Chapter 5

The Hui in Northern Thailand and Burma (Myanmar).
Burmese Muslims in Yunnan

Historic links exist between Yunnan Province and the countries neighboring it. Shared economic and cultural exchanges cause this province and the region, Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam to prosper. Thailand is very close to Yunnan, the Thai having been influenced by both the Chinese and Khmer civilizations. Numerous authors currently accept the idea of a common origin of the Thai and their kin around Dali Lake; however, the Charles Backus’s study of the Nanzhao Kingdom contradicts this thesis.

In South China, there is a long tradition of Muslim presence, and Marco Polo mentions Muslims in Yunnan. They came from Central Asia with Kublai Khan’s armies in 1253 and contributed to Yunnan’s main wave of Islamization during the thirteenth century.

The Yunnanese Admiral Zheng He and his historiographer, Ma Huan, traveled extensively in Southeast Asia. Ma Huan, from Zhejiang, accompanied the admiral on three expeditions into Southeast Asia and further. They both visited twenty countries described by Ma Huan. The voyages of Zheng He, under the patronage of Emperor Yongle (1402–24), and the writings of Ma Huan contributed to the maritime knowledge of Southeast Asia, Arabia, Yemen, and northwest Africa. Maritime and land routes of cultural and commercial exchanges, afterwards called the “Silk Road,” linked Canton and Yunnan with Southeast Asia and Thailand. The Arabs, building their maritime network, established the first encounter of Islamization with south China, and indirectly with Yunnan, a landlocked province. This province is tributary to its land routes and the Mekong River to communicate with Thailand.
Northern Thailand and Hui from Yunnan

Yunnan neighbors four Southeast Asian countries: Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. Not easily navigable because of its only recently eliminated rapids, the Mekong marked historical links between China (Jinghong and Menghai) and northern Thailand. The relationship with Yunnan (formerly Nanpao) was developed over centuries, well before the arrival of the Thai in the Valley of the Menam. Until the Second World War, Muslim caravans traveled back and forth exchanging the two countries products during the dry winter season (see map “Caravan Tracks”).

Yunnanese Muslims began to settle in northern Siam (Thailand) long ago. Their dialect and religion define the “Ho” better than the Chinese in Singapore where symbols, geographical origin, surname, and occupation enable classifying Chinese migrants albeit with difficulty. The Hui in Thailand are sometimes named “Thai Islam” (Khun Islam) as the Malais of the southern provinces, but their real name is Ho, also written Haw or Chin-Ho. This ethnonym means “Chinese from Yunnan and is loosely given to other Yunnanese people in Thailand but is a specific ethnonym of the Hui. In this study “Ho” means Muslim. In Southeast Asia, the “Ho” are not known as Hui, a name probably coined in the Middle Empire during the Liao Dynasty (907–1125). However in Chiang Mai many Ho are currently self-designated as Hui.

“Ho” are esteemed for their honesty and their good knowledge of Chinese, which they use to communicate with minorities such as Hani, Lisu, and Lahu. To speak Mandarin and Yunnanese continues to be the most important cultural trait of the Ho, above thirty years. An important issue is Chinese education. It is possible in Chiang Mai (and in Mandalay), but in the countryside and small cities the lack of Chinese schools is a matter of serious concern for the parents. Government schools are well financed, and Thai-ification is stronger and stronger. A Thai scholar, Supang, cited by Tan (2004: 41), found the Chinese “more assimilated because of Thai schooling.”

“Ho” identity depends on the interlocutor. Whether someone is “Ho,” the individual generally says: “I am Thai Islam.” To a Westerner, this simply asserts Thai identity. Thus because of the Ho’s excellent knowledge of the local Thai language and Chinese (comparable to the Panthays’ proficiency in Burmese and Chinese), identity may be chosen according to the interactive situation.

The installation of Muslim merchants in the region follows the first recorded caravans around the eighth century. In the thirteenth century, Islam entered in force in Yunnan from the north. Under the dynamic Mongol push, the first Yunnanese Muslims

began to settle in Chiang Mai. Trading by way of caravans is intimately linked to the history of Islam from its origin onwards. The large number of Muslims in the armies of Kublai Khan permitted the arrival of merchant co-religionists in Yunnan.

As mentioned by Andrew Forbes in his study of Yunnanese “Ho” (1988) these Muslims set up associations of merchant guilds. Muslim traders were numerous and caravans of two hundred animals were not rare. Mafu muleteers generally led ten mules and were able to fight to defend themselves and their company against attacks. Before the twentieth century in Yunnan, Thailand, and Ava (Burma), it was common to encounter bands of bandits en route. Muslim community and mosques provided assistance and places of rest on the road.

Caravan goods, among other products, included musk and precious metals from China in bar or powder form. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Yunnan exported tea, opium, bars of iron and lead, silver pieces, copper utensils (often coming from Sichuan), salt, and clothing. Sandalwood from Mojiang and fossil-wood were commodities in demand in the region.

Thailand furnished cotton, ivory, vegetable gums, European products, gold and silver dust, areca nuts, and swallows’ nests (the white ones being more costly). Burma also exported these products, particularly precious stones including rubies, jade, and amber. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, South China consumed large quantities of areca nuts and betel leaves. Yunnan’s tropical zone, Sipsong Panna (Xishuang Banna), exported the produce of its ricefields and immense forests. Chinese medicinal products were, and still are, especially prized in Southeast Asia. In 1872, Rocher cited some European products sold in Yunnan in the bazaar at Kailuan, Linan: children’s toys (nowadays they are exported from China to Western countries), needles and thread, and matches.

Products coming from the south, from such places as Yuanjiang, Mojiang, and Puer, were stocked in warehouses at Kunyang (now Jinping). Rocher also mentions its numerous storehouses south of Dian Lake near Kunming, where a market took place every five days. This frequency of markets still exists in Tongguan, halfway between Puer and Yuanjiang.

In Mojiang, I interviewed one of the last surviving Muslim muleteers (a Sufi) who died at the age of seventy-five. His life became boring when the border with Burma closed in 1949. Before that the road was fascinating and included dangers, but he became rich enough to educate his daughters (not common at that time) and sons. In January 2003, his youngest daughter married the son of a Jahariya Haji from Sinoa, the grandson of Imam Ma Wensi.
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Continuing their route to Thailand, caravans took more than two months to reach Moulmein by way of Tak and Mae Sot, and three months to return to Bangkok via Utharadit and Nakhon Sawan. Between Menghái and Chiang Mai, there were seven hundred to a thousand mule trains a year. The caravans were centered round a network of Yunnannese mosques: Kunming, Yuxi, Tonghai (outside the principal caravan route), Mojiang, Puqr, Simao, and Menghai. In the Buddhist Dai principality of Jinghong (Cheli), Muslims were not numerous. Caravans disappeared, but links among Muslims were kept up along the route by ancient staging-places and mosques.

During the Second World War, a few thousand “Ho” lived in Thailand. The last important Hui immigration into northern Thailand took place in 1949–50 when the Guomindang (Kuomintang) armies, including many Muslims, left China. After the war, some Hui went to Taiwan. China closed its borders, but solidarity among Yunnannese Hui remained unchanged.

In 1960–70, during the anti-Communist period in Thailand, it was unadvisable to reveal one’s Yunnannese origins, and this was so up until the end of the American War in Vietnam in 1975. Communism was outlawed, as in many countries of Southeast Asia (except obviously in North Vietnam and Laos). Few Muslims succeeded in crossing the border from Yunnan to rejoin their relatives and friends between 1950 and 1990.

After the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, the political and diplomatic situation improved between China and Southeast Asia. In the 1990s, the borders eventually reopened, and Thailand restarted its good relations with Yunnan. Around 1995, the Bank of Thailand was the first foreign bank established in Kunming. Thai Airways scheduled flights from Kunming to Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Thai businessmen and tourists from Bangkok entered Yunnan. This did not modify the post-war sedentary habits of the “Ho” of Chiang Mai who were too “Thai-ified.” They did not resume their ancient back and forth travels over the border. However, some Yunnannese imams were able, in small numbers, to enter northern Thailand.

The social dynamism of the “Ho” goes beyond the build-up of the Islamic community. Their knowledge in matters of trade with China makes them indispensable. Thanks to the network of mosques, they are also part of the Muslim world. The mosques create a network of social and economic relations. In Chiang Mai and Moulmein, numerous mosques, sectors of the Yunnanese network, have survived over the centuries and are supported by an important Islamic community. In the early 1980s, according to the national statistics mentioned by Omar Farouk, there were eleven mosques in Chiang Mai Province. Two are of Chinese origin and the others are Bengali and Indian. In the city of Chiang Mai there are currently four mosques: the main Chinese mosque (Ban Ho or Wanghe), Sun Pa Koi Mosque and its Koranic school of 150 students (30% female) including Chinese from mainland China, Changkran Mosque, and Chang Phuk (Pké) Mosque. The two last places of worship include Bengalis from Moulmein who speak Thai, Urdu, and a little English.

Haji Ma Hongming is a Thai Muslim of Yunnannese origin born in Chiang Mai, a former student of Sun Pa Koi, who studied for ten years at Medina University with a scholarship from the government of Saudi Arabia (1993–2003). His Koranic studies are exemplary, and he is fluent in Thai (his mother tongue), Arabic, and Chinese. He completed his secondary education in Arabic, but did not get a university degree. Arabic is a difficult language and to master the Koran is not easy. It is a dream for many “Ho” in Chiang Mai to study the Koran abroad, but only 10% of the students of Sun Pa Koi, also called Attaqwa Mosque, belong to the Muslim community of Chiang Mai. However, the influence of Thai culture is strong, and as in modern China, the power of money is attractive.

Mae Sai and Chiang Rai were crossed by Guomindang (KMT) troops in 1949. There are Muslim KMT villages that were established west of Chiang Mai around Mae Hong Son. They no longer have links with Bangladesh. Chiang Rai and Tak have two Yunnannese mosques; Lampang, Mae Hong Son, and Nakhon Sawan each have one. The Central Committee of Islamic Affairs of Bangkok is much more concerned about Muslims in the southern Thai provinces (this is even so in 2004. Insurgency or “violence” in the south is one of the main media themes in 2004). The Thai Central Committee of Islamic Affairs does not keep statistics on the small Yunnannese mosques in the villages of northern Thailand.

The Hui of Yunnan (now “Ho”) generally settle in the same suburb in Mae Sai, Chiang Rai, and Chiang Mai. The “Ho” number 40,000 in the northern provinces and Bangkok. Other Thai Chinese, such as the Chaozhou (Teochiu) from Guangdong, are numerous in Chiang Mai. They control the business of medicinal plants coming from Xishuang Banna. Hui expatriates are also among Chinese residents who have developed the economy of Southeast Asia. They still consider themselves Yunnannese, even if the young generations are Thai-ified by the state education system. Yunnannese fraternity is strong. A tradition of mutual help exists, and the mosque, around which all Yunnannese come together, furnishes assistance.
and logistics, thereby entering indirectly into the dynamism of exchange. Chiang Mai is the main Hui center of migration into Thailand.

**Chiang Mai’s Yunnanese Mosque**

Chiang Mai, founded in 1296, was the capital of the Lanna Kingdom for nearly three hundred years. Except for periods of trouble, between 1556 and 1775, and during the nineteenth century, the Muslim presence played an important role in the economic and cultural movement linking Yunnan and northern Siam. Chiang Mai has been the administrative center of northern Thailand since 1775.

The architecture (photo 25) and the decoration of Chiang Mai’s main mosque (built in 1915), called Qizhensi (Pure and True Mosque) or Wanghe or Ban Ho, clearly display its Yunnanese origins. A rich Yunnanese named Cheng (1871–1964) built this mosque. It seems that an older Muslim place of worship was already there. This donor’s fortune enabled him to acquire immense land holdings, later sold to the Chiang Mai administration for the construction of the city’s airport. The commercial potential of this rich founder ensured the central position of this mosque near the Night Bazaar. Several halal restaurants have been constructed nearby (see “Pearl” life-story hereafter). Mr. Lu also contributed to the prosperity of the Yunnanese Islamic community. This Yunnanese Muslim partly financed the Chiang Mai–Lamphun railway.

Another construction, the madrasa at San Pa Koi, already mentioned, is also impressive and indicates the interest of Saudi Arabia in promoting Islam and the teaching of Koran (more than a hundred students in average). China has understood the importance of studying Arabic in the Middle East, but for some reason the Islamic Association of Yunnan was not yet able to take full advantage of this golden geopolitical opportunity to enrich gifted Hui students.

Another prosperous “Ho” village, Ban Yan, exists near Chiang Mai. Its large mosque is located next to the Koranic school (Mote 1967). Imams are not called Ahong, as in Yunnan, but simply “imam.”

**Muslims from Yunnan**

Many social-cultural changes have occurred throughout the years; the “Ho” preference for green tea, however, remains unchanged except for the younger generations.

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In Chiang Mai, the presence of Indian Muslims, and the intermarriage of Hui with Thai women converted to Islam, resulted in a certain liking for black tea (Thai, Indian, or Malay) often mixed with milk.

New generations have had a good level of instruction in Thai, and it is not unusual for the most studious to obtain university diplomas. In 2004, many of Muslim lawyers in southern Thailand have come from Chiang Mai. This demonstrates the economic level and the prestige of the Muslim community in northern Thailand. The relations of these “assimilated” Muslims with the Provincial and National Committees of Islamic Affairs are excellent. The young Muslims whose grandparents are from Yunnan cannot be called _khaeak_ (foreigners); but their brothers in the four southern provinces, Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun are classified “non-assimilated” by the Thai administration, for they are still strongly influenced by the Malays of Perlis and Kedah.

Named in 1938, the first “Ho” imam recorded by Wanghe Mosque Chiang Mai or Ban Ho Mosque, is Ma Yuting. Li Renfu replaced him in 1957, himself succeeded by Yang Gentus in 1977. In 1996, during our investigation, late Haji Na Shunxing, promoted imam in 1984, was replaced by a 40-year-old imam from Jingdong, a former Koranic student in Weishan and Mandalay, Ma Qinzeng (photo 24).

The following life histories of these “Ho” show a past mobility. The short biography of Imam Na, born in Tonghai in 1919, illustrates this. Taking advantage from the confusion linked to the events and epidemics of Second World War in Yunnan, he set out with three comrades. They followed the caravan route Puer, Simao, Jinghong, Menghai, Mengban, Kengtung (Burma), and Mae Sai. At the Thai border, a Yunnanese friend took them by truck to the mosque at Chiang Rai, and from there they went to Chiang Mai, where Imam Na resided. His first wife died in Kunming in 1980. He had a son from this marriage who is still in China. His older brother and his family are in Yunnan, in Xiping, and his sister resides in Eshan. In 1983, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and this helped him to gain charge of the mosque in 1984.

Hui often marry local women. In 1955, he married a Thai Muslim from Chiang Mai, who gave him five sons and two daughters. His household, situated in the mosque, resembled that of the Thai. This imam had, in fact, three identities: Muslim, Yunnanese, and Thai. He was mainly a Muslim Thai citizen (Thai Islam) but never forgot his Yunnanese origin. He died in 2001 and is buried in Chiang Mai’s Muslim cemetery (photo 27).
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The new Yunnanese imam, a bachelor, lived many years in Burma and Thailand. He stresses his Hui identity and does not want to be called “Ho” although he speaks Thai and can preach in this language.

These former Hui people of Yunnan like to find themselves among their Chinese compatriots, and the elders like to speak their provincial dialect (Yunnan hua). Their children and grandchildren of the second generation are educated in Thai public schools, but learn to read the Koran in the mosque. “Ho” people above the age of thirty still speak Chinese.

On 13 October 1996, five days after the funeral service for a rich merchant, Yuan Xinchang (1917–96), Imam Na was in charge of the funeral commemoration. Two widows and the grandchildren of the deceased are Thai Islam, but his friends remain Yunnanese and speak Chinese with a southern accent. Their roots are in Yunnan.

The following short biography of a woman also demonstrates the intimate family relations between the Chinese province and northern Thailand. One of the individuals responsible for the halal restaurants, near the Yunnanese mosque at Ban Ho, called “Pearl,” a borrowed name derived from her Chinese name (photo 31). In 1928, just before the economic crisis, her parents migrated to Thailand and left Yuxi, with their first two daughters. For more than seven hundred years, Muslims have settled in this city, south of Kunming, known for its ancient mosques and its large tobacco factory established before 1949.

“Pearl” was born in 1929 in Chiang Mai, like her younger two sisters, and life must not have been easy for this family of five children. In 1948, at the age of 19, she married a 43-year-old Muslim from Kunming, who had left his parents and sister and went alone to Thailand. He was a good husband and gave her ten children. His death in 1982 produced a shock, and twenty days later “Pearl” lost an older sister. In 1990, another sister (a nurse) also died, adding to her distress. In 1996, the feeling of a family-community was still strong. “Pearl,” her two sisters, her younger son aged 38 (the ninth in the family), her youngest daughter and her granddaughters work in her restaurant near the mosque. She will be succeeded by a daughter (acting as second now). The eldest son plays also a role of protector—he lives at the site (Thai education weakens the Yunnanese language and identity but provides work). Another son works in a bank in Lampang. A daughter-in-law, also Muslim, is a teacher. Thai-ification obliges. The oldest grandson, aged 21, enlisted in the Thai Army.

