A Decade at the Communist University for the Workers from the East (1925-1935)

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In memory of my grandfather
Miloš Trebinjac (Милош Треъинъац) 1886-1939
who also had a Comintern report.

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PREFACE

Based on the long-secret Comintern [Communist International] archives on the Uyghur students of the Communist University for the Workers from the East (KUTV) between 1925 and 1935, Sabine Trebinjac provides important new information on Soviet policy towards Xinjiang in the first half of the 20th century. She also sheds light on the relations between the Soviet Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party, and later between the two communist states, the USSR and the People's Republic of China.

The Communist University for the Workers from the East was established towards the end of the civil war in Soviet Russia (1918-1921), when Leninists enjoyed a respite on the interventionist power front, including the Far East. In view of the rise of nationalist and revolutionary movements in the colonial empires after the First World War, they began to develop plans and theories on national and colonial issues. Hoping the Bolshevik revolution would be bolstered by the fading revolutions in the industrialised countries of Europe the Russian communists and their companions in the Third International, the Comintern, began to harbour ambitions to extend the revolution to colonised or semi-colonised countries, particularly in Asia. The training of professional revolutionaries for these countries—especially for the Russian possessions in Central Asia inherited from the Tsarist Empire—became vital. Indeed, Lenin had always insisted on the training of professional revolutionaries. Henk Sneevliet, a Dutch communist known under the pseudonym of Maring, who was a member of the Comintern and was active in the Dutch East Indies, had proposed to the Third International to devise a way for those who came from the Far East to properly understand what was happening in Russia; he hoped that Soviet Russia would 'create the conditions for the education of these revolutionaries from the East, so that the Far East would become a dynamic member of the Communist International' (Maring's proposal to the Second Congress of the Communist International, 26 July 1920).

From the 1st to the 8th of August 1920, the Congress of Delegates of the Peoples of the East was held in Baku, organised by the Comintern. The Congress elected a propaganda and action committee whose programme included the creation of a Communist University of the Workers of the East.

On 21st January 1921, the Central Committee of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the (Soviet) Union created the Organisation of Eastern Party Cadres, which was attached to the People's Commissariat for Nationalities. On 10th February 1921, the same Central Committee decided to create the Communist University for the Workers from the East, a decision ratified on 21st April by the Central Executive Committee. This University was intended to 'train political workers among the workers of the Eastern autonomous republics, autonomous regions, labour organisations and national minorities'. It was also attached to the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, directed by Stalin.

The University opened its doors the following 21st October. It had two departments, one for domestic students and one for foreigners. The domestic department grouped classes by the different nationalities within the Soviet Socialist Federal Republic: Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Georgians, and later Uyghurs (although most of the Uyghur population lived in southern Xinjiang, outside the Soviet Republic). The foreign department was home to other students from the East: Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Iranian, Turkish, Mongolian and Korean classes. By the end of 1921, the University had 713 students from 44 ethnic groups. The director of the University was one of the two deputies of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, and the professors were mostly members of the Comintern or other professional revolutionaries.

The University's curriculum underwent successive changes between 1921 and 1924. The 1921 curriculum included twelve subjects: natural sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy and biology), social history and historical progress, Russian history, history of the class struggle in the West, political economy, Orientalism, history of the Russian revolution and the Russian party, economic geography, national and colonial issues, the construction of Soviet identity, Russian language and mathematics. The 1924 programme, which applied to three different classes of students, was oriented more towards learning Russian and the politics of the Soviet regime and the

Comintern, as evidenced by the four subjects studied by third-year students: the Soviet Communist (Bolchevik) Party and the Communist International or Comintern (its current missions and operations), the economic policy of the USSR, the Soviet state and power, and practical training in factories or in the countryside.

The students who graduated from this University, in fact a Party school, were supposed to become either administrative or political cadres in the various republics or autonomous regions of the Soviet Federation, or revolutionary cadres in their home countries. They were to remain in perfect liaison with the Comintern or with the Russian state apparatus, in other words, civil and military intelligence. They were to apply in their countries the principles and experience of the Russian revolution, thanks to their familiarity with the 'workers' homeland'. In practice, this University provided important leadership cadres for the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was founded in 1921. The first class of Chinese students included Liu Shaoqi, the future number two of the CCP and President of the People's Republic of China (from 27th April 1959 to 31st October 1968, when he was expelled during the 'Cultural Revolution'). The first Chinese students stayed for only two years, as the political events that were accelerating in China from 1924 onwards called for the rapid return of cadres. Due to the growing importance of the Chinese question within the Comintern, the latter, in October 1925, created a special university for the Chinese outside the KUTV: the Sun Yatsen University of Chinese Workers. The first class had up to 300 students, including the future Marshal Zhu De and Deng Xiaoping. The students also included Jiang Jingguo, son of Chiang Kaishek (Jiang Jieshi) and future President of the Republic of China in Taiwan.

