China’s Islam in Xinjiang: from functionalization to elimination
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2. Socio-Historical Context to the Research Topic

This introductory chapter provides context to the situation of the Uyghurs and Xinjiang before and during the functionalization policy. Based on existing research, complemented by own primary sources, this chapter provides a general idea of the situation of Muslims in China as well as overall Chinese policy in Xinjiang since the 1980s up until the early 2000s, before the large-scale crackdown on Uyghur society began.

2.1. Muslims in China

In the People's Republic of China, Islam is linked with specific ethnic identities, or *minzu*. Of the fifty-six official ethnicities in China, ten are considered "Islamic": the Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Dongxiang, Salar, Bonan, and Tatar, of which the Hui and the Uyghur constitute the largest groups.[23] These two largest Muslim minorities each have a distinctive history in relation to the Chinese state.

Hui: The "Chinese" Muslims

The Hui are often called "Chinese Muslims" or "Sino-Muslims," which sets them apart from the "Turkic Muslims" in China, even though technically the latter also have Chinese citizenship. It is not always clear whether the terms "Chinese" or "Turkic" allude to the groups' cultural or linguistic aspects. Although many of the Hui do in fact have Chinese as their mother tongue, there exist multiple dialects, and there are other Hui who speak a completely different language, such as the Hui from Hainan, Tibet and Inner Mongolia.[24] Generally, the idea of "Chinese Muslims" reflects a view that the Hui are more integrated in the Chinese cultural sphere, and have adopted a very similar lifestyle to their Han neighbors. Seen as "familiar strangers," the Hui have a long history within Chinese society.[25]

Historically, Muslim communities in North, East and South China have had very different centers of social organization with diverging religious traditions. We can speak of four main types of Islamic social organization. The *gedimu* (also referred to as *qadim*, or *laojiao*) is characterized by the central position of the mosque and the importance of the local *ahong* (the Chinese word for imam, derived

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[23] See especially the work of Dru Gladney on the effect of state-imposed ethnic categorizations of the Muslims. See also Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 215-16.

[24] Dru C. Gladney, "Islam in China: State Policing and Identity Politics," in *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*, eds. Yoshika Ashiwa and David L. Wank (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 154.

[25] See Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 1997.

from Persian *akhund* آخوند). This was traditionally the most widespread form of social organization in local Muslim communities in China.[26] The Sufi organizations (*menhuan* 门宦), who have been active in China since the 17th and 18th centuries, are organized on a larger scale and are typified by political involvement and missionary activities.[27] The Yihewani, a Wahhabi-inspired movement, was founded in the late 19th century. This reformist movement called for an education reform which would allow every Muslim (both men and women) to be able to read the Qur'an for themselves. They were opposed to most Sufi practices and sought to reduce the importance of the imam. Over time, the Yihewani developed a more Hanafi-based dogma and largely aligned itself with the modernist goals of the Chinese state. The last group are the Salafi, who, in their quest to establish more "authentic" religious practices through the correct reading of the Qur'an and the Hadith (accounts and interpretations of the prophet Mohammad's words and actions), strongly rejected the "sinicized" traditions of Chinese Muslims.[28] One of the central features of Hui Muslims is that they have developed an extensive scriptural tradition of Islamic writings in Chinese, often referred to as the *Han Kitab*. This body of literature, which had its creative peak in the early 18th century with authors such as Liu Zhi, was discussed within a wide network of Islamic scholars, and its ideas were disseminated through an educational network.[29] According to Kristian Petersen, this literature and related education practices helped Chinese-speaking Muslims to fashion the idea of a distinctive

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[26] Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 37-41. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 47-49.

[27] The Chinese *menhuan* are local subgroups located around a holy place with a hereditary lineage of masters (*jiazhu* or *daozhang*) at their head. The master leads a strict central hierarchy of disciples who serve as *ahong* in the area of the master, and often also outside of it. Among the Chinese Sufi *menhuan*, the most well-known division is between the Jahriyya and the Khufiyya. See Françoise Aubin, "La Chine," in *Les Voies d'Allah: Les ordres mystiques dans l'islam des origines à aujourd'hui*, eds. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein, Paris: Fayard (1996), 265.

[28] Élisabeth Allès, "À propos de l'islam en Chine: Provocations antireligieuses et attitudes anticléricales du XIXe siècle à nos jours," *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 24 (2002): 70-71. Leila Chérif-Chebbi, "Brothers and Comrades: Muslim Fundamentalists and Communists Allied for the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in China," in *Devout Societies vs. Impious States? Transmitting Islamic Learning in Russia, Central Asia and China, through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stéphane A. Dudoignon (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), 61-63.

[29] Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). To learn more about Liu Zhi and his influence, see for example James D. Frankel, *Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Confucian Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Law* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011) or Leila Chérif-Chebbi, "Between 'Abd al-Wahhab and Liu Zhi: Chinese Muslim Intellectuals at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century," in *Islamic Thought in China: Sino-Muslim Intellectual Evolution from the 17th to the 21st Century*, ed. Jonathan Lipman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 201.

identity.[30] Research on the *Han Kitab* emphasizes the scholars' efforts to harmonize Islamic identity with the Chinese political and social environment.[31]

Uyghurs: The Unfamiliar Strangers

The Uyghur as we now understand them have their roots in the 18th and 19th century settled Turki communities of the oasis towns around the Tarim Basin, a desert area that spans more than one million square kilometers and is enclosed by mountains ranges.[32] The geographical spread of the Turki communities extended across most of what is now Xinjiang, and is often denominated by the term Altishahr (Uygh: *alte sheher* ئاتە شەھەر, literally "six cities"), referring to the six oasis communities of Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Aqsu, Kucha and Turpan.[33] The inhabitants of Altishahr shared a common identity on the basis of a common historical experience, inter-oasis mobility, shared myths and legends, and explicit perceptions of alterity towards other groups.[34] Altishahris clearly differentiated themselves from Chinese, from Turkic and Mongolic nomadic groups, and, despite sharing the same religion, language and way of life, they also differentiated themselves from the settled Turkic-speakers of Western Turkestan (the areas of Andijan, Khoqand, Samarqand, Bukhara), whom they called "Andijani."[35] The Altishahri identity was further shaped by the geographical boundaries of the Pamir, Karakoram and Tianshan mountain ranges and the political boundaries of the Qing empire in the 19th century, which restricted travel to Western Turkestan and Inner China.[36] Chinese records historically referred to the region that roughly corresponds to today's Xinjiang as Xiyu ("Western Regions"). Xinjiang as we know it was officially incorporated into the Qing Empire as a province in the 1880s amid rising colonial power play by the Chinese and Russian

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[30] Kristian Petersen, "Reconstructing Islam: Muslim Education and Literature in Ming-Qing China," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 23, no. 3 (2006): 26. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite's *Dao of Muhammad* (2005) provides a good insight in the workings of the *Han Kitab* and the educational network of the *jingtang jiaoyu*.

