

TOYO BUNKO RESEARCH LIBRARY 12

Studies on Xinjiang Historical Sources
in 17–20th Centuries

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Tokyo

The Toyo Bunko

2010

Uyghur Memoir Literature in Central Asia on Eastern Turkestan Republic (1944–49)

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Introduction

In the 1940s the Turkic Muslim population of the western province of China -Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) acquired great political significance. During that very complicated period in Chinese and world history when China was divided into two primary warring factions - that of Kuomintang and that of the Communist Party, in the northwestern districts of Xinjiang neighboring Soviet Kazakhstan (the Ili district) a Revolution of the local Muslim people broke out in 1944, and the formation of the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR), a pro-Soviet nationalist State was proclaimed. The ETR existed until 1949 when the whole of China was united under Communist power. The appearance of the Muslim Turkic State independent from China in the region bordering with the former Soviet Republics was an important event in the modern History of Central Asia. It influenced the national identity of the local Uyghurs and Kazakhs of Xinjiang as well as that of relative peoples in Soviet Central Asia.

The ETR signaled the last successful attempt among Uyghurs to found their own nation-state in the modern History. At the same time it can be seen as the forerunner of the newly independent Turkic nation-states of post Soviet Central Asia. However the history of founding the ETR remains contentious primarily because of its role in the complicated global power struggle, both historical and contemporaneous, which covered Xinjiang in the 1940's.

The foundation of the ETR was a continuation of the long-standing struggle between Russia and China for the influence in Central Asia, but this event also marked a continuation of the struggle between Great Britain and Russia for influence in the region, a competition often referred to as the "Great Game." In the later instance the founding of the ETR was certainly influenced by the extension of the Russian-British "Great Game" to the "Cold war" in Asia between the USSR and its allies and the USA and its allies. It must not be forgotten that the ETR was formed as World War II was ending and the competition between the USA and the USSR for spheres of influence in the post-war world was beginning. In Asia the most important sphere of influence under contention was the world's most populated country - China.

The contentious nature of the founding of the ETR in the context of the

geopolitics is reflected in the varied historiography of the Republic. Interpretation of the events surrounding the ETR differs in historiography of Mainland China, former Soviet Union, Taiwan, and Turkey. According to the Mainland Chinese historiography, the founding of the ETR was sparked by popular revolt that was part of the greater Chinese anti-Koumintang democratic socialist revolution, and its leaders to this day are hailed as heroes of the Chinese communist movement. Most Soviet historiography of the ETR follows a similar line, but, in general, the theme of the ETR became forbidden after the 1960's in Soviet scholarly circles, and at least one scholar was not allowed to defend his dissertation, which he has written about the ETR during the period of Sino-Soviet tensions.¹ Without exemption, the Soviet literature on the ETR also makes no mention of the USSR's involvement in the Republic's foundation. Taiwanese sources, on the other hand, tend to describe the ETR as exclusively a Soviet puppet state. In terms of estimation of the Soviet role, the Turkish interpretation is close to the Taiwanese one with the exception that it defines the founding of the ETR as an anti-Chinese national liberation movement.²

Sources for the ETR history consist of materials produced in countries involved in political developments in Xinjiang, such as Russia, China, Great Britain and the USA. Most of these materials especially those from American, British and Taiwanese archives, partly from Mainland China, have been utilized by Linda Benson,³ Andrew Forbes,⁴ David Wang⁵ and Wang Ke⁶ in their researches on the ETR. Only Soviet archival documents were not accessible for scholars, since the

¹ MINGULOV, N. 1968 "Natsional'no-osvoboditel'noye dvizheniye narodov Sintsiana kak sostavnaya chast' obshekitayskoy revoliutsii (1944–1949 gg)," in *Voprosy istorii Kazakhstana i Vostochnogo Turkestana. Trudy Instituta istorii, arkheologii i etnografii im. Ch. Ch. Valikhanova*, vol. 15., Alma-Ata: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk Kazakhskoi SSR, pp. 68–102. #5; YAKOVLEV, A. G. 1955 "K voprosu o natsional'no-osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii narodov Sintsiana v 1944–1949 gg," in *Uchenye zapiski Instituta vostokovedeniya* 11, pp. 155–88; KHAKIMBAYEV, A. 1971 *Natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie korennogo naseleeniya Sintsiana v 30-kh i 40-kh godakh XX veka* (Spetsial'nyi bulletin Instituta vostokovedeniya AN SSSR. #4(120)), Moskva; BOGOSLOVSKI, V. A., and Moskalev, A. A. 1984 *Natsionalny vopros v Kitae (1911–1949)*, Moskva: Nauka. 1984.

² KURBAN, I. 1992 *Şarki Türkistan Cumhuriyeti (1944–1949)*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi.

³ BENSON, L. 1991 *The Ili Rebellion. The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang. 1944–1949*, Armonk, New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

⁴ FORBES, A. 1986 *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A political history of Republican Sinkiang 1911–1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ WANG, D. 1999 *Under the Soviet Shadow: The Ining Incident: Ethnic Conflict and International Rivalry in Xinjiang 1944–1949*, Hong Kong: the Chinese University Press.

⁶ WANG Ke 王柯 1999 *Higashi Torukisutan kyōwakoku kenkyū* 『東トルキスタン共和国研究』, Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai.

USSR concealed for a long time its actual involvement in the situation in Xinjiang. To certain extent this lack has been filled by V. Barmin's book on relations between the USSR and Xinjiang in the 1940s published in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷

Another source of information on the ETR, which has not been yet utilized sufficiently is a memoir literature and oral stories narrated by those people who either played a significant role in the ETR and Xinjiang at that time or just eye-witnessed those events. Though we cannot assert that this type of sources has never been utilized before, but they were used only occasionally and selectively. As for recollections of the Uyghurs from former Soviet Central Asia they began to be announced widely only recently, especially after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

1. Uyghur Memoir Literature and Oral Stories on the History of the ETR

A memoir literature to certain extent contains elements of oral stories, therefore it is important to look at first at some features of oral stories as a particular source of information. There are some prejudices in favor of unreliability of oral sources of information, but they mostly have been broken out by scholars. Studies on this subject show that oral stories should be regarded to as reliable source of information, but with some different characteristics and particularities and written and oral sources do not exclude each other, but complement. Very often written sources contain an element of oral information, which is especially true for archival materials. As Alessandro Portelli indicates in his study on oral history, the main particularity of oral history is that it tells more about the significance of the event rather than the event itself. Uniqueness of oral stories also lies in their ability to fix changes occurring in a memory.⁸

Memoir literature and oral stories on the ETR also demonstrate their connections. Memoir stories published so far belong to special group of educated persons rather than ordinary people. This means that authors of published recollections are politically oriented individuals consciously representing their views on events and their political preferences define specific features of memoirs. Memoir writings were published not only by Uyghur immigrants residing outside their homeland, but also by those former activists still living in Xinjiang. All

⁷ BARMIN, V. A. 1999 *Sintsian v sovetsko-kitaiskikh otnosheniakh 1941–1949 godakh*, Barnaul: BGPU Press.