Pearl’s 28-year-old-niece in Virginia. She married an American resident, Mr. Ma, who studied in the US. From Yunnan and Chiang Mai, Pearl’s family returned to the place of origin of the tobacco from Yuxi, Virginia, but not to Yuxi itself. In time, family links are cut. “Pearl” never forgets her Hui origin; her dream in 1997 was once again to see her cousin, Chen Zhongyi in Yuxi. Between 1950 and 1998, she had no news of her family in Yunnan. Finally, in 1999, she went to Kunming where one of her granddaughters stayed for a while, but she did not even travel to Yuxi, the family birthplace, and in 2000 she visited her family in Virginia. She is faithful to Islam but has no intention of going to Mecca; she is too busy with the restaurant and her family. In 2004, at age 74, she feels a little bit tired but every day around eleven o’clock she goes to the restaurant to take care of the finances. “Ho” and Hui are Chinese, and business is important.

Chiang Mai’s Muslims are faithful to their Islamic community but retain a Chinese entrepreneurial spirit. The solidarity of the Chinese in Thailand, including Muslims and Khmu (Hani in China) is strong. “Ho” are distinguished from other Muslims by their Yunnanese dialect, a distinctive cultural trait. Religion and ethnic origin contribute to construct their strong identity in Chiang Mai. Numerous qingzhen (halal in Arabic) restaurants around the principal mosque are also part of their culture. Sometimes, Yunnan is more important, but their Islamic faith is their most distinctive trait. They also have common concerns with the Chinese such the pre-eminence of the ancestors. Some are descendants of those who fled Yunnan at the end of the nineteenth century following the rebellions. Marriage also plays a role; contrary to the Khmu, Hui do not give their daughters in marriage to Han. Hui, Chinese, or Akha origin counts less in northern Thailand than in Bangkok. “Ho” Muslims benefit from their good relations with omnipresent Buddhism in Thailand. Concerning Islam, northern Thailand is under the influence of Yunnan and Burma, whereas the south is culturally attached to the Malay language.

For hundreds of years the “Ho” of northern Thailand succeeded in keeping the tradition, sunna, their culture and, in particular, their Yunnanese dialect among the elder generation. The closure of the Chinese border between 1950 and 1990 separated the Hui in China from the “Ho.” These relations are normalized, even if there are no longer any mafi and caravans. For Islam in Chiang Mai, it is no longer the Yunnanese link that is most important in the twenty-first century but the dynamic network of Thai and “Indian” mosques linked to Bangladesh, Burma, and Mecca.

It is very convenient for Yunnanese to go on pilgrimage to Mecca via Chiang Mai and Bangkok, but many continue to travel via Beijing. They were twenty in the 1920s, twenty-three in 1923. Between 1950 and 1980, no Yunnanese Hui went
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on pilgrimage. However, more than 2,000 went on pilgrimage in 1987; at present, there are more than 6,000 Yunnanese pilgrims each year. It is now easy to obtain a passport valid for some months and a visa and to take a plane for Bangkok to Saudi Arabia for 20,000 RMB (3000 Euros). Yunnan has once again become an important departure point for pilgrimages as it was before 1940.

Contrary to their elders, the younger “Ho” generation, under pressure from the Indian world and Thai official teaching, are relatively more influenced by the Islamic world than by Yunnan, the land of their ancestors, a dynamic but landlocked province. The halal restaurants in Chiang Mai are not so Yunnanese but rather Thai Islam, although the Chinese policy of economic opening has reinforced the Yunnanese identity of the “Ho” in Mae Sai and Chiang Mai. It is no longer the “Ho” who play a significant economic role in northern Thailand but the Chaozhou (Teochiu) of Guangdong, resident in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. The former Muslim prosperity is in decline in northern Thailand. Tourism by air from Yunnan is in the hands of Han businessmen who eventually advertise their flights in Shuncheng Mosque at Kunming.

Through Mandalay and Dehong, Burmese Muslims of Indian origin benefit also from the development of border relations between Southeast Asia and Yunnan. They came in large numbers to settle in Ruili (Shuili in Burmese) and in Jinghong, in Xishuang Banna.

Burmanese Muslims in Yunnan

Islam has been recorded in Burma (Ava) since the ninth century. Islamization occurred by sea. It was linked to maritime commerce, which initially, before the Portuguese establishment in Macao, was controlled by the Arabs. As in China, the mosques synthesized the Asiatic and Muslim style, but Arabic is a dead language for the region’s Muslims, both Burmese and Hui. As in Yunnan, the Muslim elite speaking Arabic is negligible in Southeast Asia.

In 1287, the capture of Pagan by Mongol armies, commanded by and consisting partly of Muslims among other groups, opened the way to pacification and harmonious relations with Yunnan.

Yunnanese Hui in Burma (often called “Panthay” or “Panthi”) managed ancient mule caravans. The name Panthay has an obscure origin and occupies an entire page of Hobson-Jobson and three pages of The Islamic Encyclopedia. For Anderson, citing Phayre, it derived from Persian (Phaarsi in Hindi). Others, like Sladen, believe that it probably refers to a Burmese etymology. The term Pathi designates in Burmese rich Indian Muslims. All these etymologies are not scientific enough. However, the Muslim rebellion of Du Wenxiu against the Manchu was called “Panthay Uprising.” The name “Panthay” was adopted by Westerners and almost disappeared except in ethnological literature, although it has come into fashion among Hui resident in Burma. However they continue to identify themselves as Hui. China influences Southeast Asia and being Chinese is in fact prestigious in the region.

Muslims and Yunnanese were welcomed by the Burmese, and their descendants are numerous in Mandalay. Chinese are not “foreigners” in Myanmar. “Panthays” live also in the Shan States, Bhamo, Lashio, Taunggyi, Kengtung, and near the ruby mines of Mogok (west of Lashio). The Salween and Irrawaddy Rivers were their main penetration routes. Many left Yunnan in 1873–74 for Burma and in 1949–50 for Thailand. The “Panthay” population is currently approaching 50,000. Contrary to Muslims of Indian origin in Burma, they have no Muslim association to support them (in Mandalay the Cultural Association in a space offered by the government of Myanmar is above all Han Chinese). The border with China was closed for more than thirty years, and “Panthays” were dependent on their mosques, madrasa, and Chinese-type associations. Since their mothers are Burmese, it is more difficult for second and third generation “Ho” to be fluent in Chinese. Burmese schools do not teach Chinese. All the Chinese schools are private but numerous (in Lashio, Mandalay, Mogok and near the Chinese border). Only educated “Panthays” migrate to work in Ruili in large Burmese enterprises. Burmese Muslims in Yunnan are not fluent in Burmese or Chinese.

The Chinese community is important in Burma and comprises more than a million or 3% of the total population. They mainly come from three provinces: Fujian, Guangdong, Yunnan, and, without mentioning Mandarin, some speak four Chinese regional languages: Hokkien, Cantonese, Chaozhou, and Yunnanese. Except for the rare student who attends a Chinese university, their Burmese citizenship and the closing of Chinese schools in 1966 caused the “Burmanization” of the younger generation, which is less fluent in Puthonghua and regional Chinese languages.

Muslims from Yunnan (Panthays) do not participate in Burmese politics, but are fully considered citizens of Burma, contrary to their Arakanese “brothers.” In 1993, 17,000 of these Rohingyas returned to Arakan. This region is bordered by the Bay of Bengal and by Chittagong District (north) and has mountains difficult
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to cross, the Yoma Arakan to the east. After the Second World War, Arakan was divided into two parts for the first time: the north is predominantly Muslim, and the south Buddhist. Many of these Arakanese Muslims fled to India, to East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh). The State Council for the Restoration of Law and Order (SLORC), renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, is accepted by a large part of the Burmese Buddhist monks. The Burmese generals retain solid links of friendship with their powerful neighbor, China. These relations have taken on a more formal aspect since the end of the twentieth century. As a result, there is a significant migration of Burmese citizens toward China, along the route Mandalay-Bhamo-Ruili-Baoshan-Dali-Kunming.

The Hui, who once traveled between Yunnan and Burma, are replaced nowadays by Burmese Muslim traders in Ruili, Jinhong, and Kunming. They move in small groups from place to place in Yunnan. Their common language for communication is Burmese. Many speak Urdu. They wear Burmese clothing, learn a smattering of Chinese, and their principal business is jade. The majority population is of Indian origin and some are Arakanese (called Rohingya or Rohinga). These Muslims practice their religion in China without constraint. Since the 1980s, they settled by the hundreds in Ruili in Dai Jingpo Dehong Prefecture. Immigration formalities became more complicated in the 1990s. Arakanese, such as Mohammed Hei Qadiriya d’Akyah, do not experience discriminatory measures in Yunnan as sometimes occurred in their own country. The Rohingya have no Burmese citizenship, contrary to Muslims of Indian origin. The principal activity of the Burmese Muslims is the retail sale of jade, but they can also be restaurant owners, like a Haji who prospered for ten years in Ruili thanks to his halal establishment. Others are spice merchants, such as an Indo-Burmese Muslim from Lashio.

Among Yunnanese who migrated to Burma, Purcell notes that the education of children of mixed couples Chinese-Burmese, was in Chinese for boys and in Burmese for girls. In Mandalay Panthay boys and girls now study Chinese after their classes in government schools. Chinese culture and education is also very strong in Lashio where a Yunnanese mosque constitutes a landmark on the road linking Ruili to Mandalay. Burmization is strong but Chinese culture is resistant compared to Indian cultural influence, except in Rangoon where Burmese of Indian and Pakistani origin are numerous. In the past ten years Hindi and Urdu have increasingly been replaced by Burmese language. There is no school teaching Hindi or Urdu in Myanmar, private teachers in these languages are rare and cannot find students willing to have an Indian education. However, all Muslim children study the Koran, even if the Burmese mother is not devout. There is no limitation before the age of sixteen as in China for Muslim education. There are hundreds of madrassas in Myanmar’s capital.

John Anderson mentions that in the nineteenth century Chinese merchants in Burma were generally Muslims, except for a few dealers in ham. Dali was formerly reached after a month’s travel from Rangoon. From 1855 to 1873, during the years of Muslims resistance, border traffic was often disrupted except between Dali and Tengyue, which was controlled by Du Wenxian. The Chinese of Lower Burma complained because for many years they could not buy products from Canton (Guangdong) and the black market was hazardous.

At the end of the civil war, despite the attempts of the Viceroy of Yunnan, cross-border trade did not resume before the 1880s. The Governor of Yunnan sent a message to the King of Burma announcing the end of hostilities and asking to resume cross-border traffic. At the end of the century, the British, installed in the Shan States and Tengyue, made every effort to allow a recovery of the economy. In the twenty years between 1855 and 1875, Yunnan lost half of its population during the civil war and the subsequent plague, and this explains why the recovery of the province’s economy was so slow. In the years following 1873, the elimination of Muslims was the principal cause of the stagnation of border traffic, which they had controlled for centuries. Chinese, assisted by Yi (Lolo) and Lisu muleteers, replaced them. Hui who remained faithful to the imperial regime, in Kunming and in northeastern Yunnan, were untouched by this draconian social change. Thus the trans-provincial economy between Yunnan and Guizhou was not heavily disrupted. In 1900, the construction of the railroad between Hanoi and Kunming, which employed many Hui, completely changed cross-border trade and commerce.

Few Muslims took part in the exploitation and transportation of rubies, and in 1926 the mines at Mogok became less important. Generally, Hui were not involved in jade exports to China from Myitkyina and Bhamo. Today, the most beautiful pieces of jade are sent to Shanghai and Hong Kong. Ruili is the only city in Yunnan with small jade manufacturing plants. Jinghong, has a secondary retailing role. The jade business is the principal activity of Burmese Muslims in Yunnan. Their population approaches roughly 1,000 in Ruili, 500 in Jinghong and in Kunming, and 100 in Lancang ranging on a new east-west road toward Simao.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a few thousand Yunnanese, including Muslims, were resident in Bhamo and Mandalay. Vincent Scott O’Connor and Purcell believed that between 1890 and 1930 border exchanges resumed between Yunnan and Bhamo.
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In 1931, out of a total population of 14 million in Burma, there were 193,500 Chinese expatriates. Approximately 90,000 were born in China (and many in Yunnan), others in Mandalay, the Shan States, and Rangoon.

The road from Dali to Bhamo was closed (by the Japanese) in 1942. Shortly before its closure, a small number of Yunnanese returned to their country. With the view of attacking China and preparing for the eventual capture of Yunnan (which failed), the Japanese built the first road from Namkham to the Chinese border, Ruili. This new route accelerated the traffic and became the modern Burma Road.

At present, the Lashio slip road is a main route to enter Yunnan. During the Second World War, the Dali–Baoshan section was considerably improved. In Yunnan, the Burma Road was upgraded and lined with trucks for the first time during 1943–45. In 2002–05 this strategic road became a highway.

The influence of Yunnanese Islam, based on cross-border historic relations with continental Southeast Asia, deteriorated after the Second World War. Burma became independent on 4 January 1948. On 1 October 1949, the Communist Party seized power in China. Numerous Muslims, particularly those who had served in the armies of the Kuomintang, crossed from Yunnan to Thailand and Taiwan. The actual "Ho" population in Thailand is close to 40,000. In 1988, Omar Farouk stated that their number varied between 20,000 and 100,000 according to the sources of information available. Beginning from 1980–85, the opening of Yunnan and the establishment of a socialist market economy (shehuizhuyi shichang) brought many Muslims from Burma to Yunnan. They settled mainly in Ruili and Jinghong.

A Burmese Imam in Yunnan

The mosque at Ruili was constructed in 1987 by a 40-year-old imam, Wali Ali, whose family was originally from Rangpur in India. He had already more than ten years of experience as an imam in Toungoo, where he replaced his father in a mosque halfway between Rangoon and Mandalay. When he was in Ruili, the Islamic Association of Yunnan attempted several times to replace him by a Chinese Ahlong in charge of the mosque at Ruili. These frequently attempts failed because of the Burmese imam’s diplomacy and his profound knowledge of the Koran; numerous Hui candidates blundered and thus assured his continuance in his post. Around 1991 to 1992, the main aged imam of Dali was obliged to leave the mosque. Neither Hui nor Burmese Muslims accepted his controversial character and his lack of Koranic knowledge. In 1992, a second imam came to take charge of the mosque and, unlike Imam Ali, he received a salary from the Islamic Association of Yunnan. The second

Ahong was later dismissed because of dishonesty. A third Chinese imam arrived in 1996; Ali took advantage of this new event to travel to India and Pakistan with the Islamic Association of Burma. The latest Hui imam now permanently resides in the new mosque, on the front of which is not inscribed with the character Qingzhen, as on all the mosques of China, but Chaoshendian (Temple of Meditation) as on some Taoist temples. This is a strange case of Sincification for a place of worship initially constructed by an imam from Burma.

At age fifty-five, Imam Ali is now in Jinghong, where he has very good relations with his Chinese colleague in charge of the mosque. As in Ruili, the mosque at Jinghong is newly reconstructed. Two or three of the nine children of Imam Ali are married. His oldest son, a trader, resides in Ruili. Jinghong is far from Namkham where his spouse lives with the younger children. To go to Namkham, it takes three days and three nights from Jinghong by Kunning; ten years ago it would have taken eight days. Since the 1980s the road along the Burmese border has been good and it takes only four days, but it is necessary to change buses quite often.

In Ruili, a Haji of Indian origin replaced Ali (as new religious head of the Burmese community). Another Arabic scholar is a merchant from Lashio who surprisingly chose Chinese education for his children. In Ruili, only two Burmese families educate their children in Chinese.

The small Burmese Muslim community of Jinghong is mainly composed of jade dealers. Far from the extraction sites around Mandalay, these businessmen are less prosperous than their compatriots in Ruili. In order to survive, a supply of artificial jade coming from Southeast Asia is also sold. These Burmese Muslims are most often of Indian origin, but a number of them are Arakanese.

There are immigration problems for these residents; it is no longer possible to have long-term resident visa as in 1980, and all Burmese residents are required to report to the Immigration Department frequently. However they come from far away to open a shop in Yunnan, even Burmese-Indian Muslims from Rangoon are present in Ruili and Jinghong.

Let us now turn to cross-border relations. Four years ago and accompanied by ten faithful followers, Sha Jiyan went to Burma. This young imam in charge of Jinghong’s mosque visited the Muslims of Kengtung. Imam Sha is distinguished by his intellectual curiosity and good knowledge of Burmese Islam. However, it was neither the ancient Sufi networks of Mojiang nor the Yunnanese mosque at Kengtung that interested him but the setting up of cooperation with orthodox Burmese Muslims.
linked to the official Islamic Bureau. These relations finally became a mere formality. China prefers to open a sole customs entry per country in Southeast Asia. Yunnan favors Ruili as the Burmese commercial gateway. Jinghong, linked to Thailand by air, cannot consequently increase its economic and cultural relations with Kengtung. These Yunnanese Hui were, nevertheless, the first to go from Jinghong in a mixed delegation of men and women to Kengtung to visit their Muslim "brothers." In 2000, the Burmese Muslims and the local Islamic Association of Kengtung, linked to the General Council of the Islamic Associations of Burma, sent fifty Muslims to Jinghong. Consideration of exchange permitted the Islamic Association of Xishuang Banna to prove that constructing a new mosque can improve relations between the Yunnanese Muslim Association and Southeast Asia and have a certain cultural impact as well. The Burmese Muslims of Kengtung, on the other hand, went in large number to Jinghong, paving the way for migration to Yunnan, a prosperous province. Dai friends of Menghai, in Xishuang Banna, also dream of going to Burma to participate in holy Buddhist pilgrimage; they seem to have no other motivation.

Among the Burmese cities, Mandalay has only Rangoon as a competitor. Kengtung, despite its remote geographical situation, is another land access from Yunnan to Taunggyi and Rangoon. Hui (Panhay), still in large numbers in Burma, have founded mosques to construct a network for Muslim caravans that have been a feature of life since the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Yunnanese mosques still exist in Kengtung, Mandalay (also madrasa, but the majority of the students are not Chinese), Mogok (also madrasa), Rangoon, and in many cities close to the Yunnanese border.

