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Adresa redakce:

Dálný východ
Katedra asijských studií, Katedra aplikované ekonomie
Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci
Křížkovského 10
771 80 Olomouc
www.kas.upol.cz

Technická redakce a obálka: Jiřina Vaclová

Odpovědná redaktorka: Mgr. Jana Kreiselová

Vydala a vytiskla: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci,

Křížkovského 8, 771 47 Olomouc

www.upol.cz/vup

email: vup@upol.cz

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INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE PODNIKÁNÍ

Organizace konference a příprava monotematického čísla časopisu *Dálný Východ (Far East)* ze 7th Annual Conference on Cultural and Social Anthropology of East Asia – Ethnic Groups, Ethnicity and Ethnic Policies in China (2013) byla spolufinancována projektem **Budování vědeckého týmu a zapojování do mezinárodních sítí v oblasti čínských studií** (CHINET, reg. č. CZ.1.07/2.3.00/20.0152). Tento projekt byl spolufinancován Evropským sociálním fondem a státním rozpočtem České republiky.



INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity always was, is and probably will be a phenomenon which involves politics, ideologies, economics, religion, propaganda and many other fields despite its intrinsic and independent value and existence. Nowadays, we witness a fashion when a lot of struggles and social and economic problems are viewed through (or reduced to) the prism of ethnicity. At the same time, ethnicity is very rarely studied as an entity per se but rather as a tool or victim of politics, social preferences and economic interests. Ethnic identity is a core issue where one's economic, political or social rights have been violated, shortened or overlooked.

Contemporary China is a place where ethnic issues arise gradually despite the central government's efforts to prevent them. Economic growth leads to social inequalities very often interrelated with ethnic boundaries. Environmental and social issues become more and more key topics of local as well as national governments and increasingly involve also an ethnic dimension. All these and even more aspects of ethnicity in contemporary China have been discussed at the 7th Annual Conference on Cultural and Social Anthropology of East Asia – Ethnic Groups, Ethnicity and Ethnic Policies in China that took place at the Palacký University in Olomouc from October 31st till November 2nd 2013. 16 speakers from 9 countries discussed various topics related to the ethnicity of China.

The following monothematic issue of the Journal *Dálný Východ* (Far East) contains a half of the conference presentations. They cover many regions and ethnic groups of China as well as involve many different perspectives and approaches. The variety within this issue shows how colourful and also very tacit and sensitive the topic of ethnic minorities in China is. We would like to thank all the presenters and especially all the authors of the following papers for their substantial contribution to the topic and that they chose the Journal *Dálný Východ* (Far East) to be a mediator of their knowledge.

Adam Horálek

Olomouc, August 19, 2014

THE CRESCENT AND THE RED STAR.

HUI MUSLIMS AND CHINESE COMMUNISM IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Włodzimierz Cieciora

Annotation: *This article discusses the historical evolution of the relationship between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Sinophone Muslims, or the Hui, from the founding of the CPC in 1921 until the late 1950s. By defining the Hui as an ethnic minority from an early date the Chinese communists have pursued a policy of allowing the Hui a limited cultural autonomy, while viewing the religious elements of the Sino-Muslim identity as obstacles to the further development of their political potential. The negative assessment of Islam, ignoring the more progressive trends within the religious establishment, and the rejection of the long-held belief of some members of the Sino-Muslim elite that the Hui are Han followers of Islam, has led to the limitation of success of the CPC's Hui policies. This has been one of the main factors contributing to the enduring tensions between the Hui and the communist authorities.*

Keywords: *Hui, Chinese Muslims, Huizu, Communist Party of China, China, religious policies, ethnic policies, history of ethnic and religious policies of the CPC, minzu, ethnic identity, religious identity*

China is home to around twenty million Muslims officially divided into ten ethnic minorities. Of these the Turkic Uyghurs are the best known abroad. This is partially caused by their history of troubled relations with the Chinese state and the Han Chinese in their home province of Xinjiang. The other big Muslim minority in the country, the *Huizu*, are perceived as having a more peaceful relationship with China. This is perhaps because of the fact that they are a Sinophone community, inhabiting almost every corner of the country. Yet, the process of Hui adaptation to the conditions of modern China has been bumpy, and characterized in fact by bloody conflicts, first with the Qing dynasty, and then, on a much lesser scale, with the post-imperial Chinese authorities, especially in the warlord era of the northwest. The legacy of those conflicts has been a state of distrust between the Hui and Han in China, one that has not been fully resolved until today. The Chinese communists have been considerably more successful in their dealings with the Hui than their predecessors, as they have utilized a set of new ethnocentric policies when dealing with Sino-Muslims. That is, they have been more successful at least when the overall political stability of relations between the state and the Hui is concerned. The control of state over the religious life of the Hui is very tight, as the state has all the tools of political pressure at its disposal. Even though the religious life of the Hui is

comparatively less restricted than that of the Uyghurs (at least in the eastern parts of the country), they are still not outside of the close governmental scrutiny.

This article deals with the history of the Hui-CPC relations in a historical manner, beginning with the early theoretical considerations of the 'Muslim problem' by the party ideologues. The communist theoretical framework included the assumption that the Hui are an ethnic minority. This, however, was especially problematic at the time from a terminological point of view, as the term Hui had various meanings, only vaguely distinguished. After clarification in the late 1930s and early 1940s that by Hui they would mean the ethnic entity of Sinophone Muslims (with some exceptions)¹ the Party has begun to shape its Hui policies, so as to include the millions of Sino-Muslims in the constructed nation-state, and to resolve the obvious contradiction between the official atheism and allying in the nation-building process with a people whose identity rested primarily on religious practice.

The Chinese communists and the 'Muslim problem' before 1949

In the early days of its history, the Communist Party of China (CPC) had a very limited contact with the country's non-Han populations. The first generation of Party leaders, like Chen Duxiu (1879–1941), declared their adherence to the Comintern line in ethnic policies, supporting the Leninist principle of self-determination of minorities even in such difficult cases as that of Outer Mongolia. During the second CPC congress in 1922 the Party formulated a political program, in which it was planned to grant the Mongols, Tibetans and Muslims, all recognized as separate nationalities (*minzu*, 民族), temporary autonomy from 'feudal China'.

However, Li Dazhao (1888–1927), one of the fathers of Chinese Marxism, argued for a more assimilationist policy and supported a stronger nationalist agenda in the dealings with non-Han minorities of China. Li believed that with the creation of a truly democratic and republican political system, all of China's ethnoses, i.e. the Han, the Manchus, the Tibetans, the Hui and the Mongols, would form a unified, homogeneous Chinese Nation – the *Zhonghua Minzu*.² In his argument Li called on the concept of 'unity of five ethnic groups of the Chinese nation' (*wuzu gonghe*, 五族共和), an idea of a great China established as a nation-state on the lands of the former Qing Empire, and constituted by five different ethno-cultural spheres.³ Of the five, the Muslim Hui, were the most problematic. This was due to the fact that the Chinese term *Hui* historically referred to both Islam as a religion itself (for centuries called in Chinese *Huijiao*, 回教) and any practicing Muslim (the Hui-religion follower – *Huijiaotu*, 回教徒) and in geographical sense was usually applied to the Muslim dominated areas of southern Xinjiang, which was traditionally called the *Huibu* (回部, Muslim districts) or *Huijiang* (回疆, Muslim territories). It was in

¹ See: Gladney 1996, 21–26.

² Leibold 2007, 48.

³ This concept was symbolically represented on the Republic's national flag, which was designed in a form of five horizontal stripes, each representing an ethnic group: red for the Han, yellow for the Manchus, blue for the Mongols, white for the Muslims and black for the Tibetans.

this sense that the word Hui was used by Sun Yat-sen in his discussion of the ideal of *wuzu gonghe*.

The great number of Sinophone Muslims, also known by the name Hui, or more traditionally, Huihui, who formed a wide diaspora in eastern and southwestern China were not considered to belong to the politically recognized category of *zu* – race or ethnic group. In the several decades of the Republic, however, those Muslims gradually developed an ethnic narrative of their community and history, gradually beginning to consider themselves as a separate ethnicity – the *Huizu*. For the intellectual elite among the Sinophone Muslims – modernist imams, publishers, editors and historians – the question of the character of the community remained a hotly debated issue throughout the Republican era. This controversy, referred to as a conflict between the proponents of a ‘Hui ethnicity theory’ (*Huizu shuo*, 回族說) and the ‘Han Muslims’ (*Hanren xin Huijiao shuo*, 漢人信回教說) concept, formed the basic background against which the Muslim policies of two great rivaling parties were set. The Nationalist Party (Guomindang) after Sun Yat-sen’s death and the domination of the Party by Chiang Kai-shek strongly favored the latter idea, while the Communists had come to recognize the former. For the CPC this was nevertheless a long process, in which issues of both ethnicity and religion played crucial roles.

In its first years of revolutionary experience the Party had little chance to come into contact with any Muslims.⁴ Still, the Communists remained aware of Muslims’ existence in China and they considered the Muslim issue to be an important part of the ‘national problem’. The sixth Party congress held in Moscow in 1928 proclaimed that the “Chinese national minority question [refers to] the Mongols and the Hui of the North [...]; Xinjiang and Tibet”⁵ This was later repeated in the Chinese Soviet Republic constitution drafted in 1931 and adopted in 1934. What the Communists understood as Hui was still shrouded in doubt and uncertainty – at this time the CPC itself probably had little idea of what distinguished different groups of Muslims, and lumped them all in one simplifying category.

It was only after October 1934 when the GMD’s final encirclement campaign forced the Communists out of the southern bases that they were given their first chance to come into direct contact with the country’s Muslims. During the epic Long March the question of religion amongst the people of China gained the attention of the Communists. After crossing the Gansu border, the Party center was directly confronted with the ‘Muslim problem’ for the first time. Unlike in the previous months when the religion of the southwestern tribesmen was perceived more as superstition, now the CPC’s core faced followers of a monotheistic, Abrahamic religion. While crossing the Muslim areas in Gansu and Qinghai the Party issued a number of instructions aimed at securing the Muslims’ sympathy for Communists. One of those documents, ‘Instruction on political work in Muslim areas’ (*Zhongguo*

⁴ After the anti-communist purge of 1927 and the rupture of the First United Front between the GMD and the CPC, the Communists retreated to rural areas in southern China, with virtually no Muslim populations.

⁵ Leibold 2007, 87–88.

Gong-Nong Hongjun Diyifangmianjun guanyu Huimin Quyu Zhengzhi Gongzuo)⁶, issued probably in September 1935, ordered the troops to negotiate with imams (*ahong* in Chinese, the document explained that an imam is an 'Islamic leader' – *Huijiao shouling*) and to explain to them that the Red Army is going north to fight the Japanese. It further commanded the Communists to respect the Muslims' (referred to throughout the text as *Huimin*, a more generic term for a believer, rather than a member of an ethnicity) religious freedom and prohibited them entering into mosques and destroying Muslim scriptures. It also called on them to respect the dietary habits of the Muslims which prohibited the consumption of pork and lard as well as the borrowing of cooking utensils from the locals. Finally, it ordered the Party members to propagate the ideals of 'ethnic equality' (*minzu pingdeng*) and to criticize the Han officials' oppression of the Muslims. The Party therefore clearly treated the Hui populations as an ethnic minority, upholding its previous recognition of them as such.

By calling on the Party members to respect the 'feudal' rules of the Muslim communities, this instruction and the following ones issued in the next several months, marked a clear departure from the previous communist experiments in the northwest undertaken by the CPC's local cells. Those included the unsuccessful forming of Muslim soviets and appealing to the Muslim masses rather than to their elite. The new tactic was also supposed to erase the Muslims' memory of bad experiences in one of the communist bases in Shaanxi, where the class policies of the local party leaders had led to great enmity among the Hui (and the local Han as well).⁷

Despite the previous failure of CPC's local elements to win the sympathy of the Hui, all factions within the Party seem to have recognized that the awarding of an ethnic status to the Sinophone Muslims would help to achieve the task. Still, the Party's efforts to win the support of local Hui by respecting their traditions and religion did not succeed. The communist forces stayed in Gansu for too short of a time to form lasting bonds with Muslims. The Muslims on their part viewed the openly atheist Communists with suspicion, as the CPC was known for its revolutionary criticism of religion as an 'opiate for the masses'. While the Communists could have believed that the united front tactic might help them win the religious elite's sympathy, the same could not be achieved in the case of the Muslim military strongmen of the Northwest. The Ma warlord lineages of Ma Bufang and Ma Buqing in Qinghai and western Gansu and Ma Hongkui in Ningxia, who played the role of Muslim political leaders in the area, remained one of the greatest threats to the communist forces on their northward route. All of the Ma warlords were devout Muslims devoted to the idea of an alliance between the radical religious reform movement called Yihewani and Chinese nationalism.⁸ They were determined to cause as much trouble to the CPC as possible.

⁶ In: *Minzu Wenti Wenxian Huibian*, 344.

⁷ Lindbeck 1950, 475.

⁸ See: Lipman 1984 and 1997.

After the Long March ended in northern Shaanxi the CPC was able to establish its revolutionary base in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border region. The Muslims formed the largest non-Han population in the revolutionary base.⁹ Surrounded to the west and southwest by hostile Muslim warlords, the Party had to continue its efforts to not antagonize the Hui and to win their support. In order to achieve this the Communists offered the Muslims local autonomy, where they would be able to realize their ambitions and mobilize forces to fight the GMD and Japanese imperialism. The autonomy was to be dominated by the Muslims of all social classes including the gentry and imams. The 1936 Party instruction which outlined the future autonomy, included specific prescripts to antagonize the progressive religious elements against 'Muslim traitors' (*Huijian*) and 'hateful imams'.¹⁰ To incite social discontent against such 'reactionaries' the document instructed to make use of Friday mosque sermons. In the document the Party not only aimed at using religious personnel to agitate the local Muslim populations, but also advised its cadres not to confiscate the Hui gentry's land, and effectively to treat the local Han more harshly. This instruction probably marked the beginning of attempts to politicize the mosques and imams, a practice that is in place until today.

The postulated strategy to form Muslim soviets proved to be a failure. In the period of 1935–1936 nine of these were created in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia region.¹¹ Usually they would be forced upon the local Hui by the occupying Red Army units and would vanish as soon as the Communists retreated.¹² In order to convince the Muslims to adopt communist sponsored forms of administration, Mao Zedong himself addressed the 'beloved Huizu brothers' in May 1936. In his effort he used analogies to the *wuzu gonghe* concept and the example of Turkey as a modernist Muslim nation stating that: "in the colonies of the world imperialism there soon will erupt a second world war. The five minzus of our Chinese nation and our territory are cut off piece after piece by the Japanese imperialism [...] endangering the survival of your race. Will you let your Gansu die under occupation or will you rise in the war of resistance and win independence and freedom for your Huizu? Turkey has restored Islam to its glory [here, Mao uses *Huizu* in the meaning of Islam, a good indication of how confused the top Party echelons were over even basic terminologies] and gave good example to all the Muslims [he uses *Huizu* again to mean all Muslims] and oppressed nations in the world."¹³

⁹ He Zhiming 2006, 135.

¹⁰ *Zhongguo Gongnong Hongjun Zong Zhengzhibu guanyu Huimin Gongzuo de Zhishi* (Chinese Workers'-Peasants' Red Army Central Political Department's instruction concerning Muslim Work). In: *Minzu Wenti Wenxian Huibian*, 362.

¹¹ Li Rongzhen 1996, 44–52.

¹² Lindbeck 1950, 477.

¹³ Mao Zedong, *Zhonghua Suweitai Zhongyang Zhengfu dui Huizu Renmin de Xuanyan* (Chinese Soviet Republic Central Government's Manifesto to the Huizu).

Despite all these efforts, it seems that few northwestern Hui wished to join the CPC's efforts to establish Muslim autonomy.¹⁴ It seems that the CPC failed to realize what the real ambitions of the Hui Muslims were. Territorial autonomy had never been postulated by the Islamic community, nor was it found in the local tradition. The Muslim leaders argued for cultural autonomy, not for a political segregation from the surrounding Han areas, with which the Muslims have always had strong economic links.¹⁵

The forming of the second United Front after the 1937 Japanese invasion of China forced the Party to turn to Chinese patriotism and nationalism as a political platform for winning broad social support. This proved somehow more successful in the efforts to gain Muslim sympathy. Among other Guomindang representations that were allowed into Yan'an during the Sino-Japanese war was the Muslim Association for National Salvation (*Zhongguo Huijiao Jiuguo Xiehui*). A mosque was established in Yan'an that housed the offices of the Association and was bestowed with a wooden bian'e horizontal board with the mosque's name calligraphed by Mao Zedong himself. An imam was selected by the CPC to lead the religious services. This was one Cai Dengxiao (1887–1951), son of eastern Gansu village imam, who due to his allegiance to the Party line came to be known as the 'red imam'. He became the main tool of Communist Muslim propaganda; in his speeches he extolled the Party solutions designed for the Hui. Yet, his activities brought in little results. Cai could not match the authority of famous imams, none of whom ever settled, or even visited, Yan'an – despite the fact that the town became a 'Mecca' for many dissident Chinese intellectuals.¹⁶

Still, the CPC tried to convince observers that it was extremely successful in obtaining Muslim support. A communist leader told Owen Lattimore in 1937: "it took us quite a while to catch our first *ahung* [i.e. *imam*][...] but when he got into his head what we wanted, and turned him loose, he soon brought in others. From that time we had no problem with the Muslims. We have separate, non-Communist Muslim units serving in the Red army, and they are entirely loyal."¹⁷ It is not clear if the 'caught' imam mentioned to Lattimore was Cai or some other Muslim cleric, but the statement made by the communist leader must surely have been an over-

¹⁴ The autonomous Muslim county, established in Tongxin in October 1936 is a good example of this. Even though the inaugural ceremony was held in the famous Tongxin mosque few, if any, respectable religious leaders joined the celebration. The authorities were manned by people parachuted by the Yan'an government and the county autonomy ceased to exist as soon as the territory was abandoned by the communist forces in February 1937.

¹⁵ Lindbeck 1950, 479.

¹⁶ Cai's weak position vis-à-vis the Sino-Muslim elite is perhaps best evidenced in the fact that his biography is absent from the major historical monographs. There is no entry on him neither in *Huizu Renwu Zhi*, *Zhongguo Yisilan Baikeshu*, nor in *Huizu Daxidian*, nor in any other major source that I am aware of. All of these works are products of the Sino-Muslim elite which have roots in the Republican era Muslim reformist circles. The information on Cai is from the official website of his hometown Pingliang:

<http://www.pingliang.gov.cn/PingLiangWebSite/Main/news.jsp?newsid=72681> (21.01.2010)

¹⁷ Lattimore 1938, 275.

statement. There is little evidence that the CPC's policy was very successful as far as religious personnel is concerned.

While the Communists were not very effective in conciliating the religious leaders of the community, they managed to win over some lay Muslims. In 1939 the Yan'an government established the Northwestern Working Committee, which acted as a 'switchboard for the party's nationality work'.¹⁸ The committee in turn organized a National Question Research Office in which several Hui found work – among them was Shen Xiaxi (1921–2003), a very young Hui from Shanghai, who came to the communist area in 1938. Even though the research work of the Office was effectively conducted without any participation of the interested minority employees, Shen went on to become one of the most important Muslim cadres for the CPC. In 1941 together with a group of 60 other Hui, he was enrolled at the Yan'an Nationality School, where the trainees were being prepared to carry out the Party's nationality work, and not to advise the CPC on minority policies.¹⁹ Shen thus represented the first generation of communist educated Hui, who were later promoted to high positions in the management of their community. After the establishment of the People's Republic he was given some civil positions, most importantly the presidency of the Chinese Islamic Association in the 1980s.²⁰

One of the most durable results of the works of the Research Office was the publishing of a theoretical outline of Party policies towards the Hui minority. The document titled 'Huihui nationality problem' (*Huihui Minzu Wenti*) was published in April 1941, together with another such document devoted to the Inner Mongolian question, based on earlier drafts made public in the summer of 1940. The *Huihui Minzu Wenti* established a standard of treatment of the Hui ethnoreligious identity, by authoritatively pushing the Hui question into the realm of ethnic affairs. By stating that 'The Hui question is an ethnic question' the Party prepared the ground to reduce the role of religion in the social life of the Hui. The two documents stressed that the Mongols and the Hui were 'backward minorities', the latter because of 'feudal' relations in their agricultural economy.²¹ Still, the documents noticed that the Hui were less backward than the Mongols because of their more mature sinicization, which helped them become a relatively dynamic minority in terms of their politics and economy. By taking the level of sinicization as a standard of 'backwardness' and 'progressiveness' the CPC was bound to perceive the Hui as the most advanced of the Muslim groups inhabiting the country. At the same time, the Party was finally drawing lines of distinction between the Sinophone Hui and the Turkic Uyghurs in Xinjiang and other non-Chinese speaking Muslim groups in the northwest.

What is evident from the reading of the *Huihui Minzu Wenti* is that the predominantly Han authors were perplexed to see how much Islam permeated all aspects of Hui life. Even though the Party recognized the leading role of Islam (referred to both by the traditional *Huijiao* and the Arabized form *Yisilanjiao*) in the formation

¹⁸ Liu 2004, 151.

¹⁹ Idem, 213n75.

²⁰ Yang 1993, 606–607.

²¹ Liu 2004, 153.

of the Hui community in China, the general evaluation of Islam was rather negative. By discussing the religious divisions between the Hui, especially the Sufi orders, or *menhuan*, considered the most relevant from the class point of view and theorized in the class conflict framework, the authors concluded that “the religious beliefs of the Hui masses have hindered their political awareness”.²²

The communist authors of the document failed to recognize the modernist potential of the newest Islamic grouping in China, the partially Wahabbi inspired Muslim Brotherhood – *Ikhwan*, or *Yihewani* in Chinese, as an important progressive force within the Hui Islam.²³ Like the preceding Sufi sects, the *Khufiyya* and *Jahriyya*, *Yihewani* were treated within the class framework and interpreted as a force hijacked by parts of the Sino-Muslim elite for control of the Hui masses. This was undoubtedly a reference to the support of *Yihewani* by Muslim warlords like Ma Qi, his son Ma Bufang and Ma Hongkui – both important enemies of the communist regime in Yan’an.²⁴ Paradoxically it was sympathizers of the *Yihewani* that later became important for Communist Islamic policies.

In the communist rendering: “all the religious sects were initially banners under which the Hui masses intended to wage their struggle [against the oppressors] and organize their just national uprisings (*minzu qiyi*, 民族起義). However, whenever that struggle encountered difficulties and defeat those sects were taken over by capitalists and careerists who have used them as a weapon in deceiving the masses.”²⁵ The negative evaluation of Islam did not stop there – the Communists recognized the role of Islam in Hui ethnogenesis, but were clearly hoping that the role of the religion would diminish. This is evident in their discussion of the pan-Islamic movement (*fanhuijiao yundong*), which is explicitly defined as an “Imperialist and fascist scheme and an ahistorical fantasy of small numbers of supporters”.²⁶

In the pre-1949 period the Hui Muslims themselves had little direct contact with the CPC and its ideology. The materialistic Communists could count on little sympathy among the Hui, and the working policies of the CPC introduced after 1934 did not present it with expected outcomes. No important Muslim leader ever visited the Yan’an base, which forced the Communists to utilize little known, poorly educated Muslims like Cai Dengxiao or cadres with Hui background but little

²² There is a rich literature on the nature of the *menhuan* in both Chinese and English. For an English discussion of this phenomenon see Lipman 1997, 58–72; and Gladney 1996, 41–53.

²³ Chinese *Yihewani* is not to be confused with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, established by Hassan al-Banna in 1928, well after the Chinese brotherhood became known under this name. For a very detailed analysis of *Ikhwan*’s history, development and role see: Chérif-Chebbi 1999.

²⁴ For more on the role of those Muslim warlords and their support for the *Ikhwan* see: Lipman 1984.

²⁵ *Huihui Minzu Wenti* 1983, 65.