⁸ PORTELLI, Alessandro 2004 "V chem spesifika ustnoi istorii," *Zhenskaya ustnaya istoriya*, Vol.1., Bishkek: Tsentrazdatelskogo razvitiya, pp. 20, 23. (Russian version of the article published in Portelli, Alessandro 1991 *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning of Oral History*, New York: The State University of New York Press.)

this makes obvious differences in estimation of political situation in the province corresponding to two rival political groups among the 1940s Uyghur elite in Xinjiang.

One was a pro-Soviet wing of Uyghur nationalist leaders whose understanding of what is a Uyghur nation fully followed the Soviet model of national policy. This consisted of those who lived and worked on the ETR territory. Most of them were either trained in Soviet Central Asia or strongly influenced by Soviet ideology, which was very influential in Xinjiang in the 1930s. Uyghur nationalism fostered in the ETR was supported by the Soviets and naturally was anti-Chinese by nature and advocated friendship with the Soviet Union.

Another group of Uyghur nationalists was represented by those who preferred a collaboration with the Chinese state rather than being friends of the Soviets. Main proponents of this idea were three prominent Uyghur leaders Masud Sabri, Memtimin Bughra and Aisa Alptekin, known among as *Üch Äpändi* (Three Efendis). These Uyghur nationalists were educated in Turkey and very much influenced by Pan-Turkist ideas. They perceived Uyghurs as a part of a united Turkic nation in Xinjiang. Being pan-Turkists implied enmity towards the Soviets. From two options for the Uyghurs existed at that time – to be under the sway of the Soviets or the Chinese – they chose the latter.

After the Communist takeover in China and liquidation of the East Turkestan Republic in 1949, when the whole territory of Xinjiang was brought under the control of PRC, many Uyghur nationalists had to leave the country. Two groups of Uyghur nationalists competed during the ETR period – pan-Turkist autonomists and pro-Soviet separatist leaders – found themselves in immigration in Turkey and Soviet Central Asia respectively. Another group of political and military activists of the ETR stayed in China and could survive due to collaboration with communists. Representatives of both groups of immigrants as well as those who remained in Xinjiang published quite a lot of memoir writings in the form of books and articles, which can be divided into following groups.

1. Memoir writings in Xinjiang sanctioned by official Chinese authorities therefore presenting the Ili rebellion as a part of the Chinese democratic movement fought against the Kuomintang regime. Though this imposed certain confinements on narration, nevertheless it allowed announcing quite a good deal of materials valuable from the point of view of factual reconstruction of the situation during the “revolution of three districts.” These include memoirs by high rank Communist cadres such as those by Burhan Shahidi,⁹ Zakir Saudanov¹⁰ etc. Here we do not examine memoirs by Chinese political actors of those events.

⁹ SHAHIDI, B. 1986 *Shinjang 50 yili*, Beijing: Millätlär nāshriyati.

¹⁰ SAUDANOV, Z. 1989 *5-korpusning besip ötkän inqilavi musapisi*, Ürümchi: Xinjiang häliq nāshriyati.

2. There is also another group of writings which cannot be considered as a memoir literature, but contains some historical data based on oral stories – historical novels. These are very significant in terms of fostering Uyghur nationalism through creating images of glorious past and anti-Chinese feelings. This sort of literature has a broad audience compare to memoirs and its role in shaping nationalist feelings among the Uyghurs is essential. One of the most popular historical novel devoted to the events of the 1930–40s is the book “Ana yurt” (“Motherland”) by late Zordun Sabir.¹¹
3. Publications in Turkey describing the ETR as a result of a national-liberation movement of the Turkic peoples against the Chinese colonialism. Unlike Soviet publications these discern the Soviets as one of the main enemies of the Turkic peoples, who first supported them, but finally betrayed. These writings are pan-Turkic and anti-Soviet in nature. Among these writings are recollections by Aisa Alptekin.¹²
4. Specific group of Uyghur memoir literature composed of publications in Central Asia, which will be discussed more thoroughly in this article.

2. Zunun Teipov’s “Struggling for Freedom” – First Recollections in Soviet Central Asia

The breakup of the Soviet Union and emergence of new independent Central Asian states resulted in revision of the presentation of the ETR history compare to the previous time. However this revision started earlier, during the perestroika period, when the liberalization of Soviet society was accompanied by certain revisions in Soviet historiography. It should be noted here that the history of Xinjiang was differently interpreted in Soviet history works even before depending on the state of bilateral Sino-Soviet relations. Since the Soviet Union concealed its involvement in events around ETR, at first publications on this issue were not encouraged in the Soviet historiography. For this reason, it is natural that there was no room for memoirs in Soviet writings. The need for such a literature emerged during the period of Sino-Soviet confrontation, when numerous publications criticizing Chinese national policy in Xinjiang came out. Among these was a popular book on the ETR by Zunun Teipov, a former Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the ETR National Army and a colonel. His recollections “*V borbe za svobodu*” (Struggling for freedom) were published first in several issues of the literary journal “Prostor” in 1973 in Almaty and then a book under similar title was published the following year in Moscow by “Nauka,” one of central academic Publishing houses (1974).¹³

¹¹ SABIR, Z. 2001 *Ana yurt*, Vol. I-III. Ürümchi: Shinjang yashlar-ösmürlär nāshriyati.

¹² ALPTEKIN, A. 1985 *Esir Doğu Türkistan için: İsa Yusuf Alptekin'in Mücadele Hatıraları*, İstanbul: Flaş Matbaacılık.