Mandalay and Kengtung: Yunnanese Muslims in Burma

Like their co-religionists on the Silk Road in Central Asia, Yunnan's Muslims have always traveled. For mule caravans, one month was necessary from Dali-Xiaguan to the Burmese border. The road passed through remarkable points. Before arriving in Yongping, it was necessary to go over two suspended bridges, and that took about eight days. Two days later, one crossed the Mekong River. A day later, the main stage before reaching Burma was the Yongchang Prefecture (now Baoshan). Three days later, the Salween River was crossed. The region was called "Death Valley" because of its deadly environment. It took another five days to reach the custom city of Tengyue (Momein for the Burmese), now Tengchong. After having passed the market of Guyong and one of the highest passes of the whole trip, at more than 2,500 meters, one arrived in the small border village of Ganbatian after five days.

From there, in two days, the Irrawaddy, a navigable river down to Rangoon, and the railway linked the capital from Myitkyina, on the Old Burma Road.

Nowadays, the modern road passes by Luxi and Ruili, the principal border-trading center. Ruili has the most important Burmese Muslim population in Yunnan. From this Sino-Dai city, the road goes to the Shan States, Namkham, Lashio, and Mandalay. Since 1902, Lashio, some 500 kilometers from Dali, has been connected by rail to Mandalay, about 300 kilometers away (linked in six hours by bus).

The last royal city of Burma, a former British colonial capital, links Burma to Yunnan. In a rich plain surrounded by favorable hills. Mandalay, on the bank of the Irrawaddy, became a royal city in 1856 by the decision of King Mindon, who transferred his capital from Amarapura, the "City of the Immortals." After consulting with astrologers, the construction of Mandalay, the city of the Mandala, took more than two years and was finished before the monsoon season of 1859. The complete transfer of capital took another two years.

The citadel, a magic square of two kilometers on each side, had twelve gates, three on each side, and was protected by a moat. By the southeast "Door of the Dead," processions left for the Buddhist cremation site. Thanks to Lord Curzon, Governor of India (1899–1905), this royal city was protected until the end of the Second World War when it was targeted by intense bombings.

The modern part of the city and bazaars lie west of the ancient citadel. A Muslim community, centered on several mosques (sixty in 2004) still exists. The new University, an important Buddhist center, indirectly contributes to protecting the regime and, like the Buddhist University of Rangoon, was constructed by Burmese generals. Mandalay's numerous skilled artisans in silk, wood, and, above all, stones and precious metals long ago drew Chinese and Hui to Mandalay.

It took nearly twenty days by boat to come up from Rangoon, but only some twenty hours to go back down. Travel (except for expensive tourism and local navigation) by boat between Mandalay and Rangoon no longer exists in 2004. The Irrawaddy is the main navigable river of the country. For Scott O'Connor, its beauty, length, and volume made it the most beautiful river in Southeast Asia. Muslims and other Burmese currently travel by bus or by train between these two main cities.

In 1903, Du Wenxin's nephew lived in the region and carried on religious and economic links with Dali. An imam from Dali who practiced asceticism, visited this Yunnanese town, and this partly confirms long economic, cultural, and religious ties between Dali and Burma. Haji Nur-ud-Din (Ko-Shwetin), a ruby merchant who had
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voyaged in the South Seas and in the Middle East, lived close to the mosque. The later resided in Mogok, north of Mandalay, near the center of ruby production. There is currently a Yunnanese mosque on the same spot. Since his pilgrimage, religion has taken up most of the Haji’s time, though he was not an ascetic like the mullah at Dali.

China has greatly changed, and now Mandalay looks toward Yunnan. Panthays maintain economic and religious links with the neighboring Chinese province, and perpetuate old historical links with Yunnan. They are also Burmese Chinese, as Tan (2004) has pointed out, who do not want to stress “overseas” Chinese-ness. Their assimilation into Burmese society is very harmonious, and they are well accepted, unlike the Rakhine Muslims (named Rohingya) who may have a longer ancestry but are not citizens of their own country.

Around 300 Panthay families live near the Yunnanese mosque of Mandalay (built in 1868). At present it is the second oldest mosque of the city after Jong Mosque (built in 1862 but reconstructed) and is a major link in the Burmese network of Yunnanese mosques: Kengtung, Myitkina, Bhama, Mogok, Mandalay, Meiktila, Rangoon, and Moulmein.

Chinese is more resistant than Indian and Pakistani languages Hindi and Urdu. The present linguistic decline of these Indian languages has been significant over the past 20 years. The good level of Chinese of many Panthays in Burma has been achieved thanks to an ethic of hard work, the high level of knowledge of Chinese, and the endeavors of school directors who teach written characters and Putonghua, such as Master Xu Yaotang in Mandalay. He was born in Myikyina, on the Old Burmese Road.

Many Muslims have left Yunnan. In large cities such as Chiang Mai, Kengtung and Mandalay Hui have successfully migrated in the past. Their family links were cut with relatives in Kunming, Dali, Yuxi, and Simao between 1950 and 1980. Rare are the “Ho” and “Panthays” who returned to Yunnan and were able successfully to rebuild new cross-border trade and religious links.

In Yunnan, Burmese Muslims—who are very rarely Panthays—live in Ruili, Jinghong, and Kunming. From there they sometimes travel to Shanghai and Beijing. Their migration route goes through Ruili, Namkham, Lashio, and Mandalay. Bhama is linked to Mandalay and Rangoon via the Irrawaddy. Myitkyina (“Near the Great River”) was a main crossroad before the Second World War. Even though linked by rail with Mandalay and Rangoon, it has now lost its supremacy to Ruili, Lashio, and Mandalay in the Yunnan-Burma connection.

The Hui in Northern Thailand and Burma (Myanmar).

After the end of the nineteenth century, and especially since the end of the Second World War, Yunnanese Muslim merchant networks have been revived by China’s current economic boom. However, the closure of the Sino-Burmese border from 1950 to 1988 halted historical cross-border trade with Yunnan. The sealed border contributed to the development two Hui villages near Menghai with their own mosques (Mansaihui and Manluanhui). These Hui (also called Paxidai) speak Tai languages but no longer go to Kengtung.

Educated Hui in Yunnan have changed professions; they are now professors, doctors, or professionals. This has not yet completely changed their habits; some Hui merchants still live in Kunming, Xinguan, Baoshan, Yuxi, and Simao, but few have resumed business links with Southeast Asia. Han are moving across all continents with great success. The Yunnanese Muslims are certainly modern but have lost their entrepreneurial spirit to trade with Thailand and Burma.

In the 1980s with Deng’s reforms, the Muslims and Han of Yunnan adapted to China’s extraordinary economic development. This has had a considerable impact on Southeast Asia and, indirectly, on Islam in the region. Thanks to their diligent work, Chinese Muslims have succeeded in urban as well as rural areas, for instance in the region of Tonghai. The Hui are modern, though as other minority people living in the countryside, they do not receive the education and development aid they deserve. Since 1949, and particularly between 1980 and 2000, social change was rapid among the Hui and Uyghur, but religion, traditions, and the family, as always, linked the community at a micro-level.

At present, the grip of a globalization is visible in Yunnan, Southeast Asia, and Xinjiang. Following the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001, wars have rocked the Islamic world and have affected Muslim public opinion in China. The Hui remain silent on internal affairs and are even more muted in their judgment when foreign policy is at issue. But like most students of the Koran, the Hui took sides with their Iraqi “brothers,” especially during the first two weeks of the Iraq War when the Blitzkrieg scenario was deferred and no weapons of mass destruction discovered. The Hui, like the Uyghurs, were, by an overwhelming majority, opposed to the Iraq War. During three weeks, this conflict was the main program on the Chinese CTV 4 chain, broadcast throughout the world by satellite. Despite Saddam Hussein’s defeat, it showed the force of the Muslim community from Beijing to Baghdad and influenced Uyghurs in their autonomous region, Xinjiang.
Chapter 6

Uyghurs in Xinjiang: Modernization, Sinicization, or Separatism?

Uyghur Territory and the History of Xinjiang

In Chinese Turkistan, history, ethnicity, and Islam must be studied together. The Uyghurs currently occupy the Tarim Basin and the perimeter of the immense Taklamakan Desert (see map "China and Central Asia"). Dating from the sixth century, their ancient Chinese names were Huihu and Huihe. “Uy” (oey) meaning “Union” in their Turkic language is the root of the name Uyghur. This ethnonym, more or less abandoned after the Islamization of Turkistan in the twelfth century, was brought back into vogue by Soviet Union and the PRC, which included Uyghurs among its fifty-five minorities. Ancient names such as Sartes or Tarantchis have disappeared (Roy 1997: 182). In 1926, the term Sarte went out of fashion in Soviet Central Asia, but Kazakh authors, such as Ishakov of the Institute for Oriental Studies of Almaty, has used it to designate the Uyghur diaspora.

Since 1 October 1955, Xinjiang has been the Uyghur Autonomous Region. It occupies a sixth of China’s territory, comprising more than a million and a half square kilometers, of which only a small part is cultivated. The landscapes of the Tianshan, Altai, and Pamir Mountains as well as deserts and oases shape this rich and unique region.

Uyghurs distinguish themselves from other Muslim minorities and from the Hui mosaic minority, which is not an ethnic group. They are called “Chinese Muslims” here. As a result of localization (cultural adjustment to a particular geographical environment) at the periphery minorities in Xinjiang can always construct and reconstruct their identity and resist Chinese acculturation. Films from Turkey have an impact in Xinjiang and bring another type of modernization than modern
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Sinicization. This chapter will demonstrate that Sinicization is less acculturative among Uyghurs than in Hui society.

Mustapha Kemal Attaturk in 1933 foresaw the possible fragmentation of the Soviet Union, and pointed out the importance of history and language, a sort of framework for the cultural influence of Turkey in Central Asia and Xinjiang (Balci 2003: 65–66). The vernacular Uyghur is a Turkic language, classified with Uzbek in the chagatyay linguistic group. Following the reforms of Deng Xiaoping in 1981, this main language of Xinjiang is now written in Arabic-Persian script. No formal education is given in this language even though it is the language of the autonomous region. As for the Hui, they speak Chinese with different pronunciations and know Chinese characters; they are modern and ready to take jobs in a country where unemployment is common.

The Uyghurs (Weiu’erzu in modern Chinese) are descendants of the ancient Uighurs, who gave their name and a few religious traditions. They were one of the first peoples speaking a Turkic language in Central Asia, and their Chinese ethnonym Huihu continued to be used from the sixth century until the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, their ancestors began their march from Mongolia toward the west. They abandoned their Buddhist and Nestorian faiths, and many cultural traits to become Muslim. Access to a new religion, Islam, thus created historic rupture with the past as the ancient Tais of Weishan, Mengshe, who do not know their district history before its Islamization. This Nanzhao principality, initially Mengshe, became Muslim as did the Uyghurs. The ancestors of the Uyghurs were pacificists, but it is generally accepted that the Xiong-nu (Huns) were Turks. However, they spontaneously cooperated with Genghis Khan. Later, Kyrgyz (Qara Kyrgyz) were defeated in 1207. The Uyghurs love justice and hate injustice even more. They are not fanatics but fatalists and artists.

Uyghurs were the major population of the northwestern borderlands of China, which, before Islamization, participated in the long-distance caravan trade. According to the Arabs, their main cultural trait is not political but linguistic ("those who speak Turkic languages") (Frye 1945: 308–10). They settled down, devoted themselves to agriculture, and also became merchants and skilled artisans. Intellectuals are essential to safeguard this Central Asian culture. Historical novels in Uyghur are one of the rare cultural media shaping modern nationalism. An increasing number of Han, the majority group in the cities, occupy a central position in the administration, industry, and commerce of the Uyghur Autonomous Region. This urban Chinese transmigration creates resentment among Uyghurs. Thus the villages and their social organization became main cultural safeguards against Sinicization.

The neighborhood forms a major social organization and the Chinese and Uyghur cadres certainly understand its cultural strength. As with the Uzbeks, village endogamy is the rule. People also marry within the same city neighborhood (Petric 2002: 93–94). These marriages are still for the most part arranged by parents and the family. Contrary to the Han, for traditional banquets, men and women are in the same room but at different tables. For religious marriages men and women are clearly separated.

Even though the status of women in the Turkish civilization is high, Olivier Roy (2002) has noticed a regression in Central Asia, following the “indigenization” of the new Islamic republics. In the present Chinese system, and among Uyghurs, women have a high status.

As in all countries, Uyghur children like to play. In winter on the ice and on a hard surface, boys enjoy playing with tops. Girls play with dolls. Before the age of sixteen, all now attend Koranic schools. This is not possible in other regions and provinces of China where this age restriction is respected.

Music, a key element in Uyghur culture, must be learned from an early age. Art and music play an important cultural role in Central Asia and Xinjiang. The masters are esteemed. In Kashgar, parents often make sacrifices for the musical education of their sons. The makers of musical instruments profit from this sociological trend. The dutar is a distinctive Uyghur string instrument (1.45 m long) (photo 11). The best rawap have resonating drums covered with serpent skins. Other smaller instruments (kechik dutar) are also suited for children. Dutar and rawap are popular (the approximate price in Kashgar is 300 RMB); they contribute to the creation of Uyghur identity. In Xinjiang, Islam and music are intimately linked.

Since the Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin era, religion has recovered its traditional place, in particular since 1982. Amidst their agricultural or professional activities, even more than the Hui, the Uyghurs pray five times a day. Because their subsistence economy has been improving since the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, a small number of rich merchants and privileged persons of both sexes are able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lives. That was only a dream in the generation of their grandparents. China never tried to impose non-rogatory local pilgrimages to replace the Islamic pillar as in the Soviet Union.
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History

It is striking to observe the absence of an historic past in the collective memory of Central Asia and particularly among Uighurs (Roy 1997: 243). Kashgar was established more than 2,000 years ago. Two historical facts marked their history: Islamization and the establishment of the PRC in 1949. There is no model of nationalism based on history. Rewriting history in Xinjiang will probably incorporate the values instituted by China, the only ones taught in the public schools. The current vision of history in the state schools favors the Uighurs more than other minorities, but the final goal remains Sinicization, the propagation of Chinese culture, an acculturation process continuing for 2,000 years.

Sixty years before the present era, under Emperor Xuan Di (73 BCE to 49 BCE), the Chinese sent troops to consolidate the Silk Road. A governor supervised thirty-six principalities north and south of the Tianshan Mountains. In 327 BCE, the Prefecture of Gacchang (Qocho in Uyghur) was established in Turfan and under the Tang (618–907), Anxi included Yutian (Khotan) and the Taklamakan.

The Uyghur kingdom, centered in Turfan, was prosperous from the ninth to the seventeenth century. Tolerant Sufism constructed masters’ tombs (Shaik in Arabic) in sacred Buddhist places. This was the case of Yiti Qalander (Seven Qalander), buried around Turfan, near the ancient Uyghur Buddhist capital Qocho (Khotcho), in other regions of Xinjiang, Sufism was from time to time well accepted. The Qalander, and especially the Qadiriya Order, have played an important role in Islamization. Korla is the site of the mausoleum of Shah Qalander. These “Gongber” are sacred places of worship. This Arabic word for “tomb” indicates Muslim mausoleums like that north of Macao where only the toponym survived.

As we can imagine, from the tenth century, Thierry Zarcone thinks that, in Samarkand, Bukhara, and Xinjiang, Sufism had a religious and political role (Popovic 1996: 268). Many princes were themselves Sufi. This type of faith is called “total” Islamization, a strong term also given to African Sufism. Among the Muslim missionaries in Central Asia, a Kubrawiya Shaykh, Burhan ud-din Bukhari, preached in northwest China before traveling in the southern provinces. Sufi masters converted local sovereigns such as Sutuk Kara (Qara) Khan (d. 955). His other name Bughra Khan reminds the Shamanic and totemic origin of his people (bughra means camel). This mystic warrior established his capital in Kashgar, a rich oasis at the crossroads of Central Asia, Hindustan, and China. His sacred mausoleum still exists near Kashgar, one of the most traditional of Xinjiang’s Uyghur cities. This

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Qarakhaniides Sultan (also member of the Qaraghagliq Order) was the pioneer of Uyghur Islamization under the Naqshbandi banner.

In the fourteenth century, the Qadiriya Order was powerful, and Kashgar became an important center of Islamization. In the sixteenth century, Islam was a unifying factor in East Turkistan. Makdum Azam founded the Naqshbandi branch, and (K)hoja Afqa (d.1694) was a Qadiriya descendant of this line. This sovereign also established the Aqthaghliq Party (“White Mountainers of Kashgar”; in Chinese Bai shan Pai). This Sufi order also powerful in Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai was also called Baimaopai (“White Skullcap Order”). Aksu’s name, “White Water,” suggests an ancient membership in this order. The Aqthaghliq were opposed to Qaraghagliq (“Black Mountainers” or “Order of The Black Mountain”), known throughout Central Asia for more than a century. During repressions imposed by the Chinese, these two religious orders took refuge in Ferghana, in the region of Kokand. The masters of these orders were called tora and retained a strong Kashgari identity. In 1830, according to Hegel Ishakov (from Almaty), these Uyghur Sufis were more than ten thousand. Russian annexation of this khanate halted Kashgari migration.