²⁶ Clearly, what was addressed here were the Japanese plans of utilizing the Chinese Muslims against the GMD government and using their discontent with some of its policies to foster a pro-Japanese, pan-Islamic and anti-communist reaction. With the imminent threat of Japanese schemes it is not surprising that the CPC came to regard Islam in its modern form with distrust. Idem, 105–106.

religious knowledge and devotion. It was only after 1937 that the feeling of national endangerment and the 'second national front' enabled meetings between CPC officials with leading Muslim intellectuals.²⁷

John M.H. Lindbeck has described the mechanism of the Communist's failure to gain Muslim support in the 1930s and 1940s. In Lindbeck's opinion it rested on the CPC's inability to recognize the importance of modernist and progressive Muslim leaders, who were potentially the Party's closest political ally. This was caused by the fact that in the Northwest those modernists were mostly *Yihewani*-minded and as such allied with the Ma family warlords, the sworn enemies of the CPC. Therefore the Communists concentrated their propaganda on Muslim conservatives, who were ideologically and intellectually the farthest from the Communists and attacked the modernists as reactionaries. In this way the CPC lost both the potential sympathy of modernists, strengthening their pro-GMD stance, and failed to gain support from the traditionalists.²⁸

The new China. Sino-Muslims in the People's Republic

It was in the first years of the PRC that a certain mental proximity of the Sino-Muslim modernists and Communist reformers was noticed by both sides. After 1949, the Hui elite were divided in their views of the CPC victory. Many outstanding leaders of the Muslim reformist movement decided to leave the country. Among them were such important figures as imam Ma Songting who, after a brief stay in Taiwan, settled in Hong Kong. The Muslim elder Wang Jingzhai also considered leaving the mainland for Taiwan in the case of a communist victory. The Chinese Muslim Association (*Zhongguo Huijiao Xiehui*, 中國回教協會) in anticipation of GMD's defeat was preparing its base on the island and asked him to organize a branch in Taipei. However, Wang died in May 1949 while on an inspection tour of mosques in Guizhou province, not seeing the fall of the Republic of China on the mainland. His timely death perhaps saved him from being labeled a Chiang Kai-shek sympathizer by the subsequent communist regime.

Still, many devout and patriotic Muslim intellectuals, clerics and the vast majority of normal Hui Muslims stayed on the mainland. Amongst those who welcomed the CPC's victory was Pang Shiqian who saw in the Communists the promise of a fairer government for his people. Others included the famous Ningxia *Yihewani* imam and a sworn Chinese patriot Hu Songshan (虎嵩山, 1880–1955), who ran a number of scripturalist schools in his home province and became famous as the author of a patriotic Muslim prayer during the anti-Japanese war.²⁹ His grandson

²⁷ For instance, in 1938 Ma Songting (馬松亭 1895–1992), a famous imam and director of the Chengda Shifan school and its Yuehua magazine, joined the sessions of the so-called three-sided talks (*sanfang renwu zuotanhui*) organized by Zhou Enlai in Chongqing. The results of those talks are unknown, but acquaintance with Zhou was to play an important role in Ma's later life. Ma Bozhong 2006, 143.

²⁸ Lindbeck 1950, 480.

²⁹ For more on Hu see: Lipman 1997, 209–211.

recollected later that Hu was so deeply disappointed with the GMD's misrule in China that he welcomed the communist victory with a congratulatory banner on his mosque in Gansu.³⁰

Hu was one of many Sino-Muslim intellectuals who believed that the CPC would keep its promises in regards to the cultural autonomy for the Hui. The recognition of the Hui as an ethnic minority, always a part of CPC's political program, allowed those who decided to stay in the PRC to recognize the good intentions of the Party. Besides Pang and Hu many prominent Hui intellectuals joined the new government in its efforts to build a lasting consensus between the state and Muslims. Those included the famous imam, activist and educator Da Pusheng (達浦生, 1874–1965), translator and Islamic scholar Ma Jian (馬堅, 1906–1978) and Bai Shouyi (白壽彝, 1909–2000). The latter, a lay person and a historian fascinated by Marxist historical methodology even joined the Party.

Many Muslims decided to return to China, lured by the enthusiasm of building a 'new China'. One of those was a young imam Gao Haoran, who at the time of the founding of the People's Republic studied at the University in Mecca. He has written a vivid account of his own hesitation, shared by fellow Chinese Muslim residents in the Arab countries when the news of communist victory reached them: "[...] the opinions of Moslems in Mecca were divided. Some Chinese who insisted on returning home were patriotic Moslems with no political background, but many others were afraid to go home and prepared to spend the rest of their lives abroad. Eventually I, as an Islamic Imam, started my journey homeward, but with a troubled mind."³¹ Ma Songting, who entered the PRC from Hong Kong in 1952 on a personal invitation from his old acquaintance Zhou Enlai, followed Gao.

In the first several years of the PRC, the Sino-Muslim leaders enjoyed a relatively free working environment, and most were allowed to continue their work. Ma Jian remained in his position of Arabic lecturer at the Beijing University of Foreign Languages which he had held since 1946. Another Al-Azhar graduate Na Zhong (納忠, 1909–2008) was in turn entrusted with the task of establishing an Arabic language department at the Yunnan University.

As a result of the official recognition of the Hui as an ethnic minority the stress on the lay aspects of their identity became more pronounced. In addition to the Hui, the ethnic identification program of the 1950's led to an official recognition of nine other Muslim groups as ethnic minorities. Those included the Turkic Uyghurs in Xinjiang and several other Turkic groups in the province (and one Indo-European, the so-called Tajiks of the Pamir Mountains). On the Gansu-Qinghai border the Muslim groups were divided along linguistic lines, despite the fact that traditionally sectarian divisions used to play a more important role. Newly recognized groups included the Mongolian speaking Sartas, officially labeled as Dongxiang and Bao'an and Turkic Salars. For some Muslims, attached to their religious and sectarian loy-

³⁰ Hu 2005, 46.

³¹ Kao 1962, 1–2.

alties, this seemed like a 'divide and rule' policy.³² As the government increasingly tended to see the Hui in strictly ethnic terms it undertook to terminologically divorce the Hui and Islam – two terms hitherto meaning roughly the same. This had already been proposed by some of the Sino-Muslim intellectuals in the previous decades to differentiate between the universal religion and its Chinese population. *Yisilan*, a sinicized form of the Arabic term was proposed to replace the more traditional *Huijiao*. One of the main proponents of this step was Bai Shouyi, who had argued consistently that Islam and Hui people are two different categories. The State Council heeded this argumentation and in June 1956 it adopted a law that imposed the official usage of the term *Yisilan* in place of *Huijiao*. This opened the way to a previously unthinkable situation in which it is possible to be ethnically Hui, but religiously non-Muslim. The official differentiation between the Hui and Islam created a potential for Hui discontent with the Communist's policies.

However, the developments of the first years of the PRC helped to establish a common platform between the authorities and Muslim leaders like Ma Jian. Anti-American hysteria associated with the Korean War and the Chinese involvement in the conflict made the Hui elite and the communist government speak in the same anti-imperialist rhetoric. For Muslim leaders like Ma Jian this derived from his personal experience of being both Chinese and Muslim, and a graduate of the Islamic world's most important university: "the American imperialism is a deadly enemy of the People's Republic of China – our every compatriot knows that [...] I am afraid however that few of our Muslim compatriots realize that there exists also an American conspiracy against Islam."³³

The communist authorities mastered the methods of using Muslim intellectuals in their foreign policy. The communist authorities appreciated the potential of the Middle Eastern-trained Hui. Ma Jian was often used in the capacity of Arabic interpreter during state visits from Arab countries and in diplomatic delegations to the Middle East. He interpreted for top PRC leaders: Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi. The elderly imam Da Pusheng, whose linguistic abilities included Urdu, also played an important role in Chinese diplomacy towards the Muslim world. In 1952 he represented the Muslims of China at the Vienna World Peace Congress.³⁴ Da's diplomatic peak came in 1955 in the Bandung Conference, where he acted as Zhou Enlai's interpreter, and was utilized by the latter to win the confidence of Muslim states for the PRC. This secured Egypt's diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic.

The cooperation between Hui Muslims and the new communist government also rested on an organizational basis. The most important element of this was the Chinese Islamic Association (CIA) (*Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Xiehui*, 中國伊斯蘭教協會),

³² The Sartas have been labeled Dongxiang after their geographical location in a stark contravention with their own practice. This is probably the only minority in China that has been named after a place.

³³ Quoted in: Li 2000, 123.

³⁴ Feng 2003, 1425. Feng Jinyuan's biographical entry on Da incorrectly places the 1952 WPC conference in Helsinki.

established in May 1953 as the first religious association in the PRC. The institution was created to function as an intermediary between the government and the Muslim populations. It differed in name from its predecessor, having replaced the *Huijiao* with *Yisilanjiao*. This reflected the general change in official terminology outlined above, and indeed the association was no longer a Hui-only affair, but included representatives of other Muslim national minorities. The Association was a result of long-time Hui elite's ambitions to create an official institution to represent their interest's vis-à-vis the state. However, similarly to the Republican era predecessor the new organization became a tool of political control for the government, which also utilized it in its foreign policy towards Muslim states. Even though the large majority of CIA activists were Hui modernists and scripturalists, the ruling party decided to place a person of its own choice at its head.³⁵

Still, it was exactly these people who came to dominate the inner workings of the Association, and it is their pupils who continue to do so until today.³⁶ Despite having a Party nominee as their head the Hui were able to control the middle and lower echelons of the organization. The CIA commission, a collective ruling body of the Association, comprised of 83 members from all ten Muslim minorities. However, among these 62 were Hui and among the five vice-chairmen only one was a non-Hui.³⁷ One of the main tasks of the CIA formulated in its statute was to "support the People's government in its policy of religious freedom and to propagate the good Islamic traditions, defend the motherland and guard the world peace".³⁸

The CIA was delegated to organize the official state-sponsored religious education. In 1949, shortly after the proclamation of the People's Republic, the state took over the already nationalized *Chengda Shifan* and merged it with two Muslim middle schools. This was in turn transformed in 1955 into the Chinese Institute of Quranic Studies (*Zhongguo Yisilanjiao Jingxue Yuan*, 中國伊斯蘭教經學院) with Da Pusheng as its director. The institute was established to "train imams familiar with the Islamic world, possessing patriotic convictions and thorough Quranic knowledge".³⁹ The students were taught not only religion but also, in accordance with the earlier practice of *Chengda*, natural sciences and political subjects. The school was also intended to teach foreign languages, and its deployment in international propaganda work.

Despite the appearance of tolerance towards Muslim life in New China, the authorities did not intend to loosen its control over religious life. The parachuting of Party loyalists to prominent positions in the CIA eventually led to a growing discontent among the Hui's religious elite. At the end of 1957 a great storm was

³⁵ This was Burhan Shahidi (包爾漢, 1894–1989), a political activist and Party member of Tatar origin, who in his youth studied at a Tatar Jadidist school in Russia. He officially acted as a Xinjiang Uyghur to conceal the underrepresentation of Uyghurs in the CIA. Allès, Chérif-Chebbi, Halfon, 2003, 32n6.

³⁶ Chérif-Chebbi 2004, 61–90.

³⁷ See: Li, Feng and al. 1998, 822.

³⁸ Cited in: Idem, 821.

³⁹ Idem, 824.

already building over Muslim life. In that year there were still some 20 thousand mosques and over one hundred thousand imams working in China. That was about to change dramatically very soon. The 'Anti-rightist campaign' initiated that year, radicalized the religious policies of the state. Any religious activity became politically suspect, and any actions not in accord with Mao's revolutionary line became increasingly dangerous. Paradoxically it was in 1957 that the Chinese Muslims got their own journal, the first to appear since communist authorities closed down all Muslim periodicals, including Yuehua, in 1949. The first issue of 'Chinese Muslim' (*Zhongguo Musilin*, 中國穆斯林), published both in Chinese and Uyghur, appeared in the second half of the year. It included an article titled 'Oppose the rightist careerists and resolutely proceed on the path of socialism'. This was an indication, that the magazine was intended as a propaganda tool in the political struggle, and not an open platform for differing opinions like 'Yuehua'. The second issue contained a whole series of articles attacking a number of prominent Muslim leaders as rightists. The main target of the critique was Ma Songting, who, like many victims of the 'anti-rightist campaign', was attacked for his outspokenness during the 'hundred flowers' period. He was cited as saying that both the CIA and its Quranic Institute were "institutions devoted not to the study of Islam, but to control the religion and to educating 'red imams'".⁴⁰ Labeled as rightist and self-proclaimed 'Muslim leader', Ma was purged and did not emerge in the public until the early 1980s. Soon, more Hui Muslim activists followed including Da Pusheng.

In May 1958 at the second plenary session of the 7th CPC congress Yang Jingren, the communist CIA vice-chairman simultaneously holding the rank of vice-director of the state Nationality Commission (*Guojia Minzu Weiyuanhui*), announced the beginning of the 'democratic reform of religious institutions' (*Zongjiao Zhidu Minzhu Gaige*) which rested upon the principle of 'five separations' (*wuge fenkai*): the separation of the national question from religion, the separation of religious belief from religious institutions, the separation of religion and government, the separation of religion and education and finally the separation of religion and CPC.⁴¹ All hierarchical religious institutions were thus declared to be remnants of the feudal past and the teaching of any religious knowledge to children and youth was prohibited. The management of mosques was transferred to secular state-appointed committees comprised mostly of laymen loyal to the party, and imams were stripped of their incomes. In practice, the 'democratic reform' meant the closing, or demolishing of, mosques and other places of Islamic practice (Sufi tombs, schools etc.). Its impact was most heavily felt in the northwest; when in 1960 the reform was declared to be over only 31 mosques were left (out of 2878 before 1958). In the nominally Hui autonomous region of Ningxia this proportion was 109 out of 1895.⁴² The five separations meant also the removal of many lay intellectuals from teaching and social

⁴⁰ Ma Mingji 1957.

⁴¹ He 2004, 134.

⁴² Li, Feng and al. 1998, 844.

activity. Several years before the start of the Cultural Revolution, it was no longer safe to be openly Muslim in China.

Conclusion

Reading the official biographies of the leading Sino-Muslim intellectuals and religious specialists one soon discovers that they were suddenly cut at around 1957. If they survived the next twenty years, their biographies begin anew in the early 1980s, just as in the case of Ma Songting. When the religious freedoms were restored in the wake of Deng's reforms, many of those persecuted during the 'two lost decades' were able to regain their positions, and get back to work. The tight control of all religious life has not been lifted, but the believers have managed to renew their practice. Once again the official body of state control over Muslim religious life has been dominated by the Sinophone Hui *Yihewani* modernists.⁴³ China is again a country with more than 30 thousand mosques, and every year more than 10 thousand Chinese hajjis make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Yet, the experience of the six decades of CPC rule, has meant that the Hui Muslims have learned their place in China – as an ethnic minority, with minority customs and culture. This has been a painful lesson for the Sino-Muslim modernists who were hoping for a more central place in the Chinese nation-state, as one of the key hosts of the realm.

In the period from its founding to the present day, the CPC has always adhered to the principle of recognizing the Hui as an ethnic minority. While in the first stages of its relationship with the Hui this was a welcome development on the part of some Sino-Muslim leaders, the later periods were increasingly marked by the Party's overall aversion to religion, which in the best of cases meant a tolerance for the outer aspects of the faith, but did not condone a more independent practice. Using the common platform of Chinese patriotism the Communists were able to convince many of the Hui that they are an inseparable part of the Chinese family of nationalities as a minority, and that their religion is a minority phenomenon, not an important element of the wider Chinese culture, as many Hui intellectuals strived to demonstrate.

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⁴³ Chérif-Chebbi, 2004, 61–90.

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Contact: Włodzimierz Cieciora, assistant professor, Department of Sinology, University of Warsaw, Krakowskie Przedmieście 1, 00–927 Warsaw, Poland w.cieciora@uw.edu.pl

THE ETHNIC CHINESE IN INDONESIA: WHAT MAKES THE CHINESE CHINESE?

Martina Rysová

***Annotation:** This article focuses on the reasons and stereotypes that cause problems for the peaceful coexistence between the ethnic Chinese and the natives in Indonesia, and presents the results of a field study that was conducted by Izabela Klusova and Martina Rysova in Semarang city in 2010. The research focused on the current situation for the young generation of ethnic Chinese in Semarang, and their abilities of speaking Chinese, maintaining their Chinese traditions within their families, their relationship with Indonesian people, etc.*

***Keywords:** Chinese Indonesian, Overseas Chinese, stereotypes, Semarang*

Introduction

This article examines the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, primarily with regards to the self-perceptions of their own ethnicity, perceptions of them held by the Indonesian population, and their general standing within Indonesian society. The first section briefly outlines the history of the Chinese population living in Indonesia and focuses on pivotal moments of their cohabitation. Based on these historical and social facts, the stereotypes associated with the ethnic Chinese that have emerged, and which set them apart from the Indonesian population, are subsequently explored. Findings from a survey that was carried out on a small group of young ethnic Chinese in Semarang will then be presented in the second part of the paper. This research does not seek to negate or disprove the existing theories about the causes of anti-Chinese bias, but rather to identify whether or not the often criticized “Chineseness” artefacts are still current.

Historical Background of the Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia

The Overseas Chinese are usually a very special kind of society that exists within another society. This holds true in the case of Indonesia, where there is more than a five-hundred-year long history of ethnic Chinese presence. Since the Dutch colonial era the Chinese have often played very contradictory roles, and in the view of native Indonesians, mostly negative parts within the state and government game. Due to the Chinese having a sound business ability they became very powerful within the high-class society and simultaneously became hated by the lower classes. During bad economic times these suppressed emotions have often ended in acts of violence committed against the ethnic Chinese, one of the worst of which occurred in

1998. After that year, and together with a new direction of governance, the political and social situation for the ethnic Chinese began to change.

Firstly, I will mention three crucial moments in Chinese Indonesian history, not because they were times of Chinese immigration, but rather for their significant impacts on the life of the Chinese in Indonesia. The circumstances surrounding these incidents and the reasons that led them to occur may shed some light on the current situation for the ethnic Chinese, and may also explain the origins of the intolerance directed towards them by the native Indonesians.

During the Dutch East Indies period, the ethnic Chinese were included together with Indians and Arabs as Foreign Orientals and therefore officially distinct from the European and native population.¹ This tripartite racial system meant that the Europeans were placed on the highest social level whereas Foreign Orientals and the indigenous Indonesians were placed on the lower levels. As Aimee Davis has mentioned, this “arrangement was designed to segregate the Chinese from the indigenous population, and it pitted the two groups against one another”². In fact, the second category of this social distinction resulted in all so-called Foreign Orientals having different economical, tax and educational living conditions compared with the indigenous population; furthermore, many Chinese also served as tax collectors for the Dutch and therefore played the “middleman” role between the Dutch and the natives. Thanks to this social position of being “in the middle”, they became successful in their businesses, wealthy and powerful. The Chinese also profited from agriculture, as wealthy Chinese owned huge plantations with thousands of Chinese wage workers employed there. During the first half of the 18th century, as a result of an increasing Chinese population and the stagnation of the sugar trade, the Dutch decided to move the Chinese workers to south Ceylon. Uncertainty surrounding this situation led to Chinese revolts and looting all around Batavia, which in turn had further repercussions. In October 1740 Dutch authorities issued an order to search for the Chinese in Batavia which resulted in several days of arrests and killings of Chinese people. Victims of this massacre are estimated to number between five and ten thousand and the whole incident is referred to as Red (or Bloody) River due to the blood of Chinese that is said to have coloured the river in Batavia.³ Those who survived were relocated to the segregated areas within Batavia and this new model was also adopted in many of the other cities. These China-towns, or *pecinan*, did not at all help in improving the native Indonesian-Chinese relationship; the Chinese population – geographically separated and physically concentrated in select areas – became more exclusive thus making it even more difficult for both groups to mingle than before. Leonard Blusse calls this situation a “crisis of identity”, where ethnic Chinese were considered to be neither pure Chinese, nor Dutch, but rather half-baked Javanese.⁴

¹ Purdey 2006, 4.

² Davis 2009, 23.

³ Blusse 2004, 176.

⁴ Blusse 2004, 180.

Another interesting moment in the history of the Chinese in Indonesia came after the declaration of Indonesian independence during the reign of President Sukarno (1945–1966). The five principals of Pancasila (the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state) included positive virtues of social justice, democracy and a just, civilized society, which understandably brought a feeling of optimism to all Indonesian citizens, including the ethnic Chinese. In 1959, however, Sukarno issued the *Presidential Regulation 10* which forbade ownership of rural businesses by foreigners and commanded them to move from the countryside into the towns and cities. According to Leo Suryadinata it was this Regulation that indicated the beginning of the anti-Chinese movement in Indonesia.⁵ Even though this regulation addressed all foreigners in the country, ninety percent of the foreign storekeepers were those of Chinese descent. Moreover, in 1965–1966 during the anti-communist purge that was organized by Suharto to eliminate the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) as a leading political force, thousands of people were killed including a great number of Chinese because of their “general essentialising identification of their ethnicity with communism”⁶.

The situation did not improve after the rise of Suharto as president. In 1967 the *Presidential Regulation 14* was issued which essentially banned all manifestations of Chinese culture or otherness. With the arguments for nationalism, a need for assimilation of foreigners who wanted to live inside the country, and the unity of the nation, ethnic Chinese were forbidden to speak their language in public, use Chinese characters, or to openly display symbols or behaviours connected with Chinese culture and religion. Chinese schools, temples and organizations were closed and Chinese people were forced to change their names to Indonesian ones.⁷ Due to political pressure, the Chinese were pushed out of the academic, political and military spheres, and instead spread their strength into the “allowed”, and as it turned out, most prosperous areas, that being business and industry.

“In the process of making Chinese the internal ‘Other’, the New Order imposed a social stigma on the Chinese to be exclusive, asocial, rich and China-(hence, Communist) orientated. This stigmatisation of the ethnic Chinese was manifested in the reformulation and institutionalisation of the ‘Chinese problem’ in Indonesia. The ethnic Chinese – their culture, their religion, their role in the nation’s economy, and their very existence – were labelled by New Order politicians as the ‘Chinese problem’”⁸ The prohibitions and restrictions against the Chinese in the 1970s and 1980s provided the way for “solving” the “problem”. The Asian economic crisis of 1997–1998 and its social consequences showed the power of this politically manufactured problem. In May 1998, incidents of mass violence erupted throughout Indonesia with ethnic Chinese being the main victims. The riots were caused by the economic crisis in Indonesia including food shortages and mass unemployment and the Chinese were viewed as one of the main reason for the crisis.

⁵ Suryadinata 1989, 14.

⁶ Purdey 2006, 15.

⁷ Fischer 2003, 6.

⁸ Hoon 2002, 99–100.

The incident led to the resignation of President Suharto and the fall of the New Order government. All Indonesian governments post 1998 have worked on improving the Chinese position in society and inter-ethnic relations. In the first years after the Suharto step down, amongst other reforms, the use and teaching of the Chinese language was allowed in all levels, Chinese New Year was declared a national holiday in Indonesia, and the Chinese religions (Taoism, Confucianism) were no longer forbidden.

Who are the Chinese Indonesians Today?

According to the Indonesian Population Census 2010 there are more than 2.8 million self-identified ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia, which is around 1.20 percent of the country's population⁹, however, the actual number of Chinese Indonesians has been speculated. The highest (but immoderate) estimate is 5%, which would mean that more than 11.8 million of the 237.6 million inhabitants are ethnic Chinese. One of the arguments why the Chinese Indonesians may not have wanted to admit their true ethnic origin lies in their alleged fear, a result of their historical experiences.

The ethnic Chinese were traditionally divided into two social groups according to their relationship with the indigenous people and their surroundings. *Peranakans* – were locally born, spoke Indonesian or the other local languages, did not keep up the Chinese traditions and often had only one Indonesian parent. *Totoks* – were foreign born, spoke Chinese, maintained the Chinese traditions and essentially stayed Chinese but lived in a “foreign” country.

