¹ The term "Great Game" is thought to have been coined by British officials in the nineteenth century, but the larger narrative of imperial intrigue between the British and Russian empires—with each seeking to extend its control over Central and South Asia—has been expanded to include the Qing Empire and Xinjiang. Beginning with Owen Lattimore (1950), scholars have also sought to fold the Cold War struggle in the region into a larger Great Game framework. See also Share (2015), Wang (1999), and Whiting and Sheng (1958).

² For recent works on the formation of a Uyghur identity in the region, see Bovingdon (2010), Brophy (2016), Beller-Hann et al. (2007), Klimes (2015), and Thum (2014). For work on ethnic policy and Han-Turkic Muslim relations, see Smith Finley (2013), Jacobs (2016), Millward (1998), and Schluessel (2016).

³ According to the People's Republic of China's 2003 white paper on Xinjiang, "Since the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–24 AD) [Xinjiang] has been an inseparable part of the unitary multiethnic Chinese nation." <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/zfbps/t36561.htm>.

Qing/Chinese Weakness

In the years following the Qing conquest of Xinjiang in 1759, the imperial court declined to annex the region and incorporate it into its growing empire. Instead, the court administered the region as a frontier dependency (*fanshu*) and allowed for significant amounts of internal autonomy.⁴ A series of crises in Xinjiang during the nineteenth century, culminating in 1864 in the decade-long Yakub Beg rebellion, prompted Qing reformers and statecraft (*jingshi*) adherents to call for the transformation of Xinjiang from an unintegrated border region into a fully integrated province of the empire. The political distinctions that separated Xinjiang from the rest of the empire were eliminated in 1884 when Xinjiang was made an official province. Yet the high cost of constructing roads and rails ensured that the material connections that bound the newly minted province to what we might refer to as “China-proper,” or what those in Xinjiang called the “interior” (*neidi*), continued to lag well into the twentieth century.

Xinjiang had put a burden on imperial coffers since its initial conquest. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Qing officials complained about the annual shipments of silver (referred to as “interprovincial assistance,” or *xiexiang*) that the administration in the region desperately needed to keep their account books in the black. But the prospect of integrating Xinjiang, along with its lucrative local products (*tuchan*), more clearly into the Qing Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries required an even greater financial contribution. Plans drawn up by the Ministry of the Post in 1907 for a northwest rail line came with a massive 150 million-tael price tag. When the ministry informed provincial officials that they would shoulder much of the burden of repaying the high-interest foreign loans needed to construct the line, the plan collapsed amid howls of protest.⁵ The fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, and the subsequent founding of the Republic of China, did little to alter Xinjiang’s position relative to China-proper.

The early years of the Republic were notable for the ambitious integrationist rhetoric and slogans being voiced by leaders in Beijing. Less than a year after the founding of the new state, the so-called father of the country (*Guofu*), Sun Yat-sen, drew up a 67,000-mile railroad construction plan that would bind the Republic to its western periphery. Less than ten years later, he increased his ambitions by drawing up an even more comprehensive 100,000-mile rail plan.⁶ The financial and political

⁴ This allowance was at least partially a product of a pluralistic vision of empire espoused by the Qing court in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. See Millward (1998) and Crossley (1999).

⁵ See Yuan (n.d.). When confronted with the prospect of paying back the high-interest loans, in 1910, the Governor-General of Shaanxi-Gansu, formerly a high-ranking official in Xinjiang, rejected the plan, declaring that it was an “opinion based on ignorance” (Chang [1910] 1987, 367).

⁶ The 67,000-mile plan is cited in Chang and Gordon (1991, 51). The 100,000-mile plan was the centerpiece of Sun Yatsen’s 1920 book, *Shiye jihua* (The international development of China [original English title]).

challenges facing the new Republic ensured that neither plan made its way off the page. A less ambitious plan drawn up in the 1920s was later scrapped when projections placed the cost of construction at a substantial 30,000 yuan per *li* (approximately one-third of a mile; Lin 1930, 397–398). The unwillingness of planners in the Republic to come up with the resources needed to transform these plans into a material reality did not go unnoticed by officials in Xinjiang. In 1927, when a Chinese consul in the town of Irkustk, in Siberia, covertly obtained a copy of a Soviet plan to construct a new rail line that ran troublingly close to the border of Xinjiang, he sounded the alarm in a long telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Receiving a copy of the communiqué, the provincial governor Yang Zengxin replied with barely concealed disgust, “If we [China] diverted one-third of the amounts we spend paying back foreign loans or on military expenditures on the construction of railroads, then we surely would have already announced the completion of a line linking Shaanxi, Gansu and Xinjiang.” He went on, “How can we make foreigners not build a rail line surrounding us on all four sides, when we do not have the desire to build a railroad ourselves?” (Yang 1927).