During the eighteenth century, the Chinese consolidated their power in East Turkistan. For the Russian authors Melikhov and Miasnikov (1985: 32), the strategy in East Turkistan and Kashgaria of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) was an act of “aggression westward-from the Amur across Mongolia, Dzungaria (northern Xinjiang), and Kasgharia to the foothills of the Himalayas.” This statement reflects Chinese and Russian competition in Central Asia. The Khanate of Dzungar was destroyed and Khalkha was Sinicized and annexed. In 1716, Chinese armies began to take Turfan. One of the successors of Goldan Tsereng resisted for more than fifteen years until his death in 1745; Amurson, a chief aided by China, seized power there. In 1754, profiting from the troubles, the Qing Dynasty sent troops into the region. Five years later, China annexed the western borderlands. Kashgar was then six months by foot from Peking. More recently, in 1935, Eric Teichman took a month by truck to cover this distance. So, one understands the difficulties for the Chinese to impose their law in this far-off region then called Xi or “Western Territories.”

Pacification of the southwestern part continued without interruption during 1758–59. The (K)hoja Burhan ed-Din left Kashgar, besieged by imperial troops, and took refuge with a neighboring khan, who decapitated him and sent his head to the Manchu. Khoja Burhan’s brother called the “Small Khoja,” suffered the same fate. The whole of East Turkistan was annexed. Under Qian Long (1736–95), this “Great Accomplishment of the Qing Dynasty” figures among nine other victories. After
the Han and Tang Dynasties, the Manchu, following the same policy, occupied the far-distant western borderlands and assimilated new nationalities. In 1768, the name Xinjiang, “New Territory,” replaced the former name of “Chinese Turkistan.”

Chinese colonization did not prevent the construction of mosques such as that at Turfan (dating to 1778). Its large circular tower of more than 40 meters is remarkable and figures in several books on Islam in China. However, the British explorer Francis Younghusband, during his journeys of 1886–87, found that this “curious” assemblage of earthen bricks resembled a factory chimney and preferred its magnificent door.

For the historian Immanuel Hsu, the Muslim anti-Chinese rebellions of Xinjiang of the eighteenth century were the consequence of the corruption of the local imperial administration. In 1825–28, profiting from the revolts in the provinces of Shanxi and Gansu, Yakub Beg (1820–77), from Kokand in Uzbekistan, replaced Buzurg Khan by force of arms. In 1865, he ordered the construction of Kashgar’s fortifications, a mandatory point of passage toward the Khyber Pass and Lahore at the border of the dominant Sunni world and of a Shiite enclave (Tajik).

Yakub established the “Seven Khanates” and imposed sharia law on the whole of Turkistan. In 1869, for a period, China did not control Xinjiang. The English, the Russians, who concluded a treaty with Yakub in 1872, and the Ottomans tried to submit Central Asia to their hegemony and wanted to benefit from independent Kashgaria. The Kashgaria state was recognized by Turkey. The Turks were aided by the nephew of Yakub, Yakub Khan Tore, Ambassador of Kashgar to Istanbul. The Russians also took part of Xinjiang during this period. In 1873, the British were prepared to block Russia, always powerful in Central Asia, and thus, from 1866 to 1878, Kashgaria was a sovereign state, a fact that has contributed to the pride and strong ethnic identity of the Uyghurs in southwestern Xinjiang. Yakub Khan died in 1877; his nephew took refuge in India to pursue his Sufi studies. The Chinese counter-offensive in 1877 brought repression. Kashgari left their country by the hundreds of thousands at the fall of their independent kingdom. Following these events, Islam in Xinjiang became a secular religion without political power.

General Zuo Zongtang, former Governor of Zhejiang and Fujian, was responsible for anti-Muslim repression in Gansu (1851–78) and the re-conquest of Xinjiang. Russia profited from this until 1882. General Zuo, who hated the Jahariya Order, was responsible for the killing of Shaykh Ma Hualong, who had freely surrendered. The Hunanese origin of Zuo forced the transmigration of Uyghurs to southern Hunan.

This general is also accountable for the massive importation of Hunanese tea, which continues today in Qinghai and Xinjiang.

In two milleniums, the Chinese lost East Turkistan four times and conquered it five times. Continued Uyghur resistance during the period demonstrates their independent spirit. However, under the rule of Emperor Guang Xu (1875–1908) the grip on Xinjiang increased, and the transformation of East Turkistan into a Chinese province opened the path for Sinicization.

In 1911, following the example of the other Chinese provinces, the fall of the Manchu Dynasty brought warlords to Xinjiang. In the 1920s, Governor Yang Wengxin was considered a separatist. Another, a Muslim governor in Kashgar, Ma Ditai, instituted terror and established his harem of fifty women. The explorer George Roerich clearly explained how in February 1924 Ma Shaowu in an official mission set out for Kashgar with a small army of 5,000 men to overthrow Ma Ditai. The son of Ditai was killed on 1 June. The Governor of Kashgar, after having been wounded by bullets in the right arm, was crucified on one of the city gates. After having been shot, his head was cut off and displayed. His conqueror, General Ma Shaowu, standing between the dismembered governor and the firing squad, almost lost his life. After hearing the first pistol shot fired by Ma Shaowu himself, the soldiers seized with panic, opened fire without orders.

The region became almost independent once again in 1933, under the command of a charismatic Hui warlord nicknamed the “Great Ma,” General Ma Chongyin. (K)oha Niyaz Haji, a Uyghur, was associated with this movement. However, the Russians betrayed them. In January 1933, Stalin, following a confidential agreement with the Chinese military governor Sheng Shicai, sent an army to stop the separatists in Urumchi. Ma had already twice unsuccessfully attempted to invade Xinjiang’s capital, and his dream of creating an Islamic sultanate in Central Asia was destroyed in great secrecy, under snow and ice, by Soviet armored vehicles and airforce. The four years of war caused more than 10,000 deaths. Muslim troops came under the command of General Ma’s half-brother. Some soldiers escaped massacre and became bandits in order to survive. One day, not far from Kashgar, perhaps helped by the Japanese, the Great Ma crossed the border and disappeared into Soviet Union. He probably ended his life “liquidated” in Moscow. Xinjiang remained Chinese.

In 1944, a Guomindang (Kuomintang) Republic of East Turkistan of short duration was proclaimed under the umbrella of the Soviet Union and survived for
a time in Ili. It was reunited with the PRC in 1949. In the 1950s, numerous Uighurs and Kazakhs fled to Soviet Kazakhstan. Many regional chiefs never returned to their country of origin.

In 1951, purges by the Chinese administration intensified. The elimination of the former cadres and the creation of a new government were on the agenda. Passive Uighurs resistance was frequent. Robberies and armed attacks were common. During the same period, Yang (1957) mentions revolts in neighboring Gansu, causing the death of nine people. Cases of armed resistance were also reported in Xinjiang. The Kazakhs also resisted, and many fled.

In Hami (Kumul), bands of a thousand fighters were rapidly overcome. In April 1951, a leader, Wo Siman, and his partisans were captured and executed after organizing a meeting that mobilized a hundred thousand. In May, the Xinhu News Agency transferred its headquarters from Yiwu (Aratruk) to Hami, a secure city. During the same month, near Pingliang, Yang Qiun and Ma Guoyan forced the provincial authorities to send troops to assist local militias. Their lives being in danger, they pulled back to the mountains. These two leaders were later arrested, condemned, and imprisoned for seven years. In December 1951, 37 people were killed, including 19 who were poisoned.

In 1952 and 1953, under Wang Chen, campaigns of repressio were organized. In 1953, the Xinjiang Ribao mentioned the progress of Sinicization in Ili, among Kazakhs. Elections were held in April, and thousands of new political cadres were formed, mainly Uighurs and Kazakhs, but they did not have much power. In 1955, Xinjiang was proclaimed the Uighur Autonomous Region. In 1957, the Party Plenum (Central Committee) proposed the creation of a “Uighur Republic,” causing a passionate outbreak of popular reactions, followed by new repression.

The two principal Uighur opposition parties, the Sardi Turkistan Halk Partisi (People’s Party of East Turkistan) and the Sardi Turkistan Islam Partisi (Islamic Party of East Turkistan) were responsible for the main uprisings in 1962–69. Unfortunately, not much is known about other opposition groups. The Cultural Revolution of 1966–76 was a difficult period; the frontier was sealed off for 30 kilometers with the Soviet Union. Muslims were oppressed, and mosques were closed. Imam Ismail Li, interviewed in January 2003 in Tongxin, had bad memories of the religious repression along the Soviet border and in particular in Ili.

The People’s Party of Xinjiang was implanted in eight districts and nineteen cities. In 1979, China declared this party anti-Han and anti-Communist; according to its Uighur leaders, it nevertheless organized guerrillas despite police campaigns.
In 1996, repression increased, the armed police and PLA organizing a large campaign of arrests in Xinjiang. Several thousand Uyghurs were detained, following the diffusion of internal documents by the Chinese Communist Party that scheduled purges. In 1997, new Uyghur bomb attacks occurred in Xinjiang and even in Beijing. Riots and assassinations were also reported, and numerous prisoners were executed. This caused an attack by Uyghur partisans against Chinese soldiers in the Taklamakan Desert. A pro-Chinese imam of Kashgar was threatened.

Politics was not on the agenda. However, many villages began to organize discussions (meshrep), and the Chinese authorities became alarmed. Arrests followed. In August 1997, after Deng Xiaoping’s funeral, Uyghur revolts were reported in Urumchi and Kashgar. The following September Chinese soldiers died in action, Uyghur separatists were also killed in Beijing and Heshou. A cycle of violence continued during 1998–2002. In October 1999, the first National Uyghur Congress was held in Germany. In 2001, more than a hundred Uyghurs were arrested in Urumchi. There are negotiations going on between Beijing and the East Turkistan Information Center claiming to work for a peaceful resolution of conflicts within the China’s borders, however, the Uyghur autonomous vision is supported neither by Washington nor Beijing.

In 2001, when the Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan were powerful, Central Asia was ready to give assistance to the Uyghur. Now, it seems rather, that after the capture of Baghdad by the American forces on 8 April 2003, the United States, present in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, wants at times to favor Beijing’s position while at other times seems to favor that of the Uyghur. In August 2004, Beijing expected Uyghur detainees in Guantánamo to return to China. The US government did not transfer them.

Globalization does not prevent the Hui and Uyghur Muslims from having their proper characteristics. I will not speak of the political cadres, nor even of the “Sinicized” imams in Xinjiang who follow closely government instructions (through the Islamic Association). Islam in Xinjiang is caught between Sinicization and separatism. Are the Uyghurs as a whole convinced that separatism is possible? Disorder is not desirable. To live under Chinese control is not, however, easy for the Uyghurs of Kashgar, but does a logical alternative acceptable to the majority exist? The Chinese played the nationalist card, but Uyghur separatism may gain ground. Sinicization begins by the education of the Hui and Uyghur and the acquisition of Chinese culture. Legally, Arabic and the Koran cannot be taught to students younger than sixteen. Chinese schools and television reinforce Sinicization and avoid the apprenticeship in a culture other than that of the Han, form citizens, and teach “patriotism” (aiguojia zhuoy). In return, Uyghur nationalism and Islam insist on solidarity between the rich and the poor. Considering these “internal problems” in Xinjiang, how can the Muslim countries respond in order to maintain a regional social order?

The Uyghurs and Friendly Countries

Traditional Uyghurs like to call their sons Mehmet Ali after a nationalist hero, a resister against Napoleon in 1798, an anti-Wahhabite, and Ottoman Viceroy in Egypt from 1805 to 1849. He founded a dynasty that lasted until 1952. An indirect cultural influence from Turkey is certain—for example, the remarkable development of Turkic languages since the independence of the Central Asian republics. Since the 1980s, following the Turkish secularist model, some Uyghur leaders have opposed the Chinese market economy.

In the 1990s, Turkey was active in constructing madrasa and schools teaching Turkish Islam in Xinjiang. However, there is a certain fear of Turkish influence (which proved too ambitious in the 1990s). Uzbekistan closed a dozen high-class Fethullaci secondary schools in 1999 under the control of a talented Muslim educator and preacher, Fetullah Gülen (b. 1938). China never accepted the establishment of these schools teaching English and computer science in Kashgar and feared a relationship with Jamaat-i-Islami. Since 1999, in Chinese Turkistan and the neighboring republics, as a result of political and financial instability in Ankara and an attempt to draw closer to Europe and also perhaps to Russia, Turkey’s role in Xinjiang has become more cultural and religious than political and economic. The Islamic Association of Xinjiang largely dominates religious life, but Turkish cultural influence remains significant. On the other hand, the Islamic Institute of China in Beijing also trains Uyghurs who support the Chinese Communist Party. If Turkey joins the European Union, its role in Central Asia could be boosted.

Did Uyghurs receive Turkish support? One could say that Turkey was interested in Uyghur opposition forces from 1950 until 1990, with Ayda Beg, a warlord resident in Istanbul. He was later replaced in Almaty by Moukhissi, who was active until 1996. In the mid-1990s, cultural associations and Uyghur businessmen in Almaty and Bishkek were politicized and could have been used as intermediaries between the Uyghurs in Turkey and in Xinjiang. Newspapers such as Zaman (“Times”) and publishers such as Sözler and Sürat Yayınları play a significant role in Central Asia (Balci 2003: 13, 255–56). These are all part of Turkey’s cultural network in
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the region. Jamaat-i-Islami, a form of radical Islam like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, partly influenced by Wahhabism, found a relatively favorable audience among Uyghurs. At present, associations such as the Committee of East Turkistan may benefit from internet links with Turkey.

In October 2002, an announcement by Richard Armitage, US Assistant Secretary of State, placed many organizations on a “terrorist” list. This was an immense success for Chinese diplomacy, which, anticipating this action, had invited the brother of the Dalai Lama to Tibet and Xinjiang in summer 2002. Following this trip, this diplomat was unexpectedly full of praise about Xinjiang’s positive economic development. His press conference in Hong Kong before returning to India was variously interpreted. It is unclear if he wanted to be polite or was truly impressed by Xinjiang’s economic development.

Recent uprisings and demographic changes in Tibet have their parallel in Xinjiang. In the Autonomous Region of Tibet, massive Han immigration has drastically transformed the human mosaic over the last thirty years. Similarly, in Xinjiang in 1950–60 80% of the population was Muslim, but in 2004 this was no longer the case (going down possibly to 50%). Recent immigration had increased the percentage of Chinese to 50%, a de facto Han majority in the Uyghur Autonomous Region. In Xinjiang, Chinese demographic and political pressures provoked Kazakh and Uyghur emigration in the 1950s, with hundred of thousands fleeing toward Kazakhstan; this is no longer the case. In comparison to Central Asia, Chinese socio-economic rule improved Uyghur’s living standard.

The Uyghurs are still badly represented in their autonomous region. In Xinjiang, high-level cadres are puppets of the Chinese, and Uyghur cadres are generally less influential than many Tibetan Communist Party members. Xinjiang’s major industries and economic production are Han-controlled. Under the Communist regime, the people have no access to political structures and decision-making power. However, if police pressure is increased too much, Uyghur violent counter-reactions could occur and create an aggressive explosion of national pride already fuelled by news from the Middle East.

In 2003, however, an apparent calm reigned in Xinjiang. The cities are modernizing. Nonetheless, Uyghurs retain an attachment to their cultural values, especially to Islam. As the Afghans, they are true Muslim believers. Kashgar was a cultural model, a mosaic of all of Central Asia’s and Pakistan’s ethnic groups. The vision of Younghusband, who spent a winter in this key city of Xinjiang at the end of the nineteenth century, proves that nothing has changed. The power of the former Chinese Daoist-responsible of this far-off region resembles the present-day rule of the highest administrative and military Han authorities.

The Uyghurs closely followed the Iraq War. A Kashgari friend who told me dogmatically that the Americans were going to begin the war on 27 January 2003, was mistaken only by a month or two. This proves that Uyghurs—although sympathizers of Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein—are tempted by United States aid in Uzbekistan, and expect much from the recent American geopolitical presence in Central Asia. Finally, the political, military and even religious situation of the Uyghur Autonomous Region is not changing very much at the moment.

The behind-the-scenes history opens on a double polarization of the present Uyghur social life, Islamic community identity, and acculturation. To succeed in society, Uyghurs must learn Chinese and accept official norms. This acculturation counterbalances Uyghur nationalist dreams. Stalin’s concept of nationalities, developed in Europe before the end of the nineteenth century, entered China and Xinjiang through the Soviet Union; however, the independence of the republics of Central Asia brought new hopes, if of short duration, to the Uyghurs. The minzu system and Sinicization are underlying forces in society.

The Sinicization of Chinese Turkistan

At the beginning of the Christian era, Sinicization of the region began with the Han Dynasty and its conquests along the Silk Road. Later, in 939, “The History of Five Dynasties,” Jiuhuadaishi, presented Sinicization’s positive effects by using the patronizing expression fenghua (“receiving civilization”). Previously fast-riding horsemen, the Uyghurs became a Sinicized and sedentary people. By political conviction and because they saw the strategic and economic importance of the region, a certain number attempted to resist Sinicization and to develop a local nationalist spirit.

Michael Hechter (1999) explains how integration (Sinicization) in the case of Xinjiang operates:

Political integration of minority ethnic groups will be facilitated to the extent that systematic structural differences between such groups are progressively effaced... Contexts which are culturally dominant but economically disadvantaged (such as Uyghur economy compared to the dominant Han network system) are typified by the strongest extent of class political orientations... Solidarity represents high political consciousness on the part of groups seeking to alter the cultural division of labor.
Education is a key issue in Sinicization. In 1910, Broomhall reported that in the region of Kashgar the Chinese government promoted modernization with Turkish assistance: (1) the improvement of Turkish schools in which instructors from Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) were invited, (2) the setting up in Chinese Turkistan of a printing press publishing books in the regional Uyghur language, and (3) publication of newspapers encouraging Uyghur education.