The anti-Chinese rules established during the New Order have brought a lot of changes to society and as Suryadinata claims, the nowadays absolute majority of ethnic Chinese is either *peranakans* or *peranakanized totoks*¹⁰. The Chinese community has been Indonesianized and *totok* children have been *peranakanized*. As I see it, considering it is difficult even for the Chinese themselves to define their ethnic origin, Blussé's designation of being “half-baked” is as valid for today's ethnic Chinese as it was almost three hundred years ago. The important question that emerges is what keeps the ethnic Chinese being “half-baked”, what sets them apart, and what makes them unpopular or provocative to become the lightning rod or “scapegoat” for discontent within the society?

Ethnic Chinese Stereotypes in Indonesia

Thanks to the active work of researchers on the issue of the Chinese in Indonesia, we are aware of the many so-called stereotypes that may make the Chinese Chinese. The basic characteristics that make up ethnic groups include: different appearance,

⁹ sp2010.bps.go.id 2013 *Kewarganegaraan, Suku Bangsa, Agama dan Bahasa Sehari-hari Penduduk Indonesia Hasil Sensus Penduduk 2010*. Badan Pusat Statistik. 2011. ISBN 9789790644175. <http://sp2010.bps.go.id/files/ebook/kewarganegaraan%20penduduk%20indonesia/index.html>

¹⁰ Suryadinata 2008, 5.

distinct language, different religion and specific cultural traditions. When speaking about the ethnic Chinese, besides the stereotypes related to diversity in religion, ethnicity, economic and social class, there have been other, more basic, handed down characteristics, and which are most often connected with work. These include: ignition to work, purposefulness, diligence, discipline, speed, efficiency, skill and being well organized; and negative characteristics, such as: arrogance, selfishness, rudeness, materialism, exclusivity and corruption.¹¹ Within the theory of SARA discrimination (suku – ethnic, agama – religion, ras – race, antar-golongan – interethnic) I am inclined to think that the “Chinese problem” is less about religion or ethnicity, but rather more dominated by the social situation, economic jealousy, prejudices about Chinese Indonesian property and wealth, stereotypes, exclusivity, unsociability and their general “Chineseness”. An example of what this Chineseness is or what provokes the original inhabitants the most, can be illustrated by the list of nine Chinese “sins” which was issued by the then Minister for People’s Housing, Siswono, in 1991.

1. They live exclusively in their own area;
2. Some companies have a preference to recruit people of Chinese descent;
3. Some companies discriminate in salary in favour of the ethnic Chinese workers;
4. There are some who discriminate between ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indonesians in their behaviour towards clients, in their business relations;
5. They do not show social solidarity and togetherness with the ethnic Indonesians in their neighbourhood;
6. They are those whose sense of national identity is still very weak, and who treat Indonesia solely as a place to live and earn a living;
7. There are those who in their daily life still speak Chinese and who adhere to their traditions, and do not even know Indonesian customs, and who make no effort to speak Indonesian well;
8. There are those who view their Indonesian citizenship as a legality only;
9. There are those who feel superior towards other population groups.¹²

Research Aims and Methodology of the Semarang Survey

The research was conducted as part of a diploma thesis in 2010 by using simple questionnaires in Semarang, Java. The research goal was to examine a small sample of ethnic Chinese, and to determine whether they demonstrated selected markers of Chineseness which have often been criticized throughout Indonesian history and have many times led to violence as was mentioned in the first section of this article. The following topics were selected for the survey: family origin, parents’ occupation (to find possible connections with business and wealth), use of different religions, maintenance of Chinese traditions and demonstration of Chinese culture, use of the

¹¹ Hoon 2006, 261–265.

¹² Hoon 2006: 103.

Chinese language, preference for Chinese media, and preference for Chinese friends or community over others.

The survey was carried out among young people at two educational institutions. The first school was the SMP Maria Mediatrix Semarang with a group of 12–16 year old respondents, and the second one was Universitas Katolik Semarang with a group of 18–24 year old respondents. The total number of respondents was 107. These institutions were chosen because of the high concentration of ethnic Chinese. The strategy employed may not seem correct on the one hand, but on the other hand shows that there is still a large number of Chinese and Indonesians studying separately.

Through mapping the situation of the younger and thus the new generation of Chinese Indonesians in Semarang, we tried to capture the current situation and indicate the possible direction of one Chinese community in Indonesia.

Results of the Semarang Survey

I feel to be... (Table 1)

	n	%
Indonesian	21	31.8
Chinese	35	53
I don't know	9	13.6
No answer	1	1.5

Unfortunately, the question about the respondents' personal feelings was only asked to the students at SMP Maria Mediatrix; at Universitas Katolik it was recommended that this question not be asked. Results showed that 53% from 66 respondents claimed they feel themselves to be Chinese. Within the explanations of why they felt this way included: 1. because of my origin, 2. because my parents are Chinese, 3. because my family still maintain the Chinese traditions, 4. because my skin is whiter and my eyes more squinty. For those who answered that they feel as Indonesian, these were the most common arguments: 1. because I was born in Indonesia, 2. because my whole family lives in Indonesia, 3. because the majority of my friends are Indonesian.

Origin of parents (Table 2)

	n	%
Both ethnic Chinese	91	85
Chinese father, Indonesian mother	7	6.5
Indonesian father, Chinese mother	1	0.93
Other	4	3.78
No answer	4	3.78

This table shows that 85% of all respondents (107) have both parents Chinese. Within the “other” category, two respondents mentioned that not the parent but grandparent is Chinese, and that one of their parents is a *peranakan* and the other one a *pribumi* (native Indonesian). One respondent stated that the mother is Chinese and the father is Dutch. To hold together is for Chinese society a very typical characteristic (though this became a sin in somebody else’s view). This is reflected in the Chinese traditional view of marriage where it is good to marry someone who suits you in all ways, including the same ethnicity, and this method of partner selection still holds true to this day.

The part of the asking about their origins also included a question about the time of the respondents families’ arrival in Indonesia which most of the respondents did not reply to at all; some of them demonstrated their historical awareness and answered that their family has lived in Indonesia since the arrival of Zheng He. Around 31% of respondents stated that their family arrived in the early 60s or that they were 3rd generation, in other words in the period following the declaration of Indonesian independence.

Occupation of parents (Table 3)

	father	mother	both
businessman	68	24	92
employee	21	15	36
at home	0	51	51
other	11	9	20
no answer	7	8	15

‘Table 3’ shows that 92 from 214 parents (which is 43%) work in the business sphere. Thirty-six (18.8%) were presented as employees, but mostly as employees in business or trade companies, and not as state employees. From all the 214 parents

there were only 5 teachers, 3 doctors, 1 notary, 1 architect and 1 factory director. Only five of all the parents worked manually, with 3 being motor mechanics, 1 a dressmaker and 1 a repairman in a Chinese temple.

Origin of friends (Table 4)

	n	%
Only Indonesian	0	0
Mostly Indonesian	8	7.5
Both (Ch, I)	79	73.8
Only Chinese	0	0
Mostly Chinese	17	15.9
No answer	2	1.9

This table shows that the Chinese themselves do not suffer from excessive prejudices regarding their collection of friends and that they do not have any problems in assimilating with the local population.

Students of Indonesian origin (although not mentioned in this table) who attend classes at SMP Maria Mediatrix together with ethnic Chinese said that 64% of them have friends between both ethnic groups, 26% mostly with Indonesians and about 7% only with Indonesians. From 107 surveyed ethnic Chinese not even one rated the “only Chinese” option.

Contact with China (Table 5)

	n	%
Yes, often	10	9.3
Yes, rarely	26	24.3
Yes (we have a relatives in China), but we are not in touch	13	12.1
No	57	53.3
No answer	1	0.9

Interesting information related to ‘Table 5’ is that more than half of the respondents have no contact with China at all.

Religion (Table 6)

	n	%
Catholic	67	62
Protestant	34	31
Muslim	1	0.9
Buddhist	3	2.8
other	0	0
no answer	2	1.9

The question of religion is a very interesting topic within the issues of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. At the time of their arrival to Indonesia their major faith lay in one of the traditional Chinese religions – Taoism, Confucianism or Buddhism. Due to historical circumstances, which I have mentioned in the earlier section, most of the young Chinese Indonesians tended towards Catholicism, Protestantism or Islam. The fact that the survey was conducted at the Catholic university and the Christian high school may show misleading results, however, it also remains that most of Chinese Indonesians, regardless of their religion, study at this kind of educational institution. There are no purely “ethnic” or “minority” educational institutions as was the case in the past during the era of Dutch domination, and today’s minority students are mainly educated at “non-Muslim” schools.

Maintaining Chinese traditions (Table 7)

Yes	%	No	%
96	89.7	11	10.3

The questionnaires revealed that nearly 90% of respondents maintain Chinese traditions. A large majority, and even ten of the 42 Indonesian classmates in the classroom SMP MM, said that their family celebrates the holiday called Imlek and few of them also mentioned the feast Cap Go Meh and Cheng Beng.

Imlek is the Indonesian name for the celebration of Chinese New Year. The celebration of Chinese New Year was banned from 1965 until 1998 in Indonesia, but since 2003 Imlek has been ranked among the Indonesian state holidays. New Year celebrations usually begin the first day of the first month of the year and lasts until the feast called Cap Go Meh. Cheng Beng is the Indonesian name for the Chinese feast qingmingjié清明节. In Indonesia it is sometimes also called “grave sweeping day” or “Feast of Souls” and usually falls on the 5th of April.

With regards to modern Chinese culture and media, these are not overly popular among the surveyed group. Only 40% of respondents mentioned they sometimes watch Chinese TV, 21.5% sometimes listen to Chinese radio stations and 14% sometimes read Chinese newspapers (the Chinese newspapers in Indonesia are often written in the Indonesian language).

Speaking Chinese (Table 8)

	n	%
Yes, I can	3	2.8
I understand, but I cannot speak	16	15
I am learning	30	28
I cannot	54	50.5
Other	1	0.9
No answer	3	2.8

Although Chinese education was allowed and supported after the fall of Suharto, the young ethnic Chinese have lost their command of the Chinese language and felt a bigger importance in knowing English. Only 3 from 107 respondents stated that they can speak Chinese (or its dialects), 16 of them understood but could not speak, and 30 were learning it.

Discussion on the Results of the Semarang Survey

The results of the survey more than anything else support Suryadinata's claims, of the peranakanization and further Indonesianization of Chinese Indonesians. Looking at the cultural characteristics of Chineseness, we can clearly see the successful effects of the New Order assimilation pressures. The young ethnic Chinese are not able to speak and write Chinese and most probably do not feel this to be a loss. Ninety percent of families maintain the Chinese traditions, the most popular being Chinese New Year and only a few of them know or honour the other traditions. I assume that because of the religious restrictions that occurred during the New Order, that the Chinese religion these days plays more of a cultural and traditional role rather than a religious one. The ethnic Chinese go to the temples, take care of their ancestors etc., alongside having Catholic or Protestant faiths. Donald Earl Willmott who examined the life of Chinese Indonesians in the 1950s claims that according to his and previous research it is clear that the question of religion is not so essential for the Chinese population. For example, when entering into marriage it is much more important for Chinese parental consent, a good education or ideals

in the future partner rather than his or her religion¹³. That is significantly different from the Indonesian population, for whom the unity of their faith is the cornerstone of marriage.

This brings us to the second group of Chineseness characteristics which I will call subconscious Chineseness. This may operate simultaneously within both the Indonesian and Chinese psyches resulting in a vicious cycle that continues to perpetuate this Chineseness. Examples of this dynamic are visible throughout the years. As an example I will use one of the ethnic Chinese “sins”: the Chinese Indonesians live exclusively in their own areas. Although segregation is not as pronounced today as it used to be in the past, even nowadays we can find neighbourhoods inhabited only by ethnic Chinese. However, this has an inherent historical background. The ethnic Chinese have lived apart for centuries, though they did not choose this way of living by themselves. After the massacre in Batavia, the Dutch forced them to move to these isolated areas, and then the Sukarno government tried to replicate this model during the resettlement of ethnic Chinese from rural areas into the cities. Suharto’s forced assimilation methods, naturally led the ethnic Chinese to stick together, which in turn further strengthened the resentment held by the native Indonesians who became dissatisfied with the isolation and lack of integration by the Chinese people.

Another often criticized characteristic of the ethnic Chinese is their success in business which was shown by the number of parents who worked in the business sector. Even though the basis of this ethnic tension is somewhat understandable, the Indonesian disapproval has already caused the ethnic Chinese many hard times. Agus Salim carried out a survey among secondary school children about the multi-cultural situation within Indonesian society. The Javanese children freely expressed their (thus their parents’ or society’s) views which may help us elucidate the crux of the problem. They described the ethnic Chinese as sharp in thought, diligent and resilient, but also envious, arrogant, authoritarian, unsociable and calculative.¹⁴ These responses confirm my opinion that in the end the most influential and enduring determinants of prejudice may not be the most profound, but rather those more elementary in nature and borne of the fear of one’s own adequate existence.

Conclusion

The research carried out on this group of young ethnic Chinese suggests that many of the characteristic Chineseness artefacts may not be as dominant as might be expected. This was shown by low rates of: Chinese language proficiency, Chinese media preference and contact with China; and high levels of inter-racial mixing (as evidenced by the ethnic origin of their friends); in terms of self-perception, a large portion did not identify themselves to be Chinese. These results are interesting considering that the parents of the vast majority of the respondents were both of ethnic Chinese origin, Chinese traditions were to some degree maintained, and other common stereotypes did hold (e.g. occupation of parents as “businessman”).

¹³ Willmott 1960, 184.

¹⁴ Salim 2006, 172.

This survey explored the attitudes of young Chinese that were brought up in the post-Suharto period, and the results did not strongly support the stereotypes often held; it is unknown whether a shift of attitudes and perceptions within the broader Indonesian population is at play or whether this is isolated to the young Chinese themselves. An interesting question worth posing is how other generations of Chinese would have responded at other times throughout Indonesia's history (such as in the pre-Suharto and Suharto periods), which could provide clues on the strength of 'markers of Chineseness', their changes over time, and on what grounds were historical attitudes within Indonesia based on.

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Contact: Mgr. Martina Rysová, Department of Asian Studies, Palacký University in Olomouc, Křížkovského 10, 771 80 Olomouc, Czech Republic, martina.rysova@upol.cz

“INTERNAL ORIENTALISM” IN THE CONTEXT OF A STATE-NATION BUILDING PROCESS IN THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Katarzyna Golik

***Annotation:** The policy of “reforms and opening-up” in the PRC has brought significant changes in the situation for the ethnic minorities. The modern state-nation doctrine assumes the unity of the 56 nationalities, all of which merge to form the Chinese nation. The social depiction of China’s ethnic minorities has improved, nevertheless it is still based on stereotypes, which strongly resemble Western orientalism. One of the important problems arising from this “internal orientalism” is that the ethnic diversity is reduced to colourful costumes, musical performances and traditional ways of life. Although the orientalisation of minorities is rather unprompted, it has turned out to be a useful tool for the state’s policy of nation building.*

***Keywords:** internal orientalism, state-nation, education, popular culture, Mongols*

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is a country with a complicated ethnic structure, inhabited by various ethnic groups with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The concept of “nation”, which was introduced in China in the 20th century, resulted in a redefinition of the status of ethnic groups in the Chinese society. The policy of “reforms and opening-up”, especially in the last two decades, brought a significant change of the Chinese attitude towards ethnic minorities. They were allowed to openly cultivate their traditions, which according to the political doctrine, became a common heritage of the Chinese civilisation. The Han Chinese became curious of the state’s ethnic minorities but their knowledge about the non-Sinitic ethnic groups often turned out to be rather shallow. The phenomenon known as “internal orientalism” developed bottom-up, but it also became part of the state policy.

The aim of this paper is to present the issue of “internal orientalism” in the PRC. Special emphasis will be placed on the mechanism of the politicization of this phenomenon, as the stereotyping of ethnic minorities serves to the process of building national unity. Presented arguments will be supported with examples of ethnic minority education and popular culture. I will mainly refer to the cases of the Mongols and Tibetans.

“Internal Orientalism”

The term “orientalism” is used in the context of a fascination with distinct cultures, combined with the projection of ideas. After Edward Said, the term received

a negative connotation linked with the idea of the supremacy of Western civilization over other cultures. This view shares much in common with the present perception of ethnic minorities in the PRC. Although the social depiction of these nationalities has improved, it is still largely based on stereotypes. Understanding alien nationalities through the lens of one's own culture has often resulted in the simplification and diminution of their cultural heritage. These fabricated ethnic cultures influence the perception of the minorities held not only by the average Chinese but even by the elites. For the policy-makers they have turned out to be useful in creating unity among the citizens on the basis of the impression of common roots among all of the nationalities in China.

"Internal orientalism" in China illustrates an evolution of the social approach to ethnic minorities. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the peoples were divided into "external ethnic groups" (外族) in contrast to the more civilized "internal ethnic groups" (内族). The non-Chinese ethnic groups often used to be treated with ambivalence and fear. At the same time, they could become a part of the Chinese civilization through sinicization. The period of "reform and opening-up" brought a new phase of inter-ethnic relationships, when minorities started to be considered as part of the state-nation called the Chinese nation or *Zhonghua Minzu* (中华民族). This idea included the concept by the influential scholar Fei Xiaotong – "unity in diversity". The significant change was that the non-Sinitic nationalities did not need to assimilate in the strict sense to be regarded as part of the Chinese civilization.

The state-nation often refers to the dominating nationality in the state¹. In the case of some Asian countries this term is defined rather as a nation, which was created by the state². According to these two concepts, the state-nation of China is respectively: the Han Chinese and the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*). Despite the obvious political idea behind the Chinese nation, it seems to correspond with the culture-based idea of "Chineseness", where the criteria of being "Chinese" were not ethnic but rather sociolinguistic³. For this reason the idea of *Zhonghua minzu* in some aspects does not seem to be very different from the traditional concepts. It extended the ancient idea of the Chinese civilization by including the non-Sinitic cultures. At the same time it stands in contradiction to the traditional self-identification of the minorities, who share the sense of unity with a relatively small number of nationalities.

Since the beginning of the "reforms and opening-up" the role of the "red culture" in the mainstream declined. It was replaced by copies of Western culture or motives embedded in Chinese civilisation. These various cultural trends merged into difficult to pigeonhole eclectic formations. The Chinese faced a problem of redefining their cultural identity after the Cultural Revolution. In this new discourse, the ancient rural traditions became one of the foundations of the Chinese civilization. At the same time, ethnic minorities have been indirectly defined as the remains of an archaic,

¹ Jaworski 1999, 25–26, Coiplet 1996, 15–16.

² Stepan 2008, 1–2; Rejai and Enloe 1969 after: Taylor, Stephanie Joyce Ann 1997, 21–22 and Ahmar, Moonis 2001, 404–5.

³ Moser 1985, 25.

rural Chinese society. Their social structures were described as being “at a different level of development”⁴, which has led to the perception of ethnic minorities as the “living fossils” of proto-Chinese and an equating of ethnicity with folklore. This is another aspect shared with some forms of orientalism, where the Eastern cultures were regarded as less developed and incapable of scientific thought.

In the process of developing a modern culture, the Chinese have turned their attention to the rich, local traditions among which the minority cultures have proved to be exceptionally attractive. As it was noticed by Louisa Schein, a state of fascination with the internal “exotic” nationalities and the projection of stereotypical ideas about them resembles Western orientalism⁵. Previously, the minorities were promoted as an attraction for foreign tourists but they turned out to be interesting for the country’s majority as well. It came together with an increasing number of citizens, who began to accept the idea of a national community with different peoples living within the boundaries of the state⁶. The phenomenon of “internal orientalism” is not only characteristic of China (the Mainland and Taiwan)⁷, but is symptomatic for the specifics of state-nation building in the region of Southeast Asia⁸ and can be observed in Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. The efforts to create a state-nation can be observed in some other Asian countries but with significant differences. In Central Asia and Mongolia there is an emphasis on the unity of all the nationalities inside the state but without paying much attention to ethnic diversity. In the media, political practice, research and the legal system, there is no such term as “ethnic” or “national minority”⁹ or it appears very rarely¹⁰. For these reasons “internal orientalism” could not become such a significant phenomenon as it did in Southeast Asia or China¹¹.

An important element of the Chinese way of thinking is dualism, which is complementary, and not antagonistic as in the Western tradition¹². A reflection of this concept is the fact that “ethnicity” is symbolised mainly by rural ethnic women, which stands in contrast to the modern, urban men from the dominant Han nationality¹³. According to the Chinese way of thinking, the interpenetration of these two worlds allows the creation of a harmonious system. In the Age of Enlightenment the

⁴ Fei 1981, 65.

⁵ Schein 1997, 69–98

⁶ Hon 1996, 315–337.

⁷ Hon 1996, 319–321.

⁸ Khan 1998, 134–139.

⁹ Wierzbicki 2012, 5–7.

¹⁰ In the Mongolian language of the Republic of Mongolia the term for “ethnic minority” (*baga yastan* – “small bone”) is sometimes regarded as having contemptuous connotations. In Mongolian in the PRC the synonymous term (*chōōhōn ündesten* – “minority nationality”) seems rather neutral.

¹¹ The problem of inclusion or exclusion of the related ethnic groups living outside the state will not be discussed here but there are also some differences between Central Asian and East Asian countries in this aspect.

¹² Gawlikowski 2003, 7–67.

¹³ Schein 1997, 74–87.

orientalised Eastern cultures were supposed to be a mirror of Western civilization. The Chinese “internal orientalism” assigns an important role to the ethnic minorities in maintaining civilization. This is one of the most crucial differences between Western and Sinitic orientalism – the role of the ethnic minorities for Chinese culture is of a great importance.

One of the problems arising from “internal orientalism” is that ethnic diversity has been reduced to colourful costumes, musical performances and the traditional ways of life. Appreciation of these elements has resulted in an impression of tolerance towards the “backward” nationalities. There is the question of how much the majority knows and understands about the values and mentalities of the ethnic minorities. “Thou the minorities’ ways of thinking are much closer to Han Chinese than to Europeans, obviously they are far from being identical”¹⁴. What one can often come across is the idea that whatever the ethnic group is, all the members of the Chinese nation share similar values, which is a basis for national unity. “As a country of multiple nationalities, the idea of national unity is [...] the great power that keeps Chinese civilization going on and on.”¹⁵ Underestimation of the differences between the PRC’s ethnic groups carries a danger that when it comes to solving ethnic problems, the origins of the conflicts might not find a proper explanation within the society¹⁶.

Orientalisation of Ethnic Minorities

The original ethnic culture is often too hermetic to become attractive to an average Han Chinese. There are many ways of modifying it according to the Chinese idea about what ethnic motifs should be like. This can be done by the sinicization of elements of the culture, the use of characteristic attributes or by assigning certain traits, behaviours, etc.

In a market-oriented economy, ethnic cultures have become a well-selling pop-cultural product. At the same time, for some among the Han Chinese the minorities are indistinguishable. A growing demand from the Chinese consumer resulted in the supply of quasi-ethnic cultures for the wider audience. In popular culture to achieve success most of the artists had to follow Sino-centric ideas about ethnic minorities. Referring to ethnic cultures is an effective way of attracting the audience’s attention. For this reason some Han Chinese artists (like Han Hong or Sa Dingding), although their art has not much in common with the traditional minority culture, emphasize their ethnic roots and folk inspirations.

Sinicization of the elements of a minority culture is another very common way of orientalising minorities. A good example is the sleeve dance of the Mongols and Tibetans, which differs¹⁷ between these two ethnic groups. There is a tendency to

¹⁴ Szykiewicz 2003, 358.

¹⁵ People’s Daily.

¹⁶ For example: “In the face of ethnic separatists both in Tibet and Xinjiang, the Chinese government, people of all ethnic groups and overseas Chinese all showed their firm belief in unity, which is a common tradition that has developed over thousands of years,” People’s Daily.

¹⁷ As the Mongolian sleeves are heavier and much shorter than the Tibetan ones.

assimilate them with traditional Chinese dances. The result is a hybrid, which can become attractive to the Han, as well as strengthen the impression of a common heritage of these nationalities and the Chinese tradition. Another element, which is commonly orientalist, is the costumes, especially in the case of female dresses and apparels. Among the common pictures are members of ethnic minorities wearing skimpy outfits with ethnic patterns and elements like: fur (nationalities of Manchuria), cowboy hats (Mongols, Tibetans), silver tiaras (Miao), etc. Until the most recent times, the Han Chinese used to be very prudish, so the eroticisation of “wild” women became a socially accepted way of avoiding the restrictions of their own culture¹⁸.