[31] Petersen, "Reconstructing Islam," 25. See also Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, 226; Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 13. The idea put forth by Raphael Israeli, that the Han Kitab were a way for Chinese Muslims to explain and rationalize Islam for a non-Muslim Chinese elite, is countered by Kristian Petersen and others. They say that the main goal was to produce advanced theological texts for the advancement of local believers' understanding of Islam. Raphael Israeli, ed., *Islam in China: Religion, Ethnicity, Culture, and Politics* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), 61; Petersen, "Reconstructing Islam," 36.

[32] Laura J. Newby, "'Us and them' in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Xinjiang," in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, eds. Ildikó Bellér-Hann et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 16.

[33] Ildikó Bellér-Hann et al., eds., "Introduction: Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia," in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 5.

[34] Newby, "'Us and them,'" 22-26. Rian Thum, *The Sacred routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 158-159.

[35] Newby, "'Us and them,'" 17. Rian Thum, "Modular History: Identity Maintenance before Uyghur Nationalism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 71:3 (2012): 629. This group identification was also applied by the Qing administration, who clearly demarcated the Turkic Muslim sedentary population of Xinjiang from other people such the Kazakh and Chinese speaking Muslims. David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 33.

[36] Thum, "Modular History," 649.

empires in Central Asia.[37] In the 1930s, the Altishahri identity was shaped into a "Uyghur" identity, a term that has been taken over by the Communist government, and integrated into the official *minzu* classification.[38] Under the PRC administration, the settled Turkic Muslims were now officially labelled as the Uyghur *minzu*, and became the majority nationality in the Xinjiang province, also called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

The question of how Islam is entangled with Uyghur identity is a difficult one. For the pre-Communist period, historical anthropologist Ildikó Bellér-Hann has argued that by the late 19th century a basic Islamic identity characterized a large majority of the Altishahri population, but that this shared religion was no unambiguous, static boundary. Instead, communities were constructed around multiple axes, such as ethnicity, region, religion, profession, gender, etc. Whichever community was emphasized depended on the context.[39] In more recent times, Uyghur identity is equally fluid, and is characterized by numerous axes of division. For the late 20th century, Justin Jon Rudelson has provided a convincing account of the importance of different oasis identities. In addition, he argues that the different social groups within Uyghur society each bring their own interpretation to Uyghur identity.[40] But in general, Uyghurs see Islam as a central aspect of their identity, ostensibly more so than for example the other Muslim Turkic *minzu*, the Kazakh.[41] Uyghurs have historically never experienced a great divide between Sunni and Shi'a traditions and had no widespread awareness of adhering to the Hanafi school of law.[42] The binary opposition between Sufi practices or "official," scriptural Islam existed, but was not always very pronounced, with no discernible distinction between networks of religious scholars and Sufis, and the authority of both esoteric and exoteric knowledge was seen as complementary.[43] Up to the 21st century, Sufi practices were reported to be

[37] For a detailed historical account, see Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, 53-85. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 24.
[38] Thum, "Modular History," 628.
[39] Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang, 1880-1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur*, China Studies 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 427.
[40] The three different social groups identified by Rudelson are peasant, merchants, and intellectuals. Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
[41] Colin MacKerras, "Religion in Contemporary Xinjiang," in *Silk Road Studies* 12 (2008): 218. For an excellent discussion on the relation of Islam and the Hui *minzu*, see Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, 1991. Gladney emphasizes the importance of Hui ethnicity over that of Islam. Raphael Israeli, on the other hand, has fervently countered that argument, stating that Islam is clearly the most important identity marker for Muslims in China. Colin Mackerras has noted that studies that are based on single ethnic groups tend to favor Gladney's analysis. See Colin Mackerras, "Some Issues of Ethnic and Religious Identity among China's Islamic Peoples," *Asian Ethnicity* 6, no. 1 (2005): 3-18.
[42] Schrode, "The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Uyghur Religious Practice," 310.
[43] Thierry Zarcone, "Le Turkestan chinois," in *Les Voies d'Allah: Les ordres mystiques dans l'islam des origines á aujourd'hui*, eds. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein. (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 268. Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*, 284.

widespread among rural Uyghurs.[44] Wang Jianxin observed during his fieldwork in Turpan in the 1990s that “what was different for individual Uyghurs was that they used religious symbolism differently, and had different opinions about Islam and its relation to their cultural traditions. [...], different Uyghurs, no matter what their formally expressed opinions may be, actually accept differing mixtures of religious traditions. They knew how to express their Islam according to what Islamic leaders taught, while they also knew other meaningful traditions for their daily life and how to interpret them as Islamic.”[45] This observation matches anthropologist Bellér-Hann’s idea of Islam as part of a shared symbolic vocabulary in Uyghur society, which people make creative use of in different circumstances.[46]

Fellow Muslims in Xinjiang – The Hui, Kazakh, Tajik and Kirghiz

Under PRC rule, the Uyghurs for a long time formed the majority ethnic population in Xinjiang. Only recently have the Han started to outnumber the Uyghurs, because of the massive influx from other Chinese provinces.[47] Besides the Uyghurs and Han, Xinjiang is also home to other populations, such as the Kazakh, the Kirghiz, the Tajik and the Hui. Historically, there has always been a distinct otherness to the Muslim Kazakhs or Kirghiz, with their nomadic or partially nomadic lifestyle, their own rituals and myths, and their related but different language. As Laura Newby explains, trading and alliances were common, but intermarriage was rare.[48] The Shi’a Tajik who lived in the mountains and spoke an Indo-European language were also regarded as foreign.[49] In more recent times, religious activities by these groups are mostly conducted apart from the Uyghur community, although my interviewees have attested that, in small numbers, Kirghiz and especially Kazakh also attended Islamic education in the Uyghur language.[50]