It is true that there are schools at present, but priority is given to Chinese. At the beginning of the twentieth century, China was too poor to be able to put in place a structured educational program. At present, books and newspapers in Uyghur are published, but the Chinese government censors them and this has increased bad feeling among the local population.

New reforms and the modernization of the education system favor markets, Education is no longer part of the state plan and autonomous regions such as Xinjiang are controlled by a market economy controlled by the Han majority and not favorable to the Uyghur. Fourteen Chinese universities were opened in Xinjiang, and state education progressed in cities. However, many Uyghurs live in villages where competent teachers refuse to teach.

Uyghur youth from Xinjiang today find themselves excluded from power and good jobs more than their elders. They have nonetheless responded favorably to modernization transmitted through Chinese culture. Structural discrimination increases their ethnic solidarity and could ultimately create a confrontation with Chinese authorities with “patriotic” Uyghur cadres backing the majority. It is not at all clear that young Uyghurs are sufficiently motivated toward social change. To reach this level of motivation, they must resist Sinicization and become “anti-patriotic.” The frustration of younger generations is well known in other Asiatic countries such as East Timor, independent since 2002. Chinese Muslim students used the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, a rather anti-Islamic English writer of Indian origin, to promote their political ideas with some success. In 1989, The Satanic Verses were confiscated, and its publisher closed down.

Although this sort of movement does not give Xinjiang’s people a real political voice, autonomy, on the other hand, does not mean much in China. In 1982, other incidents have shown the effectivness of Chinese Muslims, reacting against an anti-Islamic article published in the review News of Youth in Shanghai. The Chinese Communist Party has, however, understood from experience the importance of the younger generation. The rapid promotion of young imams does not exist in Xinjiang, but elsewhere in China this is a current policy to favor gifted Koranic students.

Han-centrism exists in contemporary Chinese literature and culture. Latent Han-centrism exists in tandem with the cross-cultural communication between the Han majority and the ethnic minorities (Shi 2003: 215–16). “The Uyghurs will be like the Manchus, assimilated by the Chinese, because the Chinese culture is much stronger” explained an army general in Urumchi to Geoffrey York, The Globe correspondent in Beijing. Thus, there is widespread resentment of Han dominance. Discrimination exists against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, their autonomous region. It is perhaps more in their professional life that Uyghurs are disadvantaged in comparison with the Han who control the economy.

The political orientation of Uyghur teachers, contrary to their Han colleagues, is strictly controlled. There are instances of demarcation between the majority and the Uyghurs in large cities such as Urumchi, Turfan, Hami, Aksu, which are dominated by the Han. Professional and commercial competition does not favor minorities. The law forbids discrimination, but in practice the majority rules. China publicly promotes a concept of union of all nationalities (tuanjie), but it is not always faithful to its noble legal and political intentions (hanhua he tuanjie). The majority has discretionary power toward the Uyghurs, and local interpretation of laws can vary to their disadvantage. Education in Xinjiang is centered in cities, but Uyghurs live mainly in rural areas. On the other hand, local laws and patron-client relations still exist. The clan chiefs manipulate situations in their own interests, and Han use Uyghur cadres to impose their point of view.

Does the policy of clans, “localism,” and the proliferation of patron-client relations defined by Ahmed Rashid for the Soviet Tajiks currently exist in Xinjiang? There are certainly similarities. Xinjiang is politically more stable than Tajikistan. However, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang are rather close to the Tajiks of the former Soviet Union. At the local level, Tajik ex-cadres, as “patriotic” Uyghurs, benefit from administrative posts. One can say that there equally exists a certain analogy between the Chinese system of guanxi, personal relations as described by Mayfair Yang (Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China) and the Uzbek social network studied by Petrie. Social relationships are created and developed in the family, among former schoolmates, friends, and professional colleagues. Uyghurs, Tajiks, and Uzbeks are Muslim, and almost all Chinese citizens are attached to the family, friends, and their neighborhood.

The creation of a modern identity is a crucial need. Except for television and mobile telephones, Uyghur cadres adapt badly to new ideas but follow Chinese
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culture. Minorities in China, the Uyghurs in particular, have lost a sense of their history. Chinese holidays are completely unrelated to Uyghur culture. In Xinjiang, Khotan for example, Sinicization has been seen in clothing since the tenth century. Uyghur administrative vocabulary is also based on Chinese terminology, and the Chinese transform Uyghur names. Between Kashgar and Aksu, lies the small town of Sanchakou (Three Branches) (photo 20). This toponym is also used 50 kilometers west of Kunming.

New Urumchi with its modern buildings points to progress. Xinjiang’s living standard is higher than in the independent Central Asian republics. However, Chinese domination remains absolute and shows no sign of weakening. The Chinese government is attentive and attempts to act harmoniously, as required by Confucian ethics, but increasingly Chinese and Uyghurs have little to do with each other though residing in the same region. On 17 January 2003, a high-level Han cadre from Aksu, although diplomatic and cordial with Uyghur colleagues, clearly explained to a Chinese businessman from Beijing that, despite appearances, the Han dominate. Among members of the Party, even more than in the Autonomous Region of Tibet, the Uyghurs have never had real supremacy in their region. They are integrated into the Chinese system.

Demography alone explains Xinjiang’s intense Sinicization. Before the Second World War, Chinese civil servants and merchants were not numerous. In the early 1940s, there were about 4 million minority people in this province, and 200,000 Han. The Chinese increased from 6% in 1949 to 40% in 1962. In 1982, they were 5 million to 6 million Uyghurs and 1 million other Turkic minorities. In 1988, the Uyghur still dominated numerically, but this is no longer the case. The Chinese are thus peacefully invading Central Asia, and Uyghurs are now a minority in their own cities. In 2002, the population of Xinjiang officially reached 17 million, including 42% Han. This percentage does not reflect current demographic Han pre-eminence, and it will be difficult to promote Uyghur nationalism in a region dominated numerically, economically, politically, and militarily by the Han.

Yet, the Uyghur, according to Marxist terminology, are a “nationality.” The Uyghur mother tongue still plays an important role, but Chinese language dominates in Xinjiang. Since 1991, numerous Turkic peoples have acquired independence in Central Asia. Uzbekistan, 75% Uzbek, supports the supremacy of languages in constructing an identity and wants to be modern. Uzbek is currently romanized. Clothing is also a symbol of ethnic identity, but modernity also Sinicizes the Uyghurs. In Xinjiang, the religious criteria in the constitution of Uyghur identity is more pertinent. Islam has weight in Xinjiang. In Burma, it seems that the majority of the Buddhist “clergy” is pro-government, as in Xinjiang. An improbable change of regime in both countries will most probably benefit neither Burmese bonzes nor Uyghur imams.

For Zangwill (d. 1926), the collective sentiment of nationality attains its full intensity in cases of danger. This is no longer true in China. According to Roy’s theory of groups, Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, and Uyghurs are ethnic groups more by a political process than natural evolution. The question is whether a group can be powerful without possessing the conditions for political unity. Even if the Chinese give certain privileges to the Uyghurs, the creation of a Soviet-type autonomous region has had the result of suppressing real autonomy. The formation of the new republics of Central Asia was unexpected, and various ethnic identities finally emerged. This is not the case of the Uyghurs. Their identity is centered on an imaginary national minority membership, on a history shaped by a Chinese vision taught in state schools, and on myths based on historical novels in Uyghur.

Chinese/Uyghur relationships are “mixed” in term of cordiality. In 1992, in Kashgar, Uyghurs were aggressive toward Chinese residents, the harassment of Chinese in the marketplaces being particularly evident during Ramadan and Muslim feast days. Now Uyghur civil servants or police often harass Uyghurs more than other groups.

The image of the conquering Muslim warrior developed by Max Weber does not apply to modern China. Since September 2001, one might have expected a “jihadic” revival but this did not occur. Nearly all cities in Xinjiang have Han majorities: 90% of the population of Urumchi is Chinese, and in Aksu the percentage is close to 80%. Measures to control local populations are severe, and the Chinese no longer fear Uyghurs except in the countryside and that rarely. A bazaar located in the center of Kashgar (Kundervaza Street and its side streets) behind the old mosque, the most typical part of this city, might be demolished as part of a plan to renovate the city. How can the Kashgari oppose the eradication of their historic bazaar? It was finally demolished in 2003 to make room for Chinese shopping malls. Modernization and health issues are the key reasons given for urban transformation, being the same in Xinjiang, Kunming, and Oxen Street in Beijing for the upcoming Olympic Games. The consequence is the eradication of history. The Uyghurs offer a certain passive resistance called the “national liberation movement.” The Chinese call nationalism “terrorism.”

 Unlike the Hui, Uyghur religion is more homogeneous. Imams in Xinjiang are officially appointed; however, Xinjiang is the only region of China where Muslim extremism could exist. The Taliban were able to recruit Uyghur fighters, some of
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whom were detained at Guantanamo Bay. American authorities classify 30% as “terrorists.” In August 2004, the American government announced that the twenty-two Uyghurs listed in Cuba will not be sent to China.

Sufism in Xinjiang?

We know the historical link of Sufi Order Aqthagliq and Qurathagliq (“White and Black Mountainers”) along the Silk Road. Kashgar was linked to Gansu and Hezhou (Linxia), a city nearly 3,000 years old, where I twice visited the tomb of the Qadiriya Shaykh Qi Jingyi (1665–1719) who is buried in a large mausoleum (Dagongbei). Secrecy among Xinjiang’s brotherhoods does not allow knowledge about Uyghur tariqa. It is strange to observe that in Kashgar, one of the principal centers of Uyghur Sufi Islamic culture, in a little less than a week of persistent questioning, I was unable to interview a single Sufi imam. Torres confirms the difficulties of having direct interviews with them. Elsewhere, in Ningxia, Gansu, and Yunnan, no fewer than ten Jahariya imams were questioned at length in their mosques about their tariqa Order. Some are masters, such as Suo Chenzhong in Tongxin and Ma Songli in Xiji; others are less known, such as Luo Changhu of Lanzhou. Qadiriya and Khufiya imams of Linxia were also interviewed in 2003. In this old city, there are even possible descendants of the Shaykh founder of the Khufiya Order, Ma Laichi (d. 1766).

One cannot deny the existence of Sufism in the region and its crucial role in Xinjiang’s Islamization and nationalism. Between 1992 and 2004, a Sufi renaissance has been occurring in neighboring Uzbekistan. Following the independence of the Central Asian republics, the borders have opened, and culture and music revived. The Koran has played an important role in this revival. A solid Sufi structure exists in Xinjiang but silence is the rule. After being welcomed in Lanzhou by the guardians of Ma Mingxin’s mausoleum (1719–81), I experienced difficulties in visiting a small Khufiya mosque at Urumchi. Its members accepted only disciples of their order, and especially not a stranger favorable to the Jahariya Order, their enemy in the past.

First of all, in China, no Muslim, even Sufi, likes to attract attention. Sufis are thus only minimally visible, except perhaps in Linxia. Few Chinese have a clear idea about Sufism, its numeric importance, and politico-religious influence. Sufism is also sometimes wrongly classified as a “New Religion.” An intelligent Koranic student from Tonghai in Yunnan, even though living nearly three years close to a Jahariya mosque, knew nothing about the Jahariya Order and even thought that its teaching was Yihewani or related to Ikhwani reformers. Koranic students from Xinjiang, immersed in the same context of the Islamic Association, are not interested in the history of Islam in China.

Regional identities are pertinent. There is rather strong fidelity of Uyghur imams toward the Chinese government. In Xinjiang, as in the Autonomous Region of Tibet, one encounters numerous cadres, including imams, who, for personal, familial, or financial reasons, are more attached to the status quo than some of their Chinese colleagues. The Uyghur police is often “more royalist than the king.” However, Uyghurs do not feel a great love for the hammer and sickle, as at other times was the case in the rest of Central Asia. Contrary to Urumchi, few posters are displayed in Kashgar and Aksu. These show Chairman Mao, Deng, and Jiang Zemin together. It would be interesting to know if portraits of President Hu Jintao have recently been displayed in Xinjiang. In contrast, on the spot of a demolished mosque, in the middle of modern Chengdu, Sichuan, a large poster shows a huge modern red sickle instead of Communist leaders.

If the police and military increase pressure on Uyghurs, they may become the only Muslims in China capable of promoting jihad. Economic factors also play a large role in developing radicalism. The economy of the Autonomous Region is in good shape; however, news from Iraq is sometimes alarming. In January 2003, the new resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan was said to be linked to the Iraq War, and the United States characterized Uyghur nationalists as “terrorists.”

For Rashid, Sufism places no confidence in political parties. The Jahariya Order, with its million members the strongest in China, is in reality a giant with clay feet weakened by internal struggles. Since 1949, the two Jahariya sub-groups of Ma Liesun and Ma Tengai (d. 1991)—also present in Xinjiang—are reported to be close to the Party. Thus, the Islamic Association of China may develop or restrain Jahariya Sufism.

In Tongxin, in the center of the Autonomous Region of Ningxia, an 85-year-old imam, Suo Chengzhong, has an impressive knowledge of Jahariya Sufism. He survived thirteen years in labor camps from 1958 to 1971. He is linked to the 77-year-old Sufi master, Ma Liesun, a former high-ranking cadre educated in the Soviet Union also in re-education in recent years.

Islam, Imams, and Saints

Islam in Xinjiang is general, though most imams are politically pro-government. With the massive arrival of Chinese in this region at the end of the twentieth
century, the observation of Onesime Reclus is no longer accurate. In 1913, all or nearly all inhabitants were Muslim. In 1953, Beijing created a powerful association to control the Uyghurs: the Islamic Association of Xinjiang, headed by a faithful friend, Burhan Shahidi. He has the same name as the president of Kuomintang in Xinjiang who turned Communist in 1949. Unlike the rest of China, where many are ignorant about Islam, most Han in Xinjiang know particular terms such as qingzhensi (mosques). There are approximately 40,000 mosques in all of China; nearly half are found in Xinjiang, but after prayers they are often locked. More than a hundred still exist in Kashgar.

Religious practice has been reactivated, and Islam occupies a central position in constructing and perpetuating Uyghur identity. However, it appears that the acculturation process (Sinicization) already studied, more than in the 1990s, counteracts strong Uyghur Islamic faith. The Uyghurs are part of Central Asia; their books, traditions (hadith), Koranic schools, and mausoleums largely perpetuate this identity. Like the Hui, they are in majority Hanafite Sunni.

The Uyghurs in general read Koranic Arabic better than the Han. After the Cultural Revolution, the Arabic-Persian alphabet replaced the Roman alphabet that Mao Zedong’s linguists had used to transcribe Uyghur. A translation of the Koran into Uyghur was printed by the government, as a sign of goodwill toward this minority and their religion. An Islamic Institute linked to the Islamic Association of China exists in Urumchi.

There is a larger number of Hui and Han than Uyghurs educated in prestigious Arab universities. With the improvement of education, a young generation in Xinjiang is completely bilingual in Chinese and in Uyghur. Concerning their faith, there are some differences between the Uyghurs and the Hui. For the Uyghurs it is unthinkable not to have a religion, and they often ask fellow Muslims “Are you a good Muslim?” This question does not come to the mind of the Sinicized Hui.

Imams and Rites of Passage

Young imams in charge of large mosques are numerous in other provinces; this is almost impossible in Xinjiang. With some exceptions, imams are poorly lodged and badly paid in China, one of the reasons why a young imam from Oxen Street in Beijing left his post. Now married, he no longer exercises his ministry.

The daughter of the elderly imam of the large Uyghur mosque at Urumchi, Shagou, did not want her father to be disturbed. As in Turkey and Central Asia, Uyghur women enjoyed more freedom than their Chinese “sisters” prior to 1949. She knows that her father’s apartment is large and unique. She imposed her tall stature to impress and bar entrance to the family residence in the mosque and acted with great authority. In Uyghur society, women are important; however, in a mosque, such an attitude is uncommon. This imam in Urumchi lost no time after prayer. His age (he is seventy) does not prevent him from leading most of the five prayers. Sometimes his disciples must help him to get up at the end of the salat because his knees pain him. After prayer, he joins his family and leaves by a side door near the mihrab marking the direction of Mecca. A private entry connects with his magnificent apartment. His daughter will probably not find such an apartment again, under any regime, in the center of the city, two steps from a great hotel, The Hongfu, the preferred residence of high-ranking cadres on visits in Urumchi. Is there a certain analogy between this important Uyghur imam and the Tajiks of yesteryear? Rashid noted that their “localism” serves “personal interests.” Like the Tajiks in the 1980s, Uyghurs currently accuse their imams of being Communists in private but no criticism of the government can be heard.

Iman Khorum (K)hoja of Aidkah Mosque in Kashgar, President of the Islamic Association of Xinjiang, was victim of an assassination attempt in May 1996; however, his accusers did not boycott the mosque. Most Uyghurs are true believers and go to the mosque frequently. Many do not care about politics and do not judge their imams.

The Uyghur community, as do all Muslims, has its “rites of initiation.” The principal Uyghur rites (which fall into the ethnological category of “crises rites”) are birth, circumcision, marriage, the Feast of the Sacrifice (Korban or Idul-kebir in Arabic), the end of fasting, and funeral ceremonies.

At Aidkah, in Kashgar on 14 January 2003, one day after the death of an old Uyghur, in the courtyard the body lay in a coffin belonging to the mosque in which it was later transported to the cemetery. Following the afternoon prayer, Asr, an imam recited the service for the dead. Many attendants offered condolences to the family. The Great Imam after praying left quickly. The family and friends, accompanied by the officiating cleric, went to the cemetery. The body was wrapped in a simple shroud and placed in the grave, and the coffin was returned to the mosque as usual. This funeral displayed no great differences between Uyghur and Hui rituals.