¹³ ТАЙПОВ, З. 1974 *V bor'be za svobodu*, Moskva: Nauka.

Its Uyghur version came out in 1977 in Alma-Ata under the title “*Sharqi Turkstan yerida*” (On the land of East Turkistan).¹⁴ The annotation of the book highlighted a significance of the narrated events:

“These recollections relate the national liberation movement of the people of East Turkistan against the Kuomintang Chinese colonizers and how in the result of this movement, they established East Turkistan Republic in three prefectures, its National-liberation Army and its liquidation by the group of Mao Tse-tung. Being a subjective personal memoirs of a single individual, nevertheless they describe a great national liberation movement in the history of the whole Uyghur people.”¹⁵

Teipov’s book came out as a part of the anti-Chinese ideological campaign alongside with some other such kind of publications, as for example recollections by Bazilbayev¹⁶ on cultural revolution in Xinjiang. The introduction to the book has been written by Tursun Rakhimov, a Uyghur historian worked for the Central Committee of the CPSU in Moscow and a key person who was active in training of people sent to Ili from Soviet Central Asia in the early 1940s. In the introduction Rakhimov formulated the official Soviet interpretation of the ETR as a result of national-liberation movement of the oppressed local peoples against the reactionary Kuomintang regime and the movement accomplished its task with the victory of the Chinese Communists and establishing of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. At the same time, though not directly, he recognized, the Soviets implications in the ETR stressing an anti-Chinese nature of the rebellion.¹⁷

As for the content of Teipov’s book, its first part contained a description, in a popular form, of the events preceded to the 1944 rebellion. Then it describes the uprising in the Nilqi district of the Ili prefecture, led by six leaders of the Uyghur, Kazakh and Tatar origin and followed by a liberation of the town of Kuljia. Special chapter is titled “The formation of the National Liberation Army” tells how the National army was established. Generally it should be noted that the work had a popular writing describing political events pretty superficially. The narration ends up with the Communist “liberation” of the province and repression of the former ETR political and military leaders. Since the author was a military leader, his memoirs mostly emphasized military issues. This corresponded to the Soviet ideological tasks of highlighting the national liberation nature of the Ili rebellion. This was the first book on the ETR containing more or less detailed description of

¹⁴ TEIPOV, Z. 1977 *Shārqi Türkstan yerida*, Almuta: Qazaqstan nāshriāti.

¹⁵ Teipov 1977: 2.

¹⁶ BAZILBAEV, A. 1978 *Chetyre goda v khaose*, Alma-Ata: Kazakhstan.

¹⁷ Teipov 1977: 10.

its history, especially of its initial stages. At the same time, the narration followed a general evaluation of the events accepted in the Soviet Historiography. For example, the author depicted negatively a position and activities of the Uyghur leaders collaborated with KMT. The fail of the Coalition government in 1947 is fully ascribed to the KMT's violation of the 11 points Agreement concluded in 1946. This criticism also addressed the "imperialistic" policy of the United State supported the KMT government and, a first Uyghur Chairman of the provincial Coalition Government, who was accused as a collaborationist and a traitor:

"The traitors, bourgeois nationalists Masud, Mahamatimin, Aisa, together with the American advisors came back to Xinjiang protected by the armed forces of Chiang Kai-shek."¹⁸

"After being enthroned, fulfilling with devotion to the orders of America and Chiang Kai-shek, Masud started to liquidate the democratic forces. Uniting efforts with bandits, he tried to destroy the three districts revolution."¹⁹

Such an attitude corresponded to Rakhimov's estimation of Masud's role:

"Masud Sabirkhadzhiyev was a Uyghur by nationality, a big landlord, extreme reactionary, loyal servant of Chiang Kai-shek, and pan-Turkist..."²⁰

Despite of its ideological nature, Teipov's book became the first Soviet publication of a memoir genre. At the period when there was a shortage of information on the ETR, it turned into important source of knowledge about that episode in the history fo Xinjiang. The value of this first memoir literature in the Soviet Union was that it shed light to the initial stages of the Ili uprisings and related heroic battles of the National Army. It also showed a role of the Uyghurs in the war against the KMT. This is very important since due to shortage of adequate information on events on the ETR territory a role of the Uyghurs has been underestimated in publications come out outside China. Teipov's memoirs also contributed to the growth of Uyghur nationalist sentiments in Central Asia through showing recent heroic past of the Uyghurs and a successful attempt of establishing an independent nation-state.

¹⁸ Teipov 1977: 125.

¹⁹ Teipov 1977: 126.

²⁰ Teipov 1977: 13.

3. Perestroika and a Memory of the ETR Leaders

The *perestroika* changes in the late 1980s allowed discussing many topics previously banned by censorship. Among such topics was the history of the ETR and the Soviet involvement in Xinjiang in the 1930–40s. While historians were not in hurry in revising the ETR history, which was an objective process bound to the availability of sources and required certain time for revision, Uyghur newspapers in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan started publishing numerous articles filling up this gap. Interest in the ETR history was also stimulated by the rise of Uyghur nationalism pushed forward by the independence of Central Asian peoples. The core element in the growing nationalist sentiments of Uyghur émigrés was the issue of Uyghur statehood. In the process of intensification of political activities of Central Asian Uyghur organizations in the early 1990s, two short lived Uyghur nation-states in the twentieth century acquired a symbolic meaning for Uyghur separatism outside China.

Of two main Uyghur newspapers published in Almaty, the then capital of Kazakhstan, “Yengi hayat” in Arabic script provided much space for memoirs. As a result a plethora of publications appeared at that time. What was a character of those writings? First of all, the publications revised a Soviet role in the rise and fall of the ETR. While previously the role of the Soviets was hidden, now the authors revealed and accused the Soviets in betrayal of the Uyghurs and other peoples of East Turkistan. Of special significance was revealing a negative role of the Soviets in suppression of the Muslim uprisings in Xinjiang in the 1930s. At the same time, the publications characterized negatively a Soviet role in the ETR history, accusing the Soviets of making pressure on the Ili leaders to conclude a peaceful agreement with KMT and keeping a liberation war within the territory of three prefectures, and finally handing over the ETR to the Chinese Communists in 1949.

