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Narrating the Border:

The Discourse of Control over China's
Northwest Frontier

Arbeitsblätter des Instituts für Ethnologie der Universität Bern

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ISBN 3-906465-25-X

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URL: http://www.ethno.unibe.ch/arbeitsblaetter/AB25_Par.pdf

This is the electronic edition of Steven Parham, "Narrating the Border: The Discourse of Control over China's Northwest Frontier", Arbeitsblatt Nr. 25, Institut für Ethnologie, Universität Bern, Bern 2004

ISBN: 3-906465-25-X

Electronically published November 8, 2004

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"A true Communist and Internationalist wouldn't assign any particular importance to the question of borders, especially borders between fellow Socialist States." (Nikita Khrushchev 1974)

"China and the Central Asian states have been cooperating from Time Immemorial. Geography is not the only factor of their closeness: there is also spiritual affinity." (Han official in Urumqi 2003)

"The Chinese are like cockroaches: there are too many of them and you cannot get rid of them." (Kazakh official in Ucharal 2003)

Acknowledgments

The present paper could not have been accomplished without the support of many people who helped me in many different ways and to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

Special thanks go to Professor Hans-Ruedi Wicker, Institute of Ethnology, University of Bern, for his encouragement and advice during the whole process of attempting a study in a region that is, from a theoretical and geographical point of view, not all that readily accessible.

The field research for this paper would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Karman Stiftung in Bern, Switzerland, and Professor Wolfgang Marschall's aid in obtaining this support. Also, I would like to thank the Feldforschungsspesenfonds of the University of Bern for its financial support.

Research in Kazakhstan would not at all have been possible without the unwavering aid of Joseph 'let's yornkut' Peddicord whose invaluable Russian skills and personal qualities opened many doors and many more hearts in Kazakhstan; in the frequent laugh-or-cry situations he more than once helped me to keep my equanimity. Dr. Urs Breitenmoser (Institute of Veterinary Virology, University of Bern) I thank for his invaluable time and his knowledge of the area and numerous contacts he made accessible to me.

In Kazakhstan, I thank Andy Offenbacher from the Nuclear Technology Safety Centre (United States Department of Energy) in Almaty for his time and the coffee; the director of the IOM in Almaty, Michael Tschanz, for his precious time and insights on the structure of the government of Kazakhstan; Valery Vladimerivich of the Taldyqorgha Business Centre for cutting through red tape; and the migration officer in Ucharal for professing to believe in my innocence and not deporting me back to Almaty again.

In China (Xinjiang), I thank Emil and his Tatar gang of thieves for their amazing hospitality in Yining; Ma YueLiang in Turpan for several nights of genuine Chinese hospitality; and the border guards at Khorgos (Chinese side) for proving that not all who wear a uniform must be officious.

I would like to express my thanks to Emanuel Schwarz for taking the time to edit this thesis and providing many a night of insight and inspiration. This is also a good opportunity to express my gratitude to My Dying Bride and Summoning who have kept me awake and motivated through long nights of writing and months of bus travel over the last years in all parts of Asia.

Last but of course not least, I wish to thank Michèle with all my heart for being my flittery muse and providing a constant flow of creative vibes. Up The Irons for our next trip to Asia.

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Introduction

It takes but a brief and cursory glance at atlases, encyclopaedias, and historical compendia to realise that cartographers excel in highlighting the boundaries between discrete entities, be they natural, as in maps showing topographic (mountains versus plains), climatic (tropical versus temperate), or geographic (deserts versus rainforests) features, or human in nature, as with maps of demography (urban centres versus rural peripheries), language areas, or political bodies (the representation of nation-states in a multitude of colours). Learning to 'interpret' and 'read' maps is instilled in most European school children at a young age and we have come to accept the graphic representation of these discrete entities as a phenomenon approaching the realm of intuition. However, how often do those contemplating a map pause to consider the assumption that these depicted objects, by their very nature, are generally unable to represent anything other than bounded, discrete entities? This may be intuitive in respect to the assumption that one ecological zone does not cease to prevail and another begin immediately, even in such an obvious case as a coast which possesses a plethora of biosphere subsisting on occasional inundation, but in the case of political, and maybe even cultural, bodies this seems to be rather less self-evident. On maps, these bodies appear as deceptively precise sets of lines setting one entity apart from another, indeed, from all others. Too often, even in disciplines such as political science and macro-economics which one would believe to be aware of the insupportability of this notion, the borderline setting two nation-states apart is seen as the utmost limit of any one nation's area of influence. What is frequently neglected is the fact that those neat lines on maps are often more important as a mental image, an image that reifies a boundary, than as an actual everyday reality for the people living in their immediate vicinity and, therefore, borders serve the national core by being entities which "are there to be defended, to be crossed legally, or to be violated [...] but not conceived by their states to be negotiable or flexible" (Donnan&Wilson 1994:1).

The area under consideration in the present thesis is part of what is known as Inner Asia, the region stretching from the Caspian Sea in the east to Mongolia in the west and from the deserts of northern Iran through the five Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan to southern Siberia. Thus, it also encompasses what is today known as the province of Xinjiang in the People's Republic of China (PRC) but for most of its known history was referred to as Eastern Turkestan. Xinjiang ('the New Territories' in *putonghua*, or Mandarin Chinese) has been of importance to successive Chinese dynasties and governments for over two millennia and has for most of this period formed the frontier between China, at times unified and at other times an amalgamation of warring nations, and its landward neighbours to the west and north. The hardening of this frontier into a border did not take place until the late Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century when Xinjiang and its predominantly Turkic and Muslim population was in the unenviable position of being caught in the crossfire generated by Russian expansionism and Chinese national pride in territorial integrity. After this, the region became, along with Mongolia and Manchuria, a heavily contested area between two intrinsically centralist and hegemonic Socialist 'empires' vying for international prestige. The reason for choosing this specific Chinese

border for an in-depth analysis is precisely because it represents an extraordinary case: the largely unforeseen and therefore relatively abrupt dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s has sparked a host of publications in the fields of political science and history which seem to be unable to agree on whether the region is entering a period of increased connectivity and global opening (and thereby moving away from the stigmatic representation as two empires' 'backyard') or an increased return to a field of geopolitical contest between 'global players' in search of 'the riches of the Silk Roads'. This seems to be so out of touch with the way in which the nation-states concerned represent themselves and also with the reality of local everyday life that one must but wonder at the dearth of scientific interest in local strategies dealing with the imposition of mechanisms of control by as a monolithic an entity as the PRC and how they affect the people of the region beyond the PRC's national territory.

This then represents the best possible answer to the question of why an anthropological analysis of border regions should be attempted. Border regions by their very nature include two or more nation-states and, thus, are an area where several national systems concatenate. The ensuing requirements of having to deal with more than one political, social, and linguistic set of situations has unfortunately prevented anthropologically motivated researchers with their critical approaches to top-down discursive narratives from more explicitly dealing with political boundaries (as opposed to social boundaries within a political system) and has left the field of political borders and frontiers in the hands of the less critical methods of inquiry pursued by political scientists and macro-economists. Field research conducted on both sides of the borderline in March and April 2003 is intended to present an alternate approach to the overwhelmingly theoretical nature of most frontier literature that can be found and to add to the sparse inquiries into the situation *on the ground* along the recently mutated Central Asian borders. The decision to conduct field research in this case was based on the realisation that a purely theoretical analysis of the literature available would have led to a thesis which could only have incorporated a solely state-centred, top-down approach rather than a more illuminating bottom-up, local perspective.

The second aim of this thesis is to test the applicability of the theoretical notions formulated by Donnan&Wilson (1999, 1998, 1994) and Baud&van Schendel (1997) introduced in Chapter 1 to the situation of the PRC and its central governing authority, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). These theories, still as yet in a developmental phase due to their recent elaboration and the fact that cultural anthropology has as yet to concern itself more with this classically political and economical area of research, were not developed with particular nation-states or regions in mind but are meant to serve as an incentive to further debate and to interest anthropologists in questioning the methods other disciplines are employing and drawing conclusions from.

In Chapter 1 I will attempt to introduce a framework for dealing with political borders and borderlines. Because notions of static borders are so central to the construction of the modern nation-state and the way the nation-state represents itself *vis-à-vis* its neighbours and the world in general, it is vital to take a closer look at the way in which these borders are legitimised

and how the population at the nation-state's peripheral extremities, the frontier, is involved in securing national territorial integrity. Thus, the importance of the ethnic and political identity of these frontier inhabitants will be as much the focus of this chapter as will be strategies of the nation-state in controlling potentially centrifugal networks which transcend borders. Chapter 2 is devoted to the historical and political analysis of the role frontiers and, in more modern times, borders in China's North and Northwest have played at different times. I devote so much space to pre-PRC interactions between China and its neighbours, first the Steppe Empires and then tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, because "an anthropology of borders is simultaneously one of a nation's history and of a state's frontiers" (Donnan&Wilson 1998:8): As the modern PRC has the tendency to regard its present-day interactions and relationship to its neighbours as being in the vein of 'a long and glorious tradition' and instrumental in the unity of the modern nation-state it is crucial to attempt a critique of these traditions and to discover any continuities through time in attitudes towards the boundedness of the entity which is 'China'. These continuities will help us to shed light on the importance of modern borders for the rulers of China today and are generally to be found in the form of economic policies in the frontier regions and policies towards the predominantly non-Han population in the frontier areas.

In Chapter 3 I turn my attention to specific frontier policies in China as they have been pursued by successive dynasties and governments right up to the 21st century. This chapter serves to focus the theoretical concepts introduced before and thereby help in pin-pointing specific forms of national versus local forms of discourse on control over the frontier in Xinjiang province by presenting the potential for conflict between nation and ethnic group (in this case between the Han government in the East and the local Uighur and Kazakh population at the frontier). As I will attempt to show, this conflict has been in the centre of discourse between core and periphery ever since imperial China saw its survival depending on control over the deserts and steppes of Inner Asia. The form of this control may have changed from tenuous military occupation (Tang China) and later assimilation (Qing China) to economic integration and ethnic permeation (the PRC) but today just as in times of yore the entire region seems to be crucial to policy makers in Beijing and therefore methods have been developed to incorporate it firmly within the Chinese orbit. At times this hegemonic control has been heavily contested by the local population and at other times it has been, usually grudgingly, accepted by them, with local attitudes heavily influenced by central policies but also heavily influencing these at times. Finally, in Chapter 4 I present the results of my field research along the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan border. The conclusions drawn from interviews serve mainly to refocus our attention on the importance of a dialectic approach to as heavily a contested region as this border between the ex-Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan and the province of Xinjiang with its Uighurs and Kazakhs who both represent a trans-frontier people and are thus under the wary eye of both the CCP and the Nazarbaev regime. Finally, to conclude this thesis I then attempt to re-evaluate the theoretical concepts presented in Chapter 1 in the specific case of this border which, as I will show, is by no means a 'typical' Chinese border.

Chapter 1: A Framework for China's Northern Frontier

1.1. Methods of Frontier Anthropology

A Critique of the Border's Linearity

Despite my introductory comments on the nature of boundaries on maps it is of course obvious that boundaries do indeed exist. However, the reality of the borderline may well be of a different nature than commonly imagined. A simple fact of the borderline's everyday reality becomes obvious to anyone crossing it: that there exists a difference between those deemed to be alien, i.e. being granted the right to cross despite not belonging to either nation-state involved, and those with an indisputable right due to citizenship to cross, or at least to pass from 'their' part to the 'other' side¹. This, then, presents us with a basic differentiation between the two sides of the one depicted borderline: an outer line with the customs and security officials, followed generally by a stretch of no-man's-land, and then the 'foreign' line; in addition, the outer borderlines are often preceded by sometimes numerous border checkpoints with an ever-increasing presence of security or military personnel and installations. Thus, the borderline turns out to be a border zone, thereby suggesting territorial expanse and leading Ratzel to note that "the fringe on each side of the borderline is the reality of borders, while the line itself is the abstraction" (1897, as quoted in Donnan&Wilson 1994:8). These lines, or the fringes of these zones, are perceived to be markers of the limits of the nation-state's sovereignty, thus serving as "barriers of exclusion and protection, marking 'home' from 'foreign'" (Donnan&Wilson 1994:3). However, for whatever reasons seem situationally expedient, "people will ignore borders whenever it suits them [and thereby] challenge the political status quo of which borders are the ultimate symbol, [sometimes taking] advantage of borders in ways that are not intended or anticipated by their creators" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:211).

This dynamic situation, so often ignored by both politicians and social scientists and demonised by a nation-state's officialdom and propaganda apparatus, points to the uniqueness of the social and historical environment surrounding the border and lends credence to the fact that "borders are impassioned zones of political dispute and, as such, can never be passively accepted" (Donnan&Wilson 1994:7). An anthropological inquiry into borders must, by necessity, focus on the fact that this political dispute takes place not only at the national level but also within the border region itself, with the inhabitants of the region involved in almost constant cultural and national negotiation. While a view from the centre, that is, from the nation-state level as displayed by frontier policies and inclusivist/exclusivist historiographies of the frontier (see Chapter 3) is certainly necessary, a view from the periphery itself is indispensable in this context of anthropological inquiry, thereby demanding a closer look at ethnicity and ethnic

identity in these regions as well as networking systems and trans-national migration². By attempting this, it can be shown that "the study of border regions implies a critique of state-centred approaches that picture borders as unchanging, uncontested, and unproblematic" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:216).

The Conceptual Structure of the Border in Theory

In approaching an analysis of the border, one encounters a bewildering array of semantic differences in the terminologies of 'borders' and 'frontiers'. Thus, it is mandatory to stake out a set of meanings for these terms (abridged from Donnan&Wilson 1994:7-8 and Donnan&Wilson 1998:9):

§1. National 'frontiers' are zones wherein the negotiations of international and trans-national culture take place.

§2. 'Borders' are those zones, which always extend, to some degree, across borderlines. Borders are also the borderlines themselves, i.e., the narrow but long area which delimits the sovereignty of the states which meet each other there.

§3. Thus, borders are agents of a state's security and sovereignty, and a physical record of a state's past and present relations with its neighbours.

§4. Frontiers, then, are zones of varying widths, in which people have recognisable configurations of relationships to people inside that zone, on both sides of the borderline but within the cultural landscape of the borderlands, and, as the people of the border, special relationships with other people and institutions in their respective nations and states.

§5. Borders have three elements: the legal *borderline* which simultaneously separates and joins states; the physical structures of the state which exist to demarcate and protect the *borderline*, composed of people and institutions which often penetrate deeply into the territory of the state; and *frontiers*, territorial zones of varying width which stretch *across* and *away from* borders, within which people negotiate a variety of behaviours and meanings associated with their membership in nations and states. [emphases added]

To summarise, paragraphs 1 and 4 show the reality of trans-frontier networking, paragraph 2 points to the importance of territoriality and the nation-state's hegemonic control over the border regions, and paragraph 3 lays the foundation of historiographic mechanisms both within the periphery and the core³. Paragraph 5 lays the framework for an ethnographic analysis dealing

1 Of course, this is by no means a universal right granted to the inhabitants of every state. Many states restrict the egress of parts of their population for political reasons, thereby limiting the 'porosity' of the border. Examples abound: Myanmar, North Korea, the states along the former Iron Curtain, and the PRC (which limits the issuing of passports to certain people), to name just a few. See Chapter 4.

2 To show the inter-relatedness of these two views, I have melded when possible both into most chapters within this paper. For an introduction to mechanisms in the periphery see the next section.

3 See the next section for a discussion of §1-4 and Chapter 4 for §5 and §6.

with narrating the border and can be extended by Baud&van Schendel's concept of the frontier's zone-like nature in regard to social networks (adapted from 1997:221-3)⁴:

§6. We may roughly divide the border region into three geographical zones:

the *border heartland*, abutting on the border and dominated by its existence;

the *intermediate borderland*, the region that always feels the influence of the border but in intensities varying from moderate to weak;

the *outer borderland*, which only under specific circumstances feels the effects of the border and is affected by its existence in the same way that land protected by an embankment is affected by the sea.

This threefold structure of the frontier zone presents an attempt to expose the myth that borders are static and discrete. Furthermore, by testing the applicability of paragraphs 5 and 6 on a case-to-case basis in the field it may become possible to wrest control from the narrative of national and international relations pursued by the centre, i.e. the institutions of the nation-state, and refocus on the cultural constructions which symbolise precisely these boundaries imposed from above. In other words, a bottom-up perspective can be a suitable tool to analyse "the inheritance, negotiation, and invention of cultural boundaries between and among groups of people who identify themselves as members of one nation as distinct from others" (Donnan&Wilson 1994:12). This argues for an amalgamation of a historical view to show the forces influencing the modern-day construction of the border and a localised view to present strategies of acceptance or refusal in the border region itself, concerning itself specifically "with the negotiation of identity in places where everyone expects that identity to be problematic" (*ibid.*).

1.2. The Nation-State and Its Frontiers

Territoriality and Borders

The sheer presence of monumental state inscriptions to be found on China's borders (see pictures 3-5 in Appendix IV), both on the Chinese side and beyond the actual borderline, necessitates an assessment of the importance of borders for the existence and survival of that which they are to delimit: the nation-state. While realising the potential danger inherent in attempting to deconstruct such a monolithic entity which, by its very nature, represents itself as simply 'existing' rather than 'becoming', as is the case with nations and their individuated members, it nevertheless is crucial to more closely analyse how such suprasubjective and 'objectified' institutions impose themselves upon the border, which then becomes the most tangible interface between different nation-states. In the modern era, the boundedness of the nation-state plays a vital role in the construction of a state identity *vis-à-vis* its neighbouring, excluded, *foreign* counterparts. In other words, "territoriality [has become] one of the first conditions of the state's existence, and the *sine qua non* of its borders" (Donnan&Wilson

⁴ In this thesis I use the term 'frontier' to refer to this zone around the border. The fuzziness inherent in its use well suits earlier notions of a border region.

1998:9), thereby corroborating the importance of §2 above. According to Imart5, "the main characteristic of a nation-state is its discreteness [...], exemplified by the existence of discrete limits, i.e. borders" (1987:8). How can we characterise this discreteness and which effects does this have on the border regions on either side? To use an analogy from physics, the centrifugal vector, directed away from these discrete lines and, thus, into an adjacent nation-state, exemplifies a linear combined force representing the façade of stable control along the borderline to the outside, the adjacent state's frontier. Conversely, the centripetal force, directed back into the interior border region and, ultimately, towards the core of the nation-state can be used by the nation-state to control the region's inhabitants and legitimise precisely the need for this control, thereby underlining the Weberian definition of the state as an institution which holds the legitimate use of force in a territory. Obviously, in cases where these border regions are predominantly (in the case of China even exclusively) minority regions, these forms of control must be of central importance to us here, as must be their effects on the local inhabitants and, crucially, their reactions and resistance to the imposition of central control. Furthermore, can the centripetal force be utilised by the periphery to influence the core?

This, in turn, leads us to ask ourselves as to how the exact territorial extent of China is reflected in the historical and cultural construction of China as a 'powerful' and 'multi-ethnic' modern state: To which degree has the Chinese state throughout time exercised control over areas which are now claimed as 'inalienable' parts of China? Why are cultural areas that were previously considered to be non-Chinese included today in the Chinese state? And, centrally, "how [are] social identities [of the border regions' inhabitants] shaped by the state [to then] emerge as a result of, or in response to, the state's attempts to define or redefine its outer limits" (Donnan&Wilson 1998:12-13)? In my opinion, the answers to these questions are to be found in mechanisms of instrumentalising ethnicity, identity, and historiography so as to be able to explain the role that the Chinese state plays in pursuing 'inclusivist' policies over hegemonic devices on its northern frontiers.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity in China

The role played by ethnicity in modern-day China is probably best introduced by the statement that "formations which appear as ethnic groups, as cultures, or as nations [...] should be interpreted as the products of history, therefore as resulting from concrete acts that are motivated by people's interest [and no longer as] suprasubjective wholes that generate and determine human action" (Wicker 1997:1). Hence, the main subject here is the mechanism behind the construction of the modern state of China which, according to the preamble of the 1982 Constitution, "had been jointly founded [by China's various nationalities], who had jointly created a 'magnificent culture' and possessed a common 'glorious revolutionary tradition'" (as

5 In general, I find Imart's theories (as presented in his 1987 publication) and geographical/ecological determinist position on an 'Inner Asian Homeland' to be a symptomatic example of a lack of understanding toward the importance of ethnic identity and the 'bottom-up', 'outside-in' method of ethnological inquiry. Nevertheless, his theories can serve as impetus for field research which proceeds to redress these deficiencies.

quoted in Heberer 1987:35). For our purposes, ethnicity can be defined as the interplay between group relationships and the classification of people who perceive themselves to be culturally distinctive. The CCP today glosses over these fine points by stating that the 56 official nationalities (*minzu*) which make up China's population all have their own 'long and glorious histories' and have now decided to participate at the level of ideological equals in upholding their common socialist nation, thus viewing in particular the non-Han nationalities as a political phenomenon, an aspect of the 'national question' of direct relevance to issues of international borders (Tapp 1995:198). Ethnicity concerns itself, first and foremost, with an ethnic group, which Harrell defines as "a group of people that shares a putative common origin through descent and a putative commonality of cultural features such as language, food, clothing, and customs that distinguish it from other groups" (1996:2). In addition, I think, the members of that group must perceive *themselves* to be members of that group irrespective of whether others would agree or not, irrespective of whether they fit the neat category and the features ascribed to that group; they must be able to identify themselves with that group rather than another. This, of course, implies a fluidity of boundaries and categories or, in Wicker's words, "the new magic terms [in this context] are reflexivity, flexibility, negotiability, situativity, transitionality, hybridity, and process" (1997:4).

Similarly, the notion of 'identity' is highly dependent on the context of the individual in question. Enough examples have been presented⁶ for it to be safe to say that identity, that is the subjective categorisation by one individual to a specific term describing his or her ethnic background which can be synonymous with ethnic group categorisation, changes depending on the situation that individual is in at any given point in time. Identities are "no longer interpreted as the outcome of singular socialization efforts leading to fixed and bounded selves but as the *provisional result* of social interaction" (Wicker 1997:5-6, emphasis added). Thus, we notice that ethnic group identities are not only constructed by self-perception of the members of that group but also by an "interactional relationship with another group or groups whose perception or identification of the group in question exerts significant impact on the latter's self and total identity" (Harrell 1990, as quoted in Khan 1995:250). By extension, the stronger and more intensive the interaction between these groups, especially if the defining group represents the majority in an area, the stronger the ethnic identification of that group can become. This is the case in China where, as we have seen, one ethnic group, the Han, has superimposed ethnic categorisation, the creation of the *minzu*, upon many smaller groups⁷.

When the concept of 'nation' is thus examined it becomes apparent why the hegemonic discourse of the modern nation-state that creates ethnic categories and emphasises cultural differences between groups (thereby constructing ethnic identities with ethnic interests) invariably results in so-called 'ethnic problems' (Bader 1995, as quoted in Schröder 1998:15-6). Due to their nature, poly-ethnic nations must create a reason why they should not disintegrate into mono-ethnic nations. This can be achieved by convincing citizens, regardless of their ethnic

⁶ See, for example, Eriksen (1993:11) and Harrell (1996:3).

⁷ See Chapter 2.3.

group membership, that "they are citizens by virtue of their historical and cultural attachment to the nation and that this attachment is a long, glorious, and immutable one [and must therefore] actively attempt to hide the fluid, multivalent nature of ethnic identity" (Harrell 1996:4). Basically, this is a construction of an identity within the nation accomplished by suitably "correcting the past" (Martin 1995, as quoted in Wicker 1997:6) of the groups meant to be 'immutably' integrated. However, as seen above, ethnic groups are not static, which implies that their membership is not fixed and, hence, their history and territory is not as rigid as commonly assumed; their identities change when the socio-political environment around them changes. China, which Heberer sees rather as a 'nationalities state' than a 'nation-state' or even a 'multi-ethnic nation-state' (1984:18), seems to be a good example of the processes described above, as the preamble to the 1982 Constitution seems to prove, because "China and other authoritarian regimes differ from pluralistic nations in that national identity is not optional: one is born into a nationality and is registered as such, or one is not" (Gladney 1998a:115). We are, therefore, led to the question of how the 'Chinese' themselves see the essence of 'Chinese-ness' as applying to the entire national territory.

Historically, the core of China has been defined in terms of the dominant political and sociocultural position the peoples constituting the Han have had over other peoples. A national history of cohesion has been created leaving the Han in little doubt as to their central role in the state and in no need "to daily assert ethnic identity and national identity within the nation; place-based regional identities [...] are more salient in their daily lives [...]. [Thus,] there is normally no dissonance between their ethnic and national identity" (Borchgud 1996:161-162)⁸. For non-Han peoples, though, ethnic identities seem to be more important than a regional or national identity because there is a dissonance between ethnic and national. These ethnic identities are important to members of national minorities because they provide social categories that people use to structure their social interaction with members of other ethnic groups. However, these ethnic identities are often the result of an 'invention of tradition' by the state aimed at bolstering minority self-esteem and affirming ethnic diversity so as to display the gloriousness of the state and legitimise its control over its members. Such reconstructions or inventions are products of state representation, the purpose of which is to transform local identities into an official *minzu* identity and thereby, in turn, reaffirm the power of the state and help to discern 'civilised' Han from 'backward' minority.

Frontier Networks and the Local Elite

A central point of interest in the context of a nation-state's borders is, as we have seen, the usually unilateral imposition of an 'official' borderline by the respective states involved and thus a top-down mechanism. The inhabitants of the border regions are often relegated to a far distant second point of consideration in respect to their views and situation in the region. This

⁸ Irrespective of where in China, Han always pose identity questions such as "*Ni shi nali ren?*" or "*Ni shi nage difang de ren?*" (lit. what place-people are you?) when striking up conversation,

often leads, as in the case of Xinjiang's Central Asian borders, to an officially fractured cultural field with members of an ethnic group finding themselves on either side of an 'official' political divide. However, the success of these official divides surviving in the face of possible local resistance depends on a number of factors cementing the actual presence of the state in the borderland. Merely the establishing of political institutions is problematic in regulating the relationships of power and identity at borders and between borders and their respective states precisely because these political structures at the state's extremities can be turned against the state itself, as was the case in the relationship between dynastic China and the nomadic steppe empires (see Chapter 2.1). Therefore, "borders are always domains of contested power in which local, national, and international [i.e. trans-national] groups negotiate relations of subordination and control" (Donnan&Wilson 1998:10)⁹. This is further complicated by the fact that "border peoples [...] not only have to deal with the institutions of their own state, but with those institutions of the state or states across the border, entities of equal and sovereign power which overshadow all border relations" (Donnan&Wilson 1998:8). Thus, the mutation of a political system *beyond* the control of a particular nation-state, i.e. in a neighbouring country, will with all likelihood have an effect on the inhabitants of the frontier going *beyond* the control of the nation-state¹⁰. This is exacerbated by the fact that the people of a state's frontier are often members of political institutions and informal networks which compete with the state in precisely these domains: "marriage, the informal economy [including, crucially, smuggling], trading and consumption of all sorts, tourism, sports, and religion and church relations are but a few of the ways that members of a cross-border culture or society are tied to each other" (Donnan&Wilson 1994:3).

It follows that the role of the state depends to a large degree on collectivities of local communities for their support and the successful achievement of its aims (Donnan&Wilson 1994:2) and is further determined by the state's relationship with regional and local elites (Baud&van Schendel 1997:217). The roles of these local elites are manifold, consisting, from the centre's perspective, mainly in their ability to act as channels for central control if they are well integrated into the state's power structure. These elites may be enlisted as agents for expansionist or assimilatory projects if this relationship is beneficial enough to all concerned. Conversely, the failure to incorporate these elites into some form of discourse of central power may well result in a breakdown of state power in the border region leading to either military occupation or at least the increase of military presence in strategic locations such as the frontier's local centres and vital arteries (as in the case of Chechnya, for example), or to ultimate 'loss' of territory to either

followed by a discussion on the *xing* (family name) of the participants and whether there is any connection between the two.

⁹ Devolution of power to these peripheral areas can help to defuse this situation, as the examples of Spain and 21st century Britain (at least in regard to Scotland and Wales) seem to show.

¹⁰ This is precisely the situation I have attempted to approach in my field research along the newly-mutated China-Kazakhstan border, a mutation precipitated by the demise of the Soviet Union. See Chapter 4.

separatist forces (as was the case in the Yugoslav implosion) or expansionist foreign forces (for example the dissection of the Central Asian qaghanates by tsarist Russia)¹¹.

The power triangle between the two states and the local frontier elite 'between them' is further extended by the involvement of the local people of the border region and thus becomes a double triangle with respective relationships between the two nation-states, the local elite, and the local frontier population (Baud&van Schendel 1997:218-9), thereby supporting §1 and §4 described above. This also helps to explain the observation that "generally speaking, there has always been an enormous gap between the rhetoric of border maintenance and daily life in borderlands" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:220), especially in situations where the border is seen as a security threat to the nation-state's integrity. In general, the creation of a new border entails the creation of new power relationships within the borderland(s), based on new state-sanctioned definitions of social and territorial boundaries and giving rise to new relationships between trans-border peoples in the three key domains of economic interaction (smuggling and currency trading, for example), social networks ('voluntary' or 'involuntary' migration, i.e. labour migrants or refugees respectively, for example), or political networks (the presence of separatist movements supported by groups beyond the nation-state's side of the borderline, for example). The porosity of borders evinced by migratory aspects takes on a crucial importance in relation to some nation-states' self-representation as 'multi-ethnic' entities because, according to Kearney (1991 and 1996, as quoted in Baud&van Schendel 1997:221), international migrants effectively undermine the whole idea of statehood and national boundaries by creating so-called 'trans-national communities' and thereby challenge the defining power of the nation-states they transcend. This they do by the very nature of their overlapping networks in the domains of politics, economics, and culture (Herzog 1990, as quoted in *ibid.*).

First, in regard to the political domain, the border represents a nation-state's ultimate symbol of sovereignty and must not be violated. Therefore it must serve as a first line of defence against extra-territorial involvement, including agitation by trans-border peoples from the other side. If these trans-border people have maintained strong networks, the interests of the population may successfully be defended in the respective nations' centres. This, however, can lead to a shared interest of the two neighbouring states and predicate cooperation "in stamping out cross-border political networks [...] to make certain borderlands easier to control by states and regional elites" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:226-7). This kind of international cooperation, of course, depends on the interests the nation-state in question has *vis-à-vis* its neighbour; in extreme cases, animosity can lead to the support of precisely these trans-national networks (as in the case of Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir).

Second, economic networks are affected by a nation-state's macro-economic policies in regard to overland trade. Borderlands, by their very nature, often connect two economic systems and the differences arising from disparate and divergent policies very often lead to price and

¹¹ In my opinion, these processes are well represented by the events immediately following the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the ensuing power struggles in Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria (see Chapter 2.3).

prestige differentials in goods and commodities. This entails state-condoned restrictions on cross-border trade in the interest of protecting the territory from an influx of goods deemed inimical to the 'national economy'¹². Naturally, the imposition of restrictions does not mean that restricted goods are not desired, and trans-border networks are well-suited to take advantage of price differentials by way of smuggling. As a side-effect, albeit an important one in many border regions, this entails the introduction of a frontier currency, often, in my experience, the currency of the network's place of operation, i.e. the territory of the nation-state from which goods are smuggled, in addition to the wide-spread use of the US Dollar, which is often illegal tender outside major *national* centres and state institutions¹³. These restrictions are, furthermore, "one reason why it is so important to treat the region on both sides of the border as a single unit: changing economic policies on one side lead to immediate adaptations on the other side as well" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:231).

Third, in the cultural domain, the 'naturalness' of borders so often proclaimed by nation-states such as China serving as an ideological legitimisation for the existence and enforcement of the border is very often the product of manipulation and the tinkering with ethnic identities designed to disembowel trans-frontier ethnic networks. Initial laceration of these ties takes place in border regions where cultural and political divides do not coincide by a "preoccupation with establishing new cultural divides that coincide with the border [in regard to policies on] language, culture, and settlement in [these] borderlands" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:233) and the establishing of symbols of national unity such as the 'national' language, the flag, unitarian maps, and national celebrations. These incursions into an ethnic group's construction of identity evinces concern over their political loyalty and is often aimed at the 'assimilation' of the local elite from whence the local population can then be targeted. By pursuing these strategies of state denial and suppression of borderland networks, the nation-state thus attempts to create a situation in which transgressors, i.e. those who utilise trans-frontier networks, can successfully be prosecuted and punished due to their 'violation' of the borderline.

Historiographic Mechanisms of Political Identity Formation

As we have seen, the construction of ethnic identities and policies towards local elites plays a central role in securing a nation-state's control over its border regions. As §3 above shows, the border is representative of the state's relationship to its neighbours and must, therefore, be legitimised. The imposition of political centralisation "essentially means the establishment of direct control over minority ethnic groups who usually, though not always,

¹² These restrictions can range from the restriction of cheap manufactured goods (in the case of the European Union) to the ban on the import of articles deemed subversive and thus detrimental to national security (anti-Communist propaganda in China or Chinese maps in Kazakhstan, see Chapter 4 below) or national ethics (non-conformist portrayals of human bodies in Iran).

¹³ This is the case in China. The US Dollar cannot be traded legally outside the state-run banks in major cities. Neither can it be used to acquire material goods. Nevertheless, money touts on China's borders do good business trading in the currency but turn up their noses at Mongol Tögrög, Kazakh Tenge, Kyrgyz Som, or Vietnamese Dong. See Chapter 4.

reside in peripheral regions, by creating new or strengthening old networks of centralized administration. This disrupts, if not displaces, indigenous authority structures, thereby producing a legitimization crisis. Given the monoethnic character of the state, its centralization attempts are often perceived by concerned minority ethnic groups as alien encroachment if not outright invasion." (Norbu 1992:197-8). Thus, legitimization of the nation-state's control and efforts at centralisation must, to a certain degree at least, be supported by border peoples and this is often accomplished through the active discourse of historiographic 'inventions of traditions'. This process is dialectic and not reactive in regard to both the periphery and the centre, with the border peoples taking an active role in dealing with the influence of the centre and preserving what they deem to be 'in their interests'. If the local elite are not given enough participatory autonomy or feel the assimilatory factor to be too great they are likely to block these policies and so pressurise the centre's historiographic discourse (Wallerstein 1973:168-70). On the other hand, if the local elites are 'allowed' to construct independent discursive historiographies, whether by active central policy or by the absence of central state control, this can lead to the threatening of territorial hegemony and 'unity', i.e. increased separatism. Thus, a narrow line of suggestive historiographic insinuations must be followed to allow the local elite in the borderland to discover and develop inclusivist discourses *within* the nation-state. Simultaneously, historiographic discourse must be entertained within the model of the double triangle described above, hence leading to both international as well as intra-national narratives, or, in other words, a discourse of 'national history'. Duara's thoughts on the role of national histories, which are always also subjective historiographies serving specific interests in the construction of the nation-state are, I think, enlightening (1995:4, emphases added):

"National history secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, *national* subject evolving through time [and allowing] the nation-state to see itself as a unique form of community which finds its place in the oppositions between tradition and modernity, hierarchy and equality, empire and nation. Within this schema, the nation appears as the newly realized, *sovereign* subject of History, embodying a moral and political force that has overcome dynasties, aristocracies, and ruling priests and mandarins, who are seen to represent *merely themselves* historically. In contrast to them, the nation is a *collective* historical subject poised to realize its destiny in a modern future."

It follows that the mobilisation of ethnic identity, and ethnicity in general, serves the greater goal of providing "a polyphony of voices, contradictory and ambiguous, opposing, affirming, and negotiating their views of the nation [...] which are not overridden by the nation, but actually define or constitute it" (Duara 1995:10). This multiplicity of nation-views shows that political identity is not fixed *per se* but is constantly renegotiated and, therefore, a relational quality. Political identity must then be seen not as an inherent legitimising discourse but rather the dialectic of "a historical configuration designed to include certain groups and exclude and marginalize others" (Duara 1995:15) with groups mobilising particular representations of their role and participation in the nation-state (or community) against other representations, thereby often appropriating suitable 'historical pasts' as representing their role in the modern nation-state, or rather their modern political identity. The official recognition of ethnic minority place-names can play a role in visualising this process (Deal 1979:34): In Xinjiang, in my experience, official maps always depict Chinese names first, followed where appropriate by Uighur place names.

Kazakh or Kyrgyz or other minorities' names are rarely if ever mentioned. Thus, Kashgar is depicted first as Kashi (Chinese) and then as Kashgar, Urumqi as Wulumuqi, and Yining only as such with Gulja, the Kazakh name, only being used in Kazakhstan and not in China.