The lack of state investment to undergird the soaring rhetoric and ambitious plans for Xinjiang ensured that, beginning with Governor Yang in the 1920s, a succession of Han Chinese provincial leaders operated largely independently from the Chinese Republic. The frequent rhetorical assertions of Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang from the 1920s into the late 1940s were mostly hollow grandstanding. In his book on Tibet, historian Lin Hsiao-ting argues that officials in the Republic simply asserted an “imagined sovereignty” that was “was engineered to maintain its Nationalist façade and political legitimacy” (2006, 13). This imagination was also at play in Xinjiang, where a focus on the material reveals the enduring weakness of Chinese border policy. This weakness propped the door open wide for foreign powers eager to stake a claim to the region’s lucrative resource wealth.

The Rise of the Soviet Union

Beginning in the nineteenth century, explorers from various imperial powers actively explored the territories of the Qing Empire. By the turn of the century, taking advantage of fiscal crisis and institutional weakness, they sought to stake a claim to the empire’s lucrative resource wealth. Fanning out into Qing territory, explorers and geologists searched for coal, gold, tin, and later petroleum (Wu 2015, esp. chaps. 3 and 4). Border regions in particular faced waves of explorers, geologists, and potential investors eager to uncover resources demanded by emerging global markets (see Kinzley 2010, 17–41).

Bolstered by an advantageous topography, Russian, and later Soviet, explorers came to play a central role in discovering many of the Xinjiang’s most profitable gold and petroleum sites. They also highlighted the potential value of the region’s pastoral products, including fetal lambskins and camel hair. These explorers, and the state planners who often followed in their wake, spearheaded an effort to connect Xinjiang’s most promising resource production areas to international markets via newly constructed rail networks in Central Asia. This effort was highly successful, and for much

of the twentieth century, the fastest way to travel to this erstwhile Chinese province from Shanghai, Beijing, or Canton was not by roads across North China or camel caravan across Outer Mongolia, but via steamship to Black Sea ports, followed by a combination of steamer, railroad, and caravan to the Xinjiang border (“Telegram from Consul Etherton” 1920; “Trade Report” 1915). During the late 1920s, Soviet planners further improved their transport network by building the Turkestan-Siberian Rail line (better known as the Turk-Sib), which ran directly parallel to the Xinjiang border only 150 miles away. Aided by these infrastructural connections, Soviet trading companies funneled in vast quantities of manufactured goods and exchanged them for various high-value local Xinjiang products.

The growing presence of Soviet state planners, geologists, and merchants in Xinjiang in the early 1930s, and the lack of a solid infrastructural connection to China-proper, meant that when Han Chinese officials in this Chinese province began searching for the means to crush a rebellion that broke out in eastern Xinjiang in 1931, they turned to Moscow for help. For their part, Soviet representatives were eager to institutionalize their relationship with Xinjiang. On the one hand, they sought easy access to the region’s pastoral products in order to fuel light industry. On the other hand, facing sky-high heavy industry production quotas disseminated from the Kremlin as part of the First and Second Five-Year Plans, state planners targeted Xinjiang as an important producer of desperately needed industrial raw materials. During the 1930s and 1940s, Soviet officials and their provincial counterparts signed a series of agreements that offered cash loans, manufactured goods, and weapons in exchange for access to Xinjiang’s most lucrative resources. Despite this role, Soviet officials, along with their counterparts in the provincial governor’s office, continued to deny any change in Xinjiang’s status and repeatedly affirmed that it remained an official province of the Chinese Republic.⁷

Working from old geological maps drawn up by Russian teams in the early twentieth century, Soviet planners identified and began production at a handful of tungsten, tin, and beryllium ore sites, as well as petroleum fields. Despite being aware that oil and ore sites were scattered widely across this vast province, they concentrated their efforts on those located in close proximity to the Soviet-Xinjiang border and not too far from the Turk-Sib rail line. Throughout the 1930s, Soviet planners, working with their provincial counterparts, prioritized the production of industrial raw materials at a handful of sites in northern Xinjiang. According to the Soviet-Xinjiang agreements, the Soviet Union provided nearly all of the capital and the technical expertise for these