Research suggests that Uyghur and Hui Islamic traditions have historically been relatively distinct throughout most of their development. There were connections, mostly through the ties of

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[44] Thierry Zarcone, “La Naqshbandiyya,” in *Les Voies d'Allah: Les ordres mystiques dans l'islam des origines á aujourd'hui*, eds. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 456-57. Rachel Harris, “Harmonizing Islam in Xinjiang: Sound and Meaning in Rural Uyghur Religious Practice,” in *On the Fringes of the Harmonious Society*, eds. Trine Brox and Ildikó Bellér-Hann (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2014), 293-317. Zarcone, “Le Turkestan chinois,” 271-73.

[45] Jianxin Wang, *Uyghur Education and Social Order: The Role of Islamic Leadership in the Turpan Basin*, Studia Culturae Islamicae 76 (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 2004), 29–30.

[46] Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters*, 309.

[47] Nicolas Becquelin, “Staged Development in Xinjiang,” *China Quarterly* 178, no. 178 (2004): 359.

[48] Newby, “‘Us and them,’” 18.

[49] Under the late-18th and early-19th-century Qing administration through local officials (the so-called *beg* system), the Tajik were used as slaves. Newby, “‘Us and them,’” 20.

[50] Author’s interviews with Tursun, Emet, Jusupjan, July and December 2016.

Naqshbandiyya Sufi orders.[51] The influence of these connections was, however, limited. Focusing on the Hui, Leila Chérif-Chebbi has noted that, although the geographical span of the Chinese Islamic discursive tradition was wide and there was a variety of people included in it, the Uyghurs never formed a part of this Chinese religious landscape.[52] Instead, the Uyghur Islamic tradition was clearly embedded with Central Asian practices, literature, and architecture. When comparing Central Asian, Chinese and Uyghur burial practices, Bellér-Hann has noted that even though there are general similarities between Uyghur and Chinese burial practices, such as one can find in many other regions in the world, there are distinctions at a closer level, while Uyghur and the Central Asian practices share many specific similarities.[53] Historically, students studied in the Islamic centers of Bukhara or Samarqand, local rulers were related to Central Asian lineages, and Sufi saints and Islamic scholars who are central to the Uyghur Islamic experience did not come from China, but from the Central Asian, South Asian, or Middle Eastern traditions.[54] Although many works were lost during the turbulent years of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, research has shown that the legacy of the Central Asian scriptural canon is clearly present in 20th-century Xinjiang.[55] This reflects how the Uyghurs constitute a part of the Central Asian religious and cultural sphere, in a manner that is not the case for the Chinese sphere.

The Hui Muslim communities are quite populous in Xinjiang cities such as Urumqi and Turpan, where they have their own mosques, with their own imams who hold sermons in Chinese.[56] My interviewees alluded to the relative segregation of Hui and Uyghurs, with both groups keeping to their own communities. One interviewee attested that, even when studying abroad or when going on pilgrimage to Mecca, there was little intermingling between Hui and Uyghurs. He said the only circumstances under which it was deemed acceptable for Hui and Uyghurs to share a religious space,

[51] Ma Laichi, who introduced the Naqshbandiyya Sufism to Northwest China, was one of the students of the Naqshbandi Sufi leader Apaq Khoja, a major historical figure in Xinjiang whose tomb lies in Kashgar. Zarcone, "La Naqshbandiyya," 454.

[52] Leila Chérif-Chebbi, "Between 'Abd al-Wahhab and Liu Zhi: Chinese Muslim Intellectuals at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century," in *Islamic Thought in China: Sino-Muslim Intellectual Evolution from the 17th to the 21st Century*, ed. Jonathan Lipman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 201.

[53] Ildikó Bellér-Hann, "Situating Uyghur Life Cycle Rituals between China and Central Asia," in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, eds. Ildikó Bellér-Hann et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 142.

[54] Thierry Zarcone, "Le culte des saints au Xinjiang de 1949 à nos jours," in *Saints and Heroes on the Silk Road*, eds. Thierry Zarcone, Ekrem Işin and Arthur Buehler (Paris: Maisonneuve, 2002), 138. Fuller and Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," 327.

[55] See Zarcone, "Le Turkestan chinois," 271–273; Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, 62-63; Karin Scheper and Arnoud Vrolijk, "Made in China: Physical Aspects of Islamic Manuscripts form Xinjiang in Leiden University Library," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 2 (2011): 51-52. For comparison, see the textbooks used in a late-20th-century *mektep* in Bukhara as referred to in Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 23–24. One of my interviewees mentioned the Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the *Mukhtaṣar al-Wiqāya* (a core work of jurisprudence in the *medrese* of Central Asia), and "many works of Central Asian scholars" as the most important books of his time at the Xinjiang *medrese* in the late 1980s. Author's interview with Isa, December 2016.

[56] MacKerras, "Religion in Contemporary Xinjiang," 212–13.

was when Uyghurs traveled to the inner provinces. There they could attend Hui mosques or even attend courses in a Hui Islamic school.[57]

Figure 1: Hui mosque in Urumqi (Shaanxi Mosque 陕西大寺) (photo by author, July 2018)

Figure 2: Hui mosque in Urumqi (Yongdeng Mosque 永登寺) (photo by author, July 2018)

There are, nevertheless, records of religious spaces in Xinjiang shared by Hui and Uyghurs, mostly in oasis towns in the east of the province. One such space is the shrine of Thābit ibn Qays, believed to be one of the earliest bringers of Islam to the region, in Qumul (Hami). The shrine was reported to be frequented by both Hui and Uyghurs in the region.[58] But despite occasional places and instances where Uyghurs and Hui crossed paths because of their shared religious tradition, they remained a distinct "other" to each other.

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[57] Author's interview with Turgunjan, July 2016.