Sabine Trebinjac's study focuses on the years 1925-1935, a period of profound changes within the Russian Communist Party and the functioning of the Comintern. Indeed, from 1925 onwards, the political struggle for the succession to Lenin, who had died a year earlier, raged. The struggle between Stalin and Trotsky was, among other things, about the possibility of socialism in a single country. With Stalin's victory, the entire political logic of the Russian Communist Party became that of defending the interests of the USSR and its State, which meanwhile had grown stronger. By force

of circumstance, Comintern politics also bowed to these new imperatives. The directives given to the national communist parties took into consideration the diplomatic and geopolitical interests of the Soviet State, and Moscow wanted State-trained cadres who would return to their countries to follow their directives without question. There is no need to revisit here the tragedy of the Chinese revolution of 1927, when the CCP was forced into a disastrous alliance with the Guomindang, or the subsequent Moscow-driven positions of the German Communist Party that divided the opposition to Hitler.

The geopolitical interests of the USSR included strengthening its positions in the Far East. In so doing, the Soviet State was simply taking up the strategy of the Tsarist Empire: influence and control of Manchuria and Outer Mongolia to counter Japanese ambitions; influence and control of the various warlords in China against the Western powers; thrusting southwards via Xinjiang to counter British ambitions to extend the empire beyond India.

By the mid-19th century, the Russian Empire had pushed its way along the northern border of the Qing Chinese Empire. Through an 1864 treaty, Russia obtained all the territory south of Lake Balkash in northwestern Xinjiang; that territory is now divided among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 1871, the Russians occupied the Ily River valley. In 1875, the Viceroy of Shaanxi and Gansu, Zuo Zhongtang, was appointed Plenipotentiary Minister for Xinjiang Affairs and his troops regained control of the areas south of the Tianshan River in late 1877. In 1881, Chinese troops regained control of the Ily River valley. In November 1884, the Qing imperial government proclaimed the creation of Xinjiang Province. After the 1911 revolution, and many episodic power struggles, Yang Zengxin, a loyalist of the Peking regime of Yuan Shikai, took over as governor of Xinjiang. In 1912, a Mongol revolt encouraged by the Russians led to the Mongol occupation of the Altai region. Yang Zengxin ruled until 1928 and was recognised in June of that year by the new Nationalist government of Chiang Kaishek as the patron of the Xinjiang province of the Republic of China. A month later he was assassinated. The appointment in November of Jin Shuren as president of the provincial government satisfied no one. Riots broke out and Chinese warlords from Gansu took the opportunity to enter Xinjiang. They were defeated by Cheng Shicai, then Chief of Staff of the

Governor. He became the new strongman of Xinjiang thanks to an uprising carried out with the participation of White Russian troops. Jin Shuren fled to Russia. In November 1933, at the instigation of the British, a revolt broke out which established the short-lived Islamic republic of East Turkestan. This was crushed after three months.

Since coming to power, Cheng Shicai had sought support from the Soviet Union to consolidate his regime. He visited Russia and even joined the Russian Communist Party. To gain Moscow's trust, he invited representatives of the Chinese Communists to Xinjiang, including Mao Zedong's brother, Mao Zemin. The Russians set up barracks and an air base in Dihua, the capital of Xinjiang, now Urumqi. Soviet troops even intervened in 1935 to help quell the Muslim rebellion of Ma Zhongying. This idyll between Cheng Shicai and Moscow lasted until 1942, when Cheng, seeing the bad turn the war was taking in Russia, lost confidence in the Soviet Union and rallied to Chiang Kaishek. He allowed Kaishek's nationalist troops to enter Xinjiang. Again in 1944, a new revolt broke out in Xinjiang at the instigation of the Soviet government. Chiang Kaishek replaced Cheng Shicai with Wu Zhongxin and had Ma Bufang's cavalry crush the revolt. In 1949, the USSR maintained its influence over Xinjiang after the entry of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and obtained from the new regime in Beijing the right to exploit Xinjiang's oil and uranium until the 'ideological' conflict between the two 'sister parties' broke out. During this conflict, the USSR repeatedly provoked border populations to flee to Russia. It was not until the 21st century that Russia, anxious to have a second major buyer of gas and oil, and China, for reasons of energy security (land-based gas and oil pipelines to avoid the Straits of Malacca), found fundamental common interests in keeping Xinjiang free of any threat of instability from each other.