As in the Islamic world from Pakistan to Indonesia, to China, Muslims keep a record of those who give them gifts. This enables hosts to avoid a blunder in their
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return gifts. Pilaft, as in Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, is a convivial ritual dish, whereas _nan_ (a flat bread like that of India) is everyday food.

In Xinjiang, as in Central Asia, worshiping saints forms part of the cultural traditions. Cults may center round the tombs of imams, Shaykhs, Sufi saints, or “perfect” men. For example, northeast of Kashgar, the mausoleum of Abakh (K)hoja, dating from the seventeenth century, is still a place of pilgrimage.

Islam is segmented in Central Asia, but official Islam is rather strong. In Xinjiang, religion is more monolithic. Sufi brotherhoods exist in Chinese Turkistan. The dominant Islam of the Islamic Association of Xinjiang probably helps the Chinese government in its fight against separatism.

Uyghurs in Central Asia’s New Geopolitical Context

The Uyghurs are distinct from the Han in Xinjiang, but the state always occupies a central position as it did in Soviet Turkistan. In Uzbekistan, most Uyghur separatist movements currently legitimize Chinese state policy. In Xinjiang, most Uyghur imams are pro-Chinese. Thus, in 2004, how could Xinjiang be “ready to separate” as a Haji Uyghur stated in Kashgar in January 2003? Unlike the Hui, the mother tongue of the Uyghurs is not Chinese. Whether they are good citizens or not, “loving their country,” the Uyghurs have a different culture and are geopolitically distinct.

Cybercafes, numerous in Sichuan, do not exist in Xinjiang. Internet connections are closely watched everywhere in China. All of the new Central Asian republics, except part of Tajikistan, speak a Turkic language. Films, television, and compact discs enter in massive quantities from Turkey, directly and indirectly. Pan-Turkism is rather strong, but its political influence is weak as Istanbul is far away.

The vogue for English in the region existed before the implantation of American oil companies. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have received military and aid investments amounting to millions of US dollars. Without speaking of the Chinese, the main forces present are Islamists and Russian, and the Uyghurs thus find themselves isolated. Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia have no intention of meddling in China’s internal affairs. Beijing controls the Central Asian republics politically and economically. In November 2002, the Chinese, for the first time, participated in military maneuver in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, new treaties linking Russia and China have a rather similar approach to Islam.

The Chinese economic model attracts. In 1995, China allowed Kazakhstan to use the port of Lianyungang, north of Shanghai. Russian influence, especially during the 1990s, suffered a decline in the region, whereas the Chinese play an increasing role in Central Asia. Several million Han are in Siberia. Hundreds of thousands now live in the key economic region of Kazakhstan. These factors are all a brake on the idea of greater autonomy for Xinjiang.

The Uyghurs cannot count on their diaspora in Kazakhstan of nearly 200,000 East of Almaty and along the Syr Darya River. In Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, they number 40,000. In parallel with Yughur nationalism, the independence of the Central Asian republics was “too rapid and too easy” according to a young Uzbek Sufi cited by Rashid. Roy qualifies this liberation in Central Asia as “sudden and non-desired” (1997: 8). Even if people such as the Uzbeks are favorable to Uyghurs in China, they understand and speak the Turkic languages of Xinjiang. Uyghur is understandable to educated Turkic peoples. The military and religious logistics were probably furnished in part by Pakistan. Uyghur separatism has apparently no leaders in Xinjiang.

Urunchi, Kashgar, Aksu, and Korla are industrial cities. Turfan is a large oil center. The promising zones of Aksu and Kashgar display Xinjiang’s increasing development. Oil reserves in the region are enormous, and pipelines are under construction. After the oil industry, light industries, the textiles, and the agro-dietary sector have a major place in the economy. Heavy industry has a more modest position. All these enterprises, 80% state-owned, are principally tributaries for Han labor, qualified human resources in unlimited numbers, and this accentuates political-religious troubles. Uyghurs facing this impressive development in their own region do not benefit from it. The region’s internationalization slows political tensions, and Central Asian governments collaborate with China, the second world power.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The Chinese have established the Shanghai Forum, which includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. A meeting took place in July 2000. In 2001, Uzbekistan became a full member. This treaty freezes Uyghur separatism and could be dissuasive for its diaspora, hundreds of thousands of “brothers” in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. This diaspora includes around half a million people, assimilated for the most part into the Uzbek community in Ferghana but also by the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan.

Under Chinese political dominance in Central Asia, fewer Uyghur newspapers are being published. The Institute of Uyghur Studies at Almaty has been closed,
merging with the Institute of Oriental Studies, which is too large to promote Uyghur culture. Uyghur art, literature, and Islamic culture have, however, received a certain dynamism in Kazakhstan.

In 2003, Uyghurs all the same remained optimistic and expected some support from the United Nations and the United States. According to an international poll of city-dwellers, taken by the BBC in February 2004, China is the only country in the world liking American policy and economic development. Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for their economic interests, also sided with the USA during the Iraq War. However, the entire region, including Xinjiang, suffers a post-war syndrome that is unfavorable to the Uyghurs. For Bates Gill, Director of Chinese Department of the US Center for Strategic and International Studies, the improving relations of China with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) also penalizes the Uyghur separatist movement.

Central Asia

There is an undeniable international interest in Central Asia. The Iraq War reinforced the still strong Taliban, and a Taliban recruitment campaign was launched at the beginning of 2003. Their alliance with former Prime Minister Gulbadin Hekmatyar was not excluded from this mix. On 3 February 2003, eighty Taliban fought against American forces at Spin Boldak.

Oil reserves in Xinjiang could incite Uyghurs to demand greater autonomy. Who dares support them? Are American companies already present in Central Asia, such as Chevron and Unocal, interested in Xinjiang?

Stable equilibrium in the region, particularly in Afghanistan, is not guaranteed, even if a gas pipeline is planned. The designated Iraqi President of the Choura, Mohammed R. Shahir has said that “the law of the gun dominates.” If Iraq remains unstable, Central Asia and, indirectly, Xinjiang will suffer. In July 2004, Iraqis took back control of Iraq, but stability is not yet in sight.

A certain number of Muslim separatists in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang still contest the central authority of Beijing. According to trustworthy sources, the Uyghur conflict caused significant loss of life and human rights violations. Should we believe that various separatist groups are increasing their coordination? Economics is a major issue. The risks of a jihad will certainly diminish if China succeeds in maintaining a good standard of living for everyone in Xinjiang, superior to that of neighboring countries. Beijing knows that separatism could become an important menace in the long-term issue affecting China’s political stability. Separatism in Xinjiang supports the independence movement in Tibet and ethnic agitation in Inner Mongolia.

Common ethnic and religious problems in Xinjiang and Tibet are confirmed by the official voyage of the Dalai Lama’s brother in 2002, which centered on the Autonomous Regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. In 2003, in a private interview, the Assistant Head of the Police for Foreigners (Waidian) at Aksu declared: “Our country has enemies. We must always act as if we have enemies in Xinjiang.”

For Rashid (1994), there is no model of “central-Asian” nationalism based on history and culture. It is thus difficult for the Uyghurs to progress toward separatism, not only because of the region’s oil reserves but also out of “principle” will attempt by all means to ensure that a Uyghur model, which might be suitable for other minorities, never sees the light of day. It is certain that minzu conceptualization, close to the Soviet model, unifies all of China’s minorities. This concept does not take into account ethnic and cultural differences, such as Uyghur traditions. There is thus no space for social and ethnic diversity. A Kashgar company director said: “I believed in minzu zhuyi (the power of national minorities), but it is not valid. So I became a true Muslim.”

Olivier Roy’s thesis about the separation between Islam and culture is arguable. There is an intimate relation between religion and music in Uyghur culture. However, as noticed in Central Asia (Roy 1997: 9–11), there is a certain Uyghur criticism of the concept of nationality (natsionalnost in Russian or minzu in Chinese) and concerning the Chinese multi-ethnic concept applied to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region:

Break up the large linguistic and cultural groupings founded on language (a Turkic language) or religion (Islam). To accomplish this, Stalin (as did Mao) placed nationality in the forefront . . . a multi-ethnic empire, a way of management merging different populations into one and the same matrix . . . capitals where the population was always in the minority . . . economic dependency on the center . . . the foundations of a nation-state are thus imposed against a strict political identity . . . the identity becomes univocal: censuses require that each person declares his nationality from a list imposed by the state . . . the imported nation-state model was only an element inside a project, much more vast and radical, of social engineering, which would make it obsolete by integration in the (Chinese) mold . . . The Communist Party has, of course, a political monopoly.

In this analysis of Central Asia, it is striking to see the analogies with the Chinese minzu system. All the ethnic groups, including the Uyghur, are fused
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into the same mold. All the cities of Xinjiang, not just the capital as in the former
Soviet republics, have majority Han populations. Since 1997, relations between
the Han and Uyghurs have not always been good. Uyghurs control neither their
social space nor their administration. The small number of Uyghurs who have
joined the Communist Party is insufficient to eliminate the indifference of the Han
toward Xinjiang’s minorities. For Gordon Chang, a Taiwanese, the Uyghurs are
more “diluted” in their territory than before. This polemic author believes that the
Falungong is no more than a “light comedy” and that the Uyghur question is a
“tragedy.” Many Uyghurs would like more autonomy. It is no longer the case. As
in the Autonomous Region of Tibet, by means of Sinicization, the Chinese cadres
want to accelerate modernization, which does not fit well with developing minorities.
Chinese modernization combines Western ideas under the umbrella of structured
and unstructured “Sino-centric” organizations. Thus, Chinese nationalism weighs
heavily on modernization and future of the minorities—the Uyghurs, in particular
(Gladney 1996: 90). Despite Xinjiang’s rich natural resources, the Uyghurs are not
supported and their religion is not a government priority. It thus seems necessary
to look toward the borders to better understand the Uyghurs.

International Problems

Chinese Muslims are affected by current problems besetting Islam. However, the
Hui are not directly involved in Muslim “fundamentalism.” For Maris Gillette, there
is no danger of a Hui separatist movement “as some of the uprisings that occurred
in Xinjiang during the Deng era.”

In the eighteenth century, the Qing Dynasty removed influential Uyghur chiefs
and their families to Peking. In the nineteenth century, Yakub Beg (1820-77), in
conflict with China between 1862 and 1877, fortified Kashgar, at a crossroads near
the Khyber Pass, Lahore, and South Asia. Kashgaria was recognized by Turkey.
The British were ready to side with them in order to block Russia, always interested
in Central Asia. Kashgar was an independent state from 1866 to 1878, even now
instilling Uyghur nationalism in the region. Following Turkistan’s annexation by
the Chinese many Uyghurs were deported. Not until 1884 was Turkistan conquered,
becoming Xinjiang (“The New Frontier”).

In Xinjiang, the Uyghurs consider themselves to be in their own country.
The repression of students and the Han population by partly Uyghur troops was
paradoxical but logical. A large majority of the students were also Han. Dreaming

of a Western-style democracy, too theoretical and sometimes inapplicable in Asia,
these university students were overly confident after their long protest in Tiananmen
Square and their short talk with Mikhail Gorbachev, who did not restrain them.

In Beijing, Uyghur students do not publicize their ethnic origin. The presence of
an activist and key student leader Wu’er Kaixi (Ukeresh, “The Torrent” in Uyghur)
in Tiananmen Square in May-June 1989 is well known, but his ethnic origin was
undisclosed. He himself did not want to lay claim to his Uyghur origins for, as
he said, “I would not have been credible.” The psychological difficulty of being
a Uyghur outside Xinjiang is clearly apparent in such a statement. Wu’er Kaixi, a
highly educated and “Sinicized” Uyghur, speaks Mandarin fluently and behaves
like a Han, thus preferring to conceal his nationality. In a BBC interview on 3 June
2004, he was proud to mention that he had been able to interrupt the Prime Minister
Li Peng during a meeting with students in 1989.

Lu Xun said after the events in 1926 that this was not a conclusion but a new
beginning. A student of the period now living in the United States recognized, in
another BBC interview, that human rights had improved as a consequence of the
Tiananmen events. Wu’er Kaixi, on the other hand, acknowledged the lack of
current interest in the past student demonstration. In another meeting in Taipei
with a reporter of Le Figaro published on 4 June 2004, he refused to acknowledge
the failure of June 1989 and also mentioned his desire to return to Beijing without
conditions.

Mosques and religious schools in Chinese Turkistan are too often considered
centers of hostility to the regime. Xinjiang’s places of worship have periodically
been closed, and religious militants arrested and harassed. The Uyghurs, very
sensitive to injustice, are sometimes able to launch a jihad movement not existent
elsewhere in China, but there are other solutions. Sayed Abdullah (Saidov) Nuri (b.
1947), one of the founders of the Islamic Renaissance of Tajikistan, believes that
fundamentalism does not promote Islam. However, the present Western focus on
“terrorism” has perverse effects. The Chinese government has sometimes persecuted
Xinjiang’s Muslims and that caused a massive emigration of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan
in the 1950s. In a region with a strong regional identity, in April 1992, in Baren,
not far from Kashgar, twenty persons were killed, and fifty wounded, during an
uprising. Chinese authorities accused a man trained in Afghanistan, Abdul Kasim,
to have fomented it. This affair was considered seriously, and China quickly closed
the Karakorum (Qaraqorum) access toward Pakistan.
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Since then, reports of bomb attacks and assassinations committed in Xinjiang’s cities have followed one upon another. Three distinct bomb attacks in Beijing in spring 1997 have been attributed to Muslim separatists and marked the extension of violence. These actions, directed against Chinese soldiers, civil servants, and pro-Beijing Muslim sympathizers have been carried out in Xinjiang over the years. Generalized street fighting and massive arrests of presumed separatists have been reported. The Bureau of Public Security (Gonganju) has always retained considerable power in criminal procedures: arrest, investigation, and judgment are sometimes carried without charges being laid.

The Uyghurs, a majority in Xinjiang, have been targeted in the last ten years by Chinese authorities and have no international backers, such as those of Wang Juntao and his inflexible spouse, Hou Xiaotian. The events of 11 September 2001 marked a turning-point, and the Uyghur nationalist movement and freedom fighters were systematically labeled “terrorist,” allowing intensive police action against the Muslim majority. The United States now considers the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan a terrorist movement. Although Uyghurs are not always angels—the wearing of a dagger was a masculine ethnic trait—“terrorism” symbolizes another kind of threat. Some Western human rights NGOs accused China in the war on terrorism in a manner similar to Jakarta categorizing the Aceh separatists as Al-Qaeda terrorists. James Millward (Washington 2004) notes “the notion of an imminent terrorist threat in Xinjiang or from Uyghur groups is exaggerated.” For him, violent activity has declined since the late 1990s.

The Uyghur nationalist movement, a part of emergent national identities, was based in Kazakhstan. Hundreds of Uyghurs have been trained in the camps of the Jamaat-i-Islami. Forty were taken prisoner during the war in Afghanistan, and twenty detainees at Guantanamo Bay are classified as “terrorists” by American authorities. The situation improved in 2004, but little is known about the future of these detainees. Uyghur nationalists form the Liberation Front of Uyghuristan. This movement claims a membership of 5,000 militants in Central Asia. Amnesty International notes an exceptionally high proportion of executions, in response to regional separatist activities. These executions have fomented acts of violence, for they are not always preceded by a formal judgment (www.mondes-rebelles.fr).

Distant Chinese Turkistan has long been economically neglected. Deng Xiaoping, however, promised to the autonomous regions of the minorities more autonomy within the framework of national unity. China is working to develop a modern road network, and a new Urumchi-Kashgar railway was built in 1996.

Civil aviation has also progressed in the region. Central Asia has opened its oil wells to Chinese investors, and Chinese culture is spreading. The Central Asian economy did not recover consequently many new republics in the region are listed among the rare Muslim countries unable to send their annual quota of pilgrims to Mecca. The economic level of Central Asia is low compared to Xinjiang, which, in its own right, has the greatest oil reserves in China (Tarim and Dzungaria), lithium, and mica. Its coal reserves are the third largest in the country, and its water reserves are immense. In first place, Xinjiang’s oil creates an exceptional potential for economic development, but it needs peace and security to be harmoniously developed.

The second type of trans-border community, Islam, was proposed for regrouping the peoples of Central Asia. China has a long history of peaceful diplomatic relations with Islam, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Contrary to the British, French, Dutch, and Japanese, the Chinese were never imperialistic in Southeast Asia. With the exception of the troubled period of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government attempted to present an ideal image of Islam in China to the Muslim world, in particular in the Middle East, a geopolitical center. Though political Islam could spread rapidly in Central Asia, following years of religious repression, it is not the case. Several reasons explain that Pan-Islamism also could not rally support from a large part of the population. The large number of Sunni groups and Sufi brotherhoods do not offer favorable terrain for a planned organization of religions. An Islamic revival has not yet occurred in Central Asia. Islamic models offered by Iran’s Shia and the Taliban do not respect the expectations of moderate Sunni branches, a majority in the region. Finally, political authorities have left little room for the development of a militant Islam.

However, the Islamic world, often divided, has difficulty in resolving its internal conflicts and was unable to reach a consensus before the declaration of war on Iraq in 2003. Must one believe that Ahmed Rashid in Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism (1994) was very optimistic for the hopes of peace in Central Asia, thus creating better conditions in the “sensitive” region of Xinjiang? It is necessary to know if a thinker like Ajem Chaudary d’al-Muhajiroun is right when he believes that, according to the Koran, there are two kinds of jihad: that which responds to terrorism by terrorism would be justified in his opinion. Is this thesis acceptable since China qualifies the Revolutionary National Front of East Turkistan as terrorist? For Rashid, the true crisis in this part of the world is the state, and disturbances in public order do not favor Islam.
Chapter 7

By Way of a Conclusion: Perspectives on Islam’s Future in China

The term “ethno-religious” group accurately characterizes the Hui minority that embraces Islam. Community is a collective ideal, an invisible universal solidarity, an esprit de corps (asqabiya). It is composed of relatives, a notion that also fits well with their “Sinicity.” The Koran and the omni-directional symbol of Mecca, the place of pilgrimage, are essential. The resumption of pilgrimages to Mecca in the 1980s marked an important stage of cultural reassertion.

