“What do you want to study those frontier places for? All the history happened in China!” So a Chinese friend told me many years ago when I spoke of my growing interest in the Central Asian region known as Xinjiang—the Qing dynasty’s “New Dominion,” or the “Western Regions.” My experience during my first years in graduate school seemed to bear him out. Although teachers and classmates encouraged my pursuits, nothing on our reading lists seemed to apply to the far west. This bothered me, but I carried on, motivated (and funded) to a great degree by virtue of the unconventionality and, perhaps, exoticism of my topic. Eventually, my efforts to link my peripheral interests with what seemed to be the central concerns of the field led me to start on a basic, material level, examining the physical exchanges connecting China proper to Xinjiang, and investigating the travelers—mostly merchants—who frequented the routes between China and the new Qing acquisition. Thus began what started as a study of commercial relations between China proper and Xinjiang in the Qing period.

In the course of my reading in the Qing archives, annals, and gazetteers, however, I realized that in the eyes of Qing policy makers, Chinese commerce in Xinjiang was inextricably linked to issues of control. Whenever the activities of commoners became objects of state scrutiny (and on the frontier, that was often), Qing sources almost invariably took care to distinguish the type of merchant—or farmer or herdsman—in­volved, whether they were Han Chinese, Muslim Han, local Muslim, Oirat, Andijani, Kazakh, Kirghiz, or members of another of the groups the Qing carefully distinguished. Thus, I could not consider commerce without reference to this aspect of the Qing government in Xinjiang, an aspect I have called, for lack of a better term, ethnic policy.

Somewhat farther along, I discovered that the two issues I had singled out, the economics of empire and the interactions of people in an imperial context, comprised core concerns of the Qing imperial enterprise and that what I was working to uncover was nothing less than the mechanics and ethos of Qing imperialism. Moreover, during the span of time I chose to study, poli-
cies changed and ideologies shifted as events encroached and the dynasty's circumstances worsened. My Chinese sources reflected a change in attitude toward Xinjiang: what was a Qing empire in the west at the beginning of my period began to sound more like a Chinese one by the end. And in pondering the differences between Qing and China, and why such a distinction seemed odd, I began to reflect again, this time with greater understanding, on why the empire in Xinjiang, a major preoccupation of the Qing court, has been of such little concern to historians in the twentieth century.

This is a study, then, of the workings and conception of Qing empire in Xinjiang during its first phase, from the initial conquest to the time of the mid-nineteenth-century Muslim uprisings that severed the region from control by Beijing for over a decade. Qing economic and ethnic policies in Xinjiang receive the most attention here, but in the course of examining these issues, I attempt also to shed light on a broader issue: the transition from a Qing dynastic empire to a Chinese nation-state.

The chapters below approach this subject according to the following plan. We begin at the Jiayu Guan, the western terminus of the Ming walled defense system, in the early nineteenth century. I consider the ambiguity and liminality of the Jiayu Guan (and Xinjiang) during the Qing and hazard some thoughts on why the historiography of early modern and modern China has paid so little attention to these issues. Chapter 1 then provides geographic and historical background to the region and introduces the discourse on Xinjiang's place in the empire that carried through the 1759-1864 period. In this discourse—the court and scholarly debates over imperial conception and implementation—the discussion of fiscal matters overlay deeper concerns about the proper limits and nature of the empire. In order to justify the conquest, the Qianlong emperor, who had pushed ahead with the conquest of Xinjiang in the face of domestic opposition from certain quarters in China, was concerned that imperial rule in Xinjiang be inexpensive to maintain. His court thus encouraged fiscal innovation in the new territory. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the fiscal foundations, and limitations, of Qing rule in Xinjiang, outlining the means by which the military government was maintained without an agricultural tax base like that in China proper. Despite the emperor's hopes, the dynasty was forced to subsidize the Xinjiang garrisons in order to support its armies and officials there; these chapters quantify the extent of reliance on Chinese silver and examine the various means by which Xinjiang authorities attempted to reduce that reliance. Because many of these means involved the commercial economy, Chinese merchants in Xinjiang came to provide an in-
creasingly important safety margin to the tight budgets under which Qing authorities in Xinjiang operated.

The subsequent chapters examine these private merchants and the policies adopted by the Qing toward their activities in Xinjiang, especially in the south, where the population of native Muslims was highest. Chapter 4 outlines the process of Chinese commercial penetration of Xinjiang, Qing control measures, Chinese settlement patterns, and the extension of Chinese urban culture to parts of the New Dominion. One central problem explored here is the degree to which Qing authorities attempted to segregate Chinese traders from the natives of southern Xinjiang; I examine the construction and inhabitation of walled citadels in southern cities in an attempt to illuminate this question. Chapter 5 describes the experiences of Han, Tungan (Chinese Muslim, today's Hui), and East Turkestani (today's Uyghur) merchants trading between China and Xinjiang. Case studies of two major articles of trade, tea and jade, further highlight these groups' activities and reveal that private commercial links between China proper and Xinjiang were segmented at gateway cities and functionally differentiated among distinct types of merchants plying different routes, including small-scale Chinese Muslim traders, representatives of Shanxi firms, and dealers in silk and jade from the Jiangnan region. Chapter 6 first considers ethnic policy in Xinjiang from a theoretical standpoint, contrasting the historiographical commonplace that the empire was Sinocentrically conceived with how the Qianlong emperor envisioned it. This chapter concludes with a case study of a grisly incident in Kashgar in 1830 that tested, and eventually led to the replacement of, the mid-Qing ethnic policy with one more favorable to Han Chinese. Analysis of this event suggests that part of the explanation to how a new, Greater China arose out of the Qing imperium lies in the convergence of Manchu and Chinese interests in Xinjiang. A concluding chapter traces the crumbling of Qing control in Xinjiang to the dual failure of silver stipends and the Xinjiang commercial economy and argues that the continuation of the debates over Xinjiang by statecraft writers in the first half of the nineteenth century—again, framed in economic terms—anticipated a more assimilationist Chinese model of empire that was to be implemented in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.