

# Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang

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## Preamble

The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is situated in northwest China and in the hinterland of the Eurasian Continent. It borders eight countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It was a place where the famed Silk Road connected ancient China with the rest of the world and where diverse cultures gathered.

China is a unified multiethnic country, and the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang have long been part of the Chinese nation. Throughout its long history, Xinjiang's development has been closely related to that of China. However, in more recent times, hostile forces in and outside China, especially separatists, religious extremists and terrorists, have tried to split China and break it apart by distorting history and facts. They deny the fact that Xinjiang has been a part of China's territory where various ethnic groups have lived together, many cultures have communicated with each other, and different religions have coexisted since ancient times. They call Xinjiang "East Turkistan" and clamor for independence. They attempt to separate ethnic groups in Xinjiang from the Chinese nation and ethnic cultures in the region from the diverse but integrated Chinese culture.

History cannot be tampered with and facts are indisputable. Xinjiang has long been an inseparable part of Chinese territory; never has it been the so-called East Turkistan. The Uygur ethnic group came into being through a long process of migration and integration; it is part of the Chinese nation. In Xinjiang, different cultures and religions coexist, and ethnic cultures have been fostered and developed in the embrace of the Chinese civilization. Islam is neither an indigenous nor the sole belief system of the Uygur people. It has taken root in the Chinese culture and developed soundly in China.

## **I. Xinjiang Has Long Been an Inseparable Part of Chinese Territory**

A unified multiethnic country, China came into being as a result of economic and social development. Historically, the East Asia continent that nurtured the ancestors of today's Chinese nation had both farming and nomadic herding areas. Different ethnic groups with diverse livelihoods and lifestyles communicated with and complemented each other, and migrated and lived together. They experienced both conflict and integration, and pushed China to move forward and become a unified multiethnic country.

Xia, Shang, and Zhou, the three earliest dynasties in Chinese history, emerged successively in the Central Plains, a vast area covering the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. They integrated with neighboring clans, tribes, and tribal alliances into bigger ethnic groups, called by the joint name Zhuxia or Huaxia. From the Spring and Autumn Period to the Warring States Period, Huaxia groups continued to communicate and blend with neighboring clans, tribes, and tribal alliances, and

gradually seven regions – Qi, Chu, Yan, Han, Zhao, Wei, and Qin – came into being. These maintained contact with neighboring ethnic groups such as Yi in the east, Man in the south, Rong in the west, and Di in the north. In 221 BC, the First Emperor of Qin founded the first unified feudal dynasty. In 202 BC, Liu Bang, later known as Emperor Gaozu, set up another unified feudal dynasty – Han.

From the Han to the middle and late Qing, the vast areas both north and south of the Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang were called the Western Regions. Xinjiang was formally included in Chinese territory in the Han Dynasty. Later dynasties in the Central Plains, some strong, some weak, kept closer or looser contact with the Western Regions, and the central authorities exercised tighter or slacker administration over Xinjiang. But all of these dynasties regarded the Western Regions as part of Chinese territory and exercised the right of jurisdiction over Xinjiang. Through the long formative process of turning China into a unified multiethnic country, many ethnic groups worked together to develop its vast territories and build the diverse Chinese nation. The unification of multiethnic China was a result of common efforts made by the whole Chinese nation, including the ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

In the early Western Han Dynasty, the nomadic Xiongnu people in northern China controlled the Western Regions, and attacked the Central Plains from time to time. After Emperor Wudi took the throne, he adopted a series of military and political responses. In 138 BC and 119 BC, the Western Han government dispatched Zhang Qian as an envoy to the Western Regions, who convinced the Rouzhi and Wusun peoples to form an alliance to fight the Xiongnu. On three occasions between 127 BC and 119 BC, the Western Han authorities dispatched forces that inflicted heavy losses on the Xiongnu. They then set up four prefectures – Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan and Dunhuang – on key passageways from the Central Plains to the Western Regions. In 101 BC, the Western Han began to send garrison troops to transform wastelands to arable land in Luntai and some other places, and appointed local officers to command them. In 60 BC, the Xiongnu king who ruled the areas north of the eastern Tianshan Mountains surrendered to the Han government, which thereby incorporated the Western Regions into Han's territory. In the same year, the Western Regions Frontier Command was established to exercise military and political administration over the Western Regions. In 123, during the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Western Regions Frontier Command was replaced by the Western Regions Garrison Command, which continued to administer the Western Regions.

