

James Millward

Testimony to the Uyghur Tribunal, 12 September 2021

I. Professional background, expertise and credentials

A. Biographical information

I am a full professor of history, employed by Georgetown University since 1996, where I teach Chinese, Central Asian and world history to undergraduates and graduate students. I studied East Asian language and civilization as an undergraduate at Harvard, East Asian Studies at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London) for my MA degree, and history for the Ph.D. at Stanford University. While doing research for my doctoral dissertation about 18th and 19th century Qing imperial administration of the Xinjiang region, I spent 1990 in Beijing and in Xinjiang gathering archival and published materials and interviewing many scholars. Besides speaking Mandarin and reading modern and classical Chinese, I read and speak Japanese and have a limited degree of research ability in Uyghur (sufficient to consult and cite Uyghur-language articles in my published work) as well as in Manchu and Mongolian.

I travelled quite extensively through the Uyghur Region during trips in the 1990s, at which time I enjoyed a basic ability in conversational Uyghur. I have not been to the Uyghur region since 2004, however, because in the early 2000s the PRC authorities put me on a gray-list which restricts my travel to China. I have subsequently only been granted occasional visas to visit the PRC to attend official conferences in eastern China, following my assurances that I will not travel to Xinjiang or have contact with Uyghur people while in China on those trips.

B. Publications

I have published the following academic books and articles and public-facing essays relevant to the place now known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region:

Books relevant to Xinjiang:

Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang. New York: Columbia University Press; London: C. Hurst Co., 2007; second revised edition 2021.

The Silk Road: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2013. Chinese edition by Yilin publishing 译林出版社, Nanjing, China, 2017. Ma Rui, trans. Preface by Rong Xinjiang.

Millward, James, Shinmen Yasushi and Sugawara Jun, eds. *Studies on Xinjiang Historical Sources in the 17th-20th Centuries*. Tokyo: Toyobunko, 2010.

Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity and Empire in Qing Xinjiang, 1759-1864. Stanford University Press, 1998. (PRC Chinese translation in National Qing History Editorial Project Foreign Language Translation series, volume 9, 2006; Complex characters Chinese edition: 米华健, “嘉峪關外: 1759–

1864 年新疆的經濟、民族和清帝國." Jia Jianfei 賈建飛, trans. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press 中文大学出版社, 2017.

Academic articles relevant to Xinjiang:

Millward, James and Dahlia Peterson. "China's system of oppression in Xinjiang: How it developed and how to curb it." The Brookings Institution, Global China series, September 2020.

The Qing and Twentieth-Century Chinese Diversity Regimes," in Andrew Phillips and Christian Reus-smit eds. *Culture and Order in World Politics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019 (ch. 4, pp. 71-92). (This book won the 2021 International Studies Association Prize for the Best Edited Book in International Theory and was runner up for the ISA Best Edited Book in History and IR.)

Mi Huajian 米华健 (James Millward) [“丝绸之路”研究与清帝国边疆](#) (Silk Road Research and the Qing Imperial Frontier). *Pengpai xinwen* 23 February 2018.

"Towards a Xinjiang Environmental History: Evidence from Space, the Ground and in Between." In *New Historical Sources on Xinjiang*. James Millward and Yasushi Shinmen, eds. Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 2010.

Guest editor: "Special Issue: The Uyghurs in China—Questioning the Past and Understanding the Present. *Central Asian Survey* 28:4 (Dec. 2009).

"Introduction: Does the 2009 Urumchi violence mark a turning point?" In *Central Asian Survey* 28:4 (Dec. 2009): 347-360.

"Positioning Xinjiang in Eurasian and Chinese History: Differing Visions of the "Silk Road." In Michael Clarke and Colin Mackerras, eds. *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Future Prospects into the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 2009.

"Eastern Central Asia (Xinjiang): 1300-1800." *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: the Chinggisid Age*. Edited by Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen Frank and Peter Golden. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Millward, James and Laura Newby. "The Qing and Islam on the Western Frontier." In Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen Siu and Donald Sutton, eds. *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

"Uyghur Art Music and Chinese Silk Roadism." *The Silk Road* (online and print journal of the Silk Road Foundation) 3:1 (June 2005): 9-15.

"The Advent of Modern Education on the Sino-Central Asian Frontier: *Xinxue* vs. *usul-i jadid*." In Bradley J. Parker and Lars Rodseth, eds., *Untaming the Frontier in Archaeology, Anthropology and History*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005.

Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment. Policy Studies # 6. Washington: East-West Center, 2004.

"Contextualizing the Qing: the Return of the Torghuts and the End of History in Central Eurasia." In Lynn Struve, ed., *The Qing Formation and World Time*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

"Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the late 19th Century" (with Peter Perdue). In Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Frontier*. M. E. Sharpe, 2004.

"Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978" (with Nabijan Tursun). In Frederick Starr, ed. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Frontier*. M. E. Sharpe, 2004.

"Historical Perspectives on Contemporary Xinjiang." *Inner Asia* 2 (2000): 121-135.

"Coming onto the Map: "Western Regions" Geography and Cartographic Nomenclature in the Making of Chinese Empire in Xinjiang." *Late Imperial China* 20, no.2 (Dec 1999): 61-98.

"New Perspectives on the Qing Frontier." In Gail Hershatter, Emily Honig, Jonathan N. Lipman and Randall Stross, eds. *Remapping China*. Stanford University Press, 1996.

"1759-1860 nian Xinjiang baiyin shengmingxian" 1759-1860 年新疆白銀生命線 [Xinjiang's silver lifeline between 1759 and 1860], in Ma Dazheng et. al, eds., *Xiyu kaocha yu yanjiu* 西域考察與研究 [Exploration and research on the "Western Regions"]. Urumchi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1994.

"A Uyghur Muslim in Qianlong's Court: The Meanings of the Fragrant Concubine." *Journal of Asian Studies* 53:2 (May 1994): 427-458.

"The Qing Trade with the Kazakhs in Yili and Tarbagatai, 1759-1852." *Central and Inner Asian Studies* Vol VII (1992).

Pieces for Public-facing media:

["Mike Pompeo accused China of committing 'genocide,' an international crime. Biden's team agrees."](#) Conversation with Jessica Chen Weiss and Oumar Ba in *The Washington Post's The Monkey Cage*. 23 January 2021.

["The Uighurs' suffering deserves targeted solutions, not anti-Chinese posturing."](#) *The Guardian*. 27 July 2020.

["Between the lines of the Xinjiang Papers."](#) *The New York Times*. 20 November 2019.

["What Xi Jinping hasn't Learned from China's Emperors."](#) *The New York Times*. 1 October 2019.

["We need a better middle road on China. Here's how we can find it."](#) *The Washington Post*. 6 August 2019.

["Re-educating China's Muslims."](#) *The New York Review of Books*, February 7, 2019. Republished outside paywall on [Chinofile](#).

["Is China a colonial power?"](#) *The New York Times* 4 May 2018.

["What it's like to live in a surveillance state."](#) *The New York Times* 18 February 2018.

["China's fruitless repression of the Uighurs."](#) *The New York Times* p. A27, 29 September 2014.

["China's two problems with the Uyghurs."](#) *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 28 May 2014.

"Being Banned from China, and What Can be Learned from It." *The China Beat* (<http://www.thechinabeat.org/?p=3746>) 24 August 2011. [Now republished on Medium](#).

["The Urumchi Unrest Revisited."](#) *The China Beat*, 29 July 2009.

["China's Story: Putting the PR into the PRC"](#) OpenDemocracy (online), 18 April 2008.

"Statement to the Congressional Executive Committee on China" regarding the Chinese sense of insecurity in Xinjiang and the history of foreign involvement in the region, 16 Nov. 2005.
<http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/111605/Millward.php>

II. Testimony

My written testimony consists of two parts. Part A is a summary of key points, the text that I will deliver as oral testimony. Part B consists of a chapter from the revised edition of my book, *Eurasian Crossroads: a History of Xinjiang*, which I completed in the summer of 2020 and which was published in Britain early in 2021, and due out in the US in November 2021. The chapter is entitled "Colonialism, Assimilationism, and Ethnocide (2000s-2020s)." I offer this as a reference to the Tribunal, given that there are few other general surveys of this critical period available in English.

A. Text of oral testimony: PRC ethnicity policies from 1949, and the recent turn to assimilationism

1. The inauguration of PRC settler colonialism in Xinjiang

Traditional and nationalistic historical narratives often erroneously discuss "China" as a continuous political entity thousands of years old. PRC state propaganda stresses the military colonies established in the 2nd century BCE by the Han empire in parts of what is now Xinjiang. But these claims are no more relevant to contemporary PRC policies than Roman outposts in Britain would be to modern Italian-UK relations, or Ottoman imperial administration in Egypt is to Turkish-Egyptian relations today. Despite millennial cultural continuities and historical memories in China not unlike those in Europe or Islamic lands, the story of PRC policies in Xinjiang, and PRC policies towards the Uyghurs, logically begins with the PRC, and the military occupation of, first, southern, and then northern parts of Xinjiang, by the military wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Before the CCP took control of Xinjiang in 1949, the previous government of the region, in power since 1945, had been an uneasy coalition of the Guomindang (KMT), or Chinese Nationalist Party, and the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) or Eastern Turkestan People's Republic (ETPR), which had formed with Soviet support to resist the imposition of Guomindang rule in 1944. The ETR with Soviet military aid had nearly defeated the GMD militarily in Xinjiang by late 1944, but in the final months of World War II the United States urged the Guomindang, and the Soviet Union urged the Eastern Turkestan leaders, to reach a ceasefire. Thus the GMD and the ETR formed a coalition government in Xinjiang, with a Guomindang official as governor, and the Uyghur leader of the ETR as vice-governor.¹

