

THE UYGHUR DIASPORA’S PERCEPTION OF XINJIANG AND CHINA’S DISCUSSIONS ON RENAMING XINJIANG

UYGUR DİASPORASININ XİNJIANG ALGISI VE ÇİN’İN XİNJIANG’IN İSİM DEĞİŞTİRİLMESİ KONUSUNDAKİ TARTIŞMALARI

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Abstract

This study examines the Uyghur diaspora’s perception of the name *Xinjiang* ‘新疆’ and debates within China regarding a possible change to the region’s name.

In 1884, the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) renamed East Turkestan “Xinjiang” to assert Chinese sovereignty and legitimize it. The name “Xinjiang,” meaning “New Frontier” or “New Territory,” implies that the region was newly incorporated into Chinese territory, which Uyghur Turks and the Uyghur diaspora view as neglecting their historical, political, and cultural identities. They reject the term “Xinjiang” as offensive and instead use

“East Turkestan” as a way to resist China’s domination and affirm their identity. Recent debates in Chinese media and academia about renaming “Xinjiang” reflect concerns that it implies a newly incorporated region, potentially weakening historical and cultural ties and allowing misuse by internal and external forces. There is also a belief that “Xinjiang” does not align with China’s national narrative and policies, particularly regarding concepts like “national Chinese consciousness.” Changing the name is seen as a way to better reflect and strengthen China’s national identity and global strategic position, aligning with China’s historical, cultural, and strategic goals.

The study examines the history, origin, and usage of “Xinjiang” based on Chinese sources, highlighting how the name has evolved and the impact of various policies on it. It then details the Uyghur diaspora’s discomfort with the name due to historical and cultural reasons. The study discusses renaming “Xinjiang” in Chinese media and academia to align with China’s national identity and strategic goals, suggesting it could enhance China’s narrative and global stance.

Keywords: Xinjiang, Uyghur Diaspora, East Turkestan, China, western region

Öz

Bu çalışmada Uygur diasporasının *Xinjiang* ‘新疆’ ismine ilişkin algısı ve Çin’in bu ismi değiştirme tartışmaları incelenmektedir. Qing Hanedanlığı (1644-1912), Çin egemenliğini göstermek ve meşrulaştırmak için 1884 yılında Doğu Türkistan’ın adını “Xinjiang” olarak değiştirmiştir. “Yeni Sınır” veya ‘Yeni Bölge’ anlamına gelen ‘Xinjiang’ adı, Uygur Türkleri ve Uygur diasporasının tarihi, siyasi ve

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kültürel kimliklerini yok saymak olarak gördüğü Çin topraklarına yeni dâhil olma anlamına gelmektedir. Bundan dolayı “Xinjiang” kelimesini aşağılayıcı bularak reddetmekte ve Çin’in tahakkümüne direnmek ve kimliklerini savunmak için ‘Doğu Türkistan’ ifadesini tercih etmektedirler. Çin medyasında ve akademide “Xinjiang” isminin değiştirilmesine ilişkin son tartışmalar, bu ismin yeni bir bölgeyi ima ettiği, tarihi ve kültürel bağları zayıflatabileceği ve iç ve dış güçler tarafından kötüye kullanılmasına izin verebileceği yönündeki endişeleri yansıtmaktadır. Ayrıca Xinjiang’ın Çin’in ulusal söylemi ve politikalarıyla, özellikle de ‘ulusal Çin bilinci’ gibi kavramlarla uyumlu olmadığına dair bir düşünce var. İsmi değiştirilmesi, Çin’in ulusal kimliğini ve küresel stratejik konumunu daha iyi yansıtmamanın ve güçlendirmenin, Çin’in tarihi, kültürel ve stratejik hedefleriyle uyum sağlamanın bir yolu olarak görülmektedir.

Bu çalışma, Çin kaynaklarına dayanarak “Xinjiang” isminin tarihini, kökenini ve kullanımını incelemekte, ismin nasıl geliştiğini ve çeşitli politikaların bu isim üzerindeki etkisini vurgulamaktadır. Ardından Uyghur diasporasının tarihi ve kültürel nedenlerden ötürü bu isimden duyduğu rahatsızlığı incelemektedir. Çalışma ayrıca Çin’in ulusal kimliği ve stratejik hedefleriyle daha uyumlu olması için “Xinjiang” adının değiştirilmesi konusunda Çin medyası ve akademisinde son zamanlarda yapılan tartışmalara da değiniyor. Analiz, ismin değiştirilmesinin Çin’in ulusal söylemini ve küresel konumunu güçlendirebileceğini ve tarihi, kültürel ve stratejik hedeflerini yansıtabileceğine odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Xinjiang, Uyghur Diasporası, Doğu Türkistan, Çin, batı bölgesi

Introduction

The name *Xinjiang* ‘新疆’ given by China to the East Turkestan region is not only a geographical name, but also carries political, cultural and social meanings. The name “*Xinjiang*” means “*new frontier, new territory*” or “*newly opened territory*”¹ and it symbolizes the region’s incorporation into Chinese sovereignty. This naming by China is viewed as a strategy that disregards the region’s historical and cultural identity, and it is rejected by Uyghur Turks and other Turkic groups within historical context.

Uyghur Turks, especially the Uyghur diaspora, prefer the name *East Turkestan* as it reinforces a strong connection to their historical and cultural identity. The name *East Turkestan* is the traditional name of Turkic communities such as Uyghur, Kazakh and Uzbek, where they lived and developed their cultural identities throughout history; this name expresses the historical and ethnic ties of Uyghur and other Turks to the region, while the name *Xinjiang* is a name given by the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) in 1884.² Uyghur Turks, particularly those in the diaspora, argue that the name “*Xinjiang*” fails to reflect their deep historical and cultural ties to the region. They view “*East Turkestan*” as a powerful symbol of their national identity and aspirations for independence, representing Uyghur sovereignty and cultural heritage. In contrast, “*Xinjiang*” is seen as a tool used by the Chinese government to assert its dominance and delegitimize Uyghur claims to of autonomy. The name “*Xinjiang*” is perceived as part of a broader strategy to erase Uyghur cultural and historical identities, aligning the region’s heritage with China’s national

1 Commission, “Xinjiang”, <https://cidian.bmcx.com> [Access Date: February 18, 2024].

2 清德宗实录,卷一九五”光緒十年十月癸酉”条,清实录,第54册[*The Veritable Records of Emperor Dezong of the Qing Dynasty*] Volume 195, “October 10th year of Guangxu” (Guiyou), “*The Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*], Shāngwù yin shūguān, 1912, p. 773.

narrative and promoting assimilation. Consequently, Uyghur Turks, especially in the diaspora, reject “*Xinjiang*” and advocate for “*East Turkestan*” to highlight their distinct cultural and historical identity and resist China’s sovereignty claims. For them, “*East Turkestan*” signifies an ongoing effort to preserve their cultural heritage and strengthen their historical connections).³

In recent years, there have been discussions in Chinese media and academic circles about changing the name “*Xinjiang*”. These discussions are considered to reflect China’s colonialist mentality, to be part of policies encouraging the assimilation of Uyghur and other Turkic peoples, and to be a reflection of China’s efforts to adapt to its regional and international policies. In particular, China’s goal of making the region’s historical and cultural heritage more compatible with its national narrative constitutes an important element of these discussions.