The inclusion of all these groups into a greater narrative of political identity within the nation-state involves processes of closure (Duara 1995:65-9) and the concomitant hardening of social and cultural boundaries to conform to, or at least to approach conformity to, political boundaries, a process Duara describes as the narrative of *discent* which involves both the historiography of descent (i.e. a putative common and connected past) and/or dissent on heterogeneous cultural practices. This narrative "asserts a deliberate mobilization within a network of cultural representations toward a particular object of identification" (Duara 1995:66), namely the nation-state. Certain historical and cultural aspects are thus promoted to the position of encompassing the inclusivist narrative. In the case of China's frontier minority peoples and the legitimation of their inclusion within China's borders this was achieved by a historiographic tradition of seeing them as beneficial to China's existence: In imperial times they protected the frontier and sometimes led, by way of conquest, to a rejuvenation of decaying Confucian institutions by asserting notions of *tianxia*, in the ROC their resistance against assimilation under the Qing was seen as 'fighting for the same cause (liberation from the Manchus) as the Han', and in the PRC it was their 'liberation' from feudalism and class-based oppression and the construction of a trans-national proletariat that gave a common historic cause to both the majority and minority (Wade 2000:33-4). All the while, the Qing territory was largely retained and made the object of a historiographic obligation by successive Nationalist and Communist governments. As Benson notes, "given the long and violent struggle that has marked the emergence of modern China [as a nation-state] in this century, it is ironic that the north-westernmost region of China continues to bear what is in effect a name imposed by the imperial Qing ruling house [i.e. *Xinjiang*, the 'New Territories'], and that the most numerous group of the region today uses an ethnonym introduced by Chinese officials [i.e. *Uighur*; see Chapter 2.3.]" (Benson 1996:129). In other words, "History, which became the History of the nation-state in China and elsewhere, tends to narrate the evolving *unity* of the nation and becomes complicit in the project of the nation-state" (Duara 1995:173, original emphasis). Furthermore, the process of constructing historical unity in China has a specifically territorial quality (Lampton 1986, as quoted in Schmidt-Glinzer 1997:217, my translation):

"The entity of 'China' (*zhongguo*) is composed [...] of both the various ruling dynasties as well as all those border peoples living in *today's* Chinese national territory thereby making these peoples' histories a part of Chinese history. In light of this historical representation, the succession of dynasties is seen as a cumulative historical process resulting in an ever-increasing Chinese unity (*tongyihua*). Science thus delivers the historical legitimation for the one thing the state has otherwise been unable to accomplish: the homogenous Chinese nation.¹⁴"

14 "Der Begriff 'China' (*zhongguo*) umfasst [...] sowohl die jeweils regierenden Dynastien, als auch alle auf dem *heutigen* chinesischen Staatsgebiet lebenden Grenzvölker, deren Geschichte damit Teil der chinesischen Geschichte wird. In diesem Geschichtsbild wird die Abfolge der Dynastien als kumulativer geschichtlicher Prozess begriffen, der zu einer immer grösseren Einheit (*tongyihua*) Chinas geführt habe. Die Wissenschaft liefert die historische Legitimation

The afore-mentioned 'inventions of traditions' must, I think, be seen in this narrative context because we can thereby now understand why ethnicity is so important in the PRC's policy of minority autonomy in the border regions (see Chapter 3.5) and its instrumentalisation in retaining the integrity and inviolability of China's borders, primarily because it includes local elites in its discourse (Litzinger 1998:242-3). It follows then that in this context nationalism for all concerned "has three dimensions or components. Tradition connects a nation with its past which provides inspiration and a sense of continuity. Interest, ranging from economic to cultural, connects a nation with its present situation and provides incentive to tackle social problems. And ideals, mostly political, connect the nation with its future which is yet to be shaped in accordance with political ideals, economic interests and tradition." (Norbu 1992:27)

Chapter 2: A History of China's Frontier Relations

2.1. Steppe Empires and China's Frontiers

After the Warring States period, 403-221 BCE, the Qin dynasty was founded by Shi HuangDi, the first emperor to unite the disparate six states of China. He installed a new bureaucracy based upon a unified national system of provinces and prefectures and managed to unify the different forms of Chinese characters into one regular style script still in use today¹⁵. In effect, the Qin dynasty and the subsequent rulers of the Han dynasty (which lasted ultimately until 220 CE) created a unitary state which was home to a number of people from the area of modern-day Beijing right up to the modern Vietnamese border. This nascent unitary state created by the Qin had been prepared by military conquests in all parts of the area during the centuries preceding it by different feudal states such as the Shang dynasty (1500-1000 BCE) and the Zhou dynasty (1000-221 BCE). After Shi HuangDi had crushed the old warring states to create a unified empire, he turned his attention and armies to the north, the swathe of land north and east of Beijing which witnessed oscillations between military confrontation and peaceful contact between sedentary agrarians and pastoralist nomads. Using forced labour, the Qin government linked the already existing frontier walls erected by older states to establish what has subsequently become known as *changcheng*, the Great Wall¹⁶.

The Great Wall and the *heqin*-Policy

The motivation underlying this arduous task was not, contrary to popular opinion and propaganda in present-day China¹⁷, prompted by any immediate threat of nomadic invasion but rather intended to "mark the edge of Chinese civilization and the beginning of barbarian territory; [...] its purpose was [increasingly] as much to keep the frontier population of China separate from any potential allies on the steppe as it was to keep the nomads out of China" (Barfield 1989:32). Furthermore, as Eberhard (1970:118-121) has shown by extensively analysing contemporary Chinese sources, the construction of the Great Wall was probably also intended to strengthen the Chinese state's bargaining position in its economic relations with the increasingly dependent nomadic peoples to the north. These economic relations had arisen in the last centuries BCE when several Chinese kingdoms in a state of civil war were under great threat

¹⁵ Mao introduced a simplified form of many characters in the 1950s to facilitate learning; this was only accepted in mainland China with Taiwan and most overseas Chinese still using the classical complex characters from the Han dynasty. It is important to note that while the characters have largely remained unchanged for nearly 2000 years their pronunciation has, of course, gone through a number of radical changes.

¹⁶ Literally, the 'long city-wall'. The use of the second character suggests that this Great Wall represented the culmination of an older tradition in which each state surrounded itself by walls to delineate boundaries with other states as well as regions beyond that state's direct influence, eg. the steppe.

¹⁷ The mythological connotations of the Great Wall will be more closely examined in Chapter 3.1.

of being conquered by the mounted nomads later to become known as the Xiongnu¹⁸ due to the defection of several Chinese frontier rulers to the Xiongnu. The emperor of Han China was afraid that these defections would cause the northern border to unravel because other warlords far from the emperor's central authority would decide that being independent from China was worth an alliance with the northern 'barbarians'. The ensuing war between China and the Xiongnu turned into a humiliating massacre that nearly toppled the Han dynasty just two decades after it had come to power. The Xiongnu leader refrained from invading China proper due to his realisation that it would be impossible to rule an agrarian society and instead demanded huge amounts of goods and wealth from the vanquished. The Chinese imperial court acquiesced and embarked on a policy of *heqin* ('peace and friendship' or 'to peacefully affiliate oneself with the enemy') which entailed the fixed annual payment of silk, wine, grain and other foodstuffs, and the intermarriage of imperial daughters with Xiongnu chieftains, thereby giving both states co-equal status. Furthermore, the Great Wall was officially recognised as the official boundary between the two states (Barfield 1989:45-6). In effect, China under the Han dynasty had become a tribute state of the Xiongnu empire. The effects of the *heqin* policy on the Xiongnu and their empire was profound: the leaders of the Xiongnu used the material wealth to unify the steppe peoples in the region, rewarding pliant leaders with gifts and generously endowing their own people.

Ironically, the *heqin* policy prolonged and even heightened the threat to the border regions in several ways: first, despite the ever-increasing size of the subsidies China paid, the Xiongnu were not satisfied and continued to raid the frontier, followed by renewed demands for yet more tribute and better terms and thereby showing the Xiongnu leaders' power to rival groups. Second, the vast majority of goods sent by China were luxury articles designed to enable ceremonial court life, commodities the Xiongnu nobility increasingly came to depend on in their attempts at emulating the imperial court's life-style. As these commodities were of little or no use to the mass of the Xiongnu tribesmen they in turn did not see any reason to cease their raiding of Chinese territories. This, however, endangered the supplies coming from China and so the Xiongnu leaders pressed China to open "border markets where the nomads could trade pastoral products for Han goods [...]; if the [Xiongnu] were to remain at peace with China, trade at the frontier was a necessity. The pastoral economy produced large surpluses that could easily be exchanged for Chinese goods if the Han government would end its prohibition on trade with the nomads" (Barfield 1989:47). This prohibition had originally been proclaimed so as "to create as much cleavage between the steppe and China as possible; the Great Wall was to be a barrier against all contact with the steppe [so as to be better able] to tie the frontier regions to the center. [The authorities were afraid that] such trade would orientate the [border] population away from the Han court and Chinese interests" (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, China was forced to open border trade with the Xiongnu and thus the tribesmen became increasingly dependent on Chinese goods as

¹⁸ The Xiongnu (Hsiung-nu) were in fact only one of three nomadic peoples in the Great Wall area but, by the third century CE, had succeeded in driving out the Yuezhi (who had inhabited today's Gansu province) and absorbing the Donghu of Manchuria, thereby becoming a steppe empire of great military might in what is today Mongolia.

they gave up supplementary agriculture and relied more and more on imported foodstuffs, thereby causing the Xiongnu economy to become purely nomadic and no longer autarchic as it had been. According to Eberhard (1970:120), this gave China new opportunities to put the northern peoples under more pressure as, in effect, the pastoralist Xiongnu had become economically dependent, and thus politically dependent in relation to other groups in the region¹⁹, on China.

Interaction between Sedentary China and the Steppe

The Han strategy for this long and protracted war had four major objectives (Barfield 1989:54-56, Lattimore 1962a:477-480); as these strategies were to be employed time and again in later dynasties in defence of the northern Chinese frontiers it is crucial to look at them in greater detail. *First*, the Han frontier which had steadily been eroded by defections to the Xiongnu was once again pushed forward to the Qin dynasty's border and sometimes beyond²⁰. This was achieved by garrisoning the border towns with conscripts, often convicts from other parts of China, who were given farmland so as to be self-supporting. To prevent these Chinese from adapting too much to a semi-agriculturalist semi-pastoralist way of life, as the terrain would have suggested, Chinese authorities had to make "it economically more profitable for the wealth of the Frontier to flow toward China than toward the steppe, and politically more profitable for those who controlled the power of the Frontier to look toward China than toward steppe chieftains and coalitions of steppe tribes" (Lattimore 1962a:482). Thus, trade to the interior was heavily subsidised and trade to the exterior was penalised and local frontier elites were given Chinese titles and encouraged to adopt a tributary relationship with Chang'an, the capital²¹.

Second, the Han court attempted to create alliances with the nomadic neighbours of the Xiongnu from the Oxus region in Central Asia to the southern Siberian forests. The peoples beyond the Tian Shan Mountains showed no particular interest as China was seen as being outside their orbit of interest at that time but other groups aided the Han by occasionally raiding Xiongnu herds. This strategy marked the beginning of *yiyi zhiyi* ('to control the barbarians through barbarians'), a method that had already been successful in securing the southern borders to Southeast Asia²². The military effect of this strategy was the employment of Xiongnu cavalry as mercenaries to subjugate yet other nomadic peoples, thereby extending Chinese influence deep into tribal areas. *Third*, Han troops supported by mounted nomadic warriors of rival tribes moved through the Gansu corridor and pushed westwards into the Tarim Basin in today's Xinjiang province so as to prevent the Xiongnu from calling on their allies in Turkestan. This

19 With the wealth and power afforded to them by the China-trade, the Xiongnu also exploited the resources of the oasis states of Turkestan and large parts of Siberia, a fact that was to have great influence on later history (see the next sections).

20 As in Gansu province, see next section.

21 This process was greatly facilitated by the fact that nomadic chieftains "had to make use of Chinese specialists of gentry origin in the exercise of political control" (Eberhard 1970:175).

22 See Wade (2000:38) for the effects of this policy on Yunnan and Sichuan provinces and its culmination in the system of *tusi* ('native office administration').

expansion, which at the time was a purely defensive Chinese strategy, was to have far-reaching effects in the minds and myths of later dynasties as we will see in the next section. *Fourth*, the Han military mounted massive punitive expeditions designed to obliterate the Xiongnu from the steppe. These expeditions were doomed to failure due to the Xiongnu's greater degree of mobility and succeeded solely in destabilising the central government in Chang'an while the Xiongnu continuously retreated and let the effort of controlling vast swathes of agriculturally inhospitable land drain Han resolve and resources. As a consequence, the Han withdrew and ceased aggressive warfare but simultaneously refused to make peace and resume the *heqin* policy, thereby spelling disaster for the Xiongnu's style of governing the steppe peoples with China's wealth; indeed, by 60 BCE, the Xiongnu empire had broken up and become mired in countless civil wars, forcing the remnants of the Xiongnu to become a tribute state to Han China.

Outflanking the Steppe

In their attempt to circumvent the Xiongnu empire in the north, the Han court decided to dispatch envoys to the fabled lands of Turkestan and Bactria along the loose and informal connection of trade routes known as the Silk Road. The envoys encountered the powerful city-states of Transoxania and Ferghana and in time garrisons and trading posts were established "to wean eastern Turkestan from the [Xiongnu] by means of bribery rather than coercion" (Barfield 2001:242). Eastern Turkestan itself was of little intrinsic value to China; it was rather that control over this area by nomadic empires created intractable strategic problems by providing China's enemies with important resources and means of communication. It is interesting to note that China's expansion to the northwest, essentially a by-product of its defence strategies against nomads, had the profound effect of greatly enhancing the trade network of the Silk Road(s) and making "what had been a backwater [...] an important node in a Eurasian system of overland trade in which the nomads acted as key facilitators. [However,] far from being a lucrative resource that China needed to defend at all costs, the western regions were a monetary liability that could only be justified as a strategic necessity to keep the region's resources out of the [Xiongnu's] hands" (Barfield 2001:244-5). According to Lattimore (1962a:154-8), the oases of Turkestan lent themselves to a sedentary agriculturalism and so became powerful city-states²³. The Han court was considerably more successful in directly influencing these societies than it had been with the nomadic Xiongnu and the Chinese government played a central role in promoting economic growth and development, pouring in resources to strengthen its presence there and becoming involved in the trade politics of Central Asia. However, due to the stigma attached to merchants in the Confucian tradition, it was probably not the Chinese themselves who ever greatly benefited from this ancient 'global' trade network but probably rather the

23 An oasis is here defined as "an area isolated from other similar areas by desert in extreme instances or by steppe in less extreme instances. Within an oasis water must be easily accessible in order to be artificially applied to the land for the support of regular agriculture" (Lattimore 1962a:155), as was the case in most areas of Turkestan. The classical example from this area is Turpan on the rim of the Taklamakan Desert which shows signs of irrigation systems dating back over 2000 years.

sedentary oasis rulers themselves²⁴. Nevertheless, from the Han court's point of view this situation must have been satisfactory because it "shaped a situation in which the petty oasis rulers would find it more profitable to look to China for support than to submit as vassals to the nomads" (Lattimore 1962a:495); the policy of *yiyi zhiyi* was, in their eyes, well worth the enormous expense. From a semantic point of view, it is probably justified to claim that this was not a case of conquest but rather of economic bribery.

By the end of the Han dynasty, the uneasy balance of power along China's northern frontiers had more or less remained intact but the civil wars in China proper that were to last from the third century CE until the consolidation of 'reunified' China under the auspices of the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) had given rise to numerous nomadic states founded by foreign dynasties and based on the Han style of rulership. However, "the traditional view of the fall of the Han dynasty assumes that it was overrun by tribal peoples pressing at its frontiers [and] portrays the border tribes as merely waiting for China's defenses to weaken before beginning wars of conquest that would establish direct control over north China" (Barfield 1989:98). As shown above, this view does not reflect historical reality: it was not the weakening of frontier defences which led to nomadic incursions but rather the end of the subsidies and trade advantages coming out of China which adversely affected the internal structures of the nomadic empires all along the northern frontier and thereby causing massive upheavals in the power relationships between individual groups.

Ming China and the Policy of *yiyi zhiyi*

The fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 CE) was not the result of an uprising against a foreign dynasty but rather a traditional internal rebellion against a weakening central government²⁵. The newly founded Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE) incorporated the remnants of the Mongol military on Chinese territory into the new imperial army but remained wary of the continued existence of elements of the Yuan court who had retreated to Mongolia. In Confucian terms, the Mongols, despite being 'foreigners', had fulfilled Confucian requirements for legitimacy to the Mandate of Heaven and therefore posed a theoretical threat to the new dynasty. The Ming court, after several disastrous campaigns to eradicate the remnants of the Yuan, decided on a primarily defensive policy for the northern frontier and chose to move the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, the former seat of the Yuan court. This had become necessary for two reasons: *first*, while Nanjing was still the centre of the empire, the emperor, so as to be able to control the far-flung frontier regions and prevent rebellion among the frontier peoples, had parcelled out strategic territories there as fiefs to his many sons. This served the purpose of keeping the frontier within the dynasty's orbit and keeping the potential for conflict in China

²⁴ See Barfield (2001:240-1) and Adshead (2000:24-7).

²⁵ According to Hsü, the problems usually associated with the end of the 'dynastic cycle' traditionally consisted of "eunuch domination of the court, moral degradation, political corruption, intellectual irresponsibility, high taxes, and famine" (2000:19). This was certainly the case at the end of the Tang dynasty and, later, the Ming, but also the Yuan dynasty encountered most of these phenomena.

proper due to the inevitable struggle for succession to an absolute minimum. *Second*, the new emperor, who had campaigned against the Mongols, believed he could exert more direct military influence on nomadic warriors if his base of operation was simultaneously the cosmic centre of the empire.

While the Yuan threat had all but vanished by the turn of the 15th century, the danger of new nomadic confederacies arising in the power vacuum left behind by the Mongols was increasing. Once again, the old policy of *yiyi zhiyi* was reinstated, this time to protect the vulnerability of the new capital and access to rich northern provinces. The forests and steppes of Manchuria, which had been part of Yuan China, were beyond Ming China's ability to effectively occupy as had been done in Han and Tang times. The Manchurian tribes were given the right to trade at border markets and came, therefore, under China's economic sway. The emperor's policy "toward the steppe was aimed at preventing its unification" (Barfield 1989:236) and thereby it was possible, by instigating frequent shifts in Chinese military aid from one tribe to another, to prevent any one group from gaining significant ascendancy over the others. With the end to this policy in the mid-15th century due to the death of a politically far-sighted emperor, the Manchurian tribes and the Qalqa (Eastern) Mongols embarked on a process of mutual destruction on the steppe and the extortion of Ming wealth by threatening to raid the capital city to finance their respective states, until, in the late 16th century, the Ming court had had enough and refused to accommodate the two major rival nomadic states. The reasons for this are to be found in the Ming attitude that extortionate bribes to the nomads had led to the fall of previous Chinese dynasties and that thus by funding the nomad states they would be funding their own destruction. Only when the economic expense of financing the military defense of the frontier regions became too high did the Ming court revert to traditional methods of dealing with the incursions. But by this time internal rebellion had fomented due to the economic pressures placed on the citizens of China by the expensive frontier policy and the dynasty experienced the need to direct its attention to the interior.

The Manchurian tribes inhabiting the steppe and forests along today's Korean border and distributed throughout Heilongjiang province were known collectively as the Jurchen²⁶ and, due to the afore-mentioned frontier policies, had come under increasing Chinese influence. By the early 17th century they had entered into an alliance with the Qalqa Mongols and regularly invaded the Ming frontier so as to put the Ming court under pressure to cede economic concessions. The alliance with the Mongols "gave the Manchus greater military strength and a superior strategic position [and there followed] almost yearly invasions of China [...] for loot but not for conquest [...]. Like other 'vulture' dynasties, the Qing strategy was to keep itself strong and well organized in order to take advantage of political turmoil in China" (Barfield 1989: 263). Due to the oscillation of Ming frontier policy, the Manchu were able to establish a powerful state

26 Following the advice of defected Chinese scholars, the Jurchen leader adopted the term 'Manchu' in preference to the old term. The characters for both 'Manchu' and 'Qing' contain the radicals for 'water' and therefore were seen as being an auspicious omen for the 'quenching of the Ming fire' (the character for Ming has the connotation of 'bright'). See Hsü (2000:24).

in the Northeast and, when the Ming court finally decided to try to block their rise to power, they could no longer easily find rival Jurchen groups to oppose them. Finally, when internal Chinese warlords captured and killed the Ming emperor, the Manchus were invited by the Ming to help suppress the rebellion. This they gladly did and, after going through the Confucian rituals of burying the last emperor, they occupied Beijing and moved their court from Manchuria to the Ming capital and thus founded the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 CE).

Increased Control over the Periphery in Qing China

In contrast to the Ming dynasty, the Qing appeared to have a better understanding of the intricate mechanisms involved in the politics of the Mongol steppe peoples. The campaign against the Jungars, a branch of the Mongols living in Northern Turkestan, which had become a major force in Inner Asia, was not decisive as the Qing armies were not logistically able to pursue the retreating armies to their base in the Zhungarian Basin in northern Turkestan and, thus, the threat posed by them to northern Mongolia and western Gansu remained a Qing preoccupation for the Manchus saw these territories as the key to their own defence. With the additional problem of aggressive campaigns launched by the newly invigorated Kazakhs to the west and thus occupying the Jungar armies in that area, the Jungars turned inward to reorganise and revitalise their political and economic power. The importance of Tibet as Central China's south-western flank had increased by the early 18th century with the conversion of parts of the Jungar leadership to Tibetan Buddhism. As a result, the Qing court cemented its suzerainty over Tibet by "strengthening [its status] into a protectorate with a substantial degree of control [and incorporating] Tibet firmly into the Manchu Empire" (Mackerras 1994:34), leading to the withdrawal of Jungar troops in the face of Tibetan hostilities²⁷. This was followed by Qing military advances into Turkestan proper, with Urumqi being occupied in 1722. Jungar attempts to negotiate a treaty with Russia to strengthen their position once again failed due to the pre-emptive signing of the Treaty of Kiakhta between China and Russia in 1728, thereby "creating the framework for Sino-Russian relations for the next hundred years" (Barfield 1989:291). Thus ended the last of the steppe empires and the threat to China's frontiers ceased to stem from nomadic warriors and increasingly became a contest between two large sedentarised, imperialistic empires with the "nomads reduced to a subordinate status as internal colonies of the Russian and Chinese empires" (Perdue 1996:760) and a "changing world economy, better transportation and communication, and the decline of the old imperial structure in China itself [...] putting an end to old patterns and relationships" (Barfield 1989:294).

2.2. Tsarist Russia Encounters Qing China

Russian expansion to the east of the Ural mountains, beginning under the rule of Ivan IV ('the Terrible', ruled 1547-84) and actively promoted by Peter the Great (ruled 1682-1725), was initially focused on the exploration and exploitation of Siberia. This conquest was largely the

work of Russian explorers, adventurers, hunters, and trappers, all of whom, mainly Cossacks under the authority of the powerful Stroganov merchant-family, contributed ultimately to the annexation of over four million square miles between the Urals and the Pacific Ocean in just over 70 years. In 1648 Kamchatka was reached and it was possible for St. Petersburg to claim at least suzerainty over all of northern Siberia. From the Siberian tribes the Cossacks learned of the rumoured riches of the Amur region, said to be abundantly endowed with gold and silver and exploratory expeditions were sent to the south and east to secure these resources. Nerchinsk was subsequently founded on a tributary of the Amur in 1658, an area geographically belonging to Manchuria. Conflict with the newly installed Qing government in Beijing was inevitable but was delayed due to the fact that the tentative Russian advance coincided with the rise of the Manchus in China who, due to internal rebellions and general unrest associated with dynastic change, were forced to postpone punitive action directed against these infringements.

The Sino-Russian Treaties of 1689 and 1727

Russian knowledge of China in the 17th century was pitifully limited and St. Petersburg believed that it was neither big nor rich; indeed, "completely surrounded by a brick wall, from which it is evident that it [China] is no large place" (Baddeley 1919, as quoted in Hsü 2000:108). Initial diplomatic contacts by the Russians met with little success and in 1685 the Qing government sent an army to destroy the Russian outposts in the far north of Manchuria. After prolonged hostilities which neither Russia, militarily engaged in European Russia, nor China, attempting to recover after decades of civil war, were willing or indeed able to sustain for an indefinite period of time, both sides agreed to signing what was to become the first treaty ever signed by China with a European nation. The importance of this treaty for the Qing government lay primarily in the assurance that it would prevent the Russians from forming an alliance with the increasingly powerful Jungars. The Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed in 1689, set the Siberian-Manchurian border between Russia and China.

Despite the demarcation of the Siberian-Manchurian border, the general Russian-Chinese border was to remain a thorny issue for the next two centuries. No mention was made of the Siberian border to Mongolia and likewise the eastern extent of Manchuria was not clearly defined. Russia gained nearly 100'000 square miles of territory and was given commercial privileges no other European nation at that time possessed, and China felt it had gained Russian neutrality regarding the Jungars who the Chinese regarded to be an internal affair. Nevertheless, both sides realised the short-comings of the treaty and, thus, in 1727, the Treaty of Kiakhta was signed between Russia and China. In the territorial settlement, China lost 40'000 square miles around Lake Baikal and along the Irtysh River (later to be incorporated partially into Kazakhstan) but gained the 'security' of having a clearly demarcated border between the Mongolian Qalqa and Russia. By limiting Russian trade to the frontier markets of Nerchinsk and Kiakhta, the Russians

27 For the symbolic importance of maintaining nominal control over semi-nomadic Tibetan and Mongol groups in Qinghai (northern Tibet) and the subsequent imposition of ritual control by the Qing centre, see Bulag (1998:63-5).

furthermore lost the right to trade freely with the various Mongol peoples but also gained the unprecedented right to enter the Chinese capital with relative ease. Generally speaking, "the Treaty of Kiakhta established a unique relationship between China and Russia" (Paine 1996:30) and Russia was able to maintain its special privileges until the Second Opium War was over in 1861. The early Qing rulers recognised that Russian neutrality was essential to China's ongoing consolidation of its northern and north-western frontiers, and that to gain this neutrality Russia had to be granted special privileges otherwise denied to what the Chinese court usually regarded as inferior states²⁸. In hindsight, the Qing government probably need not have worried about heavy Russian involvement in North Asia at this time due to the problems that country was experiencing in its European territories. Indeed, "the century and a half immediately preceding the first modern Russo-Chinese border treaty in 1858 [was] characterized by stability and relative harmony [and] the frontier area between the two countries [remained] a backwater for both empires, whose attention had been focused elsewhere" (Paine 1996:28).

The Treaty of Aigun, 1858

In 1858, under severe pressure from the Russians, who knew that China could not afford to go to war with Russia at that time, and in an acrimonious atmosphere with much display of Russian technological superiority, the Treaty of Aigun was signed, the first of the so-called 'Unequal Treaties'²⁹ between Russia and China. It contained four articles (Paine 1996:69, my formulation):

1. The boundary between Russia and China was to be set along the Amur River, ceding to Russia the entire northern bank of the Amur, from the Argun River to the sea. Those lands between the Ussuri River and the sea, which had been left undelimited under earlier treaties, were to be jointly administered. The Amur, Ussuri, and Sungari rivers were to be open to Russian and Chinese navigation exclusively. Manchu residents on the northern bank of the Amur would be permitted to remain there under Manchu administration.
2. The inhabitants along the Amur, Ussuri, and Sungari rivers were to be permitted to trade freely with one another.
3. The Russians were to retain copies of the treaty text in Russian and Manchu, the Chinese in Manchu and Mongol.
4. The restriction that trade be confined to Kiakhta was to be lifted and made permissible all along the border.

Article 1 in effect gave Russia control of 185'000 square miles of what the Qing court regarded as the birthplace of the ruling Manchu dynasty and, therefore, the handing over of this area was seen as an act of treason by the Chinese negotiators. Hence, the Qing emperor not only refused to ratify the treaty, he completely ignored its existence much to the frustration of the Russians. According to Paine (1996:79-84), ratification of the Treaty of Aigun would probably have been

²⁸ The traditional Chinese tribute system and the impact of increased European activity in China's border regions will be more closely analysed in Chapter 3.2.

²⁹ The 'Unequal Treaties' are a term used in the modern PRC to describe the concessions European states such as Britain, France, and Russia persuaded China to sign, usually at gun point. The majority of them involved the handing over of large territories.

seen by the Qing court as a sure indicator of the emperor's unfitness to rule given the fact that the government was anyway beset by severe problems with the British and the Taiping Rebellion. However, when British troops marched into Beijing in 1860 in the Second Opium War the government had no other option but to acquiesce to Russian demands in return for their mediation with the British. Thus, in 1860 the Treaty of Beijing was signed which involved the ratification by the Chinese of the Treaty of Aigun and the settling of the eastern border along the Ussuri River to the Korean border in Russia's favour. Furthermore, Russia was able to fulfil another of its major demands: the opening of Russian consulates, the first such institutions on Chinese territory proper, in Qiqihar (in Heilongjiang), Urga (later Ulaan Baatar in Mongolia), and Kashgar (Kashi, in Xinjiang). In addition, the Treaty for the first time defined China's Central Asian border with the expanding Russian empire and called for a detailed border survey to be conducted. Russian penetration of what had become Xinjiang had begun, the second arm of a double-pronged push into China's northern frontier areas via, on the one hand, the Amur River and, on the other, the Ili River.

Russian Expansion into Western Turkestan

In the late 18th century, Russian penetration of the Kazakh steppe, which until then had been slow and gradual, began to increase mainly due to the increased mobility of Russian peasants. Tatar traders spread south and were in turn protected by Russian military outposts. Russian policy in the northern Central Asian steppes was "to consolidate control through the at first sight surprising device of tying the still only marginally Muslim Kazakhs more firmly to Islam; the idea was that this would entice the unruly nomads to a more sedate way of life, especially since it was the tsar's subjects, the Tatar mullahs, who spread among the Kazakhs as preceptors and even built mosques and madrassas" (Soucek 2000:197). Russian interests were served by the expansion of the Oyrat Mongols which entailed the respective Kazakh qaghans to seek Russian protection. Then, between 1822 and 1848, Russia decided to suppress the political structure of the traditional Kazakh hordes³⁰ so as to remove any ambivalence about Russia's dominance in the bulk of Kazakh territory. There then followed decades of skirmishing with the oasis qaghanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Khoqand until, with the fall of Merv in 1884, what are today the five Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan had been conquered. Russia's rapid advance into Central Asia had two reasons: "a desire to secure defensible borders and a mission to civilize its neighbors" (Paine 1996:117). The former argument, a strategy with which imperial China had had centuries of experience, was directed mainly against nomadic Kazakh and Kyrgyz warriors who frequently raided and looted Russian territories in southern Siberia. Indeed, Russia "as the more civilised State [was] forced, in the interest of the security of its frontier and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendancy over those whom their turbulent and unsettled character make most undesirable neighbours [and therefore] the tribes on the frontier [had] to be reduced to a state of more or less

30 In Kazakh, the term *jüz* ('hundred') is used instead of *horde*, or Russian *orda*. The Kazakhs to this day belong to one of the three hordes: *Ulu жүз* (Greater Horde), *Orta жүз* (Middle Horde), or *Kisi жүз* (Little Horde). See Benson&Svanberg 1988:5-6.

perfect submission." (Gorchakov 1864:31, as quoted in Paine 1996:116). The commercial interests alluded to by Gorchakov consisted of the Russian governments plans to use Central Asia as a base for cotton manufacturing. More importantly for our context here is that most of Xinjiang throughout the entire mid-19th century had been going through a succession of violent uprisings and the ensuing lawlessness in the entire region had, from Russia's perspective, become a grave security threat³².

Muslim Rebellion in Xinjiang

After the final defeat of the Jungars in 1757, Chinese Turkestan, hitherto known as Xiyu ('Western Frontier'), was renamed Xinjiang ('New Territories') and the Qing court, as we have seen for reasons of pre-emptive national defence, encouraged the influx of settlers from central and eastern China to 'pacify' this strategic area. Throughout the following century there were regular uprisings by the indigenous peoples in Xinjiang³³ mainly due to the immense corruption of military officers and religious tensions between Dungans (Muslim Chinese, or Hui as they are officially known today) and Han Chinese settlers. Thus, Chinese control over Xinjiang depended on military occupation and the Han settlers required protection by the armed forces. Despite the resultant expansion and specialisation of the economy, "many [Uighurs] regarded the imposition of Qing rule as an onslaught on their traditional way of life [i.e. not in keeping with Islamic tenets]" (Mackerras 1994:35). This popular unrest was seized upon by Yakub *beg*, a member of the local elite in Kashgar, and in 1867 he established a qaghanate in western Xinjiang by taking advantage of turmoil amongst the Qing troops caused by the Muslim rebellions in Gansu and Shanxi provinces. Preceding this, the entire area north and south of the Tian Shan range had fallen to the rebels and no longer even remained under nominal Qing control. Simultaneously, on the western side of the Tian Shan the Russian government found itself coming under increased pressure by Kyrgyz irregulars who supported Kyrgyz fighters amongst Yakub *beg*'s rebels in Xinjiang. Russia, in direct violation of the Treaty of Beijing, allowed fleeing Kazakh and Uighur refugees to settle in its eastern border region to populate this remote area and ingratiate itself to the anti-Chinese rebels. When the Qing government finally found itself able to begin to regain control over the situation from 1869 onwards, the rebels moved into Mongolia and threatened Russia's main communication and trade lines with China. At the same time, many rebels decided to retreat to the Ili valley and, in 1871, an Uighur sultan declared independence from China. From this base, the sultan "interfered with Russian trade, harbored Russian fugitives, clashed with Russian boundary troops, and, most important, had territorial ambitions beyond the border set by the 1860 Treaty of [Beijing]" (Paine 1996:120). Hence, the Russian government decided to occupy the entire Ili valley in an 'act of self-defence' and to 'protect Russian interests in the region'.

31 A.M.Gorchakov was the foreign minister of Russia at this time and one of the key architects of Russia's Central Asia policy in regard to what has become known as the Great Game, the imperialist rivalry between Russia and Britain in the 19th century.

32 See Chu (1966:4-22).

33 1755-58, 1765, 1815, 1817-26, 1830-35, 1847, 1852, 1854, 1857, 1862-78.

Russian Occupation

By the late 1870s the uprising around Yakub *beg* had been crushed and China was demanding the unconditional return of the Ili valley. After the disastrous Sino-Russian Treaty of Livadia (1879)³⁴ which the Qing court refused to ratify and over which Russia did not have the will nor the resources to go to war, China was able to negotiate the important Treaty of St. Petersburg in 1881. The twenty-article treaty included the following points (Paine 1996:161-3):

1. China was to regain control over the entire Ili valley with the exception of its westernmost section [on the shores of Lake Kapshagay].
2. Russia would gain the area around Lake Zaisan in the Altay Mountains.
3. Residents of Ili who preferred Russian citizenship were to move to the western part of Ili retained by Russia and the Chinese government was not to interfere with those choosing Russian citizenship.
4. The Chinese government was not to punish any inhabitants of Ili for actions taken during the uprising.
5. Russian consulates were to be opened in Jiayuguan [Gansu province] and Turpan.
6. A 33-mile duty-free zone was to be implemented along both sides of the Mongolian border but traders were to be permitted to cross at only certain designated points.

The successful signing of this treaty was the first time that China had been able to force a European nation into retreat and as such represented a milestone in China's adoption of European diplomatic methods despite Russia succeeding to pursue its traditional strategy of including articles territorially unrelated to the matter at hand (articles five and six, in this case). The Ili Crisis had awakened the Qing court to the danger presented by Russian territorial ambitions and that Russia "was particularly dangerous since it combined the traditional threat of an invading northern barbarian people with the military forces of a European nation" (Paine 1996:165). China's realisation of this and its subsequent success in the Treaty of St. Petersburg for the first time aroused Russian concern that China was learning how to defend itself and would pose a growing threat to Russian control over the vast frontier regions it had acquired by subterfuge. Thus, in the wake of the Ili Crisis and the foreign policy debacle it entailed, the tsarist government felt itself under pressure to prove its effectiveness in resolving the question of control over China's northern frontier regions, specifically in regard to Mongolia and the important role this region played in securing access to the Russian Far East.

Despite the massive amount of money Russia poured into developing trade in the Far East, Russian trade always operated at an enormous deficit with China (Paine 1996:194-5). This, however, seemed to be of no consequence because a larger purpose was being served (LeDonne 1996, as quoted in *ibid.*):

³⁴ This treaty would have left Russia in permanent possession of the entire valley and with control over all the access routes to Kashgar and would have allowed the local inhabitants of the entire region to choose their citizenship with the provision that naturalised Russian citizens would be given full protection within China from Chinese reprisals (Paine 1996:133). The treaty was obtained under duress from the Chinese negotiators and based on (possibly deliberately) erroneous Russian maps.

Russian foreign policy took for granted a number of geopolitical assumptions – that space is power; that autarchy is the highest goal because it guarantees the security of a supposedly immutable political order; that a continental economy (*Grossraumwirtschaft*) must be protected by a 'ring fence', a 'red line' to keep foreigners [i.e. other Europeans] out, even though the line kept advancing. An exclusion policy was always a built-in component of the Russian outlook.

When the xenophobic Boxer Uprising spread to Manchuria in 1900, Russia felt compelled to formally invade and annex all three north-eastern provinces and, in direct violation of the Treaty of Aigun, forcefully relocated all the Chinese living on the Amur River and assumed direct control over the administration of the entire region³⁵. After the Boxer Uprising, Russia was exceedingly reluctant to withdraw its troops and found itself confronted with increased tensions with Japan which ultimately culminated in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5). The consequences of this war which Russia resoundingly lost were threefold in regard to the Chinese frontier (Paine 1996:245-6): First, Russia lost control of the Manchurian railway and its zone of exclusion in Manchuria forcing it to build what was to become the Trans-Siberian line along the difficult terrain of the Amur so as to be able to defend Vladivostok from a perceived Japanese threat and to be in a military position to fight a two-front war³⁶. Second, Manchurian commerce could no longer be dominated by Russia and the trade routes to Beijing were blocked by Japanese encroachment on southern Manchuria. Third, through a secret treaty with Japan signed in 1907, Manchuria was to be regarded by the Russians as a Japanese sphere of interest and Japan agreed to treat Mongolia as being in the Russian sphere. Mongolia represented the only area left for potential Russian expansion, and Russia was determined to make Mongolia a protectorate. All in all, Russian activities prior to the Russo-Japanese War had succeeded in only one thing: accumulating Chinese resentment over being treated 'unfairly', especially in respect to the utter disregard the tsarist government displayed for Chinese territorial integrity despite its protestations to the contrary³⁷.