This is the context in which the training of professional Uyghur revolutionaries by the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s takes on its full meaning. The change of scale proposed by Sabine Trebinjac's work allows us to better grasp the reality of the efforts and the relative failure of the Russians in the recruitment and training of agents intended to provide them with the means to carry out actions in Xinjiang. Although in the end it failed to use these students, Soviet Russia had found in the 1930s in the perron of Cheng Shicai the instrument for this policy of influence and control of Xinjiang. It would

be interesting to continue the research begun by Sabine Trebinjac to find out what role these apprentice revolutionaries might have played in the various pro-Soviet riots and revolts mentioned. In any case, one thing is clear: the revolutionary ideal at the time of the creation of the KUTV very quickly gave way to the necessities of subversion and agitation in the service of the interests of the Soviet State. And if the latter could find other, more efficient servants or accomplices, then this training of agents could be written off. This was the case during the great purges of 1937, when many of the teachers and students of the KUTV and Sun Yatsen University disappeared in the turmoil of communist history. Sabine Trebinjac's study, showing the harshness of the language used and the violence of the methods used to supervise Uyghur students, reveals the beginnings of a relentless elimination process.

Jean-Paul Tchang

INTRODUCTION

It was in 1994 that I made a six-week trip to the heart of the Comintern Archives. The director at the time was a certain Mr Anderson. And it was Annie Kriegel who, in Paris, introduced me to the mysteries of these archives. I would like to thank her posthumously for this. Readers should know that, in Comintern jargon, a 'classified' file is a document that cannot be consulted. Only 'declassified' files are open to viewing. I worked in the Archives with a Russian-French translator, Mr Akimtchenko, whom I would also like to thank here. At the time, I was looking for anything related to Xinjiang and Uyghurs, after having been turned away from the Archives of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MD), where I had planned to study the negotiations related to the Russian-Chinese border. Officially, the files that might interest me were all 'classified' (not available for consultation) and unofficially (according to the words of one of the librarians, the supervisor of the reading room), border issues were not welcome in the MID Archives, particularly because the delineation of the Russian-Chinese border at the level of Turkestan had not yet been definitively decided. It was 1994. As background, it is necessary to know that Stalin had designed the project to purely and simply annex Xinjiang (undoubtedly along with parts of Manchuria), so rich was its subsoil and attractive its geostrategic situation, which interested not only the USSR and China but also Japan and the British Empire. I will come back to this. Assisted by Béria, Stalin had prepared everything for this project to become a reality: military logistics, weapons, men, etc. Everything was ready. But in January 1953, Stalin fell into a coma from which he would never emerge, dying on 5 March 1953. The coup de force and the annexation of Xinjiang were halted. Béria did not know what to decide. A large part of the documents that make it possible to read this story are kept in the MID Archives. This probably explains the real reason for the ban on my work. The Russians did not know what to do with these archives and were trying to put together an official version of these events that would not offend the Chinese.

But I was welcome at the Comintern Archives. The Russian embassy in Paris had given me a letter of accreditation. So I spent six weeks there. The stone and brick building in typical Soviet architectural style was imposing, with a roof that pointed skywards. Past the raised threshold, the heavy wooden entrance door opened into a large circular hall. On the right, benches had been set up with coat racks attached above them. This was the place where all the readers had to leave their coats, satchels and packages. On the first floor, dozens of wooden cabinets holding thousands of card indexes were spread around the room. Mr. Anderson, Conservator of the Comintern Archives, regularly wandered about, watching the readers pass by. In this less hushed area, it was permissible to exchange tips with other readers. It was there that I met Mrs Lin, born in Moscow of Chinese parents from Manchuria who are now American citizens. Her father, accused of Trotskyism, was executed by the Soviets and her mother, denounced for being in the pay of the Soviets, was hanged by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. She herself was imprisoned with two very young children for eight years. Mrs Lin was at the Archives to read the 'private file' of her father, who had just been rehabilitated. It was a strange meeting place where stories were recounted in the long, curved corridors with their creaking parquet floors. On the second and third floors, four reading rooms had been set up. A librarian and room supervisor, assisted by two men in charge of delivering the requested items, welcomed the reader, to whom a table was assigned. Every day I had the same table, every day the files I consulted were deposited there on my arrival and remained until I declared that I had finished reading them. Breaks were possible on a small adjacent balcony, where the reader was allowed to drink and even smoke. As in all libraries, silence was imperative. It was in this atmosphere that, every working day from 10 am to 5 pm, I read the documents on Xinjiang.

By reading these thousands of written sheets of peeling paper, I was able to appreciate what the relationship between the Uyghurs and the Soviets had been like in the early twentieth century. I will come back to this in more detail, but I can say now that, in a nutshell, it was a complex mixture of curiosity, arrogance and strong paternalism. And this range of attitudes can be paraphrased in Bolshevik terms as follows: 'We, the White Soviets and liberated population, have a responsibility to help our neighbours who are

both near and different, the yellow Muslims who are still under the yoke of domination.' The Archives allowed me to understand that the annexation desired by Stalin had indeed been envisaged as early as 1925, or 1927 at the latest, when the Uyghur branch was created at the Communist University for the Workers from the East (KUTV). Ultimately, the often difficult and ambiguous relations between the Soviets and the Uyghurs must also be seen in the pursuit of the 'new man' so sought after by the communists, since even before *homo sovieticus,* a *homo bolshevicus* was already on the march.