[58] Frederick de Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context: Life in Shinjang Documented from Public Places* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 16. De Jong also refers to Patrick Hällzon's observation of Hui and Uyghur visitors to the shrine, in Hällzon, "Stepping onto Sacred Ground: The Mazar in Uyghur Day-to-Day Life," in *Pilgrimages Today*, ed. Töre Ahlbeck, (Åbo: Donner Institute for Religious and Cultural History, 2010), 87-121. De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 96, 108.

The perception of the Hui, or Tungan as they are often called, community in Xinjiang by the Uyghurs whom I interviewed was strongly colored by state policy. The lenient state treatment of Hui religious expression, in comparison to the strict policy towards the Uyghur community, encouraged a sense of estrangement and resentment towards Hui. These are remarks made by my interviewees when asked about the relation between Uyghurs and Hui:

(1) "Tungan [Hui] are the same people as China. They talk the same, dress the same, look the same. Only the religion is different. The big difference with Uyghurs is that they are not being repressed, and that they do not have their own land." (Emet)
(2) "We don't have a good experience with Tungan. In the past, many things happened. We used to trust each other, they are Muslims, we are Muslims, so we are brothers. But then they just sold us out to the Chinese a couple of times. In the end, they are Chinese, right?" (Jusupjan)
(3) "The problem with Tungan is that they say you have to listen to China." (Isa)
(4) "You cannot compare our situation with that of the Tungan. In the 80s, there was equality, equal rights, a relaxed government that allowed things. But then they started to forbid a lot for the Uyghurs such as veiling, public religious activities, state officials praying or fasting. But up until now, not at all for the Tungan, they can do everything. They have a lot of *medrese*, and also [schools] for the children. Women are allowed to veil. State officials can pray and participate in Ramadan. The Chinese state supports Tungan to go to Mecca. Many go to Mecca. For Uyghurs, that is very rare, and practically forbidden." (Tursun)

This thesis unfortunately cannot go into the situation of other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and focuses on the Uyghur experience. While the state policies also affected other Muslim minorities in the region, the different experiences would require a research project of its own.

2.2. State Policy in Xinjiang from the 1980s until the early 2000s.

Development

As many researchers have remarked, the state's attitude towards Xinjiang and its inhabitants bears the marks of a „civilizing project," as Stevan Harrell has phrased it:

> […] a kind of interaction between peoples, in which one group, the civilizing center, interacts with other groups (the peripheral peoples) in terms of a particular kind of inequality. In this interaction, the inequality between the civilizing center and the peripheral peoples has its ideological basis in the center's claim to a superior degree of civilization, along with a

commitment to raise the peripheral peoples' civilization to the level of the center, or at least closer to that level.[59]

This civilizing project, Harrell claims, provokes a specific reaction in the peripheral people which runs counter to the aims of the civilizing center. It actually stimulates the shaping of ethnic awareness and emphasizes the differences between center and periphery.[60]

Researchers discussing the management of Xinjiang by the Chinese government have for years identified a dissatisfaction on the part of the Uyghurs with Chinese state rule, the failing of the state to ease ethnic tension and even the worsening of it by state policy.[61] The state's primary strategy for integrating the region into the Chinese state and dissipating unrest has been economic development and the strict repression of dissent. The economic push of Xinjiang has taken off since the late 1980s and early 1990s, and received new vigor with the Western Development Program in 2000, with its plans for infrastructure, foreign trade and investment, and workforce management. [62] South Xinjiang experienced a significantly slower growth rate than the north, where Chinese settlement and investment has been considerably higher.[63] In order to rectify the unequal situation, the state improved transportation between north and south, pushed Han settlement in the Kashgar and Khotan regions, and increased local investment. In 2010, Kashgar, south Xinjiang's largest city, was nominated a Special Economic Zone with increased infrastructural projects and tax-free zones, which attracted state and private investment.[64] The Silk Road Economic Belt (or One Belt, One Road, or Belt and Road Initiative, abbreviated BRI) initiative of 2013, which aims to strengthen economic cooperation with Central and South Asia, has meant a further incitement from Beijing to investment in the region and the fostering of transnational trade.

The consequences of China's development policy in Xinjiang have been multi-sided. Nicolas Becquelin has called the sustainability of the modernization and territorial integration approach into

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[59] Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 4. Several authors, such as Ildikó Bellér-Hann (2008), Joanne Smith Finley (2013), and Rian Thum (2014) have raised the concept of Harrell's civilizing project to describe the situation in Xinjiang.

[60] Harrel, *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, 17.

[61] Nicolas Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," *The China Journal* 44 (2000); Nicolas Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," *China Quarterly* 178, no. 178 (2004); Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Colin Mackerras, "Xinjiang in 2013: Problems and Prospects," *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 2 (2014). For a clear overview of organized protests and violent events in Xinjiang from 1949 to 2005, see Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 174-190 (appendix).

[62] This policy was developed in order to reduce the economic gap between China's East and West, and included plans for Chongqing, Gansu, Guangxi, Guizhou, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Tibet, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Yunnan.

[63] Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," *The China Journal* 44 (2000): 68.

[64] Matthew S. Erie, "Defining Shari'a in China: State, Ahong, and the Postsecular Turn," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 12 (2014): 94, http://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-12.

question. For him, Xinjiang‘s economical integrity was far from being achieved, the ecological challenge was growing because of rising demographic pressure, heavy industry, and mismanagement, and the ethnic minorities in the region have not been able to profit from development as much as the Han population.[65] Colin Mackerras has stated that not to develop the region would be worse, but that the way the Chinese state was implementing the push for modernization was increasing social tensions. In particular, Han immigration, ecological mismanagement, and discrimination of Uyghurs in the labor market have been detrimental to the region's social stability.[66]