The Importance of Mongolia

Mongolia's importance for the defence of Qing China's vulnerable northern frontier cannot be overstated and Qing officials were very well aware of this (Zuo ZangTang³⁸ 1877, as quoted in Chu 1966:176-7):

³⁵ According to Paine, this extraordinary move was actually instigated by the ranking officer of the military operation, who "like so many frontier officials before him, independently made Russian foreign policy" (1996:217).

³⁶ In Soviet times, the costs of troop deployments to remain able to do just this were to prove staggering.

³⁷ In 1909, the Russian envoy to China, Ivan Korostovets reported that "the Chinese have not forgotten the negative consequence for them which appeared because of the agreement with us in 1896 and they treat us with extreme distrust at our every attempt at rapprochement" (as quoted in Paine 1996:246). In 1911, a Chinese diplomat is quoted as stating that "China will not forgive Russia for taking advantage of China's current weakness, and Petersburg had better take this into account" (*sic*, as quoted in Paine 1996:272).

³⁸ Zuo ZangTang was the general in charge of quelling the Muslim Rebellion in the Northwest in the 1860s and 1870s.

"As the Mongolian tribes guarded the north, there have been no invasions [from Mongolian territory] for almost two centuries. [...] The security was guaranteed by the past emperors who accomplished the successful conquest of [Xinjiang]. Hence, stress on [Xinjiang] means an effective defense of Mongolia, and the effective defense of Mongolia means the sound security of [Beijing]. [...] If [Xinjiang] is not secure, Mongolia will be in trouble; then not only [Shanxi, Gansu, and Shaanxi provinces] will often be disturbed, the people in the area of the national capital will not have a good night's sleep."

To preclude Russian excuses pertaining to the non-existence of a Han population serving as a pretext for occupation, traditional restrictions on Han in-migration were relaxed and the Qing government attempted to absorb Mongolia in terms of administrative structures by establishing territorial boundaries within Mongolia that served to anchor the nomadic tribes to a fixed territory (Lattimore 1962a:89). It was precisely these policy changes, however, which served to induce the Mongols to first seek Russian protection and then to invite them to help secure Mongolian independence from Qing China. Thus, "Chinese policies in Mongolia backfired, for they wound up greatly augmenting Russian influence in Outer Mongolia and ultimately culminated in its separation from China [accomplished in 1911 with Russian support]" (Paine 1996:281). Given the realities of Mongolia's geographical location and its geopolitical importance in terms of the Sino-Russian frontier, Mongolia was in no position to survive politically without the cooperation of both Russia and China (Baabar 1999:163). With Russian expansionist interests redirected towards Mongolia, the tsarist government saw its position there endangered by the imminent fall of the Qing dynasty: "I venture to say that, from the point of view of our interests, the collapse of the current Chinese empire could be desirable in many respects. [...] We can use these [ensuing chaotic] circumstances to finish the matter of settling and strengthening our frontiers [...]" (Neratov³⁹ 1911, as quoted in Paine 1996:289). Thus, supporting the formation of an independent *vladenie* ('domain') of Mongolia would be in Russia's interests as it could be used as a buffer zone to the decaying and possibly imploding Chinese empire.

2.3. Soviet Central Asia and 20th Century China

Delimitation and Soviet Control over Central Asia

The effects of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that transformed imperial tsarist Russia into the Soviet Union was to have far-reaching consequences on the relationships between, on the one hand, the indigenous peoples of Central Asia and, on the other hand, the avenues of contact to their brethren 'sundered' by the increasingly politicised and less porous Inner Asian border to Xinjiang. Whereas before the Revolution and despite Russian imperialist designs the Muslims of Central Asia had been granted a relatively large degree of cultural autonomy⁴⁰ due mainly to the lack of funds and political interest, the Soviet government now regarded the 'backwardness' of these areas as a serious threat to their control over the area (Geiss 1995:54).

³⁹ Neratov was the minister of foreign affairs at this time.

⁴⁰ The level of education had been kept low with no attempts made at combating illiteracy or introducing compulsory schooling so that revolutionary European notions of Marxism and independence could not circulate.

The expressed goal of the revolutionaries was one of "true liberation, for self-determination of all the subject peoples of the former Tsarist empire" (Soucek 2000:210). The success of the Revolution in Central Asia was critically dependent on Muslim support but the Revolutionary Committee under Lenin was wary of granting Islam in the former empire any degree of real political power. In this Soviet attitude and the resulting policies which were implemented from the early 1920s onwards, remarkable continuities between former tsarist and later Soviet areas of policy can be discerned, continuities which were to have great implications for the fates of today's newly-independent nations in the region. For our context, these continuities are to be found in three fundamental areas: Islam, ethnic grouping, and the re-alignment of administrative borders (Roy 2000:52). Furthermore, in order to make possible the perpetuation of a multi-ethnic empire controlled by Russians, ideological and conceptual instruments were elaborated upon, with Stalin's classificatory system for minorities and nationalities playing a central role. According to Dreyer (1976:59), Soviet practice and theory showed a considerable disparity, on the one hand propagating *druzhba narodov* ('friendship of peoples') in terms of *sblizhenie* ('drawing together') and *sliianie* ('eventual merging')⁴¹, and on the other hand the forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people from most minorities.

Two points are crucial to an understanding of Soviet control over Central Asia: *First*, functionaries and apparatchiks (the Soviet cadre) were virtually exclusively recruited from the ranks of the workers (*trudyashchiesya*), the proletariat in Marxist terminology, and not from amongst the peasantry. In Muslim Central Asia, however, the vast majority of the population did not belong to the industrial proletariat and "lack[ed] proletarian organizations which the [Bolshevik] faction could welcome into the organs of the higher government" (Chairman Kolesov 1920, as quoted in Soucek 2000:212). Thus, in this formative phase of Central Asia's inclusion into the Soviet Union, "the Soviet tendency to prefer the 'proletariat' to the peasantry [...] had unfortunate results in the Muslim borderlands, where the politically conscious industrial proletarian minority was mainly Russian and Ukranian, that is European, and the peasant majority Asian. This tended to perpetuate and even to extend the colonialist concept of enlightened European tutelage over backward native peoples" (Wheeler 1962, as quoted in Geiss 1995:56). Furthermore, most indigenous leaders came from what the Soviets termed the 'bourgeoisie' or from the religious establishment. *Second*, as a result of Russian colonial rule and policies⁴², more than 2 million Russians had settled in the steppe *oblasts* of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. These settlers regarded their areas, first and foremost northern Kazakhstan but also the Russian cities of Vernyi (today's Almaty) and Tashkent, as an integral part of Russia⁴³. According to Schoeberlein, induced migration supported by the Soviet Union "as a strategy of social transformation [was] a means for russification of the population and russianization of the

41 As Roy (2000:52) notes, these Soviet terms were all identical to terms used by tsarist policy makers in the 19th century. The irony of this fact speaks for itself I think.

42 Greatly influenced by the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861 which affected over 40 million Russian peasants.

43 A notion supported by such luminaries as Dostoevsky who was in exile in Semipalatinsk in the late 1850s. This attitude is still a very popular notion among Russian Kazakhstanis.

governing apparatus" (2000:50), in other words a direct attempt to destroy the role of traditional Islamic forms of social organisation and subvert the position of traditional elites in charge of community rituals and economic institutions such as the *shari'a* system of law and the political organisation of the Hordes and clans. These institutions were to be replaced with Soviet forms and so strengthen the role of the state in local contexts. In particular, three policies are of interest to us in this context (adapted from Schoeberlein 2000:49-50)⁴⁴:

1. The flooding of Central Asia with immigrants from European parts of the Soviet Union, aimed at displacing and diluting the native population and its culture, and providing the state with a 'local' population from which to draw loyal cadres
2. Language policy which favoured the use of Russian, russification of the native languages (including adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet and Russian vocabulary), and a diminished role for native languages in education and government.
3. Creation of 'national cultures' as a means to 'divide and conquer', imposing artificial differences amongst the [Muslim] peoples of Central Asia.

This last two points represent a policy which was to prove to be essential to an understanding of the situation of today's independent Kazakhstan in regard to its relationship with ethnic brethren within China across the border to the east and must, therefore, be more closely analysed here.

The Embedding of Soviet Central Asia

In a statement made in 1919 by Stalin⁴⁵ and addressed not just to Central Asia's Muslims but to all Muslims everywhere, the Soviet attitude to the importance of Central Asia as a stepping stone to world revolution in international Muslim communities becomes clear: "Turkestan, because of its geographical position, is a bridge connecting socialist Russia with the oppressed countries of the East, and in view of this the strengthening of the Soviet regime in Turkestan might have the greatest revolutionary significance for the entire Orient" (as quoted in Soucek 2000:213). Hence, it was of paramount importance that Central Asia be made an integral part of the Union⁴⁶. For the Muslims of Central Asia, similarly to the Muslims of Xinjiang under Chinese control, intensified Russian control meant a significant alteration of their status and, "with the loss of political rule and military control, the traditional alternatives of [these] conquered Muslim groups seemed defined [...]. Assimilation was viewed as apostasy and was usually seen as being as sure an end to Islamic life as massacre or genocide" (Voll 1987:128). There ensued bitter resistance to Communist central control which was best encapsulated by the Basmachi Movement of the early 1920s under Enver Pasha. The emergence of Soviet-engineered national identities ensured the existence of fragmentary "smaller groups that [...] adapted themselves to existence within the Soviet system [and helped] to prevent the emergence of more threatening [i.e. to the Soviet state], pan-Turkish groupings" (Voll 1987:143-4).

⁴⁴ This is a polemical critique of Soviet policy but adeptly sums up, I think, present day attitudes of Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz in Central Asia.

⁴⁵ Still at this time the Commissar for Nationality Affairs and writing under the name of J. Dzhugashvili.

According to Roy (2000:62), the nationalities policy in the Soviet Union had three basic elements which are fundamental for the understanding of the nature of today's Central Asian borders and nation-states. *First*, there were Stalin's notions of *nationalnost* and the Soviet school of ethnography that resulted from them⁴⁷. In order to establish a firm foundation for the idea of ethnic groups, "Soviet theoreticians adopted two approaches: ethnogenesis and linguistics" (*ibid.*), that is, on the one hand the creation of a genealogy for the group resident in a certain territory and the reconstruction of that group's affiliation with that territory, and, on the other hand, the classification and formalisation of languages not according to language usage but rather to administrative criteria⁴⁸. Basically, these two approaches illustrate the Soviet implementation of Marxist-Leninist state theory: "the ethnic group in question is not first defined by scientific analysis and then given administrative status. On the contrary, first it gets its status, and then it is up to the experts to find it a *post facto* scientific foundation" (Roy 2000:64). In my opinion, the former approach was to cement the reality of the ideologically imposed boundaries between ethnic groups in Soviet Central Asia and China while the latter was to harden the growing obstacles in inter-group communication both between and within these two respective Communist states and thereby strengthen the historiographical claims to hegemony over these territories. Both the Soviet Union and China employed these strategies (see Chapter 3.4)

Second, a system of administrative and political classification based on territorialisation and language status was developed. Peoples that, in Marxist-Leninist evolutionary terminology, had reached the level of 'nation' due to their capitalist mode of production and the existence of markets were granted the status of Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Less developed peoples had to content themselves with the status of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR, for example Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan) or Autonomous Region (AR, for example Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan). While the SSRs had all the trappings of an independent nation-state the other units were more closely associated with the respective SSRs in which they lay. If a region had no national language, one was created despite the fact that this contradicted Stalin's criteria for the *nationalnost* for reasons of, *Third*, the strategic logic of territorial realignment which "had little to do with the above two principles, but which had to be expressed in their terminology" (Roy 2000:62) with this juxtaposition leading to some of the seemingly absurd frontier realities of present-day Central Asia⁴⁹. The decision on which regions were to become SSRs was not theoretical in the Marxist-Leninist sense but rather strategic. The Pamiris in

46 In addition, the Revolution in Russia had isolated the nascent regime from international support and the need for the 'national pride' resulting in the retention of empire may well have played a decisive role. See Geiss (1995:54-8), Paine (1996:288-9), and Roy (2000:50-1).

47 As defined by: shared language; shared territory; shared economic environment ('economic fraternity'); shared psychological nature in the cultural community.

48 An example of this was the 'creation' of the Tajik language to go with the creation of the Tajik nation. According to linguists, early 20th century Tajik was a local dialect of Persian Farsi.

49 For in-depth treatment of several examples of inter-Republic frontier conflict see Roy (2000:68-71).

Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan AR serve as a symptomatic example⁵⁰: afraid of the Ismaili Pamiris' connections and strong affiliations with their brethren Ismaili across the border in Pakistan and Xinjiang, the Soviet regime purged records of their vehicular language with the greatest part of the population encountering the same fate several years later in 1937. The remnants were obliged to describe themselves as Tajiks in subsequent censuses but their AR was not abolished (Roy 2000:66). It is interesting to note that it was precisely this strategic region which, in the 1881 Treaty of St. Petersburg, had never been officially delimited with China due to its vicinity to the Afghan Wakhan Corridor (which was under British control) and still figures in Chinese claims today.

The Trans-Frontier Factor

Of considerable importance in the strategic logic of these territorial realignments was what Roy (2000:67) terms 'the Trans-frontier Factor', meaning that nationalities were created according to the principle of the dual bridgehead, the idea being to favour ethnic groups which might serve as a bridgehead to enable the Soviet Union to extend its influence beyond its national borders and, inversely, to prevent other nations from utilising Soviet ethnic groups as their own bridgeheads to infiltrate the Union. Thus, ethnic groups with close ethnic ties to affiliated groups in a minority situation beyond an international border were favoured with *nationalnost* status. In our Central Asian context, this applied primarily to the Uighurs and the Dungans (Muslim Chinese), both of whom were recognised as *nationalnost* yet were not given territorial autonomy. With the turmoil in Xinjiang under the Nationalist Chinese government and until the Communists came to power in China, the Soviet government was keen on creating institutions which promoted Uighur and Dungan culture and language, expending large amounts of time and effort on a relatively small ethnic group. Local cadres were recruited from these institutions to enable the transportation of the Revolution into Xinjiang and to aid Soviet infiltration into the province. With the publishing of numerous books and pamphlets and their export from Tashkent and Almaty to Urumqi and Kashgar, "Soviet support of the Uighur culture and language greatly contributed to the development of an Uighur ethnic awareness⁵¹" (Geiss 1995:93, my translation) and, between 1933 and 1943, the Soviet Union strongly meddled in Xinjiang's affairs as we shall see in the next section. Simultaneously, by emphasising the Trans-frontier Factor, Stalin's "great victory was to have brought the intellectuals of Central Asia to a position of defending their language and their 'nation' against their neighbours, and not against Moscow, whom they called upon to assist in the mediation of conflicts" (Roy 2000:73).

The Chinese Republican Nation-State and Its Minority Policy

After the demise of the Qing dynasty and until 1928 when Chiang KaiShek commenced the successful campaigns against various insurgent warlords in the north, the Republic of China

⁵⁰ This incident is still very much remembered today at least by Pakistan's Ismailis, as I was able to witness at a public debate of the Aga Khan Foundation in Chitral, NWFP, in November 1997.

⁵¹ "Die sowjetische Förderung der uighurischen Kultur und Sprache trug sehr zur Entstehung eines uighurischen, ethnischen Bewusstseins bei."

(ROC) was ravaged by constant civil war with many areas under the control of *de facto* independent warlords. This situation was particularly pronounced in the peripheral regions of China and Nationalist central control in the borderlands was virtually non-existent. With the founding of the ROC in 1911, Dr. Sun YatSen, the leader of the Nationalists, became aware of the need to construct a modernised bureaucratic structure to deal with the centrifugal forces driving the border regions away from central control. A new understanding of China as a nation-state, based on elements of both European countries and the strong example of Japan under the Meiji Restoration, had to be formulated (Schmidt-Glinzer 1997:198-201). Of central importance to Sun in accomplishing this goal was the vision of "the existing cultural division/distinctions eventually dying out, resulting in a new single nation able to 'satisfy the demands and requirements of all races and unite them in a single cultural and political whole'" (as quoted in Benson&Svanberg 1988:47). To achieve this, a new assessment of the role of what were to be called the 'national minorities' had to be made and how they figured in the Nationalist attitude to territorial integrity⁵², an attitude that was later to be adopted by Mao's Communist government.

Despite never developing a clear theory on what exactly constituted a minority as such Sun went on to acknowledge the existence of five nationalities (*minzu ren*) within China, on which he then based the proclamation of the 'Republic of Five Nationalities', namely the *Han ren* (Han), the *Menggu ren* (Mongols), the *Manzhou ren* (Manchu), the *Xizang ren* (Tibetans), and the *Huijiao Tujue ren* (Muslim Turks, including the Uighurs and Kazakhs). However, despite the existence of these peoples, the vast majority of China was, in his eyes, Han⁵³. Furthermore, "the political nation as a whole would be better off if they [i.e. the other *minzu*] were assimilated [...] because their presence in China militated against its unity as a nation-state" (Mackerras 1994:56) and thereby distorted the 'meaning of a single Republic'. The Doctrine of the Five Nationalities was the earliest official recognition of China's multi-ethnic composition. Due to the dearth of information on the cultural and political organisation of the non-Han peoples in China mainly due to the preceding political disinterest in this matter under the Qing dynasty, Sun's policy on national minorities became heavily influenced by Soviet advice⁵⁴. Thus, in the GMD's 1924 manifesto, the government felt itself obliged to "help and guide the weak and small nationalities (*minzu*) within its [i.e. the ROC's] national boundaries toward self-determination (*zizue*) and autonomy (*zizhi*)" (Sun, as quoted in Mackerras 1994:57). Equality among the peoples of China seemed a necessary prerequisite for Sun's vision of a unified and strong China in the face of the international turmoil of the 1920s and the internal strife evoked by the rampant warlordism dominant at that time. Furthermore, the formal declaration of the independence of Outer Mongolia in 1924 galvanised the Republican government into action concerning the advantages of inclusionist strategies to keep China's territorial integrity intact. After Sun YatSen's death in 1925, Chiang KaiShek retreated from the ideals of Sun's policies of self-determination and

⁵² See Chapter 3.3 below for the methods of interference the Soviets employed.

⁵³ Included in the Han category were the peoples of Southwest China who were probably seen as 'assimilated' Chinese. See Gladney (1998b) on the construction of the Han *minzu*.

⁵⁴ This was also the time of the United Front formed between the GMD and the nascent Chinese Communist Party under Mao.

autonomy by claiming them to be Communist propaganda aimed at strengthening Soviet influence in the minority border regions. In this new policy, it was claimed that, in terms of "history, geography, and the national economy [...], Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang were part of the Chinese nation" (Third Congress of the GMD, 1929, as quoted in Mackerras 1994:58), implicitly stating an increased policy of cultural assimilation not into the Republic of China but rather into the nation of Chinese, the *Zhonghua guozu*⁵⁵.

Republican Control of Xinjiang

One of the most important areas for the GMD was Xinjiang with its newly discovered vast potential resources. The Uighurs and other minorities were restless and being inundated by Soviet propaganda from the new SSRs of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan just across the border. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Revolution in 1911 had initially made very little difference to the way the province was run except for the fact that now the provincial government was able to pursue its own, usually corrupt, policies without Nanjing's interference. Xinjiang's Muslims resented the warlords' rule because it left them entirely at their mercy. From 1931 until 1942 most of the province had become practically an independent state under the control of a Han warlord named Sheng ShiCai who enjoyed the support of the Soviet Union. The warlords of Xinjiang reluctantly recognised the need to trade with the Soviet Union but did what they could to resist its influence within the province. In time, however, the local government's dependence on Russian supplies, due mainly to the presence of the civil war to the east which cut trade lines to the Chinese interior, led to the opening of Soviet consulates and trading agencies from Kashgar over Yining to Urumqi (Mackerras 1994:88-9). Furthermore, successive warlords independently signed secret agreements with the Soviet Union which guaranteed Soviet military assistance⁵⁶. As in dynastic times, the threat to the frontier was exacerbated by the uncontrollability of local frontier governors. In 1944 a joint Uighur-Russian⁵⁷ uprising rebelled against oppression and declared Xinjiang's independence, naming their entity, which comprised mainly the Kazakh areas of north-western Xinjiang, the East Turkestan Republic with its capital in Gulja (Yining, in the Ili valley). Soviet assistance came upon official 'request' by Urumqi to quell the insurgent East Turkestan Republic. Ironically, all parties involved (that is the Xinjiang governor, the independent Republic, and the general sent by Nanjing to set things aright) ended up appealing to the Soviet military for help. Sheng ShiCai, the governor of Xinjiang and the victor of the confusing episode, had turned Xinjiang into a Soviet client-state. Until the mid-1940s and Sheng's defeat when Moscow was forced to withdraw, the Soviet economic and political impact on Xinjiang was immense. The Soviet Union was blamed for instigating the Ili uprising and supporting secessionist ideas among the Uighurs and Kazakhs in the region. In fact,

55 As Mackerras (*ibid.*) notes, Chiang KaiShek believed that all five official minorities belonged to the same racial stock and shared common ancestry.

56 Officially, the GMD did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union at all in the 1930s. Nanjing was not informed of Xinjiang's special agreements and would anyway have been in no position to have done more than protest them.

Soviet influence increased in the last years of the ROC in the Kazakh part of north-western Xinjiang due to increased suppression, or 'pacification' as it was termed, by Chinese authorities afraid of resurgent secessionism (Benson&Svanberg 1988:50-2). Realistically speaking, the GMD government only managed to assume control over Xinjiang after the end of this rebellion in 1946.

The Chinese Communist Nation-State and Its Minority Policy

A minority people being granted *minzu* status meant that rights of autonomy were granted to the *minzu* administrations. This came in the form of regional national autonomy, a system borrowed from the Soviet Union and altered to suit China's special circumstances. Regions populated by minorities were joined into autonomous prefectures and counties and self-governing bodies were set up which entitled the local administrators "to make certain decisions and to draft special regulations adapted to specific aspects and requirements of the nationality(-ies) and area(s) [...] including other special provisions in the interest of economic and cultural development of autonomous areas; [...] additionally they were allowed to manage local finances [and] organize local security forces" (Heberer 1987:25). Autonomy, however, did not, contrary to what Mao had promised during his Long March, grant the right to secede from the territory of the People's Republic; they were inalienable parts of the nation in the CCP's eyes and were not to be confused with Lenin's calls for self-determination and federation and all attempts at secession were regarded as criminal and a threat to 'national unity'. The general features of China's minorities policy after 1949 are as follows (adapted from Dreyer 1976:262-264):

1. The abolition of legal distinctions among nationality groups and prohibition of discriminatory treatment;
2. Development of the country's infrastructure to encompass minority areas and link Han and minority communities;
3. Creation of a sense of patriotism and transfer of allegiance to the CCP through propaganda and education and therefore
4. the development of minorities' spoken and written languages to facilitate this transfer and enable the reception through the group's own vernacular⁵⁸;
5. The development of magazines, films, and radio broadcasts to encourage the beginnings of a uniform common culture;
6. The granting of special privileges to minority groups to encourage them to participate in higher education, the army, bureaucracy, mass organisations, etc. in the form of affirmative action based on quotas;
7. the construction of historiography.

One clear principle emerges which, at least in theory, has remained in force throughout the entire period of the PRC: the right to equal treatment of the minorities in regard to the majority Han. The training of minority cadres was accomplished by "working together with the old ruling classes, trying to persuade them to accept and even encourage the new order, rather than setting them up as the enemy who had to be punished" (Mackerras 1994:146). The construction of

⁵⁷ White Russians, that is. These Russians had fled from the Bolshevik Revolution in Central Asia.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 3.4 for an overview of these linguistic policies.

historiographies played a central role here in this task of 'psychological integration' of minority regions with China.

The 1950s saw the establishment of the majority of the autonomous areas, among others the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1955⁵⁹. The Great Leap Forward of 1958 was not well-received in minority areas and most ARs were brought under strong military control which was not lifted until after the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of renewed liberalisation in the late 1970s. Both the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution saw the strengthening of the role the CCP played in minority affairs. Generally speaking, "the CCP [to this day] views the assimilation of all nationalities into one great Chinese people as the ultimate solution of the nationality question" (Benson&Svanberg 1988:60); the premises for this attitude were formulated as, first, "since classes exist in every nationality, the attainment of equality and improvement for a nationality depended on the working people of that nationality reaching equality and development" (Mackerras 1994:152) and, second, that this could only be achieved through the 'revolutionary struggle' of the masses. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), this was understood to be an indictment of Uighur, Mongol, or Tibetan nationalist leaders and thus the "most assimilative period in the history of the PRC" (*ibid.*) was begun with "the idea that the various nationalities should follow their own culture a casualty of this madness" (Mackerras 1994:153).

After the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution the situation regarding policy on minorities once again took a turn for the better. Upon his return to power in 1978, Deng realised that the Cultural Revolution had nearly irrevocably alienated the national minorities and found himself compelled to concede a larger scope of autonomy so as to be able to guarantee the integrity of China as a whole and thereby support national defence in the event of war with the simmering hotspots around it: Vietnam, the Soviet Union, Taiwan. Also, he must have been aware of the importance of the international image of a unified China in the years to come, especially as relating to the Hong Kong handover, the Taiwan problem, and the, at that time albeit unlikely, break-up of the USSR and the ensuing chaos projected to appear on its Central Asian borders. The challenges to modern China were, and still are, to convince ethnic minorities that they will benefit more from cooperation than resistance. The Central Institute of Nationalities, founded in 1951 and closed during the Cultural Revolution, once again began training minority cadres and, in addition, Han Chinese who were instructed on minority languages and culture. Furthermore, in 1982 a new constitution was drawn up (with special legislation pertaining to national minorities added in 1984) granting the *minzu* more autonomy and comprising the following aspects (abridged from Heberer 1987:26-33) in respect to the central right of self-determination:

⁵⁹ In total, twenty-nine autonomous prefectures and fifty-four autonomous counties were set up in this period (Mackerras 1994:150). For a more detailed list see Benson&Svanberg 1988:54-8. Interestingly, Tibet did not become an AR until 1965, the eve of the Cultural Revolution.

1. Nationalisation of the organs of self-government: primary recruitment from among the nationality(ies) practising autonomy in respect to all State organs (including economics, education, health services, culture, jurisdiction, police, etc.) affecting not only cadres but also simple employees (i.e. teachers, technicians, etc.).
2. Statutory Right of Political Self-determination: within the Constitution and the unified control by the central authorities, the autonomous units may manage local affairs on their own excepting foreign politics and military activities but including economic and socio-political measures; equal rights for all nationalities; democratic rights equally applicable to all nationalities.
3. Economic Autonomy: administrative rights in terms of the management of natural resources; right to independently manage finances (i.e. taxation); right to manage industries and business with permission to withhold part of the profits made, and to use them for their own purposes.

In addition to these rights, autonomous regions were individually assessed to allow for regional and cultural differences. In Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang the local authorities have the right to control the growth of population stemming from immigration from other provinces because the growth of population exceeds the growth of production; this meant that non-residents were subject to heavy taxes and surcharges when doing business in those areas. Additionally, these three areas are allowed to conduct foreign trade with their local products. In Xinjiang, with the majority of the minority population being Moslem Uighurs, special marriage laws were enacted, and in Tibet a special law stipulates that at least 80 percent of the delegates to People's Congresses have to come from national minorities. All in all, the new Constitution with the new autonomy laws has formally granted the most liberal rights to minorities in comparison with any of the previous legislations and represented a paradigmatic change in the CCP's attitude towards class and nationality best summed up in an article from the *People's Daily* (July 5th 1980, as quoted in Mackerras 1994:155):

From the point of view of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, nationalities and classes have their own laws governing their emergence and extinction. In most cases, the various nationalities [...] came into being after a history of several hundred or thousand years, and will continue to exist for a long time to come [...]. The existence of classes is of much shorter duration than that of nationalities. After the withering away of the former, the latter will remain in existence for a long time. [...]

In the 1990s, minority policy has come under the increasing influence of economic policy because the government realised that "poverty [was] the continuing burden of the minorities in border regions" (Soled 1995, as quoted in Iredale *et al.* 2001:61) with the best strategy for developing the regions economically being "a strengthening of the state through recentralisation [after the decentralised impetus of the 1980s] to ensure both economic growth and survival as a nation-state" (Iredale *et al.* 2001:63). The fear that the enormous economic differentials between the coastal regions and the *hinterland* would lead to centrifugal forces endangering the PRC's survival was widely distributed among CCP cadres throughout the country and thus the emphasis has come to be placed on unity based on a new form of nationalism: "pride in the economic achievements of the past 20 years [since the Cultural Revolution] [...] and pride in the great tradition of China which has enabled its economic successes" (Iredale *et al.* 2001:64), especially in the light of the obvious failures of the Soviet system, and by extension traditional Communist ideology in general, to survive the rigours of economic and political strain in a globalising world.

Communist Control of Xinjiang

Until the mid-1950s the province was governed by military control committees who concerned themselves with securing local support for CCP authority in the region and armed resistance was dealt with harshly by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Support was mainly forthcoming from local national minority leaders who could thereby guarantee their own political survival (Benson&Svanberg 1988:63). Tensions arising over the over-representation of the (still as yet in the minority) Han population led to unrest mainly among the Uighurs and the increased repression of 'local nationalism' by the PLA as a result of this. Frequent demands by Uighurs to adopting a system of more autonomy as they perceived it to exist in the Soviet Union and which could serve as a model were dealt with radically during the Great Leap Forward, leading to a mass exodus of Uighurs, Kazakhs, Mongols, and Kyrgyz across the border to the Kazakh SSR (*ibid.*). Soviet activities of an unspecified nature and the willingness to accept these refugees was seen by the CCP as an attempt to 'split Xinjiang' and pull it into its own sphere of direct influence. The excesses of the Cultural Revolution, while still detrimental to individuals and ethnic relations, were over sooner in Xinjiang than in other parts of China due to circumstances peculiar to the region: clashes between Soviet border troops and the PLA took place in the late 1960s in the area of Tacheng on the border with the result that "this international threat to national security now took precedence over domestic politics" (Benson&Svanberg 1988:71). The entire border between the Soviet Union and Xinjiang was militarised to an hitherto unprecedented degree, a situation which was to last until 2002 (see Chapter 3.4). Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, policies towards minorities in Xinjiang have undergone a remarkable transformation with one of the most visible changes being the resurgence of public observance of religious belief and the reappearance of traditional dress amongst Uighurs and other minorities. Furthermore, refugees were invited to return to Xinjiang from Turkey and the Soviet Union where "a warm reception was assured them and such indeed has been the case" (Benson&Svanberg 1988:74). The economic integration of the province and the raising of the standard of living was made a priority but while these new policies are indeed beneficial to minority peoples in the province they are most warmly welcomed by the substantial Han population present which has increased dramatically in numbers throughout the decades of the PRC (see Chapter 3.4).

With the establishing of central control over Xinjiang taking on more permeating aspects as opposed to previous imperial and Republican regimes, ethnic identities were given a platform to thrive on an unprecedented regional level. As we have seen, traditional political identities were most important in a local context (and usually limited to individual oases). However, full political unification and the influx of institutions such as the PLA and modern communication lines and infrastructure have led to "the regional concentration of ethno-religious groups [...] reinforced by the Chinese policy of creating separate administrative divisions [...] where particular ethnic or religious groups are in the majority" (Warikoo 1998:270). As Gladney remarks, "the ethnonym [*Uighur*] was revived by the Soviets in the 1930s as a term for those peoples who had no name for themselves other than their locality, *Kashgar-lik*, *Turpan-lik* [...]" (1991:301) and was accepted by the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang since this acceptance brought

with it their recognition by the state as a *minzu* and the political status of an AR. Hence, the Chinese authorities who helped 'invent the tradition' of an Uighur ethnicity⁶⁰ simultaneously and probably inadvertently aided the mass dissemination of that identity. In Hann's words, "the Uighur identity has grown and consolidated itself as the Chinese presence in Xinjiang has been consolidated in the Socialist period" (1991:224). However, ethnic relations not just between the Han Chinese and Uighurs have been the result of central control over the province. Because official policy declares all minorities to have equal rights, the Uighurs are confronted with the reality of power-sharing in the entire XUAR⁶¹. Even the smallest ethnic groups have autonomous counties in Xinjiang and provincial representation is heavily contested (*ibid.*) with the general shared dislike of the Han often being the only common denominator between most groups.

⁶⁰ As Benson (1996:115-7) notes, this ethnonym has historically little to do with the Uighur Empire of the 9th century of which it is so reminiscent. The advantage of this historiographic construction was that the Chinese government could 'prove' ancient cultural ties between China proper and Xinjiang and thereby maintain its claim to sovereignty over the region.

⁶¹ The XUAR contains twelve of the official 56 *minzu*: Uighurs, Han, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Mongols, Hui (Chinese Muslims or Dungans), Uzbeks, Tajiks, Xibe, Manchus, Daur, and Tatars.

Chapter 3: Frontier Policies Through Time: The Discourse of Control

3.1. Frontier Policy from Han to Early Qing China

Tianxia and Space

With the unification of the proto-Chinese states under the Qin dynasty, the notion of *tianxia* ('all under the sky' or 'all-encompassing') became the central defining notion of a centralist state, allowing the populace of the Chinese world "to categorically ignore the possibility of a boundary to their area of sovereignty"⁶² (Franke 1953, as quoted in Schmidt-Glinzer 1997:16, my translation). The building of walls, which in China has a 2500 year history, served to organise the orbit of Chinese 'civilisation' around an imperial centre and represent it as a cultural space surrounded by oceans and, beyond concentric circles of diminishing civilisation, 'barbaric' peripheral peoples⁶³, and thereby "constructs China as a single and unified Other, its surface marked, but not divided by, dykes and dams" (Hay 1994:11). Furthermore, the importance of the regulation of units of land "was one of the main political, economic and culturally significant and symbolic acts of government. It was one of the means by which the state claimed legitimacy [...] and all space was *civilized* space, organized space" (Yates 1994:62). For the Qin dynasty, the observance of Confucian ideals⁶⁴ was synonymous with its obligation towards the stability of the unified state and thus "boundaries were perceived to form an interlocking and integrated structure that had to be maintained in order for the Qin to fulfil its role as unifier of the world and harmonizer of the cosmos" (Yates 1994:79). Preserving the order of the cosmos as formally dictated by *tianxia* entailed maintaining the balance between 'the Chinese' and 'the barbarians' and this meant preserving a boundary between the Chinese way of life and the non-Chinese way: "The preservation of territory depends on walls; the preservation of walls depends on arms. The preservation of arms depends on men, and the preservation of men depends on grain. Therefore, unless a territory is brought under cultivation, its walls will not be secure" (*The Book of Master Guan*, translated by Ricket and as quoted in Hay 1994:13).

Walls had thus become a paradigmatic symbol for the differentiation of the state from the steppe, agriculture from pastoralism, and hence the frontier region between northern China and the nomadic peoples of the steppe acquired a new systematic connection: the frontier resembled a bipolar region of semi-agriculturalism and semi-pastoralism, "an in-between, border world of the Inner Asian Frontier itself – a world permeated by the influences of both China and the

⁶² "grundsätzlich keine Grenzen des möglichen Herrschaftsbereichs anerkannt zu werden".

⁶³ There was further differentiation between 'inner barbarians', those peoples just beyond the frontier or within the frontier zone who employed semi-agriculture, and 'outer barbarians', the pastoral nomad society of the steppe. See Lattimore (1968:377).

⁶⁴ Hsü stresses the social and political obligations of Confucian rulers by stating that they "be moral, virtuous, and attentive to the needs of [their] subjects [...] and to follow the good precedents of the past; [they] should not run counter to traditions and social customs [...]. To neglect these restraints would be to justify remonstrance by the censors or a coup d'état or even a rebellion" (2000:46).

steppe but never permanently mastered by either" (Lattimore 1962a: 468). In northern China, this frontier zone is ecologically defined by a critical watershed with the rivers to the south flowing into the Yellow River and the streams to the north generally losing themselves inland and making agriculture increasingly difficult and dependent on sporadic rainfall. Ultimately, this zone then gives way to the Mongolian steppe where herding becomes the only rational economy. In Turkestan, the vast and inimical distances involved in travel between the oases led to a far deeper frontier zone: "In the nearer territory [of Gansu and Ningxia within the Great Wall] the mass of China is close enough to dominate each oasis-like area separately [...]. In Chinese Turkestan the potency of China is diminished by the greater distance, with the result that the influence of China over any one oasis has historically tended to be less important than the separateness of each oasis from other similar oases" (Lattimore 1962a:502).

Integration of the Periphery

These geographical and ecological considerations are the crux to understanding how Confucian China attempted to integrate the frontier regions into the Chinese orbit. According to Lattimore (1968:380), three central strategies were of central concern: *First*, because the radius of military action was much greater than that of the civil administration, military hegemony divided the frontier into two areas. On the one hand, an inner frontier where conquest and occupation was feasible due to the presence of cultivatable land and state-supporting resources and, on the other hand, an outer frontier where occupation became astronomically expensive and precarious and thus was only of interest to the state due to its strategic importance for the inner frontiers it surrounded. *Second*, because civil administration in the Confucian system possessed a regional rather than a national character, the solidity of the state was guaranteed, or in times of dynastic decay threatened, by the duplication of similar administrations from region to region. This "multiplication of the centre" (Schmidt-Glinzer 1997:33) was also evident in the fact that the senior bureaucrat of a region resembled 'a minor emperor'. Nevertheless, the posting of Chinese civil administrators to frontier regions was often seen as punishment in the form of exile and these individuals' loyalty to the imperial centre was frequently less than staunch. The danger arising from these frontier commanders constituted itself in the threat they represented to the Confucian cosmic order and often it was from them that the centre experienced most challenges to its authority.