The Kingdom of Wei of the Three Kingdoms Period adopted the Han system, stationing a garrison commander to rule the Western Regions. The Western Jin Dynasty stationed a garrison commander and a governor to exercise military and

political administration over the Western Regions. In the Three Kingdoms Period and the Jin Dynasty, the Xiongnu, Xianbei, Dingling, and Wuhuan in northern China moved inland and finally integrated with the Han ethnic group. In 327, the Former Liang regime spread the system of prefectures and counties to the Western Regions and set up the Gaochang Prefecture in the Turpan Basin. From 460 to 640, the Uighur Kingdom of Gaochang centered in the Turpan Basin and with the Han people as the main population was ruled successively by the Kan, Zhang, Ma, and Qu families.

The Sui Dynasty ended the long-term division of the Central Plains, and expanded the areas in the Western Regions that adopted the system of prefectures and counties. The Turk, Tuyuhun, Dangxiang, Jialiangyi, Fuguo and some other ethnic groups submitted to the authority of the Sui. In the Tang Dynasty, the central government strengthened its rule over the Western Regions by establishing the Grand Anxi Frontier Command and the Grand Beiting Frontier Command to administer the Western Regions. The ruling clan of the Kingdom of Khotan (232 BC-AD 1006) asserted that it was related by blood to the emperor of the Tang Dynasty and changed its surname to Li, the surname of the Tang emperor. In the Song Dynasty, local regimes of the Western Regions paid tribute to the Song. The king of Uighur Kingdom of Gaochang honored the Song emperor as “Uncle” and called himself “Nephew in the Western Regions”, while the Kara-Khanid Khanate (840-1212) sent envoys many times to pay tribute to the Song court.

In the Yuan Dynasty, the central government strengthened administration over the Western Regions by establishing the Beiting Command and the Pacification Commissioner’s Office to manage military and political affairs. In 1251, the system of administrative provinces was adopted in the Western Regions. In the Ming Dynasty, the imperial court set up the Hami Garrison Command to manage local affairs, and then set up six garrison cities – Anding, Aduan, Quxian, Handong, ChijinMengu, and Shazhou – between the Jiayu Pass and Hami to support local administration. In the Qing Dynasty, the imperial court quelled a rebellion launched by the Junggar regime, defining the northwestern border of China. It then adopted more systematic policies for governing Xinjiang. In 1762, the Qing government established the post of Ili General and adopted a mechanism combining military and political administration. In 1884, it established a province and renamed the Western Regions as “Xinjiang”, meaning “land newly returned”. In 1912, as a response to the Revolution of 1911, Xinjiang became a province of the Republic of China.

In 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded, and Xinjiang was liberated peacefully. In 1955, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was established. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, all ethnic groups

in Xinjiang united and worked with other groups across the country, opening a period of unprecedented prosperity for the region.

In the long history, Chinese territory has experienced periods of division and unification, but unification and development have always been the overall trend. Small kingdoms or separatist regimes existed in the Central Plains in different periods; similarly, Xinjiang also witnessed several local regimes dividing the region. Nevertheless, no matter how long these regimes divided Xinjiang and however serious the situation was, the region was ultimately united. In different periods in Xinjiang there were city-states, nomadic states, princedoms, kingdoms, khanates, vassal states, tributary states and some other forms of local regime, such as the 36 states of the Western Regions in the Han Dynasty, the Kara-Khanid Khanate and the Uighur Kingdom of Gaochang in the Song Dynasty, the Chagatai Khanate in the Yuan Dynasty, and the Yarkant Khanate in the Ming Dynasty. But these were all local regimes within the territory of China; they were never independent countries. These local regimes had a strong sense of national identity, and acknowledged themselves as branches or vassals of the Central Plains authorities.

*A Comprehensive Dictionary of Turkic Languages*, written by Turkic scholar Mahmud al-Kashgari in the 11th century, states that China [often referred to as Qin in ancient times] was composed of three parts, namely Upper Qin (the area of the Northern Song Dynasty), Middle Qin (the area of the Liao Dynasty), and Lower Qin (the area of the Kara-Khanid Khanate). In the *Travels to the West of Master of Eternal Spring QiuChuji*, the Han people were called the Tavghaq; and in *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Turkic Languages*, the Uighur people were called Tat Tavghaq, or the Uighurs of China. The coins of the Kara-Khanid Khanate were often inscribed with such titles as TavghaqBughra Khan, King from Qin, and King from Qin and the East to indicate that the khanate was part of China.