In a 2009 article for the Singaporean newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao*, Yu Shiyu argued that the name *Xinjiang* had become a geopolitical burden and suggested reverting to *Xīyù* ‘西域’, meaning ‘Western Region’. Yu noted that the issue of the name *Xinjiang* had evolved into a significant geopolitical problem, exploited by the Western world and *Xinjiang* independence advocates for their own purposes. He emphasized that *Xinjiang* had become a strong card for the Uyghur Turks and the Western world in their quest for Uyghur independence. Yu argued for abandoning the name *Xinjiang* and using *Xīyù* ‘西域’, which was used in Chinese sources from the Han (202–220 BC) and Tang (618–907) dynasties.⁴ The discussions about the name change are also seen in the context of China’s regional and ethnic policies. In 1954, the Chinese government established the *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* in *East Turkestan*, dividing it into several smaller provinces and implementing stricter assimilation policies for the Uyghur and other Turkic peoples. Hu Lianhe and Hu Angang of Tsinghua University proposed the “*Second Generation Ethnic Policies*” in 2011, advocating for the full integration of Uyghur Turks into the Chinese nation and the abolition of autonomous regions.⁵

Chinese scholars argue that Western media’s use of the name *Xinjiang* ‘新疆’ serves to question the region’s affiliation with China. Some Western commentators suggest that *Xinjiang* does not belong to China, while *East Turkestan* independence activists use the name to assert their claims and depict Han Chinese as “*outsiders*.” The term “new” (新) in *Xinjiang* can lead some Han Chinese to view the region as culturally foreign, reinforcing the idea of its separation from China’s cultural and historical integrity. Scholars argue that renaming “*Xinjiang*” may not address underlying political and ideological conflicts, as the name is viewed as a symbol

3 Rukiye Turdush, “Genocide as Nation Building: China’s Historically Evolving Policy in East Türkistan”, (August 2019), <https://www.jpolrisk.com> [Access Date: February 22, 2024].

4 Yú shiyū – 于时域. “新疆应该正名为西域省 – Xinjiang should be renamed as Western RegionsProvince”, (27August2009), <https://www.wywxwk.com/Article/lishi/2009/09/95412.html> [Access Date: February 24, 2024].

5 Huáng zhù – 黄铸, “何为第二代民族政策 – What is the Second Generation of Ethnic Policy?(30March2012) <http://sociologyol.ruc.edu.cn/shxpy/shrdyt/f1b63bc7b23a4676a878d1856d19bab0.htm> [Access Date: February 25, 2024].

within broader Western strategies and independence movements.⁶ Liu Yazhou, examines China's Greater Turkestan policy through his Western Region Theory. Liu emphasizes the strategic importance of China's western region, including East Turkestan and Central Asia, in historical and contemporary contexts. He argues that this region is crucial for China as both a border and a source of motivation.⁷ Liu discusses the potential need to change the name "Xinjiang," suggesting it does not align with China's national interests and asserting that the region, including Xinjiang or Turkestan, is vital to China's national destiny and interests.⁸ In summary, the Uyghur diaspora sees the name "Xinjiang" as an erasure of their cultural identity and an obstacle to their struggle for independence, while the Chinese authorities are discussing the name change, considering it incompatible with the national narrative and strategic goals.

This study provides a valuable perspective by examining the cultural and historical identity of East Turkestan, referred to by China as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The Uyghur diaspora's perceptions of the name Xinjiang are of critical importance in understanding how the cultural and ethnic identity of the region is shaped. China's efforts to change the name of Xinjiang play a vital role in understanding the political and social dynamics of the region, and the diaspora's views on the matter provide insight into China's ethnic and cultural policies. In addition, this study addresses an important issue in the context of international relations and diplomacy, while clarifying China's stance and the reactions of ethnic groups. It contributes to a better understanding of China's ethnic and cultural policies by providing new perspectives to the academic world.

In this study, the views and perceptions of leaders, academics and associations in the Uyghur diaspora regarding the name Xinjiang will be examined in detail through literature review. Additionally, the views on why the name change of Xinjiang has been a subject of debate in Chinese media and academic circles will be evaluated, and the political, cultural, and social motivations behind the name change will be analyzed.

Methods

This study aims to examine the Uyghur diaspora's perceptions of the name "Xinjiang" and China's discussions on changing the name through a qualitative approach. First, in the data collection process, the name "Xinjiang" will be analyzed based on Chinese sources. In this analysis, the historical origin of the name and how it is used in China's official discourse will be evaluated. Subsequently, an exploratory approach will be followed to understand the historical,

6 Yǔ jiā xuě – 雨夹雪, "新疆正名西域背后的阴谋 – The conspiracy behind Xinjiang's renaming of the Western Regions", (Sept 6, 2009). <https://m.wyxxwk.com/content.php?classid=16&id=97045> [Access Date: February 26, 2024].

7 Liú yàzhōu – 刘亚洲, "西部论 – Western Theory", (Sept 8, 2010) <https://www.rfi.fr/cn/首页/20100809-刘亚洲中将的西部论> [Access date: March 2, 2024].

8 21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü, "Western Region Theory (China's Greater Turkestan Policy)", (Dec 16, 2020), <https://www.21yyte.org/tr>, [Access date: March 5, 2024].

cultural and political identities of the Uyghur diaspora. The attitudes of prominent leaders in the diaspora, scholars and Uyghur associations towards the name “Xinjiang” and the rationales behind these attitudes will be discussed in detail. In particular, why the Uyghur diaspora prefers the name “East Turkestan” instead of “Xinjiang”, the views of the relevant associations on this issue, and the activities they carry out will be examined in depth. This analysis aims to reveal the Uyghurs’ reasons for rejecting the name “Xinjiang” in its historical and cultural contexts.