Third, the economic interaction of the frontier areas with the rest of China was regional in nature⁶⁵. Due to this regionalisation, the inhabitants of the frontier were the main benefactors of economic transactions in the frontier areas. However, "the business in which they engaged, whether farming or trade, contributed more to the barbarian community than it did to the Chinese community" (Lattimore 1962a:240), thus explaining why frontier Chinese, especially in times of political turmoil and poor markets in China proper, often affiliated themselves quite readily with the 'barbarians'. The only gain for the centre was political in nature and consisted of the imperial

⁶⁵ The national markets of China were mainly concentrated to the south where rivers and easy terrain simplified the transportation of goods and minimised the costs.

court maintaining an economic hold over the frontier peoples. From a systemic point of view, however, the drawbacks for the centre were, especially in times of a perceived increased threat from nomadic invasion, immense: it was precisely this 'bastardisation'⁶⁶ which was so contrary to Confucian concepts of 'the proper way of doing things' that led Chinese authorities at the centre of power not only to fear the nomadic peoples' capabilities of adaptation but also to attempt to restrict the interaction of these people with the Chinese in the frontier region. In other words, "the Great Wall of China for centuries not only attempted to hold back invasion but to limit the spread of its own people [so as to prevent their breaking] away from the main body of the nation" (Lattimore 1962a:206).

The Effects of Expansion on the Centre

The expansion of China during the Han dynasty was propelled by the official policy of integrating the non-Chinese population by giving members of the tribal elite in the frontier regions positions in the local bureaucracy⁶⁷. Indeed, "the expansionistic frontier policy [...] was always also accompanied by policies of internal politics. Thus, the families of the victims of wars on the frontier were awarded with military grades, as were the 'barbarian' leaders who had subjected themselves to the state. The conflict between the world of the nomads and the agriculturist settlers on China's northern frontiers [...] remained an element of Chinese frontier and foreign policy until the nomadic peoples either disappeared, were assimilated, or were incorporated *within* the border of the expanding empire"⁶⁸ (Schmidt-Glinzer 1997:94, my translation, emphasis added). However, expansion of the state was seen as a mixed blessing: on the one hand, by extending the depth of the periphery, i.e. pushing the frontier further away from the centre, the state's stability and security would be increased. On the other hand, the more extended and thus the more tenuous the hold over the frontier, the higher the cost would prove to be to maintain it⁶⁹. In times of stability, i.e. dynastic viability, when the imperial administration within China proper was largely uncontested, the effort of allocating sufficient resources to maintain these frontier policies was met with relative stability in the frontier areas. Yet in times of internal turmoil, often linked with but not solely dependent on the economic strain placed on the Chinese population, maintaining these frontier policies was too great an economic burden for the imperial administration. It seems to be a fact that "Chinese dynasties did not normally weaken along the Frontier until they had first decayed at the core" (Lattimore 1962a:125). The

⁶⁶ Despite the very negative connotations of this word, I use the term to approximate what I interpret to be the Confucian attitude towards this phenomenon.

⁶⁷ A surprisingly similar strategy is used in today's China. See Chapter 3.4.

⁶⁸ "Die expansionistische Grenzpolitik [...] wurde immer auch durch innenpolitische Massnahmen begleitet. So verlieh man an Hinterbliebene von in Grenzkriegen Gefallenen sowie an sich unterwerfende Barbaren-Führer Ränge. Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen der Welt der Nomaden und den Ackerbau treibenden Siedlern an Chinas Nordgrenzen [...] blieb auch aus innenpolitischen Gründen ein Element chinesischer Grenz- und Aussenpolitik, bis diese nomadischen Völker verschwanden, sich assimilierten oder eben in die Grenzen des sich weiter ausdehnenden Reichs einbezogen wurden."

complex interplay between core and periphery from the Han dynasty until the last conquest of China by a foreign people, the Manchu, has invariably always led to ever-increasing tensions along the frontier and, ultimately, the implosion of Chinese control over these areas. The interest that successive Chinese dynasties have had in favouring the view of the northern frontiers as rigid, static boundaries to include that which was truly Chinese and exclude whatever could not be fitted into this mould neither realistically represents historical events nor the social and economic reality of the inhabitants, both Chinese and non-Chinese, of these frontier areas.

In Pursuit of Frontier Security

Early Qing China ably dealt with the threat to its northern frontiers, maybe because the Qing leaders and a large part of the court had had much experience with the mechanisms of steppe politics and its interconnections with China from the outside. According to Barfield (1989:276), it was recognised that four main threats existed beyond China's frontiers which could seriously jeopardise the continuation of the Qing dynasty:

1. Incessant conflict among the [Qalqa] rendered them vulnerable to civil strife and subversion.
2. Tibetan Buddhism, with its church hierarchy and monasteries throughout the Mongol world, provided an alternative political structure and the locus of revolt for otherwise loyal Mongols.
3. The [Jungar] tribes which bordered Mongolia were a direct military threat to the [Qalqa]. They had the strength and the desire to incorporate northern Mongolia into a new steppe empire which would endanger [Qing] control of southern Mongolia and put China's own frontier at risk.
4. Russian expansion into Siberia and Manchuria put new pressure on the borders of Mongolia.

The search for a solution to all these problems led Qing China to provoke a series of wars that led to the annexation of huge areas of Inner Asia, mainly in Turkestan, in pursuit of frontier security. The Qalqa were forced into submission by the systematic destruction of their traditional bonds to the tribal elite and tribal units as represented by their reorganisation under the 'banner system' with the banner leaders "completely dependent on the [Qing] dynasty for their continued survival" (*ibid.*). The political importance of Buddhism as a link between Tibet and the Mongol world went back to the time of the Yuan dynasty but only under the late Ming did the religion gain a firm foothold in the steppe. The Qing court was well aware of these ties and succeeded in playing off the Fifth Dalai Lama against the newly reincarnated Panchen Lama. When the Dalai Lama died, his successor, after a failed attempt to exile the child to China, was placed under intense Manchu supervision and became an amenable tool for the Qing court to employ against the Jungars who were by this time threatening to invade China all along the north-western frontier (from the Tarim Basin and Gansu to Mongolia) and from Tibet. The Jungar conquest of the Muslim oases of Turkestan hinged on exploiting civil strife in the nominally Chinese administrated region. Because trade with China was conducted by merchants from Turkestan

⁶⁹ Both of these arguments are found in political debates in successive Chinese dynasties right into the 19th century.

who needed protection for their caravan routes, the patronage of powerful warriors from the steppe was welcomed, particularly in that time of weak Chinese authority. With the strengthening of the dynasty and the assertion of its power within China proper, the Qing government with the added advantage of Tibetan support was able to reassert its hold over increasingly large parts of Eastern Turkestan and southern Mongolia, and the Jungars were pushed back. The dynasty's greatest problem in this endeavour was, however, not Jungar resistance but the ignorance of Chinese commanders and generals: "personal experience with conditions in Mongolia was rarely found among the Chinese military commanders under native dynasties because service at the border and knowledge of the nomads was culturally devalued. [With only very few exceptions,] Chinese officials viewed the land north of the border as *terra incognita*, the only region in East Asia that continually rejected Chinese conceptions of world order" (Barfield 1989:285). To combat this problem, the Qing dynasty went to great lengths to familiarise border commanders with the peoples they were dealing with.

The Taming of the Frontier

The campaign against the Jungars in the Northwest was afflicted with the same problems earlier dynasties had encountered in their campaigns against other steppe empires. Two main problems are of interest to us here: *First*, the fact of the Jungar's highly superior mobility versus the static nature of Chinese control over Turkestan. As Perdue states, it is probably a fact that "larger boundaries offered space for peasants to flee exploitation at the core by moving to the frontier [in addition to the] population density gradient push[ing] marginal settlers from the core to the periphery" (1996:770). The Qing court took an ambivalent stance on this fact: on the one hand, by supporting the settling of the frontier region by these people and thus introducing settled agriculture where possible the frontier could be 'tamed' and brought into the Chinese world order. On the other hand, these frontier regions were the least subject to control by the centre and most likely to revolt or be 'negatively' influenced (from the centre's perspective, that is) by the confrontation with other world orders⁷⁰. As we shall see in the following section, Han colonisation of these frontier regions took on a new fervour with the disappearance of the Jungar threat. The Qing government made extensive use of frontier settlers and took advantage of the pressure these agriculturalists put on nomadic pastoralists in the competition for land in their winning-over of the Qalqa and, later, the pushing back of the Jungars: aid was offered by the bureaucracy in settling disputes over pasturelands and thus the mostly independent nomadic pastoralists came under increased domination by the administration⁷¹. *Second*, the question of logistical practicality was greatly enhanced by the construction of a supply route through the Gansu corridor and into Turkestan. This was essential in counteracting strategies of nomadic warfare so similar to guerrilla tactics. Thus the importance of the fall of Urumqi in 1722. From a

⁷⁰ As Perdue (*ibid.*) notes, all the major rebellions which broke out in China from the 17th to 19th centuries originated in peripheral areas only incompletely subdued by the centre, such as Taiwan, Gansu, Xinjiang, and Guangxi. A similar problem existed in Russia in about the same time span.

⁷¹ In fact, this was roughly the same strategy (in an inverted form) as the steppe empires had used for centuries to pressurise and control the oasis-states of Turkestan. See Perdue (1996:774).

theoretical point of view, the expansion of China's permanent frontiers, defined here by the centre's ability to claim authority *right up to* the border, was made possible due to the expansion and replication of social and economic structures in the newly conquered territories. Naturally, this expansion of the Chinese system and world order into regions hitherto only tenuously, if at all, held by the centre in Beijing by military expeditionary forces did not go uncontested, either by the peoples inhabiting these regions such as the Muslim Uighurs and Kazakhs or by the new power which was beginning to make itself felt in China from beyond the Jungar empire: Romanov Russia.

3.2. Frontier Policy in Qing China

The Tributary System

Prior to China's disastrous diplomatic encounter with European empires pushing into eastern Asia, 'foreign relations', that is, avenues of political contact, between China and the states surrounding it had been instituted as a hierarchical system with China occupying the position of leadership and states such as Korea, Annam (Vietnam), Siam, Burma, and other 'peripheral' states in East and Southeast Asia accepting the status of junior members. This conformed to Confucian notions of proper relations between individuals and, thus, the basic principle underlying this system "was inequality of states rather than equality of states as in the modern West, and relations between the members were not governed by international law but by what is known as the tributary system" (Hsü 2000:130). In accordance with these Confucian ideals the Chinese emperor was seen not only as the emperor of the Chinese but rather as the emperor of all civilization and his role "was to maintain the harmony of [*tianxia*] through the proper performance of rituals [meaning that] unsinicized peoples interacted with the Chinese government only through the carefully choreographed strictures of tribute missions to [Beijing]" (Paine 1996:50)⁷². In Confucian thought the tribute system insulated the centre of civilisation, China, from the 'lawless' world beyond its boundaries, the barbarians' abode, by minimising any interaction between the centre and the periphery of civilisation. Infractions of this system could not be tolerated by the court because it indicated that unrest had penetrated from the periphery, a sure indictment of the emperor's inability to rule *tianxia*. The tribute system was the mechanics of the celestial commandment of *tianxia* and entailed that under it China could have no *fixed* boundaries "but rather a web of bilateral relations with a changing assortment of frontier peoples. This web was organised in a concentric arc of frontier territory surrounding China proper" (*ibid.*), the size of which oscillated with dynastic fortune. This web was meant to guarantee China's superior cultural status, its security, and its inviolability from some vaguely imagined 'outside'.

⁷² The most graphic of these rituals was the performance by emissaries of the kowtow (the scraping of one's forehead on the ground at the emperor's feet) before the emperor. This was also probably the single largest area of friction in China's early contacts with Europeans.

The Tradition of Vague Frontiers

It was this system that the Russians encountered when they attempted to establish contact with a court that "mistook the Russians for a traditional enemy of the Central Asian variety" (Paine 1996:52). A foreign entity named Russia which was outside the Chinese orbit was initially unimaginable and so this "foreign polity was simply considered a frontier polity further removed geographically, and equally subject to tribute payments" (Wade 2000:31). Thus, when China was confronted by the fact that Russia saw its borders in terms of definite lines drawn on a map and legitimised by treaties, the Qing court decided to operate within the traditional system of vague and shifting frontiers, "which were given up in times of troubles to 'placate the barbarians' only to be retaken at a later date when it was possible to 'bridle the barbarians' once again" (Paine 1996:69). China was, however, not dealing with a nomadic steppe empire but rather an entity which was technologically superior in terms of mobilisation and determined to gain territory. Furthermore, although the traditional policy of *yiyi zhiyi* was still being applied in many instances, the ignorance of Europe by Chinese officials prevented them from employing this, in the case of Anglo-Russian rivalry, possibly very successful strategy against Russia⁷³. Instead, the Qing court decided to remain faithful to the traditional system of bilateral relations, a tactic which actually benefited Russia greatly in pursuing the settlement of its border issues without the interference of the other European states. In addition, China's legal system differed considerably by placing considerable emphasis on 'acts of moral or ritual impropriety'⁷⁴ and left disagreements in commercial matters to the *hong* ('guilds') which arbitrated not by abstract legal principles but rather in terms of *guanxi* ('personal relations'). Similarly to the structure of 'foreign relations', *guanxi* operated (and still does today in everyday China) as a web of interrelationships based on common ties. The primary consequence of the tribute system and the related legal structures and their effect on diplomatic negotiations with Russia (and Britain, in the south and along the maritime frontier) was complete mutual incomprehension and therefore inflexibility with regard to the threat posed by the European 'invaders'. Furthermore, from the mid-19th century onwards, the Qing court was in an increasingly precarious position with regard to the treaties it was forced to sign with Russia, with one of the main issues being the handing over of what was seen as the Manchu homeland under the Treaty of Aigun: the loss of this area was, from a theoretical point of view, equivalent to the loss of the mandate from heaven to rule, and to admit this would be equal to admitting the inferiority of China's position in comparison to Russia.

By the late 19th century, both China and Russia were empires which had acquired a vast territorial extent largely because of the requirements of border defence. In both cases, expansion into Central Asia, Siberia, and Mongolia had derived its impetus from the quest for defensible borders. Russia's situation was that of a huge country with few natural boundaries and vast plains

⁷³ Chinese knowledge of European affairs was so poor that they were fatally misinformed about Russia's relative strength *vis-à-vis* Britain, a fact that cost them dearly under the Treaty of Beijing.

⁷⁴ The Qing court's attitude to European legal systems was that it was too overwhelmingly penal in emphasis. See Paine (1996:79-82).

to defend. The subjugation of nomadic peoples was seen as the best guarantee of the security of the Russian plains north of Kazakhstan and, between 1858 and 1864, Russia acquired 350'000 square miles on the Siberian periphery by way of treaties with China. On the other hand, China's northern frontier was the only area lacking natural boundaries in the form of mountains or ocean until it was extended to the rim of the Pamirs in south-western Xinjiang, the Tian Shan in the west, and the Altay in the Northwest; hence also the importance of the Amur in Manchuria. The Gansu corridor had been a constant irritant in the eyes of successive Chinese dynasties due to its traversability by mounted cavalry and thus Xinjiang was seen as a more feasible, and indeed cheaper, defensive option (see map 1 in Appendix II). The successful defence of Xinjiang, as we have seen, entailed a greater degree of control over Mongolia, in particular of the territory of what is today the independent state of Outer Mongolia. While the modern-day province of Inner Mongolia (*Nei Menggu*) was tied closely to Qing administrative structures and institutions⁷⁵, Outer Mongolia enjoyed considerably more leeway and Chinese rule there until the late Qing was of the traditional 'divide and rule' kind (*yiyi zhiyi*) and served, as we have seen above, as a militarised buffer zone. The Qing government enforced ethnic segregation to maintain Mongolia as a patchwork of mutually hostile groups so that they "could never again unite to pose a threat to China, [thereby preventing] a resurgence of Mongol military power" (Paine 1996:278), an early example of the employment of the Trans-frontier Factor. This, however, also seriously weakened Mongolia's defences to outside invasion and left it vulnerable to Russian incursions.

Military Occupation of Xinjiang

The original basic Manchu policy in Xinjiang can be described in two phases: first a primarily military occupation of the region beginning with the overthrow of the Jungars, and second the expansion of control over the area after the Ili Crisis to cement Chinese claims to its right over Xinjiang. In the first phase, emphasis was laid primarily on holding the natural frontier line along Xinjiang's western rim. Logistically, if this line were broken a defence of the major cities in Xinjiang would become very difficult indeed (see map 2 in Appendix II). The strategic value of the Ili valley was of paramount importance in this endeavour because it provided access to the lines of communication between south-western Xinjiang (the Tarim Basin and Kashgar) and central Xinjiang (Urumqi) through the Muzart Pass in the Tian Shan; it also represented the easiest route of access between China and the Central Asian steppes since the remainder of the frontier followed impassable natural barriers. Furthermore, the Ili valley constituted one of the largest and most fertile oases of Central Asia and was the richest area in Xinjiang. With the Russian occupation China saw its control over most of Xinjiang in danger. Hence, the adamant insistence of Russia to retain the area and China's adamant response to oust the Russians from it. The Qing court was well aware of the inherent importance of the entire Ili valley to Russia's territorial ambitions and had learned from the disastrous Treaties of Aigun and Beijing. They had

⁷⁵ In fact, this is due mainly to historical ties between Inner Mongolia and northern China which had been cemented by the Yuan dynasty, which had arisen from Inner Mongolia. Outer Mongolia had been far less integrated into the following Ming dynasty and even the Qing only tenuously held the region.

also learned to treat demands for commercial penetration with suspicion because they generally served as a precursor to permanent territorial acquisitions. Their fears may be summed up as follows and represent the guidelines of general Chinese mistrust of Russian intentions well into the 20th century and the Soviet era (Qing officials, as quoted in Paine 1996:143):

China and Russia set the border during the reign of [QianLong] and did so again in 1864. China and Russia have already reset the border several times. Statutes given imperial authorization should be respected forever, but now Russia has invaded again and wants to reset the boundary. In the future, the more we rearrange the border, the more unclear it will become. [...] Since the Russians did not honor the old statutes, why would they respect the new ones? Therefore, the Russians will not stop their invasion until they have occupied all of our territory. [...] Now the Russians are arbitrarily requesting the right to use [important trade routes] in every province [and plan] to spy thoroughly on all the strategic areas in the northern and southern provinces as if these were uninhabited areas.

China had realised that in European, and specifically Russian, law borders once fixed were precise and immutable except by war and that, thus, treaties dealing with borders were to be treated with the utmost circumspection. The direct consequence arising from the Ili Crisis was the realisation that the Qing court could no longer rely on the defunct tributary system to ward off territorial encroachments and "that retaining control over [Xinjiang] would require closer administrative ties with the rest of China" (Paine 1996:165). Hence, in 1884, for the first time Xinjiang ceased to be a vaguely defined frontier area surrounding the approaches to China proper and was incorporated into the Qing empire as a full-fledged province. A paradigmatic shift had taken place with the focus moving from purely military occupation to a more aggressive integration of the region into China as a political entity in the European sense. This entailed an intensification of basic Qing hegemony over the inhabitants of Xinjiang (Chu 1966:18-22), leading to what Paine (1996:166) has described as the adoption of the practices of Russian imperialism, the second phase of the basic Manchu policy.

Ethnic Bloc Policy in Xinjiang

In this extended second phase, emphasis was laid on keeping a delicate balance of power between the various peoples in the region so that the Qing government could rule them all and retain control over this conspicuously volatile region. The western border to Central Asia in particular followed geographic features and disregarded ethnic boundaries and long established ethnic ties by nomadic peoples traversing the formidable natural barriers. Both expanding empires saw themselves confronted by the reality that "these peoples had indisputable ties with each other that were historically far stronger than any ties they had with Russia or China" (Paine 1996:115). As Imart shows, the reasons for this, here in the case of tsarist Russia, are to be found in the attitude towards the frontiers of Empire (1987:14):

"The Tsars were not 'gatherers of the Russian lands' [but rather] annexed indifferently whatever came to hand, without ever bothering about the ethnic ties of the inhabitants. All territories were deemed 'res nullius' and this process of self-stimulated territorial chain-reaction accurately described by a Tsarist officer quoted as saying 'our border strides forward together with us' (as quoted in Gooch 1879-1919:24) exemplifies a very particular understanding of what a border is."

By the mid-19th century, Xinjiang incorporated an ethnic mix including Uighurs, various Mongol peoples, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz who, generally mutually hostile to one another, shared a common

overriding animosity toward Qing overlordship with periodic uprisings by every group involved directed against the Chinese. Initially, the Qing governments were very circumspect in their policies towards these ethnic groups: while Han immigration was encouraged and settlers were given financial incentives to move there, the government "attempted to maintain clear cultural and physical boundaries between Han and non-Han natives [and] viewed the various peoples brought under its rule as discrete ethnic blocs, components of a greater empire" (Millward 1996:123)⁷⁶. It tried to protect non-Han natives from depredations by the commercially more powerful migrants but this proved to be extremely difficult considering the level of reported corruption among Chinese officials in the region⁷⁷. Dissatisfaction among all ethnic groups was high, including amongst the Han as the government still pursued the policy of allowing only Manchus into the ranks of the provincial government with Han Chinese being forced to serve as junior officers (Benson&Svanberg 1988:40). This did not change until the late 19th century when the Qing court, under the increased financial strain induced by rebellions and foreign indemnity demands, actively pursued a policy of increased agriculturalist Han immigration so as to achieve "a concomitant strengthening of the agricultural tax base [to finance and] enhance Qing control of the frontier territory" (Millward 1996:125). Increased financial burdens, however, engendered more unrest in the volatile frontier regions of Manchuria, Mongolia, and Xinjiang, and increased migration strained the Qing's 'ethnic bloc' policy and exacerbated tensions with the indigenous peoples⁷⁸. Nevertheless, the fiscal and military advantages overrode the concerns of the hard-pressed Qing policy makers.

The Role of the Local Elite

A major element of Qing frontier policy was the implementation of 'indirect governing institutions', with members of local elites or tribal chiefs (known in Muslim Xinjiang as *begs*) being employed as Qing officials (Millward 1996:123) who were responsible for their respective 'ethnic bloc', or the ethnic group in that specific region. Central control over these local elites was tenuous at best, with the presence of the military representing Beijing's strongest claim to a

⁷⁶ In fact, this 'ethnic bloc' policy and its segregationary nature was evident in all major Han settlements of the time, most importantly Urumqi, Kashgar, Hami, Yining, Tacheng, and Kuqa; all these cities were marked by the fact that they were meticulously partitioned into an Old City in which indigenous inhabitants resided, and a walled-in New City which incorporated Han officials with their families and the armed forces. As any visitor to the area can attest to, this partitioning is probably even more evident today in nearly all the cities of Xinjiang, albeit on a far larger scale with most of the local industries and services located in the modern part and the old sections being relegated to 'quaint' and 'primitive' suburbs.

⁷⁷ See Paine:1996:117-8. Many Han settlers were in fact criminals who had been exiled to Xinjiang for crimes against the Qing court.

⁷⁸ I think it is important to emphasise the fact (as Millward 1996, Paine 1996, and Mackerras 1994 do by making use of Manchu sources) that increased Han in-migration was financially and not racially motivated, as Benson&Svanberg (1988), who only use Western sources, seem to think. Naturally, the imperialistic advantages of a Chinese population cannot be disregarded, but the Manchus, as is evinced by their banner strategy of restricting positions of power to Manchus

semblance of hegemonic order. Only when this broke down did it become possible for local *begs*, such as the infamous Yakub *beg*, to assert their own power and challenge Qing control over Xinjiang⁷⁹. Aggressive Russian activities on Xinjiang's frontier must be seen in this context: the Russian government expediently recognised Yakub *beg*'s claim to power and simultaneously pursued an active policy of placing the Chinese military under economic pressure by monopolising supply routes and increasing food prices, thereby extracting territorial concessions from the rebels *and* from Beijing. After the Ili Crisis, the Russian occupation, and China's subsequent diplomatic victory in the Treaty of St. Petersburg, all the Sino-Russian border regions from Manchuria to Kashgar were opened up to Han settlement. This "represented a conscious policy to use Han settlement [...] to retain Chinese control over them [and thus] prevent easy Russian annexation" (Paine 1996:181). The adoption of the afore-mentioned imperialistic Russian strategies by the Qing government in the frontier areas must, therefore, be seen as a *reactive* policy and not as part of a natural Chinese drive towards empire. Similarly, in its attempt to incorporate Xinjiang as an 'integral' and inherently 'Chinese' part of the Qing empire, "long-term hegemony over the region depended on convincing both Han and non-Han subjects that the conquest [and further retention (S.P.)] was 'natural', foreordained, and irresistible" (Perdue 1996:783, my addition); thus, the foundation of hegemonic and inclusionist historiography still actively proposed and pursued by 21st century Communist China was laid in the late Qing period and frontier policy from this period onwards evinced extrinsic rather than intrinsic imperialistic qualities.

3.3. Frontier Policy in the ROC

Unlike preceding dynastic governments, the GMD found itself confronted with a plethora of new problems arising at its frontiers. China in the early 20th century was heavily exposed to international attention in regard to its internal policies. On the one hand, the Soviet Union had developed a system by which it successfully (in the political sense) ruled over its Central Asian domains and, on the other hand, large parts of north-eastern China were under the direct occupational control of Japan. Simultaneously, the independence of Outer Mongolia, the Mongolian People's Republic, which had been brought about by direct Soviet intervention and was openly supported by Moscow, 'threatened' the stability of the ROC's entire northern border to the Soviet Union. The importance of a policy dealing with 'appeasing' the minorities in the border regions cannot be overstated, for "compared with the Han, the minorities occupied considerably more of that area which the governments of the Republic of China regarded as legitimately part of their national territory" (Mackerras 1994:53).

and not Han Chinese, did not equate the *presence* of the Han as such with the existence of a 'more Chinese' region.

⁷⁹ Bulag (1998:76) makes an interesting case for the mechanisms of the break-down of Qing ritual control over the religious Tibetan and Mongol elite in Qinghai and its implications for subsequent Republican control over the area; thus, the shift from the political institution of a religious cult to a symbolic representation of 'nationalities unity' made central hegemonic discourse possible.

The Desire for Territorial Integrity

The GMD's insistence on territorial integrity was so vital to the Republican government that it outweighed all idealistic considerations of policy (autonomy and self-determination) on the minorities in the border regions. In fact, "the identity of the minorities was irrelevant, except insofar as it was opposed to Chinese unity, in which case it needed suppression" (*ibid.*). The Republican government was convinced of its right to inherit the territories ruled by the Qing dynasty and subsequently regarded any infringement on this territory as a direct challenge to its authority to rule. Officially, the term *bianjiang* ('borders') was used to designate the territories which were home to the minorities, which included the Manchurian provinces, Inner and Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet⁸⁰. In its attempt to tie the *bianjiang* more closely to central rule and thereby preclude any loss of territory whatsoever, new structural administrative bodies were created, such as the creation of the province of Qinghai in 1928 and the extension of Xizang (Tibet) into parts of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. These reforms were based on the assumption that the inclusion of areas settled by Han would prove to have assimilatory advantages, thereby facilitating central control and making the promise of autonomy redundant. However, central control remained tenuous throughout the entire Republican period and the government remained unable to implement any policy at all in most areas.

Migration and Trans-Frontier Networks, 1911-1949

Russian policy on the demarcation of the Xinjiang border to Russian Central Asia was made on the basis of topography and not ethnicity and is best summed up in the words of Babkov⁸¹ (as quoted in Paine 1996:91):

"The direction of the boundary depends on political considerations and, in view of the importance of government interests, it is necessary to sacrifice the local interests, in essence, of the most inconsequential part of the boundary inhabitants. In this connection, the separation of [Kyrgyz] groups by the boundary [...] is necessary owing to political necessity."

These 'inconsequential' Kyrgyz, however, along with the Kazakhs were to figure strongly in Stalin's policy of the 'Trans-frontier Factor' as described above. With the break-down of central policy implementation on minorities, the treatment of the Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other peoples in Xinjiang was open to the interpretation of the warlords in Urumqi. With their dependence on the Soviet Union, the dual bridgehead that the fractioning of especially the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz represented came into play. Traditionally, "because the border reflects geographic and not ethnic considerations, these ethnic minorities have had much more in common with their counterparts across the border than with their culturally and geographically remote central governments" (Paine 1996:345), even the local ones in Tashkent (or Almaty) or Urumqi. The warlords, while never happy to acknowledge explicit central control by the GMD, were neither interested in the establishment of an independent Xinjiang because this would have severely limited their

⁸⁰ Yunan, Guizhou, and Guangxi were not included because those minorities were seen as having been assimilated. See *ibid.*

⁸¹ Babkov was a senior colonel in the Siberian Corps and one of the signatories of an 1864 treaty delimiting the Sino-Russian Xinjiang border.

possibilities for personal power⁸². Thus, their policies towards minorities were always repressive and assimilative in nature, albeit probably less so than the implementation of GMD policies would have proved to be (Mackerras 1994:100-4, and Benson&Svanberg 1988:49-53).

However, despite all this repressive policy it was not possible "to stem the continued growth of Muslim Turkic nationalism in [Xinjiang] which was spurred on by a conference of Turkic Muslims of Central Asia held at Tashkent in 1921 [when] native renaissance became sophisticated enough to rise above local particularism and reach for a common denominator, which was the historic but long extinct name 'Uighur'" (Soucek 2000:270). This portrays a typical example of the functioning of the afore-mentioned dual bridgehead: the strengthening, or re-invention, of an ethnonym served the purpose of defining a minority's identity *vis-à-vis* the encroaching Han presence. The introduction of these notions was accomplished by the instruction of Uighur refugees in Soviet Central Asia (Baabar 1999:396). The migration of Kazakh pastoralists into Xinjiang in the late 19th century due to the increased immigration of Russian peasants onto traditional pasture lands intensified the ethnic trans-frontier networks, with the migrant Kazakhs pushed deep into Chinese territory by political unrest and Russian claims on the Chinese frontier (Svanberg 1988:112-13). Similarly, Kyrgyz pastoralists found themselves on the Chinese side of the solidifying border for much the same reasons. However, with the instability of the Republican period and their dislocation stemming from Mongolian independence⁸³ many Kazakhs moved from the reaches of the Altay to the south, an area already populated by Chinese farmers. The Chinese government had realised the threat of these Kazakh groups being used by the Soviet Union to support their own possible claims on the Ili valley where many had finally settled and decided that only a small number would be allowed to re-emigrate to Soviet Central Asia (Svanberg 1988:114)⁸⁴. On the other hand, the last warlord of Xinjiang, Sheng ShiCai, regarded "the Kazakhs as an obstacle to the peaceful development and construction of Xinjiang *as well as* to his continued friendship with the USSR (Benson&Svanberg 1988:52, emphasis added); the Kazakhs were in the unenviable position of being *personae non grata* in both the Soviet Union and the ROC, with the former using them to pressurise the Urumqi regime and the latter suspecting them of collaboration⁸⁵. The pressure exerted by the Soviet Union took the form of support for the Kazakh rebellion against Urumqi aided by goods and arms supplied by the Soviet Union through Kazakhs living in the Mongolian People's Republic (Baabar 1999:396-8). This strategy once again portrays an example of the instrumentalisation of trans-frontier networks to accomplish political gains.

⁸² All three of the warlords between 1911 and 1944 were Han Chinese, a fact that would have cost them dearly in an independent Muslim state of East Turkestan.

⁸³ Kazakhs and Mongols still regarded each other as traditional enemies. See Finke (1999:105-6).

⁸⁴ This oscillation of Kazakh families will be of interest to us in the field research chapter. See also next section below.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, today's Kazakhstan seems to regard the Kazakhs living in Xinjiang with a similar kind of fear: the fear of them serving as a precursor to increased Han penetration of the former Soviet Central Asia as I was able to observe during my field research. See Chapter 4.

The Nationalist Attitude to Soviet Involvement in Mongolia

In 1919, the Soviet government issued the Karakhan Declaration stating that "the government of the workers and peasants has then declared null and void all secret treaties concluded with Japan, China and ex-Allies, the treaties which were to enable the Russian government of the Tsar and his Allies to enslave the peoples of the East and principally the people of China" (as quoted in Paine 1996:320). This was declared with a view to gaining China's silent support in the suppression of the anti-Bolsheviks in the Far East. With the increased success of the Red Army, Soviet generosity towards renegotiating the 'Unequal Treaties' waned and, significantly, by the mid-1920s the Soviets were disclaiming the Declaration's authenticity⁸⁶. One of the main points of contention was the state of Mongolian autonomy and Soviet Russia's desire for a zone of exclusion in Inner Mongolia. As a result, the GMD government "perceived the Soviet government to be acting in precisely the same manner toward China as the late tsarist government, [considering] the Soviet policies to equally imperialistic and, therefore, equally inimical to Chinese interests" (Paine 1996:324). For the Chinese, the ensuing transformation of Outer Mongolia into a Soviet client-state and Soviet reluctance to hand over the railway concessions in Manchuria⁸⁷ was simply the latest step in a long history of Russian expansion into Chinese territories. Soviet economic imperialism in Mongolia and Manchuria, that is, the exploitation of natural resources and the prejudicial treatment of Chinese trade interests, continued unabated until the end of World War II.

3.4. Frontier Policy in the PRC

The Development of Minority Scripts

Part of the policy of the Trans-frontier Factor, as we have seen, was the insulating of the peoples 'shared' by both the Soviet Union and China. One of the most efficient ways of accomplishing this was the development of scripts and the subsequent policy of script changes so as to, in my opinion, complicate simple communication between trans-frontier networks. To shed light on the intricate mechanisms involved a brief overview of historical script changes is necessary. During the 19th century, the intellectuals of Central Asia (including Xinjiang) used a common literary language called Chagatay, an archaic form of Turkic heavily influenced by its promotion as an elite language by the Mongols during their control over the region (Benson&Svanberg 1988:94-5) and written in Arabic. In the 1920s, script changes were implemented in the Soviet Union and Turkey to adapt the Arabic writing of modern Turkic to the realities of modern pronunciation and, in 1926, the modified Arabic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet only to be once again replaced ten years later by the Cyrillic alphabet in the Soviet Union representing a crucial break with the traditions of Chagatay which up until then had served as a common denominator in the Turkic world (Benner 1996:52).

⁸⁶ The ensuing argument over this lasted until the demise of the Soviet Union with Moscow claiming the original document (kept in Taipei's archives today) to be a fake. This was to cause considerable tensions between the Soviet Union and the PRC in the decades to follow.

⁸⁷ Finally accomplished in 1955 after the Korean War.

In Xinjiang, the use of the Arabic script continued until the mid-1950s when the Chinese decided to introduce a modified version of the Cyrillic script used across the border for Kazakhs and Uighurs so as to enable the introduction of books printed in the Soviet Union which had had great success in combating illiteracy. However, the worsening Sino-Soviet relationship in the late 1950s, the time of the Great Leap Forward and increased flight of said ethnic groups across the border led the Chinese authorities to introduce a Latin-based script based on the *pinyin* system increasingly used for the phonetic transcription of *putonghua*. This represented a clear break with language policy in the Soviet Union and was designed to now *prevent* the influx of books published abroad which might influence nationalist and separatist aspirations among the minorities concerned and thus was politically motivated (Bellér-Hann 1991:74). Simultaneously, the *pinyin* system for the Kazakh and Uighur languages and the subsequent influence of *putonghua* on these languages in the form of new lexical elements and structural changes in their grammar went hand-in-hand with a similar process of Russification of modern Kazakh in the Soviet Union, thereby evoking two different trends in the development of the languages on either side of the border. During the Cultural Revolution most minority policies were in a state of stasis due to suppression of any form of political and cultural identity amongst minority peoples in the PRC but by 1974 large-scale acceptance of the new Latin script was officially reported in Xinjiang (*ibid.*). According to Benson&Svanberg, however, local acceptance of what was regarded as assimilatory linguistic policies, i.e. the *pinyin* system, "was never widely accepted by Xinjiang Turkic speakers [and] in 1982 the authorities decided to reintroduce the Arabic script again among the Uighurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz" (1988:97). Today, it is this script which is used exclusively in the entire area of Xinjiang and Bellér-Hann (1991:80), quoting individuals interviewed in Xinjiang shortly after the latest reform, asserts that this change must be seen as a victory for primarily Uighur national identity *vis-à-vis* the Chinese state and as a manifestation of increased autonomy and the possibility of political participation by national minorities in the PRC. However, this latest script change also reinforces the cultural separation of Turkic-speaking peoples and complicates trans-frontier communication with such communities beyond the PRC's borders.

