China's Islam in Xinjiang: from functionalization to elimination

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5. Functionalizing Islam in Xinjiang

In this chapter we will see how the Chinese state implemented the functionalization of Islam in Xinjiang. It builds on the previous chapter's discussion of central policies and the functionalization of religion, showing how the policies were translated under Xinjiang's specific conditions and in what shape the state has allowed Islam's continued existence in the region. Based on field observations in Xinjiang in Urumqi, Turpan, Kashgar and Khotan, as well as official textbooks, publications by the China Islamic Association and interviews with Uyghur religious scholars, we will see how the state not only oppressed many religious activities, but also enlisted religious doctrine and religious sites into its nation narrative.

As we have seen in the previous chapter there was a project since the early 2000s that developed a nationalist narrative for Islam, suitable for training Islamic clergy and CIA officials in leading religious communities to fit into Chinese society. Xinjiang, as a border province with a majority Muslim population and a distinct socio-cultural history, presented a challenge to this narrative. Uyghur dissatisfaction with Chinese rule has troubled the region since the 1980s with repeated protests and often with calls for more autonomy or independence. As open protests were shut down ever more effectively in the 1990s, Uyghurs sought other ways to express themselves vis-a-vis the Chinese. Over time, Islam gained traction as a symbol of resistance against Chinese rule.[358] To meet the threat of Uyghur unrest in the region, the state has sought to drain the power of Islam as a platform for anti-Chinese identity expression. While restriction and repression of religious activities were a way to eliminate any platforms which the state could not control, the state did not consider those measures sufficient to counter the perceived danger of Islam and its relation to Uyghur dissent. With the functionalization policy, the state offered a counter-narrative of an Islam that was defined by participation in the Chinese nation. We will take a look at what message the state-directed version of Islam wanted to convey and what means were used spread this message, before considering the problems that arose with this policy in the Xinjiang context.

5.1. The Message

The state sought to communicate three main messages through the Islamic narrative in Xinjiang. First and foremost, it emphasized that patriotism is an Islamic virtue, and that historically and doctrinally Islam is loyal to China. Second, it cautioned against harmful interpretations, warning against other forces that use Islam as a vessel for damaging messages. In contrast, state-approved Islam was equated with good Islam. And third, it identified a good Muslim with someone who strives for a

[358] See especially Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*.

modern, wealthy China. This implied that Muslims should support the state's social and economic initiatives.

Islam is Culturally and Politically Loyal to China

The dominant message preached via state Islam was that patriotism was a Muslim's obligation. The Islamic Institute's textbook used for an imam's education clearly stipulated that one of the "basic requirements of an imam in the new period" was patriotism:

> Fiercely loving the motherland and abiding by the law are basic requirements of every citizen of a cultured country. They are also the social criterion that every God-respecting and prophet-obeying Muslim needs to adhere to. It also is one of the qualities that a suitable *ahong* needs to possess. This is the test which shows whether or not an imam conforms to the standards of the New Era society.[359]

This claim was backed with scriptural examples such as Qur'anic verse 4:59: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and offers the best result."[360]

Besides using Islamic scripture, the state carefully constructed a historiography of the region that supports a China-centered story of Xinjiang and regarded it as something that "holds an important position in the anti-separatist struggle in the ideological field."[361] It embarked upon projects to appropriate local history and local historic figures for the construction of its patriotic Islamic narrative of Xinjiang. The Chinese state proffered works of cultural importance by Uyghur Muslim intellectuals as examples of Islamic patriotism, on the grounds that they lifted the cultural level of society. One of the Uyghur scholars praised in the *Handbook for Muslim Patriotism* is Mahmud Kashgari, an 11th-century scholar whose tomb lies in Opal in the Kashgar region (see Figures 15 and 16). Kashgari's *Compendium of the Language of the Turks* (Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk), a comprehensive dictionary of Turkic languages composed in Baghdad, was seen as national treasure of international renown. One of the main reasons Kashgari's work is hailed as an example of Uyghur Islamic

[359] Editorial Commitee for the China Islamic Association National Institutes' Uniform Teaching Materials 中国伊斯兰教协会全国经学院统编教材编审委员会, ed., *Ahong jiaowu zhidao jianming jiaocheng (shiyongben)* 阿訇教务指导简明教程（试用本）[Concise Handbook for Imam Educational Administration and Guidance (Trial Edition)], (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2013), 6.

[360] Editorial Commitee for the China Islamic Association National Institutes' Uniform Teaching, *Ahong jiaowu zhidao jianming jiaocheng (shiyongben)* [Concise Handbook for Imam Educational Administration and Guidance (Trial Edition)], 6.

