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Historical Roots of the Xinjiang Problem as an Obstacle to the Development of Sino-Turkish Relations

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Abstract. Within the framework of relations between China and Turkey, connections between Turkey and the Xinjiang Region of China occupy a special place. Sympathy and support from Turkey for the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan (hereinafter – ETIM) became an obstacle to the development of Sino-Turkish relations after the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and China in 1971. In the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), almost no trace of connections existed between the Ottoman Empire and Xinjiang. The Ottoman Empire began its political and religious penetration into Xinjiang with the help of the propaganda of the ideology of pan-Islamism during the uprising of Yakub-bek (1865-1878). Since the end of the XIX century the Ottoman Empire also began to spread its Pan-Turkism ideology to Xinjiang. Gradually, such a policy led to the growth of separatist sentiments in the region, and the Xinjiang problem has become an integral part of Sino-Turkish relations. This article examines the process of the emergence and spread of the ideology and practice of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism in Xinjiang in the 1860s – 1930s.

Key words: Sino-Turkish relations, Xinjiang, Yakub-bek's regime, Ottoman Empire, pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism

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Исторические корни Синьцзянской проблемы как препятствие развитию Китайско-Турецких отношений

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Аннотация. В рамках отношений между Китаем и Турцией связи между Турцией и Синьцзяном занимают особое место. Сочувствие и поддержка со стороны Турции исламского движения Восточного Туркестана (далее – ИДВТ) стали препятствием для развития китайско-турецких отношений после установления дипломатических отношений между Турцией и Китаем в 1971 г. До эпохи династии Цин (1636-1912 гг.) между Османской империей и Синьцзяном почти не существовало никаких связей. Османская империя начала политическое и религиозное проникновение в Синьцзян с помощью пропаганды идеологии пан-исламизма в период восстания Якуб-бека (1865-1878 гг.). С конца XIX в. Османская империя стала распространять на Синьцзян

свою идеологию пантюркизма. Постепенно такая политика привела в росту сепаратистских настроений в этом регионе, а проблема Синьцзяна стала неотъемлемой частью китайско-турецких отношений. В данной статье рассматривается процесс возникновения и распространения идеологии и практики панисламизма и пантюркизма в Синьцзяне в 1860-е – 1930-е гг.

Ключевые слова: китайско-турецкие отношения, Синьцзян, режим Якуб-бека, Османская империя, панисламизм, пантюркизм.

ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ: Tao Цзинхун Исторические корни Синьцзянской проблемы как препятствие развитию Китайско-Турецких отношений // *История и современное мировоззрение*. 2021. Т. 3. №3. С. 22-27. DOI: 10.33693/2658-4654-2021-3-3-22-27

1. INTRODUCTION

On July 5, 2009, over a thousand Uyghurs (the indigenous population of Xinjiang) protested in Urumqi (the administrative center of Xinjiang) against the ethnic Han Chinese. As a result of the riots, according to official figures, at least 156 people died and more than a thousand were injured. The police detained more than 1.4 thousand people suspected of participating in this event. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan compared bloody riots on ethnic grounds in Urumqi, to «genocide» [PIA Новости, 2009]. Tensions between Turkey and China have emerged amid a visit to Beijing by Turkish President Abdullah Gul in 2015, when some of major contracts were signed. Relations between China and Turkey deteriorated significantly due to protests from Turkish activists in support of Chinese Muslim Uyghurs. The Turks made claims to China in infringement of the rights of the Muslim population, to which Beijing responded quite sharply [Взгляд, 2015].

The claims, which were expressed by Turkish activists, displeased the Chinese side, and China managed to report that the problem was far-fetched. Turkey and China are linked by joint projects, which are not good for the aggravation of relations between the countries on religious grounds. A protest action took place against the visit of Chinese State Counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to the Turkish capital in front of the Chinese Embassy in Ankara. Hundreds of ethnic Uyghurs protested in Ankara and Istanbul to condemn Wang Yi's visit and urge the Turkish government to take a tougher stance on so-called «human rights abuses» in Xinjiang [Радио азаттык, 2021]. Why did China's internal affairs in Xinjiang affect public opinion in Turkey and even diplomatic relations between these two countries? When did the connections between Turkey and Xinjiang start? What are its background and historical origins? These questions are the focus of this article.