To understand the reasons behind the numerous script changes along the Soviet frontier and their effect on Chinese script policies and their importance for the border, a brief analysis of the role that 'language engineering' plays in minority policies is necessary with a focus on Uighur and Kazakh scripts. The formulation of language policies towards minorities plays a central role in the Communist ideology of developing nationalities so as to better incorporate them into the Socialist state. According to Ma&Dai88, "without a language of common understanding for the members of a nationality, that nationality cannot develop [...] and contribute to the creation of a splendid and glorious historical culture for the motherland" (1988:89). The argument continues with a focus on the boundaries between nationalities and the corresponding boundaries between languages: "when nations [i.e. the totality of all members of a nationality] merge and become

88 Both Ma, Dai, and Fu are linguists affiliated with the department of minority languages at the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing and thus represent the 'official line' on this topic.

assimilated, their languages do not immediately follow suit" (Ma&Dai 1988:90-1) and thus "we should look at the division and unification of languages from the perspective of the division and unification of nationalities" (Ma&Dai 1988:98). Hence, the standardisation of any one language must comply with the incorporation of this nationality into the Chinese nation-state. The connection between the territoriality of a people and the language they speak is a central part of Communist ideology, underlined by the statement that, in the case of trans-frontier languages, "difference in environment [entails] certain different characteristics" (Ma&Dai 1988:100) which stem from the influence of the "language of the mainstream nationality – the Han" (*ibid.*). The importance of *putonghua*, the language of this 'mainstream nationality', in language policy and the development of minority scripts is evinced by the statement that "formulating writing systems not only does not hamper the study of Han characters, it also improves Han language and script study" (Fu 1988:73). This represents the central policy of the state in facilitating the aim of spreading "the party's voice and socialist culture's technical knowledge [...] to the border areas [*bianjiang*] where the Han language is little understood by minority languages [i.e. speakers of minority languages]" (*sic*, Fu 1988:75).

Generally speaking, the formation of minority languages must then be seen as a strategy to further the state's interests and hegemony over minorities' identities. To reach this objective of strengthening its hold over the region, the PRC "needed to 'educate' the people and in Xinjiang, where Chinese was only spoken by a very small minority, only a reform of the local languages would serve" (Duval 1996:144). In the Soviet Union, language reform and new scripts served the ultimate policy, "in terms of the Soviet Union's policy of cultural absorption, of cutting off the Turkic peoples from their common Turco-Islamic sources and reducing the influence of Koranic schools" (Duval 1996:142), a clear break with the Islamic past of these peoples. In Xinjiang, due to the fact that modern Uighur was 'created' in the Soviet Union in the 1920s (*ibid.*), the Chinese authorities had to limit trans-frontier influences and this was accomplished by script changes and the promotion of Chinese language-borrowing for the creation of new terms in both Uighur and Kazakh⁸⁹. Furthermore, for political reasons translation from Chinese has become the major form of Modern Uighur and Kazakh language materials in Xinjiang today (Duval 1996:154) and thus these languages differ substantially from those forms present in today's Kazakhstan where anyway Russian forms the dominant language even between Kazakhs.

The Militarisation of the Border

After an initial phase of active support and mutual agreement on basic issues, the CCP increasingly came to regard the Soviet Union not as an 'elder brother' intent on lending a helping hand in promoting global Revolution but rather as an aberrant pseudo-imperialist power intent on wielding its power for self-serving purposes⁹⁰. As Robinson argues (1991:254-5), the falling-out

⁸⁹ See Duval (1996:151-3) for examples showing Russian influence on Uighur in Kazakhstan and *putonghua* influence on Uighur in Xinjiang.

⁹⁰ The subject of tensions between Stalin and Mao and later Brezhnev and Mao exceeds the scope of this paper. Here I only refer to aspects of these tensions as pertaining to the border conflicts of the late 1960s.

between Moscow and Beijing preceded the incidents along the Manchurian, Mongolian, and Xinjiang borders. After the political split between both states in the late 1950s specific border-related problems fed the tensions. These tensions were based primarily on China's old contentions of the illegality of the Unequal Treaties concluded with imperial Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries. Both sides accused each other of 'systematic provocations' along the Ussuri River in Manchuria and this escalated into armed conflict in the mid-1960s with the Soviets accusing the PRC of wildly provocative behaviour during the Cultural Revolution and China accusing the Soviet Union of attacking Chinese citizens. Furthermore, the CCP was very wary of the influence the Soviet Union had over Kazakh intellectuals in the Ili region and Uighur leaders in Urumqi (Mackerras 1994:170-1). Military tensions erupted around the time when the authorities decided to close down the border between Xinjiang and the Kazakh SSR to prevent the flight of Kazakhs and Uighurs⁹¹. This was done to counteract "large-scale subversive activities in the [Ili] region [which had] enticed and coerced these people to move to Kazakhstan" (as quoted in Mackerras 1994:171). Thus, the border to the Kazakh SSR was militarised in order to keep Soviet secret agents out of China and to prevent minorities from supporting the Soviet cause by giving their propaganda apparatus material to use against the CCP⁹².

This militarisation fundamentally altered the face of Chinese frontier policies because, "for the first time since the nineteenth century, a Chinese government had the wherewithal to begin effectively defending its borders militarily" (Paine 1996:353). The Soviet Union, however, did not have the economical means and advantage of population density for the defence of its borders with China and acted so as to prevent full-scale war. Following the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviet Union saw it in its interest to secure its Central Asian borders in a number of novel ways by providing additional monetary incentives to settlers (mainly Russian or Slavic) willing to relocate near the border, constructing the prohibitively expensive BAM railway in Manchuria so as to enable troop deployments throughout Siberia and the Far East, and changing names of the border towns to more Slavic-sounding titles (Robinson 1991:277)⁹³. Furthermore, there were persistent reports of the authorities officially sanctioning and helping to organise a 'Free Turkestan Movement' from the ranks of refugees coming from China (*ibid.*). The effect of these policies was to remove China (and, to a lesser degree and as a side-effect, Iran and Turkey) from the cognitive map mainly of Kazakhstanis and to make individual cross-border contact virtually

91 According to Mackerras (*ibid.*), about 50'000 people fled in fear of a possible conflict which they were convinced the PRC would lose. The border was only officially reopened in 1990.

92 Similar strategies and occurrences on the Chinese-Indian border in the 1960s led to similar tensions with India, the occupation of the Aksai Chin border region to Kashmir (Lamb 1970:148-50), and has had a profound influence on Chinese-Pakistani-Indian relationships to the present day.

93 In Kazakhstan, for example the cities of Öskemen and Zharkent became Ust-Kamenogorsk and Panfilov. They were not changed back to their Kazakh titles until the late 1990s and are still predominantly referred to by their Russian names by all concerned.

impossible (Svanberg 1999:6)⁹⁴. In the PRC, the Sino-Soviet split had the effect of motivating the CCP to increase the economical development of all the border regions, particularly Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, both of which were seen as being especially open to potential Soviet propaganda due to the existence of trans-frontier peoples. In addition, the PLA was ordered to contribute to historiographic inclusionist policies by aiding in the archaeological excavation of artefacts 'proving' these regions' inherent Chineseness in antiquity (Rudelson 1996:172-3).

Normalisation of bilateral relations between the PRC and the Soviet Union was not reached before the latter's demise. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was seen in China as endangering regional security and threatening national security itself because of the implications for the Tajik minority in the Pamirs and along the China-Afghanistan border and entailed further militarisation of Xinjiang. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan brought about the completion of the Karakorum Highway to Pakistan, still the only official border crossing between the two countries. The increase of ethnic unrest in Xinjiang which accompanied the new liberalisation policies of the 1980s and 90s led to further PLA deployments near Kashgar and Aksu in the Southwest of the province and the uncompromising crack-downs of 1989, 1990, 1995, 1997, and 1999. However, with the signing of the Joint Declaration with Kazakhstan in 1995⁹⁵, the northern region of Xinjiang has gone through an as yet largely undocumented and unpublicised phase of demilitarisation with most PLA units being redeployed to other parts of China or towards the Tajik and Kyrgyz borders in 2001. The reasons for this must surely lie in the two-fold threat, from Beijing's perspective, of new American involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and the ensuing possibility of routed Taliban entering China and supporting Uighur separatists, and the ever-increasing trade in illegal narcotics which are 'flooding' China from this region.

Migration and Settlement Policies, 1949-

Awareness of the importance of retaining territorial integrity was at the forefront of all the CCP's frontier policies. National humiliation in the form of loss of territory to 'imperialist' powers was seen to be a thing of the past and never to be allowed to happen again. As I tried to show in Chapter 2.3, the government in Beijing was concerned with winning the support of frontier minorities in presenting the PRC as the legitimate form of rule over territories ruled by the Qing. The objective of forging closer ties between the Han and other peoples of China was not only accomplished politically with the granting of minority and autonomy rights but also demographically. The situation in Xinjiang in 1949 was seen as being potentially dangerous to continued rule over an area which contained few members of the national majority and a policy of 'ethnic engineering' in all the frontier regions was actively promoted. When the CCP came to power, only 5% of the population in Xinjiang was Han; by the time of the 1990 census, around 38% claimed Han nationality which now forms the second largest ethnic group after the Uighurs

⁹⁴ As I will attempt to show in Chapter 4, the ramifications of these strategies by Soviet authorities still do not seem overcome in today's independent Kazakhstan.

⁹⁵ See Appendix III and the next section for an analysis.

(48% in 1990). For the central authorities "Han migration to border and minority areas [*bianjiang*] has been seen as a way of correcting gross population imbalances and disparities of wealth between the highly developed eastern coastal provinces and the underdeveloped areas of the western region" (Tapp 1995:210) and would be beneficial to 'nationalities' solidarity' by "encouraging Han colonization of [Xinjiang], Manchuria, and Inner Mongolia [and promoting] their integration into the provincial system" (Paine 1996:344). This would serve to create a permanent solution to border security by means of a *fait accompli*⁹⁶. Reality proved to be different and Han settlement in minority areas has exacerbated tensions between the ethnic groups and led to the hardening of ethnic boundaries in the region reflected by "self-imposed segregation among the Han Chinese, the Uighurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks, who all live in separate settlements in their respective areas of concentration" (Warikoo 1998:272).

In the case of the Kazakhs, between 1959 and 1961 a massive influx of Han Chinese settlers were allocated traditional pasture lands in the Ili valley and north of the Zhungarian Basin with many of these new arrivals being attracted by the introduction of heavy industry and the exploitation of newly discovered oil fields in Xinjiang (Benson&Svanberg 1988:83). By 1982 the Han had outnumbered Kazakhs by 2 to 1 in the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture mainly as a result of increased in-migration during the Cultural Revolution. This immigration affected the minority areas for the most part adversely "since Han immigration not only deprived minorities of scarce local resources but the immigrants tended to monopolize the best wage-earning opportunities" (Tapp 1995:211). These tensions accompanied by oscillating policies throughout the period of the PRC have at various times led to shifts of population amongst Kazakhs and Uighurs across the borders to neighbouring Central Asian countries, primarily Kazakhstan. It is difficult to obtain statistics of the numbers involved but the presence of over 200'000 Uighurs in Kazakhstan today came about between the Great Leap Forward and the end of the Cultural Revolution. Likewise, the majority of Kazakhs from Xinjiang left for the Kazakh SSR after the introduction of communes and their sedentarising effect on the traditionally nomadic Kazakhs of the Altay region⁹⁷. Precise numbers of migration out of China in the 1990s are unavailable but it seems as if a considerable proportion of those Kazakhs leaving for Kazakhstan are returning several years later for reasons of ethnic tensions with the predominantly Russian population in the areas given to them by the government to settle in. Furthermore, the economic situation in Kazakhstan does not seem to be conducive to incite mass relocation of Kazakhs from Xinjiang where economic policies are starting to show an effect and the standard of living of minorities is actually rising⁹⁸. Political repression by the central authorities of 'separatist' movements, after reaching a peak in the 1990s with violence between

96 The continuity of this frontier policy from times of the Han dynasty is shown by Schmidt-Glinzer (1997:94).

97 Once again, exact numbers are unofficial and not reliable but it seems as if 'several ten thousand Kazakhs' had fled across the border by the end of the Cultural Revolution. Many of them were descendants, and sometimes the same individuals, who had escaped from the purges in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 30s (Svanberg 1999:10-12).

98 For personal anecdotes and an attempt at a local perspective of this process, see Chapter 4.

Han settlers and Uighurs, seems to be taking on a different aspect. The demilitarisation of the XUAR just after the turn of the millennium points to the importance the CCP is giving to economic means of integration rather than military repression. Nevertheless, tensions remain high although it appears as if most agitation against the unitary nature of the PRC, i.e. the support of an independent 'Eastern Turkestan' or 'Uighuristan', is coming from intellectual Uighur émigrés based mainly in the West and Turkey (Kocaoglu 2000:124-5) even though how the presence of over one million ethnic Kazakhs and many other minorities would be dealt with is debatable as is the exact degree of support these notions have on a local level within the Uighur communities themselves.

3.5. Xinjiang and Its Borders Today

In the sections that follow I will be more closely analysing central policies in respect to Xinjiang and mainly Kazakhstan with the top-down strategies presented here forming a basis for the following chapter's analysis of local perspectives and bottom-up implementation. The resulting discrepancies and contradictions form the core of the discourse to be found at the PRC's interface with other nation-states and are central to understanding the discourse of control over its borders, in this case the Kazakhstan border, and will be discussed in the Conclusion after Chapter 4. The PRC's relationship with its Central Asian neighbours has changed considerably since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The legacy of mutual suspicion and fear stemming primarily from the times of the Sino-Soviet split but also having deeper roots in the relationship between imperial China and the Steppe empires and qaghanates is slowly being renegotiated and decreased, at least in the official circles of the nations involved.

According to Hunter, "China was [initially] ambivalent about the impact of the Soviet Union's dissolution on its security and other interests" (1996:125) especially in regard to nuclear proliferation and the potential for ethnic tensions intensifying through trans-frontier networks being revived. With nuclear non-proliferation guaranteed by Kazakhstan after independence the balance of power in the region has geopolitically shifted in China's favour entailing sensitivity in Central Asia towards China's interests (Hunter 1996:128). The presence of all the titular peoples of Central Asia (with the sole exception of Turkmens) as minorities in the PRC means that China is interested in strengthening political discourse between the respective centres in the region (Wacker 1995:12). The importance of central control over this discourse is expressed in the CCP's fear that Beijing would be bypassed and that direct economical and political ties could be developed between Xinjiang and the Central Asian Republics (Olcott 1996:17). Thus, the official line on ties between Central Asia and the PRC is the dominant form of discourse encountered today in Xinjiang. In the context of this thesis, the basic principles of policy between Kazakhstan and China are of interest and are put forth in the 'Joint Declaration on Further Development and

Deepening of Amicable Relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China' as signed on September 11th, 1995⁹⁹:

In the domain of political relations there must be compliance with:

[...]

- the agreements between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China about the Kazakhstan-China national borders (signed April 26th 1994) as soon as possible regarding the demarcation of the border; furthermore, based on the treaties dealing with the present-day border between the two countries [...] along the principles of international law by means of equal consultation in the spirit of mutual compliance and understanding to continue the discussion of the remaining issues in order to find just and rational solutions acceptable to both sides;

- opposition to all kinds of separatist movements and the disallowing of separatist activities of any organisations or forces against the other country in their [...] territory.

In the domain of economic relations there must be:

[...]

- more active economic and market cooperation between the regions of Kazakhstan and China, especially immediately adjacent to the border.

In the domain of military policy there must be:

- further establishment of links between the two governmental departments of defence of the two countries.

In the humanitarian domain there must be:

- a strengthening of control over the mutual travel of the citizenry of the two sides [...] to guarantee safety and to defend the legal rights and interests of the citizenry of both sides in their respective territories;

- encouragement in bilateral cultural ties and exchanges in the domain of education [...];

- assistance in the development of bilateral tourism exchanges, specifically [recreational] tourism, for the wider mutual familiarisation of the people of Kazakhstan and China with their ancient histories and distinctive cultures and traditions.

In the domain of international relations there must be:

- joint efforts made for the establishment of a new, just, rational, international, political, and economic order under consideration of the fact that it must be built on the foundation of principles of mutual respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-intervention in internal affairs, equality, mutual benefits, peaceful co-existence, and the respect of rights of the peoples/nationalities [*naroda*] of both countries about the choice of social system and model of development.

The salience of this Declaration lie in its implications for the settlement of the long-standing dispute with the Soviet Union over the applicability of the Unequal Treaties in the specific case of Central Asia (article 1) and in securing the new state's support in what Yi calls the fate shared by both countries "living under the three major terrorist forces [of] religious extremism, international terrorism, and separatism" (2001:100)¹⁰⁰, thereby addressing Beijing's fear of an intensification of Islamic forces in Xinjiang and support of Uighur separatism in Kazakhstan.

99 The Russian version of the original text (courtesy of Michael Tschanz of the IOM, Almaty, and kindly translated by Joseph Peddicord) is given in Appendix III. Here I only review parts which are of interest in this context.

100 Yi's opinions seem to me to be obviously CCP-conform, due maybe to the fact that he is associated with a major research institute in China. I use his statements here as a representation of the 'official line'.

With the Kazakhstani¹⁰¹ government's acquiescence to not support Uighur groups in Kazakhstan, China's fear of this trans-frontier people being used to destabilise the region seems banished.

Territorial Issues after the Soviet Union

Awareness of local and regional history among China's neighbours in Central Asia is strong in regard to Chinese dominance over parts of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan before imperial Russia 'civilised' the region and was actively promoted for decades by the Soviet Union in this specific case to bolster its own claims to sovereignty (Olcott 1996:109), especially in the case of Kyrgyzstan, and it is commonly believed in the region that China believes large parts of these countries to rightfully belong to its own territory¹⁰². The regularisation of military ties (article 3 above) and the following reduction of armed forces along the entire Central Asian borders in 1997 have eased fears of territorial claims amongst China's western neighbours (Pomfret 2000:192) but everyday attitudes of the local population and the behaviour of local officials exude distrust and suspicion in regard to the presence of Chinese citizens in their countries. The recent reported influx of 300'000 Chinese 'business men' into Kazakhstan (Roy 2000:189) raised alarm bells in Astana and Bishkek¹⁰³. Laws in both Republics pertaining to permanent residency, all of which were revised and made more restrictive, display a direct reaction to what is seen as "the threat from indirect forms of ethnic expansion in the infiltration of Chinese" (Bluth&Kassenov 2000:32). Interestingly, Kyrgyzstan seems to have been less able to negotiate something similar to the afore-mentioned Joint Declaration between Kazakhstan and China. I was told in Bishkek in late April 2003 that the government had 'handed over' 90'000 square kilometres in the Khan Tengri region (Özön Gush area) to China. I have been unable to independently confirm this fact but in 1996 Olcott remarked on the fact that "China's initial refusal to recognize the existing borders with Kyrgyzstan [is] profoundly unsettling, as [are] the implications for its demand for 'clarification' of twelve specific border points" (1996:36). I am not aware of actual claims on Kazakhstani territory today.

Economic Factors

Xinjiang's situation in the early 1990s was that of the province with the poorest and least developed infrastructure in China. In a study conducted by a Beijing institute which had the aim of comparing infrastructural accomplishments between Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, the province

101 I use the term Kazakhstani to refer to all citizens of Kazakhstan including Kazakhs, Russian, and Uighurs. I use the term Chinese Kazakh to refer to ethnic Kazakhs resident in China.

102 I encountered this belief several times in my field research in Kazakhstan but never from people in China. See Discussion in the next chapter.

103 Personally, I do not believe this number to be correct and I am unaware of where Roy obtained it. As I attempt to show in the next chapter, the local definition of 'Chinese' differs somewhat to Western expectations and thus this statement may be a misreading of official statistics. These 'Chinese' are not in evidence in Kazakhstan today but I did hear of recent deportations of 'Chinese' to Kyrgyzstan (i.e. in 2002). In Bishkek, there are considerably more Chinese individuals present due to Kyrgyzstan's open visa policy.

was found to contain only a fraction of the roads and railway lines that Kazakhstan possessed (Chen 1993, as quoted in Wacker 1995:17). The construction of a railway line linking Urumqi to Almaty through the border checkpoint of Dostyk/Druzhba104, a project which had been planned for decades but never realised due to Sino-Soviet tensions, was completed in 1990 and since then the volume of trade has increased dramatically. Xinjiang's wealth of natural resources are now slowly being tapped and shipped to the east coast and with the discovery of vast potential resources in Kazakhstan the PRC's government and the preliminary agreement on the construction of an oil pipeline from Central Asia through Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, the PRC's government has found new incentives to greatly improve the infrastructural network in the province.

According to Yi, "late in the 1990s the Chinese government elaborated a strategy of 'Opening up China's Western Regions' to mine resources and add life to the western markets" (2001:100) mainly because of the realisation that the Central Asian countries and China were highly complementary in regard to their respective industries (Wacker 1995:20) and, economically speaking, Xinjiang could assist the Central Asian republics more than the other way around (Mackerras 1994:272). 'Adding life' to the economy in Xinjiang means an influx of workers from other parts of China and the newest 'Remake the West' campaign which was announced in 2000 places ethnic relations under yet more strain, possibly "leading to minority autonomy again losing out in the interests of the wider population policy and overall Chinese development" (Iredale *et al.* 2001:195). However, trans-frontier trade is hampered on a structural level by Kazakhstan's main rail, road and pipeline links leading north to Russia, and on a technical level by the dearth of useful and sophisticated communication links to the east (Pomfret 2000:190). The situation in 2003 starkly shows the contrast between central policies directed towards this form of trade: in Xinjiang the sheer number of new roads being built right up to the border with Kazakhstan is incongruous with the absence of their continuation in Kazakhstan and while these new transport routes are of good quality and considerable potential capacity in the former they wither away to a trickle of unmetalled and poorly maintained one-lane roads beyond the border. While official trade with Kazakhstan seems to be mainly large-scale in nature, i.e. in the form of natural resources and machinery (see next chapter), trade with Kyrgyzstan "comes at less noticeable levels [in the form of] considerable purchases of Kyrgyzstani real estate, especially in Bishkek and in the border region of Naryn" (Olcott 1996:109-10)105.

The Role of Ethnicity

During the Soviet era trans-frontier peoples were given special freedoms in the form of cultural autonomy and the right to organise themselves in 'cultural groups' and publish (Party-conform) newspapers and the like (Hunter 1996:126). In the case of the Uighurs this was a

104 Dostyk (Kazakh name) was formerly known as Druzhba (Russian name) with both versions meaning 'Friendship'.

strategy in keeping with policies of the Trans-frontier Factor and probably intended to influence Uighurs within China. In the times of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the 1980s this was used to plead for greater cultural and religious freedoms for China's Uighurs and possibly even independence. While the Uighurs in Xinjiang were deprived of *glasnost* they did not have to wait for *perestroika* to embark on a more economically prosperous road for China seems to have been more successful in implementing economic reform than the Soviet Union ever was and, in addition, "Beijing's iron rule has not tried to curb the Uighur's identity on the cultural level" (Soucek 2000:314). Furthermore, the Joint Declaration has induced Kazakhstan to criminalise the political organisation of Uighurs within Kazakhstan¹⁰⁶. On the other hand, the situation of Xinjiang's Kazakhs is "potentially more destabilizing [because they] enjoy better living standards than their kin in Kazakhstan, but complain about Chinese restrictions that prevent them from emigrating to Kazakhstan [and about] the steady stream of Chinese [i.e. Han] coming into Xinjiang threatening the survival of [their] pastoral and traditional lifestyle" (Hunter 1996:127).

Simultaneously, in Kazakhstan the gradual abolishment of the Soviet system of the titular nationality, in this case the Kazakhs, being just one group among equals in favour of the elevation of the titular nationality to official preferential treatment in terms of language use ('de-Russification'), employment ('indigenisation'), and educational emphasis (history and culture), has given rise to anxiety among other national minorities such as the Russians but also the Uighurs (Akiner 1997:16-7). Thus, the situation of these two minorities in the PRC today is a heavily contested area carried out at the state level and, in both the case of China as well as Kazakhstan, perceived to be of prime interest to the continued existence of the nation-state as represented by the inviolability of its borders. Naturally, this can only be a one-sided perspective concocted in collaboration by the respective national centres. The effects of this top-down and hegemonic discourse must become apparent on the ground and the locals affected will have developed their own perspective towards these factors, a subject which will now be approached and more closely illuminated in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁵ I shall return to such discrepancies between the Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan situations in the Conclusion.

¹⁰⁶ It is also interesting to note that in exchange for Chinese acquiescence to the War on Terror in Afghanistan, the USA was obliged to add internationally operating Uighur groups pleading for an independent territory in Xinjiang to the list of internationally prohibited terrorist organisations.

Chapter 4: Field Research on the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan Border

4.1. Introduction

The results of the field research along the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan border in March and April 2003 is the focus of this chapter. In this chapter I first, in this section, present some general considerations pertaining to the environment of my research. In the second section I introduce my research methodology and the limitations to the results I obtained. The third and fourth sections are devoted to a discussion of my results in Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, respectively. These sections are structured by five sub-sections which correlate with the five topics of my semi-structured interviews. In the last section I then attempt to compare my results and place them in a trans-frontier context, again along the lines of the same five topics. Altogether I was able to stay eight weeks in the region, several weeks less than originally planned due to not entirely unforeseen external circumstances. Although these circumstances will not have more than passing importance in this chapter, they nevertheless must be mentioned as events which greatly complicated my attempts at doing research in the area and may have distorted the results obtained.

My trip began ten days before the outbreak of the US-British Iraq war, thereby curtailing my efforts, as a British citizen, to extend my Kazakh visa which was a standard one-month tourist visa as business visas with a longer duration were impossible to obtain in my case from Switzerland. Furthermore, my stay within China was made more complicated due to the outbreak of the SARS epidemic in Beijing and the South in late April, with local PSB offices ('People's Security Bureau', i.e. the police) in Xinjiang unsure of the exact situation of processing visa extensions and therefore refusing any information at all on the subject. To add to this, the newly opened Torugart Pass road (newly opened for foreigners, that is) from Kashgar to Naryn in Kyrgyzstan was closed all through late April and early May due to violent bandit activity on the Kyrgyz side of the Tian Shan mountains; likewise, the Irkeshtam Pass road from Kashgar to Osh was inaccessible, for foreigners at least, because of a devastating earthquake which had greatly damaged the road in February. All of these circumstances led me to have to replan my route and objectives almost on a daily basis and ultimately led to the exclusion of research on the Kyrgyzstan-Xinjiang border because of a lack of time and geographic penetration.

The Obstacle Race

It is, I think, necessary to briefly describe my original route and the obstacles which made it impossible to follow it because, at least in Kazakhstan, this will be of central importance to my research results (see maps 4, 5, and 6 in Appendix II). Due to information obtained in China in 2002, I had learned that the Chinese government had demilitarised most of Xinjiang's north-western border with Kazakhstan (from the town of Altay all the way to just before Artush) following a relaxation of formerly strict border controls. This is indeed even now the situation in China whereas Kazakhstan, however, seems to have *intensified* its controls of the corresponding stretches of territory on its side and, as I shall describe below, imposed the strictest regulations

imaginable along the entire length of the border, re-militarising the entire *granicheskaya zona* ('border zone'¹⁰⁷) and making it entirely off-limits to any non-local. The presence of 'security checkpoints', in my experience often staffed by extremely corrupt officers of the Ministry of the Interior, is well-nigh universal and evading them, something I attempted to no avail, is very difficult. The conflict between internal and international organs in the Kazakhstani government, i.e. the Ministry of the Interior and the Foreign Ministry, is noteworthy and more closely described in the next section. The transformation of picturesque and virtually untouched nature reserves such as Altyn Emel between the Sary Ishikotrau Desert and the Zhungarsky Alatau mountains into 'military shooting zones' speaks for itself in this context (a fact, however, unconfirmed by any sources I could find and avidly denied by the government yet self-evident when in the region). In fact, the sheer number of military personnel and an abundant assortment of Kazakhstan's multitudinous police forces, a fact I had expected from past experiences in Asian border regions, seemed to be noteworthy to most of my informants.

These facts coupled with the unhappy situation that, by the time I arrived in the Northeastern *oblast*, my name had come to be associated with allegations of espionage and 'zone violation' prevented me from crossing the Kazakh-Chinese border at Maykapchigay near Lake Zaysan. I was given to understand in no uncertain terms that if I wanted to cross to China I would have to do so *directly* from Almaty to Yining¹⁰⁸. And this despite the fact that officially, that is as regulated by the Foreign Ministry and as communicated to foreign embassies, there exist four border crossings open to all¹⁰⁹. These are, from south to north: first, the direct Almaty to Yining road route via Zharkent/Panfilov and Khorgos; second, the direct rail route Almaty to Urumqi via Dostyk/Druzhba and the Zhungarian Gate (near Lake Alaköl); third, the road route Aktogay to Tacheng via Makanchi and Bakhty; and fourth, the road route Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk to Burqin via Maykapchigay and Jeminay. Originally, I had planned to pass the Kazakh border sites from south to north and, then, the Chinese border sites from north to south, spending roughly a week in each site on either side (the maximum I was able to afford on my visa). This would have been far too short a time to make in-depth observations but it would hopefully have sufficed to obtain a general impression of the border situation¹¹⁰. As it was, I was granted even less time than I had hoped, and my observations must by necessity be

¹⁰⁷ I will consistently use this Russian term to describe the Kazakhstani border zone because of its specific connotations (see Discussion).

¹⁰⁸ This encounter was actually my third deportation back to Almaty. All deportations were made on the grounds of 'insufficient documentation' and 'suspicious behaviour' and may well have been avoidable with the payment of a substantial bribe. See Discussion below.

¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that these crossing points are the only sanctioned crossing points for all concerned, including Kazakhs and Chinese. They were opened to international traffic sometime between 1999 and 2002 (depending on the goodwill of the local commanding officer). See map 4, Appendix II.

¹¹⁰ The lack of field studies in this region made the selection of sites very difficult. Furthermore, official and officious obstacles would have made longer stays in any one town impossible: for example, after attempting to spend more than two nights in Ucharal, near Lake Alaköl, I spent two more days in military detention on charges of espionage.

superficial and the information obtained circumstantial in nature. After my visit to Xinjiang's border regions I intended to travel south over the Tian Shan mountains to Kuqa and then on to Kashgar from whence I wanted to attempt the frequently inaccessible Torugart pass into Kyrgyzstan, spending about a week in the Naryn area in the Central Tian Shan and then continue onwards to Bishkek. I had hoped that this route would make a comparison between the Kazakhstan-Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan-Xinjiang borders possible and thereby show possible differences between these two ex-Soviet Republics and their relationship to China.

My experiences in China were of a wholly different nature. The Chinese government has, to the locally perceived detriment of 'local culture', begun to encourage tourism into remote areas of Xinjiang, in particular the minority regions of the Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture around Yining (formerly Ili, known to the Kazakhs today as Gulja) and the region around Kashgar in the extreme Southwest and Burqin (a Kazakh and Mongol minority region) in the Altay mountains in the Northwest. Without wanting to go into the negative side-effects of this policy here, and they are in my opinion worthy of future research due to the impact that increased Han immigration is having and certainly will have in the future, this has resulted in infrastructural benefits for the local population and the easing of official hurdles for the itinerant researcher. Furthermore, the number of foreign tourists has increased over the last decade but is still very low in comparison to other border regions of China such as Tibet, Guangdong, and Yunnan. While not being a person overly concerned by comfort and ease while travelling, the lack of this very infrastructure in Kazakhstan makes comparative research almost impossible due to the absence of transport and lines of communication. In China on the other hand, it has, as we have seen in Chapter 3.5 above, been government policy to 'open up' these regions.

Crossing into Kyrgyzstan, as already mentioned, was made impossible due to the absolute refusal of the Chinese authorities to allow foreign nationals to access the Torugart or Irkeshtam Passes, the former for reasons of increased bandit activity along the Tajik-Kyrgyz-Chinese borders (activity stretching from Gorno-Badakhshan into the Central Tian Shan and leading to the murder of over 40 bus passengers in early April¹¹¹) and the latter because of infrastructural damage caused by a succession of earthquakes shortly before. Realising that my Chinese visa's duration, unextendable at that point in time due to SARS, was not going to allow me to risk major delays I was forced to opt for a flight from Urumqi to Bishkek. My stay in Kyrgyzstan was, once again because of the Iraq war and the fact that Bishkek serves as an American aircraft base for material transports to the Middle East and Afghanistan, cut short due to the curtailment of international domestic flights in the light of 'terror threats'.

¹¹¹ According to unconfirmed reports I was receiving from local Kyrgyz and a handful of foreign residents in Bishkek, the weekly Kashgar-Bishkek bus had been held-up and entirely destroyed by bandits. The most commonly accepted theory was that the local Naryn police were involved. The passengers were all of Chinese origin.

Communication

Communication throughout the trip was a central concern. My knowledge of Russian is patchy probably due to the fact that I learned the little I could speak before this trip in Mongolia, where Russian is highly unpopular, and on a brief trip to Kazakhstan in 1999. Because I was aware of the importance of being able to communicate with interviewees and informants without the falsifying factor of a translator unaware of my needs and aims, I was exceedingly fortunate in having been granted enough financial support to be able to gain the crucial support of Joseph Peddicord (hereafter JP) for the Kazakh leg of the research trip, a highly capable Russian-speaking graduate student of Slavic Studies at the University of Bern who was intimately acquainted with my research project¹¹². Through his help I was able to communicate with informants, none of which in Kazakhstan spoke any English, German, French, or Chinese. In China, problems of communication arose solely from the deficits of my own memory regarding Chinese characters¹¹³; orally, I was able to communicate to, I think, a sufficient degree of capability, especially because most Uighurs and Chinese Kazakhs and all the Han Chinese are so positively surprised to encounter a foreigner who speaks passing Chinese (*putonghua*).

4.2. Research Methodology and Critique

Topics and Questions in Semi-structured Interviews

As a pre-departure preparation I compiled a list of topics of general interest to the field research. I decided to cover major areas of interest whilst fully aware of the unlikelihood of being able to gain substantial information on more than a selection of questions. This I did because I was not sure as to the extent that informants would be willing or knowledgeable enough to answer many questions. Furthermore, because of the nature of cross-border research and my attendant insecurity of whether people on both sides of the border under investigation would have even similar and thus comparable attitudes, I decided to adapt the precise questions to the given reality of their applicability and thus opted against a structured questionnaire. Originally, I had planned to make use of a dictaphone, dependent on the informant agreeing to its use, to record these conversations so as to be able to evaluate and structure any information received. However, once in the field I quickly came to realise that the mere presence of a recording device would have made any interviews at all practically impossible due to its suspicious nature. Not wanting to exacerbate my already tenuous position and give anybody, primarily the police in Kazakhstan, any excuse whatsoever to further curtail my movements, I decided to use the dictaphone as a memory-enhancing tool to be used after an interview. In Kazakhstan I had to be very circumspect in regard to my 'cover story' (see below) due to police

¹¹² Unfortunately, in the context of my research, Joe is an American citizen, a point I had not considered as being of any importance. In fact, the situation of a British and an American citizen travelling in the *granicheskaya zona* was not in any way helpful to the research, especially in light of the concurrent war in Iraq.

¹¹³ In Xinjiang as well I encountered no Chinese citizens who could communicate in anything other than *putonghua*.

presence whereas in Xinjiang most Uighurs and Kazakhs were wary of being overheard by police informers.

My original set of question topics was inspired by Donnan&Wilson's suggestions for field research in border regions (1994 and 1998) and Baud&van Schendel's comparative approach (1997) and roughly comprised the following:

Baud&van Schendel's notions of the three geographical zones of the frontier (border heartland, intermediate borderland, outer borderland) and whether they actually exist in this specific case. Is there any evidence supporting these notions, eg. on maps or in the form of different security zones?

The suspected existence of conflict between the rhetoric of border maintenance and the realities of daily life in the border zone. Thus, questions of the borders' permeability especially in regard to everyday dealing with an enforced borderline.

The nature of economic transactions taking place in the border zone and whether they in any way conflict with state economic policies. Following from this, what is the nature of local markets and in which way are they influenced by the presence of the border?

The nature of trans-frontier networks and possible state intervention in their functioning, i.e. obtaining any possible evidence on the ground of the 'engineering of ethnic differences'. Following from this, what are the local perspectives and attitudes towards the border and the local and national population on the other side?

The question of core-periphery relations and the nature of the dialogue between national and local interests in the border region.

Following from this, I developed a set of specific questions once in the field which I could pose to informants to elicit information on these general topics (the numbers correspond to the numbers listed above):

What is the purpose of crossing? To visit family members and friends/acquaintances, to buy or sell goods, or for recreational tourism?

Do you have friends/acquaintances or family members who cross or do you know anyone personally who crosses?

Are these crossings of a regular or irregular nature?

Do you know of anyone else, maybe tourists or other foreigners, who cross or have crossed the border? Have you noticed any differences in the nature of the crossing (official formalities, security checks, general hassle)?

Is there an 'informal' economy that transcends the border, i.e. do you know anyone who crosses the border to marry, to travel (leisure), or to attend leisurely or professional activities such as sporting events?

What kind of economic transactions take place in the border zone and which effects do state policies have in this area?

Do you know of any products of foreign origin? If so, where do they come from?

Do you buy or sell any products of foreign origin? If so, where do they come from and can you make a profit?

Are products of foreign origin easy or difficult to obtain? Do you know of any restrictions on the import/export of certain products? Do you think this is respected or should be respected at your local market?

Do you know of smuggling activities?¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Obviously, this is a topic fraught with a particularly large number of potential hazards. In asking this kind of question I was very circumspect and therefore, more often than not, could not elicit precise answers. However, I was able to obtain some amazingly frank responses.

Do you know whether it is possible to obtain contraband? If so, where and from whom?

Which currencies can one obtain, legally or illegally, in the border region? Where can they be bought or sold and where do you think the best rates can be obtained?