The most intriguing theme in the publications was and still is a fate of the ETR leaders. Official interpretation of the death of the ETR leaders was that their plane crashed on the way to Beijing in August 1949. This official interpretation was not accepted by Uyghur eye-witnesses of the ETR. In the literature there were given two alternative possibilities of their death. The first was that they even did not fly to Beijing, and from Alma-Ata where they were to change their planes, they were taken by plane to Moscow and jailed in the Soviet prison of KGB, where they were tortured and killed. This story was recalled ostensibly by a former KGB agent Akim Zhapparov, a Soviet Uyghur who served as a doctor at the Soviet hospital in Kuljia and played an intermediary role between the leaders of the uprising and the Soviet Consulate. This person did not announce any published materials, but he is said to tell other Uyghurs that he saw the corpses of the killed ETR leaders in Moscow (another version of this story says that he was called on by two KGB officers and asked to affirm that the bodies belonged to the Ili leaders who died of

the airplane crash, but when he assumed that the bodies should be burned because of the plane crash, the officers changed their mind and left him saying that they would invite him later; however they never invited him). Another version of the Ili leaders' fate is that the leaders were taken to Beijing and kept imprisoned and alive until the early 1960s. However, while the first version has its certain source, even if it is unproved, the latter is circulated without any reference to source of information.²¹ The mysterious fate of the Ili leaders still remains a puzzle to be resolved only by the Soviet Archival documents.

Another aspect of memoir literature was a Uyghur political elite. Simultaneous to the revision of the Soviet role, the role of the Uyghur leaders collaborated with the KMT was also revised. This was natural for the opening of Central Asian Uyghur communities to the rest of the world. Establishing of closer contacts with the Uyghur community in Turkey, center of pan-Turkist ideology, and the country of residence of two prominent Uyghurs collaborated with the KMT, Mamtimin Bughra and Aisa Alptekin, and a necessity of reconciliation between two former rival groups of Uyghur nationalists made the Central Asian Uyghurs to revise their attitude to Three Efendis. New publications in newspapers idealized a relationship between the ETR leaders and pan-Turkists. They both now were described as Uyghur patriots and nationalists whose final task was similar, namely an independence of the Uyghurs. In this connection there should be mentioned a large article "*Mäsüt äpädi häqqidä häqiqät*" (Truth about Masut Sabri Efendi) devoted to Masud Sabri's life and activity, which appeared "Yengi Hayat" newspaper during the last months of the Soviet Union.²² It was given under the rubric "Those who fought for independence." The introduction to the article referred to the process of *perestroika*, openness, democratization, and pluralism that makes people to get rid of stagnant and dogmatic views and learn to think in a new way. The article based on Turkish publications described Masud Sabri as a national hero, whose contribution to the national-liberation movement was significant. Many articles and interviews with another Uyghur leader - Aisa Alptekin, living at that time in Turkey also appeared in Uyghur newspapers. All these materials soothed ideological contradictions between the two rival factions among the Uyghur leaders of the 1940s.

The *perestroika* period enabled to discuss the role of another ETR leader, Alihan Tura Saghuni, who was a first president of the ETR. Since he has been kidnapped by the Soviet KGB in summer 1946 and settled in Tashkent under home arrest, the story about Alihan Tura was among the themes prohibited in Soviet historiography. In academic writings his name was mentioned when describing the

²¹ *Yengi hayat* newspaper, 9 May 1999.

²² VAHIDI, H. 1991 "Masut äpädi häqqidä häqiqät," *Yengi hayat* newspaper, #105 from 2 September 1991; #106 from 5 September 1991; #107 from 7 September 1991; #108 from 10 September 1991; #109 from 12 September 1991; #110 from 14 September 1991; # 112 from 19 September 1991.

initial period of the Ili uprising and establishment of the ETR. Generally, a strict silence was kept on his fate. Western scholars were not aware of his life after his disappearance in 1946. Democratization of the Soviet society made it possible to talk about Alihan Tura. The first story based on the personal interviews with Alihan Tura who passed away in 1976, was published by Assym Bakiev, a Uyghur scholar (philologist) from Tashkent.²³ This article was based on interviews held with Alihan Tura. One of the most significant information in this publication concerned a role of Islamic leader in the ETR history, since Alihan Tura was an eminent religious figure in Kuljia. Such an information included: 1) a role of Muta'ali Hälfät Kamali, another prominent Islamic *ulama* in Kuljia, who promoted him to the position of imam of the Baytulla mosque in the town of Kuljia ("one day, a resident of Kulja, a religious leader who had extreme authority and was respected among the people, Muta'ali Hälfät invited him to deliver a preach (*waza*) on the life of the Prophet for the congregation of Baytulla."²⁴ 2) a role of Alihan Tura in establishing of the Azatliq täshkilat (Liberation Organization), which was actually initiated by a Soviet Consul Dubashin, who had several meetings with him and persuaded him to head the organization. Here we can mention another interesting information told by Dr. Saut Mollaudov, who talked to Muta'ali Hälfät in 1958 during his visit to Kuljia. Muta'ali Hälfät told him that at first the Soviets approached him with a request to head the organization, but he declined referring to his old age, but recommended Alihan Tura for that position. When the ETR government was established on November 12, 1944 Muta'ali Hälfät was appointed as a government member in charge for religious affairs (maybe was replaced from this post after Alihan Tura's kidnapping). Assym Bakiev believes that the reason for forced replacement of Alihan Tura was his opposition to the growing Soviet interference through advisors and agents after the mid 1945.

Circumstances of Alihan Tura's kidnapping are also obscure. According to Bakiev's article, he was taken by the KGB agents on 28 July 1946 at first to the Sanatorium in Medeo, in vicinities of Alma-Ata, then sent to Tashkent. From other sources we know that he had been invited to talks with the First Secretary of Uzbekistan Usman Yusupov to be ostensibly held at Horgos, near the Soviet border. This is confirmed by a former intelligent service officer Rishat Sabitov, who participated in the kidnapping of Alihan Tura.²⁵ Assym Bakiev notes that it is striking that the Uyghur and other peoples did not demand to return their president and were satisfied with the official explanation claiming that Alihan Tura was taking rest at the Borotala springs.

²³ BAKIEV, A. 1991 "Älihan Töra Saghuniy," *Yengi Hayat* newspaper. October 1, 3, and 5, 1991.

²⁴ Bakiev 1991: 1 October 1991, 3.