In the next stage, the discussions on the renaming of “Xinjiang” in the Chinese media and academic literature will be evaluated through content analysis. In this process, the historical development of the name and how it is used in line with China’s national discourse and strategic goals will be discussed. In addition, themes such as concerns about weakening the historical and cultural ties of the name, the extent to which this name is compatible with China’s national identity discourse, and how it can serve China’s global strategic goals will be analyzed. All the collected data will be analyzed through thematic analysis, aiming to reveal the relationships between the Uyghur diaspora’s sense of identity and the political and cultural underpinnings of China’s proposed name change.

1. History of the Name Xinjiang

1.1. Origin and Usage of the Name Xinjiang

Chinese sources will be resigined in order to obtain detailed information on the historical origins and background of the name *Xinjiang* “新疆”. These resources will help us explore the region’s naming process, the historical changes in the name, and their impact on the region’s cultural and political history. We will review historical records and academic studies to understand how the name Xinjiang relates to the Chinese government’s strategies for governing and representing the region. This approach will help us comprehend when and why the name Xinjiang was adopted, its effects on ethnic and cultural identities, and its connection to the region’s socio-political dynamics.

According to reports by *Zhang Qian* (张骞), the first envoy sent by the Western Han Empire (Former Han Dynasty, 202 BC – 8 AD), Chinese historian *Sima Qian* (司马迁) provides a detailed description of the region’s nature, geography, politics, economy, and ethnic structure in the *Dayuan* (大宛列传 – Biography of Dayuan) section of his work *Shiji* (史记 – Historical Records). Sima Qian did not specify a name for the region, which was referred to as *Xiyù* ‘西域’ (Western Region) in Chinese sources. During the reign *Emperor Han Zhao* (汉昭帝), *Sang Hongyang* (桑弘羊) mentioned the Western Region’s opposition to the Huns. In the second year of Shenjue (神爵) (59 BC) of the *Emperor Han Xuan* (汉宣帝), *Ming Zheng Ji* (命郑吉) was appointed as Protector of the Western Region. *Emperor Han Cheng* (汉成帝) discussed the

Western Region's instability and the disruption caused by previous opposing movements in a meeting with *Du Qin Wang Feng* (杜钦对王凤).⁹

In Chinese sources, the name *Xīyù* '西域' (Western Region) refers to lands west of China, and is used in both narrow and broad senses *Ban Gu* (班固) in the *Western Region* (西域传) section of *Han Shu* (汉书 – History of the Han) noted that the Western Region included thirty-six kingdoms during *Xuan Wu's* (孝武) reign and later expanded to over fifty. It is situated west of the Huns, south of the *Uysuns* (乌孙), and surrounded by mountains. It is united with the Han Empire to the east, bordered by *Yumen* (玉门) and *Yangguan* (阳关), and surrounded by *Congling* (葱岭) to the west. This definition covers areas south of the modern-day *Tanrı* Mountains, north of *Koylun*, west of *Dunhuang* (敦煌), and east of the Pamir. The Western Region described in the *Han Shu* is broader, encompassing not just southern regions but also areas around the Aral Sea, Central Asia, and even the Black Sea. This indicates that the name *Western Region* referred to a larger area from the Eastern Han period onwards.¹⁰

During the Qing period (1644-1912), the name Western Region was widely used in official and private documents. Initially, East Turkestan was referred to as Western Region until the Qing Dynasty overthrew the *Çungar Khanate* (1634 – 1755). During this time, Qinghai and Tibet were sometimes included in this definition. After the *Çungar Khanate* was defeated, the name *Çungar Region* (准疆) fell into disuse. The region was then referred to as 回疆/*Huí jiāng* 'Hui Region', specifically in reference to the Uyghur Turks south of the Tian Shan Mountains, as mentioned in the "Strategy for the Hui Region Rebellion and its Suppression" from the tenth year of Qing Daoguang. From the mid-18th century, especially after the *Çungar Khanate's* fall, the name *Xinjiang* '新疆' began to replace Western Region and was used in Qing official documents during Emperor Qianlong's (乾隆) reign.¹¹

During the Qing Dynasty, the name Xinjiang was used because East Turkestan was considered part of the Western Region, indicating that the Western Region had a wider geographical scope. The Qing government adopted the name *Xinjiang* to geographically define the region, thereby enabling it to be established as a distinct territory (Qi 2015: 18). Apart from that, during the Qing Dynasty, the term Xinjiang retained the same connotations in various parts/regions of China, such as *Guizhou* (贵州), *Yunnan* (云南) and *Sichuan* (四川).¹²

The Qing government divided the Western Region into two separate categories: the "old region" (旧部 – *Jiùbù*) and *Xinjiang* '新疆'.¹³ The word '*Xinjiang*' in the expression (西域新

9 Chinese Philosophy Text Electronic Project – 中国哲学书电子化计划, "西域传 – Biography of Western Regions", <https://ctext.org/han-shu/xi-yu-zhuan/zhs> [Access date: March 6, 2024].

10 Féng Chéngjūn – 冯承钧. 西域地名 [Western Regions Place Names], 中华书局, Pekin 1955, p. 2.

11 Chinese Philosophy Text Electronic Project – 中国哲学书电子化计划. "清高宗实录-Records of Emperor Gaozong of the Qing Dynasty", <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapte> [Access date: March 8, 2024].

12 Chinese Philosophy Text Electronic Project-中国哲学书电子化计划. "清高宗实录-Records of Emperor Gaozong of the Qing Dynasty", <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapte> [Access date: 8 March 2024].

13 钦定皇舆西域图志: Abbreviated as 西域图志 – Map of the Western Regions. is the first official local chronicle

疆’ – *Xīyù xīnjiāng*), which translates to the Western Region of the Qing Dynasty Xinjiang, Gradually evolved from a general noun into a fixed place name, connotating a “*newly expanded frontier*” (新辟疆围 – *Xīn pì jiāng wéi*) or “*newly opened territory*” (新辟疆土 – *Xīn pì jiāngtǔ*). It is stated that from the end of the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, especially from the Jiaqing period, the use of the name Xinjiang ‘新疆’ as a fixed place name became widespread in both official and private correspondence, and its use together with the name of the *Western Region* ‘西域’ became common (Qi 2015: 38).¹⁴