⁷ The Soviet efforts in Xinjiang in the first half of the twentieth century should be seen as a nearly textbook example of “informal empire.” According to the historian Jurgen Osterhammel, informal empires “are a means to the end of securing significant economic interest (trade, direct investments, loans, etc.) that often came about without political support” (2002, 20). For the classic literature on informal empires, see Galbraith (1963); Robinson and Gallagher, with Denny (1961). See also Duus, Meyers, and Peattie (1989).

enterprises, and provincial officials simply provided access to the land, labor, and building materials.



Closed road in the Alatau Mountains, not far from the Russian border.
Source: All photos were taken by the author.



Former Soviet worker dorm in Dushanzi.

In 1937, Soviet planners completed construction on a new oil hub in Dushanzi, whose eponymous lone hill on the southern edge of town bubbled a steady stream of sticky black crude. The site would soon boast a top-of-the-line refinery, a pipeline network, an electric power station, a network of workshops and warehouses, a ten-kilometer highway spur connecting the site to the province's main east-west trunk road, and housing, which included three houses for Soviet technicians and eight dormitories for local workers and their families (Pantsev 1940). Similar facilities were constructed at the tin and tungsten fields in Bortala, in far western Xinjiang along the Soviet border, as well as at the beryllium and lithium ore mine at Koktokay in far northern Xinjiang.

The bulky equipment demanded at the sites, as well as the difficulties in transporting raw ore and petroleum, necessitated a heavy investment in Xinjiang's infrastructural network. Soviet planners and provincial leaders provided the capital and technical support for the construction of an internal highway network that bound extraction sites to the border. The gravel and bitumen that was paved over Xinjiang's tamped earth roads in the 1930s and 1940s ensured that the new roads were capable of accommodating large, fully laden trucks and that they connected production sites to border crossings and rail hubs on the Turk-Sib line year-round.

The Material Power of Extraction

In the spring of 1942, as the German invasion of the Soviet Union reached a grim crescendo, Sheng Shicai, the provincial governor of Xinjiang, began to fear the imminent collapse of the Soviet regime and the end of Soviet support for the province. Taking action, he chose to sever his relationship with the Soviet Union and embrace the Republic of China, which had just affirmed a new military and economic alliance with the deep-pocketed United States. But the material power of the resource-extraction facilities constructed with Soviet capital in the 1930s and early 1940s ensured that Soviet plans continued to shape the region. The steel, stone, and asphalt that had been assembled to produce and channel vast volumes of raw materials into the Soviet Union continued to shape the region well after Soviet planners were pushed out of the province.

Chinese planners were eager to produce critical resources but, considering the tremendous costs of China's war effort in central China, were also reluctant to spend heavily on extraction, processing, and transport in this distant border region. As a result, they concentrated their efforts on those sites identified and worked by their provincial and Soviet counterparts. In April 1942, the first high-ranking official from the Chinese Republic visited Xinjiang. In addition to meeting with Sheng in the provincial capital, Minister of the Economy Weng Wenhao also conducted extensive surveys of the Soviet oil operation at Dushanzi. Not long after, large numbers of geological expeditions and technical delegations from China followed in his footsteps at Dushanzi and at all of the major Soviet production sites in the province. Chiang Kai-shek and his planners in China's wartime capital of Chongqing offered ambitious integrationist rhetoric that promised a new evaluation of Xinjiang's most promising resource sites and the

construction of comprehensive infrastructural connections that bound Xinjiang's resources to the Chinese nation. In the end, however, the fiscal realities of wartime China meant that planners largely followed the Soviet surveys, roads, refineries, and drilling operations right back to Dushanzi, Bortala, Koktokay, and the Soviet border.



The pipelines of Dushanzi.