The abovementioned clichés are not surprising when used in the promotion of tourism or shows for the wider audience. However, popular culture can also influence education, science, politics, arts, etc. Official publications about the ethnic regions often differ in contents, depending on whether they were compiled by the Han Chinese or by the minorities. In the first case, their contents are, in most cases, influenced by the “internal orientalism”. The ethnic minorities are mainly portrayed as women in colourful costumes, busy with their traditional crafts¹⁹. In real life, the clothes they wear are not always traditional, the environment and living conditions have already changed and their everyday activities are mostly not connected with traditional arts and crafts.

The issue of education in Tibet may in some publications receive an orientalist entourage, where the region and its inhabitants are presented as an object of paternalistic care of the advanced society²⁰. In this aspect, sometimes the “white man’s burden” has been replaced by the progress brought by the Han civilization. Many photographs present Tibetans wearing their traditional robes, even in situations where in real life they would most likely be dressed like the Han majority²¹. Situation with official publications about Inner Mongolia for the mainstream recipient can be very similar, as it includes artificial situations involving minorities²². Its grasslands and minorities are an object of orientalisation and not only by the Han Chinese²³. It is also an Arcadia for China’s Mongols, who have noticed the threat of sinicization of their own culture. At the same time, they are attracted by the art of mongolised communities of Dagurs, Evenks and Orochens (三少族) according to the same pattern as the Chinese majority is interested in the sinicized Mongolian culture. Not to mention the Russian Buriats, who idealise Hölön Buir’s “real Buriats” and worship the singer Sesegmaa as a semi-deity.

Among the sinicized members of the minorities, some are likely to follow the Han majority’s way of thinking about “ethnicity”. Even the conservative minority elites put effort on promoting the culture of the communities which in their opinion is less affected by Chinese influences. Many of them are not aware of, or do not want

¹⁸ Schein 1997, 74–87.

¹⁹ Ding 2011, 148–189.

²⁰ Han ed. 2011b.

²¹ Han ed. 2011a.

²² Inner Mongolian 1997, 146–207.

²³ Zhang 2012.

to notice, the fact that traditional culture is also dynamic. The promotion of ethnic cultures led by the minorities might in some cases copy popular schemes, but it can also explore the original elements of the minority culture. This usually refers to particular elements which would otherwise be unnoticed by the average Han Chinese. The Mongols of Liaoning province promote heritage of the great writer Injanashi, even though they are mostly unable to read his important works²⁴. Mongols of the Western Baarin county spread the knowledge about their epic Geser through the works of Mongolian (and a Tibetan) calligraphers²⁵. The abovementioned elements of Mongolian culture can be successfully promoted only to a narrow target. With this kind of action some minorities prove to have a high culture and system of values different from the Sinitic one. The exploration of the original sources of their culture, which are not shared with the Han Chinese, exposes the contradictions that can undermine the popular concept of the *Zhonghua minzu*.

There are many studies that make an attempt at defining the cultural system of the ethnic groups²⁶. However, even in scientific studies, examples of reducing ethnic minority traditions to material elements such as clothes, food, place of living, etc.²⁷ can be found. This attitude is sometimes shared by the sinicized minority's elites, who are not always aware of the importance of the non-material heritage of their own nationality. The most obvious elements of culture should not be regarded as more important than ways of thinking and values. The publications which are affected by "internal orientalism" miss these elements, so the reader might have problems in understanding the essence of the culture. Without being aware of the important differences between the Sinitic and minority cultures, the majority might continue reducing them to rustic folklore.

One of the commonly underestimated elements is the importance of maintaining the traditional social structure. This issue might be politically sensitive, as all of the so-called feudal social structures were supposed to be abolished. Nevertheless, among some ethnic minorities the memory of social hierarchy is preserved and can still play an important role in social relations. As it has strong foundations in the history and the ways of thinking of an ethnic group, it can be tightly bound with national identity. As such, the social structure is not easy to change. Sinicization in some cases results in an increasing number of people who become unaware of their roots. However, there seem to be exceptions, because probably for most of the Mongols, the tribal-clan structure still defines their place in Mongolian society; for some Manchurian communities the banner hierarchy remains one of the main elements of their identity²⁸; and, there is a number of Yi people who still remember whether they are descendants of the Black or White Yi.

²⁴ As they were written in Mongolian. Sarentuya 2007.

²⁵ Biligtu ed. 2013.

²⁶ Bao 2009, 119–131.

²⁷ Hao and Bao 2010, 324–327.

²⁸ Elliott 2001, 13, 16–25.

Education of the Ethnic Minorities

The school curriculums can be affected by “internal orientalism” mainly in their use of the stereotype of backward but cheerful ethnic minorities. These simplifications are also presented in textbooks translated into minority languages. They tend to underline the unity between ethnic groups and reduce the differences between them to colourful costumes. The aim of this kind of indoctrination is to allow the minorities to accept the common national identity, shared with the Han majority. Although the orientalisation of minorities was rather unprompted, it turned out to be a useful tool for the state-run policy of nation building.

One of the main goals of the public educational system is to integrate the various communities within a society. Inculcation of loyalty to the country by promoting national unity and shared values is another important task. “The Party’s ethnic theory and policy, and state laws and ordinances shall be introduced in textbooks, lectured in classrooms, and borne in students’ minds, and guidance shall be given to teachers and students in fostering Marxist outlooks on the motherland, ethnicity and religion, consolidating the grand unity between people of all ethnic backgrounds, and enhancing national pride and cohesion.”²⁹

The integration of ethnic minorities with the Han Chinese majority is a controversial issue, as it is done by means of acculturation, which might lead to a complete assimilation. Even though in the research about minority education published in the PRC there is lot of criticism towards the system, the problem of sinicization is not always explicitly mentioned. Professor Teng Xing from the Central University for Nationalities wrote that the education of every nation is a way to pass on its heritage³⁰. This statement led him to the conclusion that the system of minority education is not adapted to the cultures of ethnic minorities and is not proper for passing on their ways of thinking to the younger generation. The system of education, which is imposed by the alien ethnic group, can in his opinion, lead to assimilation³¹.

It is certainly a hard task to reconcile the often contradictory elements: modernity and tradition³²; Western, Han and minority cultures; acculturation to the Chinese culture versus the development of the minorities’ cultures, etc.³³. Some of the textbooks link technological development with the Han culture. This evokes positive connotations due to the state ideology of “scientific development”³⁴, which strengthens the perception of the Han Chinese as superior to other nationalities. The minorities, in contrast to the Han Chinese, are regarded as “backward” and all their economic activity is reduced their traditional (and not very prestigious)

²⁹ Ministry of Education 2010, 22–3.

³⁰ Teng and Wang 2001, 8–9.

³¹ Teng and Wang 2001, 9–10.

³² “It is like trying ‘to sell the cow and drink the milk (鱼与熊掌不能兼得)’”. Teng and Wang 2001, 443.

³³ Jin 2008, 41.

³⁴ Fewsmith.

occupations³⁵. To catch up with the socio-economically “advanced nationalities” is in fact to achieve a Sinitic cultural formation.

Language usually reflects the culture of a nationality. However, in the case of the translations of Chinese schoolbooks into minority languages, done without any cultural adaptation, this statement becomes less obvious. The books can be written in a minority language but at the same time reflect the Sinitic way of thinking. This makes them difficult to be understood by those, who are not familiar with Chinese culture³⁶. A typical example is a series entitled *Encyclopedia of Chinese Children*. These books were compiled by a multi-ethnic committee, but the Han Chinese naturally imposed elements of the Sinitic culture, as they are understandable to the educated representatives of the minorities³⁷. For such a variety of different nationalities a common platform of communication is Chinese culture and language. Scholars from the Han, Mongol, Kazak, Uygur, Hui, Tibetan and Korean ethnic groups had to find a consensus on the contents of the books, which do not reflect the intellectual and esthetical needs of any of these nationalities. Rather, they cut them down to an artificial “minority standard”.

In the overloaded school curriculum the Mongols have to learn not only about the great Chinese civilization and common knowledge, but also about Mongolian ethical values. As the public education has to bring common standards to all the nationalities in China, the dominating Sino-centric stereotype is confronted with the national stereotypes of the ethnic minorities³⁸. Here the Mongols – a nationality with a rich culture and history – are presented as just one of China’s ethnic minorities. The Yuan state becomes a Chinese empire³⁹ with Mongolia as its province⁴⁰. The Mongols outside of China, especially the 20th century Mongolian state, are not mentioned.

Not only were the states of peoples, which are now among the PRC’s minority groups, incorporated into Chinese history. Many elements of the non-Chinese nationalities’ culture were also merged into the Chinese civilisation. One example is the Beijing Opera⁴¹, which has been described as an important heritage of the Han⁴². Its origins in the Yuan (Mongolian) period were not at all mentioned. The

³⁵ Xu ed. 2007b, 6–21.

³⁶ Szykiewicz 2012, 191–3.

³⁷ Szykiewicz 2003, 358, Szykiewicz 2012, 191–3.

³⁸ Szykiewicz 2003, 356, Szykiewicz 2012, 183–4.

³⁹ Xu ed. 2007c, 40–41.

⁴⁰ “Thus the extension of Chinese sovereignty over Mongolia (both “Inner” and, at various points of Chinese history, “Outer”) and Manchuria, the respective founts of the foreign conquerors that founded the Yuan and Qing Dynasties.” This refers to the process of developing Chinese administration in minority areas under the rule of non-Sinitic dynasties, giving the impression that it was the Chinese who governed the regions in question. Kissinger, 2011, 11, 18, 189.

⁴¹ In the described *Encyclopedias* the term referring to Beijing Opera is *Begezeng si*, which is an incorrect term in any language, either Chinese (京剧 *jīngjù*, 京戏 *jīngxì*), or Mongolian (*Begezeng dayuri*). It is a hybrid, most likely derived from *jingxi*, which would be not clear to Mongols, so *bei* (北) was added. So, the term *Begezeng si* is not fully adapted to Mongolian culture and it also breaks the structure of a Chinese word.

⁴² Xu ed. 2007a, 40–3, Xu ed. 2007b, 62–3.

type of Beijing Opera, described in the *Encyclopedia*, was formed at the court of the emperor Qianlong of the Manchurian dynasty, based on musical traditions of the Northern nationalities. Moreover, inside Mongolian textbooks high culture is represented mainly by the Chinese culture. A good example could be a story about “little Lu Xun⁴³ who liked to read books”⁴⁴. Mongolian herders often have not even heard about him, not to mention knowing any of his works⁴⁵.

Image of the Minorities in Popular Culture

The recognition of the right of minorities to express their cultures has created favourable conditions for preserving them, as compared to the previous periods. However, the traditional cultures have become vulnerable to changing conditions, such as abandoning the traditional way of life or the commercialization of ethnic cultures. Popular culture turned out to be a very influential sphere for orientalising of the minorities and also served as propaganda for national unity. The nation-building state policy has found ways to influence the pop scene.

In fact, the politicization of popular culture, together with stereotypical portrayals of the ethnic minorities started before the reforms of Deng Xiaoping. After the foundation of the PRC, the minorities were used to exalt the socialist revolution. The quasi-traditional melodies with revolutionary themes had some orientalising elements. The picture of singing ethnic minorities who benefit from the superior Han culture, is strongly represented in that period. One of the most influential figures of the ethnic revolutionary culture is Tseten Dulma (Caidan Zhouma). Because she is a descendant of minor gentry, some Tibetans criticize her for involvement in glorifying the liberation of serfs. At the same time, she has followers among the hungry-for-success Tibetan singers, who perform her Chinese and Tibetan patriotic songs like “Communism has come, turned bitter into sweet” (共产来了苦变甜) and “Beijing Has a Golden Sun” (北京有个金太阳). “Revolutionary orientalism” is present in popular culture in various ways. Some so-called historical movies include the motifs of ethnic minorities in the context of “national unity” among ethnic groups. “Liberation of Tibet” is still a very popular theme, especially with a romantic relation between a male Han Chinese and a local, ethnic woman. This theme is reproduced even in present-day movies like “Liberate Tibet” (解放西藏) or “Advance-guard” (先遣连), both from 2012. One of the peaks of historical creativity was a series “The Legend of the Eastern Hero” (东归英雄传). The story of the Volga Kalmyks, who moved to today’s Xinjiang was re-interpreted in a nonsensical way. The Mongolian tribe become Chinese nationals, who return to the Motherland (China). The Kalmyks are shown in an orientalising way according

⁴³ Baya Suryayuli Suryal nom 2008, 3.

⁴⁴ Which, by replacing “little Lenin” and “little Lei Feng”, reflects the drift from the socialist to a national propaganda. Compare with: *Lablaqu bičig bay-a suryayuli-du üsekü mongyol kele bičig-ü* 1994.

⁴⁵ At the same time, from early childhood at home they memorise various poems of Inner and Outer Mongolian writers.

to the popular depiction of the Mongols. In the eyes of some Mongols in China, this production is not only state propaganda, but also a promotion of the stereotypes of their nationality⁴⁶.

A more sublime way of promoting China's cross-ethnic unity is done by the composer Zhang Qianyi (张千一), who is also an officer of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The hit single "Green Tibetan Plateau" (青藏高原), the album "Prairies" (大草原) or the soundtrack to the "Genghis Khan" series are well known examples of the "new folk music" of the *Zhonghua minzu*. The original minority folk songs are usually translated into Chinese but the "Green Tibetan Plateau" was written in Chinese and then translated into Tibetan.

Another prominent figure in the PLA is Peng Liyuan (彭丽媛), who reached a rank of major general. Performing folk and patriotic songs she used to be one of the most popular Chinese singers. Among her well known performances are quasi-Tibetan songs: "Chomolungma" (珠穆朗玛) and "Laundry Song" (洗衣歌). The first one reflects the stereotype of the mystic "Roof of the World", which turns out to be not only a Western idea. The second one is a revolutionary song reflecting the stereotype of Tibetans being on the lower level of development, who show their gratitude to the PLA for bringing them modernity (here in the form of hygiene). Peng's performance of the Mongolian folk song "Gada Meiren" (嘎达梅林), as well as the movie of the same title, contributed to the creation of a communist legend of the anti-feudal hero. For the Mongols in China, Gada Meiren is an icon of the anti-Chinese uprising, who wanted to prevent Han colonialism and protect Mongolian pasturelands. In fact the background of the uprising was much more complicated⁴⁷. It is a real paradox that opposing parties (the *Zhonghua minzu* nationalists and the Mongolian nationalists) both appropriated Gada Meiren as a symbol used to consolidate their *minzu*⁴⁸.

In the context of politicization of orientalism it would be difficult not to mention a popular duo called The Phoenix Legend (凤凰传奇). Their music is a blend of Western pop with quasi-ethnic motifs. Modernity is represented by a male Han Chinese and ethnicity is embodied by a Mongolian female singer, so the band itself is a good example of pop-cultural "internal orientalism". It is no different with some of their songs, such as "The Coolest Ethnic Style" (最炫民族风). The term "ethnic" (民族) has a strong connotation with the minorities and it rarely refers to the Han nationality. The lyrics and the music video put ethnic minorities in a rustic context. Together with promoting the Sino-centric stereotypes, the band also serves nation-state building by performing patriotic songs like "I love you, China" (中国我爱你). In the same way these two aspects are combined in the art of other ethnic (or so-called) ethnic artists. One of the prominent examples is a singer Song Zuying (宋祖英), who comes from the Miao nationality and became famous for her folk and patriotic repertoire. Her performance of a Tibetan folk song "Ballade from Kanding"

⁴⁶ When the Mongolian film director passed away because of cancer, the Author witnessed a private discussion, when Mongols said that it was a punishment for directing this movie.

⁴⁷ Wu, Lian and Zhang 2008, 146, Henochowicz 2013.

⁴⁸ Jankowiak 1993, 46.

(康定情歌) with the Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo and Manchurian pianist Lang Lang, might seem a strange blend but reflects the idea of diverse sources of Chinese culture. Another song “Love our China” (爱我中华) in simple words defines the essence of the popular idea of 56 nationalities which merge into the Chinese nation.

State Identity, National Identity

The attitude towards the state-nation differs among Han Chinese and the minorities. For some minorities, identification with the Chinese state is not the same as considering themselves as a part of the Chinese nation. What is more, the sinicization of the minorities does not necessarily automatically lead to their acceptance of this idea.

The term “sinicization” (汉化) is usually understood as a synonym of “assimilation” but it can also mean “acculturation”⁴⁹. The process of assimilation in the strict sense cannot be observed⁵⁰, as it can be only traced back. What can be witnessed is an absorption of the elements of an “alien” culture into one’s own cultural system. This may result in the abandonment of some of the ethnic attributes, but can also lead to their hybridization⁵¹. No matter how much their culture and way of life come close to that of the Han Chinese, some minority communities still consider Sinitic elements as “alien” and do not want to accept the superiority of the Chinese culture. A decrease in cultural distance between the minorities and the Han Chinese might be accompanied by an increase in psychological distance. Even among the Manchus – descendants of the “banner men” – some describe their attitude towards “Chineseness” as a complicated issue. Culture and ethnic structure bring them close to the Han Chinese⁵², but at the same time they feel stronger unity with the Sibe, Mongols and Dagurs. It is not hard to find Manchus who object to being called sinicized, as they find their traditions and rituals different from those of the Han Chinese. It is still rare to find Mongols directly calling the Chinese language their mother tongue. They would rather say that they were unfortunate to grow up in a not “proper [language] environment”. For them losing the skill of speaking Mongolian in favour of Chinese does not equal ‘progress’⁵³ (as many Han Chinese would see it).

The process of state-nation building requires deep changes in the identity of both – the majority and the minorities. Both sides have to redefine the status of each other in China. The Han Chinese seem to accept the idea of *Zhonghua minzu*, as they originated from the merging of many nationalities (融合民族)⁵⁴. Sometimes the terms *Zhongguoren* and *Zhonghua minzu* are said to have very similar meanings⁵⁵.

⁴⁹ Szyrkiewicz 2003, 364

⁵⁰ Szyrkiewicz 2012, 185–191.

⁵¹ Like the Horchin dialect, compare with: Schatz.

⁵² Kong 2008, 63–99.

⁵³ Jankowiak 1993, 42.

⁵⁴ Guan, *Zhongguo Minzu Bao*.

⁵⁵ Szyrkiewicz 2012, 177.

From the Han Chinese perspective, an attitude toward the state might be linked with being a part of the state culture.

The minorities do not necessarily share this sense of unity. The absorption of the traditions and history of different nationalities into the Chinese civilization brings frustration to the minorities' elites, as they regard this as stealing their heritage. Identification with the Chinese nation seems to be much more difficult for the minorities to adopt. In their situation, a difference between *Zhongguoren* and *Zhonghua minzu* becomes significant. For some important ethnic groups it is hard to accept the central role of the Chinese culture, which equals to degradation of their own culture. There are some controversies among their elites as to how to cope with the hybridization of cultures, which is by some regarded as the first step to assimilation. Nevertheless, for the traditional cultures which are facing changes to their external foundations, it might become a chance for survival.

Another issue is that acculturation might in fact strengthen an ethnic minority's identity and support the consolidation of the nationality. In these processes the diversity between various communities of a nationality can be to some extent overcome. For example, the sinicization among Mongols could help to promote their unity against tribal divisions, which were historically strengthened by the differences in dialects and customs.

The situation of ethnic minorities inside China influences some of their languages in a way which enables them to identify with the state. The official name of the PRC used in the Republic of Mongolia is *Bügt Nairamdah Hyatad Ard Uls* (People's Republic of China), whereas in Inner Mongolia it is *Bügt Nairamdah Dundad Ard Uls* (People's Republic of the Middle State). In Mongolian dialects within China one can notice that the meaning of the term *Hyatad* is narrowed to an ethnic sense. Another important element is a successful adaptation of the Mongolian equivalent of the term *Zhongguo* (中国), which is the *Dundad uls*. The Mongols seem to maintain a balance between inculcation of the local identity (hometown – *nutug*) and the state identity (our country – *man-u ulus*)⁵⁶. This dual identity might be a result of both political pragmatism of their ethnic elite and unprompted social processes. The situation is not obvious with the term *oron*⁵⁷, which can mean: the region, territory or the state. It is very useful in strengthening the Mongolian identity without rejecting the Chinese state.

Traditionally in the Tibetan language there is a distinction between *Bod yul* (Tibetan territory) and *rGya yul* (Chinese territory)⁵⁸. In the PRC, instead of the traditional term *rGya nag* (China, literally: a black extend), the language policy promotes *Krung go* – an artificial term, which (in the Lhasa dialect) is a phonetic imitation of the sound *Zhongguo* (中国). Furthermore, the term *rGya nag* and *rGya yul* are now being removed from many modern dictionaries as well as from official use. In the new language reality *Krung go* is the only term used for "China". The

⁵⁶ Compare with essays in: Bökedelger 2012, 1–4.

⁵⁷ Op.cit.

⁵⁸ Jaeshke 2003, 105–6, 512.

term *rGya mi* received an ethnic connotation of the Han nationality – 汉人或汉族⁵⁹. What is significant that there is no *rGya yul* and *Bod yul*⁶⁰, which falsifies the language reality. It is not hard to find out that the Tibetans of different regions do not use *Krung go* in their daily life. In their language there is still a clear division between the *rGya yul* and *Bod yul*, with no psycho-linguistic unification into one territory⁶¹.

Conclusion

The state doctrine assumes the existence of the Chinese nation, which arises from the concept of the unity of all nationalities. This political idea has influenced the Han Chinese, who have begun to accept unity with the non-Sinitic folk. What is more, they have become interested in the ethnic minorities, which has resulted in the emergence of the phenomenon known as “internal orientalism”. The new depiction of ethnic minorities has become an important esthetical trend in popular culture. The “internal orientalism” has even influenced school curriculums, which reflect popular stereotypes of rustic minority people maintaining their traditional ways of life. Examples from popular culture and education programmes reflect the politicization of “internal orientalism”, which has started to serve the state-nation building process. One of the important problems is the attitude of the ethnic minorities, as not all of them identify themselves with the Chinese Nation. This low level of acceptance of the idea of the Chinese nation proves that it is just the beginning of the process of unification of the diverse peoples living in the state.

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⁵⁹ Temuerqidouer, Gangzhuolike and Menggenqimuge 2001, 304.

⁶⁰ Some dictionaries do not even mention the term *rGya mi* for Chinese, only the *Krung go mi* - 中国人. bKra-shis 1997, 146.

⁶¹ This way of thinking can be noticed when Tibetans switch into Chinese or English. They refer to *Xizang* or Tibet in contrast to *Dalu* or Mainland China.