²⁵ Personal interview, 15 May 2004.

Bakiev claims that Zhang Zhi-zhong, a governor of the province, characterized Alihan Tura as a person with whom it was difficult to come to compromise. All these descriptions were confirmed later by V. A. Barmin based on Soviet archival documents. It is clear from those materials that the Soviets were dissatisfied with him since he ceased to obey their orders and recommendations. Barmin writes on this point:

Alihan Tura's activities were oriented to the breakdown of negotiations... On October 24 General Egnarov reported to Molotov and Beria that... "Sadyq" (nickname of Alihan Tura in the reports of the Soviet representatives by the ETR government – *V. Barmin*) conveyed urgently a meeting of the government, where the question of the recall of the delegates from Urumchi has been raised.²⁶

Alihan Tura and his followers (at that time they comprised a majority in the government and included such authoritative leaders as Rakhimjan Sabirkhajiev, Mutaali Halfat, Zhani Yuldashev, Abdurauf Mahsum, Karim Haji, Colonel Zunun Teipov etc) stood up against any negotiation with the Chinese and insisted on continuation of active military actions.²⁷

Later, in the Tashkent period of his life, Alihan Tura was engaged in writing his memoirs and continued religious studies and poetry. After Alihan Tura's death, his sons published his book "Tarihi Muhammadiy" (first edition 1990; second 1997)²⁸ on the history of Islam, life and activity of the Prophet Muhammad. The first part of his memoirs titled "Turkiston qaighusi" appeared in Tashkent recently, in 2003.²⁹ This book tells about his life in the 1930s when he had to leave Kyrgyzstan for Xinjiang and his life there during the Sheng Shi-cai rule. Unfortunately Alihan Tura was not able to describe his life in 1940s.³⁰

The memoir writings in Central Asia always paid attention to Akhmedjan Kassimi, another leader who became a true head of the rebellious zones after Alihan Tura's kidnapping. Since he was a pro-Soviet political leader who had been declared a Uyghur national hero of the twentieth century. in the PRC, there were published numerous memoirs about him in Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region, which are of tremendous ideological nature. Publications on Kassimi come out in Central Asia included those reprints from Xinjiang articles and original

²⁶ Barmin 1999: 102.

²⁷ Barmin 1999: 93.

²⁸ SOG'UNIY, A. 1997 *Tarixi Muhammadiy*, 2 ed., Toshkent: Movarounnahr.

²⁹ SOG'UNIY, A. 2003 *Turkiston qayg'usi*, vol. 1, Toshkent: Sharq nashriyoti.

³⁰ According to Sabit Abdurahman (Uyghuri), the 1940s events were reconstructed by Alihan Tura's son.

recollections of immigrants worked with him in the past. Anyway, creation of the image of Kassimi as a Uyghur national hero occurred on both sides of the Sino-Central Asian border, with a difference in anti-Chinese character of this image outside China. Significant contribution to the hailing Kassimi as a national hero in Central Asia was made by Ziya Samadi, a high rank official in the ETR and then a minister of education and culture of the Xinjiang government in the 1950s. Samadi became a well-known writer and author of historical novels in Kazakhstan. These included “Zhillar siri” (Secret of years) narrating the 1930s historical events and a novel “Akhmad Epanidi” (1995), which certainly cannot be considered as a memoir literature. Before his death Samadi wrote his memoirs, of which only some passages devoted to the 1930s were published in the Uyghur newspaper.³¹ Besides, newspapers published numerous short etudes on Kassimi, most of which mythologize him as a revolutionary and national hero of the Uyghurs.³²

4. Memory of Resistance

Some changes in the memory of the ETR demonstrated recollections by a former ETR officer Sabit Abdurahman (Uyghuri) published in 1999 in a brochure “Sharqi Turkistan inqilavi toghrisida” (On the rebellion in East Turkistan).³³ These recollections as well as interviews with him held by the author show complexity in the relations of the Ili leadership with Chinese communists. Abdurakhman spent about 20 years of his life in Chinese prisons. Most interesting is that his long-time imprisonment started with his detention in June 1949 in Ili for his political position. Abdurakhman recalls:

...a group of young intellectuals who got their education in the Soviet Union or those in Uyghurstan accepted a Communist ideology, in May 1946 established in Kujia a party of the communist character called the Party of the People Revolution. PPR members openly refused independence, and advocated for living in the Chinese state. This idea also began to spread in the National army. In summer of 1948 the heads of political departments of the National Army’s regiments were gathered together in the field headquarter at Shihuo to hold political line. The PPR’s leaders Abdukerim Abbasov, Saifuddin Azizi and Kheliam Khudaiberdiev, who came from the Soviet Union, delivered lectures at this course...

³¹ SAMADI, Z. 2004 “Taqip,” *Uyghur avazi* newspaper, #16 from 16 April 2004, p. 5; #19 from 7 May 2004, p. 9.

³² SAMADI, Z. 1991 “Nanjingha säpä,” *Uyghur avazi* newspaper, 11 April 1991, p. 4.

³³ UYGHURI, S. 1999 *Shärqiy Türkistan inqilawi toghrisida*, n.p., p. 63.

Young officers who could not accept this wrong initiative opposed. With the secretary of the First Shihuo cavalry regiment Sabit Abdurakhmanov at the head, they established semi-secret organization of “young Turkistanians.” The main task of this organization was to oppose joining the approaching Chinese communists and keeping our Free East Turkistan state. This was the first political organization opposed the betrayal way of the PPR.

After this organization has been disclosed, in June 1949 fourteen officers-members of the organization, were arrested by the intelligence department of the main headquarter. They were brought to Kuljia and jailed in separate cells of the police office. “Young Turkistanians” were in fact an organization which declared independence. But the Russian and Chinese communists labeled them “pan-Turkist” organization.³⁴

As Abdurahman told in personal interviews, this case was investigated by General Iskhakbek Muninov, who made a resolution saying that the officers were mistaken and might be returned to their positions after having been re-educated. However, they still were in jail when in the early 1950s the Chinese communists came to power in Xinjiang and were kept imprisoned even after PRC was declared. This instance is important for its evidence of that 1) the Ili leader decided to join the Chinese communists long before 1949; 2) this decision made a split among the Uyghur military leaders some of which protested against any form of collaboration with the Chinese. This event also shows that actually there was implicit resistance in the rebellious zone to the Chinese communist takeover, but the Ili leadership was not only pro-Soviet, but also pro-Communist.