In the first year (1821) of the Qing Daoguang (清道光) era, *the Official Xinjiang Guide*, an official work recording East Turkestan and its surrounding areas, was published. In this work, it was stated that East Turkestan was defined as the “*Former Western Region*” (今之新疆, 即古西域),¹⁵ and the area covered a large area extending from the Kumul and Barikoli in the east, the Aral Sea in the west, Zaysan Lake in the north, and the Koylun Mountains in the south, thus encompassing a larger area than the definition of Xinjiang in the Qianlong period. In the twenty-fifth year (1820) of the Qing Jiaqing (清嘉庆) era, the famous Chinese scholar *Gong Zizhen* (龚自珍) first proposed the establishment of a province in East Turkestan in his article titled “*Proposal for the Establishment of a Province in the Western Region*.”¹⁶ The provincial name he proposed was *Zhunhui Province* ‘准回省’. Later, *Zhu Fengjia* (朱逢甲) advocated his article with the title “*Proposal for Establishing a Province in the Western Region*”¹⁷ to be used in the establishment of Xinjiang Province. The province name he suggested was *Western Region Border Province* ‘西域疆省’. Apart from these, the idea of establishing East Turkestan as a province was put forward by Li Yunlin in his work “*On Transforming Xinjiang into a Province*”.¹⁸ *Zuo Zongtang* (左宗棠), who played a role in the invasion of East Turkestan and its becoming a province under China, mentioned in a poem written in the thirteenth year of Daoguang (道光, 1833), “The Western Region was established after years of war, the establishment of a province is difficult, but settlement and support are very necessary.”¹⁹ During this period, the name Xinjiang Does

of Xinjiang from the Qing Dynasty, compiled over a period of 27 years starting from the twenty-first year of the Qianlong reign (1756) by Grand Secretaries Fuheng, Liu Tongxun, and others.

14 Qí Qīngshùn – 齐清顺, “新疆的由来和发展” [The Origin and Development of Xinjiang, *Historical Research*], 历史研究, 2015, p.38.

15 Today’s Xinjiang is the ancient Western Region.

16 西域置行省议: Proposal for Establishing a Provincial Administration in the Western Regions is discusses the vastness of the Qing Empire, emphasizing that it is the greatest among the “Four Seas” of the world. It claims that the Qing Dynasty, established in the Changbai Mountains, extends far beyond historical limits, covering 18 provinces with significant territories. The text argues that despite ancient rulers’ claims, no one had control over such vast seas or territories. The Qing Dynasty now controls both the Eastern and Southern Seas and has expanded westward, reaching 17,000 li from the capital. It questions whether Heaven intends to connect with the Western Sea, reflecting on the costs and sacrifices involved in this expansion. The writer expresses concern about the wisdom and benevolence of the authorities in their approach to these vast territories. Gong Zizhen; edited by Wang Peizheng: “The Complete Works of Gong Zizhen”, Shanghai People’s Publishing House, Shanghai 1975, p. 106 – 111.

17 Zhu Fengjia, “西域设行省议-*On the Establishment of a Province in the Western Regions*”, in Wang Xiqi (ed.), *Xiaofanghuzhai Yudi Congchao* (Volume 2), Hangzhou Ancient Books Store, 1985, p. 119.

18 论新疆改省.

19 Wúyìqún – 吴軼群 and Wáng xuě huā – 王雪花, “治广以狭与人地相宜: 晚清南疆二道政区变迁及基层职官的选

not yet appear to have emerged. Zuo Zongtang Proposed the establishment of East Turkestan as “Xinjiang Province”, and he expressed this request in the reports of the third (1877)²⁰ and fourth (1878)²¹ years of *Guangxu* (光绪). years of Guangxu, while also emphasizing the urgency of the establishment again in 1882.²² These proposals differ from the previous “Zhunhui Province” or “Western Region Province” proposals.

After the establishment of Xinjiang Province, the Qing government referred to the region as *Gansu Xinjiang* (甘肃新疆). *Liu Jingtang* (刘锦棠), who was appointed governor, proposed merging East Turkestan with Gansu to create “Gansu Xinjiang Province” due to the region’s vastness, low population, and economic issues. However, this proposal was not implemented, and Liu’s authority was limited to Xinjiang. The establishment of Xinjiang Province led to changes in administrative structure: the Ili General’s responsibilities were limited to the Ili and Çöçek regions, military commanders were abolished, and local administration was aligned with inland provinces. The eastern regions, previously governed by Gansu, came under the direct administration of the “Governor of Xinjiang,” solidifying Xinjiang as a Province. After the Qing government collapsed following the Xinhai Revolution, the name Gansu Xinjiang was removed, and the administration of East Turkestan was reorganized in 1911 and 1912, with proposals aiming for stronger central control.²³

During the Nationalist Chinese government, several proposals were put forward regarding the administration of East Turkestan. *Zhang Zhizhong* (张治中) proposed dividing East Turkestan into four or six provinces²⁴, but this plan was postponed due to regional unrest and Soviet influence. Zhang’s successor, *Wu Zhongxin* (吴忠信), also supported the idea of dividing Xinjiang. However, in the early 1940s, the political situation changed with the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic (1944-1949) and Soviet policy, leading to the suspension of the division plan.²⁵ Zhang Zhizhong suggested changing the name Xinjiang, which was perceived negatively

任 – Govern the broad with narrow and match people and land: The changes in the administrative divisions and the selection of local officials in late Qing Dynasty South Xinjiang”, http://iqh.ruc.edu.cn/zglslslj/lsl_lzjj/qsdlyj/c5eb014.340.90413991b54e6703a537c7.htm [Access date: March 9, 2024].

20 Chinese Philosophy Text Electronic Project-中国哲学书电子化计划. “左文襄公年谱 – Chronicle of Zuo Wenxiang”, <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=8015241&remap=gb> [Access date: 16 March 2024].

21 覆陈新疆宜开设行省请先简督抚臣以专责成折: This document is a memorial submitted by Zuo Zongtang on June 16, 1877, in the third year of the Guangxu reign, after he led his troops to suppress the Xinjiang Hui leaders supported by Russia and Britain. Having recaptured Urumqi and Turpan, he responded to the court’s inquiry, explaining his comprehensive considerations regarding the military affairs and post-war administration of Xinjiang.

22 新疆行省急宜议设关外防军难以速裁折: Proposal for Urgently Establishing Frontier Defense Forces in Xinjiang Province, Difficult to Abandon Immediately is a work authored by Zuo Zongtang and is included in ‘Zuo Zongtang Juan (Library of Modern Chinese Thinkers). Proposal for Urgently Establishing Xinjiang Province: The Frontier Defense Forces Are Difficult to Disband Immediately. Humbly submitted for your consideration, with the hope of your divine insight.

23 光绪朝东华录, 卷 49: *Eastern Record of the Guangxu Reign*, 49 Bölüm.