2. FROM THE 1860S TO THE 1880S: THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE YAKUB-BEK'S REGIME AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

There were almost no direct contacts between the Ottoman Empire and China until the Kokand officer Muhammad Yakub-bek (1820-1877, hereinafter Yakub-bek) invaded Xinjiang and established the so-called «Yettishar» state in Kashgar (The largest city in southern Xinjiang). He began to seek support from the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire used the power of Yakub-bek to look for its interests in Xinjiang and began to exercise its influence in this region in the political and religious spheres. In 1865, Yakub-bek took advantage of the Chinese civil

war and used his identity as a descendant of the Khoja to invade Xinjiang and found Yettishar in Kashgar. His power even reached Urumqi. After the establishment of his regime, Yakub-bek actively sought support from Great Britain, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Sayyid Yakub Khan played a key role in the process of establishing ties between the regime of Yakub Bek and the Ottoman Empire. Sayyid was Yakub-bek's nephew [Boulger, 1878: 170]. In early 1865, Russia launched a full-scale attack on the Kokand Khanate, and Kokand was under the threat of conquest. Sayyid, as a special envoy of Kokand, went to Istanbul for help. However, even before he saw the Ottoman Sultan, he received news of the fall of Tashkent and the defeat of the Kokand Khanate. At that moment, he learned that the uprising of Yakub-bek in Xinjiang was going smoothly. In connection with his kinship with Yakub-bek, Sayyid turned to the Ottoman Sultan and explained the importance of Xinjiang, asked the Sultan to help Yakub-bek and received a promise of support from the Sultan [Saray, 2003: 159-160]. Sayyid began to serve Yakub-bek, and connections between Turkey and Xinjiang also began in this dramatic form.

In the spring of 1869 Sayyid arrived in Kashgar. At that time, the influence of the Yakub-bek's regime was growing rapidly. Yakub-bek was preparing for an attack in the north of Xinjiang. However, the pressure on his regime was unprecedented. The most pressing problems for the Yakub-bek's regime were from Qing dynasty, Russia and Britain. Firstly, it is the pressure of the Qing government to drive out the invaders and return the territory back to Qing dynasty; secondly, the threat posed by competition between Britain and Russia in Central Asia; thirdly, the emergency of stabilizing governance in Yettishar and obtaining outside support. Great Britain and Russia vied for the opportunity to influence Yakub-bek, but Yakub-bek did not dare to get too close to one of these players, otherwise he would have an enemy from the other side. The Ottoman Empire was a priority option for Yakub-bek as a source of external support. There was a lot in common between them: the Turks, the Uyghurs, and the Dungsans all profess Sunni Islam; the Ottoman and Uyghur languages belong to the Turkic languages; and Sayyid had close ties with the Ottoman Empire. Precisely because of the urgent practical need to consolidate his power, Yakub-bek quickly accepted Sayyid's offer and agreed to contact with the Ottoman Empire.

Since the early 1870s the Ottoman Empire gradually eliminated its fear of overreaction from Russia and its reluctance to accept requests from the Central Asian khanates for help in upholding the unity of the Muslim world. The Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz appreciated this point of view in the last years of his life: the Ottoman Sultan was not only the head of the Ottoman Empire, but was also considered the leader of the Sunni Muslim world as a whole [Lewis, 1968: 123-124]. The Ottoman Empire

enthusiastically developed relations with other Muslim countries. From 1869 to 1871, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was invited to Istanbul to propagate Pan-Islamism. Pan-Islamism gained widespread acceptance and support in the Ottoman Empire and reached its peak at the end of the reign of Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909). It was against this background that the Ottoman Empire, under the influence of pan-Islamism, began to support the so-called Islamic regime established by Yakub-bek, and Kashgar became known to the Ottoman people. It can be seen that the Ottoman Empire realized the practical need to support the power of Yakub-bek, and the public opinion within the empire was also on the side of Yettishar.