This passage seems to be one of the most interesting places in the S. Abdurakhman’s brochure, which can hardly be qualified as a “pure” memoir literature: the author’s narration seems to be influenced by other publications including those came out in XUAR. Most of his narration looks as an analysis rather than memoirs: he frequently refers to the publications by John Garver, S. Aziz, Z. Savdanov etc. Even though, it contains many details on the structure of the National Army and some other topics. Some of his observations in estimation of new publications on the events of the 1940s seem to be correct. For example, characterizing the relationship between adherents of the concept of Chinese Turkistan (*Chinni türkistanlchilar*) and the rebellious leaders.³⁵

One of the most interesting themes raised in memoir literature after the Soviet

³⁴ Uyghuri 1999: 36–37. This story is confirmed by Saidulla Saifullayev, who in his article “Üch vilayät inqilavigha dair bäzi mäsililär” (Shiniang täzkirisi, # 4, 1994) mentions that Sabit Abdurakhman organized a pan-Turkist organization.

³⁵ Uyghuri 1999: 16, 51–53.

breakup is the Soviet presence in the rebellious zone. As it is known well, when the rebellion broke out in the 1940s the Kuomintang government was convinced that it has been instigated and supported by the Soviets. The Taiwanese scholars also did not hesitate in this. Of latest authors who addressed the ETR history, D. Wang in his book tried to substantiate this concept. Soviet historiography concealed real involvement of the USSR in the events in Xinjiang. Only recently a Russian scholar V. A. Barmin showed a real scale of the Russian military assistance to rebels, however he justified it, as well as a whole Soviet policy in Xinjiang, referring to the state interest of the Soviet Union.

This topic also became an important issue for discussions in Uyghur writings in Central Asia. It should be said that the attitude of authors to the Soviet policy was controversial, since the Soviets played a negative role during the 1930s interfering internal affairs on the side of the Chinese provincial government and suppressing the Muslim uprisings, but in the 1940s the Soviets took the side of the Muslim rebels. Because of this controversial role of the Soviets, it was difficult to depict it only as a negative or positive one. Authors of new publications condemned Soviet military assistance to Sheng Shi-cai, but the estimation of the Soviets role in the 1940s was more complicated issue. The Soviet military involvement in the Ili uprising remained a puzzle for contemporary western observers, especially American and British Consuls, who even traveled to the rebels' territory in 1946 and 1947 trying to ascertain real Soviet military presence on the territory of rebellious prefectures. Recent Uyghur memoir literature also drew attention to this issue. No one of authors of such writings and those who related their oral stories ever mentioned that the Soviets sent regular troops to Xinjiang at that time. Though one can speculate that the Soviets could disguised their military assistance by sending soldiers of Muslim origin making it difficult to distinguish between Soviet and local soldiers. However, we should trust local informers since they obviously were in a position to make such a distinction.

5. The ETR Government Secretary Recalls

In this connection one of the most interesting evidences belong to the former Secretary of the ETR government, Abdurauf Mäkhsum (Ibragimov), who passed away in 2005 in Almaty. Being one of key persons in the ETR government, A. Mäkhsum did not publish any serious writing. Only a few of his interviews were published in newspapers. In 1994 the newspaper "Yengi hayat" published his memoirs in occasion with the 50th anniversary of the ETR under the title "Shärqi Türkistan inqilavidin bäzi hatirilär" (Some reminiscence on the Eastern Turkistan

rebellion).³⁶ At the beginning of his article he notices that because of his old age and the fact that written materials have been lost, he was not able to reconstruct details of events. His main focus was done on uprising in the town of Kuljia, which were more familiar to him. It is worthy drawing attention to his statement that Uyghurs fell victims of the Soviet treacherous policy and in 1944 they fell into Soviet trap for the second time. Describing rebellion in Kuljia, Mäkhsum again highlights a role of the Soviets in mobilizing people against Kuomintang regime, though it was confined to activities of the Soviet Consulate. The Soviet Consul Dubashin, whose name is frequently referred to in Uyghur memoir literature, approached local leaders to persuade them to start uprising against the Chinese promising a military help in establishing an independent Republic on a pattern of Outer Mongolia. The Soviets approached a Tatar partisan leader in Nilqi area Fatikh Muslimov and promised that “after Eastern Turkistan is liberated, it will be an independent Republic as Outer Mongolia.” Soviet Consul Dubashin also discussed this issue with Alihan tore at the Borotala springs.

However, as it is seen from Mäkhsum’s narration, the Soviets never sent any serious military assistance to Ili once rebellion started. The only group of the Soviet aid came up on 7 November: young Abdukerim Abassov was sent to the Soviet border to request a help and returned with a group of approximately 40 Uyghur, Russian and Kazakh partisans, who resided before in Kuljia. That group led by a Russian leader whose name was Piotr Romanovich Alexandrov, was not well armed and was not sufficient to render significant support to insurgents in the war against the KMT forces. The Russians brought by Alexandrov were ordinary residents of the Ili region without any special training. However due to the Soviets involvement, when the people rose in rebellion, the Chinese forces, thought that the Soviet troops crossed the border and entered the town and therefore were not active in undertaking measures to counter attack insurgents. The Soviets took initiative only after the rebellion has started. Mäkhsum recalls that the Soviet generals V. S. Kozlov and I. Polinov arrived in Kuljia after the rebellion broke up and took initiative in organizing military actions of the rebels. They commanded further military marches of the ETR National Army, which has been organized on April 8, 1945.

As its has been already shown elsewhere, initially the insurgents’ leaders frequently appealed to the religious Islamic feelings of the Muslim population to affect people. This is confirmed by the memoirs of Mäkhsum, who mentions that people of Old Aksu joyfully joined the ETR army regiments as volunteers considering the army as ‘the Islam warriors’ and believing that “*ghazavat*” (holy war) started against infidel Chinese.

As for the other forms of the Soviet military assistance, they have also been

³⁶ MAKHSUM, A. 1994 “Shärqiy Türkistan inqilawidin bäzi khatirilär,” *Yengi hayat* newspaper, 15 October 1994, pp. 6–7.

limited. According to S. Abdurakhman, the Soviets sold weapons to insurgents, exchanging 1 rifle for 5 sheep and 25 bullets for 1 sheep.³⁷ However, it is obvious that the Soviets supplied insurgents with weapons (rifles and bullets) in initial period, but later insurgents gained weapon taken from defeated KMT soldiers as spoils.