Sources and Archives

In the Comintern Archives, a particularly well-organised archive centre, I found two types of documents.

Firstly, there are very detailed accounts of all kinds of missions carried out by Russian emissaries, including some written by military personnel at the beginning of the 20th century (Kornilov, 1903; Captain Syrtlanov, 1908-1909). Numerous details on population distribution by ethnicity, occupation and social class are recorded. Works relating to Xinjiang written by communists for teaching purposes (Rostovsky, 1931 and 1935; Fessenko, 1934) or for information for superiors (Colonel of the Mikado, 1911; Anonymous, 1930; Russian Consulate in Kashgar, 1935). These seven files belong to Part 4 of Collection 532. I also noted the oddity of some parts labeled out of order, i.e., Part 4 appearing before Parts 1 and 2; but perhaps it was only a specific call number for this type of document.

And secondly, in Parts 1 and 2 of Collection 532, I found the weekly and even bi-weekly proceedings of the Uyghur group of the Communist University for the Workers from the East (KUTV), which existed for ten years (1925-1935). Questions relating to recruitment, the internal organisation of the group, and the training of students are mentioned; the agendas of work and study sessions are also noted, as well as difficulties encountered (from the points of view of both class level and discipline), the future of the students trained, etc. Finally, the collection also includes what are known as 'characteristics', a sort of formal portrait of teachers and students under standardised headings.

In total, I had at my disposal 70 or so pages written by hand in the Archives with the translator, as well as 110 pages brought back in the form of microfilm (photocopies were forbidden at the time) which were then printed,[1] scanned and finally translated by Liliya Sergueïevna and Élise Escalle, whom I thank very much. The handwritten notes and the scanned pages together form a text of 178 pages.

Before addressing the texts themselves, it is necessary to comment on the nature of these Archives. They are secret archives, and this in more ways than one. Firstly, because they were inaccessible for a long time and then *ipso facto* ignored, and secondly, because they are governed by 'the secrecy of opacity', to use S. Wolikow's expression. But moving beyond the 'secrecy of opacity', let us consider the Comintern Archives, secret once more, as a place where total oblivion was practised through numerous techniques. Indeed, not only was everything related to the Comintern itself deliberately erased as soon as the latter effectively disappeared in 1943, but so were the actors, whose existence was concealed (people's names were replaced by Russianised surnames, for example). Who could have recognised someone's involvement in the move to transform a Chinese province into a Soviet territory? None distinguished himself, none became a hero, all disappeared. Their traces remain only in the Archives. Oblivion exceeds secrecy in the sense that the latter remains *ipso facto* anchored in memory. The forgotten, on the other hand, is destined to disappear. That this oblivion makes work in the Archives difficult must be kept in mind.

In the first part of this book, 'The Unlikely Elite', I will discuss the geopolitical context as it appears in the Archives and briefly recall what the Comintern was before introducing the Communist University for the Workers from the East, or KUTV. The framework having been laid down, three questions then arise: why was it necessary to educate classes of Eastern workers, who was in charge of it and how was the pedagogical project developed? The methods of the KUTV are then discussed. Next, following the theories of Vilfredo Pareto and of Edmond Goblot (*The*

[1] I would like to thank Jean-Michel Payral, photographer in Mauriac, Cantal

Barrier and the Level), I will discuss the training and circulation of elites, which is a chronicle of a predicted failure.

It is necessary to pause here to examine the very term 'elite'. Which elite is in question here? Not the bourgeois dear to Goblot nor the dominant economic groups followed by Pareto, but a political elite in a context where a revolution is in the making. But this communist elite is itself in the process of being born without anyone knowing how to educate it. While some may argue that it is easier to manipulate uneducated individuals (Tartakowsky, Lazitch), others, on the contrary, envisage this emergent elite as needing to come from people experienced in ideological combat (Tran). In the example studied here, we will see that both were right. This is why the emerging political elite at the heart of a fledgling revolution is, in itself, especially interesting, and it must be understood in its particularities.

In the second part, titled 'Workers from the East', I will present the biographies of the KUTV students.

THE UNLIKELY ELITE

Geopolitical context

The geostrategic environment I am taking up here is the one set out in the Archives. This is for two reasons. The first is that I leave it to the historians of communism and Sovietologists of the early 20th century, which I am not, to understand and analyse this moment in its entirety. The second reason is that it was important for me to understand what pedagogical tools the instructors of the Comintern and the KUTV had at their disposal to train the new generations of revolutionary cadres and militants. So, historically, and even geographically, the picture is not complete, but it does reflect what had to be taught *ad minima* to the future elites.

