The relationship of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to the modern Chinese nation-state is written onto its landscape. For Qing officials in the 18th and early 19th centuries, Xinjiang’s landscape was simply “wasteland” (huang), largely incapable of producing the grain needed to support the state's administrative apparatus in the region. Beginning in the late 19th century but continuing throughout the 20th, multiple generations of Chinese officials grappled with the interrelated problems of “opening wasteland” and incorporating Xinjiang, a region located over 2,000 miles from Beijing, into the emerging Chinese nation-state. This effort to solve these two problems at once is the subject of my talk, which will reveal a new perspective on Xinjiang’s changing relationship to the Chinese nation, and offer insights onto the connection between landscapes and power in China and beyond.