The Soviets were not only involved in the negotiations between the rebel leaders and the representatives of the Central government. They are believed to initiate fully these negotiations and stopped the further spreading of the rebellion. As it is known from other sources, the Soviet Consulate approached the Chinese government claiming that the Soviet Consulate in Kuljia was asked by insurgents to help arrange negotiations with Central government. In contrast to this Mähsums claims that the idea of concluding peaceful agreement fully belonged and was initiated by the Soviets, while the ETR government never requested on intermediation of the Soviets in such negotiations. The very word “agreement” started circulating among population in August 1945. General Kozlov informed Alihan Tura, a Chairman of the government, that the Soviets intercepted a Chinese telegram saying that the Central Government was ready to start negotiations with the insurgents if they will and would appreciate if the Soviet Consulate acts as intermediary between the warring sides and finally was able to persuade him to approve the idea of negotiations. Mähsum also negatively characterizes the Soviets’ role during the negotiations: it were Soviet diplomats that made pressure on ETR representatives with Akhmedjan Kassimi at the head to accept many of the KMT’s demands.

While Mähsum’s recollections of 1994 focused on the uprising in Kuljia, his recent unpublished interview (2005) makes some other emphasis, which can be explained by special questions put by K. Talipov, who conducted that interview. Here Mahsum reiterates that the Kuljia rebellion organizers did not have concrete plan of actions, but followed instructions of the Soviet Consul Dubashin. Another detail is that Abbasov left for Khorghos to meet Soviet soldiers on the Russian Consulate’s advice.

Mähsum recollects that initial stage of the rebellion was led by local leaders, members of the organization “Azatliq tashkilati” with Alihan Tura at the head. Since December 1944 when Soviet Generals arrived “the whole fate of Eastern Turkistan rebellion fell into the hands of the Soviets,” the partisan stage finished. The further actions of the ETR were controlled by the Soviets’ “Second House,” a headquarter of the Soviet military advisors. Mähsum calls Dubashin sarcastically “our imam”: “Thus, since that time Dubashin became our “imam” supervisor, we depended on him, and fulfilled what he said.”³⁸ Estimating a leading role of the

³⁷ Uyghuri 1999: 27.

³⁸ TALIPOV, K. “Pajjälilik ayaqlashqan shanliq inqilap sahibiliridin (Abdurauf Mähsum bilän bolghan söhbätin),” (unpublished interview), p. 4.

Soviets, nevertheless Mähsum does not underestimate the role of the local peoples in the rebellion: the Soviets decided to intervene and send their generals and advisors after the local partisans and regular people successfully fought the surpassing KMT forces. In other words they came to help when they were sure that the local peoples were able to fight successfully the enemy.

6. Recollections of the Soviet Advisor

Since the Soviet government concealed its involvement in Xinjiang events, military and civil advisors to the ETR government also kept silence for a long while. Only few of them survived by the break-up of the USSR and these included two prominent Uyghurs – Kheliam Khudaiberdiyev (Tashkent) and Mirzighul Nassirov (Almaty oblast). While former announced some of his recollections of the 1930s Xinjiang where he was sent as a Soviet soldier, latter's life was depicted in a book "Mirzighul" written by a Kazakhstani Uyghur writer Shaim Shavayev.³⁹ The book cannot be qualified as a memoir literature in a strict meaning, rather it is a documentary essay on his life related by another person. Nevertheless, if we look only at the facts given in the book and ignore literary inclusions of the author, we can extract many interesting stories told by Mirzighul himself. This is especially true for passages of the work about the events in Eastern Turkistan described in the Part III (pp. 58–100).

Most valuable part of the book concerns the participation of Soviet advisors in the Ili events. For the first time Mirzighul tells how Soviet advisors to Xinjiang were trained. Mirzighul himself was born in the Uyghur region of Kazakhstan bordering with Xinjiang, grew up at pre-war time and as a young man participated in World War II. In 1942 he was participating in battles in vicinities of Kuibyshev, when he, a commander of snipers' platoon, got an order to leave for Central Asia. Many young people of Uyghur, Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz origin under age 25 were taken to Tashkent, where they were put in groups of 24 people each and enrolled in the Military College training commanders. At the outset, they were taught lectures on the Uyghur history and culture. Introductory lecture was delivered by the First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party Usman Yusupov, who was responsible for Eastern Turkistan affairs. A supervisor of the group was Tursun Rakhimov and lectures were given by a historian Arsham Khidayatov and Tursun Rakhimov as well.

After this theoretical training a military training started: young officers were brought at first to the village Paitukh, Asaka district of Andijan prefecture, where they spent three months.⁴⁰ Here they were under command of General I.

³⁹ SHAVAYEV, Sh. 2000 *Mirzighul: Höjjätlik qissa*, Almuta: Qazaqparat.

⁴⁰ Shavayev 2000: 59.

Polinov, who in the 1930s participated in the Hoja Niyaz uprising. When special training was accomplished, they were received by Usman Yusupov whose gave a very inspiring speech on success of liberation movement. Then they harried up to Kuljia region, where the uprising has already begun in Nilqi. The author does not give exact number of the military men sent to Kuljia, he only gives the names of several Uyghurs from his village who also went to Kuljia: Saidakhmat Omarov, Assim Ibragimov, Tursun Khamraev, Ussen Khoshurov. On September 9, 1944 this small group crossed state border and on the other side of the border it was met by Abdukerim Abbasov and a military attaché of the Soviet Consulate in Kuljia Kuzmin. They were placed north from Khorghos, where a military headquarter was set up.

As it is related by Mirzighul, when this group (or groups?) arrived in Khorghos, the uprising has already begun in Nilqi led by Fatikh Muslimov (August 1944). This means that training of these young Muslim officers started in Tashkent not later than May 1944, in other words long before the Nilqi uprising.