The power of the Soviet investments was tested in late 1942. While Chinese officials turned a blind eye, Sheng spearheaded a vicious campaign against Soviet citizens: punishing stores that sold food to them, threatening to imprison doctors who provided their medical care, and strip-searching high-ranking officials and their families during routine border crossings. Things were no better in the province's large Soviet-Xinjiang extraction sites, where the growing tensions exploded to the surface. Provincial officials arrested several high-ranking Soviet officials in the oil operation at Dushanzi on questionable charges of sabotage and theft and regularly detained and interrogated drivers working for Soviet operations. Eager to close the once-promising operation, Soviet technicians filled a sixty-truck convoy with tools, equipment, and machinery in late May 1943, and a month later the last truck rumbled out of town on the roads constructed with Soviet loans and drawn up by Soviet planners. That July, an ironically apt fire, almost certainly an act of arson, completely gutted the joint Sino-Soviet conference room at Dushanzi.

In their communications with one another, Sheng and other Chinese officials insisted that the actions would reassert their national sovereignty in this border region. They also naively hoped that, without the Soviet presence, Xinjiang's rich natural resource wealth would naturally flow east and be used to meet China's desperate wartime demands for raw materials like petroleum. In reality, the investments made by the Soviet Union continued to shape the larger patterns of extraction and transport. The obstacle to rewriting patterns of extraction and reorienting the flow of resources was that the new Chinese administrators of the province, who complained about the high cost of constructing roads, rails, and even new geological surveying campaigns, did not make the substantial investments that would fundamentally reorient the province to the east. Faced with the daunting task of surveying this massive province, the main geologist tapped to survey Xinjiang in 1942 threw up his hands, saying Xinjiang "is too large a province for a score of field geologists to handle" (Huang et al. 1947).



Number Three Ore Vein, Koktokay.

From the 1930s into the 1960s, various regimes with an assortment of ideological orientations—the Republic of China, the East Turkestan Republic, and the People's Republic, among others—took the Soviet plans and operations as a blueprint and foundation for their own larger efforts to profit from Xinjiang's resource wealth. Despite rhetoric and slogans that continually called for more comprehensive extraction plans and new calls for aggressive state spending in Xinjiang, the patterns of investment and surveying clung to those patterns drawn up by their Soviet counterparts.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Chinese officials signed an agreement with the Soviet Union that established two Sino-Soviet extraction enterprises: an oil company and a nonferrous metals company. Not

surprisingly, considering their reliance on Soviet geologists and technicians, these operations clung closely to the contours of extraction drawn up by Soviet planners during the 1930s. In 1953, despite clear evidence that there was oil at several sites in southern Xinjiang, Chinese Communist Party planners shuttered all wells south of the Tianshan mountain range, noting that without better transportation infrastructure connecting the south, “the focus of [geological] exploration should be on northern Xinjiang.” In a nod to the material power of refineries and processing facilities, they went on to note that in order to hold down the cost of transporting raw petroleum, “production should be restricted to areas with existing [refining] equipment” (“Zhonggong zhongyang” [1953] 1997, 55). As the only modern refinery in the province, oil production was tethered in a tight circumference around Dushanzi in north-central Xinjiang.



Oil train in Kuitun.

Officially, Sino-Soviet cooperation in resource extraction continued until the end of 1954, when the two Sino-Soviet extraction companies were officially shuttered, though Soviet technicians continued to work with their Chinese counterparts into the early 1960s. Chinese planners also continued to ship large quantities of high-value nonferrous metals produced at Koktokay to the Soviet Union via the Irtys River in far northern Xinjiang. These shipments only ended only in 1965, when the PRC completed the payments on their loan obligations. Even after relations soured, the Soviet investments and their material relics continued to shape the region. Today, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is built atop these material relics. In *Natural Resources and the New Frontier*, I point out their powerful and ongoing reverberations: how they served as the framework upon which institutions of state power rest, steered the migration of larger and larger numbers of immigrant Han Chinese to a small handful of

sites scattered across northern Xinjiang, and continue to channel state resources to the Han majority north at the expense of the Uyghur majority south.

New Narratives

By the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union's historic role in resource production in Xinjiang was already being reframed in light of the downturn in Sino-Soviet relations. Increasingly, Soviet efforts in Xinjiang were viewed as an outgrowth of a larger imperial mindset, with its roots in the Russian Empire. The central role of Soviet scientists and technicians in shaping the production priorities of modern Xinjiang was actively erased, as tensions between the two states escalated in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In its place was a new narrative that emphasized Chinese surveying teams and planners.



"Large Oil Bubble," Karamay.