## **II. Xinjiang Has Never Been “East Turkistan”**

The Turks (*Tujue* in Chinese) were nomads who originated in the Altai Mountains in the middle of the 6th century. The Turks annihilated the Rouran and established a Turkic khanate in 552, which split into two forces, settling on either side of the Altai in 583. The Tang Dynasty defeated the Eastern Turkic Khaganate (583-630) in 630, and joined forces with the Ouigours to eliminate the Western Turkic Khaganate (583-657) in 657, thus uniting the Western Regions under central rule. In

682, the remnants of the Eastern Turks that were relocated in the north rebelled against the Tang court and established the Second Turkic Khaganate (682-744). This was quelled by the Tang in 744 with the help of the Ouigour and Karluk peoples in Mobei (the area north of the vast deserts on the Mongolian Plateau). Kutlug Bilge Khagan, leader of the Ouigours, was granted a title by the Tang court, and established a khanate in Mobei. In the late 8th century, the nomadic Turks dissolved as its last khanate collapsed. They mixed with local tribes during their migration to Central and West Asia, but these newly formed peoples were fundamentally different to the ancient Turks. Ever since then, Turks have disappeared from China's northern regions.

Never in Chinese history has Xinjiang been referred to as "East Turkistan", and there has never been any state known as "East Turkistan". From the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century, as the West made a distinction between the various Turkic languages (branches of the Altaic languages), some foreign scholars and writers coined the term "Turkistan" to refer to the region south of the Tianshan Mountains and north of Afghanistan, which roughly covered the area from southern Xinjiang to Central Asia. They called the two areas on either side of the Pamirs "West Turkistan" and "East Turkistan". At the turn of the 20th century, as "Pan-Turkism" and "Pan-Islamism" made inroads into Xinjiang, separatists in and outside China politicized the geographical concept and manipulated its meaning, inciting all ethnic groups speaking Turkic languages and believing in Islam to join in creating the theocratic state of "East Turkistan". The advocacy of this so-called state has become a political tool and program for separatists and anti-China forces attempting to split China.

### **III. The Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang Are Part of the Chinese Nation**

Historically, the Chinese nation was formed and developed through cultural communication, exchanges and integration between peoples in the Central Plains and in other regions. The Huaxia people who appeared in the pre-Qin period, after years of integration with various other peoples, and especially after 500 turbulent years of cultural convergence in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, further integrated with other peoples in the Qin and Han dynasties to form the Han people, a majority group in the Central Plains and the major people in Chinese history. In the period of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, different peoples, especially the northern ethnic minorities, migrated on a large scale to the Central

Plains, resulting in further ethnic merging. In the 13th century, with the founding of the Yuan Dynasty, an unprecedented level of political unification gave rise to unprecedented ethnic migration, leading to various ethnic groups living together within the Yuan territories.

After this long historical process, different ethnic groups of China eventually settled among each other, with compact communities here and there. Multiethnicity is a prominent feature of China. Together, the ethnic groups of China have explored the country's rich resources and vast territories, and have created a long history and a splendid culture.

Xinjiang has been in close contact with the Central Plains since ancient times. As early as the Shang Dynasty, the Western Regions traded jade with the Central Plains. In the Han Dynasty, imperial envoy Zhang Qian opened up the Silk Road, along which emissaries and merchants traveled. In the Tang Dynasty, merchants from the Central Plains and the Western Regions traded silk and horses, and a grand thoroughfare connected the Western Regions directly to Chang'an, the Tang capital, with courier stations along the way. Music and dances from Khotan, Gaochang and other places in the Western Regions were performed in the Tang court, and the exotic cultures of the Western Regions were popular in Chang'an. The music of Qiuci (today's Kucha, Xinjiang) enjoyed great fame in the Central Plains, and became an important component of court music in the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties. In modern times, at critical junctures of the Chinese nation, the ethnic peoples in Xinjiang have fought alongside the rest of the country with great patriotism. Since the founding of the PRC, ethnic relations in Xinjiang have entered a new era characterized by equality, solidarity, mutual help, and harmony.