Part 4 of Collection 532, a sort of contextual part, begins with the manuscript of a course written in 1931 by a Red professor by the name of S. Rostovsky. A professor at the Communist University of Leningrad, Rostovsky began his course manual (p. 7) with the population figures for Xinjiang given by his predecessor Kornilov in a book, *Kaigar Ili Vost. Turk,* published in 1903 (p. 229), which he compared with figures given in 1924 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang region. Rostovsky's text states that there were 15 ethnic groups in Xinjiang (16 if one counts the category of 'Others'), totalling 3,882,518 people. The figure is lower than the actual population during the 1930s, the author tells us, since it does not take into account the migratory movement of many Mongols, Kazakhs, Dungans, Kirghizs, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Russians who chose to migrate to Xinjiang following the killing of the *kulaks* (landowning peasants) in the USSR. The presence of Han Chinese is attested throughout the region. They are peasants, soldiers, traders and military administrators. The Russians who settled in Xinjiang are either former fugitives from the tsarist government accused of belonging to sects or White Russians who emigrated after the 1917-1922 civil war. After distribution by ethnicity, Rostovsky presents the distribution of the population of Xinjiang by profession. He counts seven of them, namely: landowners, stockbreeders,

craftsmen and workers, merchants, religious clerics, police employees and family soldiers; all are divided, according to the author, into four social classes: feudalists and landowners; the bourgeoisie along with traders and pawnbrokers; 'sovereign' *khans* and herders; and, finally, the proletariat of the countryside, steppes and towns. Following these enumerations, distributions and very didactic and pedagogical classifications, which are ideologically well marked, Rostovsky ends his course by specifying that Xinjiang separated from China as a province by decree on 5 November 1884 and that formerly the region was a semi-colony of Tsarist Russia.

The manuscript of Rostovsky's course was later considerably expanded. From 23 pages, it was republished in 1935 as a 247-page book, entitled *Opyt Kharakteristiki provintsii Sintzian* [Essay on the Characteristics of the Xinjiang Province].

Doungan	Population of Muslim Han or Hui refugees in Kyrgyzstan in the 19th century.
Dzoungar	Name given first to the Oirats and then to all the inhabitants of Dzungaria, a region located north of the Tianshan range in China.
Kalmyk	Western Mongols or Oirats who, in the 17th century, migrated westwards towards the Volga delta.
Kazakh	Turko-Mongolian population in northern Central Asia.
Uyghur	Turko-Mongolian population settled in Xinjiang (China), consisting of sedentary farmers.
Taranchi	Meaning 'farmer' in ancient Turkic Chagatai, the Taranchi are the inhabitants of the Tarim basin in Xinjiang. They are different from craftsmen and traders.

The remainder of Part 4 of Collection 532 is devoted to Rostovsky's re-edited course manual, which became one of the basic textbooks used at the KUTV for the education of future revolutionaries. After providing primary data (population rates, ethnic and occupational distributions, social classes),

the Red professor turns to more political and geostrategic aspects. He argues that as early as 1911, well before the 1917 revolution, Russia was threatening war against China because, despite an ultimatum formulated by the Russian authorities, China had contested Russia's safeguarding of its trade monopolies in Mongolia and Xinjiang. The annexation of these lands was desirable, to say the least. Russia was then very touchy about its plundering successes in China, compared to similar successes of Japan, England and other powers. The Red professor Rostovsky even wrote (p. 69):

> The partition of China was clearly in question. Russia had no intention of restricting its spheres of influence to Mongolia and Xinjiang, but of advancing much further. [...] It was obvious that decisive action had to be taken, especially with such a weakened China.

If Russia was interested in Xinjiang, so was Japan. And Rostovsky reported (p. 81) an anecdote cited in an April 1916 journal (*Dalnievostochne*, n° 8-11, p. 66): A Japanese colonel who went to Xinjiang in 1911 to inquire about the state of Japanese affairs mentioned to the emperor in his mission report that the border between Russia and Xinjiang was 'quite alive'. 'What do you mean by alive?' asked the emperor. 'It is a fact! It is literally full of vitality. As soon as night falls, it gradually moves step by step from the Russian side towards China.' At the beginning of the 20th century, Xinjiang was shared among England, Russia, Japan and China. The race for commercial ties, diplomatic exchanges and conquest among these states was unbridled. But let us remember that in the 19th century, the above-mentioned nations already coveted Xinjiang. Between 1863 and 1877, the uprising led by Tajik adventurer Yakub Beg against the Manchu power in China, for example, was not only supported by the British, whose empire, let us not forget, included the whole of India, but it also allowed the Russians to annex northern Turkestan (1871). We should recall here that for four centuries Tsarist Russia expanded by 89 square kilometres daily, or nearly 32,000 square kilometres yearly (Olivier Weber *in* Peter Hopkirk, *Le Grand Jeu: officiers et espions en Asie centrale*, 2013, p. 31). So the border was indeed alive!