In 1997, the state vainly attempted to reduce the number of pilgrims when economic difficulties in the countries of Central Asia did not allow them to reach their annual Hajj quota. In sharp contrast, the Chinese economy functions well and benefits the country’s Muslim minorities, making the pilgrimage possible again. Thus, numerous Hui and Uyghurs have become Haji since the opening up of China that brought modernization and improved international relations. These two minorities, however, must accept local restrictions. In China, state and religion are not linked together as idealized in Muslim countries. Islam is a minority factor. The Koran nevertheless guides Hui traditional life distinct from the ethic of the Han majority and far from Western modernity. Hui Muslims are well integrated in Chinese society thanks to their Confucian spirit and their fluency in Chinese, their mother tongue.

Arabic has long been a dead language in China, although there a slight revival has occurred in Beijing’s diplomatic circles. Yet, since the 1980s, a certain number of imams are once again learning the language in order to join the Islamic world order and to communicate with their Arab “brothers.”

Language and education are important components of identity; however, minorities such as the Uyghurs want more than the right to attend government Chinese
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schools and wish to speak their own language in the Uyghur Autonomous Region. According to many in Xinjiang, the judicial and political rights of the Uyghurs are not truly respected. Violent reactions by the younger generation against the Han are sometimes reported in the region. Jihad does not exist among the Hui in China but is said to have existed in the past in Xinjiang. Given Chinese society’s secular orientation, conflicts can still arise with its Muslim population.

Geopolitics and Sinicization

In converting to Islam around the ninth century, Uyghurs broke with their past. The other important change occurred in 1884, with the transformation of East Turkistan into a province of China. In 1991, a third key date, the Soviet republics of Central Asia became independent states in which Islam plays an essential role. This independence, too easy and sometimes undesired, gave impetus to Uyghur separatism. There is a growing Sinicization linked to intense Han immigration. This wave of the Chinese population recently brought the percentage of Han to more than 50% in the region for the first time. Han migrants are rarely mentioned by local authorities (Gladney 2004), but the Uyghurs are no longer the majority in their Autonomous Region. If a referendum were to take place, a self-governing platform would not be assured of victory.

Philippe Massonnet (2000: 194–96) describes “potentially violent national questions . . . particularly at the far reaches of the empire, in the so-called ‘minority regions’ of Xinjiang and Tibet . . . Prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic, Chinese Communists planned that these regions would be independent members of a federation of republics. But when the Communists came to power, Mao vigorously opposed the separation of Han Chinese from the fifty or so ‘national minorities’ . . . Segregation between Han and non-Han exists in all cities in the Xinjiang region. . . . Urumchi is becoming increasingly Chinese. Minarets are disappearing behind office buildings, shopping centers, and karaoke bars, all covered with ideograms”. Chinese Muslims are immersed in the acculturation process of Sinicization, but Uyghurs often resist it.

In parallel to Han migration, since 1996, China and its friendly countries, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan make up the “Shanghai Five” that tightly control Muslim activism. However, three years after its creation in the year 2000, Bishkek, their counter-terrorism center near Kashgar, which was intended to coordinate intelligence and military force, did not yet seem to function in the framework of the renamed Shanghai Cooperation Organization. According to Jiang Zemin, former President of the Military Commission (Junwei), national security cannot damage the fundamental interests of other countries. In this system of Chinese security, nationalities, Uyghurs must follow the sacred principle of “unity” complementary to a Sinicization that goes unmentioned. China’s new leadership did not introduce policy changes in this field.

At the gate of Xinjiang there are still sources of ethnic or fundamentalist instability. In matters of institutional religion, the psychological adoption of Muslims to China is collective (possibly Confucianist); in matters of belief it is individual. Society and private convictions are distinct.

In 1993, bombs exploded in Kashgar as an expression of discontent. In Xinjiang, since the Islamist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States, Sinicization has been reinforced. In the wake of the American “war on terrorism,” China hopes to obtain support for its repressive actions by sanctioning US policy. The principles of unity, law, and order are primordial in determining government policy in the autonomous regions. The fight against Uyghur jihadi terrorism is an American priority, and China thus finds itself faced with a dilemma. Should it follow the policy of the most powerful country in the world, the United States, or take a less anti-Islamic position? China uses the concept of the “war on terrorism” to its advantage, without taking into account the Uyghur point of view in Xinjiang. To believe that jihadi could one day develop is unthinkable and intolerable for the Han. Chinese society and, particularly its Han majority, is wholly opposed to sharia law but have never received a formal Islamic fatwa. Ahmed Rashid, notes optimistically that “Central Asia is almost certain to become the new global battleground.” Dissident unity is growing in strength, and their motives are converging; morale among national troops in the region is variable.

With respect to borders and for all Muslim minorities, the Chinese government is proud of its success, in particular sustained economic development since 1980. But, from a religious point of view, even if many muls are “patriotic,” to satisfy the state as in Xinjiang and in Yunnan, that is not enough. The global irrational world and China devote a disproportionate importance to vital economic questions and do not always look at standards of living and social well-being. On the other hand, many Muslims remain attached to other values. The conflict of interest between development and religion in Xinjiang is an ongoing disagreement.

Religion and language are important cultural traits, but the determination of the Uyghurs also counts. The Chinese nation Sinicizes and transcends citizenship,
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but Kashgari pride, forged by history and the landscapes of desert and oasis, goes unrecognized. The Han are always the “big brothers,” but only part of Xinjiang’s population accepts this fact. Chinese law forbids ethnocentrism, but political relations in favor of the majority are always evident. China places the unity of all nationalities (tuanjie) in the forefront but does not always apply its good legal and political intentions. One can speak of Han discretionary power, but local practices can deviate from the central line. Sinicization is thus “hierarchizing” and not truly egalitarian and democratic. Western countries, themselves often ethnocentric, would like to apply everywhere a “globalized” type of democracy and egalitarianism to the whole of Asia without jeopardizing their economies.

Almost thirty years have passed since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the reforms that brought an extraordinary modernity to China. After Mao Zedong’s death on 9 September 1976, the Deng Xiaoping era brought rapid changes. The oldest civilization in the world is now gripped by the idea of unity and acculturation in a modern framework of sustained economic development, but Chinese nationalism brings less hope for a dialogue with the minorities at the periphery such as the Uyghurs. The world is tending to become more uniform through globalization, but China is modernizing in its own way and keeping its identity through the Sinicization process. This has been an unchanging program over centuries. Sinicization and its complement, the unity of all the minorities (tuanjie), remain national priorities. The “Great Union” has once again become fashionable. Forming an integral part of the just and constant (zhongyong) Confucian Doctrine of the Mean, the concept of national unity is again associated with Confucianism. In particular, the principle of national integration remains unchanged. The creation of a harmonious society is also a criterion of good governance. A “comfortable society” (xiakang shehui) is the current recipe for unifying all Chinese citizens, including Muslims.

Is there a cultural imbalance between the majority and minorities? The Uyghurs are ethnically different. Their mother tongue, contrary to the Hui, is not Chinese. However, religion, controlled by the Islamic Association of Xinjiang, is generally faithful to the regime, because the majority of imams are pro-China. To compare different Asian countries, China and Burma have roughly the same policy toward Islam but use different approaches to deal with the question of religion and society. Burma’s leaders use Buddhism as a tool to control society. China, without mentioning it, manipulates Sinicization and tightly controls the media. China is much more liberal. In Myanmar, it is difficult to find more than two similar newspapers, local daily papers alike and a weekly review in Burmese and English. In Xinjiang, Uyghur television and radio programs exist. However, Turkish films and, more recently, programs broadcast in the Turkic languages of Central Asia that form a cultural reference point. Official programs are judged to be too “governmental.” Many Hui share the PRC’s standard of modernization, but it is not clear that the Uyghur majority accepts Han material indices of modernization. It is true that Uyghur music succeeds in transmitting Uyghur culture. Uyghur cadres implement Sinicization and modernization. However, the clothing and the Uyghur cap, veils and beards (prohibited for the civil servants and teachers) keep tradition on track. This is not enough in the face of Chinese language, which shapes the society. It is also difficult to find suitable employment in Xinjiang if the language of the majority is not mastered.

By Way of a Conclusion: Perspectives on Islam’s Future in China

Confucianism, often placed in the forefront for the Hui, has little power over the Uyghurs even if the young, bilingual generation, educated in universities, is Sinicized. It is certain that, to allow a minority to preserve its ethnic identity, the principle of autonomy satisfies the national spirit, but an integration policy can constrain minority nationalities. For the Uyghurs, autonomy is theoretical, and a large number would like a practical and serious study of this question.

Uyghurs and Kazakhs are ethnically more homogeneous than the Hui. However, at the level of society, the concepts of minority (shaoshu minzu) and Sinicization structure daily life of all Muslim minorities in China. It is a legal, rigid, and complex system, and Hui and Uyghur minority cadres who implement Sinicization rarely take part of real political power. Thus one understands that districts such as Kashgar, which has a long history of Uyghur sovereignty, are regions where an eventual separatism could be revived.

As long as Muslim activism and “separatism” are equated, activism “will be regarded as going against not only China’s national destiny but also history itself” (Gladney 2004). A serious effort is becoming apparent at the local and national levels for the formation of Uyghur cadres, but is insufficient. In the contemporary world, there is a duality between nationalism and ethnicity. The improvement of the relationship majority/minority is an ongoing process, although discrimination against the Uyghurs can be observed in their own autonomous region, not in terms of education (in Chinese), but in their professional life. Numerous Hui in the cities have more advantages than the Uyghurs.

The Hui must adapt and are tied to the Chinese nation. The Uyghur question is more complex and cannot be resolved by a pithy formula. In Islamic countries, state
and religion are one, even in secular Turkey which sharply distinguishes between religion and politics. The Hui, and especially the Uyghurs, are forced to separate these two concepts. Koranic Law is part of the Koran but not of daily Chinese life. The umma exists in Mecca but is not well delineated among the Hui even if their quarter or village is a well-defined space. One cannot speak of "territory" for these Chinese Muslims; they are everywhere and nowhere because they live very close to the Han without having a sentiment of ownership of "motherland China." This, despite the fact that many Muslims (closely associated) with the Han defended China against all types of aggression for more than a thousand years.

Among the Hui, Sinicization has not altered strong Muslim orthodoxy. Chinese culture and Islam are juxtaposed. For Sinicization, Confucianism is important. The notion of a God or the existence of an invisible superior power, and the mortuary shroud, are equally important for Confucianism and Islam. Its psalmody is common. The ethic of Islamic life and the belief in the afterlife are parallel to the Chinese notion of social relationships and to the ethic of guanxi-renqing. Reciprocal and mutual aid ties family, friends, and classmates, sometimes combined with a feeling of Islamic fraternity, which is strong among the Hui. Must one believe the writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who thinks that ancient nations create a common denominator, a protective and isolating "us," and that, despite this, centrifugal forces once again place the socio-political balance in question? "Us" (the Han majority) cannot be fully equated to "the Others" (the minorities) and that may create tensions if Chinese nationalism and "Hanism" are too strong.

A first step to try to solve Xinjiang ethnic problems is to improve the mutual respect of the Han and the Uyghur. To recall the five criteria ("variables") in relationship to peripherality presented by Hechter (1999): (1) the degree of administrative integration; (2) the extensiveness of citizenship in the periphery; (3) the prestige of the peripheral culture; (4) the existence of geographical contiguity; and (5) the length of the association between the periphery and the core," we may conclude that the Han majority gets three positive points, namely: an efficient integrating administrative system, a political and military link with Central Asian Muslim countries through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and a long territorial association with the Uyghurs.

Uyghurs are certainly disadvantaged with respect to many rights, but they can rely on their own cultural prestige. Nationalism, particularly Han nationalism, shows no sign of abating, and Xinjiang ethnic problems promise to continue. However, equal access for the Uyghurs to new social roles within Xinjiang's society could certainly create dynamic ethnic change leading to a stable autonomous region.

Thus many forces favor reconciliation, and other constraints cause discord. For the Uyghurs as well as for the Hui an improvement in education is a major point. The Chinese state tends to give more power to the provinces and autonomous regions that have other priorities. More globally, if the Shanghai Cooperation Organization uses some of its power to build a new harmony in Xinjiang society instead of trying to find Uyghur terrorism everywhere, chances for peace in the Uyghur Autonomous Region as well as in the whole of Central Asia will increase. Such reforms will eventually modernize the whole region.

Modernization

Modernization is undoubtedly a long-range social, political, and economic process adapted differently according to country and religious tradition. China is truly modern but at the same time retains its identity, with its own way of seeing modernization. The doctrine of Deng Xiaoping praises wealth, banished from 1949 to 1978.

Chinese official discourse is concerned with modernization and development. On the other hand, there is a basic incompatibility between modernity and Islam. Even if Muslims are modern in their daily life, it is difficult to "adapt" Islam and modernity in China. One must avoid falling into the trap described by Maxime Rodinson (1915-2004): "Conservatism pushes the traditionalists to draw back from anything that seems to him, in the domain of ideas as well as in that of practice, to be linked to destabilization" (Rodinson 1989: 133). Western philosophy of modern discourse does not favor a linkage between Koranic Law and society, even less so when one finds Islamic and Western principles not well suited to one another. The West is recognized for its technical superiority, but Islam gave rise to the first liberal ideas, even if, afterwards, diverse currents have rejected this original liberalism.

Thus, China's Muslims have suffered two shocks. One social process, Sinicization, is a light once because it has lasted for centuries already. The other is sometimes distressing because Western modernization with its technological applications can be seen as the sister of colonialism. Ejaz Akram links modernity and globalization (Akram 2004: 271): "modernity seeks to destroy the power of religion." For him the true followers of Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism will not give up religion for an ephemeral ideology.

Having lasted so many centuries in China, Islam has known how to present an image of "cohesion and peaceful participation," which proves its flexibility and an
exemplary adaptation to an enduring civilization of nearly five thousand years. For Xu Jilin (1996), the history of modernization begins with an “explosion of participation” (canyu baozha). It is certainly true for the new China of Deng Xiaoping, who opted with good sense and clear-sightedness for opening up and for reform. These giant steps of Chinese society, sustained by a galloping economy, concern the Hui indirectly. The Uighurs are excluded, but their standard of living is superior to that of other peoples in Central Asia. In “secular” exchanges they are also “modern.”

To be “modern” has become a slogan since Deng’s reforms got underway, but this irreversible process does not apply to the religion of the Hui. Confucianism is not considered a religion, or an official philosophy, even if present in the written language (characters), daily life, and the philosophy of the economic boom. Léon Vandermeersch called this social and economic revolution a “modern transformation (‘mutation’)” of the Sinicized countries, and the peoples involved are Tongwen (“cultural brothers”) (Vandermeersch 1986: 9, 152). The adaptation to modernity compels the Hui to be modern in their secular marriage ceremonies but leaves Islamic rituals unchanged. The Hui are neither “aboriginals” like the Miao, nor true immigrants like the Russians; contrary to many other shaoshu minzu, they are Tongwen, a fact that sets them completely apart.

However, the scenario of the modernization of Chinese Islam is another question. The modernization of Chinese Muslims is not concerned exclusively with religious matters. As Maris Gillette has shown, the mosque does not seem to play the same role according to sex among the young generation. Girls, more concerned perhaps with the material side of modernity, lack the same motivations as boys. They were mobilized by the events of 2003. The mosque is a more masculine central space. The more educated in cities can be tempted to marry modern Han women. This is the case of a Burmese Muslim, residing in Ruili, who wants to succeed economically in Yunnan Province. He married a Han maiden, a rather rare secular union for her did not convert to Islam.

Gender issues are a field where modernization could have an impact. The modernization of relationships between women and men has been recorded in the Constitution of China since 1949. Muslim women are very active and have equal status. Only the state administration is authorized to issue marriage certificates (jiehun zhengshu); this causes a marginalization of imams common when Islam is in a minority position. Islam is part of the private domain for China’s Muslims.

Numerous young Muslims are modern in their own way. Muslim women, more reserved than female Han, are unjustly considered as too traditional by young Han.

By Way of a Conclusion: Perspectives on Islam’s Future in China

Education, except for the study of the Koran, traditionally taught to men, is in essence egalitarian. Hui and Uyghur women can drive, be elected to assemblies, and enter the professions as teachers, doctors, and journalists. But mosques for women are rare; mosques and especially prayer-halls are a male social space.

Concerning modernization, one can raise the question of the indirect destruction of history and of the works of art like old mosques. What accounts for the recent fashion for constructing new places of worship and destroying old ones rather “Confucian” in style but belonging to the historic Muslim heritage of China? This new sociological phenomenon is part of modernization, which also has positive elements. Without the investments of Saudi Arabia in Lanzhou and perhaps in Tonghai, there would be no new mosques. In a word, for a Chinese Islam caught between “tradition” and “Sinicization,” it is more difficult than in the Middle East to find “modern” solutions acceptable to everyone.