Xinjiang has been a multiethnic region since ancient times. The earliest explorers of Xinjiang included the Sai, Rouzhi, Wusun, Qiang, Qiuci, Yanqi, Khotan, Shule, Shache, Loulan and Cheshi peoples living in the Tianshan Mountains and the Xiongnu and Han peoples in the pre-Qin, Qin and Han dynasties. Following them were peoples of the Han, the Xianbei, Rouran, Gaoche, Yeda, and Tuyuhun in the period of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties; of the Turk, Tubo, and Ouigour in the period of the Sui and Tang dynasties; of the Khitan in the period of the Song, Liao, and Jin dynasties; of the Mongol, Jurchen, Dangxiang (Tangut), Kazak, Kirgiz, Manchu, Xibe, Daur, Hui, Uzbek, and Tatar in the period of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Large numbers of various ethnic groups entering Xinjiang in different periods brought technology, culture and ideas, folk customs, and many other aspects of their lives into the region, promoting economic and social development through exchanges and integration. They were all explorers of Xinjiang. By the end of the 19th century, 13 ethnic groups – the Uygur, Han, Kazak, Mongol, Hui, Kirgiz, Manchu,

Xibe, Tajik, Daur, Uzbek, Tatar, and Russian – had settled in Xinjiang, with the Uygurs having the largest population. Ethnic groups had grown, developed and integrated with each other despite periods of isolations and conflict, and shared good fortune and hardship in a close relationship. All of them have made important contribution to exploring, developing and protecting Xinjiang, and they are all masters of Xinjiang. Currently inhabited by 56 ethnic groups, Xinjiang is one of the provincial-level administrative regions with the most ethnic groups in China. The Uygur, Han, Kazak and Hui have populations of one million and above, and the Kirgiz and Mongol have populations exceeding 100,000. Today, Xinjiang, home to various ethnic groups, is an integral part of the Chinese nation.

The evolution of ethnic relations in Xinjiang has always been linked to that between all ethnic groups in China. There have been periods of isolation and conflict, but exchange and integration, and unity and joint effort have always been the prevailing trend. The ethnic groups of China, including those in Xinjiang, live together alongside each other. They are economically interdependent and embrace each other's culture, and are a unified whole that has become impossible to separate. They are members of the same big family. In this family of the Chinese nation, the ethnic groups in Xinjiang are like brothers and sisters who work and live together and help each other out. They have guarded against foreign aggression, opposed separatist activities, and safeguarded national unification.

## **IV. The Uygur Ethnic Group Formed Through a Long Process of Migration and Integration**

The main ancestors of the Uygurs were the Ouigour people who lived on the Mongolian Plateau during the Sui and Tang dynasties. Many different names were used in historical records to refer to this group of people.

Historically, to resist oppression and slavery by the Turks, the Ouigour people united with some of the Tiele tribes to form the Ouigour tribal alliance. In 744, the Tang court conferred a title on Kutlug Bilge Khagan, who united the Ouigour tribes. In 788, the then Ouigour ruler wrote to the Tang emperor, requesting to have their name changed to "Uighur".

After the Uighur Khanate was defeated by the Kyrgyz people in 840, some of the Uighurs moved inland to live with the Han people, and the rest were divided into three sub-groups. One of the sub-groups moved to the Turpan Basin and the present-day Jimsar region, where they founded the Uighur Kingdom of Gaochang. Another moved

to the Hexi Corridor, where they merged with local ethnic groups to become what was later known as the Yugurs. The third sub-group moved to the west of Pamir, scattered in areas from Central Asia to Kashgar, and joined the Karluk and Yagma peoples in founding the Kara-Khanid Khanate. There they merged with the Han people in the Turpan Basin and the Yanqi, Qiuci, Khotan, Shule, and other peoples in the Tarim Basin to form the main body of the modern Uygur ethnic group.

In the Yuan and Ming dynasties, the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang further merged. The Mongols, especially those of the Chagatai Khanate, were fused with the Uighurs, adding fresh blood to the Uighur group. In 1934, Xinjiang issued a government order, stipulating that “维吾尔” would be the standard Chinese name for Uygurs, which for the first time expressed the accurate meaning of “Uygur”: to maintain unity among the people.

The Ouigours endured slavery under the rule of the Turks. With support from Tang Dynasty troops, they rebelled against the Eastern Turkic Khaganate and defeated the Western Turkic Khaganate and the Second Turkic Khaganate. After the demise of the Western Turkic Khaganate, some Turkic-speaking tribes migrated westward. One of these tribes gradually settled down in Asia Minor, and integrated with local ethnic groups. The Uygurs are not descendants of the Turks.

Since the modern times, some Pan-Turkism advocates with ulterior motives have described all peoples of the Turkic language family as “the Turks” using the untenable argument that the Turkic-speaking tribe integrated with the ancestors of the Turkish people after migrating westward. A language family and an ethnic group are two essentially different concepts. In China, ethnic groups speaking Turkic languages include the Uygurs, Kazaks, Kirgiz, Uzbeks, Tatars, Yugurs, and Salars, each with its own history and unique culture. These peoples cannot be referred to as “Turks”.