The second part of Rostovsky's book is devoted to Xinjiang at the time of the general crisis of capitalism. In the first chapter, the author describes the proletarian revolution in Russia and Xinjiang. It was clear that Xinjiang's future and development depended entirely on the existence of the USSR. It is important to note that on 6th October 1924, the USSR re-established diplomatic relations with China and thus *ipso facto* with Xinjiang, which, thanks to their long, shared border, was also very closely linked to China economically. The USSR and Xinjiang had a lot to do together. And Xinjiang was also the buffer between the surrounding imperialist countries, China, England and Japan, on one hand, and the USSR, on the other. Geostrategy took on its full meaning in that annexing Xinjiang would give China a base to strike at the Soviet Union and also to appropriate natural resources, especially gold, precious stones, coal, gas and oil. The Soviet Union was also interested in these resources. So the Soviets decided to 'help their backward Uyghur neighbours' to escape the clutches of the imperialists and who would then rely on the USSR for development. A so-called anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution, conducted under the hegemony of the proletariat, was thus indispensable. A Sovietized Xinjiang would have to side with the USSR.

Next, Rostovsky studied 'the civil war in Russia and its repercussions in Xinjiang'. He testified to how the general crisis of capitalism had serious consequences in Xinjiang. The economic crisis that shook the region led to a fall in the prices of raw materials and, at the same time, a phenomenal rise in the prices of industrial products imported from Russia. For example, iron in 1920 rose by 800% compared to 1916, manufactured goods by 300%, cotton by 40% and wool by 50%. At the same time as this financial crisis, which was caused by a tightening of Sino-Russian trade, Xinjiang traders sought to establish relations with the world market, particularly via India, where the imperialists played a determining role; this shift was promoted by the Russian White Guards. In the hope that the situation in the USSR would reverse, some Tsarist Russian institutions in Xinjiang were preserved for a few more years. Thus, the Russian-Asian Bank was maintained until 1927 and the consulates until 1922. Rostovsky then reported the 'intensification of imperialist penetration in Xinjiang'. He denounced the growing interest of the imperialist countries in this region and the multiplication of projects

to improve the means of communication in Xinjiang (train, roads with the help of Citroën, and even the airplane between India and Eastern China). European and American explorers were not to be outdone. Among them were geographer-topographer Sven Hedin, explorer Lattimore, Herzog Espaletto (cousin of the King of Italy), the Roosevelt brothers, Christian missionary Mildred Cable and archaeologist Aurel Stein. And Rostovsky narcissistically concluded: 'post-war imperialism fell in love with "science"' (p. 93).

If Rostovsky staked everything on denouncing the attitude of the imperialist countries towards Xinjiang, it is interesting to note that, following his plea, in the next part of Collection 532 is mentioned another book, *Territoria i naselenie Sintzian* [Territory and Population in Xinjiang], published in 1934, written by a Comintern executive, a certain Fessenko, who was very active within the KUTV. For reasons that are unclear today, Fessenko considered Rostovsky's book politically incorrect. It is quite possible that the disagreement between the two authors stemmed from an ideological trend, strongly influenced by Stalin, that was not much in vogue at the beginning of the 1930s.

Thus concludes Part 4 of Collection 532. The context has been broadly outlined. It will have been understood that Xinjiang was a country with a very rich subsoil, difficult access with its high mountains and deserts, subject to struggles between khanates, with both nomadic and sedentary peoples with little education. It was this land that generated sometimes violent rivalries between States—the USSR, Japan, China and the British kingdom—with a view to disposing of it by fair means or foul. This is where the 'Great Game', or *Bolshaya Igra,* took place*,* mainly between the Russians and the British, between the proponents of the 'Forward Policy' and the 'Masterly Inactivity School'. I will come back to this in my conclusion (p. 110).

During the years 1925 to 1935, the Uyghurs were not fully confident in themselves, as conflicts between Uyghur warlords abounded and literally ruined their own land. And then, on the Soviet side, there were populations with whom the Uyghurs felt somewhat related, such as the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. Some Uyghurs even thought that they could be

better understood and accepted on the Soviet side. However, as early as 1920 the Uyghurs were very critical of the Soviets, as demonstrated at the first Congress of the Peoples from the East held in Baku. In front of more than 2,000 delegates, the majority of whom came from Central Asia and the Caucasus, Uyghurs loudly asserted their difference as practising Muslims. From then on, they began to denounce the persecution of ritual practices and went so far as to call into question what they described as colonialist behaviour. For at that time the Uyghurs wanted communism, but certainly not the atheism that was linked to it. This was only the first snag.

In order to help their Uyghur neighbour, the Soviets, like other 'supporters', envisaged not only economic aid but also, and especially for the Uyghurs, cultural 'aid' under the auspices of the Communist International, or Comintern, which I will now describe.

A Short Note on the Comintern (Communist International)

The Communist International, or Comintern, (1919-1943) set up a whole series of structures to train and supervise militants and cadres devoted to the organisation. It was intended to be a center of education with solid political training, but also a center for organising propaganda. It was born in March 1919, with an executive committee and a board. Zinoviev was the first president. At the Second Congress in 1920, the structures of the Comintern were established: central bodies supervising national sections. The latter were none other than the various national communist parties. The pinnacle of this edifice was the centralised World Communist Party. The world revolution was now underway.