One must also separate consumption, technology, and religion. The unavoidable question of clothing and technical innovations interested Ibn Khaldun 600 years ago. The relations between objects, markets, people, and the state has greatly changed in China. Muslims want to choose modernity for themselves without really knowing that it comes through Sinicization. To consume in a modern way is not forbidden in the limit imposed by the dietary ethic of halal (purity). Its antonym is haram (forbidden or impure). It is difficult to modernize the Islam and certainly cannot occur by using Western concepts, but the adoption of modern technologies does not pose a problem for Chinese Muslims. Islam is not opposed to technological innovation, to individual engagement, and to the search for progress and comfort.

This concerns the dress of Chinese Muslims, their participation in the telecommunications boom, and in the transformation of family furniture. The accumulation of modern electrical household appliances such as large television sets, a fashionable gift for wedding ceremonies, continues apace. China borrows modern technology from the Western but keeps its own values (a hardworking ethic among other qualities). Chris Patten pointed out the Confucian values of family, order, hierarchy, self-discipline, and obedience (Patten 1999: 161). In parallel, technological progress in China has brought changes in daily life at a rapid pace; no country has known such a development in less than twenty years. The Chinese know-sometimes better than many Westerners-how to dominate modern technologies, but take less advantage of them.

That is, however, only the tip of the iceberg. The modernization of Islam poses a huge challenge. The Second Iraq War caused cultural reconciliation to recede in
2003, and, like Mao’s Great Leap Forward (Duyuejin) of 1958, has resolved nothing. The idea of modernizing Islam is for a Hui a psychological dilemma: Islam or Chinese society? To be a Chinese citizen and at the same time a Muslim requires an adaptation to the acculturative process of Sinicization. Can one cut these beliefs in half? That would cause distress to the Hui, like the division into two parts of a gift by a Kyrgyz returning to his country (Shahrami 2002). He was returning from Kabul by the Wakhan corridor, and the religious head of the region, a Shaykh, was informed of his arrival. He asked the traveler to give him the magnificent and invaluable blanket he had brought back. The Kyrgyz cut it in two and gave half to the Shaykh, sending him a message that he regretted receiving the request too late. He also informed him that he would be very grateful if this modest gift suited the imam; the other half had already been given to his own brother. Modernization has its limits but the power of a Shaykh for those who believe does not call for compromises. However, the typically Hui way of resolving problems between Islam and daily life’s constraints is a constant adaptation between religion and Sinicization.

Any modification of the Chinese Islamic tradition toward modernity is a part of a Western dream. The Hui are truly “torn” between Sinicization and modernity. Their Chinese citizenship is rooted in Chinese Confucian culture. They always unconsciously try to adapt the Koran to their Chinese culture. This perhaps is the reason for the constant popularity of Ma Zhu’s Guide to Purity (Qingzhen Zhihuan), published in 1683 and still reprinted. The first translator of the Koran, Ma Fuchu, was also strongly influenced by Confucianism.

Modernity privileges the human, universal, and rational spirit, but harmonizes with difficulty with the Islamic scholastic order. The preservation of old mosques would be a rather modern idea that has no weight in China, given the transformation of the Muslim quarters in Beijing for the Olympic Games of 2008 and in Kunming. Modernity in Western countries and in Asia is not exactly the same. China is modern, but one does not see when the Hui, contrary to many Turks, will modernize their religion. This is perhaps the consequence of an omnipresent Sinicization, a force modernizing the minorities, imposing on them constant adaptation and destroying many traditions. To exist, the Hui have to harmonize their two cultures, Islamic and Chinese, but, in order to follow the tradition, sunna, there is no compromise.

In 1966, a modern reformer like Sayyid Qutb died in prison in Egypt. It does not seem that in China the thought of moderate Muslims like Fazlur Rahman (Islam and Modernity) can, in the coming years, transform the Islamic community.

Muslim China lives in peace, but the “new” Wahhabism and “the ancient religion” (Laojiao) are not yet in harmony. Reforms on the line of religion would be easier in an Islamic country, but remain inapplicable for the Hui sandwiched between religion and Sinicization.

For Tan (2004) religion is able to resist acculturation, but the challenge of modernity, also present in the media, could, through Sinicization, touch a large number of Muslims in China. Modernization can also reach a large Hui and Uyghur public through the press and Chinese media, above all by the intermediary of television. One sees on television paradigmatic representations of the ongoing tension between the traditional claims of Islam and the demands of China’s government.

This balancing act between old religious customs and modern Chinese ideology takes many forms. One is the reluctance of foreign observers to identify these imbalances. Another form is the state’s will to build mosques for women in order to appease concerns about gender issues. However, “rethinking Islam,” to use the word of Mohammed Arkoun, Professor at the Sorbonne, or really changing religion or the understanding of Islam is not for tomorrow in China.

Can one then speak of reforms toward an Islamic modernity? The adaptation of the Koran to modernity, fundamentally a Western idea, is confronted with the absence of basic texts. There is no clear work explaining how to modernize Islam. The Koran, a unique book, dominates the horizon from Mecca to Beijing. Some seek to create bridges to attempt to resolve this conflict of modern times. Is it possible in China? The Islamic revival has to take into account the social realities of an immense country needing social order. Economic growth linked to modernization has transformed the living standards of all Chinese citizens. Many Muslims practice their religion and enjoy undreamed of personal freedoms compared with the period 1966–76. Can the present modernity have a real impact on Chinese Islam? Is it the Muslims themselves, the Hui and the Uyghurs, who will be able to respond to this question in a few years.

Islam in Contemporary China: Expansion, Threat, or Steady State?

The history of Islam in China is a long sequence of some 1300 years. The Tang saw the arrival of the first Muslims at the end of the eighth century. The Yuan (1279–1368) assured a golden period for Chinese Islam. The Ming (1368–1644) for the first time integrated Muslims into the Chinese system, and in the nineteenth century Sinicization under the Manchu created serious conflicts.
Following periods of exchange with the outside world, Gladney, after Joseph Fletcher, confirms the Islamization of China into three historical phases ("tides"). It spread by regional areas: northwest, Xinjiang and the north of China, the coast of China in Canton and Zaitun (Quanzhou), along the Yellow River, and in Yunnan. The first wave, orthodox Sunnite, which the Hui themselves name the "Old Religion" (Laojia), began around the ninth century under the Tang Dynasty by land and sea, by the two Silk Roads. Around the eighteenth century and, particularly between 1744 and 1781, a second wave developed under the influence of Sufi saints such as Jahariya Master Ma Mingxin. The expansion of the Islamic Brothers (Wahhabi) occurred at the end of the Qing Dynasty. They are also called Yihewani and favor an education directly in Arabic, which is difficult to apply in China.

The traditional Gedimu religion dominates but masks a fact: many Muslims do not know to which branch of Chinese Islam they belong and do not understand Sufism. Nonetheless, Sunni doctrine dominates among nine of the ten Muslim minorities and modernity is also present at another cultural level.

The abrupt judgment of the non-renaissance of Islam by Baber and Grosvenor in 1878, after the civil war in Yunnan, must be considered in historical context. Islam was for long the province's main religion. After the revolt, the nineteenth century ended in massacres, and Islam did not recover its central position. There were several million Hui in the middle of the nineteenth century in Gansu, but the present Autonomous Region of Ningxia currently has less than two million Muslims. In Ningxia, the Yihewani reformers are, however, powerful and rich, but apolitical like the imam responsible for the important Nandasi Mosque in Yinchuan or the "patriotic" imams in Xinjiang. Similarly, the recent statement of Geoffrey York in Beijing pointing out a decline "Islam is visibly in retreat" -does not reflect realities in Xinjiang and elsewhere. China is a country where nothing is direct. You have to look at the back streets of the mosques. The demolition of many typical Muslim quarters to promote modernization does not deter Uyghurs and Hui or diminish the faith of Muslims in Urumchi and Kunming.

Similarly, the Islamic faith of many Yunnanese in Thailand and Burma is high. Yunnanese Hui became Panthays in Burma and Ho in Thailand. It followed the nineteenth-century events and post-Second World War migration. During thirty long years they had no contact with Yunnan Province. Between 1949 and 1980, a period of international seclusion, Muslims did not really have the right to believe except in their hearts. In the twenty-first century, it is no longer illegal to believe. The freedom of enterprise and growth equally favor the Hui. I cannot however cor-

roborate the existence of a fourth wave of expansion of Chinese Islam predicted by other authors in the new patriotic and nationalist China. Life being currently more easy, one can foresee a development of modernization jointly with Sinicization. This secularizing process has positive effects and others less positive ones for the five recognized religions and for Islam in particular.

"The Great Leap Forward" (1958–62) created a demographic "hole," and Islam was unable to progress during the period. The ideological persecutions in the years 1966–70 slowed it, but much less than the civil and religious wars of the nineteenth century and the Second World War. There has been a revival of all religions after the Cultural Revolution. All Chinese citizens have the right to believe, much more than during the Mao period (1949–76) during which many citizens placed their faith in Marxism. However an Islamic apostolate is not really predictable. The Han theoretically cannot convert to Islam, but the higher birthrate of Muslims creates Hui and Uygur natural demographic expansion. In the Chinese countryside, the Muslim ethic tends to ignore the official limit of two children. In cities, family planning imposes a son or a daughter on a conjugal family. The Muslims must pay fines when their family size infringes these administrative norms, for instance in Kunming or Beijing. Significant demographic growth, like that of the European Muslims, is excluded in China.

The Uyghurs have seemed to follow Islam more strongly in the last ten years. Despite more secular, Kazakhstan the republics of Central Asia are giving much importance to Islam and this is an incitement. If this Islamization is confirmed, it would make the Uyghurs more "foreign" in the eyes of the Chinese, and their integration into the society of modern Xinjiang would become more difficult.

The Hui are among the most Sinicized of China's minorities. Hui are mainly conciliatory in tendency and for thirteen hundred years have accepted control and leadership by the Chinese state. Even more than the Dong minority in Guangxi, Guizhou, and Hunan, one wonders if these Muslims are not simply Chinese citizens but Han like the others. They are rather close to the central power. The Hui are ethnically and culturally distinct from the Uyghurs. To be Chinese and Muslim does not pose an identity problem. The Hui like their own country, China, even if they complain privately about a lack of religious liberty, adjusting themselves to Chinese "Communist capitalism." Must one finally pay for this Sinicization by silence and accept the control by the Chinese market economy? It is so for the Uyghur nationality, no longer a majority in its autonomous region. There is an
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impossibility of developing a constructive critical spirit for Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and for the Han; the Uyghurs must accept this socio-economic situation. China respects differences in the framework of national unity (tuanjie). Inversely, under coercion the government cannot ask religious concessions from the Uyghurs, who already unhappy about the growing number of "patriotic" imams.

For Maurice Freedman (1979), the Chinese state has completely succeeded in eliminating "religious authority," but Chinese society is changing. What are the consequences of the present drastic social changes at the level of belief? Official discourse of the twenty-first century has changed somewhat; it is less rigid and has a tendency to assimilate culture and religion. There is no longer a perceived incompatibility between socialism and Islam. However, China, though up-to-date in its modernization and globalization, has not yet truly modernized its relations with Islam.

Islam in China cannot be compared to that practiced in the independent republics of Central Asia or to that in the Middle East. To sum up, among the Chinese Sunni and Hanafite majority, Islam is rather traditional and relatively static. But as in Indonesia, one sees a revival of Sufism. Chinese Islam counts 5% of Sufis; they are very active in the northwestern provinces and Yunnan. Some orders like the Jahariya are dynamic; their impact on the youth is sometimes astonishing. As in the Middle East, it is not rare that jobless youth, sometimes rather poor, take refuge in intensive study of the Koran and join a Naqshbandi Order.

To form a community it is almost impossible to avoid government associations. In the 1920s, the first modern Islamic associations appeared, already combining the primordial affinity of nationality with religion. The Islamic Association of China, very secretive, more political and economic than religious, controls the nomination of imams and is the central structure of complex official Chinese Islam linked to the Party. It continues to be the only organized Muslim institution inside the country. It is also a superior state organization dealing with Muslim countries the world over and has many experts in Arabic.

China has witnessed a revival of Koranic studies and a concomitant intensification of Sinicization that draws youth away from mosques. The common educative curriculum for all Chinese citizens until the age of sixteen prevents an early sustained study of Islam, and consequently a generation gap exists among Hui and Uyghurs. Those who have known the Cultural Revolution did not enjoy the same opportunities of university (and even secondary) education as their children.

Elsewhere there is a re-Islamization of tenacious Hui survivors who abandoned Islam during many centuries in Fujian. A large number of Chinese have been able to prove their Muslim origin and have taken up the faith of their ancestors. The advantages given to minorities after the reforms of Deng Xiaoping have also facilitated the revival of religion.

Immense China is still far away and continues to be a mysterious country for most Muslims, even though sometimes closer as a result of irreversible globalization. Muslims want to know more about their Chinese "brothers," but in order to communicate must use English or Mandarin, which few foreigners know. The dynamism of Chinese Islam is due in large part to its relations with the outside world, thanks to indirect factors such as oil and business, or direct ones such as academic and Koranic relations and pilgrimages. Since the 1980s, the Hui have often communicated with foreign Muslims through the intermediary of Chinese diplomacy, except when they go to Mecca on an individual basis. However, if they do not know Arabic or English they cannot communicate. For Western countries, Chinese Islam represents more of an unknown domain than a menace. The Hui often benefit from a friendly attitude. On the other hand, somewhat like the Kosovars in Europe, Uyghurs can rouse either a profound attraction or indifference on the part of Western media.

There are few ways to communicate with the outside world, with the exception of electronic communication, known only to the elite. Hui, Uyghurs and, to a lesser extent, China’s eight other Muslim minorities are sometimes in contact with the international Islamic community through the neighboring countries of Central and Southeast Asia, especially during the annual Hajj. They silently took sides with their Afghan and Iraqi “brothers” during the wars that followed the attacks on the United States in September 2001.

In 1998 religion had a promising future in China (Berlie 1998: 132–34), as the political, economical, social and cultural sectors displayed improvement. However, few changes have occurred at the beginning of a new century, and silent proselytism is the only religious attitude tolerated. In a country where economic pressures are great and the population gigantic, humans seek reassurance when solving their problems. Islam, by its simplicity, can appear to resolve them. The future of Islam in China is certain, if it is able to adjust itself to the modern socio-political context merging religion and culture.
Glossary of Chinese Characters

Ahong 阿訇
Baimao 白帽
Baoan 保安
Chaozhen dian 朝真殿
Darou 大肉
Dashi 大食
Dayuejin 大跃进
Dike'er 迪克尔
Dongxiang 东乡
Fangjia 放假
Gaodian 糕点
Gedimu 格底木
Gonganju 公安局
Gongbei 拱北
Guangta 光塔
Guanxi-renqing 关系 人情
Guerbangjie 古尔邦节
Gusi 古寺
Hanhua he tuanjie 汉化和团结
Huasheng 怀圣
Huajuann 花卷
Hufeiye 虏非耶
Huihe 回纥
Huihuu 回鹘
Huijiao 回教
Huiizu zizhixian 回族自治县
Jiehun zhengshu 婚姻证书
Kaizhai 开斋
Kuanxiang 宽巷

Imam; anyone advanced in Koranic studies
White skullcap
A Muslim minority in China
Mosque (a new term, formerly Taoist temple)
"Big meat," a Chinese name for pork
"Arab"
Great Leap Forward
Dhikr; Sufi remembrance
Muslim minority of China
Holiday
Cakes
Orthodox Sunni
Police office
Tomb of saint
Oldest mosque at Guangzhou
Family or professional relation and its ethic
Korban; The Feast of the Sacrifice
Ancient mosque
Sinicization and unity
The Mosque of Holy Memory (Canton)
Steamed sugar buns
Khufiya, Sufi Order
Ancient ethnonym for the Uyghurs
Another ethnonym for the Uyghurs
Old name for Islam in China
Hui Autonomous District
Marriage certificate
To break the fast; end of fasting
Name of a mosque, Urumchi
Glossary of Chinese Characters

Laojiao 老教
Old religion (Gedimu)
Laotou 老头
Muslim (in Yunnanese dialect)
Libaisi 礼拜寺
Mosque
Libaitian 礼拜天
Day of prayer: Friday
Mafu 马夫
Muleteer
Menhuang 门宦
Order, saintly descent group
Minzu zhuyi 民族主义
Minority power
Muslin 穆斯林
Muslim
Nandasi 南大寺
Name of a mosque, Yinchuan
Putonghua 普通话
Chinese language; Mandarin
Qingjiaosi 清教寺
Mosque
Qingzhen Zhinan 清真指南
Muslim guidebook
Qingzhensi 清真寺
Mosque (Pure and True Temple)
Renminbi 人民币
Yuan monetary unit; Chinese currency
Shahe 沙赫
Shaykh (master)
Shaoshu minzu 少数民族
National minorities of China
Shenhui zhuyi shichang 社会主义市场
Chinese socialist market economy
Shunchengjie 顺城街
Ancient street and mosque in Kunming
Sufei 苏菲
Sufi
Weiwu’erzu 维吾尔族
Uyghur (in Chinese)
Wenming 文明
Civilized; refined
Wuxing Huì 五姓会
Hui Association of “The Five Families”
Xiaodongying 小东营
Mosque at Guangzhou
Xiaokang shengshui 小康社会
“Comfortable Society” (a slogan)
Xinhua 新华
Chinese News Agency
Xinjiao 新教
“New Religion,” Yihewani
Xinjiang 新疆
Xinjiang Ribao 新疆日报
A Xinjiang newspaper
Yihewani 伊赫瓦尼
Chinese Wahhabism
Yimamu 伊玛目
Imam
Youxiang 油香
Muslim fried cake (puri in India)
Yunnan hua 云南话
Yunnanese dialect
Yuquan 玉圈
“Jade Circle” in Huhehot
Zhehelinye 哲赫林耶
Jahariya Sufi Order
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