Description of military developments in Xinjiang given in the book seems to be not unique and might be reconstructed based on various information, including those already circulated in publications. Most valuable information here again concerns the Soviet advisors. Mirzighul points out several interesting aspects of their activity. First of all their role was to train local people who voluntarily joined the insurgents and then, after April 8, 1945, the National Army. The Soviet instructors trained these people how to use rifles, grenade, and other weapons. Soviet officers were subordinates of the "Second House," and personally of the General V. C. Kozlov and a Consul I. A. Dubashin.⁴¹

Another aspect of the advisors' responsibility was teaching manuals and enlightenment. Though at first glance, this was simple, but since training personnel was provided by Soviet advisors, a problem of oral commands came up. Military commands in the Soviet Army were in Russian and were used to be translated into Uyghur, since regular soldiers did not understand them. A task of translation of these commands as well as informing soldiers and officers about the Uyghur language and history was imposed on Mirzighul and a Uyghur poet Älqam Äkhtäm.

Mirzighul Nassirov commanded a cavalry troop and participated in battles inside and outside Kuljia, with other regiments in marches reached town of Aksu in the south. After the Kuljia battles the ETR governments sent a group of Soviet advisors for 10 days to the resort at Medeo, near Alma-Ata. When Mirzighul took a rest at Medeo, two prominent Soviet Uyghur intellectuals came to visit him. These were a poet Kadyr Khassanov and a composer Kuddus Khujamyarov. Mirzighul told them about the battles in Kuljia and death of a Uyghur girl Rizvanghul, a medical orderly, who died in those battles. Later Kuddus Khujamyarov composed

⁴¹ Shavayev 2000: 78.

a symphony titled “Rizvanghul.” The last military episode, in which Mirzighul’s cavalry was involved, was an attack of Aksu. On 22 August 1945 the ETR National army detachments were ordered to leave their positions in Aksu and retreat.

It is not surprisingly that Mirzighul Nassirov being a military advisor mostly emphasized on military issues and battles he partook in. Not all of Soviet advisors were military commanders as Mirzighul. Many of them served as advisors to high rank military and administrative officials. Other publications of memoir nature give some more details on other advisors. Mukhsin Abdullayev (Uzbek)⁴² served as assistant to Alihan Tura; Saidakhmet Omarov, one of the Uyghur fellows of Mirzighul, mentioned above, assisted Akhmedjan Kassimi, Sulaiman Roziev was an assistant to Jani Yuldashev.⁴³ Except Soviet Generals and Colonels from the Second House (as Generals V. C. Kuznetsov, I. Polinov, Majarov, Iskhakbek, Colonel Mogutnov, Leskin, Noghaibayev, Mavlanov, Khanin etc),⁴⁴ there were numerous KGB agents some of whom got high positions in governmental bodies, such as a Tatar Gabit Mazitovich Muzipov known by his nick-name “Ali Mamedov” or “Ali-äpändi”: he controlled local Ministry of internal affairs.⁴⁵ There are also mentions in literature of other Soviet agents as Zakir-äpändi (Piotr Ivanovich Savinov) and Iskändär (not identified yet).

Materials analyzed here are only small but most interesting part of the Uyghur memoir literature published in Kazakhstan over the last decades. Apart from these materials there are numerous publications in the form of articles published in Uyghur newspapers by other witnesses of the ETR. Of special importance here is the newspaper “Yengi hayat” published in Arabic script. This newspaper became a center of radical Uyghur nationalist ideas during the early 1990s in Kazakhstan due to close collaboration of its Editor in Chief Alimjan Kassimov with leaders of “Uyghurstan Azatliq täshkilati.” After a while, when he was dismissed from his position the newspaper became more moderate, but still published short recollections. These were mostly devoted to individual stories, the role of Tatars and Dunghans (Hui) in the rebellion, etc. Since many authors of the articles have already passed away, copies of “Yengi hayat” turned into very valuable source of information on the ETR history.

⁴² Mukhsin Abdullayev is mentioned as being present at the meeting of the First Secretary of the CP of Uzbekistan Sharaf Rashidov with Gheni Batur.

⁴³ Uyghuriy 1999: 23.

⁴⁴ Uyghuriy 1999: 23.

⁴⁵ KUKSUSHKINA, A. “Shpionskaya voina,” Online material. Also cf. Russkiye v Turkestane. Seriya istoricheskikh rabot <http://dipkurier.narod.ru/russin.htm>.

Conclusions

Memoir literature and oral stories are specific source of knowledge on the ETR history. Its particularity lies in that they represent a memory of a distant past going back to the 1940s. This long time distance of more than 5–6 decades makes narration of events extremely contingent. However, it should be said that even other more ‘reliable’ sources of information, including archival materials, very often are based on oral stories. Therefore memoir literature and oral stories should not be underestimated as a reliable source of our knowledge.

Memoir writings on ETR examined in this article has another particularity connected with impossibility to record such stories in the period before Soviet demise. Participants and eyewitnesses of the ETR were not able to record their recollections for several decades until perestroika made it possible to open discussion on the pages of a few local newspapers. This entailed another feature of Uyghur memoir literature in Central Asia: its confinement to a certain relatively small number of publications, mostly in a form of short articles and as a result of a latter literary processing of those recollections by professional journalists that polished texts adjusting them to the current needs and ideas.

Uyghur memoirs on the ETR reflected political changes taken place in Central Asia. First recollections on the ETR came out in the Soviet period and were sanctioned by the government and composed in a line with Soviet ideology. Numerous publications on the subject appeared in the perestroika period were free of censorship and revised traditional Soviet interpretation of events. Revised were a nature of the ETR, a role of the Soviet Union in its rise and fall, Uyghur political elite of the 1940s. Much more details were given on various aspects of the ETR history, including military battles, biographies of people participated in military marches and civil life on the territory of ETR history, ethnic diversity of the population and activists etc. All these new perspectives were described from Uyghur nationalist standpoint, especially after 1991 with emergence of new Central Asian states, which very much stimulated Uyghur political movement in Central Asia for independence of Eastern Turkistan. The history of the ETR as well as that of the first short lived Eastern Turkistan Republic in Kashgaria became a symbol of Uyghur statehood and separatist movement for secession from China.

Thus, a period of late 1980s through early 2000s became very important time for rethinking a history of the Eastern Turkistan Republic (1944–49) in Central Asia and in a situation when Soviet archival documents on the ETR were still inaccessible, memory of the ETR became of especial need in strengthening Uyghur national consciousness and nationalism in Central Asia.

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