From 1935 onwards, Stalin gradually took over the Comintern. World revolution had given way to 'International revolution'.

First of all, it should be noted that from its plethoric organisation a Comintern culture was born, which survived the organisation by spreading to the national organisation via their cadres. Another point is that the disappearance of the Comintern in 1943 was accompanied by a fierce desire to erase the role the organisation, and even its past actions. Here again is the seal of oblivion now pressed down by the weight of Stalinisation.

Under the cover of the Comintern, universities were created.

In 1920, the University for Peoples of the East was created, first in Baku and then in Irkutsk. The aim was to oversee communist action in the zones dominated by the great Western powers and to deploy the strategy of a united anti-imperialist front there. The University was organised into three sections, one was devoted to North Africa, another to the Near East and the third to South and South-East Asia.

Between 1921 and 1926, four schools were inaugurated in Moscow to train revolutionaries from all over the world. First came the Communist University the Workers from the East (KUTV), and then the Communist University for National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ). These were followed by the Chinese Sun Yat-Sen University in 1925 and the Leninist School of the Comintern in 1926. The Comintern was keen to make an effort to educate colonised peoples and national minorities. The inauguration of so many educational institutions at the same time may seem costly and of little interest. In fact, it turned out to be very clever, because a student identified by Comintern authorities had the possibility of applying to one or another of these schools depending on his past political errors, his (in)ability to adapt or his intellectual shortcomings. So, any student spotted for his potential had his future as a party leader guaranteed.

The enormous network, a sort of spider's web, set up by the communists also included pre-university stages. For young people aged between 9 and 14, the Pioneers organisation was instituted. For those aged between 14 and 28, the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) was created in 1918. This organisation played a major role as the antechamber of the Party. Its hundreds of thousands of cells were established in schools, universities and industrial and agricultural enterprises—in other words, everywhere. The exponential figures are there to attest to its size: 22,000 members in 1918, 400,000 members in 1920, 1.5 million in 1925, 4 million in 1934, and 9 million in 1939.

Between 1918 and 1926, a framework that had as its pillars the Comintern, the universities and the Komsomol was ready to manufacture the 'new man'.

The KUTV: a Soviet National School of Administration

The KUTV was conceived as a truly Soviet National School of Administration, with (at least) one difference compared to the French National School of Administration (*École normale d'Administration*, or *ENA*): it was not students who were to be trained but peasants and workers. The strategy was intended to be clever and *a priori* successful. It was a question of offering room and board and an education to young Central Asians destined to become perfect communist activists.

The KUTV, located in Moscow, sought to train an elite that would lead the revolutionary struggle. To do this, elements of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice were taught. Parallel to coursework, apprentices were taken to Moscow for stays outside their usual environment, which allowed the Comintern cadres to observe how they acclimatised to Soviet realities and then to select the best among them. But who were these young people with a political future? Where did they come from, and why them?

I found the answer to these questions in the Archives, where I learned about the Comintern's procedures for recruiting student (i.e., workers).

Recruitment

In general, workers were sent to the University by the Executive Committee of the Communist International [*Isponitelnie Komitet Komunistitcheskovo Internatsionala*, or IKKI]. Here we find the aforementioned spider's web that encompassed the Soviet academic world. It was necessary to pass through the IKKI before being enrolled at the KUTV.

However, this rule did not seem to apply to Uyghurs. Indeed, from the first documents in the Archives, we learn that in March 1925 it was the KUTV that asked the rector in Moscow to enroll a group of 35 Dzungars. The interest in this ethnic minority in particular and the other populations of Xinjiang in general is based on two aspects, one factual and the other strategic. On the factual side, it is important to know, and the archives make ample mention of this, that since 1912 there had been a national revolutionary movement among Dzungars. However, this political momentum was not supported by the Komsomol or the Bolshevik Party. The unfortunate result

was that, due to the lack of rules and framework, the movement had turned into pan-Turkic Islamism and not into a Bolshevik revolution. So there was a serious possibility of bringing revolutionary work to fruition in Xinjiang, even if only in its northern part, but it was first necessary to train the future recruits at the KUTV. A 1927 proceedings is devoted to KUTV students from Xinjiang. It states that this class consisted of 12 people: 7 Uyghurs, 2 Dungans, 2 Kalmyks and 1 Kazakh. The 2 Kalmyks had arrived following their assignment by the IKKI; the rest had come from Central Asian Republics (i.e., the USSR) and Mongolia. No one from East Turkestan—i.e., Xinjiang—had yet been assigned by the Comintern. Why then title this statement 'Concerning KUTV students from Xinjiang'? The party director offered an explanation. The comrades who presented themselves as Uyghurs were in fact from southern Kazakhstan (i.e., the USSR). But now we must take into account the aforementioned strategic aspect. Indeed, a detailed reading of the Archives allows us to understand that the Comintern had envisaged encroaching into Xinjiang on two fronts: one in northern Xinjiang, north of the Tianshan, in what is called Dzungary, as reported in Collection 532, Part 1; and the other in the vicinity of the city of Kashgar, in the southwest of Xinjiang, which corresponds to the Kashgar group mentioned in Collection 532, Part 2.