## **V. Xinjiang Ethnic Cultures Are Part of Chinese Culture**

The Chinese nation has a civilization that dates back more than 5,000 years. Over these five millennia, all ethnic groups of China have created a long history and a splendid culture. The prosperity of the Qin, Han and Tang dynasties and during the reign of the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors of the Qing Dynasty was achieved by all the ethnic groups together. Ethnic and cultural diversity is a salient feature of the Chinese nation and also an important driving force for China’s national development.

Since ancient times, due to geographic variations and the unbalanced development of different regions, Chinese culture has grown diverse between the south and the north and between the east and the west. As early as the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, basic regional cultures with their own distinctive features had already formed. From the Qin and Han dynasties, on through all the dynasties that followed, across the vast territory of China, cultures of all ethnic groups engaged in constant exchange and integration through migration, convergence, wars, marriage, and trade, and finally formed a splendid overall Chinese culture.

More than 2,000 years ago and beyond, Xinjiang was a gateway for China's civilization to open to the West and an important base for cultural exchange and communication between the East and the West. The region experienced a wealth of cultural diversity and coexistence. Long periods of exchange and integration between the culture of the Central Plains and those of the Western Regions drove not only the development of various ethnic cultures in Xinjiang, but also the diversified and integrated Chinese culture as a whole. From the very beginning, ethnic cultures in Xinjiang have reflected elements of Chinese culture, which has always been the emotional attachment and spiritual home for all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, as well as a dynamic source of development for the ethnic cultures in the region.

Economic and cultural exchange between the Central Plains and the Western Regions began in the pre-Qin period. In the Han Dynasty, the Chinese language became one of the official languages used in government documents of that region. Pipa (the four-stringed Chinese lute), the Qiang flute, and other musical instruments were introduced to the Central Plains from or via the region. Agricultural production techniques, the system of etiquette, books in Chinese, and music and dances of the Central Plains spread widely in the region.

Later, the Uighur Kingdom of Gaochang adopted the calendar of the Tang Dynasty, and this practice continued until the latter half of the 10th century. "The governor's generals are skilled in the songs of ethnic minorities, and local chiefs are able to speak Chinese." This verse by the Tang poet Cen Shen reflects the equal status of Chinese and other ethnic languages commonly used at that time. It also demonstrates the cultural prosperity of that period.

Late in the Song Dynasty, Buddhist arts were still flourishing in the south of the Tianshan Mountains and a large number of relics remain till today. In the Western Liao period (1124-1218), the Khitan people, who destroyed the Kara-Khanid Khanate, controlled the Xinjiang region and Central Asia and realized regional unification, extensively inheriting and adopting the laws and regulations and etiquette of the Central Plains.

In the Yuan Dynasty, large numbers of Uighurs and people of other ethnic groups migrated into the inland areas. They settled there and learned and used the Chinese language. Some of them even sat for the imperial examinations and were recruited as officials at various levels. From these groups emerged statesmen, writers, artists, historians, agronomists, translators and specialists of other types, who vigorously promoted the development of ethnic cultures in Xinjiang.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, under the influence of Islamic culture, ethnic cultures in Xinjiang developed slowly in integration and conflict with cultures from outside the region. In modern China, under the influence of the Revolution of 1911, the October Revolution in Russia, the May 4th Movement, and the New Democratic Revolution, ethnic cultures in Xinjiang began to modernize, and the Chinese national and cultural identity of all ethnic groups in the region reached a new height. After the founding of the PRC in 1949, ethnic cultures in Xinjiang entered a period of unprecedented prosperity and development.

The historical record indicates that when multiple languages were used as official languages and when exchanges were frequent in Xinjiang, it witnessed a boom in ethnic cultures and social progress. Long years of experience shows that learning and using standard Chinese as a spoken and written language has helped Xinjiang's ethnic cultures to flourish.

The ethnic cultures in Xinjiang always have their roots in the fertile soil of Chinese civilization and make up an inseparable part of Chinese culture. Well before Islamic culture spread into Xinjiang, all ethnic cultures in the region, including the Uygur culture, had prospered in the fertile soil of China's civilization. It was not until the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries, when Islam spread into the region, that the Islamic culture of the Arab civilization – which dates back to the 7th century – began to exert an influence on ethnic cultures in Xinjiang.