During the 1960s, state resources continued to flow toward Dushanzi and other sites first prioritized by the Soviet Union. But the site itself was relegated to the background. In its place, a new oil field took prominence—one located 150 miles to the north at a location called Black Oil Mountain (Heiyoushan, later renamed Karamay; Karamay itself is Uyghur for black oil, or *heiyou*). Soviet geologists had already surveyed the field in the 1940s. They even highlighted it as a production priority in a 1950 planning report submitted to the newly established joint Sino-Soviet Oil Company ("Xinjiang diqu" 1950). But when Chinese drilling teams uncorked a massive gusher at Karamay on October 29, 1955, the success of the site was promoted as a definitively Chinese success story. The date of the gusher was held up as the moment of birth for China's fossil-fuel industry in Xinjiang and a critical moment for the nation. Today the date is boldly displayed throughout the city of Karamay. In a nod toward the emergence

of a new China-centric mythos, one worker who was present on that fall day later remembered that the gusher turned the sky an auspicious shade of red that reminded him of “the rising sun emerging in all of its splendor” (Zhang and Wu 2005, 71).



Oil derrick in Karamay.

In recent years, however, the geopolitical landscape has changed again. Today, tensions with Russia have eased, and a new generation of Chinese leaders seeks to showcase China’s historic connections to Eurasia. At least part of this is connected to new efforts by the Chinese state to create a wider regional resource production apparatus. Since 2005, the construction of a new cross-border pipeline has allowed the refinery at Dushanzi to draw in raw petroleum from oil fields in Kazakhstan. Raw crude is processed at Dushanzi, and petroleum products are then redirected back toward China’s industrial and population centers in central and eastern China via a long east-west pipeline.

Running on fossil fuels from across the wider region, the refinery sprawls into the surrounding steppe. At night, the lights of the operations can be seen from almost

any building in town and hold a prominent place on Dushanzi's admittedly limited tourist itinerary. The growing importance of places like Dushanzi and Karamay for China's fossil fuels industry, coupled with ever-growing paranoia from officials about global terrorism in Xinjiang, has made some of these sites first developed by the Soviet Union highly restricted areas. In 2016, Dushanzi itself was established as a military region (*junzhiqu*) and closed to foreign tourists. For those few who make it in, hiking up to the bubbling oil springs that first attracted Russian and Soviet explorers and that today offer a bird's-eye view of the PetroChina oil refinery, is strictly forbidden. Similar, though less heavily enforced restrictions, are in place in Karamay.



Mural in Koktokay.

But that is not to say that tourists are not welcome at many of these sites of Sino-Soviet or Xinjiang-Soviet cooperation in Xinjiang. Indeed, all across northern Xinjiang, a new desire to highlight the cross-border connections that bind China to Eurasia has prompted local officials to hang new plaques and erect monuments commemorating Sino-Soviet cooperation in resource extraction in the twentieth century. Dusty buildings once constructed to house, entertain, and feed Soviet workers and their families are being cleaned up and displayed as evidence of the historic connections that have bound Xinjiang and, by extension, China to Central Asia and beyond. Since the unveiling of Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, there has been a more systematic effort to construct a new narrative that connects China to Eurasia.

There is clearly mythmaking at play here, and the giant Russian *matryoshka* (nesting dolls) at the old Sino-Soviet Irtysh River port in Burqin, the newly constructed Russian-style buildings that house Chinese hotpot restaurants, and the growing number of monuments to Sino-Soviet friendship that have been affixed to old buildings across

northern Xinjiang help reinforce new Chinese political goals that are only dimly connected to the production of resources. This new effort seeks to repackage these relics of Soviet informal empire as the evidence for a mythical “Silk Road” that stretches in an unbroken line from the Han dynasty through the tumultuous twentieth century to today.

This effort is part of a larger campaign to shape Xinjiang’s twentieth-century history, bending it toward narratives that unequivocally support the state. Today, the relics left behind by foreign powers in Xinjiang are either repurposed to reinforce these narratives or else covered up, carted away, or destroyed. An unlikely parallel exists in the unprecedented surveillance and assimilationist campaign being waged against Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang since 2016. Arrest, detention, and reeducation await those Uyghurs and Kazakhs deemed by the government as a threat to state-sponsored narratives of ethnic unity and harmony. Reframing relics, reshaping historical narratives, and reeducating indigenous populations are all part of a single, emergent border policy that seeks to sanitize Xinjiang’s complex history of political, economic, and ethno-cultural connections to Eurasia in a way that bolsters Chinese state claims to the region and its rich resource wealth.

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