Do you know of major currency fluctuations over the last 15 years or so and has this affected local foreign trade?¹¹⁵

What are the local perspectives and attitudes towards the border and the regional and national population of the other side?

Do you personally know or know of anybody who knows any members of the other nation?¹¹⁶

Are there any members of what you consider to be a foreign ethnic group (*nationalnost/minzu*) in this country? If so, where are they and what do they do? Why do you think they are here? Do they have a 'right' to be here or do you think they should not be here?

What do you personally think about the other nation? What do you personally think about its people or peoples?

Is there any contact you know of between your nation and the other nation? Do you know of historical or cultural contacts?

Which languages do you speak? Do you know which languages are spoken in the border region?

Who lives in the border region (*granicheskaya zona/bianjiang*) of your country?

Do you feel that the border region is in any way special and/or different from other parts of your country?

Do you in any way experience a positive or negative influence emanating from the other side of the border?

Are top-down state policies and strategies (i.e. from the national centre) evident in the border region and how are they perceived locally?

Do you feel that your country treats the locals [in the border region] differently in any way from locals in other parts of your country?

Are you satisfied with the 'general situation' (political, economical, social) in the border region? Has it been through major changes that you can remember?

Do you think that your local leaders are loyal to your interests? Or do you perceive them as being state officials with little local support?

Do you feel well-connected (in terms of infrastructure, media, perceived cultural affinity) to other people in your country?

As mentioned above, the range of questions is quite considerable and I was never able to ask every informant every question. I was, however, able to cover each of the major five topics in most cases, the notable, and I think understandable, exceptions being conversations with local officials and the police.

Subsequent questions were centrally dependent on the individual situation and are discussed in the sections below.

115 I chose 15 years because this would cover possible changing attitudes in regard to the introduction of Central Asian currencies (the Kazakh Tenge and the Kyrgyz Som) *vis-à-vis* the outgoing Russian Rouble, thereby reflecting possible general attitudes to the Chinese Yuan.

116 In Kazakhstan I specifically asked about Chinese (*kitai*), Uighurs (*ugur*), and Kazakhs. In Xinjiang I asked about Russians (*Eguo ren*), Kazakhstani Kazakhs (*Hasakesitan ren*), Uighurs (*weiwuer zu*), and Kyrgyz (*ji'erjisisitan ren*). The Uighurs both in Xinjiang and Kazakhstan I asked about their attitudes towards their present situation in the respective country they were living in. The relationship between Kazakhs and Kyrgyz would also have been a fascinating topic to include but goes beyond the means of this thesis.

Access to Informants: the Cover Stories

The importance of a cover story never really entered my mind until I encountered my first problems with the police which impressed on me just how heavily contested control over the frontier really is. From the start I had planned to present myself as a student with a profound interest in local forms of culture without mentioning my preoccupation with questions relating to the borders of the countries I was in. This I think would have guaranteed the objective of comparing the border areas in the respective countries by ensuring that all information was obtained in a similar way. However, it immediately became clear in Kazakhstan that this would have been a foolish line to take with the hostility of the police and security personnel. Thus, I realised that a cover story was needed that was as consistent as possible in all given situations, independently of whether I was attempting to convince taxi drivers to take me somewhere within the security zone or whether I was being cross-interrogated by the police¹¹⁷. This was even more important because my partner JP had to be intimately familiar with our story so that we could credibly tell the same people the same thing. In China I encountered another reason for a good cover story: when talking superficially to Uighurs it is beneficial to be circumspect as to questions regarding Chinese control of Xinjiang and the unavoidable questions pertaining to one's own political loyalty and attitude towards Beijing; representing oneself as a student of cultural anthropology (*minzu xue*) always, in my experience of Chinese minority areas, carries a bad connotation due to its official endorsement as evolutionary and its subsequent use as a tool for hegemonic control by the CCP¹¹⁸.

In Kazakhstan we (JP and myself) decided to portray ourselves in two ways depending on the situation. Neither story was mutually exclusive and we could therefore retain a certain credibility. On the one hand, in first contact situations we presented ourselves as professional hikers with a profound interest in mountainous regions, thereby explaining our presence in mountainous eastern Kazakhstan. This proved to be a harmless explanation well-suited to satisfy most police and security officers who, in most cases, had never heard of or encountered individual 'tourists' in the remote areas of the Zhungarsky Alatau mountains in eastern Kazakhstan. On the other hand, with private individuals we would then expand this story to encompass the fact that we were also affiliated with a Swiss university and students of Central Asian and Russian history interested in presenting some aspects of rural Kazakhstan to a Swiss audience unacquainted with the region. This invariably captured informants' imaginations and sparked their interest in our project. After initial mistakes pertaining to my specific interest in China, a subject which in *all* cases led to wariness and counter-productive incredulity on behalf of the informants, I decided to only mention China obliquely and as an inferior object of study

117 In at least two situations, witnesses were brought in by the police to corroborate my statements. Fortunately the cover story held up to closer inspection and my motives were regarded as basically harmless.

118 The often encountered term *renlei xue* I feel to be more appropriate for physical anthropology. One problem which frequently appears in this context is the confusion of *minzu xue* with *minzhu xue*, which means 'the study of democracy' or 'the study of the people's

(in terms of interest, that is). Thereby it was possible to allude to China without placing it in the perceived centre of my interest. Additionally, I generally realised that it was more helpful to conceal my plan of continuing onwards to China as this elicited automatic suspicion. This cover story was successful in gaining access to people's attitudes towards their local region, i.e. the border region, and their relationships with other ethnic groups in the region. Conversely, however, it also impeded direct questions pertaining to China, thereby making any results circumstantial in nature (see discussion below). It also resulted in considerably more information on a topic I had not considered to be of such importance in this context: the relationship between Kazakhs and Russian citizens of Kazakhstan¹¹⁹.

In Xinjiang, I decided to stay with the general outline of the Kazakhstan cover story so as to be able to compare reactions. Thus, I presented myself as a student of Chinese and Soviet history. This facilitated talks with both Han and minority peoples because I made an effort of focusing on Xinjiang province, a topic all groups concerned could personally relate to. I found it beneficial to mention the fact that I had come from Kazakhstan because this generally served to motivate informants to air their views directly on the border situation; this I did with both private individuals and officials and police. I made no secret of my plan to continue to Kyrgyzstan as this seemed to produce positive reactions and induce support of my interest in the general region. The success of this relatively open cover story made me aware of the fact that my Chinese informants seemed to have a far more neutral attitude towards their Central Asian neighbours than my Central Asian informants, particularly the Kazakhs (see discussion below).

Interview Situations and Limitations of Research

Interviews were conducted in a predominantly public setting, the majority by necessity taking place either in cafes/restaurants or on public transport (trains and buses). Only rarely was it possible to talk with informants privately, i.e. in their homes, offices, or cars. Establishing contact with potential informants was very easy due to peoples' fascination with the presence of a foreigner in the rarely frequented regions of eastern Kazakhstan and northern Xinjiang. Furthermore, contact with local officials, while originally not planned was guaranteed and more often than not I was able to conduct at least some superficial form of interview because most officials, while not overly talkative, were still intrigued and informative. Infrequently I was given specific access by invitation to individuals I specifically wanted to target due to their special position in regard to my research (for example members of local elites, i.e. politicians and business people). I was also able to interview several foreign nationals in crucial positions who were able to set me up with certain acquaintances and who invited me to make use of their networks; thus, I encountered members of the US Department of Energy in Almaty in charge of border security in Kazakhstan regarding nuclear matters and also managed to meet the director of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). As can be seen from these few examples,

freedoms', a fact that has, in my experience, raised several unpleasant questions from officials within China.

¹¹⁹ For more on this topic see von Gumpfenberg (2002:177-9).

the majority of all my informants in Kazakhstan were well-educated individuals usually with strong social connections to Russia or even Europe and the United States. For a list of all interviews conducted and a brief description of the background of my informants see Appendix I.

Believability is, of course, not objectively and absolutely to be guaranteed and I do not seek to patronise attitudes I encountered. In my experience, I feel I can generally believe what I hear from informants but, where applicable, I feel it is important to note that many interviews were, in keeping with Russian and Chinese traditions¹²⁰, conducted over copious amounts of vodka and *baijiu*. As anyone acquainted with the region will know, it is practically impossible to be social without drinking and this can lead to the consumption of inordinate amounts of alcohol making it difficult to keep one's wits and relating to the interview at hand.

The one single element greatly influencing and complicating the research results especially in Kazakhstan was the lack of official endorsement for the research as a whole. This, together with the fact that I refused to pay a single bribe to Kazakh officials as a matter of principle, made my enterprise rather difficult and at times impossible because of delays and reroutings¹²¹. The discretion I used in formulating questions often led to very vague topicalisation and, due to my inability to use a recording device, I am aware of the limitations imposed upon results obtained due to the impossibility of transcription and, in most cases, direct quotes. My lack of knowledge of indigenous languages (Kazakh and Uighur) does not seem to me to have played a large role as I did not encounter a person who did not speak Russian or *putonghua* fluently, but it is of course possible that speaking in these language to informants may have made conversations more open in general. The sample of informants was well distributed by sex ratio and generation but informants were predominantly well-educated and of a higher social class than the average population. Thus, the opinions aired cannot be claimed to be representative of all levels of society. This, I think, has primarily played a role in attitudes towards local perspectives and trans-frontier networks because most informants had a top-down view in this regard. Finally, the small number of people interviewed cannot lead me to attempt a generalisation of the attitudes I encountered. I do, however, attempt to crystallise general trends from the information obtained.

¹²⁰ The notable exceptions were interviews held with Uighurs who, especially outside of Urumqi, generally abstain from drinking alcohol in keeping with the strictures of Islam.

¹²¹ I am convinced that my incapability of crossing the border at Maykapchigay was due to financial 'gridlock'. Likewise, the deportations from the *granicheskaya zona* may have been avoidable by offering suitable financial incentives and the numerous detentions may have been avoided in this way.

4.3. Discussion: Kazakhstan

Nature of the Border Zone

The partitioning of Kazakhstan's border with China into the three distinct regions as defined by Baud&van Schendel (1997) does not seem to reflect the reality of the border zone. There does, however, exist a differentiation between the nature of the border zone in Taldyqorghān *oblast* and in Northeast Kazakhstan *oblast*: in the former, the proximity of Kazakhstan's premier city, Almaty, to the border (a mere 360km) has brought about the curious situation of the first border checkpoint (near Shonzhy which is south-east of Lake Kapshagay) existing just 200km from the former national capital, making the *granicheskaya zona* about 160 km broad, hence nearly 50% of the total territory between Almaty and the borderline. Near Taldyqorghān, the present capital of the *oblast*, the *zona* begins just beyond the village of Tekeli (about 35km away) and comprises uninhabited mountainous terrain no more than 100km broad, making it 70% of the territory between the *oblast* capital and the borderline. Further north in the Lake Alaköl region of the *oblast*, the situation becomes more complicated with the presence of the only rail connection between Kazakhstan and China and one of the three major roads linking the two countries. Ucharal lies just outside the *zona* but all villages to the east are within the restricted area; however, the roads linking these villages and the rail tracks are not within the *zona* and are thus accessible without any special *propusk* ('permit'). Thus, the *granicheskaya zona* seems to be partitioned into inhabited areas of residence and non-inhabited areas of transit. The width of the *zona* in regard to the former is roughly 170km whereas in the latter case it is non-existent. However, as only transit is permitted through the entire region without a *propusk* and as the train station for Ucharal also lies within the restricted area the effective width of the *zona* for those travelling from China is roughly 250km (the city of Aktogay on Lake Balkash being the first stop where it is physically possible to exit the train). In the second frontier *oblast*, the *granicheskaya zona* runs roughly parallel to the Turksib train line connecting Almaty to Semey/Semipalatinsk and Novosibirsk in Russia with all the towns to the east strictly off-limits after Kokpekty, which is roughly 300km from the borderline. This places the entire Altay region of Northeast Kazakhstan within the *zona*. Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk, the capital of Northeast Kazakhstan *oblast*, is roughly 400km from the borderline and thus the *zona* comprises nearly 70% of the territory between this city and China. All the access points to the *zona* are heavily controlled in the form of numerous security checkpoints. It is interesting to note that the depth of the *zona* to the north (to Russia) is never more than 20km with many infrastructural transport routes frequently criss-crossing the border¹²².

Gaining access to the *granicheskaya zona* depends on the political status of the person concerned and on the individual arbitration of the security personnel involved (DB1, DB2). As a Kazakhstani citizen of non-local residence, access is only granted with a *propusk* by the relevant

¹²² Of course, this is a border between former members of the Soviet Union and checks have only lately actually been introduced. As a non-CIS national, however, a multiple-entry visa for both countries is required.

agency of the Interior Ministry in the individual's *oblast* of residence (MARGERITA, ALEXANDER K.); which agency is responsible remained unclear to my informants but 'depends on a personal relationship to a resident within the *zona*' (VADIM, DB1) and 'a suitable financial incentive to have the papers accepted at the relevant checkpoint' (PATRICK). As a Kazakhstani citizen with local residence within the *zona*, formalities and papers should be organised by the local *akim*¹²³ of the place of residence (ACHMAD), but very often the *akims* are not informed as to the precise number of checkpoints that must be passed in order to gain access to one's home town or village; this leads to delays and expensive 'financial incentives to be offered' (ACHMAD, PATRICK) to the security personnel and induces many locals to remain within the *zona* whenever possible (ACHMAD, MARAT) if they do not have connections to the authorities involved. As a foreign citizen access is practically impossible even if the individual is resident in the immediate vicinity of the *zona* and has official papers from the Foreign Ministry granting access to the border itself (PATRICK). These papers are granted to anyone with an official reason to visit the border or cross the border by the Foreign Ministry. However, neither the Foreign Ministry nor international diplomatic missions are informed by the Ministry of the Interior as to the stringency of controls within the *granicheskaya zona*, and thus the papers issued are not accepted at the checkpoints (PATRICK, ANDY), including papers issued by embassies and the Foreign Ministry such as visas. A visa for China was not sufficient documentation to allow me to pass through the *zona* at Lake Zaysan and was actually a reason for heavy suspicion and detention in the Lake Alaköl region.

The conflict between Foreign Ministry, 'relatively competent and communicative' (MT), and Ministry of the Interior, 'an unintelligible confusion of semi-legal rules with underpaid personnel' (MT), seems particularly evident in the *granicheskaya zona*: there is little or no communication between either of the bodies. The borderline itself is under the administration of the former, which controls border formalities at the actual crossing point, while the security of the zone stretching back into Kazakhstan is under the control of the latter. From an informant, who due to his political vulnerability wishes to remain anonymous, I was told that power struggles within the police forces of the Ministry of the Interior led to general insecurity in people who were forced to deal with their corrupt methods at the security checkpoints in the *zona*¹²⁴. In Ucharal, JP and myself were detained for two days because the local police forces were not informed as to the correct procedure of dealing with foreigners within the *zona*. Telephone calls to Almaty were inconclusive and resulted in OSKAR's decision to deport us to Almaty 'just to be sure'. The migration officer in Ucharal (DB2), however, then decided to merely deport us from the town itself and leave us to the mercy of the police force in the next town 'who might know what should be done'. According to Article 394 of the Code on Administrative Offences, foreign nationals are not permitted for any reason within the boundaries of military

¹²³ The *akim* is a local political leader of a town or number of villages. As far as I know (PATRICK, ACHMAD, MT, OSKAR), they are always ethnic Kazakhs.

¹²⁴ Most checkpoints are staffed by members of different police forces; in at least two cases in the vicinity of Zharkent/Panfilov I was able to corroborate this fact due to the respective personnel's ignorance of the presence of other checkpoints and the recurrent demand for me to 'register anew' (i.e. pay a bribe) for the entire region.

security zones, with the punishment being national deportation. However, in 2001 the Foreign Ministry decided to allow foreign nationals to plead their case in a court of law instead of instantaneously enforcing deportation; the local police in both the Ucharal area and the Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk area were unaware of this regulation and unable to obtain precise information from the Ministry of the Interior in our case (OSKAR, DB3)¹²⁵.

As can be seen, the *zona* is an area of highly interpretable negotiation between individuals and security personnel. Depending on residence status and, most importantly, financial resources it is possible for all Kazakhstanis to pass the checkpoints and proceed to specific places within the *zona*. As far as I could tell (ACHMAD, DB2, VALERY), movement between places *within* the *zona* is practically impossible without the support of both *akims* concerned, thereby entailing costs which are prohibitive to most people. I am unfortunately not able to make any statements pertaining to communication networks within the *zona* but it seems likely that, because federal funds to the entire border region are such a low priority (MT), the infrastructure there is even more decrepit than in other rural areas of Kazakhstan. The power of the individual police officers staffing the checkpoints is considerable (MARAT), thus suggesting that members of the financial elite are most likely at an advantage in negotiating transit and, conversely, disadvantaged people (such as the Uighur minority in the region, see below) are heavily discriminated against in everyday practice.

Hence, in the case of Kazakhstan, Baud&van Schendel's zones must be modified. The *granicheskaya zona* to Xinjiang has a depth of between 100km and over 300km, the least in heavily mountainous areas such as the Zhungarsky Alatau and the most in relatively open areas such as the Ili valley and the region leading up to the Zhungarian Gates at Lake Alaköl. The *zona* is an unofficially demarcated area, in terms of admittance to its existence by central authorities, which waxes and wanes depending on present political considerations of the centre¹²⁶. It is therefore difficult to find evidence of the existence of a differentiation between border heartland and intermediate borderland because the *granicheskaya zona* seems to incorporate a border for itself, complete with passport checks and custom controls, thus representing an abrupt line between Kazakhstan proper and the Kazakhstan frontier. Additionally, internationally accepted documents such as visas or *carnets-de-passage* are as insufficient in gaining access as national work permits (as in the case of PATRICK). The presence of an outer borderland as defined by Baud&van Schendel was only observable in the generally derogatory attitude of all Kazakhstanis I encountered towards the 'backwardness' of the border region and the Chinese 'threat' beyond; this vaguely defined 'beyond' seems not to be connected to notions of geographic proximity but rather to residue from the Soviet propaganda of earlier times relating to supposed Chinese territorial claims. The fact that Kazakhstan is locally perceived as being a transit country for goods to and from Russia strengthens my impression that, if we want to talk about an outer

¹²⁵ Thus, we simply signed a confession to breaking said article and were allowed to retrace our route to Aktogay. Others have not been so fortunate (PATRICK, ANDY, MARGERITA, MT).

¹²⁶ In my case, the Iraq invasion precipitated a waxing of control over the *zona*. Apparently, the checkpoint near Shonzhy had only just been reopened in February 2003 (PATRICK).

borderland in this case, we must include all of Kazakhstan within this category. This is reminiscent of Moscow's attitude in pre-Soviet times towards Kazakhstan, which saw the country as a buffer zone, an area of 'empty steppe' (*prostor*, or 'res nullius') in Imart's words (1987:4).

The Border's Permeability

With the exception of two informants (MAZHIT and LING), I encountered nobody who had either been to China or knew of people who had been to China. Furthermore, as we shall see in a following section, my informants' views of China ranged from neutral/disinterested to negative/polemical, thereby making most questions pertaining to the second topic of inquiry redundant in most cases. In MAZHIT's case, his knowledge of the location of border crossings and the corresponding towns in Xinjiang was notable because, according to himself, he had never been to China. He did, however, because of his work (a real estate developer in Northeast Kazakhstan *oblast*), regularly come into contact with people within the *zona* who had some form of business interests in the region. Unfortunately, due to semi-legal aspects of his work he was unwilling to further expand on the nature of these individuals except for saying that they were predominantly wealthy officials, thus leading me to believe that he dealt mainly with Kazakhs. LING's case is more illuminating I think: when I asked him why he thought I had encountered so few Chinese individuals (in fact, he was the only Chinese national I met until I was on the bus from Almaty to Yining when I finally crossed the border) he hinted at the fact that the 'Chinese were not welcome' outside of Almaty¹²⁷ and were subject to strict controls by the migration police and secret police. Furthermore, he claimed that in January and February 2003 many Chinese had been deported to Kyrgyzstan because of 'illegal economic activities' such as price dumping (LING). When I asked him how easy it was for him to traverse the *granicheskaya zona* and cross the border he proudly admitted to his family connections (via an aunt who had married a Chinese Kazakh who had emigrated to Kazakhstan in the early 1990s) at the Maykapchigay border crossing which made border formalities and the obtaining of the relevant *propuski* 'no problem' (*mei you wenti*). He had chosen the Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk area because of these family ties and because the city was both large (i.e. anonymous) and relatively wealthy due to its proximity to the Russian border. He mentioned a community of around a hundred fellow Han Chinese migrant workers but frustratingly I did not have the opportunity to meet them. Their area of activities was mainly in construction work and menial labour and the precise number of individuals fluctuated according to their fortune in being able to bribe officials in Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk and thus avoid deportation (a frequent event). LING did not personally know of any people from back home in Urumqi who came to Kazakhstan to work. He learned Russian from his aunt's husband's brother who was a native Kazakhstani Kazakh but did not see any value in learning Kazakh as 'nobody in the Northeast speaks it' (LING).

Generally speaking, I was astounded to encounter such a pronounced lack of interest in China. I asked all my informants about whether they could imagine going to China for any

¹²⁷ There does seem to exist a sizable group of Chinese nationals in Almaty's western suburbs around the Barakholka market. I was unable to actually personally meet any, however.

reason and in all cases the answer was roughly 'why should I?' and most thought I was making a mistake in crossing the border myself. The only people encountered within Kazakhstan who had any personal experience of crossing the border were Uighur refugees and, as most live within the *granicheskaya zona*, they were inaccessible to me for interviewing with the exceptions of ACHMAD and ZOYA¹²⁸. Both had only crossed the border once (when they originally came to the then Kazakh SSR) and neither had ever gone back to China. ZOYA, originally from Kashgar, had never visited the grave of her father who was buried there and, despite her desire to do so had never seriously contemplated going back because she was afraid of not being able to return to Kazakhstan and her husband. She no longer had any contact with family members in China because communication had been so difficult in the 1960s and 70s (ZOYA). She did not know of any other Uighur refugees who had contact to China and she thought Uighurs 'collaborating' with the PRC were 'traitors'. In Ucharal, the official line was that very few Chinese citizens crossed the border and that nobody from Ucharal or the area had ever applied for a Chinese visa (DB2). In the Chinese embassy in Almaty it is practically impossible to obtain a Chinese tourist visa without an official invitation from a Chinese firm or 'credible individual', and this applies to all non-Chinese nationals intending to enter from Kazakhstan. Strangely, this is the only Chinese border I know of where this is the case¹²⁹ and certainly the only border where European applicants are treated in the same way as the local nationals. Furthermore, when actually crossing into China all non-Chinese individuals must 'have the means to spend 100 US Dollars per day of their stay so as to guarantee their financial survival within China' (DB4). Thus, not even a valid visa will allow access into China without the possession of large amounts of cash or a credit card. Once again, this is to my knowledge the only Chinese border where this regulation exists. When asked why this was the case, I was told that it was to prevent the flow of migrant Central Asian workers, particularly from Afghanistan and Tajikistan but also impoverished Kazakhstanis (DB4) and had to be applied to *all* non-Chinese citizens including Europeans so that the 'Kazakh authorities did not think it was directed specifically against Kazakhstani citizens' (DB4), which would be a direct violation of the agreements of the Sino-Kazakh Joint Declaration of 1995.

The permeability of the border thus seems unexpectedly low with very few Kazakhstani citizens crossing into China. This I was able to corroborate in China: I heard of very few Kazakhstani citizens who had been encountered either in the Chinese border region or in Urumqi, Xinjiang's centre of gravity for other migrant workers from Pakistan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, or Afghanistan. Indeed, one Kazakhstani business man in Yining claimed that he

128 I encountered ACHMAD in PATRICK's company and ZOYA on a train trip from Semey/Semipalatinsk to Almaty. Both individuals actually live outside the *zona*.

129 Mongolians need a letter of support from the local police, Vietnamese and Lao need some form of written statement signed by a Vietnamese or Lao official, Pakistanis and Russians need only apply for a visa in Islamabad or Moscow/Vladivostok, and Burmese are not allowed to enter their own border zone with China due to 'rebel activities' in the region. I am not aware of the situation on the Nepalese border.

was the first citizen of Kazakhstan to set up a joint venture within China (EMIL) and he knew of no other Kazakhstani citizens in the area.

Economy and the Border

Before arriving in the area I had expected to witness an economic differential between China and Kazakhstan with the strength of the Chinese economy making itself felt in Central Asia in the form of Chinese investments and a flow of money related to the import of products from Chinese markets, a situation I have seen in Mongolia, Pakistan, and Vietnam. In the case of Kazakhstan, however, Chinese products are far from ubiquitous and are confined to a small selection of goods. In the towns and villages within the *granicheskaya zona* I was fortunate enough to visit (Koktuma, Zharkent/Panfilov, Khorgos) the situation is vastly different from places outside it. The bazaar in Koktuma, consisting only of about 10 stalls and serviced by two old ladies, was the only bazaar I encountered that sold exclusively Chinese products (with the exception of local produce such as vegetables). When I inquired as to the reason for this, one of the ladies informed me that they were brought by a local Kazakh entrepreneur from Dostyk on the border; MARAT assured me that all the items for sale 'had fallen off the back of a train carriage', probably items confiscated by local border guards at the border crossing and sold onwards as contraband. I heard similar 'stories' from informants in Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk relating to villages around Makanchi and around Lake Zaysan (LING, ZOYA). Nevertheless, both old ladies, who were of Russian origin, were able to communicate economic terms in *putonghua* (numbers one to ten, terms for 'how much' and 'too expensive', etc.), an exceptional fact in my experience in Kazakhstan, pointing to the fact that there was some contact to Chinese traders, probably truck drivers or small time dealers (MARAT, VADIM). Officially, however, these individuals are not present within the *zona* (DB1, DB2, VALERY). In Ucharal and Tekeli, both in the immediate vicinity of the *zona*, Chinese products only dominated the clothes sections and were in no way cheaper than similar products in towns further away from the border, suggesting that there was no small-time cross-border trade taking place. The presence of Chinese packaging material such as boxes and rice bags, however, might point to the fact that products are brought first to regional centres such as Almaty, Taldyqorghana, or Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk, and then subsequently transported back towards the border. This suspicion was partly confirmed by the observation that the trucks coming from the border are all sealed with Chinese customs seals. When I asked the bus driver who took me over the border at Khorgos about these seals he said that they were only broken at *oblast* capitals or in Almaty so as 'to prevent smuggling'. In the large bazaars of Semey/Semipalatinsk, Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk, and Taldyqorghana, most Chinese goods, again mainly clothes, were luxury items and considerably more expensive than the ubiquitous Russian or Iranian products. In Almaty, the only exception to this is the large Barakholka Chinese bazaar which is strongly reminiscent of any bazaar within Xinjiang, the majority of goods being electronics and foodstuffs at higher than average prices. This bazaar is serviced exclusively by the train link through Dostyk (LING, MARAT, MARGERITA) for imports and the bus link via Khorgos for exports.

According to some informants, Taldyqorghan experiences many problems with contraband in the form of electronics and luxury goods (VALERY, VADIM) but, of course, I was unable to discover any in the bazaars. Smuggling activity, which certainly must exist according to most informants asked, is low-key and low in volume, mainly consisting in said luxury goods but not the classic products such as alcohol (which is cheaper in Kazakhstan) or cigarettes (Kazakhstan has easier access to Russian black market cigarettes from Europe)¹³⁰. In no bazaars in Kazakhstan except for Barakholka did I see products catering to Chinese customers (Chinese music, Chinese-language magazines or newspapers) and I was not aware of any towns outside of Almaty having a Chinese bazaar. This also to my mind points to the virtual non-existence of Chinese individuals in the entire region. Furthermore, the utter absence of money-changers or changing booths that would trade Chinese Yuan for Kazakh Tenge or vice versa is noteworthy throughout the region. Even major banks (such as Kazkommertsbank) would not deal in Yuan. The only exceptions I encountered were the Barakholka area in Almaty (mainly illegal and clandestine money-changers with good rates), the Taldyqorghan bazaar (average rates), and a bank in Semey/Semipalatinsk which would only buy Yuan (at a bad rate). When I asked in this bank whether it was illegal to buy or sell Yuan I was told that it was perfectly legal but 'why would anyone have or want Yuan?' According to IRINA and MAZHIT, banks used to trade in the currency but stopped in about 2000 due to lack of demand. Chinese banknotes were not visually recognised by saleswomen in Koktuma or Zharkent/Panfilov and they do not have to be declared on Kazakhstan immigration/emigration forms (as opposed to Kyrgyz Som or Russian Roubles or even Iranian Rials). I was not able to gather information on the former Rouble-Yuan rate which may have given a clue as to possible past fluctuations or periods of official boycotts.

When asked about their attitude towards Chinese products in general, I was told by informants that up until 2000 there had been considerably more Chinese goods for sale in the bazaars, mainly electronics and machines, but that today Russian quality was better (IRINA) and that Chinese products were not popular anyway because they were 'not produced fairly' due to the employment of children and the forced labour of minority peoples (MAZHIT, ADILBEK). This seems to reflect a generally held view that the Chinese cannot be trusted in economic matters and that 'it is better to let them mind their own business in their own country' (ALEXANDER K.)¹³¹.

¹³⁰ I was later told by EMIL in Xinjiang that most 'Western luxury items' in Kazakhstan were actually of Chinese origin but most entered the country via Russia and not through Xinjiang although I am sure a small proportion must cross this border locally. He further added that it would be impossible to sell the same goods if they were perceived to be Chinese.

¹³¹ This attitude is further in evidence in a popular joke among the residents of Almaty: "In 2030 Nazarbaev, by now an old man, one day gets out of bed and decides to go out and meet the common people. He encounters a young woman with a baby son playing with a toy truck. She recognises him as the first President of Kazakhstan and the man she has to thank for living in the affluence Kazakhstani society has reached by now. She profusely thanks him and tells him that thanks to his far-sighted policies life is as good as in the West. Then Nazarbaev inquires as to her son's health and well-being and is told that he will grow up happily in modern Kazakhstan. Then he asks about the toy and how much it cost whereupon she answers: 8 Yuan."

Local Perspectives of Trans-Frontier Networks

As I have attempted to show, the attitude of Kazakhstanis, regardless of whether they are ethnic Kazakhs or Russians, towards 'the Chinese' is generally either non-interest or negative. Comments I heard¹³² ranged from the neutral 'they once invaded Kazakhstan and occupied and may still have designs on our territory' (IRINA) to the negative 'they regard the Zhungarsky Alatau mountains including Taldyqorghana and Lake Kapshagay as Chinese territory 'under temporary administration of Kazakhstan' (VALERY) to the hostile 'the Chinese are like cockroaches: there are too many of them and you cannot get rid of them' (DB2). Other statements include 'there are far too many Chinese in Almaty' (MARGERITA), 'there are too many Chinese in the border region who are waiting to burst into the country proper' (ALEXANDER K.), 'the Chinese and the Kazakhs may look the same to you but the Kazakhs are honest while the Chinese lie and cheat' (ADILBEK), and 'give me one million Chinese who can type but a word and I will republish Tolstoy and become rich' (OSKAR). It is, I think, obvious that the sentiment in eastern Kazakhstan is definitely anti-Chinese and, as mentioned in Chapter 3.5 above, the claims to territorial ambitions by the Chinese certainly are not preposterous considering decades of Soviet propaganda.

The usage of the term 'Chinese' (*kitaisky*) must be more closely analysed here because I was receiving conflicting statements as to the presence of Chinese within Kazakhstan: on the ground I never encountered any Chinese except for LING and the traders at Barakholka but most informants claimed there were many. I was never able to get a closer specification as to the ethnic nature of these 'Chinese' and I suspect that Uighurs and even Chinese Kazakhs were meant. This is possibly confirmed by a number of statements pertaining to this subject: There should be no Uighurs in Kazakhstan because they are Chinese citizens and possess a high degree of autonomy (ADILBEK); the Uighurs enable other Chinese to come here (OSKAR); many Chinese come here to marry Kazakhs and thereby return to their homeland (MARGERITA). Is it possible that my informants equate nationality with ethnicity? Or, in other words, are all citizens of China 'Chinese' for Kazakhstanis (despite the obviously untenable position of this notion when turned upon Kazakhstanis themselves)? I cannot answer these questions due to lack of quantitative evidence but I get the strong impression that this seems to be so¹³³. In addition, the passengers on the bus from Almaty to Yining via Khorgos were exclusively Chinese citizens and also Uighurs living in the Yining area. At the checkpoints they were exclusively referred to as Chinese. In Yining, EMIL referred to his Tatar friend GENNADY, a Chinese citizen all his life, as Chinese.

The presence of just over 200'000 Uighurs mainly in the Southeast is another point that needs clarifying in regard to Kazakhstanis' reactions and the possible existence of trans-frontier networks. This topic is best introduced by the case of the Öskemen Ethnography Museum, the

¹³² All the following statements are quotes by the individuals involved, translated from Russian by JP.

largest of its kind in eastern Kazakhstan. This museum contains archaeological discoveries and customary relics and articles of, in the words of the museum's curator, 'all the peoples of Central Asia', namely the titular nationalities of the five newly independent Republics and also the Karakalpaks (an autonomous region within Uzbekistan) and Pashtuns of Afghanistan. It does *not* include the Uighurs because, again in the words of the curator, 'the Uighurs protested at their representation in such a museum' due to their self-representation as 'a people apart' and their 'reluctance to associate themselves with the rest'. The curator and the staff were adamant in their ethnographic classification of Uighurs as 'outsiders', possibly also because of their historical political association with the Han Chinese. This attitude can also be seen in several of my informants' statements on Uighurs (see above, ADILBEK and OSKAR). The presence of Uighurs in Kazakhstan is seen as at best a refugee situation and at worst a political threat to Kazakhstan's stability by endangering the country's *political* ties to China (ADILBEK, MT, ACHMAD). According to MT, the government of Kazakhstan tries to keep a low profile in respect to the presence of Uighurs on its territory neither regularising their status nor deporting them *en masse* back to China. Due to the fact that only about 4300 Uighurs have been awarded official migrant status by the government, the vast majority of the population lives in a constantly irregular legal environment (MT quoting UNHCR sources) and is perpetually at risk from corrupt local Kazakh authorities. In addition to this, mixed ethnic marriages do not lead to citizenship or the right to residency for the non-national individual (MT), thereby offering no legal incentive to regularise inter-ethnic ties.

Most ethnic Kazakhs' attitudes towards Uighurs are derogatory in nature and a similar attitude seems to prevail among Uighurs in respect to Kazakhs. Thus, an Uighur insults a Kazakh by calling him or her a Kyrgyz (with all the historic connotations of the friction between the sedentary Uighurs and nomadic and war-like Kyrgyz); vice versa, Kazakhs call Uighurs 'Turkic Han' (both statements by ACHMAD). These tensions are exacerbated by government policies to replace local qualified Uighurs with Kazakhs (PATRICK). In general, however, the government does not greatly interfere with the Uighur settlements (ACHMAD). Very few Uighurs speak more than a little Russian even though mutual understanding between Kazakhs and Uighurs is guaranteed by the similarities between the two languages. Uighur connections to Xinjiang are difficult to portray on the grounds of my field research because I was not able to discuss this topic with many Uighurs in Kazakhstan. My impression is that those Uighurs who do cross the border are all exclusively Chinese citizens and thus individuals who for some reason are not deemed a threat by the authorities of the PRC. From a theoretical point of view, and this is what I had originally expected, these Uighurs could imaginably be 'culture brokers' between China and Kazakhstan due to their trans-national nature. However, in addition to inimical attitudes, state policies tend to marginalise the Uighurs' role in the nation-state of Kazakhstan (see Chapter 3.5 above). Furthermore, there is the difficulty of communication between Chinese Uighurs and Uighurs living in Kazakhstan. Most of the latter do not speak much Chinese and their form of

133 The importance of this categorisation is fundamental in understanding the present-day implications of Soviet notions of the nation-state in the ex-Soviet Republics. Unfortunately, this

Uighur is quite different from the Uighur 'standard' in China which is heavily influenced by the Kashgar dialect (PATRICK). Their Uighur is infused by Russian and Kazakh terminology and generally, due to the differences in script policies between the Soviet Union and the PRC, they are not able to read the Arabic script commonly used in the PRC today, making written communication nearly impossible (ACHMAD)¹³⁴. When talking to Chinese Uighurs on the bus to Khorgos and Yining, I was told that contacts between Uighurs crossing the border and Uighurs living in south-east Kazakhstan were minimal and usually limited to close family members or the local elders who still retained 'knowledge of real Uighur culture'. Hence, I do not think it correct to speak of Uighurs as potentially possessing trans-frontier networks *from Kazakhstan*. The situation from the Chinese side of the border will be more closely analysed in the next section.

As a final point illuminating attitudes of Kazakhstanis towards China in general, the dearth of Chinese language abilities and complete lack of state-supported incentives to enable communication with Chinese must be mentioned (see picture 2 in Appendix IV). In the entire eastern region outside of Almaty I was unable to locate a single Chinese cultural centre, a noteworthy fact considering the presence of a German cultural centre in Semey/Semipalatinsk, a Polish faculty at a University in Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk, and a small Korean institute also in Semey/Semipalatinsk. Furthermore, I did not encounter a single Russian-Chinese dictionary in any bookstore or bazaar anywhere in Kazakhstan or any Chinese publications in libraries (universities and public libraries), again as opposed to the widely available German, Spanish, English, or even Italian literature and dictionaries. Almaty does possess a small Chinese language institute but the number of students is small (ALEXANDER K., MT). When inquiring about Chinese publications of any sort I regularly received negative and sometimes hostile replies. Furthermore, the complete absence of Chinese restaurants, usually a prime and very visible export from China, is noteworthy. The only restaurant I was able to locate outside of Almaty (which reportedly has between two and four restaurants in the downtown area and a few snack stalls around Barakholka) was in Semey/Semipalatinsk (Kafesi Asiya); here, the menu was written in Chinese characters (old style, pointing to a non-resident expatriate of the PRC) and the *pinyin* transcription and Russian translation were both faulty. No Chinese was employed there and nobody had ever served a Chinese guest, and the menu contained mainly Russian dishes.