24 Táng zòng – 唐纵, 在蒋介石身边八年: 侍从室高级幕僚唐纵日記 [Eight Years with Chiang Kai-shek: Diary of Tang Zong, a Senior Staff Member in the Secretariat], 群众出版社, Pekin 1991, p. 89.

25 Wú Zhōng Xīn – 吴忠信. 民國日記 [Diary of the Republic of China], 民國歷史文化學社, 1951, p. 15.

Zhāng Zhìzhōng – 张治中, 张治中回忆录 [Memoirs of Zhang Zhizhong], 文史资料出版社, Pekin 2000, p. 54.

by some, to *Tian Shan/Tanrı Mountains Province* (天山省), but this was not implemented, and it did not help that the political situation became more complicated after Zhang's resignation.²⁶

After World War II, the political balance in Asia was transformed, as did the Soviet influence in Europe. In China, nationalists and communists who had fought together against The Japanese Empire came into conflict due to ideological differences when the war ended. From 1946 onwards, the Soviet-backed communists gained the upper hand, and in 1949, the communists under Mao Zedong's leadership forced the nationalists to retreat to Taiwan. Mao's armies invaded East Turkestan in 1949 and took over the region "peacefully".²⁷

In 1955, East Turkestan was stripped of its provincial status and restructured as the *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*. Despite being granted autonomy, the Administrative power governance remained under the control of the Communist Party's Xinjiang General Secretary Wang Zhen, whose policies policy encouraged the migration of the Han Chinese, who made up the majority of the population in the region, to replace the Turkic population, and to impose restrictions on the national identity and Islamic life of the East Turkestan Turks.²⁸

2. The Uyghur Diaspora's Perception of 'Xinjiang'

The Uyghur diaspora views the name Xinjiang as a political designation that disregards the region's history and cultural identity, reflecting a colonialist approach. Particularly Uyghur Turks and their supporters perceive Xinjiang as a tool for legitimizing China's dominance and cultural assimilation policies. The diaspora views this name as a symbol of colonialism, ignoring their historical and cultural connections, and prefers using the traditional name, East Turkestan, to defend their identity and history. The following section will provide examples illustrating the meaning of Xinjiang in the Uyghur diaspora's thought and practice.

Mehmet Emin Buğra (1901-1965), a key figure in the East Turkestan independence movement, defended the name and identity of East Turkestan in his academic works, articles, and declarations. He argued that the name Xinjiang was imposed, symbolizing a new phase of occupation and colonialism. His significant works include: *A Pencil Fight* (Nanjing 1945), *The History of East Turkestan* (1947), *East Turkestan: Historical, Geographical and Present Situation* (Istanbul 1952), *East Turkestan's Cause for Freedom and Chinese Politics* (Istanbul 1954), *East Turkestan Rejects Red Chinese Autonomy* (Ankara 1955), *Arab Conquests in Turkic Lands* (Ankara, 1958), *Unknown Political Issues on Tibet and East Turkestan* (Ankara 1959), *The Inside Story of the Tashkent Conference and the Situation of Writers in Communist Countries* (Ankara 1959), and *The Delhi Conference and Tibet* (Ankara 1960) (Kurban, 2020: 214). In

26 Age, p.16.

27 Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi 1914-1995*, 15. Bs., Alkım Yayınevi, İstanbul 2005, s. 438-439.

28 Mehmet Emin Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan Tarihi, Coğrafi ve Şimdiki Durumu*, Güven Basımevi, İstanbul 1952, s. 72-73.

these works, Buğra emphasized that Xinjiang was meant to erase the identity of the Turkish homeland and that its true name was East Turkestan.

İsa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-1995), as one of the leading figures of the East Turkistan independence movement, wrote extensive scholarly works on the region. These scholarly works are as follows: *East Turkestan Behind the Iron Curtain* (Milli Türkistan, LXXIV [Munich 1951], pp. 23-27); *East Turkestan Requests Help from Humanity* (Istanbul 1971); *The Cause of East Turkestan* (Istanbul 1981); *For Captive East Turkestan: Memoirs of the Struggle of İsa Yusuf Alptekin* (ed. M. Ali Taşçı, Istanbul 1985); *The Forgotten Homeland East Turkestan* (Istanbul 1992); *For Captive East Turkestan-2, Memoirs of the Struggle of İsa Yusuf Alptekin (1901-1949)* (ed. Ömer Kul, Ankara 2009); and *For Captive East Turkestan-1, İsa Yusuf Alptekin's Struggle Memoirs* (ed. Ömer Kul, Ankara 2010). Alptekin's views on the name Xinjiang align with those of Mehmet Emin Buğra, reflecting a similar perspective on the name's implications for East Turkestan's identity.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Erkin Ekrem, a notable figure in the East Turkistan independence movement, shares views on the name Xinjiang similar to Mehmet Emin Buğra and İsa Yusuf Alptekin. His academic works and conferences include “*East Turkestan Issue: Current Situation and Future*” (2007), “*Turkestan in Hsüan Tsang's Travels*” (2003), “*Homeland of the Turks*” (1994), “China's Policy Towards the East Turkestan Independence Movement: Before and After September 11-1 and 2” (2001), and “*East Turkestan Issue and Türkiye-China Relations*” (2004). His research extensively discusses the name Xinjiang, focusing on Chinese sources.

Prof. Dr. Erkin Emet, an expert on East Turkestan's historical, cultural, and political aspects, aligns with the views of Mehmet Emin Buğra and İsa Yusuf Alptekin regarding the name Xinjiang. In his works, including *The Struggle for Freedom in East Turkestan* (2023), *The Chinese Communist Party's Employment of Hard Power to Assertively Assimilate the Uyghurs in East Turkestan: The Case of the Uyghur Diaspora in Turkey* (2022), *20th Century Uyghur Drama: Migration* (2018), *The Language and Education Policy of the People's Republic of China in East Turkestan* (2005), *China's Education Policy in East Turkestan* (2005), *East Turkestan Autonomous Republic* (2002), and *Urumqi Clashers: The Reactions and Aftermath* (2018), he argues that the name Xinjiang reflects a colonial mentality. Apart from those already mentioned above, numerous scholars and writers of Uyghur origin also express similar views on the name Xinjiang. For example, in works such as Rukiye Turdush's “*East Turkistan's Right to Sovereignty: Decolonization and Beyond*” (2024), Ferhat Kurban Tanrıdağlı's “China's Western Regional Theory, China's Turkistan and Turkey Policy” (2021), Amaç Karahoca's “*East Turkistan: The Chinese Colony*” (2008), Zuhridin Mirza Abid Türkistani's “*Hijra Years on the Path to Turkistan Independence*” (2013), İklil Kurban's “*Anxiety: A Historical Story Specific to East Turkistan's Recent Past*” (1995), Nurgül Uzunel's “*National Turkistan: The Journal of Turkistani Refugees in Europe 1942-1975*” (2016), Hidayet Oğuzhan's “*The Real Face of East Turkistan Captivity and Cruelty*” (2018), Kaşgarlı İsmail Cengiz's “*East Turkestan under the Occupation of Red*