Marginalization of Uyghurs

Han immigration into the region, popularly referred to as "mixing sand" (*chan shazi* 搀砂子), was already taking place on a massive scale in the 1990s and has become a confirmed policy by the government since the start of the Western Development Program.[67] In 2000, head of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission Li Dezhu openly stated that the goal of Han westward migration was homogenization and development. He did warn that the migration push would cause problems with the ethnic minorities and that this conflictual situation should be handled well.[68] Whereas Han constituted only six percent of the population in Xinjiang in 1949, it rose to almost half of the province's total population in the early 2000s.[69] In 2010, the number of Uyghurs in Xinjiang was estimated to be around ten million, while the Han in the region numbered 8.4 million.[70] Han immigration was indirectly promoted through beneficial policies for new Han workforces in Xinjiang. The fostering of migration to western minority regions in order to dilute the ethnic populations in these areas is called "homogenization" (*ningjuhua* 凝聚化) and explicitly serves to strengthen national unity.[71] The state's application of family-planning policies (birth restrictions) for non-Han ethnicities since the late 1980s in Xinjiang further exacerbated tensions between the Uyghurs and the state and intensified frustration over Han immigration, without which Xinjiang would not have had such a steep population increase.[72] The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC, also referred to as *bingtuan*), as one of the most important economic players in the region, contributed to

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[65] Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 371-72.
[66] Mackerras, "Xinjiang in 2013," 249. Colin Mackerras, "Some Issues of Ethnic and Religious Identity among China's Islamic Peoples," *Asian Ethnicity* 6, no. 1 (2005): 16-17.
[67] Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," 74-76.
[68] Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 374. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 58.
[69] Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 359.
[70] Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang, "Language, education and Uyghur identity: an introductory essay," in *Language, Education and Uyghur Identity in Urban Xinjiang*, eds. Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang (London: Routledge, 2015), 5.
[71] Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 373-74.
[72] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 59.

the Han domination of Xinjiang's economy and resources. It holds about one third of Xinjiang's arable land, is overwhelmingly Han, and continues to attract Han migrants to the region. Becquelin calls it a "powerful colonizing force."[73] The *de facto* colonization of the region has aggravated ethnic tensions in the region, as it has resulted in more competition over land resources and work placement.[74]

Another important aspect of China's policy in Xinjiang has focused on language. Through the Western Development Program, the government increasingly pushed the promotion of Mandarin among ethnic minorities, as good communication was considered necessary for development.[75] Before the region's Han domination, Uyghur was the *lingua franca* for most ethnicities in Xinjiang. Now, the language has been increasingly marginalized as publications and media broadcasts are largely in Mandarin. During my visit in 2015, local respondents working in schools reported in conversations that although the government for a long time lacked the means and manpower to implement the desired level of Mandarin instruction in public schools in rural areas of Xinjiang, education was increasingly becoming a Mandarin-dominated domain.[76] Han Chinese, especially recent work migrants, hardly possessed any Uyghur language skills and often did not make the effort to learn more than basic words. Although Uyghur language use was still very much widespread, especially in the south, it became a sensitive issue and part of the battleground in the region's ethnic strife.[77]

Han also increasingly gained the upper ground at the political level. Uyghurs were underrepresented in the political system managing the PRC's Xinjiang province, with Han Party officials occupying every major post in state and Party governing entities.[78] Even Uyghur elite students who had attended special schools in inner China with the purpose of training them as loyal Party cadres found themselves marginalized in the labor market upon their return to Xinjiang.[79] Xinjiang's management

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[73] Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 367.
[74] Becquelin, Xinjiang in the Nineties," 77-80. Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 374. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 58.
[75] Officially, the 1952 Chinese constitution protects the status of minority languages, which means among other things that education and publications have to be made available in the minority languages. But at the same time the law also states that Mandarin Chinese should be promoted throughout China. In practice, neither of those stipulations acts as guiding principles for educational language policy. Instead, specific historical developments on political and economic issues have made languages functionally unequal. Language policies and practices are determined for the most part by regional and local officials who try to balance central against local demands. Regie Stites, "Writing Cultural Boundaries: National Minority Language Policy, Literacy Planning, and Bilingual Education," in *China's National Minority Education: Culture, Schooling, and Development*, ed. Gerard A. Postiglione (New York: Falmer Press, 1999), 104.
[76] Conversations with Xinjiang University employee and school personnel, October 2015.
[77] Eric T. Schluessel, "'Bilingual' education and discontent in Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey* 26 (2007): 251-77. Joanne Smith Finley and Xiaowei Zang, eds., *Language, Education and Uyghur Identity in Urban Xinjiang* (London: Routledge, 2015). Arienne M. Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*, Policy Studies 15 (Washington: East-West Washington Center, 2005).
[78] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 23.
[79] Timothy Grose, "Protested Homecomings: Xinjiang Class Graduates and Reacclimating to Life in Xinjiang," in *Inside Xinjiang: Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest*, eds. Anna Hayes and Michael Clarke (London: Routledge, 2016), 206-24.

was very strongly connected to central Party authorities in comparison to other Chinese provinces, and Beijing had a powerful economic hand in the province since the largest part of the Xinjiang economy was driven by state investment.[80] An important share of Beijing's power in the province is concentrated in the aforementioned Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC).[81] It functions as a Party organization, with all of the higher offices held by Party members. Founded in 1954 under Mao Zedong, the institution was meant to help stabilize and develop the border province. Research has shown that the XPCC has moved away from being a military-agricultural colony and has become an influential corporate entity that is socially and economically well-integrated into the region.[82] Its power and influence have risen further in the 21st century and are now equal to that of the provincial government, and it is answerable only to Party officials in Beijing. It provides a powerful way for Beijing to influence Xinjiang's management, as XPCC specialist Thomas Cliff has argued: "[…], the assertion of full Party control over the *bingtuan*, in combination with the organization's ability to operate flexibly as a corporation and/or as an organ of the central state in parallel with the XUAR [Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region] government, means that the Party in Beijing now has at its disposal a selection of different tools with which to mould the socio-political economy of Xinjiang."[83] The high degree of central control over the region is taking place at the expense of local governmental bodies, which translates in the increased marginalization of the Uyghurs in the province's decision-making processes.[84] This conflicted with the sense of collective identity and expectations of self-governance among the Uyghurs that according to Gardner Bovingdon was strengthened by the granting of the status of Autonomous Region and the use of the Uyghur ethnonym.[85] The general system in Chinese politics of a single-party state left no room for dissident voices, and the increased paranoia towards any Uyghur petition for self-governance dramatically reduced the capacity of any Uyghur collective identity to have a hand in political decision-making.