Interestingly, the only place I encountered a small degree of spoken Chinese was in Ucharal and Koktuma. All the police officers spoke a sentence or two, usually a phrase of greeting or of social pleasantries such as 'how is your health?' (DB2), and MARAT knew one or two economical terms. As noted above, this seems to point to the unofficial presence of a small number of Chinese 'entrepreneurs'. The official statistics for the presence of foreigners in that region show that in 2001 the Ucharal migration police dealt with 176 non-Kazakhstanis, in 2002

is a topic far beyond the scope of this paper.

¹³⁴ A very similar situation exists between Chinese Kazakhs and Kazakhs in Kazakhstan with the former speaking an 'unadulterated form of Kazakh' (KINARA) and the latter being unable to read Kazakh script and using many Russian loan words. See Chapter 5.4.

94 non-Kazakhstanis, and in March 2003 JP and myself were the first two¹³⁵. When I asked the migration officer who these foreigners were he stated that most were Russian citizens visiting relatives in the area and 'a handful' of 'Chinese' visiting relatives (hence, probably Chinese Kazakhs).

Centre and Periphery

A clue as to the function of the borderland in the nation's interest may lie in the ethnic composition of the region. The entire eastern area of Northeast Kazakhstan *oblast* is predominantly populated by ethnic Russians and the eastern area of Taldyqorghana *oblast* is predominantly Uighur. Thus, the *granicheskaya zona* mainly contains ethnic minorities with strong local interests which conflict with the central government in Astana and the institutions in Almaty. In Soviet times, this form of 'ethnically engineering' the frontier population was seen as, on the one hand, securing the frontier's integrity, which explains the presence of the Russians in the area¹³⁶, and on the other hand enabling a policy of pressure (see Chapters 2.3 and 3 above) on China's Xinjiang region through the presence of the Uighurs, the so-called Trans-frontier Factor. Today, in independent Kazakhstan, these former advantages may well be seen as potential threats to territorial integrity and 'cultural invasion' (OSKAR, ALEXANDER K.). In fact, the purpose of the *granicheskaya zona* was explained to me as follows by VALERY: Kazakhstan is tightening border control officially because of the Iraq war but unofficially the purpose of heightened security is to keep everyone where they belong – the Uighurs in their semi-legal settlements, the Chinese in China, and the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. This was further expanded upon by an assistant officer at the Shonzhy checkpoint: 'you cannot pass because if we let you pass the Chinese will realise that in reality we only want to curb their movements; this is nothing personal against Westerners but we must maintain a façade'.

When I confronted DB4, a Chinese Kazakh, at the actual border (Chinese side) with these statements he concluded that this 'was typical of the racist policies back there' directed against Chinese citizens and that the Chinese government was probably aware of the problem. At an Intourist office in Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk the manager, when asked about restrictions for Chinese tourists, told me that the few who came to the Altay region were forced to travel in officially accompanied groups and kept separate from locals. The survival of Soviet policies in the *zona* corroborate MT's statement that because of the presence of infrastructural military installations and functioning bureaucratic obstacles erected by the regime between the 1960s and 1980s, the IOM did not regard the Kazakhstan-China border as a porous border as opposed to the more 'transparent' inter-Republic borders. In addition, the government of Kazakhstan is further tightening central control of its border region by allowing the US Department of Energy in association with the Nuclear Technology Safety Centre in Almaty to reinforce the *zona* as a 'second line of defence' in regard to the trafficking of nuclear materials (ANDY). This is due to the

¹³⁵ This information was obtained from a statistical table on DB2's office wall.

¹³⁶ All my ethnic Russian informants had been in the area all their lives and generally their parents or grandparents had been given financial and territorial incentives to move there.

fact that the Kazakhstan government has suspected China of dumping nuclear waste from its Lop Nor testing facilities in Xinjiang via the rail link at Dostyk¹³⁷.

Central control over the *zona* and its Soviet origin is further illustrated by the fact that all police and security personnel in the *zona* are ethnic Kazakh despite the predominance of an ethnic population of Russians and Uighurs, while the border guards at Khorgos are exclusively ethnic Russians who, unfortunately, I was not able to interview as this may have given a clue to this ethnic division of institutional labour within the *zona*. This has led to a large degree of local disgruntlement at this situation (ACHMAD, ZOYA, OSKAR) and accusations of ethnic segregation and repression (LING, VALERY). Reportedly, the situation in other parts of Kazakhstan is far less disproportionate in regard to local representation at the institutional level (MAZHIT).

4.4. Discussion: Xinjiang

Nature of the Border Zone

The case of Xinjiang's border with the Central Asian Republics is, I think, easier to deal with theoretically than *vice versa*. After encountering the considerable geographic depth of Kazakhstan's *granicheskaya zona*, it came as a surprise to me to note that on the Chinese side of the border the depth of security checkpoints directly and visibly associated with the borderline itself (visa checks, baggage checks, and the necessity of possessing permission to be within the zone) was far smaller. Between Khorgos, the actual border checkpoint, and the last security checkpoint of this nature towards the Chinese side of the borderline there lie merely about 8km. Within this zone there are frequent checkpoints by the PLA to check on possible terrorist activity (DB4) and the People's Security Bureau (PSB) to check on the identity of passengers but there seemed no particular differentiation between Chinese nationals and Kazakhstani nationals (EMIL). Further north, the train route at Dostyk cannot be accessed by individuals, either local or non-local, not directly associated with actual border formalities such as guards and railway workers. This inaccessibility is underlined by the presence of, to my knowledge, just one road connecting the border town of Dostyk with the town of Bole about 50km to the south, a moderately-sized city with direct and public bus connections to Urumqi and Yining. In the Northwest of Xinjiang, the major city of the region, Tacheng, which lies at the Bakhty road crossing, is again readily accessible. The first security checkpoint is located at the bus station of the city with travel to the west (directly towards the Kazakhstan border) and north (to villages without an official border crossing to Kazakhstan) only possible with an onward Kazakh visa for non-locals or a residency permit *beyond* Tacheng for locals (GULMIRA). The distance to Bakhty is roughly 20km and unfortunately I was not able to visit the actual border crossing due to my

¹³⁷ ANDY told me that several incidents had occurred at the border with freight carriages being refused entry into China by Chinese officials only to then be sent back into Kazakhstan with measurable radioactive emissions. Whether the waste was dumped by Kazakhstan or China remains unclear to him and is rated as classified information by the US administration.

lack of a multiple Chinese visa¹³⁸. This is noteworthy because it corroborates my observation that Chinese entry stamps are not checked at the border itself but at the first municipality within China, hence either in Yining (from Khorgos), Urumqi (from Dostyk by train), Tacheng (from Bakhty), and Burqin (from Maykapchigay/Jeminay). At the northernmost crossing, I was able to leave my passport with the local PSB office in Burqin and continue to Jeminay on a day-trip with an official permit issued within the hour by the commanding officer¹³⁹. The route between Burqin and Jeminay, about 100km, was devoid of security checkpoints but I was told that between Jeminay and Maykapchigay on the borderline (18km) there were several (BAI). This northernmost border region is, furthermore, the only part of the border region which is not either mountainous (Tacheng) or an obviously limited valley (Khorgos and the Zhungarian Gates at Dostyk) which possibly explains the increased distance of the first checkpoint to the borderline.

The entire northern section of northern Xinjiang (see map 3 in Appendix II), i.e. the borders to Russia (Tannu Tuva and Gorno-Altay) and Mongolia (Khovd and Bayan-Ölgii), are still restricted areas controlled by the Chinese military even if the PLA's presence has been heavily diminished over the past year (BAI). It is, however, relatively simple to obtain permits allowing one to visit the region for five to ten days and, according to BAI, some foreign nationals are known to have crossed both borders despite the official lack of border crossings for non-local residents¹⁴⁰. From him I also gathered that it was no problem hiking out to remote villages in the entire Altay region 'as long as one did not inadvertently cross the border'.

As far as I was able to tell, access to the geographically small border areas between the towns mentioned above and the borderline is restricted to Chinese citizens with local residency papers (GULMIRA, KINARA). Non-local Chinese citizens and all foreign nationals require either a valid visa for Kazakhstan to pass or written permission to enter the zone which serves as collateral for passports held by the PSB. These permissions are difficult to obtain (except for the case of Burqin which is regarded as of potential interest to tourists) unless the PSB has documentation proving that an individual has been invited by local residents and these are generally only granted to family members (BAI, USMAN). Due to the limited expanse of the areas involved there is generally only one graded road leading through them and, hence, the number of settlements within the zone is very limited with, as far as I know, all of them lying within easy access of the respective road and all minor roads leading away from the main road controlled by checkpoints.

¹³⁸ Interestingly, despite being able to believably explain my lack of a new Kazakh visa to the security guards they nevertheless insisted that once I left to the west I would be unable to re-enter Tacheng from the west without having gone through border formalities on the Kazakhstan-Chinese border checkpoint (i.e. without possessing a new entry stamp).

¹³⁹ This was obtained by telling him my cover story but the regulations did not seem very stringent. I was, however, under the impression that I was one of the first foreigners to benefit from this relaxed attitude (BAI). See below.

¹⁴⁰ In all cases he mentioned, none of these foreigners were Mongolian, Russian, or Chinese nationals but rather 'individual tourists'. He also mentioned the case of a handful of Germans who had crossed from Mongolia and received entry stamps in Urumqi with his recommendation; this does, however, seem to be an exception.

Applying Baud&van Schendel's proposals for the tripartite nature of the frontier is more straightforward in Xinjiang's case than in Kazakhstan. The border heartland is a zone with a varying depth of between 8km and nearly 100km, the least in the heavily populated Ili Valley and the most on the sparsely populated fringes of the Zhungarian Basin and the Altay mountains. Beyond the last checkpoint, which I take to demarcate this border heartland, several features are noteworthy which may point to the presence of an intermediate borderland: there exist no more security checkpoints whatsoever except for at bus stations for buses which actually go to the borderline¹⁴¹, Han settlements are officially not permitted within the security zone abutting the borderline but begin abruptly beyond it (ABLIMIT), and Russian signs abruptly cease to exist. I was not able to independently confirm the official settlement policy alluded to by ABLIMIT but I did note the absence of Han Chinese farmers between Khorgos and the last checkpoint, a fact which I think is noteworthy considering the quite substantial numbers of Han in the Ili valley in general. The presence of Russian signs in Cyrillic pointing to *gostinitsi* (hotels), *cafés*, *magasins* (shops), and *restorans* (restaurants) is conspicuous precisely because of the abruptness of their cessation beyond the security zone (see below). The zone from the last checkpoint from the border until Urumqi could possibly be seen as an intermediate borderland due to the preponderance of major east-west infrastructure in the form of new and well-maintained roads and the rail link leading into the border heartland and also the presence, otherwise absent from Xinjiang east and south of Urumqi, of Russian bazaars (basically import-export shops) and a direct awareness by most inhabitants of the region of the presence of the border (for both topics see sections below).

The existence of an outer borderland as defined by Baud&van Schendel is, in my opinion, not evident on the ground but may well lie in a wider, nation-wide perspective of the entire region: when mentioning my interest and travels in the north-western provinces to Chinese elsewhere in the country the reactions I received ranged from incredulity as to why I should visit such an 'uncivilised' and remote desert area to admiration for my 'courage' in braving what are still seen as corrupt officials and adverse conditions of living far from the pale of Chinese civilisation and close to such obvious hotspots as Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Naturally, these are reactions encountered elsewhere but they take on a new light when encountered in the same country as the area under consideration. Still today, many Chinese in the east consider Urumqi to be a dusty village replete with dangerous kidnappers and semi-autarchic warlords and Kashgar to be an 'oriental city' where women are in danger of being raped and men being press-ganged into serving in desert caravans. Even amongst Han immigrants in Xinjiang's major cities such attitudes seem to be widely spread beliefs, at least among family members who remained in the east (MA). Thus, it may be possible to consider the entire political province of Xinjiang, and maybe the largely 'unknown province of Gansu', as an outer borderland at least in the national consciousness, a fact underlined by the use of the term *bianjiang* to describe, among other regions such as Tibet and Inner Mongolia, the XUAR. The local perception of the province, on

¹⁴¹ Except for the direct Yining-Almaty and Urumqi-Almaty buses, no Chinese buses are allowed to cross into Kazakhstan. Furthermore, no Chinese or Kazakh vehicles including trucks

the other hand, is far more influenced by official policies towards the substantial minority populations and their attitudes towards the influx of Han migrants from the east. Several of my informants regarded the increasing Han population of Xinjiang as being a direct effect of their position in inhabiting such a vast, under-populated, and potentially rich province so close to the vaster, more under-populated, and potentially even richer regions of Central Asia (KINARA, USMAN), in particular Kazakhstan (ABLIMIT).

The Border's Permeability

The only informant I encountered who had personally crossed the border was ABLIMIT. Part of his great-uncle's family lives in the Zharkent/Panfilov region of Taldyqorghana *oblast* in Kazakhstan after fleeing there in 1949. He told me that most of the family had returned to the PRC in the 1980s for economic and 'discriminatory' reasons but that he still travelled to Kazakhstan once every other year. In his experience it was easiest to travel directly to Almaty from Yining as a small-time trader supplying Barakholka with select luxury articles such as chopsticks, which he did through a connection with a local Kazakh in Almaty who enabled him to obtain the necessary papers to pass Kazakh immigration¹⁴². In his opinion, the Dostyk rail crossing, the official way of importing goods into Kazakhstan, was fraught with the danger of 'immensely corrupt' (*feichang duoluode*) officials on the Kazakhstan side and many bureaucratic hurdles. The excuse of economic interests was apparently also preferable to alerting the Kazakh officials to the real nature of his visit and thereby 'endangering the position' of his family within Kazakhstan. ABLIMIT told me that he knew of several individuals, all Uighurs, who used similar strategies to visit family members in Kazakhstan and knew of some Han Chinese who traded at Barakholka. He was unaware of other places in Kazakhstan which could possibly attract Chinese interest due to the 'hostile Kazakh authorities'.

In Tacheng, both KINARA and GULMIRA had repeatedly visited Bakhty and, while never actually crossing into Kazakhstan, frequently spent time outside the border checkpoint. KINARA, a guesthouse owner, did this to solicit guests for her business and GULMIRA, a proficient speaker of Russian, sometimes met Kazakhstani traders and helped them to complete border formalities and organise onward transport. Neither informant was aware of non-local foreign citizens crossing the border in the past year or so but both mentioned that the Kazakhstan officials were infamous for their arbitrariness and that the government in Almaty (neither were aware of the recent move of the capital to Astana) were 'worried' about the situation. Furthermore, they stated that the Chinese officials at Bakhty had in the past attempted to dissuade foreign nationals from crossing there because of the insecure situation beyond the border. KINARA confirmed anecdotes I had read about on the Internet telling of Chinese officials issuing foreigners coming from Kazakhstan with a special entry stamp requiring these individuals to leave China through the

are allowed to pass; all freight must be reloaded at the border.

¹⁴² This connection also organised the 'necessary bribes' (ABLIMIT) to the Khorgos checkpoint (Kazakhstani side).

original port of entry¹⁴³; this practice was discontinued at both Bakhty and Jeminay 'about a year ago' (BAI). The regulation requiring foreign nationals to be capable of spending 100 US Dollars per day when entering China does not apply to Chinese citizens but is stringently enforced at all border crossings with Kazakhstan (BAI, GULMIRA).

Gaining official access to Kazakhstan from Xinjiang has become easier in the past six years since I was last in the province. In 1997, the newly opened Kazakhstan consulate in Urumqi would not issue visas of any kind to citizens of any country including China and only assisted citizens of Kazakhstan and promoted official ties between Beijing and Almaty. Today, the consulate will issue transit visas to foreign nationals if onward visas or transport beyond Kazakhstan have been organised in advance. Chinese citizens can obtain business visas if they are supported by an organisation within Kazakhstan but I am not aware of the situation regarding tourist visas for Chinese citizens. The Uighurs on the bus from Almaty to Yining, all Chinese citizens, reported few obstacles in obtaining Kazakhstan visas from the consulate because of their contacts at Barakholka who organised invitations for them. However, they also asserted that in the case of Uighurs the Kazakh consulate required official Chinese endorsement guaranteeing their return to China, usually only granted to Uighurs who were not officially known to have family members in Kazakhstan. The permeability of the border for Uighurs is further complicated by the fact that many Uighurs do not actually possess passports as the authorities are restrictive in issuing international documentation to private individuals 'without good reasons' (USMAN) such as CCP membership or economic or academic prestige¹⁴⁴.

Economy and the Border

On the whole, trans-frontier economic contacts seem considerably more visible in the periphery of Xinjiang than they did in Kazakhstan. While the products in shops are exclusively of Chinese origin produced in the factories further to the east, the bazaars of the region sell mainly foodstuffs such as dairy products, fish, and meat stemming from local agriculture in the actual border region. Cheaply manufactured goods such as carpets are as far as I could tell the only products predominantly originating from beyond China's borders. Actual official cross-border trade from Kazakhstan seems to be in the form of goods not locally available for purchase in the border region and mainly consists in natural resources transported by train directly from Almaty to Urumqi and beyond (EMIL), thereby by-passing local markets. The only products my informants could point to which were certainly of Kazakhstani origin were dairy products,

¹⁴³ The Kazakhstan-Xinjiang border is the only border I am aware of which still pursued this policy until so recently. Even in 1997 most border checkpoints had long since abolished this practice.

¹⁴⁴ This is a generally encountered point of contention even amongst Han Chinese. The government does not automatically grant every citizen the right of movement beyond the national borders.

vodka, and livestock¹⁴⁵. According to EMIL, the import of these articles from Central Asia over Kazakhstan is financially very lucrative if they are then transported onward to the eastern seaboard and Chinese cities such as Xi'an and Shanghai; locally, not much profit could be made due to competition from local Pakistani traders from the Gilgit region in Kashmir who distributed their products via Kashgar's Sunday Market. I heard from several informants (USMAN, GENNADY, MA) that local minority peoples preferred to buy products of non-Chinese origin whenever possible and that most of these products did indeed enter China from the south, i.e. Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan, and not from Kazakhstan to the west. According to ALEXANDER B., most Uzbek products such as cotton and silk were imported through Kyrgyzstan these days and not through Kazakhstan 'because of Kazakhstani obstacles'.

Therefore, the presence of three relatively newly established 'Special Economic Zones' along Kazakhstan's border is remarkable: these three zones, centred on the cities of Yining, Tacheng, and Bole (near Dostyk), were established in the late 1990s with the specific purpose of encouraging economic growth in the border region and promoting trans-frontier economic ties as stipulated by the Joint Declaration of 1995. However, on the ground there is little evidence of these zones encouraging actual economic transactions *between* Kazakhstanis and Chinese. It seems far likelier that their purpose is to increase the internal economic prosperity of the region by allowing the import of Chinese products at discounted prices. When comparing prices for example for Chinese cars (all produced beyond Urumqi) in Tacheng and in Urumqi it becomes obvious that it is advantageous to purchase such articles in the border region as opposed to the local provincial capital. 'Exporting' these articles back into China proper is a simple and straightforward matter (ABLIMIT, EMIL) and is done frequently by residents further away. Likewise, electronics and luxury articles are cheaper in Yining than in Urumqi with price differences ranging from 10% to 30%. Those Chinese citizens who sell products into Kazakhstan, i.e. to Barakholka, do so mainly with products purchased in these three Special Economic Zones (EMIL)¹⁴⁶ but the total volume is reportedly 'far lower than internal Chinese consumption' (ABLIMIT). Goods coming from Kazakhstan fetch prices of up to 50% above the original purchasing price in Central Asia and considerably more than they would in Urumqi but still not as much as they do in Shanghai or Beijing (EMIL)¹⁴⁷. According to both EMIL and ABLIMIT, Pakistani traders, the main source of competition for non-Chinese products in the

¹⁴⁵ Both dairy products and vodka are also produced in China albeit in inferior quality and quantity. Livestock is locally kept as well but the prestige of owning sheep and horses from Kazakhstan or Mongolia is far greater (ABLIMIT).

¹⁴⁶ These products are then transported back to Urumqi and then moved by train into Kazakhstan.

¹⁴⁷ The example quoted by EMIL applied to Turmen carpets which DAF (delivered at frontier) cost him 245\$ a piece including necessary bribes to Kazakh officials which corresponds to roughly 50\$. If sold in Yining they fetch around 350\$, in Urumqi about 290\$ ('due to Pakistani competition'), and in Shanghai he can sell them for around 800\$ (with transport through China costing roughly 100\$). If exported from Shanghai by ship he pays around 200\$ per piece in duties only to be able to sell them onward to Germany (his main source of income) for between

region, are not allowed to enter the Special Economic Zones. When I asked a Pakistani trader in Urumqi's main bazaar as to his access to the west, he told me that it was impossible for him to legally sell products outside of Tashkurgan, Kashgar, Kuqa, or Urumqi; he did, however, know of ethnic Kazakhs who bought Pakistani products to then sell them onwards into other regions beyond his reach. Direct economic competition is thus limited to a corridor stretching from the Pakistani border to Xinjiang's capital.

In regard to evidence pertaining to contraband and smuggling activities my observations are primarily limited to information obtained from EMIL and GENNADY. According to both, mainly narcotics are smuggled into China from Central Asia either through the Khorgos checkpoint (primarily marijuana grown in Kazakhstan itself but also synthetic drugs from Russia) or over the Irkeshtam Pass from Kyrgyzstan (mainly opium from Afghanistan and Tajikistan). To EMIL's knowledge, the Kazakhstani border guards at Khorgos were well aware of the problem and 'busily making money'. The Chinese guards, of whom I never heard any accusations of corruption, were moderately successful in discovering shipments of narcotics (DB4) but unofficially I was told that the first line of defence against these products was the actual security zone within China (GENNADY) and the secret police in Yining (USMAN). In fact, it is relatively easy to obtain access to illegal substances in Yining with prices considerably cheaper, at least for marijuana, than further east within China¹⁴⁸. Apart from products of this nature, I am not informed as to the nature of possible contraband although I was told by an Uighur in Kashgar that weapons and 'subversive literature', i.e. publications dealing with Uighur independence, predominantly came from Kyrgyzstan and sometimes Pakistan. When inquiring as to the possibility for smuggling through non-official border crossings, I was told by an official in Urumqi that 'precautions had been taken to prevent the abuse of easily accessible topographic features'. The precise nature of these precautions are unknown to me but I heard about the poisoning of streams in the Jeminay region (LING) and the use of landmines around Dostyk and the Zhungarian Gates (KINARA) on the Chinese side of the borderline. The entire region along the border crossing at Khorgos has clearly visible signs warning about the danger of mines with the otherwise fertile Ili valley taking on a blasted atmosphere in the immediate vicinity of the border checkpoint. Thus, it seems that if smuggled contraband does indeed reach China it is likely to have passed an official checkpoint, at least in the case of the Kazakhstan-Xinjiang border¹⁴⁹.

The only currency regarded as legal tender in the PRC is the Chinese Yuan which is easily converted into US Dollars at all local banks for Chinese citizens. Non-Chinese nationals are required to exchange money exclusively at branches of the Bank of China which are present in most towns and all cities in Xinjiang. The use of US Dollars to purchase goods or services is

1500\$-2000\$. The same carpet exported through Russia and Eastern Europe would raise shipping costs to over 1000\$.

148 Quoting an informant whose anonymity I wish to preserve, marijuana costs about .50\$ for 10 grammes in Yining as opposed to over 5\$ in Lanzhou. I am unaware of prices in the east of China but I was told that they lie around 8\$ for Chinese nationals.

149 In Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, I was told that there were routes over the Tian Shan used by nomadic herders and only controlled by Chinese helicopters.

strictly prohibited and generally all transactions must officially be made in Yuan. However, nowhere in China's border regions in other parts of the country have I encountered as obvious a presence of US Dollars as in Xinjiang's Kazakhstan border region. The exchange of Kazakh Tenge for Chinese Yuan is all but impossible in any Bank of China branch office I could find in the entire region except for at the border itself. This is officially explained by the notorious tendency of that currency to fluctuate according to the political fortunes of the Nazarbaev regime (USMAN). In fact, it is easier to legally exchange Russian Roubles for Yuan even if the exchange rate is consistently worse than doing the same thing via US Dollars. The rate of the Tenge at the Khorgos crossing was excellent and corresponded to a theoretical calculation of the correct rate but 'only small amounts' (under 50\$) are generally available (DB4, who also acted as the bank clerk when I pleaded). Conversely, exchanging Yuan for Tenge is impossible on both sides of the border. The ensuing lack of supply is covered by money changers who board the bus on the Chinese side of the borderline and disembark at the last security checkpoint to return on the next bus, making their locus of operation the Chinese border heartland¹⁵⁰. These money changers exclusively deal in US Dollars, either selling them in exchange for Tenge or Yuan (with the Yuan getting better rates) or buying them from Uighurs returning from Kazakhstan at better rates than the Bank of China¹⁵¹. The profit thus generated by the money changers enables them to 'live as well as a bank employee' (USMAN). Thus, the border currency in this border region is exclusively the US Dollar and not the national currency of either China or Kazakhstan.

Local Perspectives of Trans-Frontier Networks

The difference between attitudes in Kazakhstan towards Chinese and in China towards Kazakhstanis could not be more striking. Whilst in the former case all statements made about 'the Chinese' were generally derogatory in nature, most informants in China refrained from making such comments on Kazakhstanis in general and limited their statements to observations about the infamous corruption in the region. Thus, official Kazakhstan is seen as 'an ineffective and pitiable society ruled by bureaucracy' (ABLIMIT), 'a country in which the common people are victims to slavery (*nuyi de shouhaizhe*) by the regime' (KINARA), and where 'ethnic minorities are discriminated against in a country that is corrupt and poor' (MA). The Kazakhs in Kazakhstan are seen as rightfully 'inheriting their country' from 'Stalin's empire (*Sidalin de diguo*)' and 'now struggling to overcome old habits' (all quotes from USMAN). Several Uighur informants were resentful of the situation of the Kazakhs having an officially recognised 'homeland (*jiaguo*)' whereas Uighurs did not have this political right (ABLIMIT).

¹⁵⁰ I was told that they are not allowed to pass Kazakhstani immigration and thus had to complete all transactions before the Kazakh end of the no-man's-land between the border checkpoints. There are no such money changers on the Kazakhstan side of the border.

¹⁵¹ At the time of research rates were as follows: Tenge-Dollar in Almaty 150-1, Tenge-Dollar on the bus 153-1, Dollar-Yuan at the Bank of China 1-8.2, Dollar-Yuan on the bus 1-7.9, Tenge-Yuan at Khorgos 19-1. Many people deal in the Uzbek cross-border trade of Dollars due to the incredible difference between official and black market exchange rates in Uzbekistan which at the time of research was roughly one to three.

Most ethnic Kazakh informants in China lamented the fact that Kazakhstan did not allow dual citizenship, thereby preventing them from cultivating closer ties across the border. Interestingly, ethnic Kazakh Chinese citizens do not need a visa for Kazakhstan if they can prove their minority status to the consulate of Kazakhstan in Urumqi. This proof does not need to be officially supported by Chinese official bodies (probably not even requiring a valid passport) and seems to consist of knowledge of the Kazakh language and an ancestral place of origin within the territory of the three Hordes (USMAN, GULMIRA, DB4). This certainly supports comments made by MT in Almaty that the official immigration policy of Kazakhstan is to support 'the return' of ethnic Kazakhs from the PRC and Mongolia to Kazakhstan as regulated by quotas and that the PRC's official emigration policy is to only allow ethnic Kazakhs with 'close kinship ties' (BAI) to at all travel to Kazakhstan. It seems that due to the consulate's policy of not needing official Chinese endorsement in the form of papers proving an individual's kinship situation there exists a discrepancy between official and unofficial avenues of migration. Furthermore, according to GENNADY, who teaches Russian mainly to Kazakhs who intend to emigrate to Kazakhstan, the government of Kazakhstan 'secretly assists' prospective émigrés in the form of financial assistance and the allotment of a certain amount of land usually in the border region. GENNADY was adamant about both these points but also added that 'educated Kazakhs' were given preference over others. This, then, is a crucial element in understanding possible trans-frontier policies and networks in the region: on the one hand, Kazakhstan encourages the (one-way) flow of ethnic Kazakhs across the border and, on the other hand, it prefers to settle these newly arrived citizens in the ethnically predominantly Russian *granicheskaya zona*¹⁵². Whether this is an attempt to 'correct' previous Soviet 'ethnic engineering' in the region and to encourage other Chinese Kazakhs to join their brethren, thus representing a form of 'dual bridgehead' mentioned in Chapter 2.3 above, is beyond my ability to state for a fact but the evidence seems to point in this direction. Conversely, Chinese authorities are aware of this unofficial policy (BAI) and, according to a Han official in Urumqi, seek to enable ethnic Kazakhs to integrate into local power structures by granting quotas at universities and state-run enterprises. Furthermore, the Xinjiang media regularly publicises anecdotes in which emigrated Chinese Kazakhs generally 'regret' their move to Kazakhstan and the ensuing loss of their Chinese residency permits¹⁵³.

Several ethnic Kazakh informants told me stories of acquaintances who had travelled to Kazakhstan to marry 'suitable women', thereby corroborating what I had heard from MARGERITA in Almaty and confirming my suspicions that these marriages were intra-ethnic, i.e. between Kazakhs (see Kazakhstan discussion above). As opposed to marriages between members from different ethnic groups I was told that these marriages usually resulted in the Chinese Kazakhs being granted citizenship rights within Kazakhstan. I did not hear of any Kazakhstani individuals

¹⁵² According to GENNADY, who maintains contact with some emigrated Kazakhs, obtaining a passport takes merely about two months.

¹⁵³ I saw two one-hour documentaries on XJTV (the local CCTV subsidiary) on such cases and was told by BAI that such programmes 'were very popular'. Furthermore, as Finke (1999:114-6) states, re-migration into Xinjiang and Mongolia was fueled by tensions between ethnic Russians and the immigrated Kazakhs who were settled on their lands.

applying for Chinese passports or residency permits. According to EMIL, the last time this kind of thing happened was in the 1980s when China, after recovering from the Cultural Revolution, began to grant ethnic minorities certain political rights *vis-à-vis* the Han Chinese.

Another element obviously different from Kazakhstan is the existence of Russian language institutes at universities in Urumqi, Yining, Tacheng, and Kashgar. I was unable to gather information on the composition of classes and the motivations of people attending Russian courses but the very fact of their existence is indicative of a more open attitude to the proximity of the border in general. All major towns in the region have 'Russian bazaars' with Cyrillic writing proclaiming their existence at the entrance. In fact, the role played by English in eastern China seems to be filled by Russian in this region with shop fronts attesting to the 'international' nature of products within despite not actually stocking any foreign products. In most cases, the Cyrillic was faulty and represented Russified Chinese expressions aimed, I think, at Chinese consumers just as English billboards and shop fronts further east are intended not to represent English as such but rather serve as a marketing tool for Chinese by giving products 'international' prestige. Nevertheless, Russian-Chinese dictionaries, Russian-learning materials, and Russian literature is readily available in most bookshops and libraries. I was told by one informant that Russian was a popular language to learn in the region because it 'enabled getting into the business with Russia' (MA); business or other ties to Kazakhstan were not mentioned by any informants as being the motivation behind learning Russian. Russian language proficiency is reportedly not very common locally in the border regions (GENNADY, GULMIRA) because of the lack of Russian native speakers and the fact that the cross-border ties that do exist seem to be predominantly between Uighurs (in the south) and Kazakhs (in the north) who prefer to communicate in their own languages despite the considerable difficulties arising from the aforementioned linguistic policies. As I showed above, there cannot be many Kazakhstanis in the Chinese border regions. It is important to note, however, that all the border guards I encountered at Khorgos speak fair Russian and that all the material at the border checkpoint pertaining to regulations was in both Chinese and Russian, as opposed to the complete absence of Chinese material at the Khorgos border checkpoint in Kazakhstan.

Most contact between the two nations seems to take place at a higher level between officials from Yining or Urumqi and Almaty or Astana. When I asked a Han Chinese official at a PSB office in Urumqi as to his perspective of official ties to Kazakhstan he stated that China and the Central Asian states had been cooperating from 'Time Immemorial' and that the reasons for this lay not solely in their geographic proximity but also their 'cultural affinity' (*wenhuade xiyinli*). Obviously, this is the official line taken by Beijing in regard to national ties between the two countries as elaborated upon in Chapter 3.5 above. This supports my observation in Kazakhstan that networks between China and Kazakhstan are mainly non-local in nature and conducted over Urumqi and Almaty and not over Yining or Tacheng and Taldyqorghon or Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk.

Centre and Periphery

During my inquiries in the border region I encountered two topics that dominate local perceptions of central policies in the region. *First*, the authorities of the PRC are seen to be 'bleeding dry' (GULMIRA) the region of its natural resources and the potential for wealth in the exploitation of resources beyond the border in Kazakhstan. On the one hand, the government promotes Xinjiang, the poorest and largest of China's provinces, as an area worthy of economic investment for firms from Hong Kong and Shanghai while, on the other hand, most policies are perceived as draining the obtained wealth away from the province and back to the east. *Second*, there is considerable friction between ethnic groups and their role in the political hierarchy of the province. Kazakhs see Uighurs as unfairly dominating the province's ethnic quota in regard to ethnic autonomous bodies such as local CCP cadres and administrative positions (USMAN, BAI quoting local Kazakh residents of Burqin). Conversely, Uighurs see Kazakh attempts at gaining political concessions from the authorities as infringing upon their autonomous status in 'their homeland' (ABLIMIT, GENNADY). Considerations of space and limitations in information gained from interviews prevent me from going beyond these superficial statements but the importance for us here I think is the local perception of the actual existence of this conflict. Thus, both ethnic groups have a strained relationship to one another as well as to central authorities as represented by local leaders.

As my research led me primarily to Kazakh areas (the Ili valley forms the bulk of the Kazakh Autonomous Region) I am unable to draw comparisons between Uighur local leaders and Kazakh leaders, but the case of the latter seems to underline Baud&van Schendel's notions of the double triangle of power structures in border regions: local cadres are part of a local elite educated, according to all my Kazakh informants, in Beijing or Urumqi and are thus seen as representatives of the national government. Frequently, they were criticised by people I talked to as promoting the afore-mentioned gravitation away from the local area and towards the east. The construction of brand-new infrastructure in the entire region with 'money from Beijing and not from Yining' (BAI) which serves to improve connections between Urumqi and the local centres is in direct visible opposition to the neglect of local connections between these centres. Thus, travel time between Urumqi and Yining has been cut in half over the last five years and greatly reduced with the construction of airports in Tacheng and Burqin¹⁵⁴. This infrastructural integration of select points in the border region therefore seems to promote the national objective of the 'Remake the West Campaign' launched in 2000 (see picture 6 in Appendix IV for an example of this).

The discrepancy between local interests presented in this section and national interests presented above is furthermore visibly portrayed by the Chinese media's representation of the region, a subject worthy of research in itself, which still predominantly carries programmes

¹⁵⁴ All Uighur informants agreed that the completion of the rail link between Urumqi and Kashgar, completed in 1998 and cutting travel times by up to 24 hours, could only have negative effects on the cultural heritage of the Uighurs which far out-weighed the benefits gained in regard to trade.

dealing with the traditional oasis societies of Turpan, Kashgar, and Hami, thereby exoticising the Muslim population for consumption by the majority of the Chinese population. Much is made in official propaganda of the 'potential wealth' of this area and its 'historical importance for the Silk Road of the 21st Century', a fact which underlines the liminal nature of this region juxtaposed between the booming economy of China and the vast untapped natural resources of Central Asia. Finally, this liminality is emphasised by the bizarre fact that Xinjiang lies officially in the same timezone as the rest of China and thus runs on what is locally called Beijing time (*'beijing shijian'*). All public buildings and institutions advertise their opening times in national time and all public transport follows this schedule. In reality, Xinjiang functions according to the unofficial Xinjiang time (*'xinjiang shijian'*) which lies two hours behind the official timezone. Opening times are thus officially two hours later than in the rest of China with, for example, banks open from 10am to 8pm *beijing shijian*, corresponding to 8am to 6pm *xinjiang shijian*, the exact same office hours as in the rest of China. Hence, the imposition of a unified timezone for the whole of the PRC is unofficially ignored in official life in Xinjiang¹⁵⁵. It seems that, at least in this symbolic domain, it suffices for the government in Beijing to have official control over its periphery even if in reality this control is only nominal.