China” (1981), “*Turkestan Anxiety*” (2006) by Alihan Töre Saguni, “*Some Issues in the History of East Turkestan and the Chinese*” (1976) by C. Tarbagataylı, “*Uyghur Turks*” (1978) by Erkin Alptekin, “*The History of the National Struggle of East Turkestan (1930-1949)*” (2009) by Polat Kadiri, “*Exploited Homeland: Turkestan*” (2013) by Hızırбек Gayretullah and “*East Turkestan Searches on the Path to Freedom*” (2006) by Gulam Osman Zulpikar, it has been emphasized that the name “Xinjiang” is an indicator of a colonialist and occupying mentality, and the name East Turkestan has been preferred instead.

The Uyghur diaspora’s perspectives on the name Xinjiang have been thoroughly examined in both books and various magazines and articles published by people from East Turkestan. These publications provide a comprehensive analysis of how the name Xinjiang impacts Uyghur identity and shapes the historical connections to East Turkestan. They delve into the perception of this name among Uyghur Turks and explore the social and political calls for its change. Additionally, these sources highlight that the name Xinjiang is viewed as a manifestation of Chinese government policies, used as a tool to erase the cultural identity and historical heritage of the Uyghur Turks.

These publications extensively examine the impacts of the name Xinjiang on Uyghur identity and its historical connections to East Turkistan. They discuss how this name is perceived by Uyghur Turks and detail the social and political demands for changing this name. Furthermore, these publications highlight that the name Xinjiang is viewed as a reflection of the Chinese government’s policies in the region and is used as a tool for erasing the cultural identity and historical background of Uyghur Turks.

The “Türkistan Sesi/ Voice of Turkestan” magazine, first published in Turkey in 1956 with a total of 11 issues, along with other magazines such as “Doğu Türkistan’ın Sesi/ Voice of East Turkestan,” “Gökbayrak/ Sky flag,” “Halkara Veziyet ve Şerki Türkistan/International Situation and East Turkestan,” “Anyayurt/homeland” and “Uygurlar” provides detailed discussions on the Uyghur diaspora’s views regarding the name Xinjiang. These magazines discuss the effects of the name Xinjiang on Uyghur Turks and East Turkistan, how it is perceived in cultural and historical contexts, and various criticisms against this name. They also provide information on how the name Xinjiang reflects the Chinese government’s policies in the region and how it impacts Uyghur identity and history, thus addressing the demands and views on changing the name.²⁹

The views of the Uyghur diaspora on the name Xinjinag have also been expressed on websites established by the Uyghur diaspora like www.gokbayrak.com, www.hurgokbayrak.com, www.uygur.org, www.istiklalgazetesi.com, www.dogtuder.org, www.maariponline.com, www.doguturkistanvakfi.org, www.uyghurnet.org, uyghurcongress.org etc.³⁰

29 Abdülcelil Turan, “Çin Hükümetinin Yayımladığı Xinjiang’ın Tarihi ve Bugünü Başlıklı Beyaz Hakkında Kısaca Mülâhaza”, *Gökbayrak Dergisi*, 13, (2006), s. 24-28.

30 Yücel Tanay, “Not Central Asia, Not Turkestan-Xinjiang, East Turkestan”. (April 1, 2023), <https://www.uyghurnet>.

Furthermore, organizations established by the Uyghur diaspora in Turkey and other countries worldwide staunchly reject the name Xinjiang. These organizations are founded on the principle of opposing the name Xinjiang, which they argue fails to accurately represent the historical and cultural identity of the region. They view the name as an imposition by the Chinese government and a product of colonialist mentality. By using the name Xinjiang, these organizations contend that China seeks to legitimize its dominance and assimilation policies in the region, while disregarding the unique cultural and historical identity of East Turkistan.³¹

The *raison d'être* of these organisations is to reject this name and fight for the recognition of the true identity of the region. In this context, they avoid using the name Xinjiang, and support names such as East Turkestan or Uyghuristan, which are the historical names of the region, and try to ensure that these names are more widely recognized by the international community. The visions of these organizations are focused on preserving the identity of the region and ensuring that this identity is accurately represented on international platforms.

Organizations such as the East Turkistan Migrants Association (1960-), East Turkistan Foundation (1986-), East Turkistan Solidarity Association (1993-), East Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association (1989-), East Turkistan Youth and Culture Association (2006-), East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (2006-), Independent East Turkistanis Union Association (2007-), International East Turkistan NGOs Union (UDTSB), European East Turkistan Education Association (1993-), World Uyghur Congress (2004-), Norway Uyghur Committee (2003-), UK Uyghur Association (2005-), Canada East Turkistan Association (2018-), Australia East Turkistan Association (1992-), and the East Turkistan Exile Government (2004-), as well as the Uyghur Movement (2017-), express their views on the name Xinjiang through various activities and publications³²

The Uyghur diaspora, including politicians, academics, organizations, and ordinary citizens, widely rejects the name *Xinjiang* as a political designation that fails to reflect the region's identity. Particularly among Uyghur Turks, the name is seen as embodying a colonialist policy that ignores the region's historical and cultural roots. It is seen as a tool used to legitimize the Chinese government's dominance and assimilation efforts. As a result, the Uyghur diaspora rejects this name and resists being identified with it. To fully understand the extent of these views and the general societal trends, comprehensive research using surveys and other scientific methods is essential. Such studies would offer detailed insights into how the name Xinjiang is perceived and the reactions it elicits, providing a clearer picture of the social implications of the name change, and the ongoing debate over the region's identity.

org [Access Date: April 6, 2024].

