

The dissertation examines evolution of intellectual ideas of nation and nationalism of Uyghurs, a Turkic nation inhabiting today's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China, throughout the period from 1880s to 1949. Primary sources of the research are texts written by Uyghur intellectuals throughout the period, in particular historiography works, poems, journalistic articles, memoirs, political essays and propaganda pamphlets. Most of the sources have not been previously researched, the dissertation therefore presents new information and conclusions. The perceptions of nation and nationalism in the sources are also juxtaposed to several general authoritative approaches to nation-formation processes, such as those of Benedict Anderson, Ernst Gellner, Anthony Smith, Miroslav Hroch and John Breuilly. Based primarily on the criteria of historical chronology and content of the respective sources, the dissertation is structured into four empirical chapters.

The first chapter examines perceptions of communal identity in late imperial period and illustrates that although at this stage Xinjiang Turkic intellectuals perceived their community as a clearly defined group, its communal interest did not outweigh interests of numerous local and social sub-groups. The second chapter outlines the transfer of the idea of Uyghur nation from progressive Muslim circles in the Russian and Ottoman empire to Xinjiang and shows that during this period Xinjiang Turkic intellectuals started to view their community as a modern nation and to define its national interest as a pursuit of cultural objectives. The third chapter shows that in 1930s, Xinjiang Turkic intelligentsia perceived their community as East Turkestani or Uyghur nation and articulated its political interests as establishing an independent nation-state or effecting autonomy within Xinjiang as a part of republican China.