



Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang—China's Muslim Far North West*

London, New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, 201 p.

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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/511>

DOI : 10.4000/chinaperspectives.511

ISSN : 1996-4617

Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 août 2005

ISSN : 2070-3449

Référence électronique

Rémi Castets, « Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang—China's Muslim Far North West* », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 60 | july - august 2005, mis en ligne le 29 novembre 2006, consulté le 24 septembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/511> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.511>

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Philip Liddell

- 1 A combination of a massive process of demographic colonisation and a policy for the development of the western region of China (*xibu dakaifa*), the stabilisation of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is a principal target of China's security policy. Yet, the ins and outs of this thorny problem are still largely unrecognised, mainly for lack of research. Michael Dillon, who has paid several visits to China's north west and travelled throughout the Uyghur diaspora, has earned himself great merit for having enriched the fragmentary body of studies on this little-known region. In fact, the main interest of *Xinjiang—China's Far North West* is its concise but complete narrative (201 pages) of Xinjiang's history in the twentieth century.
- 2 Aiming his first part more particularly at non-specialists, the writer gives an outline history of this unstable region and highlights the cultural, religious, political and socioeconomic features of this mainly Turkic Muslim Central Asian fringe. In the second part, basing himself on Chinese official press releases and on information garnered from the Uyghur diaspora, Dillon recapitulates the political disturbances that have shaken the region since 1949 (chapters 6 and 10): insurgencies, student movements, acts of violence . . . He also assesses Peking's reaction to the disturbances (Chapter 7), in particular the "Strike Hard" campaign (*Yanda*) and its consequences (Chapter 9).
- 3 Lastly, in Part Three, Dillon looks at the international dimension of China's policy of stabilising the region. He goes back in particular over the skilful diplomacy that enabled Peking to isolate the Uyghur separatist movement by improving China's

relations with countries likely to support it passively or actively (the Turkic republics of Central Asia¹, Iran and Turkey) (chapters 11 and 12). He goes on to examine how China took advantage of the post-2001 situation to justify its repression of all forms of dissent in Xinjiang (Chapter 13). Even though he describes this process in an interesting way, we may nevertheless reproach him for neglecting what is the direct target of Chinese diplomatic efforts: the militant networks of the Uyghur diaspora which, because of official repression in Xinjiang, are acquiring growing political weight.

- 4 The book (an extended version of the article “Xinjiang: Ethnicity, Separatism and Control in Chinese Central Asia”²) is a summary based upon significant source documents: Western and Chinese press, official Chinese publications, academic studies both Western and Chinese and, to a lesser extent, data and interviews either on the spot or broadcast by militant Uyghur groups sheltering abroad. Much of the data cited comes from strongly committed sources. The writer, being aware of their lack of objectivity, even sometimes of their unreliability, attempts to tread a sometimes elusive middle path when some assertions are utterly distorted, denied or invented. As the book does not look forward for an amount of new data that only a field study could uncover, we have sometimes the impression of a book that rarely delves below the surface. This summary ought ideally to have been filled out by more field studies; but it is difficult to hold Dillon responsible bearing in mind the near-impossibility of carrying out this kind of work in the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.
- 5 However, the writer's excellent knowledge of the Muslim world and his meticulous analysis do rescue the book from those small weaknesses. All things considered, *Xinjiang—China's Muslim Far North West* is a good summary for anyone seeking to know more of the present-day political history of China's Muslim Turkic fringe. Moreover, the sheer bulk of its written source material makes it a valuable reference for the specialist.

NOTES

1. As the writer points out, China has pursued an active foreign policy—on a bilateral basis at first and, since 2001, also multilaterally, having encouraged the establishment of the Shanghai Group. By developing economic and military co-operation with these countries, China has succeeded (together with Russia) in extending its power into an oil-rich area at the crossroad between the Far East and Europe or the Middle East.

2. Published in 1995 by the University of Durham.