4.5. One Borderline – Two Frontiers: Comparing Both Sides

The nature of the border zones on either side of the borderline differ quite considerably. In terms of geographic depth it is strikingly obvious that Kazakhstan's *granicheskaya zona* is three to twelve times broader than Xinjiang's security zone, i.e. roughly 100km to 300km as opposed to 8km to 100km. Topographically, Kazakhstan's *zona* is broader in open and more accessible areas such as the Ili valley while in Xinjiang remote, uninhabited, and inaccessible areas entail a broader security zone. Access to the respective zones is fundamentally different with Kazakhstan's *zona* being heavily militarised and under intense control through the bureaucratic apparatus, mainly from the *oblast* capital, with local residents' movements heavily restricted by the lack of local power and infrastructure, whereas Xinjiang's zone has recently been demilitarised and regionalised by the creation of Special Economic Zones and increased infrastructural investments. Access to the border heartland in Kazakhstan is difficult and only locally negotiable while in Xinjiang the border heartland is officially regulated on a local level; in both cases, however, trans-frontier transit is a precondition to access and both therefore represent a region where security interests prevail. For Kazakhstan I have argued that the *granicheskaya zona* represents both border heartland and intermediate borderland and thus both zones are inaccessible to non-locals regardless of their nationality, thereby representing a liminal region not really part of the rest of the country but rather a buffer zone. In Xinjiang, the intermediate borderland can easily be accessed by most (non-commercially motivated) individuals and it evinces a far less liminal atmosphere due to its orientation and integration to the regional political capital Urumqi. In regard to notions of an outer borderland, both Kazakhstan and Xinjiang can be seen in their territorial entirety as being outer borderlands,

¹⁵⁵ This fact is very reminiscent of the situation in the former Soviet Union in regard to all

probably due to their economic and historical roles as peripheral regions in larger political entities (Xinjiang as a part of the PRC and Kazakhstan today being an area where Russian, Chinese, and American interests overlap in the wider regional context of trans-continental trade and security¹⁵⁶).

The permeability of the border is in both cases very low in regard to actual traversal of the border. The obstacles imposed by central authorities on the Kazakhstan side make the border difficult to negotiate for Chinese citizens of non-Kazakh ethnicity returning from Kazakhstan while Chinese authorities impose unique (in terms of other Chinese borders) regulations on non-Chinese citizens including Kazakhstanis who cross into China. Entry to Kazakhstan is only readily possible for business people and it seems as if those crossing the border for other reasons resort to presenting themselves as such to avoid 'problems' in the traversal. Exit from China seems to present no great problem except in the case of the Uighurs; here, Chinese authorities impose additional regulations to prevent an unrestricted flow of individuals who could present a 'potential hazard to the state'. As opposed to this, Kazakhstan through its system of obligatory registration and the ensuing control over the movement of foreigners within the country seems to prefer to keep Uighurs concentrated in the region between Almaty and the border. Generally speaking, most traversal seems to take place not by locals or private individuals but by business people on official visits. Thus, high level and non-local (in regard to residents of the immediate vicinity of the border) contacts seem to be more pronounced than private and local contacts.

Economic aspects of the border are more evident in Xinjiang than in Kazakhstan. The presence of obviously Chinese products in Kazakhstan today is limited to the villages of the *zona* and predominantly stem from smuggling activities or other illegal methods of distribution. Official cross-border trade from China is channelled through the *oblast* capitals and from there back into the border region with Barakholka bazaar in Almaty representing the main outlet for these goods. This market is serviced exclusively by the direct train from Urumqi and therefore probably does not involve goods produced just beyond the border in China. The vast majority of Chinese goods in Kazakhstan are goods not perceived to be Chinese, mainly forgeries of well-known and prestigious Western brands such as perfumes, clothes, and shoes. In Xinjiang, products from Kazakhstan or coming through Kazakhstan from other Central Asian states or Russia are available and doing business in them is lucrative. The presence of the three Special Economic Zones must certainly encourage this kind of trade but the prime importance of these zones is in promoting local economic attractiveness and not trans-frontier economic contacts despite official attestations to the contrary (see picture 5 in Appendix IV). Furthermore, these show-cases of the 'successes' of the Chinese system may well be intended to enhance regional prestige and present to locals the advantages of this system *vis-à-vis* the locally perceived deficiencies of the ex-Soviet Republics. The unavailability of Yuan or Tenge in the respective other country points to the importance of the US Dollar as the border currency and to the low volume of individual trafficking and local-to-local economic contact, i.e. direct economic

timetables for public transport throughout the Union running according to Moscow time.

156 See, for example, Pomfret (2000), Bluth&Kassenov (2000), and Golunov (2001).

transactions between the *granicheskaya zona* and the security zone in Xinjiang, but this dealing in Dollars does in itself represent a form of cross-border trade.

Local perspectives of trans-frontier networks suffer greatly from, on the one hand, the inherent animosity to be found among Kazakhstanis towards China and Chinese and, on the other hand, the difficulties which Chinese citizens are confronted with when actually crossing the border. Of prime interest in analysing the role of possible trans-frontier networks is the situation and perspectives of the two trans-frontier peoples: the Uighurs and ethnic Kazakhs. The Uighurs are in general not welcome in Kazakhstan and, except for limited and usually uni-directional exchange brought about by Uighurs resident in China, their role as 'culture brokers' between the two states is limited by the political involvement of the governments in Astana and Beijing who both regard the 'unregularised status' of Uighur refugees as a threat. Ethnic Kazakhs are welcome in Kazakhstan and it seems as if they are theoretically in a better position to form viable and strong trans-frontier ethnic networks. However, the absence of dual citizenship in Kazakhstan's legal code and the PRC's wariness in allowing Chinese Kazakhs to migrate too freely and its subsequent policy of 'opening up' the border region, i.e. connecting it more centrally to the rest of China, heavily inhibits the creation and sustenance of such functioning networks. Furthermore, decades of policies by both the PRC and the Soviet Union aimed at 'engineering differences' between Chinese Kazakhs and Kazakhs in Kazakhstan have come to fruition in the difficulties both groups have in communicating with one another in general (see Chapter 3.4). The ethnic composition of the *granicheskaya zona* (mainly ethnic Russians) across the border from the predominantly Kazakh parts of Xinjiang's periphery has not supported such potential networks and the tensions between Uighurs and Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, subjectively seen by my informants as being actively encouraged or at least not discouraged by the government, likewise has not led to a strong local commitment to strengthen trans-frontier ties. To conclude, trans-frontier exchange and communication does seem to be marginally more apparent in Xinjiang than in Kazakhstan, with language-learning opportunities and trade-supporting institutions existing and the prevailing non-hostile attitude towards Russians and Kazakhstanis in general being beneficial for a future increase of exchange at least at an official level.

Centre and periphery are in direct conflict with one another on either side of the borderline in the border heartland itself. In both cases control over the border by the centre is evident and in both cases this specific border under consideration is exceptional in comparison to other borders of the respective countries. In Kazakhstan, Soviet preoccupation with the Chinese border led to the *zona* being populated by ethnic Russians with Kazakhs only penetrating it since the late 1980s. The strategic importance of this frontier for the Soviet Union cannot be overstated and it is thus copiously equipped with state inscriptions and symbols in the form of military installations, security checkpoints, and non-local control (Foreign Ministry and Ministry of the Interior with personnel from the *oblast* capital and not generally locally recruited; additionally, the presence of political slogans seems more pronounced here with picture 1 in Appendix IV being a representative example). Animosity amongst this personnel is high towards Chinese

citizens and policies reflect the unofficial fear of 'cultural invasion'. In Xinjiang, the central authorities are promoting extended central control over the border area by constructing high-quality roads and establishing Special Economic Zones to firmly incorporate the region into China. Increased Han immigration can also be seen to be supporting the 'Chinese system' locally by introducing the ethnically dominant group in the state as a whole into an area ethnically dominated by minorities. The differing depth of the two border zones may well point to two different attitudes at the respective national centres towards the role of the border for the respective state: Kazakhstan seems to see the border as an unfortunate by-product of independence whereas China sees the possibility of gaining access to the overland route to the west and to vast natural resources abroad. Therefore, in the case of the former, the *zona* and its local importance must be closely watched so as to prevent any 'unwanted influence from beyond' while, in the case of the latter, a narrow line must be negotiated in the *bianjiang* between local interests (Uighur autonomy and ethnic Kazakh inclusion into the PRC) and national interests (the prevention of a flow of illegal products threatening security and the exploitation of the entire region's resources). Thus, the presence of state inscriptions and symbols on the Chinese border must by necessity represent this delicate discourse by presenting the strength of the state at this vulnerable interface *and* the possibility of identifying with this state by local minority peoples. Symbols of exclusion are hence to be found alongside symbols of inclusion (see pictures 3 and 4 in Appendix IV and the title page of this thesis) with the restriction on Han settlements within the border heartland serving to underline the special status of this zone and thereby evoking the illusion of a region controlled by members of this national minority and trans-frontier people, the Kazakhs.

Conclusion

To narrate the border is to show the intricacies of the discourse entertained by both the representatives of the nation-state and the inhabitants at its frontiers, by both the effect official policies have on the implementation of control over the borders and how this implementation is received and influenced by those it affects, and by the inhabitants of the frontier on both sides of the borderline in regard to the respective nation-states involved and the channels of communication and exchange, be they economical, political, and/or cultural, which exist between them. It is important to realise that regardless of official rhetorics about border maintenance, reality takes on a different form when observed in the frontier zone or at the actual border itself. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider local attitudes and the local situation in order to approach a qualitative analysis of the double triangle of power relations between the respective national centres, the local frontier elites, and the people on both sides of the borderline, and so be able to examine the nature of a nation-state's interface with another's. Of course, insights gained from interviews, especially under the conditions prevailing in this case, can only serve as over-generalised currents in the afore-mentioned discourse and any theories which are analysed with data gained in this way can only be of use as a dialectic tool for further research. However, the overwhelming amount of published material on borders seems to be official in nature with ethnographic studies on political frontiers few and far between. I think it must be in the interest of the field of anthropology to correct this grave imbalance and thus give us the opportunity to reappraise the role which these areas so heavily encumbered and inscribed with symbolic importance play in respect to the nation-state.

In the theories and methods presented by Donnan&Wilson and Baud&van Schendel (see Chapter 1), much emphasis is placed on the existence of networks which transcend the actual borderline and connect a trans-frontier people. One of the main aims of this thesis has been to examine this notion in the case of the China-Kazakhstan border and to see in which way the respective states attempt to exercise control over this phenomenon. From a historical perspective, both states seem to have only just begun to rethink their relationship with one another. The people of Kazakhstan are confronted with the legacy of the Soviet era regarding their attitudes to China, and in China national policy is at least superficially dominated by economic concerns and prospects. Both of these views are present in the border zone and, in my opinion, both represent a strong narrative of political agendas. The ethnic composition of the *granicheskaya zona*, a relic from Soviet days, has led to an exclusionist view directed against the 'Chinese' among the region's inhabitants on this side of the border. In China, the drive to economic revitalisation seems to be mainly geared towards internal strengthening of 'national unity' rather than the promotion of trans-frontier contacts. Thus, in both cases, the borderline is seen *from a national point of view* as limiting and excluding rather than giving the opportunity of exercising influence beyond it. Furthermore, *from the point of view of locals* the borderline is also seen as being a natural boundary with little connecting the inhabitants on either side of it. Thus, we have at all levels a refutation of the notion of a 'trans-frontier zone' encompassing local inhabitants on both sides of the border. The reasons for this I think lie in the success of national level discourse as

witnessed in the last fifty years. Generally, the PRC has successfully managed to incorporate ethnic factors with identification with the state by instrumentalising historiographic mechanisms of inclusion and a minority policy which, if certainly not liberal, was at least always gradually improved upon (except several locally well-remembered setbacks such as the Cultural Revolution). The Soviet Union was less successful in maintaining territorial unity but so far Kazakhstan despite the presence of strong centrifugal forces, has likewise managed to establish itself as a nation-state and to position itself as a country with strong and defended national interests. From a local point of view, there seems to be little motivation in altering the status quo of the border. Even Uighurs and ethnic Kazakhs do not seem to plead for more trans-frontier contacts; instead, they wish for the liberalisation of residency rights so as to be able to unite families rather than the liberalisation of transit rights or visa formalities.

These observations are in contrast to the situation as described in most literature I have consulted on the subject of Kazakhstan and China. While not being able to discount the possibility that my methods of research were faulty, I nevertheless believe that this discrepancy is due to lack of first-hand knowledge of this particular border. It is a fact that there is little literature available on Sino-Kazakhstani relations other than geopolitical and strategic works which all disregard local factors and the few social scientists who have concerned themselves with the region have limited themselves to either ethnic groups (Benson&Svanberg 1988, Gladney 1998a-c, Rudelson 1996), historical analyses (Barfield 1989, Duara 1995, Millward 1996, Paine 1996), or political systems (Olcott 1994, von Gumpfenberg 2002, Dreyer 1976, Hay 1994). While these generally useful texts do shed some light on the processes involved with negotiating the border, this is not their primary focus and so most information is circumstantial for the subject at hand. I do have the impression, however, that the China-Kazakhstan border is an exceptional and unique border for both states. Nowhere have I encountered a border so difficult to negotiate in either country with Chinese immigration being so restrictive to entering non-nationals and Kazakhstan emigration being so restrictive to exiting non-nationals. Again, I see the reasons for this in historical factors and the long tradition of this border being heavily contested first between two empires and then between two closely related but mutually hostile ideological regimes vying for prestige. The effect of this national level discourse for control over the frontier on local perspectives has, maybe surprisingly, been to focus local attention of the border away from it and towards the national centre.

The objective of this thesis has been to wrest control from the narrative of national and international relations pursued by the centre and its institutions at the frontier and so heavily over-represented in the literature, and to refocus on a local perspective of the border, in effect showing that the border is an example of "a mental construct becoming a social reality" (Baud&van Schendel 1997:242). This I have attempted to do by examining historical and political policies towards the border and by interviewing people in the region as to their perspectives towards this political construct. I have found that the national discourse of control over the border is present at the levels I could gain access to and that it goes surprisingly uncontested by my informants. Noteworthy is the fact that both locals and officials on the

Chinese side seemed considerably more aware of its ramifications than informants on the Kazakhstani side were. Is this due to the much attested to fact of the 'strength' of the Chinese nation-state as projected outwards into Kazakhstan or is it maybe because of a differing attitude towards the role borders play typologically in both countries? Why is it that neighbouring countries such as Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, despite similarly tumultuous historical and political relations to China, seem to present a different form of frontier? This points to the role other factors may play in the discourse of border control and negotiation, possibly of a more political or economic nature. I have unfortunately been unable to draw these much-needed comparisons between the various borders so as to be able to satisfactorily answer these questions although if I had been unable to visit the Kyrgyzstan border I may have been able to attempt an answer. Yet it seems to me that we can only understand the precise mechanisms of 'The Border' and narrate it in such a way that we can approach an understanding of the way in which the inhabitants on both sides of it and the frontier zone in general see their role in 'their' nation-state's society by attempting a comparative analysis of borders in general. The social reality invoked by the mental construct, to paraphrase Baud&van Schendel, is dependent on the nature of the border discourse and the motivations underlying this discourse held by all the participants. As one informant so succinctly put it, 'the border is the first and the last thing you see of a nation; thus, if it is a traumatic experience it shows that the society you approach is traumatised and if it is a pleasant experience then that society is at peace with itself'.

Appendix I: Interviews Conducted

Kazakhstan

MARGERITA (11.3.03): Business woman in Almaty, Kazakhstani of Russian descent, mid-40s.

ANDY (14.3.03): American citizen working for the Nuclear Technology Safety Centre in Almaty, fluent speaker of Russian and married to a Kazakh from Almaty. Resident in Kazakhstan for five years.

ALEXANDER K. (14.3.03): Project leader for the Nuclear Technology Safety Centre in Almaty, Kazakhstani of partly Russian and partly Kazakh descent, mid-30s.

Michael Tschanz [MT] (14.3.03): Director of the International Organisation for Migration in Almaty, Swiss citizen, fluent speaker of Russian. Active in Kazakhstan for two years.

Security Guard [DB1] (15.3.03): Kazakh commanding officer at the first border checkpoint from Almaty (near Schonzhy). Probably resident in Almaty, early 40s.

PATRICK (15.3.03): American citizen, project manager of 'Harvest', a non-profit organisation in the Visyek region (near Esik) aimed at Uighurs in Southeast Kazakhstan. Fluent speaker of Uighur (Kashgar dialect) and Kazakh.

ACHMAD (15.3.03): Kazakhstani Uighur from Xinjiang's Kuqa region and resident in Visyek, member of an expatriate Uighur group (no closer specifications possible), early 50s, fluent speaker of Uighur and Russian. In the interview he translated for two adolescent Uighur students from the Zharkent/Panfilov area near the border.

VALERY (17.3.03): Director of the Business Centre in Taldyqorghana, Kazakhstani of Russian descent, mid-50s.

VADIM (17.3.03): Taxi driver and local entrepreneur (no closer specifications possible), Kazakhstani of Russian descent, resident in Tekeli, mid-40s.

MARAT (20.3.03): Taxi driver and local entrepreneur (no closer specifications possible), Kazakh, family relations to the local police, resident of Ucharal, early 50s.

OSKAR (20.3.03): Police chief in Koktuma, Kazakh, family relations to the business elite in Almaty, early 40s.

Migration Officer [DB2] (20.3.03): Head of the Migration Police in the Alaköl region (Ucharal), Kazakh, wealthy and well-connected to local politicians and international business in Almaty, late 40s.

IRINA (29.3.03): Student of Sociology in Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstani of Russian descent, late 20s.

MAZHIT (29.3.03): Real estate developer active in Northeast Kazakhstan *oblast* and resident in Semey/Semipalatinsk, in his own words the richest man in the area, political connections to Astana and Almaty, Kazakh, late 40s.

LING (30.3.03): Hui Chinese (Muslim) migrant worker in Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk, originally from Gansu province, family connections to border guards at Maykapchigay, speaker of conversational Russian and fluent *putonghua*, early 30s.

Security Guard [DB3] (1.4.03): Ranking police officer at Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk bus station, Kazakh, early 30s.

ZOYA (2.4.03): Uighur originally from Kashgar, married to a prominent Kazakh businessman and resident in Almaty, theoretically a citizen of China but without a passport. Came to Kazakhstan as a refugee in the early 1950s as a teenager. Fluent speaker of Russian and conversational *putonghua*. Early 60s.

ADILBEK (2.4.03): Senior Party official in Semey/Semipalatinsk and former Communist Party apparatchik (in his own words), Kazakh, late 60s.

Xinjiang

Border Guard [DB4] (5.4.03): Ranking immigration officer at the Khorgos border post, ethnic Kazakh, resident of Yining, late 20s.

EMIL (6.4.03): Director of the Border Economic Cooperative Zone enterprise in Yining, Kazakhstani of Russian descent, family connections to President Nazarbaev, graduate of Oxford University, late 20s.

GENNADY (7.4.03): Chinese citizen of Tatar descent (fourth generation), resident of Yining, fluent speaker of *putonghua* and Russian. Teaches Russian to Kazakh Chinese wanting to emigrate to Kazakhstan. Early 40s.

ALEXANDER B. (7.4.03): Uzbekistani of Korean descent, professional ballet dancer in a Tashkent ensemble often performing in China. Speaker of conversational *putonghua* and fluent Russian, late 20s.

USMAN (8.4.03): Assistant manager of the Bank of China in Yining, ethnic Kazakh and Chinese citizen, fluent speaker of *putonghua* and Kazakh, mid-30s.

ABLIMIT (10.4.03): High school teacher in Urumqi, ethnic Uighur with emigrated family members in Kazakhstan. Frequent trader at the Kashgar Sunday market. Late 40s.

MA (11.4.03): Café owner and local entrepreneur, ethnic Han originally from Shanxi province, resident in Turpan for over 20 years, early 30s.

KINARA (14.4.03): Guesthouse owner in Tacheng, ethnic Kazakh and Chinese citizen, speaker of Kazakh and *putonghua*, early 50s.

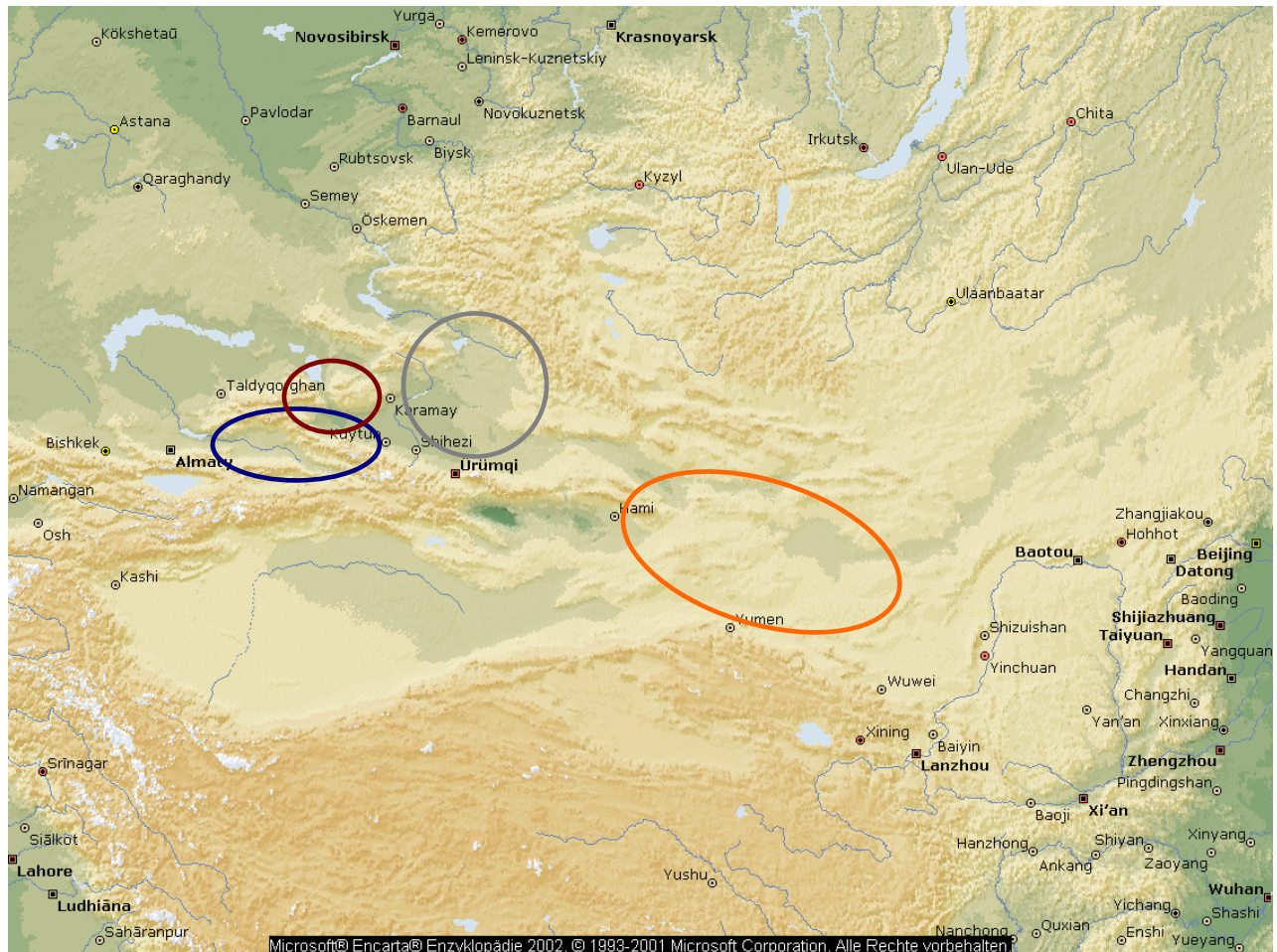
GULMIRA (15.4.03): Primary school teacher in Tacheng and bazaar saleswoman, ethnic Kazakh and Chinese citizen, speaker of fluent Kazakh and *putonghua* and conversational Russian, late 50s.

BAI (17.4.03): Local official for the PSB in Burqin, ethnic Han originally from Hubei province where most of his family still live. Married to an Uighur, speaker of conversational Uighur and some Kazakh, mid-40s.



Blue arrow: approaches from Siberia and the Mongolian Steppe through Manchuria

Map 2: Xinjiang, Mongolia, and the South-eastern Kazakh Steppe



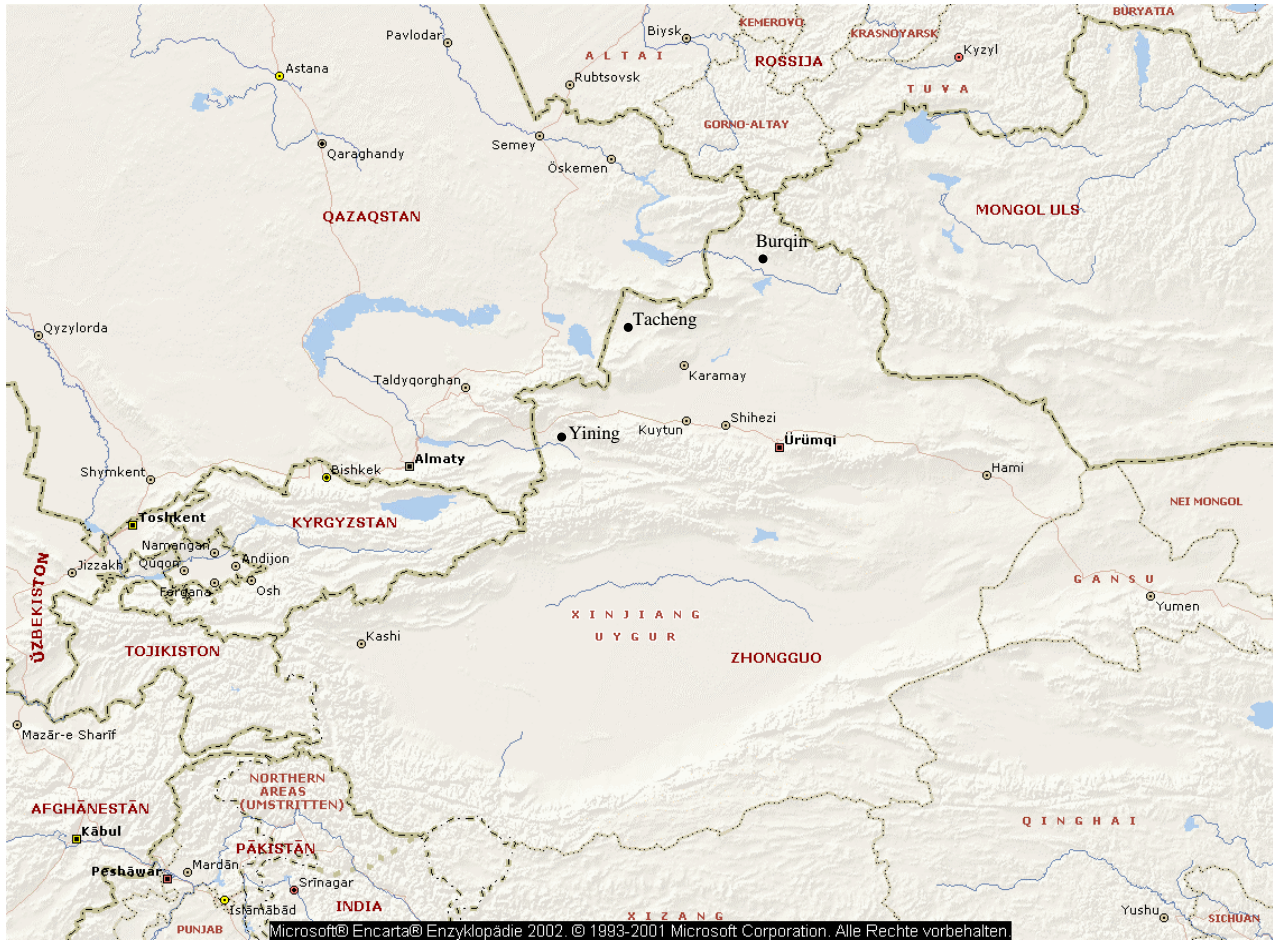
Red circle: the Gansu Corridor

Grey circle: the Zhungarian Basin with the Irtys (Ertix) River and the Altay in the north

Brown circle: Zhungarian Gates at Dostyk/Druzhba between Zhungarsky Alatau and Tian Shan

Blue circle: The Ili Valley through the Tian Shan

**Map 3: Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR)
and Its Neighbouring States Today**



Map 4: The Kazakhstan-Xinjiang Border



Red dashes: travel route in Xinjiang, April 2003

Blue circles: The four official border crossings (from the south: Khorgos between Zharkent/Panfilov and Yining, Dostyk/Druzhba (train), Bakhty between Makanchi and Tacheng, Maykapchigay and Jeminay between Öskemen/Ust-Kamenogorsk and Burqin)

The total length of the Kazakhstan-Xinjiang border equals 1583km, or 12.8% of Kazakhstan's borders and 6.9% of China's borders.

Map 5: Southeast Kazakhstan (Taldyqorghan *Oblast*) – Xinjiang Border



Red dashes: travel route Kazakhstan March/April 2003

Map 6: Northeast Kazakhstan *Oblast* – Xinjiang – Russian Border



Red dashes: travel route Kazakhstan March/April 2003

Appendix III: Joint Kazakhstan-PRC Declaration of 1995 (Russian Original)

ЮРИСТ - справочная правовая система. ЮРИСТ 3.0
Документ "СОВМЕСТНАЯ ДЕКЛАРАЦИЯ МЕЖДУ РК И КНР ОТ 11.09.95"
Измеченный номер: Август 08, 2002

Совместная декларация о дальнейшем развитии и углублении дружественных взаимоотношений между Республикой Казахстан и Китайской Народной Республикой (г. Пекин, 11 сентября 1995 г.)

Вступила в силу со дня подписания

I. Республика Казахстан и Китайская Народная Республика, в дальнейшем именуемые Сторонами, единодушно считают, что содержание и развитие между ними долговременных и стабильных отношений добрососедства, дружбы и взаимовыгодного сотрудничества отвечает коренным интересам двух стран и народов, благоприятствует сохранению и укреплению мира, стабильности и развития в Азии и во всем мире.

II. Стороны высоко оценивают успешное развитие отношений между двумя странами после установления дипломатических отношений между Казахстаном и Китаем, считают, что имеются широкие перспективы и обширный потенциал для дальнейшего развития двусторонних отношений в политической, экономической, гуманитарной и других областях.

III. Стороны подтверждают твердую приверженность принципам, зафиксированным в опубликованном в январе 1992 года Совместном коммюнике об установлении дипломатических отношений между Республикой Казахстан и Китайской Народной Республикой, в подписанном в феврале 1992 года Совместном коммюнике, Совместной Декларации об основах дружественных взаимоотношений между Республикой Казахстан и Китайской Народной Республикой, подписанной в октябре 1993 года, и полны решимости, обращаясь в XXI век, поднять отношения между двумя странами на качественно новый уровень.

IV. В этих целях Стороны преисполнены решимости предпринимать активные и разносторонние шаги:

1. В области политических отношений:

- основываясь на пяти принципах мирного сосуществования, решительно и неуклонно сохранять и развивать взаимоотношения долговременного добрососедства и дружбы между двумя странами, продолжать укреплять взаимопонимание и доверие, поддерживать интенсивный и разносторонний диалог на разных уровнях, решать возникающие проблемы на основе общепринятых норм международного права, в духе открытости, доброжелательности, учета взаимных интересов;
- строго соблюдать Соглашение между Республикой Казахстан и Китайской Народной Республикой о казахстанско-китайской государственной границе, подписанное 26 апреля 1994 года, в скорейшее время приступить к демаркации границы и, основываясь на договорах о нынешней границе между двумя странами и общепринятых принципах международного права, путем равноправных консультаций, в духе взаимоуступчивости и взаимопонимания продолжать обсуждение остающихся вопросов, чтобы найти приемлемое для обеих сторон справедливое и рациональное решение;
- выступать против всякого рода национального сепаратизма, не допуская на своей территории направленную против другой Стороны сепаратистскую деятельность любых организаций и сил;
- исходя из взаимного уважения пути развития, выбранного народом каждой из Сторон с учетом конкретных условий своей страны, проводить взаимное ознакомление с политикой и практикой осуществляемых реформ;

2. В торгово-экономической сфере:

- в максимальной степени использовать преимущества, предоставляемые географической близостью и взаимодополняемым характером экономик, придерживаясь принципа равенства и взаимной выгоды, с учетом условий и возможностей обеих Сторон; постепенно осуществлять переход к формам хозяйственных связей, соответствующим международным стандартам, уделяя приоритетное внимание сотрудничеству в областях энергетики, металлургии, нефтехимической промышленности, производства минеральных удобрений, транспорта, текстильной промышленности;
- повышать уровень и качество сотрудничества, с учетом потребностей и возможностей увеличивать удельный вес крупных объектов сотрудничества, в том числе активно изучать возможности сотрудничества по проекту прокладки нефтепровода от Казахстана до тихоокеанского побережья Китая по территории двух стран;
- эффективно реализовывать Соглашение о поощрении и взаимной защите капиталовложений, подписанное Правительствами двух стран; улучшать инвестиционные условия в своей стране в соответствии с установившимися правилами и практикой международных торгово-экономических отношений с тем, чтобы повысить активность деловых кругов обеих стран в сфере взаимных инвестиций;
- предпринимать действенные и эффективные меры для практической реализации подписанных двусторонних экономических, торговых и финансовых договоров и соглашений, прилагать дальнейшие усилия к усовершенствованию и укреплению договорно-правовой базы двусторонних отношений в данной сфере;
- активизировать усилия по поощрению и поддержке предприятий и компаний, являющихся субъектами торгово-экономических отношений между двумя странами, особенно мощных и кредитоспособных предприятий и компаний, в расширении и развитии торгово-экономического сотрудничества в различных формах на равноправной и взаимовыгодной основе;
- предпринимать действенные меры по обеспечению бесперебойных грузопассажирских перевозок, и в этих целях полностью выполнить уже подписанные и планируемые к подписанию соответствующие двусторонние и многосторонние соглашения;
- поощрять развитие отношений и сотрудничества в области банковского дела;
- активизировать работу казахстанско-китайской межправительственной комиссии по торгово-экономическому, научно-техническому сотрудничеству с тем, чтобы она в полной мере проявила свою роль в урегулировании и стимулировании экономических связей двух стран;
- более активно развивать торгово-экономическое сотрудничество между регионами Казахстана и Китая, особенно приграничными;

3. В военно-политической области:

- способствовать установлению и развитию связей между министерствами обороны двух стран;
- прилагать усилия к скорейшей выработке Соглашения о взаимном сокращении вооруженных сил и мерах укрепления доверия в военной области в районе границы с тем, чтобы и в дальнейшем укреплять атмосферу дружбы, доверия и сотрудничества в районе границы;
- осуществлять военно-техническое сотрудничество на основе взаимной выгоды и с учетом международных обязательств, взятых двумя странами.

4. В гуманитарной области:

- усиливать контроль за взаимными поездками граждан Сторон в соответствии с двусторонними соглашениями и нормами международного права, надежно гарантировать безопасность, защищать законные права и интересы граждан другой Стороны на своей территории;
- в рамках заключенного Договора о правовой помощи по гражданским и уголовным делам и других планируемых к подписанию соглашений, в соответствии с общепринятой международной практикой укреплять сотрудничество в правовой сфере;
- расширять двусторонние культурные связи и обмена в сфере образования, в первую очередь содействуя реализации соответствующими министерствами, комитетами и ведомствами двух стран достигнутых договоренностей о сотрудничестве в этих областях;
- содействовать развитию двусторонних туристических обменов, имея в виду значение туризма для более широкого взаимного ознакомления народов Казахстана и Китая с их древней историей, самобытной культурой и традициями;

5. В сфере международных отношений:

- в целях дальнейшего расширения общего понимания по международным и региональным проблемам проводить консультации между внешнеполитическими ведомствами двух стран и в рамках международных организаций, укреплять взаимодействие в международных делах, согласовывать позиции по актуальным проблемам современных международных отношений;
- прилагать совместные усилия к установлению нового справедливого и рационального международного политического и экономического порядка, считая, что он должен строиться на основе принципов взаимного уважения суверенитета и территориальной целостности, ненападения, невмешательства во внутренние дела, равенства и взаимной выгоды, мирного сосуществования, уважения права народов всех стран на выбор социального строя и модели развития.

Appendix IV: Pictures

Picture 1: Entrance to the town of Tekeli (Kazakhstan)



Slogan reads *'Strength and Power of the People for Solidarity'* (left Kazakh, right Russian).

Picture 2: Presidential slogan in Ucharal (Kazakhstan)



Slogan reads *'To possess a state language – the moral duty of every citizen'* (top Kazakh, bottom Russian, left a picture of President Nazarbaev).

Picture 3: Chinese edge of no-man's-land to Kazakhstan at Khorgos



Picture 4: First Chinese building at Chinese customs (Khorgos)



Slogan on the building reads '*Be politically qualified – Be truly proficient in military affairs – Have moral integrity*' (the last three characters (*feng zheng tai*) are missing).

Slogan in the foreground is a quote and reads '*To be a good border guard means to establish a window of civility*' (President Jiang ZeMin, 1990, on the occasion of the re-opening of this border checkpoint).

Picture 5: Entrance to the Chinese border heartland beyond customs (Khorgos)



Slogan reads *'The market for trade between countries in Khorgos for the inhabitants of the frontier'*

Picture 6: View of the Chinese town of Khorgos and the road to Yining¹⁵⁷



¹⁵⁷ Pictures 1 and 2 were taken by me in Kazakhstan in March 2003. Pictures 3-6 are postcards widely available in all post offices in Yining, Tacheng, and Urumqi and are part of a set depicting border crossings to Kazakhstan. All pictures in this set show Chinese settings and exclusively portray Chinese inscriptions and motifs, completely ignoring the presence of the Kazakhstani borderline with its inscriptions. The slogans on picture 4 are widely known throughout China and commonly encountered at stations, airports, and borders.

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