31 Bovingdon Gardoner, *The Uyghurs: Strangers In Their Own Land*, Columbia University Press, New York 2010, p. 50-55.

32 Campaignforuyghurs, <https://campaignforuyghurs.org/how-to-help-uyghurs/> [Access Date: 6 April 2024].

3. Discussions on the Name “Xinjinag/新疆” in China

A variety of reasons have led Chinese media and academic circles to engage in discussions about changing the name of Xinjiang. Among these reasons, it is possible to say that the word Xinjiang itself and the connotations contained in this name play a significant role. The name *Xinjiang* ‘新疆’, meaning “new frontier” or “newly opened territory,” was defined in the New English-Chinese Dictionary ‘英華新字典, Yīnghuá Xīn Zìdiǎn’ published in 1913 by the Business Library/Shangwu Shuguan (商務書館). The dictionary associates Xinjiang with the term “*colony*” describing it as a designation for the western borders of China. The term *Jiāngdì*/僵地 is used to denote the region as a military or strategic border area, while *Zhídìjūmín* ‘殖民地居民’ refers to the inhabitants as colonists, reflecting the region’s status as a settled colony.³³

The dictionary meaning of the name Xinjiang implies that the region is perceived as a colony with a history separate from that of China, highlighting its current colonial status and pre-Chinese independence. This view emphasizes Xinjiang’s cultural and political background, offering insight into how the region is perceived in Chinese history. However, Chinese scholars argue that interpreting Xinjiang only by its dictionary meaning as “*New Frontier*” or “*New Territory*” limits the name to a geographical place, overlooking the region’s deep historical ties with China. This interpretation, they contend, fails to capture Xinjiang’s true role and influence in Chinese history.³⁴

Chinese scholars argue that the name Xinjiang, meaning “*New Frontier*” or “*New Territory*,” has been exploited by the Western world and East Turkestan independence activists for their own interests. They believe this interpretation is used for political purposes, particularly in Western media and by independence movements, disregarding the region’s historical and cultural ties to China. The phrase “*New Frontier*” creates a misleading impression of the historical continuity between the region and China’s sovereignty. In the West, and among pro-independence groups, the name is used to criticize China’s sovereignty or promote separatism. Chinese scholars assert that such uses fail to reflect the historical and cultural context of the name. They suggest using the name *Xī Yù* ‘西域’, meaning “*Western region*,” which has been in use since the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD) and reflects the region’s significant role in Chinese political history.³⁵

The fact that the name Xinjiang was given by the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty administration³⁶ is another reason why the issue of changing or re-evaluating the name has arisen. The Qing dynasty, founded by the Manchus, prompts questions about the name’s relevance in the region’s

33 Commission, 英華新字典 [*New English-Chinese Dictionary*]. 商務印書館, Shanghai 1913, p. 97.

34 Liú shānshān – 刘姗姗, “新疆”是“新的疆域”吗? – Is “Xinjiang” a “new territory”. (17 January 2021) <https://www.xj.chinanews.com.cn/tuwen/> [Access Date: 16 April 2024].

35 新疆应该正名为西域省: Xinjiang should be renamed as Western Regions Province

36 The Manchu (满族, Manju), also known as Manchur (满洲族), were officially called Manchur (满洲) during the Qing Dynasty. They were also known as the “Red-Tasseled Manchur” due to their distinctive hats. As one of China’s ethnic minority groups and part of the Tungusic ethnic groups, the Manchu established the Qing Dynasty, the last major unified dynasty in Chinese history and the final imperial period (A gui 1988, p. 28).

historical and cultural context. While Chinese history and culture typically reflect the Han Chinese, the Qing period, as a Manchu-origin government, generates disapproval among the Han Chinese, leading to dissatisfaction with names given during that era. From the Han Chinese perspective, the name Xinjiang is seen as not fully reflecting the historical and cultural integrity of China, particularly the Han Chinese political culture. This dissociation between the name's meaning and the identities it represents fuels ongoing discussions about renaming the region and other related issues.

The name *Xinjiang* is considered by Chinese scholars and officials to be incompatible with the Chinese government's recent policy of “*national Chinese consciousness*”³⁷ policy that the Chinese government has recently implemented against the East Turkestan people. The region, officially designated as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by China, is home to Uyghur and other Turkic communities, who are entitled to live in accordance with their own culture and traditions, as guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution and the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy.³⁸ However, the policy of “national Chinese consciousness” does not support the survival of different cultural identities in the region, and aims to harmonize these cultures with China's national identity.³⁹

This policy falls short of acknowledging the historical and cultural identity of East Turkestan, and generally aims to harmonize the unique cultural elements in the region with Han Chinese culture, or eliminate them altogether.⁴⁰ China's understanding of “*national Chinese consciousness*” does not accept the culture of East Turkestan shaped by Islam and Turkishness, but instead aims to assimilate these cultures and replace them with Han Chinese culture. In this context, Chinese authorities address the cultural heritage of the Uyghur and other Turkic communities in East Turkestan within the framework of the “national Chinese consciousness” discourse, and organize this heritage in line with the policies of assimilation and destruction.⁴¹ According to Chinese authorities, the intellectual foundations of the national Chinese consciousness trace back to ancient China, when the region was called the Western Region. They believe that the name Xinjiang, recently adopted, does not fully reflect China's long and uninterrupted history, and criticize it for not adequately representing the country's

37 China's National Chinese Consciousness “中华民族共同体意识” (Zhōnghuá Mínzú Gòngtóngtǐ Yìshí) is an ideology within the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) framework, emphasizing national identity, unity, and sovereignty. It focuses on preserving territorial integrity, promoting unity among ethnic groups, and celebrating cultural heritage. The concept also includes propaganda and education policies to spread state ideology and strengthen social awareness, along with policies of ethnic harmony and cultural assimilation. This ideology significantly influences China's domestic and foreign policies and shapes its social and cultural structure.

38 Guówùyyuàn-国务院, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/14/content_5624800.htm. [Access Date: April 19, 2024].

39 Khalid Jamel Wiam Lena, “Made in China – assimilating ethnic minorities in the 21st century”, *Department of Political Science Independent Research Project in Political Science – SV7052*, Autumn term 2020, p. 7.

40 Wángyǔn-王允, “习近平这十年之三：民族主义十年：从“中国梦”到权力的温柔乡-Xi Jinping's Decade Part 3: The Decade of Nationalism: From the “Chinese Dream” to the Tenderness of Power”(October 10, 2022), <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/duomeiti/tebiejiemu/xijinpingshinian> [Access Date: April 22, 2024].