When the CCP took over Xinjiang, it replaced the former ETR leaders with its own hand-picked Uyghur, Kazakh and other native officials. It accepted the GMD surrender in southern Xinjiang and settled 80,000 demobilized Guomindang troops in the region, where they formed the Xinjiang Production Construction Military Corps (XPCMC, sometimes abbreviated XPCC), or Bingtuan (Military Corps). There had been settler colonies under the Qing in northern Xinjiang, and the GMD harbored similar aspirations, but the modern colonial settlement of the Xinjiang region with Han Chinese begins with the

¹ James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, revised 2nd edition (London: Hurst, Co., 2021), chapter 5.

demobilized GMD troops and formation of the Bingtuan. The XPCMC is now deeply involved in running Xinjiang prisons, internment camps as well as in the region's agriculture, including the cotton and tomato industry.

2. Ethnic policies designed to cover the appearance and ameliorate the experience of colonial rule

Like the Soviet Union after 1917, the PRC from 1949 was a socialist state ruling over a former empire—the Qing empire. For a regime like the PRC, a dedicated opponent of imperialism and nominal proponent of socialist internationalism, this legacy of imperial diversity posed both a practical and an image problem. The PRC thus implemented a modified version of Soviet nationalities policies, and in China officially recognized 56 ethnic groups, 55 "minority nationalities" and the Han. The designation of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, three other "Autonomous Regions," each nominally self-governed under a titular ethnic group, along with many so-called "autonomous" prefectures and counties, comprises the territorial element of that original PRC approach to ethnicity. We may call this PRC's diversity management system.

This original diversity management system made ethnic identity a building block of state administration. Administratively, financially and rhetorically it supported language, education and cultural expression of each officially recognized group; in theory, and at times in practice, in following this system the Party publically denounced "Great Han Chauvinism," protected non-Han groups from discrimination and cultural erasure by the Han majority, and assured that each official ethnic group was represented within the authoritarian government and party. While very different from the diversity management systems of liberal democracies, this first generation PRC diversity system, when honestly implemented, proved popular among non-Han people. One might even say that in the 1950s, non-Han people in China were, as regards racial discrimination and violence, better off than Blacks and other persons of color in Jim Crow America. The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s-1970s was a horrific exception that took Han-supremacist form in Xinjiang and Tibet. But Uyghurs and other non-Han groups in the PRC look back to the 1980s, in which the Party attempted to make amends for the cruel chaos of the Cultural Revolution, as a golden age of PRC diversity policies.

3. The PRC's assimilationist turn and racialization of Zhonghua identity

With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, PRC scholars and Party ideologues debated whether Soviet nationalities policies themselves had contributed to the disintegration of the USSR. Some called for a second generation Chinese ethnicity policy that would promote "melding" and "fusion" of ethnic groups, and reduce state and party support for the 55 non-Han identities and their nominally autonomous territories.²

When Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, he embarked on a radical revision of the PRC diversity system. He transferred the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and the State Administration for Religious Affairs, formerly under the State Council, to reside instead under the United Front Work Department of the

² Mark Elliott, "The Case of the Missing Indigene: Debate Over a 'Second-Generation' Ethnic Policy," *The China Journal* 73 (January 2015): 186–213.

Communist Party. In other words, he moved the bureaucracies dealing with ethnicity and religion out of the government, and under more direct Party control.³ Xi announced in 2014 that problems in Xinjiang would require attention not just to "material" measures (that is, economic development) but also to "psychological issues" (*jingshen wenti* 精神问题; "*jingshen*" is also translated as "spiritual").⁴ He launched a campaign to "sinicize" (*Zhongguo hua* 中国化) religion in China by destroying domes and minarets and removing crosses, moons and stars from architecture; hanging the national flag and Party slogans in houses of worship; and erasing Arabic script and even the word "*halal*" from the windows of restaurants. Since 2017, this so-called Sinicization program has completely razed 30% of the mosques and shrines in the Uyghur region, and removed major architectural elements (domes, minarets) from another 27% of religious structures.⁵