The idea of a double front does not seem to have been born upon the arrival of the first Uyghur workers at the KUTV but much earlier. Indeed, as early as June 1921, at a special session of the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party, the chairman of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, Y.E. Rudzutak, had proposed having one revolutionary training centre in Kashgar and another based in the Dzungarian republics of Xinjiang. But the Commissioner for External Affairs, G. V. Chicherin, who was also a diplomat and probably aware of the problems associated with the coexistence of the populations concerned, was categorically opposed to this, arguing that it would be too risky an operation. After heated discussions, the members of the Politburo, including Lenin himself, seemed to agree with Chicherin's opinion, while still entertaining the idea of leading the revolution in Xinjiang in the near future[2]. Finally, it was in the mid-1940s

[2] *Cf.* Valerii Barmin, *The Activities of the Comintern on the Creation of a Revolutionary Party in Xinjiang in the 1920s*, First International Conference on Uygur Studies, History, Culture, and Society, September 25-27, 2014, Washington, D.C.

that everything was put in place by Stalin himself, assisted by Beria, to forge revolutionary Xinjiang.

Both fronts arose from strategic disputes between members of the Soviet Communist Party, who, in the early 1920s, were still hesitant to ally themselves with the Nationalist forces of the Guomindang or to support the newly formed Chinese Communist Party (July 1921).

Finally, a last mode of recruitment, which seems peculiar and related to the plethora of communist universities mentioned above, would be that devised by a former student who had been expelled from the KUTV but then admitted to the Lenin School under a Russianised name; he recruited young people in Kyrgyzstan who were later admitted to the KUTV by order of the Comintern. The other part of the 'Uyghur Circle' were students recruited two years earlier, without verification, by another former student. The two groups fought violently, after which a rapporteur recommended that the group be divided into three branches according to their mode of recruitment: first, Uyghur students from Central Asia (i.e., Soviet Uyghurs) who entered the university through their own efforts without being recruited and who would never go to Xinjiang and intended to work in Central Asia; second, students recruited by the former student with no subsequent verification; and third, young, unemployed, and unexperienced Uyghur students recruited by two cadres.

In summary, it can be said that recruitment was driven by three injunctions:

- That of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, IKKI. These candidates were Uyghurs from the Soviet Union who would never fight in Xinjiang.
- That of the KUTV itself, which urged the Moscow rector to respond to the strategic choice set out by the Party leadership. He had to find candidates geographically located in northern and northwestern Xinjiang in order to open two fronts to advance the revolution. Cadres were sent to the area to recruit forces for the second front.
- That of the private network of students from other political schools.

Everything seemed ready to recruit cadres to lead the Bolshevik revolution in Xinjiang, which was necessary for obvious geopolitical reasons, including the desire to get hold of the enormous natural resources.

However, despite the highly organised three-pillared recruitment framework that I have already mentioned twice, despite the diversity of possible entries into the Moscow university milieu, despite the effervescent social and political climate of those years, I was very disappointed to find in the 178 relevant pages of the Archives only 39 workers from the East trained at the KUTV between 1925 and 1935. The majority Uyghurs (29), the 39 students included peasants (22), workers (10), craftsmen (2), unknown (5) and were born between 1891 and 1913, i.e., a little more than twenty years apart (22 years to be exact).

The rigidity of the Comintern authorities seemed to be undermined, all the more so as, in addition to the difficulties of recruitment, the cadres had to deal with the extremely low level of training of the student candidates and with a seemingly recurrent problem, the 'overcrowding of the section'. Indeed, only Uyghurs of Central Asia had access to the Institute for Education (INPROS), while the others had no primary schooling and were not fluent in either Chinese or Mongolian. In addition, the nomadic lifestyle of many peasants obviously posed a practical problem for their integration into the KUTV. Also, the case of East Turkestan was problematic.

The level of the 'workers' was such that many of them could not read or write; they were illiterate. Rakhmanov testifies:

> My level is low. I can't read or write. Our mother-tongue teacher gave us a text to write; I wrote it all down but I didn't understand anything I wrote. I told the new classmates that I couldn't even write my surname.

And Rakhmanov added that neither his father nor his mother would have imagined him as a student and wondered whether he would die from studying so much (he would come back to this last allegation during a self-criticism session). While Rakhmanov admitted to not knowing how to read or write, many others seem to have had little more education: Askarov, for example, is described as 'one of the backward ones but has changed a lot since his admission'. Bashi 'arrived at the KUTV without any education at