Religion can exert an influence on culture in two ways: willing acceptance, and forced acceptance through cultural conflict or even religious wars. In the case of Xinjiang, Islam entered mainly through the latter. This caused serious damage to the cultures and arts of the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang created in earlier periods when Buddhism was popular in the region. As to the incoming Islamic culture, the ethnic cultures in Xinjiang both resisted and assimilated it in a selective manner, and adapted it to China's realities. This did not alter the fact that ethnic cultures in Xinjiang were ingrained with Chinese features, nor did it halt the flow of local cultures into Chinese civilization, or change the fact that they were part of Chinese culture. The epic *Manas*, which originated in the 9th and 10th centuries, became a literary masterpiece well-known in and outside China, thanks to performances and adaptation by Kirgiz singers. Around the 15th century, the epic *Jangar* of the Oirat

Mongols gradually took shape in Xinjiang. These two epics, together with *Life of King Gesar*, are regarded as the three most renowned epics of China's ethnic minority groups. Uygur literature has given birth to a galaxy of excellent works, including *KutadguBilig (Wisdom of Fortune and Joy)*, *Atebetu'lHakayik (A Guide to Truth)*, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Turkic Languages*, and *Twelve Muqams*, all of which are treasures of Chinese culture. They represent the enormous contribution that ethnic groups in Xinjiang have made to the formation and development of Chinese culture.

Having a stronger sense of identity with Chinese culture is essential to the prosperity and development of ethnic cultures in Xinjiang. Throughout history, whenever the central government exercised effective governance over Xinjiang and the society of the region was stable, exchanges and communication between ethnic cultures in Xinjiang and the culture of the Central Plains ran smoothly, and the economy and culture of Xinjiang flourished and grew prosperous. Whenever ethnic cultures in Xinjiang assimilated, integrated and accommodated the diverse culture of the Central Plains, including the concepts of benevolence, people-orientation, integrity, sound reasoning, harmony and unity, diversity and integration of Xinjiang ethnic cultures were more apparent, and these cultures could make more progress. For the ethnic cultures in Xinjiang to prosper and develop they must keep pace with the times, be open and inclusive, engage in exchange and integration with other ethnic cultures in China and mutual learning with other ethnic cultures throughout the world, and play their role in fostering a shared spiritual home for all China's ethnic groups.

## **VI. Multiple Religions Have Long Coexisted in Xinjiang**

China has long been a multi-religious country. In addition to several major religions that are structured in accordance with strict religious norms, a variety of folk beliefs are also popular in China. Among these, Taoism and local folk beliefs are native to China, while all other religions were introduced from foreign countries. The history of Xinjiang shows that multiple religions have long coexisted there, with one or two predominant. The region's religious structure is characterized by blending and coexistence.

The formation and evolution of the coexistence of multiple religions in Xinjiang has been a long process:

- Prior to the 4th century BC, primitive religion was widespread in Xinjiang.
- Around the 1st century BC, Buddhism was introduced into Xinjiang.

•From the 4th to 10th centuries, Buddhism reached its peak, while Zoroastrianism proliferated throughout Xinjiang.

•During the late 16th century and early 17th century, Tibetan Buddhism thrived in northern Xinjiang.

•Around the 5th century, Taoism spread into Xinjiang, prevalent in Turpan and Hami areas. During the Qing Dynasty, it revived in most parts of Xinjiang.

•In the 6th century, Manichaeism and Nestorianism entered Xinjiang. From the 10th to 14th centuries, Nestorianism flourished as the Uighur and some other peoples converted to it.

In the late 9th century and early 10th century, the Kara-Khanid Khanate accepted Islam. It started a 40-year-long religious war in the mid-10th century against the Buddhist Kingdom of Khotan, and conquered it in the early 11th century and imposed Islam there, putting an end to the thousand-year history of Buddhism in that region. With the expansion of Islam, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism declined. In the mid-14th century, the rulers of the Eastern Chagatai Khanate (1348-1509) spread Islam to the northern edge of the Tarim Basin, the Turpan Basin and Hami through war and duress. By the early 16th century, many religions had coexisted in Xinjiang, with Islam predominant, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism gone, and Buddhism and Taoism surviving. The coexistence has continued to this day in the region. In the early 17th century, the Oirat Mongols accepted Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning in the 18th century, Protestantism, Catholicism, and the Eastern Orthodox Church reached Xinjiang.