The 1985 educational reform initiated by the CCP Central Committee consisted of a total of nine years of compulsory education, six years' primary and three years' junior secondary classes.[86] Among urban Uyghur residents, many parents decided to send their children to schools that would facilitate their way into higher education and consequently employment. Because the chances to receive a

[80] Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 362. Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," 71-74.
[81] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 60.
[82] Thomas Matthew James Cliff, "Neo Oasis: The Xinjiang *Bingtuan* in the Twenty-first Century," *Asian Studies Review* 33, no. 1 (2009).
[83] Cliff, "Neo Oasis," 102.
[84] Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," 77-80.
[85] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 40-44. See also Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 373.
[86] Linda Benson, "Education and Social Mobility among Minority Populations," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. Frederick S. Starr (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 197.

higher education and steady employment significantly improved with Chinese language skills, this often meant sending children to Chinese schools.[87] That being said, the Chinese state also experienced difficulties convincing the Uyghur population to send their children to state schools. Up until the early 1990s there was a strong rise in the number of school students in Xinjiang, but afterwards mostly poor parents were reportedly pulling their children out of school after primary school due to relaxed state control, but also due to the rising importance of the market economy.[88] Peasants with small landholdings could not cover their livelihood and expenses with farming alone, and sideline production provided an important source of income for them. Bellér-Hann noticed that during her 1996 fieldwork in Kashgar many peasants were engaged in sideline production as felt makers, cobblers, carpenters and other crafts. She noted that boys were taken out of state schooling after a few years to take an apprenticeship with a local master. This apprenticeship was seen as a secure way to a stable source of living and a certain level of prestige in society.[89] Higher-level education was seen as coming with high costs and was often considered a waste of time, since the chances of obtaining a good job were thought to be very low. As Bellér-Hann has noted, "[m]any people believe that only the children of the Han Chinese and privileged Uyghur groups, namely higher level cadres children, and young people educated in Chinese schools stand a chance to get into university."[90] In this regard, there was a very important distinction between urban and rural households. Rural households often considered the chances that their children can enter university to be very slim, since urban schools were generally considered to be better. Even if rural children did pass the entrance exams and got a university degree, the residence registration system, which distinguishes between urban and rural residents, prevented rural residents from obtaining employment in the city.[91] But even among urban residents, ambitions to reap the advantages that higher education and economic development had to offer were often frustrated by a Han-dominated market. As Steenberg and Rippa argued in an article on development in Kashgar, "development indicators (such as rising gross domestic product, lower poverty rates, and higher education standards) hide a much more complex reality, in which growing inequality is fueling marginalization and discontent."[92] The importance of the market economy was rising, and with it the importance of a

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[87] Uyghurs educated in the Chinese language are usually referred to as *minkaohan* (民考汉), as opposed to *minkaomin* (民考民), Uyghurs educated in the Uyghur language. Joanne Smith Finley, "'‘Ethnic Anomaly' or Modern Uyghur Survivor? A Case Study of the *Minkaohan* Hybrid Identity in Xinjiang," in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, eds. Ildikó Bellér-Hann et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 220.
[88] Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken: Literacy and Oral Transmission among the Uyghur* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), 70.
[89] Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, 74-75.
[90] Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 82. Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, 77-78.
[91] Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, 77-78.
[92] Rune Steenberg and Alessandro Rippa, "Development for all? State schemes, security, and marginalization in Kashgar, Xinjiang," *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 6.

modern, higher education. But significant portions of Uyghur society were only able to enter this new system to a limited degree. As the Han dominance of Xinjiang economic life grew exponentially since the late 1990s, it became increasingly clear that although marketable skills were crucial for Uyghurs to take advantage of the economic growth, they were not the only conditions for participation in economic success. Entering the higher levels of economic opportunities often entailed adapting to Han-dominated surroundings. The Uyghur youth found itself at the center of the conflict, as they struggled between the prospect of better chances on the job market by learning Mandarin, and the fear of marginalizing their cultural and linguistic heritage.[93]

As touched upon earlier in this chapter, the history of Xinjiang is contested by different parties, and the CCP seeks to claim the region as a historical part of China. The historiography of Xinjiang has been deployed as an essential tool in the Chinese administration of the region. All publications on Uyghur culture and history have to be approved by the Chinese Propaganda Department.[94] Both in publications and museums Uyghur history and culture are marginalized in favor of a Xinjiang historiography that is directed towards Beijing.[95] The Chinese state's official Three Histories (*san shi* 三史) historical narrative for the region divides Xinjiang history in three parts: Xinjiang history, religious history and ethnic history. The Xinjiang history aims to establish that the Xinjiang territory has always been tied to China's dynastic history. The religious history explains how Xinjiang is not just Islamic, but has known several religious traditions, such as Buddhism.[96] This way, it does integrate Islam into the region's identity, but rather repudiates the idea that Xinjiang's history is mainly Islamic. The ethnic history seeks to demonstrate that Xinjiang has always been home to multiple ethnicities. This counters the idea that Xinjiang can be designated as the "Uyghur homeland." In this way, the Chinese state tries to separate Uyghur history from Xinjiang history, claiming that Xinjiang has always been a part of China, and that the Uyghurs were for a long time a migrant people and have no claim on indigeneity in the region, but that they did belong to China's great family of *zhonghua minzu*.[97]

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[93] Dwyer, *The Xinjiang Conflict,* 13. Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*, 33.
[94] Bellér-Hann, "Feudal Villains or Just Rulers?," 312.
[95] Anna Hayes, "Space, Place and Ethnic Identity in the Xinjiang Regional Museum," in *Inside Xinjiang: Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest*, eds. Anna Hayes and Michael Clarke (London: Routledge, 2016), 52-72.
[96] Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Central Committee Propaganda Department, *Xinjiang 'san shi': jiaoyu jianming duben* 新疆"三史":教育简明读本 [Xinjiang 'Three Histories': Basic Educational Textbook] (Urumqi: Xinjiang Qingshaonian Chubanshe, 2010).
[97] Gardner Bovingdon, "The History of the History of Xinjiang," *Twentieth-Century China* 26, no. 2 (2001): 123-25.