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Contact: Katarzyna Golik, Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Political Studies, Polna 18/20, 00-625 Warszawa, Poland, katarzyna.golik@g.pl

UNREST IN TIBET: INTERPRETING THE POST-2008 WAVE OF PROTEST AND CONFLICT

Ben Hillman

Annotation: *This article examines the post-2008 wave of ethnic unrest in Tibet. It discusses different interpretations of the unrest, from political and academic perspectives. The article explains how Chinese Communist Party interpretations of the unrest are rooted in revolutionary ideology and how this has led to a stiffening of security measures. The article also compares the different scholarly approaches to interpreting Tibetan grievances and the causes of the current wave of unrest. The article argues that there is evidence of significant inter-generational and demographic variation in the sources of grievances among the Tibetan population in China, and advocates for greater scholarly sensitivity to such differences.*

Keywords: *China, Tibet, conflict, unrest, protest, 2008, Tibetan youth, Chinese Communist Party, Tibetan Buddhism, rural Tibet, urban Tibet, Tibetan exiles, Dalai Lama*

China's Tibetan areas have experienced several waves of ethnic unrest since the founding of the People's Republic. The first wave of unrest (1956–1962) was characterized by armed uprisings against the Chinese state. From 1962–74 there was sporadic fighting between Chinese troops and US-funded Tibetan guerrillas operating from bases inside Nepal. The third wave of unrest took place in the late 1980s and was characterized by street protests. Protests against Chinese government policies peaked in March 1989, when throngs of Tibetans took to the streets to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day, the failed 1959 uprising against Chinese Communist Party rule in Tibet that ended with the Dalai Lama's flight into exile and a harsh crackdown on the Tibetan independence movement. In March 1989 the anniversary of Uprising Day was marked by rioting, which included attacks on government offices and property. Martial law was declared on 8 March.¹

Nineteen years later the anniversary of Uprising Day was the trigger for a new wave of unrest. On March 10, 2008 a group of Tibetan monks gathered in Lhasa to commemorate the anniversary. It has been suggested that large demonstrations were planned for the 49th anniversary of the uprising rather than for the 50th anniversary in the following year because 2008 was the year China would host the Olympics and the world's eyes were upon it. Between March 10 and March 14, 2008 monks in Lhasa led various demonstrations against religious controls, including patriotic education campaigns and forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama. When police attempted to break up the demonstrations lay Tibetans joined the monks and the

¹ For a detailed account of these events see Tsering Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*. Street protests in Tibetan areas continued sporadically during the 1990s.

numbers of demonstrators swelled.² Some waved the Tibetan national flag. Over the following days peaceful demonstrations turned to violent protests as a number of protestors began attacking government offices, and police stations, as well as Han and Hui Muslim-owned businesses. In contrast with earlier waves of unrest, the 2008 unrest was characterized not just by “ethnic protest” against the state, but also by “ethnic conflict”, inter-communal ethnic violence.³ In Lhasa Tibetan rioters targeted non-Tibetan civilians, leading to the death of 18 people.⁴ Exile Tibetan sources estimate that at least 200 Tibetans lost their lives during the subsequent crackdown by security forces.⁵

Another characteristic of the 2008 unrest was its scale. During 1987–1989 ethnic unrest was largely concentrated in Lhasa, the political and religious center of the Tibetan world. Only a very small number of demonstrations took place outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) during this period. In 2008 the unrest spread from Lhasa to Tibetan areas in Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan provinces, with as many as 30,000 Tibetans participating in more than 100 separate incidents of protest actions across the plateau.⁶



Figure 1: Sites of protest on the Tibet Plateau 1987–2007

² Hillman 2008a.

³ The distinction between “ethnic protest” and “ethnic conflict” follows Suzan Olzak. Olzak defines ethnic conflict as “a confrontation between members of two or more ethnic groups,” and ethnic protest as a demonstration of public grievance by an ethnic group that “has the general public or some office of government as its audience.” See Olzak 1992, 8–9.

⁴ See various news reports from this period. The Chinese government reports 18 civilian deaths.

⁵ Barnett 2009.

⁶ According to China’s official news agency Xinhua, there were more than 150 incidents of vandalism or burning across Tibetan areas during the two weeks from March 10 to March 25, 2008. See <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-04-01/233615271291.shtml>, (10. 1. 2014).



Figure 2: Sites of protest and violence on the Tibet Plateau in 2008

Since Spring 2008 periodic unrest has continued in Tibetan areas. There have been frequent clashes between Tibetan citizens and the police in Ngaba (Ch. Aba) Prefecture and Kardze (Ch. Ganzi) Prefecture in Sichuan Province, leading to several deaths. There have also been regular demonstrations by monks and students in Golog (Ch. Guoluo) in Gansu Province. Since 2009 self-immolation has emerged as a new and extreme form of ethnic protest in various parts of the plateau. More than 120 Tibetans have set themselves on fire in protest against Chinese government policies and/or Communist Party rules. Self-immolators include monks, nuns and lay people.⁷

The cause of the current wave of extreme ethnic unrest that began in 2008 is the subject of ongoing political and scholarly debate. The political debate is characterized by hostile polemics between Chinese Communist Party leaders on the one hand, and representatives of exile Tibetan communities on the other. Exile groups charge that the unrest is a reaction to the oppressive and non-inclusive policies of the Chinese Communist Party. The exiles and their supporters charge that Tibetans are being marginalized culturally and economically in their homelands and that their rights are being systematically violated. Some have gone so far as to accuse the Chinese government of perpetrating “cultural genocide” against Tibetans by limiting avenues for the expression and development of Tibetan culture.⁸ According to this view, the unrest is a result of a deterioration of “ethnic security”—that is, Tibetans’ percepti-

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the self-immolations as a new form of protest in Tibet see Shakya 2012.

⁸ For an example of this perspective, see the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) publication '60 Years of Chinese Misrule | Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet'. <https://www.savetibet.org/60-years-of-chinese-misrule-arguing-cultural-genocide-in-tibet/>, (8. 11. 2013).

ons of their ability to preserve, express and develop their ethnic distinctiveness in everyday economic, social and cultural practices.⁹

The Chinese government vehemently rejects the view that either Tibetan culture or Tibetan ways of life are under threat. On the contrary, the Chinese government argues that its policies promote Tibetan culture. China's leaders argue that the claim of "cultural genocide" is a lie fabricated by the exiles to support their case for Tibetan independence.¹⁰ While the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA, Tibetan government-in-exile) advocate only for genuine Tibetan autonomy within the People's Republic of China and not full independence, the Chinese government calls their position a subterfuge, accusing the exiles of seeking independence by stealth. The Chinese government accuses the "Dalai clique"—a derogatory term for the Dalai Lama, other exile leaders and their supporters—of orchestrating the unrest since 2008, and of promoting self-immolations to foment instability and promote the separatist agenda. Speaking at a televised press conference following the 2008 riots China's Premier Wen Jiabao declared that „there were ample facts and plenty of evidence proving that the incident was organised, premeditated, masterminded and incited by the Dalai clique.“¹¹ The Premier also publicly blamed the Dalai Lama and exiled leaders for instigating the self-immolations that began in 2009. Chinese media outlets routinely repeated the accusation, including in English-language publications targeting an international audience. According to one such publication, the self-immolations are to be blamed on "the shameless brutality of the "Dalai clique" as the organizer and author of these crimes.”¹²

The Chinese Communist Party leadership's framework for interpreting the unrest is rooted in Maoist-era approaches to identifying friends and foes of the Communist revolution, and by the rhetoric of class struggle. A key reference is Mao Zedong's 1937 essay on the distinction between "contradictions among the people" and "contradictions against the people".¹³ According to Mao, contradictions among the people are the result of ignorance or false consciousness and can be resolved through education and persuasion. Contradictions against the people, however, represent a threat that must be eliminated or subjected to absolute control.

Because the Chinese Communist Party's position is that unrest is orchestrated by Tibetan "splittists" and their anti-China supporters in the West, incidents of unrest are now routinely identified as contradictions against the people. The Party's categorization of the unrest as hostile provides the political justification needed for a harsh response. China has responded to the 2008 unrest by dramatically expanding its internal security apparatus. Since 2008 Chinese government expenditure on internal security has grown so dramatically that it now exceeds expenditure on

⁹ On theories of ethnic security, see Wolff 2006; Horowitz 2000.

¹⁰ See Wen Jiabao comments March 2008.

¹¹ Wen Jiabao was speaking at a televised news conference in Beijing on 18 March 2008. The quote was provided by CNN: „Report: Over 100 surrender, admit involvement in Tibet clashes“. CNN. March 19, 2008. Accessed July 3, 2008.

¹² See Yeshe 2013.

¹³ Mao Zedong 1990.

external defense.¹⁴ China's "stability maintenance" (*weiwen*) approach to governing Tibet has involved a dramatic scaling up of security forces and surveillance infrastructure. Police numbers have been increased in all Tibetan areas and People's Armed Police reinforcements that were sent as a response to the 2008 riots have been made permanent. A local official from Ngaba Prefecture in Sichuan Province estimated that more than half of all state employees in his prefecture work for one of several law enforcement agencies.¹⁵ Limitations on Tibetans' movements have also been strictly enforced. Tibetans from outside the TAR are not permitted to travel to the TAR. Many Tibetans suspected of sympathies with the protest movements are barred from leaving their home counties. Many have had their passports confiscated and it is extremely difficult for Tibetans to obtain new ones. Communications in Tibetan areas are also tightly controlled. Internet services are often closed for months at a time or made available only through monitored Internet cafes. 3G networks providing Internet access to mobile phones are unavailable throughout much of the plateau. Festivals and other cultural events have been cancelled indefinitely in order to prevent large public gatherings of Tibetans.¹⁶

Since 2011 when the number of self-immolations by Tibetans began to rise, Chinese authorities further increased investment in the surveillance of Tibetan communities. In scenes reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, "red arm band" volunteers were seen patrolling in some neighborhoods looking for signs of trouble. In several rural areas, especially in parts of Sichuan Province where there has been a high number of self-immolations, local governments have stationed public servants, known as "volunteers", in every village. The volunteers' task is to gather intelligence and to report suspected preparations for protest or self-immolation. In urban areas local authorities have divided neighborhoods into grids, appointing staff to monitor each grid and to report suspicious activities to the district administration or police. Self-immolation has been made a criminal act and even family members of self-immolators are being held accountable. For CCP leaders self-immolations are contradictions against the people, serving the "black hand" of splittists and anti-China forces. As the head of Ngaba (Ch. Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan asserted, "Tibetans who set themselves on fire are outcasts, criminals and mentally ill people manipulated by the exiled Dalai Lama".¹⁷

International scholarly opinion on the causes of the recent wave of unrest can be broadly divided into two camps. One group emphasizes social and economic factors

¹⁴ In 2013 China's budget for domestic security was RMB 740.6 billion; the budget for external defense was RMB 769.1 billion. See "China hikes defense budget, to spend more on internal security", Reuters online 3 March 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/05/us-china-parliament-defence-idUSBRE92403620130305>, (2. 1. 2014).

¹⁵ Interview, Chengdu, March 11, 2013.

¹⁶ An example is the famous Lithang (Sichuan Province) horse race festival that was held every summer before 2008.

¹⁷ See "Tibetan self-immolators are outcasts, criminals and mentally ill, claims China", The Guardian Online, 7 March 2012, (3. 1. 2014). <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/07/tibetan-immolators-outcasts-criminals-china>,

as the primary sources of grievance. According to this view, Tibetans are becoming increasingly marginalized as Tibetan areas become increasingly integrated into the Chinese national economy. China's Tibetan regions have undergone dramatic social and economic change during the past 15 years, especially since the launch of the Great Western Development (GWD, Ch. *Xibu dakaifa*) campaign in 2000. This long-term multibillion-dollar program was designed in response to increasing economic inequality between China's eastern coastal provinces and the western regions. Compared with the westward expansion of the USA in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the GWD was essentially an enormous infrastructure development program designed to integrate the resource-rich, western provinces, many parts of which are ethnographically Tibetan, with the dynamic, but resource-poor economies of the eastern provinces.¹⁸ While there has been much debate about the aims of the GWD and its benefits for the diverse communities of western China¹⁹, the scale of public investment and its impacts have been enormous. Much of the GWD-labeled investment has been channeled into large-scale infrastructure projects, such as in airports, railways and gas pipelines. A flagship project was the railway to Lhasa, which opened in 2006. By 2008 all Tibetan counties were connected to the national highway network. GWD-related investments contributed to more than a decade of double-digit growth for Tibetan areas and a rapid increase in Tibetan incomes.

However, although China's western provinces have experienced more than a decade of double-digit economic growth, scholars point out that growth has been uneven, non-inclusive and destabilizing.²⁰ Approximately 85% of Tibetans live in rural areas where incomes remain low—less than a dollar a day in many places.²¹ Scholars have observed that state-led economic growth has created employment opportunities in particular economic sectors such as construction, administration and services, which has benefited only a minority of Tibetans, particularly those employed by state agencies. State-led development has also benefited non-Tibetan economic migrants who have followed state investment to the region in unprecedented numbers. There is evidence that better skilled non-Tibetan migrants have out-competed Tibetans in urban labor markets.²² Nearly all Lhasa taxi drivers are non-Tibetan, for example, and a majority of Lhasa's small businesses are operated by ethnic Han and ethnic Hui. A similar picture is emerging in Tibetan towns as non-Tibetan migrants take advantage of knowhow, networks and access to capital to set up new businesses to serve new industries. Some analysts have drawn a link

¹⁸ China's remote, western regions have the country's highest concentrations of rural poverty. On China's evolving approaches to poverty alleviation in the region and policy parallels with the Great Western Development strategy, see Hillman 2003b; 2003c.

¹⁹ Some commentators have accused the Chinese government of using the Go West campaign as being little more than a civilizing project, designed to pacify restive minorities through long-term and gradual integration with Han Chinese. See Hillman 2009. Others have highlighted the connection between increased state investment and worsening official corruption at the local level. See Hillman 2014.

²⁰ See Fischer 2005; Hillman 2008b.

²¹ See Barnett 2009.

²² See Hillman 2013a.

between these economic factors and the targeting of non-Tibetan civilians and property during the Spring 2008 unrest.²³

The flood of non-Tibetan migrants into Tibet in recent years is also dramatically changing the character of many Tibetan towns, fueling perceptions that Tibetan culture is under threat. Indeed, many scholars argue that fears for Tibet's cultural and religious identity are the primary triggers for the recent wave of unrest. Scholars argue, for example, that increased restrictions on organized religion have angered many among the Tibetan Buddhist communities. Restrictions on monasteries include bans on worship of the Dalai Lama, compulsory attendance at 'patriotic education' sessions that often involve forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama, strict registration requirements on the number of monks attached to a particular monastery and travel limitations for monks.²⁴ At a number of regionally significant monasteries and Buddhist training centers, monks who are not from the immediate local area are forbidden from visiting. While these restrictions apply only to the Buddhist clergy, scholars argue that the perceived injustices against monks and nuns cause much resentment among ordinary Tibetans. Robert Barnett has argued, for example, that the introduction of tighter restrictions on organized religion in parts of the plateau outside the TAR explains the spread of protests to these areas since 2008.²⁵

Scholars argue that China's cultural and education policies also stoke fears among Tibetans about the survival of their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. Indeed, language and education issues have been at the core of several recent protests in Tibetan areas. Tibetan-medium education offers an opportunity to master Tibetan literature and the rich body of cultural and historical knowledge recorded in the Tibetan language. Attending Tibetan-medium schools, however, severely limits young people's future career opportunities as further education and employment opportunities require the skills and education that only Chinese-medium schools can provide. Entry to the civil service in Tibetan areas, for example, requires candidates to sit an examination in Chinese. Although Chinese law requires that Tibetan-area civil servants have knowledge of Tibetan language, the Tibetan language component of the exam is very basic. This is a cause of great frustration to many educated Tibetan youth who are increasingly aware that their plight is a widespread social phenomenon and not just an individual problem. Indeed there is evidence of a rising Tibetan nationalism and rights consciousness among a new generation of youth.²⁶ As Clémence Henry argues, Tibetan language and education policy is a site where Chinese Communist Party leaders' fears and Tibetan people's worries meet: a fear of resurgent nationalism on the one side, and worries of losing one's cultural identity on the other.²⁷

²³ Economic inequality is evident even in culture tourism, an industry that has expanded rapidly in recent years due to improvements in transport infrastructure. Studies have shown that higher paid positions are often taken by non-Tibetans from other parts of China. See Ashild Kolas 2008; Hillman 2003b.

²⁴ For more details on religious restrictions, see Barnett 2012.

²⁵ See Barnett 2009.

²⁶ See Robin 2015.

²⁷ Henry 2015.

Other scholars have highlighted the local political dimension of ethnic unrest, including the superficiality of China's system of so-called ethnic regional autonomy (*diyu minzu zizhi*).²⁸ Other political dimensions of discontent include the tendency for local governments in Tibetan areas to recruit Sinicized ethnic Tibetan cadres who form a separate political class, and, because of their weaker Tibetan language skills, are often unable to communicate effectively with ordinary Tibetans. Scholars have also pointed to the rise in official corruption in Tibetan areas as a result of the massive increases in fiscal transfers during the 2000s.²⁹ The CCP's identification of protestors as antagonists with links to 'hostile forces' gives local authorities limited political space to show tolerance toward protestors. Sympathizers risk being accused of disloyalty. It also discourages local officials from experimenting with conflict-sensitive social and economic policies lest they be accused of stoking Tibetan ethnic consciousness or nationalism. This has also resulted in decreased cooperation between local governments and local and international NGOs, further limiting the space for public debate and policy influence.³⁰

As Emily Yeh has pointed out, interpretations of Tibetans' grievances often reflect individual scholars' backgrounds.³¹ Scholars educated in Tibetan literature, religion and history tend to emphasize cultural and religious factors in their analyses. Students of contemporary Chinese politics and society tend to emphasize social and economic factors in their analyses of the Tibetan unrest. Overall, the evidence suggests that social, economic, cultural and religious factors are all relevant in the analysis of the recent unrest in Tibet. Indeed, the relationship between language and education and economic opportunities suggests that socio-economic and cultural factors underlying Tibetan grievances are closely intertwined. The challenge for scholarship lies in understanding how different sources of grievance interrelate in different local contexts to fuel ethnic unrest. It is noteworthy that the nature of ethnic protest and ethnic conflict has varied from region to region, as has the level of violence. For example, there have been many more incidents of violence in towns than in rural areas. Notably also, the majority of self-immolations have occurred in the Ngaba region in northwest Sichuan Province.³² In each of the Tibetan regions local historical, demographic, cultural, geographic, institutional and economic factors interact to shape local conflict dynamics.

Although systematic surveys of the issues are impossible at the present time, anecdotal evidence suggests that sources of grievances vary not just by region, but also according to demographics. There is a noticeable difference in attitudes of young, formally educated Tibetans in their twenties and thirties and their parents' generation. Many Tibetans above the age of 50 have memories of the Cultural Revolution and periods of far worse cultural and economic deprivation and political instability. Indeed, many elderly Tibetans I have met during recent travels to the pla-

²⁸ Leibold 2015.

²⁹ Hillman 2015.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Yeh 2009.

³² Sperling 2013.

teau openly criticize the protestors of Spring 2008 for threatening hard-won stability and improvements in material livelihoods. Many elderly Tibetans, especially those living in rural areas, express general satisfaction with recent government policies.³³ However, many younger and better-educated Tibetans are more aware of the social, economic and cultural changes underway in the People's Republic of China and are aware that they face difficult choices. Success in the Chinese world is often perceived to require turning one's back on the Tibetan world and vice versa. This dilemma appears to be heightening a sense of ethnic insecurity among young Tibetans.

Tibetan youth are also more likely than their elders to be affected by the Chinese government's restrictions on freedoms. At schools Tibetan students are monitored by thought police and disciplined if they write or say anything that challenges the Party's official line. Tibetan youth are also more likely to suffer new restrictions on communications and travel. Internet blockages, the confiscation of mobile phones, and limits on movement are fueling resentment among Tibetan youth. As a Tibetan teacher told me on a recent visit to the plateau, "the only people free to travel around Tibet are the Han Chinese".³⁴

Such resentments have led to a rising ethnic consciousness among Tibetan youth. Whereas Tibetans in eastern parts of Tibet once lived under the more liberal policies of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan Provinces, the expansion of controls and surveillance across the entire Plateau is galvanizing a pan-Tibetan identity among people whose ancestors would not have readily identified with one another in the same way. At the same time, the 2008 unrest also triggered a Han Chinese nationalist backlash within China, which is fed by and feeds into a rising tide of Chinese nationalism on the world stage. The new Communist Party chief and PRC President Xi Jinping has already declared his intent to "smash Tibetan separatism", and has overseen continued expansion of China's tough security maintenance agenda in the region.³⁵ The rise of Tibetan ethnic consciousness alongside an increasingly assertive Chinese nationalism is a "contradiction" that will not be resolved anytime soon.

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³³ See Nyima and Yeh 2015; Hillman 2013b.

³⁴ Interview, Sichuan Province, March 2013.

³⁵ Xi Jinping was speaking in Lhasa in July 2013. See "Xi Jinping: China will 'smash' Tibet separatism", BBC online news: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14205998>, accessed 02 January 2014.

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Contact: Ben Hillman, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University

BEING TIBETAN IN SHANGRI-LA

Sonja Laukkanen

Annotation: *In the year 2002 Zhongdian town (which is the administrative center of Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Northwestern Yunnan) officially changed its name into Shangri-la in the hope of attracting more tourists to the area. The plan has been successful. This paper examines how the imaginings of others (be it Western or Chinese tourists) are affecting the identity of local Tibetans in the area, especially in Xidang village where the author conducted her field research.*

Keywords: *Tibetanness, tourism, Shangri-la, imagining, identity, authenticity.*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss what it means to be Tibetan in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Northwestern Yunnan, China, and how the imaginings of others (mainly tourists) are affecting the identity of local Tibetans in Zhongdian town, which officially changed its name into Shangri-la in 2002, and especially in Xidang village located in Meili Snow Mountains. Both of these places are now affected by large scale tourism and the influences it brings with it; Shangri-la more directly as the result of its name change and Xidang as it is located on the route to the holy mountains and other popular trekking destinations. I will start by introducing Xidang village. Then I shall discuss both the Western and Han Chinese images of Tibetans in order to show that the differences between them are actually very small. Lastly I will discuss tourism and its effects in the area.

Xidang

Xidang village is located in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Northwestern Yunnan, China. Diqing also includes Zhongdian County and Weixi Lisu Autonomous County. Xidang consists of approximately 75 households, and around 350 people. The village is located in the Mekong river valley near the Tibet and Myanmar borders. Farming is the main source of livelihood, complemented with some income from tourism. The villagers get two harvests per year; the first is highland barley and the second is corn. Every house also has a vegetable garden for the household's needs. All families also own walnut trees around the village, and walnuts, corn and grapes are the money crops. The rest of the harvest goes to the needs of the family and their livestock. From the mountains they collect mushrooms (i.e. matsutake) to sell, and many of the herbs of Tibetan medicine grow here (e.g. snow lotus).

Xidang is located in the Meili Snow Mountains nature reserve in the Hengduan Mountains which is part of the "Three Parallel Rivers" nature reserve, and is

a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The whole area covers 1.7 million hectares and consists of 15 nature reserves. Here three of the great rivers of Asia flow off the Tibetan plateau within 75 kilometers of each other: the Chang (Yangtze), Nu (Salween) and Mekong. The topographic extremes are immense. Locally, elevations can change 2,000 to 4,000 meters within 10 to 20 kilometers. This topographic variation has also caused a very rich environmental variation. Compressed within short distances are subtropical ecosystems in the canyon bottoms, rising through temperate, boreal and arctic-alpine life zones to permanent snow. Glaciers descending off Kawa Gebo Peak (6,740 meters), the highest summit in the Meili Snow Mountain range and the highest in Yunnan, reach the lowest elevation of any glaciers in China, descending to 2,700 m and nearly terminating in a subtropical eco-zone. Along these rivers and up the mountain valleys grow some 10,000 of Yunnan's plant species. Some 500 species of birds live in and migrate through the area. This is also the home of the snub-nosed monkey and the endangered black-necked crane.

Although Xidang is located in the nature reserve, it is not the main tourist attraction. Most tourists stay overnight in Feilaisi which is outside of the reserve and then hire cars to go to Mingyong Glacier or Yubeng village. Xidang is on the way to Yubeng and the road ends at Xidang Hot Springs beyond which the tourists need to hike or ride on mules. The mule rides are the biggest tourism related source of income for the villagers. There are a couple of guesthouses and small shops in the village, but all families participate in the mule transportation. There is a rotation system in the village ensuring that every family gets their turn to provide mule ride services. In addition to the tourists themselves, all goods and food they consume in Yubeng and on the way there have to be transported with mules. Many people, especially men, engage in guiding. Another income from tourism is car transportation.

One very interesting aspect of Xidang village is that whilst the village is Tibetan and deeply Buddhist, the villagers are also communist. This can be easily observed by the communist flag flying on the roofs of the houses, and many families have an altar to Chairman Mao.