Xinjiang now has multiple religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and the Eastern Orthodox Church. It has 24,800 venues for religious activities, including mosques, churches, Buddhist and Taoist temples, with 29,300 religious staff. Among these, there are 24,400 mosques, 59 Buddhist temples, 1 Taoist temple, 227 Protestant churches (or meeting grounds), 26 Catholic churches (or meeting grounds), and 3 Orthodox churches (or meeting grounds).

China, along with most other countries, upholds separation of religion from government. No religious organization is allowed to interfere in political and government affairs. No individual or organization is allowed to use religion to interfere in administration, judicial affairs, education, marriage and birth control, to hinder social order, work order and life order, to oppose the Communist Party of China and China's socialist system, or to undermine ethnic solidarity and national unity.

Xinjiang fully respects and protects freedom of religious belief as stipulated in the Constitution of the PRC. Xinjiang respects citizens' freedom to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion. Xinjiang shows zero tolerance to any action that creates

disputes between believers and non-believers, between believers of different religions, and between believers of different sects of a religion. Xinjiang always upholds equality for all religions, showing neither favoritism towards nor discrimination against any religion and allowing no religion to be superior to any other religion. Xinjiang always upholds equality for all individuals before the law. Believers and non-believers enjoy equal rights and obligations, and all law violators, whatever their social background, ethnicity, and religious belief, will be punished in accordance with the law.

To survive and develop, religions must adapt to their social environment. The history of religions in China shows that only by adapting themselves to the Chinese context can they be accommodated within Chinese society. The 70-year history of the PRC also shows that only by adapting to socialist society can religions in China develop soundly. We must uphold the principle of independence and self-management of China's religious affairs, and prevent all religious tendency that seeks to divest itself of all Chinese elements. We must develop and encourage secular, modern and civilized ways of life, and abandon backward and outdated conventions and customs. We must carry forward religious practices adapted to Chinese society, inspire various religions in China with core socialist values and Chinese culture, foster the fusion of religious doctrines with Chinese culture, and lead these religions, including Islam, onto the Chinese path of development.

## **VII. Islam Is Neither an Indigenous nor the Sole Belief System of the Uyghurs**

Primitive religion and Shamanism were practiced by the ancestors of the Uyghurs before Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Nestorianism and Islam were introduced into the region. During the period spanning the Tang and Song dynasties, Buddhism was the predominant religion practiced by the nobility and the common people in the Uighur Kingdom of Gaochang and the Kingdom of Khotan. Many Uighurs converted to Nestorianism during the Yuan Dynasty. Today in Xinjiang, a significant number of people do not follow any religion, and many Uyghurs follow religions other than Islam.

The introduction of Islam into Xinjiang was related to the emergence of the Arab Empire and the eastward expansion of Islam. The Uighur conversion to Islam was not a voluntary choice made by the common people, but a result of religious wars and imposition by the ruling class, though this fact does not undermine our respect for the

Muslims' right to their beliefs. Islam is neither an indigenous nor the sole belief system of the Uygur people.

In the process of accepting Islam, the ancestors of the Uygurs and Kazaks integrated it with local faiths and traditions, while absorbing the cultures of other ethnic groups in the region and from inland areas. Some of their religious concepts, rituals and customs remained as they evolved. Through interaction with these elements, Islam in Xinjiang gradually developed distinct local and ethnic features. For example, orthodox Islam does not allow the worship of anyone or anything other than Allah. However, the Uygurs and some other ethnic groups still venerate mazars, which are mausoleums or shrines, typically of saints or notable religious leaders. Mazar worship is a prominent example of the localization of Islam in Xinjiang. The practice of erecting long poles around the mazars, hung with streamers and sheepskin, is a result of influence from multiple religions including Shamanism and Buddhism. As another example, the Baytulla Mosque in Yining and the Shaanxi Mosque in Urumqi, both first built in Emperor Qianlong's reign (1736-1795) during the Qing Dynasty, are characterized by beam-column construction which was common in inland areas. This embodies a form of localization of Islam.

It should be noted that since the late 1970s and early 1980s, and in particular since the end of the Cold War, the surge in religious extremism around the world has caused a rise in religious extremism in Xinjiang. This has resulted in an increasing number of incidents of terror and violence that pose a serious danger to social stability and to the lives and property of people in the region. Under the guise of religion, religious extremism trumpets theocracy, religious supremacism, actions against "pagans", and "holy wars". It instigates terror and violence and incites hostility between different ethnic groups, running counter to the teachings concerning patriotism, peace, solidarity, the golden mean, tolerance, and good works advocated by Islam and many other religions. Religious extremism, which constitutes the ideological base of ethnic separatism and terrorism, is by nature anti-human, anti-society, anti-civilization, and anti-religion. It is a betrayal of religion and should never be confused with religious matters, or be glossed over or excused through religious rhetoric. Drawing lessons from international experiences and in view of reality of the region, Xinjiang has taken resolute action to fight terrorism and extremism in accordance with the law, effectively clamp down on terrorism and violence and the spread of religious terrorism. Through these efforts Xinjiang has responded to the public's expectation of security for all ethnic groups, protected the basic human rights, and maintained social harmony and stability in the region. Xinjiang's fight against terrorism and extremism is a battle for justice and civilization against evil and barbaric forces. As such it deserves support, respect and