Uyghur Dissent

Development in Xinjiang went hand in hand with intolerance towards any open forms of Uyghur dissent. Whereas the relatively open climate in the early 1980s allowed for protests, most of which were relatively peaceful, these began to be forcefully suppressed in the late 1980s. The national political environment after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 heralded a time of stricter regulation of demonstrations and repression of open protests. In the 1990 conflict in Baren, a township in the Kashgar region, around 200 Uyghurs rebelled against the Chinese government, protesting Han immigration, and calling for independence. The protest lasted several days and was eventually shut down by Chinese armed forces.[98] Adding to the tensions in the region, the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent Central Asian states in 1991 fueled ideas of independence among Uyghurs.[99] In 1996, a Party Central Committee document sent to the Xinjiang government stated that the threat of foreign and domestic terrorist and separatist movements was critical and might undermine the region's and possibly the whole country's stability.[100] Beijing's call for action caused the provincial government to step up its repression of separatist movements. In 1996, the province participated in the national Strike Hard campaign, focusing on separatist and religious activities in Xinjiang and in 1997 and 1998 they held "rectification of the social order" campaigns.[101] Bovingdon has shown that the number of protests fell in the 1990s, claiming that the stricter policies were successful in "keep[ing] off the streets many people who might have joined protests in the more open climate of the 1980s."[102] At the turn of the century, the state crackdown on Uyghur protests intensified. In 2003, Xinjiang's Party secretary Wang Lequan stated that the economic development of the province would not be sufficient to guarantee stability. He said that the belief in a natural solution to Xinjiang's tensions by economic development and improvement of living standard was "wrong and dangerous." He said that "economic development cannot eliminate separatists and cannot prevent them from separating from the motherland and seeking independence."[103] The state took an increasingly harder stance towards any persons, institutions or practices that were perceived as potential challenges to Beijing authority. While the state was successful in repressing large-scale protests, the region was marked by several small and often violent acts of protest, demonstrated by thousands of arrests each year.[104] The brewing pot of Uyghur dissatisfaction boiled over during the

[98] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 123-24.
[99] Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," 70-71. Ildikó Bellér-Hann et al., "Introduction: Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia," in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, eds. Ildikó Bellér-Hann et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 4.
[100] Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," 87-88.
[101] Becquelin, 87-88.
[102] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 106.
[103] Quoted in Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," 374.
[104] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 106, 133-34.

2009 Urumqi riots, one of the most violent outbreaks of interethnic conflict in CCP history with almost 200 reported deaths.[105] While state restrictions were intensified after the Urumqi riots, small acts of everyday resistance and several conflicts involving Uyghurs throughout and outside of the province since 2009 testified to the fact that discontent remained widespread.[106]

Uyghur Activism Abroad

There are large Uyghur diasporic communities in Central Asia, an estimated 350,000, most of them residing in Kazakhstan, where they constitute the second largest ethnic group in the country.[107] Although large, the Uyghur diasporic communities in Central Asia have not served as bases for Uyghur separatists movements since the late 1990s due to successful pressure from China not to give any platform to Uyghur separatist voices.[108] Turkey, which has been a primary destination for Uyghur exiles and refugees, has also become a difficult country for Uyghur political activism, with China criticizing the country more openly since the late 1990s and successfully stifling Turkish political support for Uyghur activists.[109] As a result of the successful pressure exerted by China on Central Asia and Turkey, Uyghur activists became more active in the industrial democracies of Europe and the United States, which were deemed to be less sensitive to Beijing's pressure. The strategies and effects of Uyghur activism in these countries are different, since they do not offer the geographical proximity of the Central Asian states or the possibility of appealing to pan-Turkic sentiments in

[105] Tania Branigan, "China locks down western province after ethnic riots kill 140," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/06/china-uighur-urumqi-riots. "Timeline: Xinjiang Unrest," BBC News, page last updated July 10, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8138866.stm.
[106] Rémi Castets, "The Modern Chinese State and Strategies of Control over Uyghur Islam," *Central Asian Affairs* 2 (2015): 245. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 79.
[107] These Central Asian diasporic communities consist mostly of two different groups of Uyghur immigrants: the first wave came in the late 19th and early 20th century, and have now lost practically all connection to Xinjiang. The second wave came in the 1950s and 1960s, and are said to have more contact with Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Presentation Sebastien Peyrouse, 2nd International Conference on Uyghur Studies (Brussels – Paris), November 17-20, 2015.
[108] Xinjiang borders Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. A substantial number of Uyghurs live in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Beijing started negotiations with several Central Asian states, resulting in the Shanghai Five (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia) in 1996, which was later expanded with several other countries and renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It became a platform for cooperation in the region, and successfully curbed Uyghur nationalist movements from gaining a foothold in the neighboring countries. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 145-46.
[109] Yitzhak Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uyghur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence," in *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*, eds. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 305.

Turkey.[110] The activists have to rely on states and other political organizations for material resources as well as political support.[111]

Attempts to unite Uyghur diasporic communities in a single authoritative representative body have been unsuccessful. After several meetings in Istanbul, Munich and Brussels, with debates on the Uyghur nature of the organization, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) was founded in Munich in 2004, with activists from Turkey, Germany and Central Asia as their leaders. However promising the founding of the WUC, the fractured nature of Uyghur transnational activities was made clear when, in that same year, a group of Uyghurs in Washington announced the formation of the "Eastern Turkestan Government in Exile."[112] Although the WUC does have a large constituency, it still cannot claim to be the sole representative body of all Uyghurs.[113] The construction of diasporic Uyghur identity has especially been facilitated by social media, which offer a platform for activists to spread their message and for Uyghur community members to discuss important issues concerning the situation in Xinjiang. However, a 2013 study on Uyghur diasporic activity on Facebook showed that although it was an important forum for discussion and expression, it did not necessarily incite political action.[114] As of yet, even though international awareness of the Uyghur situation has risen, Uyghur activists seem to have won almost no tangible results in improving the situation in Xinjiang. There have been some successes in heightening the acceptance rate of Uyghur refugees in host countries, but there is no sign that they have compelled the Beijing government to be more receptive to Uyghur demands.[115] If anything, Beijing has stepped up its efforts at thwarting Uyghur lobbying by discrediting them and labeling them violent terrorist organizations.[116]