Western Ideas of Tibetanness: baby seals and repositories

First I want to discuss the Western ideas of Tibet and Tibetanness as many Westerners have strong opinions on the subject and our conceptions are affecting the Tibetans themselves. In the Western imagination Tibet is seen as the 'Roof of the world', 'Land of the snows', the mystic Shangri-la, a heaven on earth, which was a holy kingdom led by peace-loving lamas. It was a repository of ancient knowledge with an unchanging tradition which is now under threat of being lost because of the Chinese invasion and assimilation schemes. As Vincanne Adams writes:

"Construction of Tibet as a place of spirituality, as exotic, as offering esoteric forms of Buddhism, as a location for dynastic intrigue, as a wild frontier of bare-chested, horseback-riding singing nomads and rugged yaks, and, of course, as a place for

ultimate challenge for Western physical endurance have all been bound up, Bishop¹ notes, both not only with realities that actually exist in Tibet and among Tibetans but also with Western geopolitical interests in the region².”

According to Adams there are two types of images of Tibet that dominate the Western popular imagination. First is the pre-Mao Tibet that was universally and uniformly religious. All Tibetans possessed esoteric spiritual awareness and religious knowledge. The second is an image of Tibet that has been destroyed by Chinese communism and where Tibetans, one and all, are engaged in acts of political resistance.³ Therefore, authentic Tibetanness can only be found in people who are religiously devout and resist the Chinese government.

Besides religion and resistance there are also other images of Tibetans, and according to these the Tibetans are innately nonviolent, environmentally friendly and equal. Common statements are: “Tibetans are an essentially peaceful and non-violent people, who never developed an army of their own,” and “Environmentalism is an innate aspect of Tibetan culture,” and “Women in traditional Tibet enjoyed a higher degree of equality than in other Asian societies”. Toni Huber argues that these types of reflexive, politicized notions of Tibetan culture and identity are unprecedented and distinctly modern⁴. According to him:

“Tibetan exiles have reinvented a kind of modern, liberal Shangri-la image of themselves, which has its precedents in two different sets of discourses, the first of which is the product of the three powerful “-isms” of early modernity: colonialism, orientalism, and nationalism. The second set derives from liberal social and protest movements that originated mainly in the industrialized West, but which are now transnational in scope and appeal: environmentalism, pacifism, human rights and feminism.”⁵

As these images are constructed, they do not conform to reality. Robert Barnett⁶ argues that according to the ecological image of Tibetans they are seen as an endangered species or Tibet as a threatened habitat. As the American Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman described it, “the Tibetans are the baby seals of the human rights movement”. These images are basically constructions based primarily on Western psychological needs but they have been adopted and developed by the government-in-exile in India. Such identity construction also has roots in what Heinz Bechert calls “Buddhist Modernism”, some of whose salient features he describes as: the reinterpretation of Buddhism as an essentially rational religion; the idea that Buddhism is a natural vehicle for various kinds of social reform; and the close connection between Buddhism and emergent South Asian anti-colonialism and

¹ Bishop 1989.

² Adams 1996, 515.

³ Adams 1996, 515.

⁴ Huber 2001, 357.

⁵ Huber 2001, 358.

⁶ Barnett 2001, 276.

⁷ DeVoss, 1997 (see Barnett 2001, 276–277).

nationalism⁸. All of this belongs to the Orientalist discourse. As Huber points out one aspect of that discourse “is the way in which the Oriental Other has also been creative agent for essentialist constructions, and moreover an agent who reflects, refracts, and recycles Orientalist discourse back to what is held to be the dominant objectifying group⁹”. So according to Romantic Orientalist reading, Tibetan identity is seen as innately spiritual in opposition to the soulless materialism and moral bankruptcy of Communist China or the greed and spiritual impoverishment of the industrialized West. Huber¹⁰ also notes that many of these identity images first appeared in multiple English texts before they appeared in Tibetan versions. This gives a clear picture of their targeted audience and purpose.

Still, this ‘Shangri-la syndrome’ continues to captivate the Western imagination. Donald S. Lopez Jr.¹¹ has argued that the Western definitions of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism have been so powerful that the Tibetans have been denied agency, so that, in effect, they have been colonized. In his response to Lopez’s book Tsering Shakyas writes:

“There is certainly a process of mimicry, hybridization, and appropriation of western representations of Tibetanness or Buddhism among certain sections of the Tibetan diaspora. However, it is clear to me that the penetration of the western construct into the Tibetan community remains at best superficial, and the mimicry is not necessarily carried out by way of imbibing a set of values and definitions offered by the West. Unlike the case in many colonized territories, penetration by western constructs, whether cultural or political remains at the margins of Tibetan subjectivity¹²”.

As Jamyang Norbu¹³ writes, it is this dreamlike Shangri-la quality that is focused on, so much so that other aspects of Tibetan life or culture are ignored no matter how important they may be to Tibetans themselves. According to him this can also be seen in the desire to maintain the cultural purity of such societies by sheltering them from the realities of the outside world, especially politics, commerce, and technology. Development for such societies is seen appropriate only if it is nonmilitary, nonindustrial, and environmentally friendly. This kind of stand ignores the society’s own needs and the desires of its people, who may be seeking change.¹⁴ In the conclusion of his article Donald S. Lopez contends that for Westerners to indulge in the Shangri-la fantasy of Tibet is “to deny Tibet its history, to exclude Tibet from real world of which it has always been a part, and to deny Tibetans their role as agents participating in the creation of a contested quotidian reality¹⁵”. Even, if we leave out the Western imaginations, these identities are creations of the exiles in contact with

⁸ Bechert 1984, 275–277

⁹ Huber 2001, 363.

¹⁰ Huber 2001, 364–367

¹¹ Lopez 1998.

¹² Shakyas 2001, 185.

¹³ Norbu 2001.

¹⁴ Norbu 2001, 375.

¹⁵ Lopez 1994, 43.

Western audiences. As Tsering Shakya¹⁶ says the Tibetan communities in Tibet have little interaction with the Tibetan community in India. According to him “the exiles in India sometimes see themselves as the ‘true’ representatives of Tibetanness, and the Tibetans inside as merely passive, oppressed victims – a patronizing attitude that does not go well in Tibet¹⁷”. These images are also catered to the West in hope of political support for the Tibetan cause.

What is in common with all these images of Tibet is that it is seen as a zone of specialness, uniqueness, distinctiveness, or excellence that has been threatened, violated, or abused. In some cases the violation is seen as a result of advancing modernity or commercialization in general. But usually this violation is identified with acts of violence, desecration, or intolerance that have been carried out by the Chinese authorities.¹⁸ Stevan Harrell¹⁹, for example, has argued that the Chinese state sees its minorities as women, as children, or as ancient and thus needing protection, education and modernization. But the metaphor of Tibetans as women is also used by the Westerners (the rape of Tibet being a common metaphor). In the same way the Western imagination sees the Tibetans although not as children, but as innocent and needing protection and preservation. And, of course, the Tibetans are seen as ancient and always deeply religious. But what if every Tibetan is not willing to be our baby seal or repository of archaic knowledge?

Chinese Imaginings: Han chauvinism?

Dru Gladney also uses the sexual metaphor. He argues that in China “the minority is to the majority as female is to male, as ‘third’ world is to ‘first’, and as subjectivized is to objectivized identity²⁰”. As we saw earlier the imagery of sexual relations also appeared in Western perceptions but they were in the form of violation and rape. But according to Barnett the Chinese imagery involves: “marriage rather than violation, and the innocence is male, a result not of moral purity but a lack of sophistication or modernity – in other words, an excess of barbarity. In this view, the newcomer in the liaison is not a male violator but a nonviolent female who brings knowledge and advanced culture²¹.” I think this view is interesting especially in the light of what is happening at the local level. It seems to be fashionable among the young and wealthy Han girls to have a holiday romance with handsome Tibetan boys. Although it could be seen mainly as sex tourism, some of these girls actually fall in love with these boys and want to marry them. Because the local Tibetans get married quite early many of the boys already have a wife and children. Not all the boys are married, though, but marrying girls from outside means these boys have to leave the village because it is not very likely that these well-educated girls will

¹⁶ Shakya 2008.

¹⁷ Shakya 2008, 22.

¹⁸ Barnett 2001, 273.

¹⁹ Harrell 1995.

²⁰ Gladney 1994, 93.

²¹ Barnett 2001, 274.

move in and start farming. In this way, the local family not only loses the daughter-in-law, who mostly does the farming and household work, but also their son. As this phenomenon is quite recent it is impossible to say yet what will become of the children from these mixed marriages. It might be that they do not even speak the same language as their grandparents if they are raised and educated outside of the village. Maybe the Han girls by marrying their Tibetan boyfriends actually see themselves like this – as the bringers of knowledge and culture to the poor, uneducated, though handsome boys. So, marriage is a metaphor for China's civilizing mission towards a backward people and its modernization project in Tibet.

The Han are also often accused of exoticizing and even eroticizing the minorities²². Gladney²³ uses the 'Yunnan School' of modern Chinese painting as an example of this. The paintings portray nude minority women. So, again the minorities are seen as female. But in the case of Tibetans, the exotic and erotic is mostly male. This has also been argued by Hillman and Henfry²⁴. Gladney mentions the reported presence of 'sex tours' to Yunnan and in our minds eye we can see Han men flocking to Xishuangbanna to see bathing Dai women or Lugu Lake to wonder the walking marriage of the Mosuo people. But in Tibetan areas it is mainly Han girls looking for a holiday romance with a Tibetan man.

"It is exactly this exoticism that appears to characterize the official public image of 'minorities' in China. Most depictions show colorfully dressed minorities dancing, singing, and laughing in palm groves, on mountain tops, or in downright bizarre landscapes. They dance wildly, fires blaze, and mythic images are created that send a shiver down the spine of the Han-Chinese who view them. In facial structure, figure, and movement these depictions correspond to Han ideals of beauty. The official cultural policy also adapts minorities' music, song, and dance according to Chinese forms, since the 'backward' originals do not meet the Han standards of taste and must be elevated. The other is thus counterfeit"²⁵.

I am not denying the existence of this exotic-erotic image of minorities but I do argue that it is too simplistic. Everything is always seen as 'done to' the minorities, forced upon them by the Han. I think that Heberer's is a pretty good description of Tibetan music videos, but rather than sending the shivers down the spine of the Han Chinese, I would see the Tibetans themselves shivering. The greatest consumers of Tibetan dance and music videos are Tibetans themselves. Local Kham Tibetan music and music videos are very popular all over Yunnan. They can be seen and heard from buses to bars and sung in karaoke. They mostly show handsome, long haired Tibetan men, real 'Kangba hanzi' singing and dancing at the grasslands. Especially young men seem to identify deeply with these images. They are particularly proud of their abilities to sing and often you can see them using exactly the same poses and gestures as the men in the videos. Naturally beautiful women are also featured in the videos but it appears that women are not as easily taken by the

²² For example Gladney 1994, Heberer 2001.

²³ Gladney 1994.

²⁴ Hillman and Henfry 2006.

²⁵ Heberer 2001, 123–124.

imagery. And as in the videos where you can see the singer hopping in his sports car after dancing at the grasslands, the local 'Kangba hanzi' also wants his car: a cheap mini-van if he cannot afford a bigger one.

So yes, traditional Tibetan songs are being converted into pop songs with a disco beat but I would call this Westernization rather than Sinicization. Tibetan pop is also sometimes sung in Putonghua but if the artists desire to have a bigger audience it is better to have the lyrics in a language that more people can understand. No one is criticizing artists singing in English. And it has worked. Tibetan pop is very popular all over Yunnan. I have seen Bai women in Dali performing 'traditional' Bai dances danced in Tibetan pop. So, many times the Other is counterfeit but it is not something that is forced upon them. And why would Sinicization be so much more capable of erasing Tibetanness than Westernization or 'Bollywoodification,' for that matter?

But as Barnett writes, "'Tibetanizing' practices in themselves have no inherent purity of purpose or origin, and it is easy to find examples of economically driven and government-mandated fabrications of the celebration of Tibetan identity²⁶". Because tourists pay a lot of money for Tibetan-style products, Chinese and foreign entrepreneurs as well as Tibetans, have been quick to cash in on this trend. He also notes that it could actually be said that Chinese culture is so addicted to demonstrating its tolerance of and admiration for its minority nationalities that it is almost impossible to find examples of Chinese pop videos, television programs, books, paintings, music, and costume that do not include Tibetan or other nationality features²⁷. So it could be said that it is all a matter of a point of view. Instead of denigration there might be fascination in the majority's enthusiasm with the minorities. What is the difference between the Chinese and Western view is that, for example, when the Chinese official conception sees the uniqueness as backwardness that needs to be advanced or educated through the process of social evolution, the Western conception sees it as something quaint or special that needs to be preserved or returned to an earlier condition.

Tourism: Searching for Shangri-la

Besides the international area the imaginings of others also have local consequences, most obvious of which is tourism. The changing of the name of Zhongdian into Shangri-la was carried out in order to attract more tourists, and the plan has been successful. People flock to the area because of the natural beauty of the place, of course, but also in search of an escape from the modern world, a spiritual experience, or perhaps a certain harmony between people and nature. This is also how it is advertised:

"Here is just such imagined oriental Shangri-la, it is separated from the outside world by pretty valleys, where live hundreds of thousands of inhabitants who are friendly and tolerant to each other and coexisting harmoniously, even though

²⁶ Barnett 2006, 39.

²⁷ Barnett 2006, 39–40.

they have different beliefs and folk customs. Most of such inhabitants are Tibetans. Shangri-la is very beautiful, and extremely beautiful, which will not let you move from her and you will not have the heart to leave it. This is because there are not only the miraculous waters and mountains and kind people, but also the saintly belief and sensibility: when a rustic and devotional face orients to the earth, and the noble forehead touches the ground, you will understand thoroughly the reason why the Tibetans repute the Shangri-la as the “sun and moon in heart”, and they for generations fall down on their knees and worship the divine mountains. Under the blue sky with the colorful clouds and in front of the uncovered veil, you will even expect to be a member of the native Kangba [Khampa] people and then eat and stay with them and enjoy life with them.²⁸

According to Kolås²⁹ since the late 1990s local officials have been working actively to revive Tibetan culture in Diqing. In 1998 they had formulated a five-point plan, where one of the top priorities was to ‘rescue Tibetan culture’, explicitly understood as a resource to be invested in for the sake of tourism. Folk songs, folk dances and music had been particularly singled out as cultural ‘products’ for tourist consumption. Religious sites such as monasteries were also termed as ‘cultural resources’ to be used to attract tourists. This being China naturally means selling tickets to monasteries which traditionally were open to pilgrims. But, to be precise, it is the tourists who have to buy the ticket, not pilgrims. Tibetans can still enter the monasteries free of charge. The same rule applies, for example, to Mingyong glacier and Yubeng village, that are part of the inner pilgrimage route of Meili Snow Mountains. It is the tourists who pay. Certainly, labeling cultural practices as ‘products’ for tourist consumption means commoditizing them, but if it is the destruction and loss of Tibetan culture that we are worried about this type of ‘preservation’ could be seen as promoting the culture. For example, you can see Tibetan dancing at the central square of Shangri-la old town every night. Naturally this is organized for the tourists but all kinds of people come to dance daily. Many people practice the dance moves at home as the best dancers get more attention. Young people especially might be more appreciative of their own culture as it gets attention from others. But with increasing amounts of tourists, the religious sites and monasteries tend to be seen as lacking in authenticity. Furthermore, it is the Chinese tourists that are negatively affecting this authenticity, not Westerners. For example, an Israeli tourist complained to me how the Chinese tourists are ruining his authentic experience of China.

An example of another form of mobility, that can be seen as changing the sense of authentic Tibetanness in the area, are the Dharamsala educated people, mostly young men that have brought with them their English skills and also the ideas of the exiles (freedom, human rights, cultural preservation etc.). These are not things that the villagers would normally think about. Conversations about this topic, though, I have not had in the village but mainly in Shangri-la town where these educated Tibetans are employed in the tourist business. Chinese education, naturally, stresses

²⁸ Anonymous 2005, 14.

²⁹ Kolås 2004, 271–272.

patriotism towards the state. Another kind of mobility also awakens these kinds of thoughts, and that is travel. Some villagers have traveled to Lhasa or other parts of the Tibet Autonomous Region for work or for pilgrimage. The troops of Chinese soldiers in Lhasa, certain travel restrictions and constant ID-checks have brewed anger in these villagers, surfacing feelings of Tibetan nationalism in people who previously did not feel that way. Growing tourism (especially foreign tourism) in the area might work in the same way. Many foreigners have noticed the communist flags flying above the houses and posters of Mao but they assume that the people are somehow forced to display these items. When explained that the villagers indeed are communists, they seem to think of it as an anomaly, a 'real' Tibetan cannot be a communist.

With the improved road conditions the number of tourists is expected to rocket. Already world famous international hotel chains are building massive hotels in Zhongdian, and holiday apartment complexes are rising in Feilaisi. Tourists can enjoy the comforts of luxury while discovering the harmonious connection with nature and Tibetan culture on organized tours. Jonathan Friedman writes about Hawaii, but the same holds true in Shangri-la with minor modifications:

"This hotel fantasy land sports the added attraction of the nostalgia and tradition that, extracted from their life processes, can fill executive lives with the rich experiences of Hawaiian cowboy life, a dinner in a former royal palace, or the excitement of a live volcano. ... [This is] **the imaginary landscape of the historically uninformed new wealth**³⁰ (emphasis added)."

Take out the volcano and replace it with a Tibetan holy mountain; instead of Hawaiian cowboys imagine handsome Khampa men riding in the grasslands spotted with hairy yaks, and, of course, singing and dancing. Tibetan food, though, is not a culinary highlight but you can always have a meal in your luxury hotel after tasting some tsampa and butter tea. This image is now reality in Shangri-la and soon in Feilaisi. The remoter regions are still reserved for the more adventurous tourists as you have to walk or ride a mule to get to the destination, and the offered accommodation services are not up to even one-star hotel standards. However, if the rumored cable-car is to be built, one can only speculate what that might bring along.

Being Tibetan

So who actually has the right to define Tibetanness? As Jonathan Friedman³¹ points out the identification of the Other is the rendering to someone of identity. Ethnography renders the Other's identity to us and, via the conditions in which it is executed, back to the Other. By speaking of him, or for him, we ultimately force him to speak through our categories. This applies to both the Western as well as the Chinese identification projects. As stable hegemonies are disintegrating in this time of globalization and the central/peripheral reality is crumbling, the correlative discourses are losing their authority, not only because we ourselves come to the

³⁰ Friedman 1992, 344.

³¹ Friedman 1992, 332.

realization that we can no longer simply re-present them, but because they will not let us do so. Their self-identification interferes with our identification of them. When I started my research in Xidang several Chinese people told me that it was not a good place to study the Tibetans as the villagers had already 'changed'; they had lost their authenticity. This is also a concern for many Tibetans from other Tibetan areas. As an example, I once had a conversation with a young, Dharamsala-educated man in Zhongdian. He told me that the Sichuan Tibetans are worried about the cultural preservation of Yunnan Tibetans. He asked me if the women in Xidang still wore traditional dresses (no, they do not as women do most of the farm work and the traditional dresses are not very practical while working), was there a monastery in the village (no, but a couple of temples), and can they read or write Tibetan (no, only a few are able to do so). For him this all equaled the loss of Tibetanness.

All these opinions of what it is to be a Tibetan are also filtering down to the local level and it has led to the loss of identity for some people. I have often heard how people feel that they are not 'real' Tibetans. They do not speak the Lhasa Tibetan, they do not know how to read or write Tibetan, they no longer wear the traditional dresses daily, not everyone knows how to sing the traditional songs and perform the dances, at least not very well. They do not spend their days in prayer but working their fields. So, others' conceptions (be it Western, Chinese or Tibetan) of real Tibetanness has taken away their identity as Tibetans. "We are not Han, but also not real Tibetans. We don't quite know who we are." (Woman from Xidang). If it is the loss of culture that we are concerned about, forcing others to doubt their identity seems to me to be a poor strategy.

As we have seen the 'authentic' Tibetanness is scripted by Chinese and Westerners and is internalized by Tibetans in performances that create and reinforce cultural differences between these groups. But as Adams also notes, "it is also possible to find Tibetans [...] who engage in a „blurring“ of the boundaries between these scripted differences.³²" Adams is talking about the Tibetans in Lhasa but this same "blurring" can be seen at work in Xidang. The locals are used to cater different images to different audiences. They are willing to hold discussions concerning the Dalai Lama or the Chinese troops in Lhasa with Western tourists. At the same time they are freely enjoying some of the benefits provided by the Chinese modernity and the state. And, quoting John Tomlinson, this is "how globalization is affecting people's sense of identity, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, how it impacts on the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally situated life³³".

Conclusions

Jonathan Friedman³⁴ has argued that modernity moves east, leaving postmodernity in its wake. In China, modernity is moving west. Postmodernity has caused a felt

³² Adams 1996, 511.

³³ Tomlinson 1999, 20.

³⁴ Friedman 1992.

lack of identity which can be seen in religious revival, ethnic renaissance, roots and nationalism. Both Western and Chinese tourists flock to the ethnic minority areas in search of tradition, nature and spirituality. As the Tibetans are seen as innately representing archaic knowledge, spirituality and harmonious relationship with nature quite naturally tourists from all over the world wish to share this experience. In Diqing this is accentuated by the change of the name into Shangri-la.

But this fascination with Tibet as Shangri-la has its downside as well. As the images of Tibet continue to capture people's (both Chinese and Western) imagination the real people are often forgotten. Also, if the Tibetans fail to fit into our conceptions of them, we all too easily see them as false and this has caused some of them to feel that they actually are inauthentic. We require them to preserve the traditions that we have lost and deny them the change that is a natural part of culture. No culture is unchanging especially in this time of globalization. This attitude also neglects to pay attention to the wishes of the people themselves. Not all Tibetans are opposing the promise of modernity that the Chinese government is offering. There exists multiple voices that are often ignored because we are too focused on our own images of the others. Tourists arriving from different parts of the world are looking for "Shangri-la", spirituality, traditions, nature and harmony, maybe as an escape from modernity. They have brought with them their ideas of "authenticity" of culture and what it means to be Tibetan. With the increase of tourism these conceptions are affecting the lives of the local villagers who have learned to cater visitors what they are searching for. This has probably also revitalized some traditions but also caused some of the villagers to question their own authenticity and identity.

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Contact: Sonja Laukkanen, Ph.D. candidate, Leiden Institute of Area Studies, Leiden, Netherlands, sonjaukkanen@hotmail.com

CRISIS OF ETHNIC CULTURE AMONG THE TUVINIANS OF CHINA

Sławoj Szynkiewicz

Annotation:

Keywords: *Tuvinian minority, China, social and economic change, social disequilibrium, interethnic relations*

Few ordinary people have heard of the Tuvinians and even fewer would locate them in China. A tiny group moved from what is now Tuva to the southern side of the Altai range most probably at the tumultuous time of the Jungar khanate to become one of the smallest ethnic groups in present day China. Some two thousand people occupy three villages along the Kanas Lake close to the northern Xinjiang border and about five hundred are scattered in adjacent towns of the Altai prefecture.

Further in the text, the term “Tuvinians” refers to this ethnic group, that has not yet received official recognition as one of the 55 minorities (*minzu*) in the People’s Republic of China. In spite of a definite perception of identity, distinct language¹ and a long-time social isolation from other ethnicities, they have been passed over in the run for acknowledgement of an independent place in the state’s internal politics. They have not even been able to press for recognition due to both a lack of a leaders of rated standing and an educated elite. They have really been a people from the wilderness, and to an extent are still perceived as such.

The present paper is about marginality and its possible causes. It is built on short-term observations and interviews, too short for a factual investigation. Therefore, my conclusions are tentative and remain debatable. Fortunately, I had the possibility of confronting them to a great extent with a Chinese student of Tuvinian life whose opinions corroborate my own in many points.² My study was carried out in 2007 and published after discussions with the referred scholar (Szynkiewicz, Hou, 2013).

Background to the Present Situation

Tuvinian subsistence has been based on pastoral husbandry and on hunting in remote valleys around the lake, with commuting Chinese traders occasionally calling in for raw materials. This way of life was terminated at the time of the Cultural Revo-

¹ According to Mongush (1995: 546–47) who herself is a researcher from Russian Tuva, there is clearly a Tuvinian dialect with many Mongolian borrowings.