understanding. Some countries, organizations and individuals that apply double standards to terrorism and human rights have issued unjustified criticism of Xinjiang's effort. This kind of criticism betrays the basic conscience and justice of humanity, and will be repudiated by all genuine champions of justice and progress.

## Conclusion

It is a matter of principle to correctly treat historical issues. The historical and dialectical materialist stance, viewpoint and methodology help us gain a clear understanding of our country and its history, ethnic groups, culture, and religious affairs. They help us to properly understand and treat historical issues concerning Xinjiang. This is essential to maintaining the Chinese people's sense of cohesion and identity, the country's unity and long-term stability, and the security, stability and development of a wider region.

Xinjiang is enjoying sustained economic development, social stability, a better standard of living, unprecedented cultural prosperity, a harmonious coexistence of all religions, and solidarity among all ethnic groups. The region is experiencing its most auspicious period of development and prosperity. Hostile foreign forces and separatist, religious extremist and terrorist forces that have colluded to distort history and tamper with facts run counter to the trend of our times and will be cast aside by history and the people.

Xinjiang belongs to all ethnic groups in the region and the country. It is the common responsibility and aspiration of the Chinese people, including all those in Xinjiang, to carry forward our cultural heritage and build a shared spiritual home based on Chinese culture. Under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China with Xi Jinping as the core, and with the support of the whole country and its people, all ethnic groups in Xinjiang are striving to achieve the Two Centenary Goals and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. Xinjiang will embrace an ever better future.

### Appendix

#### A Brief Chronology of Chinese History

Period of the Five Legendary Rulers	c. 30th century BC- c. 21st century BC	
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Xia Dynasty	c. 2070 BC-1600 BC	
Shang Dynasty	c. 1600 BC-1046 BC	
Zhou Dynasty	c. 1046 BC-256 BC	Western Zhou (c. 1046 BC-771 BC) Eastern Zhou (770 BC-256 BC) Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC-476 BC) Warring States Period (475 BC-221 BC)
Qin Dynasty	221 BC-206 BC	The state of Qin overthrew Zhou in 256 BC and unified the country in 221 BC.
Han Dynasty	206 BC-AD 220	Western Han (206 BC-AD 25) Eastern Han (25-220)
Three Kingdoms	220-280	Wei (220-265) Shu Han (221-263) Wu (222-280)
Jin Dynasty	265-420	Western Jin (265-317) Eastern Jin (317-420)
Northern and Southern Dynasties	420-589	Southern Dynasties: Song (420-479) Qi (479-502) Liang (502-557) Chen (557-589) Northern Dynasties: Northern Wei (386-534) Eastern Wei (534-550) Northern Qi (550-577) Western Wei (535-556) Northern Zhou (557-581)
Sui Dynasty	581-618	Sui was founded in 581 and unified the country after defeating Chen in 589.
Tang Dynasty	618-907	
Five Dynasties	907-960	The Five Dynasties include Later Liang, Later Tang, Later Jin, Later Han, and Later Zhou. Some other regimes also existed during this period, including Wu, Former Shu, Wuyue, Chu, Min, Southern Han, Jingnan (also Nanping), Later Shu, Southern Tang, and Northern Han, known as the Ten States.
Song Dynasty	960-1279	Northern Song (960-1127) Southern Song (1127-1279)
Liao	907-1125	
Xixia	1038-1227	
Jin	1115-1234	

Yuan Dynasty	1206-1368	TemujinBorjigin unified the Mongol tribes and became Genghis Khan in 1206. Kublai Khan renamed the Mongol empire Yuan in 1271. Yuan defeated Southern Song in 1279.
Ming Dynasty	1368-1644	
Qing Dynasty	1616-1911	Qing was founded in 1616 as Later Jin and renamed Qing in 1636. Qing captured the Ming capital of Beijing in 1644.
Republic of China	1912-1949	
People's Republic of China	1949-	