With the spread of pan-Islamism, Yakub-bek's ties with the Ottoman Empire became closer and closer. On the one hand, the Ottoman Empire used pan-Islamism to expand its influence in Xinjiang, on the other hand, the rule of Yakub-bek, supported by religious forces, began to continuously expand its territory in Xinjiang. Sayyid's visits to the Ottoman Empire on the orders of Yakub-bek, which was convincing evidence of cooperation between the two sides. Sayyid first arrived in Istanbul in 1873 to conduct diplomatic activities on behalf of Yakub-bek. He firmly admitted that Yakub-bek recognized the religious authority and status of the Sultan as a caliph – the religious head of Muslims [Frechting, 1983], argued that «as the ruler of the Yettishar state with a large Muslim population», Yakub-bek sent Sayyid as an envoy to form «subordinate relations» with the Ottoman Empire [Kim, 2004: 151]. The Ottoman Empire responded positively and not only agreed to the request of Yakub-bek, but also supported him in many aspects. Firstly, Yakub-bek was awarded the title «Emir ul-Mulmin» («Commander of the Faithful») [Frechting, 1983]. It was decided to transfer 1000 old guns, 200 new guns and 6 cannons to the Yakub-bek regime, and 4 officers were sent to Xinjiang [Bellew, 2019: 188]. Sayyid, as the envoy of Yakub-bek's regime, last arrived in the Ottoman Empire in 1877 to celebrate the accession to the throne of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II. He was received by the Sultan and conveyed good wishes and assurances of Yakub-bek's loyalty to the new Sultan and presented congratulatory letters and gifts [Kim, 2004: 170].

At the beginning of 1878, the Yakub-bek's regime was defeated by the Qing army, Yakub-bek himself was already dead by that time, but the remnants of the forces loyal to him were still in contact with the Ottoman Empire. In 1879, a representative of the Yakub-bek's regime submitted a petition to the government of the Ottoman Empire, asking Abdul-Hamid II to send a mission to China with the assurance that Xinjiang was the territory of the Ottoman Empire. In this regard, Abdul Hamid II was very careful and did not respond to this request. The history of Ottoman political support for the anti-Qing insurgents has come to an end.

Thus, one can see that the penetration of the Ottoman Empire into Xinjiang took place under a special background of the invasion of Yakub-bek in Xinjiang. Although the «official relationship» between the Ottoman Empire and the Yakub-bek's regime was not actually established, the Ottoman Empire used the Yakub-bek's regime for its political and religious penetration into Xinjiang. It should also be noted that after the collapse of the Yakub-bek's regime, the channels of the Ottoman Empire's penetration into Xinjiang were preserved. Later, the Ottoman Empire continued to penetrate Xinjiang with the ideologies of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism.

3. LATE 19TH CENTURY – 1930S: THE SPREAD AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEOLOGIES OF PAN-ISLAMISM AND PAN-TURKISM IN XINJIANG UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF TURKEY

The Ottoman Empire lost almost all its territory in Europe in the First Balkan War (1912-1913), and the First World War soon broke out. Pan-Islamism was no longer attractive in the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, Pan-Turkism played an increasingly important role under the influence of the Young Turks. In the middle of the 19th century, due to the rise of European Turkic studies and the influence of the Tanzimat reform in the Ottoman Empire, as well as under the pressure of the assimilation of the Pan-Slavic culture, Russian Turkic Muslims began to awaken. In these conditions, Ismail Gasprinsky (1851-1914) put forward the idea of Pan-Turkism, the essence of which is to realize the need for education and cultural reform and modernization of the Turkic and Islamic communities. After that, Pan-Turkism was introduced to the Ottoman Empire. Pan-Turkism underwent evolution from a movement led by Russian Tatars and serving to protect the Turkic Muslim culture in Russia to Pan-Turkism, led by the Ottoman Turks and persecuting the political unity of all Turkic-speaking peoples. At the end of the 19th century, Russian Pan-Turkists and Ottoman Young Turks contributed to the introduction of Pan-Turkism in Xinjiang. The introduction of Pan-Turkism and its combination with the religious and ethnic situation in Xinjiang directly stimulated the emergence of separatism in this region.