41 Graham E Fuller and S. Frederick Starr, *The Xinjiang Problem*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Washington 2020, p. 8.

historical integrity and continuity. The Chinese government argues that the name Western Regions aligns better with China's historical past, and more meaningfully shapes national Chinese consciousness by emphasizing historical continuity and cultural integrity. They view the name Xinjiang as inadequate in reinforcing national identity and central control, and as being more associated with the identities of Uyghur and other Turkic communities. The Chinese government suggests that the name *Western Region* better reflects China's central control and cultural hegemony. This proposed name change is seen as a tool to consolidate political and social control, while also strengthening ties with the central government. Therefore, Chinese authorities have initiated discussions on changing the name Xinjiang back to Western Region.⁴²

These discussions constitute an important indicator in understanding how China maintains the balance between its national identity policies and its historical and cultural understanding, and how these policies affect regional identities. In this context, changing the name of Xinjiang is considered more than just a name change, but it is, rather, part of China's efforts to redefine its national unity, Chinese national consciousness, and historical perspective.

For China, which aims to become more influential regionally and globally⁴³, the name 'Xinjiang' may no longer align with its vision of the Chinese Dream. Thus, China is considering renaming Xinjiang to reflect the historical concept of the Western region, which encompassed all of Central Asia, including day Xinjiang. This name change is seen as a way to realign with historical borders and implement the "Western Region Theory". The proposed name change is driven by China's strategic goals to provide the region with broader global and historical significance, emphasize its influence in Central Asia, and strengthen both domestic and foreign policies while altering international perceptions of the region.

In his 2010 Western Region Theory, *Liu Yazhou*, a brigadier general in the Chinese army, President of China Defense University, and son-in-law of former President *Li Xiannian*, highlighted the strategic importance of East Turkestan, Central Asia, or Turkestan for China's grand strategy. Liu's theory refers to the name "West" as encompassing the East Turkestan and Greater Turkestan regions west of central China. He approaches their strategic significance from both historical and contemporary perspectives, explaining their role in China's strategic policies. Liu emphasizes that the West (including East Turkestan) is not just a strategic option, but also a vital hope and destiny for China. He highlights the region's excellent geographical location and the wealth of Central Asia, describing it as a divine gift to China that strongly supports China's global ambitions.

The article also touched on the debates on the Maritime Coastal Defense and Western Border Defense during the Qing Dynasty. While *Li Hongzhang* primarily advocated maritime coastal defense, *Zuo Zongtang's* (左宗棠, 1812-1885) preference for the Western Border

42 新疆应该正名为西域省: Xinjiang should be renamed as Western Regions Province.

43 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Systemic Earthquake and the Struggle for World Order*, Cambridge University Press, London 2020, p. 122.

Defense was validated by historical outcomes. *Zuo Zongtang's* success has highlighted the strategic importance of the Western region.

Today, it is stated that East Turkestan plays a critical role in China's energy security and strategic interests. East Turkestan serves as a bridge between Central Asia, the Middle East and China, and therefore it is emphasized that China should prioritize its western border. Liu states that shifting China's modernization strategy from the eastern to the western regions is essential for safeguarding the country's national interests. He also explains how East Turkestan and Central Asia, to the west of China, played a central role in the three golden ages of its history, and states that East Turkestan's strategic importance and natural resources provide a great advantage, especially in terms of energy security. The article discusses China's current dependence on energy and mineral resources, and the problems related to the security of these resources, and emphasizes the importance of Central Asia for China's energy security and suggest how natural resources in this region can provide China with a strategic advantage. It also discusses various alternative pipeline routes in Central Asia and evaluates Russia's influence in the region. As a result, the control of East Turkestan and Central Asia regions as well as the strategic importance of pipelines in these regions are emphasized for China's energy security and economic development.

According to Liu Yazhou, China's strategic goals in Central Asia are largely based on economic and energy policies. China is strengthening its economic relations and building pipelines in order to access energy resources in the region. These efforts are increasing China's economic influence in the region, and shaping the energy transportation routes of Central Asia. However, while Russia and the US stand out among the countries competing with China's strategic goals, Turkey is also emphasized as an important cultural and strategic rival. Turkey is notable for its cultural influence and investments in the region. Central Asian countries face problems stemming from the legacy of the Soviet Union, such as ethnic identity and border distinctions. These problems can lead to regional instabilities and ethnic conflicts. China's handling of ethnic issues in East Turkestan is of critical importance to the country's internal stability and national interests. It is stated that China needs to develop more comprehensive and long-term strategies to solve these issues. The article emphasizes that while China's economic power plays an important role in establishing regional influence; soft power, that is, cultural and ideological effectiveness, is equally important. It is stated that instead of unnecessary and temporary solutions, strategies that will create permanent and deep impact should be developed.⁴⁴

The Western Region Theory has created an intellectual basis for China to strengthen its influence and impact throughout Central Asia, including East Turkestan. In this context, when the discussion of changing the name Xinjiang comes to the fore, it makes sense to prefer the name Western Region, which encompasses East Turkestan and all of Central Asia or the Turkestan geography.

44 Liú yàzhōu – 刘亚洲 “西部论 – Western Theory”, <https://www.rfi.fr/cn/首页/20100809-刘亚洲中将的西部论> [Access Date: April 25, 2024].

Conclusion

The meanings of the name “Xinjiang” have become a significant topic of debate for both the Uyghur diaspora and Chinese authorities. In Chinese, the name Xinjiang, which means “*new*” (新) and “*border*” or “*region*” (疆), has led to various interpretations and reactions. The Uyghur diaspora views the name Xinjiang as a reflection of colonialist mentality, perceiving it as part of an effort to erase the historical and cultural identity of East Turkistan. Consequently, the name Xinjiang is seen as a symbol of the repressive policies and cultural erosion implemented by China in the region.

Chinese authorities, on the other hand, argue that the meanings associated with the name Xinjiang are being exploited by both internal and external adversaries. They claim that the name falls short in aligning with current national and international policies, fails to fully reflect the historical and cultural context of the region, and does not correspond with the ancient concept of the *Western Region* ‘西域’ that represented China’s western territories. As a result, a debate has emerged over whether the name Xinjiang should be changed. Based on China’s Western Region theory, it can be concluded that the designation of Xinjiang as the *New Frontier or New Region* has now ended, and that the New Frontier or New Region for China now aligns with Central Asia, which corresponds to the *Western Region* ‘西域’ of ancient China. Furthermore, this redefinition and renaming likely involves expanding the New Frontier or New Region to include Central Asia, historically considered part of the Western Region, which as to align the region’s historical and cultural context with modern Chinese borders and policies. This change seeks to integrate old concepts with current borders, and to restructure the region’s historical function in line with contemporary geographical and political realities.

China’s debate over renaming Xinjiang reflects its colonial ambitions to expand influence in Central Asia and redefine the region to align with its strategic and cultural objectives. The proposed name change is part of efforts to reshape Xinjiang, distancing it from its historical and cultural context in pursuit of regional control.

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