Moreover, General Secretary Xi has promoted the ideal of a unitary, homogeneous Chinese identity, labeled "*Zhonghua*," as an ideological centerpiece closely related to his "China Dream." As one current Chinese political catchphrase puts it, "Take firmly the forging of a *Zhonghua* collective consciousness, as the main [political] line" (铸牢中华民族共同体意识为主线).⁶ The *Zhonghua* concept is meant as a super-ethnicity, a national category above and encompassing all the other ethnic ones, but defined more culturally than simple passport citizenship. The word *Zhonghua* itself is composed of two Chinese characters that each individually mean "Chinese," and the officially promoted characteristics of *Zhonghua* identity are indistinguishable from Han characteristics and customs. The muscular state promotion of *Zhonghua* identity is in effect, then, a top-down effort to Han-ize, or Sinicize, the non-Han ethnic groups in China.

Another prominent slogan, appearing at least since 2018, makes *Zhonghua* a racial concept, and even argues that Uyghur and other Xinjiang non-Han groups are, in fact, *racially* part of the *Zhonghua* identity. The official press read-out of the Third Central Xinjiang Work Forum (Sept. 26-26, 2020) quotes Xi Jinping saying, "Every ethnic group [*minzu* 民族] of Xinjiang is a **family-member linked to *Zhonghua* bloodlines**" 新疆各民族是中华民族血脉相连的家庭成员 (emphasis added).⁷ Such official invocation of blood-ties has been accompanied by official promulgations falsely claiming that the Uyghur language

³ James Leibold tracked these developments as they happened, with great prescience.

<https://jamestown.org/program/hu-the-uniter-hu-lianhe-and-the-radical-turn-in-chinas-xinjiang-policy/>

⁴ <https://jamestown.org/program/a-family-divided-the-ccps-central-ethnic-work-conference/>

⁵ Nathan Ruser and James Leibold, "Cultural Erasure & Re-writing: How China is Using State Cultural Protection to Erase Islamic and Indigenous Cultures from Xinjiang." Paper delivered at the conference "The Xinjiang Crisis: Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, Justice," 1 Sept. 2021. The authors compared satellite photos from before 2017 with recent photos and consulted registers of religious places and cultural monuments to conduct their survey.

⁶ http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-09/26/c_1126544371.htm. And see <https://jimmillward.medium.com/notes-on-xi-jinpings-speech-to-the-3rd-xinjiang-central-work-forum-25-26-september-2020-768b43242b8f>

⁷ http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-09/26/c_1126544371.htm. And <https://jimmillward.medium.com/notes-on-xi-jinpings-speech-to-the-3rd-xinjiang-central-work-forum-25-26-september-2020-768b43242b8f>

is linguistically Chinese, not Turkic; and that Uyghurs are not historically descended from Central Asian Turkic peoples, but rather from so-called *Zhonghua* people.⁸

This is an assimilationist narrative arguing in effect that Uyghurs are primordially Chinese, whether they know it or not. Because the characteristics of the *Zhonghua* category are for all practical intents and purposes indistinguishable from those of the Han category, it is also Han-supremacist. It is not the kind of chauvinism that *excludes* diverse ethnic groups from membership in a national community or expels them across national borders—a fact that has confused some who associate ethnic cleansing and genocide with burning villages and massed refugees driven across national borders. Rather, the current PRC assimilationism seeks to forcibly submerge Xinjiang non-Han peoples into an invented identity, mandating that distinctive ethnic features be scrubbed away through false historical narratives, cultural and language erasure, rhetoric about shared bloodlines, and coerced re-education—while at the same time implementing birth suppression measures for non-Hans and incentivizing Han in-migration to re-engineer demographic ratios in Xinjiang. The goal of the cultural assimilation and of the demographic policies is to assure that the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region—never Autonomous, also ceases to be Uyghur.

Today's PRC assimilationism is diametrically opposed to the diversity system espoused and practiced during first six and a half decades of the PRC. The phrase "forging collective *Zhonghua* consciousness" reminds me of a metaphor we now reject in the United States: the melting pot. The CCP, however, has substituted a blast furnace for the melting pot, and directed it at the indigenous peoples of Xinjiang and, increasingly, at other non-Han and at speakers of languages other than Mandarin as well. The industrial-strength metaphor of the blast furnace, embraced and publically trumpeted by the CCP itself, aptly sums up the physical coercion and cultural violence of the concrete policies inflicted upon Xinjiang indigenous peoples since 2017.

B. "Colonialism, Assimilationism, and Ethnocide (2000s-2020s)"

[The second part of my written testimony follows in a scan of chapter 8 from *Eurasian Crossroads*.]

⁸ In 2018 the Mayor of Urumchi declared that "The Uyghur people are members of the Chinese family, not descendants of the Turks." <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1117158.shtml>