After Pan-Turkism began to spread in Xinjiang, it also experienced a transition from cultural Pan-Turkism to the politicization of Pan-Turkism. Cultural Pan-Turkism was mainly focused on education and cultural reform. Beginning in the 1880s, in the Ottoman Empire the experiments of modernization of education was carried out: seeking to modernize Islamic education system, including the introduction of non-Islamic subjects. These educational experiments were introduced into Xinjiang territory directly or indirectly through Uyghur merchants. At the end of the Qing dynasty, some Uyghurs from Xinjiang went to study in Turkey, and at the beginning of the Republic of China (hereinafter ROC) many of them returned to Xinjiang. Most of them were deeply influenced by the Pan-Turkism ideology while they were educated in Turkey. Returning to Xinjiang, they built new schools to spread the ideologies of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism. Masud Sabri (1888-1952) was born in Ili, Xinjiang, in 1888 and began his studies in the Ottoman Empire in 1904. Returning to Ili in 1915 under the banner of establishing education, he hired Turks as teachers, spread the ideology of Pan-Turkism, and even opened schools called «Turan», more than 2000 students studying in Turkish, listened to the propaganda of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism in the classrooms [Pan Zhiping, 2014].

In the 1930s, Pan-Turkism began to move from the educational sphere to the political sphere in Xinjiang. According to the records of the British Consul General in Kashgar, in 1933 two Turkish officers arrived in Kashgar and became advisors to the ETIM in southern Xinjiang, led at the time by Sabit Abdalbaki Damulla and Muhammad Amin Bughr, and helped to draft many projects [Xu Jianying, 2008: 175]. On November 12, 1933, the ETIM, headed by Sabit Abdalbaki Damulla, created in Kashgar the «Turkic Islamic Republic of East Turkestan» (hereinafter – IRET). Its flag was a white star and a crescent moon on

a blue background. It was an expression of the connection between IRET and Turkey and showed the great influence of Turkey in Xinjiang. At the same time, ETIM members living in Turkey established the «East Turkestan Independence Committee». Turkish newspapers advertised separatist activities in southern Xinjiang, but the Turkish government denied any cooperation with the IRET [Xu Jianying, 2008: 175].

From the above description, it can be seen that during the time of ROC Turkey has always maintained contact with Xinjiang and carried out separatist activities. The characteristics of Turkey's ideological dissemination in Xinjiang during this period are manifested in the following three aspects: Firstly, Turkey has never had formal relations with the local government of Xinjiang. The Turks in Xinjiang at that time mostly acted unofficially, but they all had the political intention of expanding Turkey's influence through the propaganda of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism; secondly, the Turks came to Xinjiang mainly to interact with religious and cultural groups with a strong separatist consciousness, support for separatist activities is a vivid proof of this; thirdly, they made great efforts in the field of ideology and education, taking Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism as a basis. In fact, Turkey's actions in Xinjiang represented an aggressive infiltration.

4. FINDINGS

From the late 1860s to the 1930s Turkey has constantly maintained informal ties with Xinjiang. Connections began during the Yakub-bek's invasion in Xinjiang and underwent an abnormal evolution during the ROC. The continuously propaganda of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism took roots in certain classes of Xinjiang Uyghur society and had a profound influence on modern Xinjiang.

(1) Turkey had a great political influence in Xinjiang.