² I am indebted to the consultations provided by Dr. Hou Yuxin who has carried out sociological and anthropological studies among the Tuvinians. His PhD dissertation on the subject (Hou 2012) has been defended at the Institute of Sociology of Beijing University and still remains unpublished. His data and findings are a valuable contribution on the modern condition of these people and cast much light on their dilemmas.

lution, which caused the resettlement of a 'backward and traditional' community to Han Chinese-dominated agricultural areas. That was the first time they encountered the wider world, even though the latter was also a closed society, albeit organised according to previously unknown rules. It was at that time that they underwent a re-education to modernization of that particular age; that is, they started on their way to resemble the Han.

Being thrown into a Chinese agricultural environment, and in addition mixed with the Kazakh pastoral neighbourhood, they gradually lost their stock under the pressure to become like the advanced Han people instead of adapting the 'underdeveloped' Kazakh nomadism. Thus, in the parley of those days, the Tuvinians seemingly joined the mainstream of the developing society.

They felt, however, uneasy in their new costume, unable to effectively cultivate and sow, ridiculed for their unprocessed food, for their truncated communication in poor Chinese and for the cultural vagueness of messages exchanged.

After they returned to their Kanas homeland they were richer in new experiences but poorer in material goods, particularly in animals. Since then, only a few families have restored their livestock, some keep a much reduced stock, while others have fallen into poverty. Those in the first category nomadize on shorter distances than the previous generations used to, and during their winters they take leisure time and rent-out their animals for hired labour.

The experiences of the Cultural Revolution years have not changed much of Tuvinians' values. The nomadic way of life continued to rate high, even though they learned to live settled lives. They have de-nomadized to a great extent under the influence of deportations that lasted over a decade. These two episodes are kept in mind as eventful cases marking the origin of their present plight.

Their plight is understood as a loss of social and economic stability, which has led to a deregulation of equilibrium that has caused poverty, loosening of in-group ties and a weakening of morals. Tuvinians perceive themselves as a people failing in their survival ability and blame the latest history for this impediment.

The understanding of local history is based on a division into two stages: an inborn one founded on the premises of indigenous and primordial virtues that used to constitute normality up to a certain turning point, and the other one being a contradiction of the former and thus a period of chaos. The latter is recognized as the hallmark of Tuvinian contemporaneity.

New 'historical calamities' have emerged in the 1980s and in the following decades. First there appeared a ban on hunting in the adjoining forests, explained as nature protection. Game prey was a substantial contribution to the pastoral economy but for many families this made up their basic source of sustenance. Reducing its status to poaching has angered many people. The ban has curtailed maintenance but also impaired mental resistance that had been drawing on intercourse with environment.

There also came limitations on pastoral freedoms, namely through cuts in the size of grazing lands, principally being a result of privatization. Some portions of

grassland have been rented to migrants from the outside or designated for construction purposes.

Tourist Factor

The latest trouble to appear was a result of tourist developments of the Kanas Lake and surroundings. The lake has evoked a great interest among the domestic tourists who began to flock there in rising numbers.³ The already mentioned construction had to cater for these requirements, and initial opposition by the local inhabitants was quelled by the promise of jobs and economic profits for the Tuvinians.

In market advertising, Kanas was presented as a residuum of an interesting traditional culture, and in order to live up to that picture the local people were central in playing the host population. They were expected to wear 'traditional' dress (that has almost vanished), to serve local dishes, to receive guests in demonstration houses and to organize trekking expeditions in the mountains. For that reason some households were resettled to make room for social purposes, while others were told to clean up and reorganize their yards.

In a few years the optimistic expectations became invalid as Tuvinians could not cope with them. They simply could not comply with the specific requirements for hosting tourists, while trekking guides, on occasion, did not show up. Tourists started to complain about an inadequate service and garbage in the villages and even in the forests.

Travel bureaus quickly found a substitute for the 'local unique culture' they had promised in their brochures. The Kazakhs and Han dressed in would-be local costumes, and started to serve guests in hotels and pension-houses. They also entered with stalls selling fabricated souvenirs that pretended to represent Tuvinian folklore and art. Visitors were not concerned about its accurateness because they did not come to study it. People claiming to be Tuvinians even took up tramping businesses.

Tuvinians are aware of their own inadequacy but at the same time blame the local administration for letting strangers do the jobs they were promised would be theirs. The administration itself was determined to keep remunerative businesses going on, however, nobody on their part, including Tuvinians by origin, have done anything to train the village inhabitants on how to do the expected trades.

The indigenous population has voiced its demands, to restore the original model of their participation in tourist services according to the initial promise of a share in the businesses. But this is hindered by the stereotype of lazy and greedy natives who demand payment for a treatment. Visitors from cities embrace a naïve fondness for simple-minded and sincere autochthons that welcome strangers with benevolence, and of tribal simplicity that has not yet learned of a market economy. They expect Tuvinians to match this fanciful imagination. The latter, however, behave as if they imposed a contribution to reinstate promised but unfulfilled gains. It is a classic case of cultural misunderstanding that results in further barriers for communication.

³ After 20 years of operation, in 2007 the center received over 900 thousand tourists according to the local Chronicle of Kanas (in Chinese): <http://news.qq.com/a/20071117/000839.htm>.

Social Disorganization

Taking together all the difficulties the Tuvinians have had to pass through from the time of the Cultural Revolution to the vicissitudes of the tourism experience, there is no wonder that villagers have been driven to despair, and which has been developing for several decades. The memory of misfortunes that have struck them since the 1960s is long, and is even growing with time because it has become narrated in the style of a standard folk-tale. Basically such tales are rooted in facts but their overall significance is martyrological. Individual cases are added, while natural calamities and imagined set-backs, caused by resentful otherworldly powers, are quoted. This is demonstrated by issues such as the desecration of tabooed divine groves that surrendered to the appetites of construction developers. The stories are told in a most affectionate mood during gloomy gatherings when pieces of these epic-type narrations appear in alcohol assisted party gatherings. They are not merry, but instead impregnated with grief.

Since 1983, the time that Tuvinians returned to their villages around Kanas Lake, they have been mourning their greatly diminished wealth in animals, as well as their inability and need to properly nomadize. They have even lost touch with supernatural powers, represented by *genius loci*, and unable to restore it according to the old customs due to the death of the last shaman in exile. Thus they have become disconnected with their habitat and with a great portion of culture as it was a generation or two before. Although the *ovaa* ritual (comp. Mongolian *obo*) still remains, it is now performed only once annually, rather than twice as it used to be.

The ritual is devoted to praying for human wellbeing, particularly for thriving herds. Lately, the abundance of crops has been added after the Tuvinians have imported an agricultural vocation. The more important of the two, however, remains pastoral trade, even though it is constantly shrinking due to the government's policy of settling people and the privatization of grassland. Households do not follow their herds anymore and live in wooden houses they became familiarized with, at least cursorily, in the early decades of the 20th century when Russian old-believers took flight from Bolshevik dominated Siberia and settled close to the Tuvinians.

Local pastoralists were never far-range nomads due to the abundance of rich grass, both in the open and in the forests. Nevertheless, they had to change camps to adapt to fluctuating grass qualities. Now they live in smaller segments that do not allow for expanse. The diversity of grass is secured to an extent by the linear planning of pastures from low sites up to mountainous sectors.

Land scarcity, however, does not allow for the keeping of large herds, and as a result of this a small group of rich households go after some ten horses, a similar number of cows and two or three dozen of sheep. This provides a modest, though assured, sustenance, but only for some five or perhaps ten percent of the population.

Agricultural products contribute a supplementary and rather minor share of their provisions but do not at all provide income. These are mainly based on gardening which, after a long period of exile during the Cultural Revolution, taught the Tuvinians to rate them well alongside standard agriculture. Notwithstanding this

example, there typically remains a nomadic contempt for agriculture, even though flour-based meals nowadays constitute the basic source of nourishment.

The everyday diet, however, is not counted among the principal impediments to the enjoyment of Tuvinian existence. Much more important are the already mentioned: memory of exile, lost flocks and nomadic style of living, prohibition of hunting, minimized conjunction with powers of the other world that has resulted in a reduction of ritual life, adversities of clashes with tourist companies, and the inefficiency of the local administration.

These factors contribute to the feeling of despair among a great portion of the population. This, in turn, develops a disposition for alcohol abuse that spoils many of the Tuvinians, irrespective of age, sex and social position; even Buddhist monks are often seen inebriated. Melancholy brings about a gloomy vision of the future and reduces industriousness. Some people that started small businesses, mostly as shopkeepers, but could not cope with the requirements of trade, pulled out thus leaving space for Chinese entrepreneurs.

Depression is responsible to a great extent for the inability to enter the tourism industry, taking aside the inept attitude of local bureaucrats. Of course, there are also practical and sober people; they are, however, preoccupied with their herds or trade outside food stuffs and raw materials. They must have overlooked the opportunities presented by the new economic opening that came with tourism.

Many Tuvinians exhibit realistic attitudes to life, but they usually tend to leave their villages or marry out. Although alcoholism is not mentioned among the Tuvinian troubles, it is seen as a hidden plight readily forcing out venturesome individuals, which means that the latter feel uneasy in their environment.

By no means has ethnicity defined their incompetency or inapt behaviour. This has been proven by enterprising persons who have not returned from exile or departed after finishing their education. Some have stayed on as teachers or clerks taking minor positions in administration. But almost none feel a responsibility to do social work for the rest of the community. Exceptionally, some set up petty museums that display traditional objects and try to upkeep the memory of the group's past and history. These sites are seldom visited except by organised excursions of school pupils or curious tourists.

Some Tuvinians express anxiety about the future fate of their identity and predict its annihilation. It is not a common feeling but strongly asserted by the elite. On the other hand they do not regret much that they have not been listed as an officially recognized national minority. Their ethnicity is not limited in their public intercourse, as they freely use their own name 'Tuba' and they still speak their own language. So, technically their ethnic consciousness is not endangered, even though in social terms it is dwindling due to a declining resistance to the outer world. Group cohesiveness has been reduced mostly in the sense of weakened prospects for future development.

Ethnic Relations

Inter-ethnic relations are somehow enigmatic. For many decades the strongest surrounding was constituted by the Kazakhs whose number is constantly growing. The latter are linguistically related and Tuvinians in general speak the Kazakh language well. Hence there existed a challenge for the Tuvinian identity of not being acculturated or even assimilated. For this reason they have developed a defence wall consisting of prejudiced stereotypes and resentments. Mutual contacts, however, have not been reduced for reasons of neighbourly necessities and of cultural proximity based on a similar economy.

The other numerically important group around were the Oirats (Western Mongols), but contacts with them were rather sporadic due to a language disparity. The Oirats are also nomadic pastoralists and were not demanding in the sense of land space or any other sort of control over Tuvinian life.

The most complicated relations concern the Han people. They started from occasional barter exchange and then entered the period of domination when the People's Republic asserted administrative control over Tuvinian villages. In the meantime the connection turned submissive when the local population was sent into exile. Han administrative domination still prevails but provokes no open disapproval because of a feeling of passive obedience to the state. Therefore, the view of the Han is off the agenda in terms of ethnic relations.

In private, however, the Han people are declared to be deceitful on account of shopkeepers who sell low quality products. But generally speaking their conduct is not a subject for debate. Also tourists, who are all but Chinese, present a special social category that endangers the Tuvinian rights but is not a matter of ethnic consideration.

One might expect that the local Han would maintain a derogatory opinion about Tuvinians, but this does not seem to be a widespread view. For example, a Han person is the author of a conceived portrait of the God of Nature, a highly venerated Tuvinian sacred being. It was imagined on the basis of native folkloristic descriptions that inspired the painter who studied the character while discussing with elders. This example indicates rather neighbourly mutual relations.

Thus, the only open resentment concerns the Kazakhs who offend Tuvinian interests by marrying their girls, settle next to their in-laws and claim property rights in relation to pasturelands. Besides this, they sell souvenirs marked as Tuvinian and often refrain from alcoholic partying. Again, this is not a universal attitude since acceptance of a son-in-law involves an extension of familial relations. Nevertheless, a negative Kazakh stereotype dominates as a principle.

In this context it seems that the decision to classify the Tuvinians as a part of the Mongol ethnicity was quite reasonable, given that separate *minzu* status was out of question and their ascription to the Kazakh group could have appeared provocative. Instead the Mongols were chosen to become the host group and Tuvinians seem reconciled with this.

Children learn the Mongol language in primary schools as prescribed by the law for minorities. They are never fluent in it unless they reside within a Mongol community. Knowledge of other languages is limited rather to Kazakh and Chinese. Irrespective of language command, Tuvinians would display Mongol gratulatory texts in the New Year ritual period. In the absence of their own written script they would thus demonstrate separateness from their basic ethnic surrounding. This is a rare case when they borrow Mongolian attributes. Their common religion cannot be qualified as such since it has already been established for centuries; nevertheless, this is a uniting bond.

These mentioned factors induce closer relations with the Mongols rather than with the other two remaining groups. Tuvinian elite, however, are prone to maintain that the lost opportunity of being officially recognized as a national minority is one of the reasons for the group's cultural crisis. It is possible this may have affected the situation since a representation of singleness to the outer world makes a group integrated and develops a stronger responsibility for ethnic performance.

Conclusion

It is true that such a responsibility has been weakened due to an inability to resist the memories of the past and present wrongs that they have incurred. Many Tuvinians, if not most, seem resigned to their fate which limits their vitality and endangers their destiny. There may remain a disagreement on who is accountable for the 'Tuvinian plight': is it from an outer influence (as they claim), or an inner vulnerability. It seems that both are on the agenda and any improvements call for a mobilization of activity on both sides.

The feeling of marginalization mainly pertains to the Kanas villagers. Others who are dispersed among the mixed population are not affected and seem to be active in their pursuits. The latter seldom refer to their ethnicity apart from when they associate with village relatives. This again proves that ethnicity is not a disadvantage. However, ethnicity's residue is in the villages and the latter keep the group's culture alive. This poses the question of how long will that residue resist the internal and external risks.

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Contact: *Slawoj Szynkiewicz, professor emeritus of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, szynk3@gmail.com*

ETHNICITY RECONSIDERED: LAND ACQUISITION AND POWER DYNAMICS IN THE KASHGAR PREFECTURE

Alessandra Cappelletti

Annotation: *In this article I will explore the topic of the relationship between Uyghurs and power, starting from a reconsideration of ethnic identities and representations, and taking the land acquisition dynamics in the Kashgar Prefecture, in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as an example. The three main questions around which this study is built are: “What is subsumed under ethnic labels in China?”, “To what extent does the term ‘Uyghur’ correspond to a multiplicity of identities?”, and “Is the ethnic divide between the Han and Uyghurs a fundamental factor of inequality?”. My fieldworks’ outcomes show that a broad array of identities are subsumed under an ethnic label. For instance, in Uyghur society, a main divide can be assessed between the Uyghur élite and Uyghur commoners. According to my fieldwork outcomes, there is a Uyghur élite, which I will call “bridge society”, sharing the same views and expectations of its Han counterparts. I will argue that members of this part of Uyghur society have hybrid identities which position them in the middle between Han and Uyghurs: born and grown up in Uyghur Muslim families, abiding by Islamic principles and education, this Uyghur élite – mainly Party cadres, government officials and intellectuals – received a Han formal education, and are trained in Party schools. As a result, they have a peculiar relationship with institutions in power and the Han establishment, since they partly benefit from the profits of the current economic growth in the region. What came out from the fieldwork material is that a trans-ethnic élite is currently governing today’s Xinjiang.*

Keywords: *ethnicity, identity, Party-State, Islam, élite cooptation, bridge society, development disparities, land acquisition, power dynamics, economic growth, rural communities, China, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Kashgar Prefecture, Uyghur, Han*

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is located in Northwestern China, bordering Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India as its foreign neighbours, and the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai and Tibet Autonomous Region as its internal eastern and southeastern neighbours¹. My fieldworks were conducted in the Kashgar Prefecture, located in Southwestern Xinjiang, with international borders to Tajikistan, Afghanistan and India, and internal borders to Kyzilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture, Aksu Prefecture and Khotan Prefecture. The contents of this article are part of the outcomes of my fieldworks conducted for two research works: my PhD (2009–2013) on socio-economic de-

¹ For an introduction to Xinjiang, see Dillon 2004; for a history of the region, Millward 2007.

velopment in Xinjiang, with a focus on the two areas of Kashgar and Shihezi in a comparative perspective, and my work as “area and land allocation expert” for the Sino-German Poverty Alleviation Programme Xinjiang. Within the framework of this development project I was in charge of monitoring the procedures followed by local authorities for land allocation, in particular for those agricultural plots irrigated with water-saving equipment financed by the two governments, and installed by German engineers. Moreover, I was in charge of assessing the legal validity of land related documents, and to what extent farmers are protected from potential abuses perpetrated by local authorities. Two local lawyers specialized in agricultural land issues supported our team in the assessment of the legal validity of land contracts. Through the analysis of land related documents and contracts, interviews with local authorities and farmers, as well as participant observation, the research generated a new perspective on the socio-political environment in Xinjiang. I worked in a team headed by my PhD supervisor Abduresit Jelil Qarluq, Chinese professor of Uyghur ethnicity who made access to villages’ venues and farmers’ houses a smooth and even pleasant job.

Development plans and local communities in Kashgar

The ancient oasis of Kashgar² is currently undergoing deep transformations, mainly anticipated since the “Work Conference on Xinjiang” (*Zhongyang Xinjiang gongzuo zuotanhui*, 中央新疆工作座谈会), held from the 17th to the 19th of May 2010 in Beijing, when Kashgar was officially declared a Special Economic Zone³. Major investments are targeting the region: they are aimed at building capital-intensive infrastructures and establishing business ventures, with funding conveyed through different development programs, the most important ones being the “Large-scale Development of the Western Regions” (*Xibu da kaifa*, 西部大开发), which officially started in 2001 and is still ongoing⁴, and the “19 Provinces and Municipalities Support Xinjiang” (*Shijiu shisheng yuanzhu Xinjiang*, 十九省市援助新疆), launched in 2010⁵. The official aims of these development projects are to cope with inequalities between the China’s Southeastern and Northwestern regions, and to make an effort to rebalance development disparities inside Xinjiang, thus improving the standards of life of its population with special attention to national minorities; among the non-stated goals there is the need to better integrate XUAR into the Chinese core, on a demographic, political, social and cultural level. Investments are attracting businessmen, professionals and non-skilled workers from all over China, new residents who spend part of their lives in Xinjiang, and eventually settle in the region. The project “19 Provinces and Municipalities Support Xinjiang” encourages the rich and developed areas of Inner China to invest in the region, and to twin with local prefectures and counties to carry on joint projects in different fields, from business

² For an overview of the modern history of the oasis, see Kuropatkin 2008.

³ Zhang 2010.

⁴ Goodman 2004; Wen and Hu 2001.

⁵ Zhang Hui 2010.

to education, and administration to tourism, generating various outcomes; one of these is the establishment of Guangzhou, Shanghai, Tianjin citadels (*xiao cheng*, 小城), settlements of Han peoples from provinces and municipalities investing in the region. For instance, a Guangzhou city has already been established on the outskirts of Kashgar. The numbers related to migration waves from Inner China, which have either been organized by the central or regional governments through “Labor Mobility Programs”, or constituted by migrants who have moved spontaneously from their areas of origin, are considered sensitive, since demography in Xinjiang is a political issue which generates claims of “being invaded” and “assimilated” by parts of the local Uyghur society. At the same time, there are scholars⁶ who report that hundreds of thousands of Han, who, in certain times in history, moved yearly from the overcrowded cities of Inner China to Xinjiang, deeply impacting the demographic balance in the region. Moreover, investment opportunities and fiscal facilitations at home represent a solution for those Chinese nationals who want to get profits from their growing capital, but find themselves in a system which still prevents private citizens from investing in foreign financial markets.

The swift economic growth determined by investments in large-scale infrastructures and capital-intensive ventures generated an “investment and price dynamics” which caused a disproportionate increase in the value of land, and in related land prices. In Kashgar, before the summer raids of 2011, which left 40 dead and several casualties⁷, average land prices corresponded to 200,000 RMB/mu⁸, while today they fluctuate between 700,000 and 1,000,000 RMB/mu⁹. In Han areas, for those with the highest real estate pricings, the average cost of a new apartment is 4,400 RMB per square meter, while in 2011 the price per square meter was 2,500 RMB. Accordingly, Kashgar real estate prices per square meter experienced a fivefold increase over the last 15 years. Considering the data and figures of 2012, analysts expect that property costs in Kashgar will exceed 5,000 RMB/sqm (approximately 605 euros) over the next four years. In view of these trends, investors are already turning to more affordable areas such as Khotan, 800 km southeast of Kashgar, where prices of urban land currently correspond to 100,000 RMB/mu. Only in the year 2011, a total of 400,000 square meters of new apartments have been sold in Kashgar, raising speculations among analysts and investors of an overheated economy and the concrete risk of a real estate bubble.

The fast appreciation of land is generating an array of dynamics which are impacting local communities in different ways: land repossession; demolitions; restorations of ancient and old buildings, and transformation of entire areas of the old city into touristic spots; demolition of religious venues such as *madrassas* and *wakf* buildings¹⁰; entrustment of touristic spots to Inner China’s agencies for the

⁶ Bovington 2004.

⁷ Demick 2011.

⁸ One *mu* corresponds to 666.7 square meters.

⁹ Li 2012.

¹⁰ *Madrassas* are Koranic schools and *wakf* are the Islamic charity institutions. The last *madrassa* which was demolished in Kashgar in 2010, was the Hanlik Madrassa.

management of the sites and of the tourists¹¹ – with serious consequences on the local job market¹²; transfer of local residents and communities into new apartment blocks at the outskirts of the city; huge construction sites in the city's centre and its surroundings; and, gentrification of entire areas in Kashgar's centre and its suburbs. Moreover, the speculative dynamics of the real estate sector in Kashgar¹³, are activating a mechanism in which an increase in living costs and pricings are making the situation unsustainable for the majority of local Uyghurs. We have to underline that what is happening in today's Kashgar is not an entirely new phenomenon: the same development model, based on investments in infrastructure and capital-intensive ventures, and implemented with a top-down approach, was adopted in the southeastern regions of China during the 1980s, when Special Economic Zones and free-trade areas were established, attracting investments from all over the country and from abroad, causing fast urbanization and industrialization dynamics, reshaping sleepy fishermen villages into booming commercial and economic hubs¹⁴. One of the “side effects” of this development model on socio-economic patterns is the institutionalized support of capital accumulation and profit increase, and a consequent penalization of labourers and workers¹⁵. Notwithstanding this, the rhetorical representations of social change and economic development are still conveyed through socialist/communist watchwords, symbolized into the city environment by a huge Mao statue erected in the People's Square 人民广场 (*renmin guangchang*) in Kashgar, the main venue for Han residents in the city¹⁶. The Chinese media and government documents are already presenting Kashgar as the “Dubai of Central Asia”, or the “New Shenzhen”.

¹¹ An entire part of the old city of Kashgar has been preserved, it is surrounded by gates and is accessible by paying a ticket fee of 60 RMB. A Beijing based company called Zhongkun manages the touristic spot, where residents still live and receive a monthly allowance of a few hundred RMB; they receive tourists in traditional Uyghur clothes and explain how much their lives have improved in the houses which have been restored according to the criteria of traditional Uyghur architecture, where tap water, electricity and modern facilities are now available.

¹² In Kashgar the jobs and activities related to the tourist sector, from hotels to restaurants, are shifting from Uyghur into Han hands. Those Uyghurs who continue working in the field are usually either tourist guides or drivers.

¹³ According to eyewitnesses, buses of Han businessmen from Inner China reach Kashgar every month to find business opportunities in the real estate sector, with entirely newly-built compounds being sold to single persons. Also, Korean and Japanese businessmen are turning to Kashgar to buy buildings and compounds, waiting for prices to rise in order to resell the properties at a profit.

¹⁴ Shenzhen and Guangzhou are two cases. For an exhaustive study on the Special Economic Zones established in the 1980s, see Crane 1990.

¹⁵ The Economist 2013.

¹⁶ The main square of Kashgar is where Id Gah mosque lies, and it is the traditional religious center for local Uyghur communities. The People's Square is a major venue for the Han residents of the city.