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[110] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 157. Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism," 307-8.
[111] Inevitably, states, or more specifically, political parties within states, have used Uyghur activist organizations for their own benefit. For example, in Germany, where many Uyghur activities have been concentrated, the Green Party uses their support of the Uyghur cause to convince German voters that their party speaks on behalf of multiculturalism. Similarly, both Democrats and Republicans in the US support Uyghurs to demonstrate their fight for democratic development and human rights in China. In Japan, the Uyghur lobby is supported by right-wing politicians with a strong anti-Chinese rhetoric. Yu-Wen Chen, *The Uyghur Lobby: Global Networks, Coalitions, and Strategies of the World Uyghur Congress* (London: Routledge, 2014), 130. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 152.
[112] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 149-151.
[113] An important step in presenting a unified face for the Uyghur cause was the WUC leadership of Rabiye Qadir since 2006, who served as the symbolic leader of the Uyghurs. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 156. Since 2017, Dolkun Isa was elected the new president of the WUC. World Uyghur Congress, "Dolkun Isa", accessed June 2, 2022, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/staff/dolkun-isa/.
[114] Nur-Muhammad Rizwangul et al.,"Identity, Responsibility, then Politics: The Uyghur Diaspora, Facebook and the Construction of Identity Online," paper presented at The Asian Conference on Media and Mass Communication 2013, Osaka, available online, accessed October 10, 2016, http://iafor.org/archives/offprints/mediasia2013-offprints/MediAsia2013_0080.pdf.
[115] Presentation Henryk Szadziewski (Uyhur Human Rights Project), 2nd International Conference on Uyghur Studies (Brussels – Paris) November 17-20, 2015. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 157.
[116] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 154.

Religion: Repression and Control

The Chinese state has seen religion as a dangerous force in its battle with Uyghur dissent. The early 1980s were a period of relative lenient policy towards religion, and many mosques were rebuilt after almost every mosque in the province had been closed or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.[117] Uyghur religious life experienced a revival, with imams restored to their position in local societies, and people observing prayer, attending mosque sermons and resuming shrine pilgrimage. But by the end of the 1980s, which was a period where Uyghurs repeatedly voiced their discontent with Chinese governance, the lenient religious policy was condemned as encouraging the formation of opposition networks on an Islamo-nationalist basis.[118] The Xinjiang provincial government started to gradually build up a system of control, which included new legislation and the repression of religious activities not organized or sanctioned by the state. In 1988, Xinjiang served as a testing ground for new policies on religion with the "Temporary Rules for the Management of Venues of Religious Activities."[119] The Baren protest in April 1990 as well as the protest in Ghulja in February 1997, Xinjiang's two major protests in the 1990s, intensified the officials' fear for religion-based protest and separatism. The alleged leader of the Baren protest was Zeydin Yusuf, leader of the East Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP).[120] A follower of Zeydin Yusuf was reported to have said that Yusuf was inspired by the concept of holy war of the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan.[121] Bovingdon concludes that Baren and the Ghulja protest "were religiously motivated, and both emphasized public repudiation of the official policy on religion and the party's claim to be the highest authority."[122] Alarmed by the religious elements in the protests, the state sought to intensify control of religious activities through juridicization and institutionalization. The "Temporary Rules for the Administration of Religious Personnel" were

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[117] In the late 19th and early 20th century, before socialist rule in Xinjiang, only limited restrictions were imposed on Islamic practice by provincial authorities. State policies were concerned with only the most visible manifestations of religion that were considered a threat to social and political stability. This state policy impeded certain reformist trends from gaining a foothold in the region, but did not interfere in more intimate areas of Islamic practice. Only after the Communists came to power did Beijing politics interfere systematically in the religious life of Uyghurs. (Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang*, 422.) In the 1950s, the CCP tried to undermine the authority of religious elites by taking away their economic base. Property laws were changed and religious institutes were not allowed to withhold taxes. Agrarian reform and the wide-scale collectivization in the 1950s turned the whole country's, including Xinjiang's, social and economic life upside-down. (Castets, "The Modern Chinese State," 228.)

[118] Castets, "The Modern Chinese State," 235. Erie, "Defining Shari'a in China," 101.

[119] Mackerras, "Religion in Contemporary Xinjiang," 207.

[120] For a more detailed account of the Baren protests, see Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 123-24. According to former members interviewed by researcher Rémi Castets, the ETIP shifted its anticolonial and nationalist discourse to an Islamic discourse after the state shut down famous medrese in Karghilik in 1987-1988. Rémi Castets, "Uyghur Islam: Caught between Foreign Influences and Domestic Constraints," in *China and India in Central Asia: A New "Great Game"?*, eds. Marlène Laruelle, Jean-François Huchet, Sébastien Peyrouse, and Bayram Balci (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 224.

[121] MacKerras, "Religion in Contemporary Xinjiang," 213.

[122] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 128.

drafted six months after the Baren protests, followed by the permanent “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Religious Affairs Regulations” in 1994.[123] A 1993 law protecting minors stipulated that parents and legal guardians are forbidden to allow children under eighteen to participate in religious activities.[124] Mosques were often only opened during prayer time, and restrictions on religious education for minors were more strictly enforced.[125] Private learning, male social gatherings (Uygh.: *meshrep* مەشرەپ) and shrine pilgrimages were considered “illegal religious activities.”[126] Every religious activity needed to obtain the approval of local authorities, which in practice meant that only a few officially regulated activities were conducted, and imams were checked by government informants and received punitive measures if their actions did not accord with government instructions.[127]

Considering the economic, social and political situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, what can we say about the role of Islam? In the following chapter, I will explore the situation of Uyghur Islam more deeply. We will consider what possibilities and what difficulties the Uyghur community experienced with regard to their religious life in times not only of state restrictions, but also of rapid socio-economic change.

[123] Castets, “The Modern Chinese State,” 235-36.
[124] Mackerras, “Religion in Contemporary Xinjiang”, 207. Mackerras, “Religion and the Uyghurs,” 59-84.
[125] Allès, “Muslim Religious Education in China,” *China Perspectives [online]* 45 (2003): 2-3. http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/230. Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*, 265.
[126] Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, 87, 120.
[127] Castets, “The Modern Chinese State,” 236-37.