During the period when Yakub-bek invaded Xinjiang, the support of the Ottoman Empire for the Yakub-bek's regime contributed to the expansion of the empire's international influence in Asia. In the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey had a great influence on the ETIM forces. Although there were no political relations between Turkey and Xinjiang during this period, Turkey became the psychological pillar of the ETIM. This can be seen during the creation of the IRET in Kashgar. The Kashgar forces of the ETIM created the so-called «Young Kashgar Party». It was a nationalist Uyghur political party that existed from 1933 to 1934. Obviously, its name imitated the name of the Young Turks, which was deeply influenced by the Pan-Turkic ideology. This is closely related to the long-term relationship between the Young Turks and Xinjiang. The «Young Kashgar Party» had a serious tendency to split. Its ideology was based on a combination of anti-communism, hostility to non-Muslims, anti-Dungan (Hui) and anti-Han sentiments, as well as a project to create an Islamic state. In a word, Turkey became the psychological support on which the ETIM forces relied politically. Today, Turkey's influence on ETIM continues. On March 25, 2021, ethnic Uyghurs protested the visit of China's State Counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to the Turkish capital in Ankara. Many of them waved the blue and white flags of IRET, as supporters of the Uyghur independence movement [Radio Azattyk, 2021].

(2) Turkey had a huge influence on Xinjiang in the field of education.

On the one hand, since the end of the Qing dynasty, the children of wealthy merchants in Xinjiang were sent to study in Turkey, and later some of them became famous in political circles. Masud Sabri went to study in Turkey in 1904 and returned to Xinjiang in 1915. Later, he worked for a long time in the south of Xinjiang and in 1947 became chairman of Xinjiang province [Li Xin, 2011: 8363]. Some of them remained in Turkey and became active members of the ETIM abroad. For example, Mehmet Riza Bekin, nephew of Mehmet Yimin, was born in Hetian, Xinjiang, in 1924. At the age of 13 he went to study at a military school in Turkey. During the Korean War, he fought in the war as a captain of the Turkish army, and then received the rank of general of the Turkish army [Biyografya, 2019]. After retirement, he constantly supported the activities of the ETIM.

On the other hand, Turkey directly penetrated Xinjiang in the field of education, promoted the ideologies of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism. As for the content of education, the Turks themselves compiled and printed textbooks on subjects such as Arabic and Persian languages, religious subjects, history, geography, gymnastics, drawing, and also published the religious magazine «Great Religion» in Xinjiang; students perceived the Ottoman Sultan as a national leader and sang Turkish songs in classrooms. In the British archives, it is recorded that in schools run by the Turks, students were required to accept the Ottoman Caliph as their spiritual father [Skrine, Nightingale, 2005: 248-249]. Some wealthy Uyghur businessmen in Xinjiang have opened schools and hired Turkish teachers and sent «promising» students to Turkey for further education. In general, the Turks opened schools in Xinjiang, compiled textbooks, introduced Turkish educational etiquette and attracted outstanding students to study abroad, these actions strengthened Turkey's influence in Xinjiang's education system. It should be noted that the use of education to promote the ideologies of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism continues in modern Xinjiang. In 2016, according to the media reports, the Uyghur textbooks of 2003 and 2009 versions for primary and secondary schools, which were published by Xinjiang Education Press in Uyghur, contained a lot of deviations in content and caused some serious problems. The Xinjiang local government formed a special team to investigate this case and soon became known to the public [CGTN, 2021]. In 2002, Shaatar Shavuti served as director of the Xinjiang Department of Education, organizing the compilation of textbooks for Uyghur elementary school. During the investigation Shaatar Shavuti himself admitted that the textbooks from beginning to end promoted the ideologies Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism, such as, the primary school textbook of 2003 version depicted the state emblem of the Republic of East Turkestan, but there is no mention of the national emblem and anthem of the People's Republic of China, same as the Uyghur textbooks of 2009 version. Those textbooks were used for many years until 2016 [CGTN, 2021]. It showed that Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism had a profound impact on education in Xinjiang, but at the same time the needs of the introduction of modern educational concepts and improvement of the education system in Xinjiang cannot be ignored, which was relatively backward in modern education, as it also facilitates the penetration of Turkey's influence.