The fieldwork

The transformations occurring in Kashgar city are matched by equally impressive changes in the rural areas of Kashgar Prefecture. Following the geographer Piper Gaubatz¹⁷, from a theoretical point of view we are in front of a shift from a “frontier of control” to a “frontier of settlement”¹⁸, where “settlers from the core penetrate and increasingly occupy an area, residing not only in the cities but in the rural areas as well. In this situation it is common for the settlers to displace, or at least disrupt, local settlement and subsistence”¹⁹. The economic development that a “frontier of settlement” triggers is the main process and a major factor of the change and alteration in local demographic and socio-economic patterns. These dynamics and processes from “control” to “settlement”, which are transforming the rural areas of Kashgar (once characterized by small plot farming performed with traditional hand tools and rudimentary irrigation equipment) into a “modern” countryside cluttered with greenhouses, and reclaimed by large-scale agricultural enterprises utilising intensive mechanized agriculture, with a high employment of fertilizers, is what I was confronted with while doing fieldwork in the rural villages.

In the Kashgar Prefecture, I have been working in seven sites: Yingwusitan/Yengjosteng²⁰ Township in Shufu/Konasheher County, Qiaolepan/Cholpan Township in Yingjisha/Yenghisar County, Seyeke/Siyek and Tielimu/Terim Townships in Yuepuhu/Yopurgha County, Xiaputuli/Shaptul Township in Jiashi/Peyzawat County, Alali/Aral and Yangdaman/Yandurma Townships in Shule/Yengisheher County. In Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture I worked in Baren/Barin Township in Aketao/Akto County. The average income of the selected families ranged from 600 to 1000 RMB per year, for a four-member farmer household, while the average amount of cultivated *mu* for each household was six. Among the above mentioned sites, Peyzawat/Jiashi County in the Kashgar Prefecture and Barin/Baren Township in Akto/Aketao County in Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture are closed both to foreigners and Chinese non-residents. Access to these two areas is restricted by policemen and the army who, at dedicated checkpoints, stop cars and buses to control passengers’ documents and prevent non-residents from entering the villages. According to what I have been told by local authorities in Peyzawat, frequent tensions and protests erupt between the county authorities and farmers, due to social and religious groups opposing the fast “development” of the area, land issues, evictions and building sites reshaping the rural villages’ environment. For instance, the traditional squares where the mosque (*masjid*) and the market (*bazar*) represent the venues where villagers meet and discuss with religious leaders, are being transformed

¹⁷ Gaubatz 1996.

¹⁸ For this section on Gaubatz’s arguments and local economic development, I follow Cliff 2009, pp. 85–90, who refers to Gaubatz for his analysis on the process of territorial expansion of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

¹⁹ Reported in Cliff 2009, p. 85.

²⁰ The first naming is in Mandarin Chinese, the second in the Uyghur language. In the text I use alternatively the Mandarin and Uyghur names, considering the commonly accepted forms in the academic literature and media reports.

into concrete squares, in the typical style of the squares of Inner China cities; these wide spaces are equipped with red lanterns, showy illuminations and Han traditional folk dances and music during the night. Even the local poplar trees, *ak tirek* or *kara tirek* in Uyghur²¹, and *baiyang shu* (白杨树) in Chinese, are being replaced by maples, a kind of tree which is very common in Inner China. Moreover, the newly built apartment blocks and green spaces are conceived respecting the criteria of residential and park architecture in Inner China. On the other hand, since in Baren village there have been violent riots in 1990, characterized by religious watchwords²², authorities consider free circulation in the area as potentially dangerous, because issues still considered sensitive might arise at the presence of non-residents. I have been able to access both these sites because I was part of an intergovernmental project between China and Germany, and thanks to the intercession and support of the Project Implementing Agency, the Water Affairs Bureau in Kashgar city. The material I am going to present here has been collected during two missions which were specifically dedicated to assess land allocation and acquisition dynamics in Kashgar, but also presents data, interview outcomes and documents collected during fieldwork activities which I conducted since 2007, both as a PhD student as well as a collaborator of Italian magazines on China and Xinjiang related topics.

Actors, documents and actions performed in land acquisition dynamics

A relevant part of my research consisted in identifying and understanding who the institutional and business actors involved in land related issues are – those bodies dealing with land-related documents, contracts, acquisition processes, and land management in more general terms. Each identified actor is linked to a certain kind of document or action performed: what emerges is a whole net of interactions which is re-shaping the whole socio-political environment in the region. Here below I try to list the main actors involved in the land acquisition process: 1. **Water Resources Bureau**, WRB (*shuiliju*, 水利局), at Prefecture/County/Township level; 2. **Land Resources Bureau**, LRB (*guotu ziyuan ju*, 国土资源局), at Prefecture/County level; 3. **Township Government**, TG (*xiang zhengfu*, 乡政府); 4. **Village Committee**, VC (*cunmin weiyuanhui*, 村民委员会); 5. **Investors – Developers** (*touzizhe*, 投资者); 6. **Farmers** (*nongmin*, 农民). The WRB and the LRB realize the **Cadastral Maps**, CMs (*hujitu*, 户籍图), which are compiled together with the experts of Qinghua University in Beijing. The CM plots are indicated to scale, a reference number is assigned to each allocated plot, and the name of the household head who cultivates the plot is indicated in relation to each reference number. Borders in between plots are neatly indicated so that it is easy to visualise the plots' locations and that of their neighbours. At the same time, the LRB issues **Land Use Certificates**, LUCs (*nongcun tudi chengbao jingying quanzheng/guoyou tudi shiyongzheng*, 农村土地承包经营权证/国有土地使用证), contracts with a validity of 30 years. The TGs and VCs are the

²¹ *Ak* means white, *kara* black.

²² Dillon 2004, pp. 62–68.

two local institutions which: manage the rights to use and cultivate the plots²³; are in charge of allocating the land following fair criteria; define and collect taxes; and, issue and enforce “special regulations” (*teshu guiding*, 特殊规定). Among their functions, TG and VC cadres negotiate with investors and developers who are interested in taking over the right to use the land from farmers. Terms and rental amounts are directly discussed between TG/VC cadres and investors; in some cases local authorities entrust the plots to special financial agencies in exchange for loans, which are either used to start infrastructural projects or to pay compensations to farmers. After a previously fixed period of time, the agency returns the land to local authorities, who in turn need to pay-off the loan. Contextually, TG/VC cadres interact with farmers about all that concerns land-related issues: allocation of plots, collection of taxes, appointment of heads of farmers’ units, land acquisition, farmers’ claims, distribution of compensations, and so on. One of the most important functions performed by local cadres is to issue **Land Leasing Contracts**, LLC (*nongcun jiti tudi chengbao hetong*, 农村集体土地承包合同), new land documents with a validity ranging from 2 to 15 years. This land contract is a new document which is meant to replace the 30-year-validity contracts, entailing a range of new terms. For instance, while the old contracts did not entail any rent, the new ones require farmers to pay annual rents, one amount for land and another for water usage. These amounts of money are renegotiated each year on the basis of the market value of land, which is increasing all over China²⁴. Moreover, the expiry date of the contract is arbitrarily decided upon by local authorities, and, according to my fieldwork outcomes, in many cases is not necessarily defined within the stipulation. The legal validity of LLCs is much weaker than that of LUCs for at least three reasons: 1. LLCs are issued by local authorities, who have a lower degree of power than the prefectural bodies, and, in order to have a stronger legal validity, need to be notarized; 2. the necessity to issue LLCs arises in areas of “new development”, where important “development actions” are implemented, thus local authorities are entitled to seize plots for the “benefit of the whole community”, without encountering any relevant legal obstacles and without any required notification; 3. when LLCs are issued, local authorities are in full control of contract-related matters, without being supervised by any higher body. This opens the way to critical questions of partialities and corruption, considering that local authorities are deep-rooted among local communities, where the majority of their families, relatives and friends live. Among the other documents which local cadres are entitled to issue, worth mentioning is the **Commitment Letter**, CL (*tudi fenpei daohu de chengnuo han*, 土地分配到户的承诺涵), a text undersigned by all of the involved authorities, in which information is provided on the situation of the villages under their jurisdiction, and a commitment of allocating plots following fair

²³ The Township Government and the Village Committee replaced the “natural village” as institutions in charge of the management of the land. This shift in jurisdiction and authority was deliberated during the reform era in the 1980s, when the Household Contract Responsibility System was enforced in the rural areas. For a historical overview and critical assessment, see Ho 2005, Introduction and Ch.1.

²⁴ Zhang et al. 2013.

criteria is signed, for instance taking into consideration the farmer family's income, members, labour force and so on. The **Land Allocation Farmers' List**, FL (*tudi fenpei tongjibiao*, 土地分配统计表) is another document issued by local authorities which contains the list of farmers, their incomes, the allocated plots and the related references to the CM, together with the eventual rents which farmers have to pay. Each listed farmer has to sign the document, endorsing actions and measures undertaken by local authorities in allocating the plots.

Incongruities in land-related documents and weak land tenure regulations

The map of land acquisition actors, connected to land documents and actions performed, is a necessary basis to start a research on land acquisition dynamics in China. The main literature on the topic, written and edited by Peter Ho (mainly the two volumes *Developmental Dilemmas: Land Reform and Institutional Change in China*, 2009 and *Institutions in Transition: Land Ownership, Property Rights and Social Conflict in China*, 2005), explores the characteristics of institutional change in China by focusing on the shifts in institutional arrangements that surround land-related issues, underlining the importance of this kind of research, and of land as one of mankind's most basic resources. Ho assumes that empirical evidence shows how, in the past, an "intentional institutional ambiguity", which is essentially a restraint which the central government exercised in leaving land rights ambiguous, made the tenure system of agricultural land or cropland credible and socially accepted by the state and the rural populace. But "there is an inherent danger in the natural village's unclear land ownership: in economically developed regions where land prices are booming due to real estate development, higher administrative levels might misuse ambiguous property rights to expropriate land. Farmers are confronted with forced evictions and relocation to 'modern apartment buildings in the city' in the name of economic progress"²⁵. The Kashgar case fits very much into this theoretical framework, since the outcomes of my fieldwork highlight several problems in the system of rural land lease, an unclear usufruct structure and a low awareness of the importance of legal guarantees among farmers and local authorities. More specifically, I could assess a loose legal framework, uncertainty of legal standards, absence of commonly accepted criteria in managing land issues, mistakes in writing the personal data of farmers (with information written on contracts not corresponding to those in identity cards), monolingual contracts (only in Mandarin or only in Uyghur), missing data, irregularities of different kinds and illegal collective renting (when a group of farmers together rent out several plots to a single boss). These findings suggest a particularly weak legal protection for farmers: in the case that legal controversies occur, and if the farmer needs to contest a repossession order against local authorities in front of a court, the possibility of getting the better of it is feeble. Disputes over farmland in China – who owns it and who has the right to earn money from it – highlight

²⁵ Ho 2005, p.12.

fundamental dynamics that regulate the relationship between people and authorities, a historical constant in China, where a fragile equilibrium often results in clashes between angry villagers, who feel the land belongs to them, and government officials, who are eager to boost investment and tax revenues in their areas.

The new contracts: from long-term LUCs to short-term LLCs

Of particular interest for our topic are the fieldwork outcomes which I list here below in bullet point form:

- In the Kashgar Prefecture, long-term LUCs are quickly being replaced by short-term LLCs. This replacement is more frequent among those farmers whose LUC has expired, or has gotten lost, but there are also circumstances in which farmers with still valid LUCs see their long-term contracts replaced with short-term ones. According to Chinese laws, this replacement is not possible, but special local regulations (*difang teshu guiding*, 地方特殊规定) authorise local cadres to undertake some actions; arguments like the following ones can always be advanced to explain evictions and land seizures: “the area is fastly being developed”, “facilities and infrastructures beneficial to the whole community are scheduled for this village”, “a new educational complex is being built” or “land is fastly appreciating and it is attracting important investments”. These arguments are put forward by local authorities, who have the right to ask the Prefecture for an issuing of special regulations, which in turn, to be put in force and have legal validity, need to be registered at the prefectural court. If the regulation is not registered, then it is not valid²⁶.
- The replacement of contracts is subject to farmers’ approval, whose consent is obtained by local authorities through different means: paying of compensations which is considered decent by farmers (ranging from 500 to 2000 RMB per *mu*, according to the power of negotiation from the farmer’s side); promising to find a good job position for the farmer’s family members in the near future; in the case that the house is also seized, providing the farmer’s family with a new apartment at the outskirts of the city at a preferential pricing, with benefits, and the granting of a deferred payment plan; threatening the farmer with removal from the list of beneficiaries of free healthcare and monthly allowance from the state; threatening the farmer in various ways, with possible retaliations against family members or warning about the possible suspension of water supply for irrigation. The high illiteracy rate on the farmers’ part prevents them from effectively responding to these pressures, further accentuated considering that they are tied to the local authorities by their trust in good faith, and commitment to community affairs²⁷.

²⁶ Unfortunately, it was not possible to verify if the alleged local regulations justifying land acquisition and evictions were registered or not, because the lawyers who collaborated with our team did not agree to go to the court and check the registration, since they deemed it dangerous due to the sensitive nature of land-related issues.

²⁷ On the relationship between farmers and local authorities, see Ho 2005, Ch.1.

- The LLC provides a weaker legal guarantee than the LUC, since it is issued by local bodies, less powerful than the prefectural ones, and considering the terms of the contract entail a certain degree of arbitrary initiative, local authorities have the freedom to define the LLC's terms. In order to acquire a stronger guarantee, the contract must be notarized, an action which local authorities claim as not feasible due to farmers' resistance in taking on the expenses of the notarization process, which corresponds to 200 RMB. From their side, the interviewed farmers claimed that they wanted the document to be notarized, but were prevented to do so by local authorities. Moreover, the majority of farmers do not have a copy of the land contract at home (see the next point), thus any initiative taken by farmers to notarize the LLC is unworkable.
- Even though the law prescribes that farmers must be provided with copies of their land contract and of the CL, respondents with documents at hand corresponded to a mere 15% of all examined cases²⁸. When authorities were asked why farmers do not have any document, their answer was: "They [farmers] are like animals, they lose documents immediately", "Uyghurs are so backward that they cannot keep the house in order, and the documents get dirty or lost", "These Uyghurs are ignorant and illiterate, they cannot read documents, thus there is no point in distributing papers to them".
- The legal framework governing land-related issues is still extremely loose, in the sense that there are no prescriptions of fixed and commonly respected criteria for managing land use and repossession procedures. Moreover, new documents are issued without following common standards: this, if we also add the obvious incongruities and mistakes contained in contracts, strongly affects the legal validity of these documents. Under these conditions, authorities are allowed to seize plots without the risk of being subjected to any relevant legal consequences.
- There is a general unawareness on the importance of having a clearly regulated legal framework, which sets the rules and conditions for handling land issues, in order to avoid social instability, the eruption of violence and other socio-political consequences. From the farmers' side, this can be explained by the high rate of illiteracy, and by their unwillingness to side with any idea or position which could attract the attention of authorities, eventually generating a negative impact on their relationship with power. From the authorities' side, a direct interest, and the perspective of profits from the "land business", prevent them from undertaking any action which could challenge or question the status quo.

Reconsidering ethnicity

My research can be explained as a progressive "gaining awareness" of the inconsistency and ambiguity of ethnic identity and ethnic boundaries. Categories and classifications which follow ethnic lines shape government sources and research material, thus in order to get an understanding of the dynamics and socio-political

²⁸ Respondents were 165 in total.

mechanisms it is necessary to work within communities, to build confidence and participate in their activities and lives. Only in this way it is possible to overcome the limits of written sources and formal interviews. For all these reasons, the criteria of formal research need to be re-discussed and challenged periodically, in an attempt to find new ways of doing research and to open new paths. In our specific case, the enquiry on land acquisition dynamics has been a fundamental step towards the understanding of how hybrid identities are actually shaping the new socio-economic patterns and environment in XUAR.

The uncertain and weak legal framework, matched with the violent dynamics of land acquisition, are having a long-lasting impact on local Uyghur communities in the Kashgar Prefecture, generating an array of deep socio-political consequences. Among them, a relevant one is the redefinition of the concept, understanding, and legal value of “land” (*tudi*, 土地). “Collective land” (*jiti tudi*, 集体土地), believed to be a “common good”, at least since the 1950s, is quickly becoming a commercial asset: in the manner it is specified in new contracts, farmers and authorities are now dealing with “commodity land” (*shangpin tudi*, 商品土地), a definition which makes land fully fit into the dynamics of commercial transactions. From a public asset entrusted to farmers who make a living out of it, land becomes then a profitable business occasion for local authorities and investors. Considering that the agricultural sector in Kashgar is characterized by small-plot farming, this new situation is quickly transforming the socio-economic environment of the area, mainly for the shift from the traditional small-plot farming to large-scale agricultural enterprises. A more flexible legal framework, guaranteed by the new status of land and by the range of freedom granted by regional autonomy, which basically admits that local authorities have a certain degree of discretion in issuing special regulations bypassing Beijing, allows the replacement of thirty-year validity land use certificates with short-term land contracts.

The overall operation of reshaping the demography, society and economy of the Kashgar Prefecture is possible because part of the Uyghur society, a *bridge society*, acts as mediator between the Han establishment and the Uyghur society at large, in exchange for benefits from the current development and growth in Kashgar. Members of this *bridge society* are a category which escapes all definitions: the main characteristic of their being Chinese citizens²⁹ is hybridity, and the new generations are those who are quickly getting accustomed to this hybridity. Since this part of society enjoys the benefits of land acquisitions, there is neither an interest in understanding the farmers’ claims nor in finding a shared solution.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be argued that a fundamental factor of development disparities is not *ethnicity* in itself, which can be considered as a symbol of diversity and community engagement, but the way it is perceived and negotiated by subjects in

²⁹ On the current debate on Chinese nationality, *zhonghua minzu* 中华民族, see Sautman 2010”.

their interaction with other subjects and within the overall context. Local authorities in the Kashgar Prefecture feel to be, and present themselves as, Uyghurs in front of other Uyghurs and do legitimize their role and reputation by taking on that symbolic, cultural and political capital³⁰ associated with “Uyghurness”. Starting from the clothes they wear, the ways they greet people and the behaviours they perform, to their religious identity and social charity’s activities, they introject those characteristics which make them appear powerful in front of other Uyghurs. This circumstantialist use of *ethnicity* turns out to be essentialist³¹, when needed. For instance, when questioned about the ethnicity of a child born from a mixed marriage, a very rare situation, without Han listening to the conversation, the answer is that the child is Uyghur, as if to be Uyghur is something which is automatically transmitted to the child and has priority over any other ethnicity. The perceived inborn nature of Uyghurness is also assessed when members of this *bridge society* give handouts to the Uyghur poor and do not consider poor Han, as if *ethnicity* was inborn, not like social status. At the same time, the same respondents, members of the *bridge society*, refer to Uyghur farmers as “animals”, or “backward people”, stating that “Uyghurs are ignorant and not modern”, which is the commonly-understood meaning of the label “Uyghur” in popular Han contexts. The fact that rich Uyghurs distance themselves from poor farmers of the same ethnicity, using the ethnic label as Han do, means that they perceive themselves as non-Uyghur, but rather something in the middle, something different both from Uyghurs and Han. This hybridity of identities makes them able to act as middlemen and control Uyghur society on behalf of Beijing. The use they make of ethnicity is extremely helpful in their willingness to preserve and show their symbolic capital which positions them in the middle between other Uyghurs and Beijing: defenders of Uyghurs’ rights in front of Uyghur communities, and keepers of the status quo through the enforcement of the Party line within their communities, in front of the Han establishment. Their cultural background and leadership power in Uyghur communities, together with their Han education and respect of the Party line and rules, make them the perfect *bridge* between a disadvantaged part of society and those who benefit from that disadvantage.

In front of Han people, they pay attention to hiding their religious identity – for instance when they eat at Han restaurants (something which is forbidden by their Islamic creed, since in Han restaurants pork is cooked), or drink alcohol – they show themselves to be educated in the Party line. When both Han and Uyghurs are present, they put on their half-Han nature, showing their satisfaction to be Chinese, and justifying themselves to other Uyghurs by claiming that they have no choice, for their career and their life as well. In Kashgar rural areas, they strive to make the territory they administer turn from rural to urban, because with urban land it is easier to repurchase plots from farmers, and land is more valuable so they can ask developers higher rents. In their power to manage land as a commercial asset, they turn themselves from simple Uyghur Muslim officials to key local economic players.

³⁰ Bourdieu (1977)

³¹ Gil-White (1999) .

Their limited interest for the future of Uyghur farmers becomes clear when the informative material about the laws and regulations on land issues is only distributed in Mandarin, while at the same time authorities are aware of the fact that 95% of Uyghur farmers cannot read it. Moreover, the implementation of religious policies which are extremely unpopular among Uyghurs (like defining secular dress for men, preventing women from putting on the veil and preventing under-18-year-old boys to go to the mosque) require a constant renegotiation of their identity and power within Uyghur communities, and of their position and reliability within the Han establishment.

To make the whole situation acceptable by Beijing and by higher bodies, and not to meet with farmers' discontent, local authorities of Uyghur ethnicity hide behind rhetorical strategies which allow them to proceed in pursuing their goals. Local Uyghur cadres distance themselves from illiterate farmers, whom they consider as animals and backward people, thus promoting the "development of thought" (*sixiang fazhan*, 思想发展) and "social progress" (*shehui jinbu*, 社会进步). Everything is conducted under the label of *gonggong liyi* (公共利益, "public interest"): land is seized because the new agricultural factories will make plots more productive for the whole community, a new hospital or a new educational complex for farmers' children will be built on the seized land, a new road will connect the village to the prefectural capital or new apartment blocks with all the modern facilities will replace the old houses without tap water and electricity. These stated goals fit into the context of the establishment of a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*, 和谐社会) and of a "well-off society" (*xiaokang shehui*, 小康社会). The distance between the promised "development" and the reality of the dislocated farmers becomes clear when the latter find it difficult to live in the new apartment blocks, since they cannot afford to pay the electricity and water bills, and the maintenance costs related to the apartment. They are then obliged to move to the cities in Xinjiang or Inner China to look for a job, but since they are not qualified they can find only poorly-paid work or even become involved in illegal activities. In this way, they cannot benefit from the new infrastructure established on their former plots, and the new condition they find themselves in is that of dislocation and dispossession. In summary, the two main consequences of Kashgar development are: an increasing number of Uyghur peasant workers becoming a "floating population"³² and the "re-feudalization" of land properties.

This alleged shift from the "private" sphere to the "public interest" entails an understanding of "development" as an ideological category invoked by profit-seeking entities, and fits very much into the theoretical framework proposed by Ugo Mattei in his study of commons³³. The expropriation of "privately used plots" in favour of an alleged "public interest" and for the construction of "infrastructures which are of benefit to the whole community", is then, very often, a formal operation undertaken by profit-seeking public authorities turned into key local economic players. Local

³² Qarluq 2011.

³³ Mattei 2011.

authorities then become powerful business operators who, on their territories, obtain a higher degree of freedom in using state rhetoric and shaping the local environment than Beijing has. We then find ourselves in front of a deceiving juxtaposition between “State” and “market”, where borders between these two entities become blurred and the legal framework is not suitable to settle the new situation, thus leaving room for abuse. The polarization of the socio-political struggle between a “private interest” and a “common interest”, juxtaposing individuals and state, reveals itself to be a fake problem. While Mattei argues that in our contemporary world multinational entities are stronger than states, and that a new legal framework is needed to regulate the operations of the privatization of public properties (the “commons”) by states, in favour of multinational entities (since to sell commons means to expropriate citizens for the sake of multinational profit-seeking entities), I argue that investors and developers, together with local authorities turned into business players in the Kashgar Prefecture, become stronger than Beijing in their territories, and farmers do not have legal guarantees against eventual abuses (in this case when land acquisitions occur). This new framework reshapes the configuration of power and balance of interests in the Kashgar Prefecture, taking the whole political struggle into entirely new directions.

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Contact: Alessandra Cappelletti, PhD, Minzu University of China and University of Naples "L'Orientale", Adjunct Professor of International Relations of East Asia at the American University of Rome