(3) Turkey's Religious and Linguistic Influence in Xinjiang

Pan-Islamism exerted its influence at the end of the Qing dynasty, as evidenced by Molla Musa Sairami's revision of the name *Tārikh-i amniyya* (History of Peace). Molla Musa Sairami (1836-1917) was born in Bai County, Xinjiang. In his youth, he

was the secretary of the chief tax inspector of the Yakub-bek government in Aksu. He wrote many books, and his masterpiece is *Tārīkh-i amniyya*. In 1908, when Sairami revised *Tārīkh-i amniyya*, he changed the title of the book to *Tārīkh-i Hamidi* (History of Hamidi), indicating that he dedicated the book to the Ottoman Caliph Abdul-Hamid II [Yakufu, 2009]. Sairami considered the Ottoman Turkish Sultan the leader and protector of all Muslims, which agreed with the pan-Islamic ideology that Abdul Hamid II proclaimed to rule all Muslims. Pan-Islamism was adopted by local religious circles and intellectuals at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and its influence was reflected in the religious consciousness. At that time, the British Consul General in Kashgar, George Macartney, also watched this moment closely. In his important speech in London in 1908, he clearly indicated that pan-Islamism had affected the Uyghur national consciousness [Macartney, 1909: 23]. During the period of the ROC, pan-Islamism was «East Turkestanized» in the course of the evolution of the ideological climate of Xinjiang and became one of the important elements of the division of «nations», promoting Turkic nationalism with the help of pan-Turkism. As mentioned above, Pan-Turkism also spread to Xinjiang during exchanges in the field of culture and education between Xinjiang and Turkey, and ETIM used it as a theoretical weapon to explain their nationalism. Masud Sabri returned to Ili from Istanbul to found new schools, instilling in elementary school pupils «our ancestors are Turks» [Baoerkhan, 1982 : 110]. After the victory in the War of Resistance against Japan, Masud Sabri and other Xinjiang separatists returned to Xinjiang and occupied important posts in the provincial government. They founded newspapers and continued to propagate pan-Turkism. They called the Xinjiang Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz together «the Turkic people». At the same time, they used the Institute of Language Research at the Altai publishing house to participate in the activities of the so-called «one language», the essence of which was to adopt Turkish as the official language. They also used Turkish vocabulary and grammar in large-scale publications in newspapers such as «Freedom», deliberately incorporating Turkish grammar and vocabulary into the Uyghur language in an attempt to invent a common language for the «Turkic

nation». It can be seen Turkey had a profound influence on the culture of Xinjiang. Regardless of religion or language, Turkey's influence on Xinjiang is very extensive, and it plays a cultural and educational role in the formation of Xinjiang separatism and divided views of the ETIM forces.

5. CONCLUSION

The penetration of Turkey's influence into Xinjiang began under unusual conditions: Yakub-bek needed to strengthen his regime, and Istanbul needed to save its separating empire. Both sides established connections, and Turkey's infiltration into Xinjiang also began. The Ottoman Empire used the power of Yakub-bek to infiltrate Xinjiang and infringe on China's national interests. During the period of the ROC, relations between Turkey and Xinjiang continued to develop at an unofficial level. The connections between Turkey and Xinjiang have never been approved by the local government of Xinjiang, let alone the central government of China, and have always been on a special «civil» level; and the content of such connections between Turkey and China remains unchanged. Turkey's influence on the ideological sphere in Xinjiang was greater than on other spheres. Turkey became the source of ideologies of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism which were successfully spread in Xinjiang.

Although ties between Turkey and Xinjiang were limited to an unofficial level, Turkey continued to provide political and theoretical support to the ETIM forces during the time of the ROC. Xinjiang students went to Turkey to study, the Turks came to Xinjiang to open schools and propagate the ideologies of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism, Turkey has served as a model and source of political and nationalist inspiration for the ETIM forces. Summing up, throughout the history of modern Xinjiang, connections between Turkey and Xinjiang have always been marginal, Turkey's influence in Xinjiang seems rather indirect, but with the continuous propaganda of the ideologies of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, which became the theoretical basis of the ETIM, and separatist activities based on this ground caused great harm to modern Xinjiang society, also to the development of China-Turkey relations.

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