[361] China Islamic Association, "Xinjiang ge minzu shi zhonghua minzu xuemai xianglian de jiatong chengyuan" 新疆各民族是中华民族血脉相连的家庭成员 [Each ethnic group in Xinjiang is a family member of the Chinese nation], April 29, 2019, http://www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/news/jujiaoredian/201904/29-13165.html.

patriotism, is that Mahmud Kashgari allegedly claimed that "Kashgar was an inseparable part of Chinese territory".[362]

Figure 15: Pictures at the Mahmud Kashgari site showing state celebrations and administrator visits in 2008 (photo by author, Opal [Kashgar] 2015)

Figure 16: Entrance of the mosque at the Mahmud Kashgari mazar (photo by author, Opal [Kashgar] 2015)

[362] China Islamic Association, *Musilin aiguozhuyi jiaocheng (shiyongben)* [Handbook for Muslim Patriotism (Trial Edition)], 40. The section that is referred to in Kashgari's *Compendium* says that "Ṣīn [i.e., China] is originally threefold; Upper, in the east which is called Tawjāch; middle which is Khitāy, lower which is Barkhān in the vicinity of Kashgar." See Michal Biran for a discussion of 11th- and 12th-century Islamic works referring to the boundaries of China in Central Asia. Michal Biran, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 98-101.

Another work that the *Handbook for Muslim Patriotism* hails as a work of Xinjiang patriotic Islam is *Stories of Efendi* (*afanti de gushi* 阿凡提的故事). Efendi, also known as Nasrdin Avanti, was a popular protagonist of humorous and satirical short stories that circulated throughout Central Asia, including Xinjiang.[363] He became well-known throughout China after the Shanghai Art Film Studio made him a popular cartoon character in the 1980s, when it produced an animated series called *Stories of Efendi*. He is portrayed as a turbaned man with a pointy curly beard and a white turban, accompanied by his well-known sidekick donkey. Up until today, he remains a well-known character, with a 3D animation film produced in 2017.[364] The *Handbook for Muslim Patriotism* praises him for being "the embodiment of cleverness, wisdom, humor, justice and courage. He represents the fine aspiration and ideal of the numerous lower-ranking common people daring to fight all evil forces and overcome difficulties."[365] Being a witty figure of humorous short stories, he lacks much of the solemnity that surrounds other figures of patriotic Islam. His image is used to embody the kind, harmless, almost Disneyesque Muslim.[366] In a 2014 anti-extremism booklet, an image very similar to the commercialized depiction of Efendi was used to show the dangers of religious extremism (see Figure 17).[367]

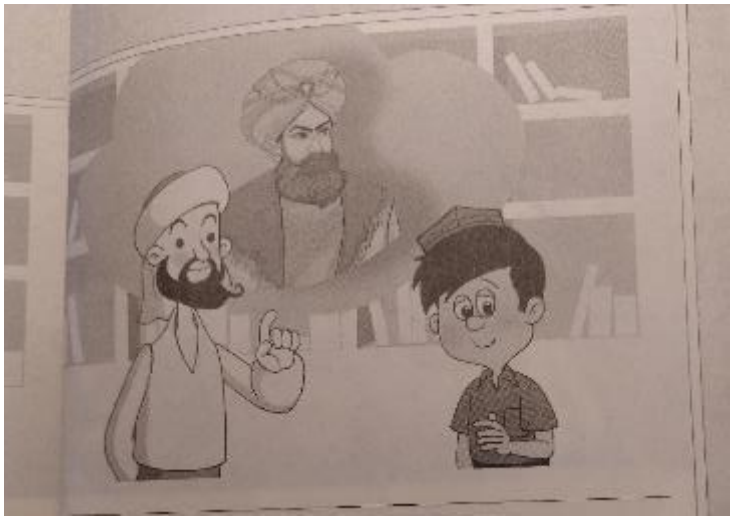

Figure 17: Efendi image (left) used in a 2014 anti-extremism booklet. Here, the Efendi figure is praising another patriotic Islamic scholar, Yusuf Khas Hajip, and his well-known work Wisdom of Royal Glory, to say that people should study because knowledge gives hope and usefulness.

[363] The personage was known under several names throughout Central Asia, such as Nasrdin Avanti, Nasrdin Khoja, and served as a popular wit figure. Wei and Luckert published several Efendi short stories that circulated among the Uyghurs in Cuiyi Wei and Karl W. Luckert, *Uighur Stories from along the Silk Road* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 283-310.
[364] Xu Qin, "The legend of Afanti lives on in exhibition," *Shanghai Daily*, August 21, 2017, https://archive.shine.cn/feature/The-legend-of-Afanti-lives-on-in-exhibition/shdaily.shtml.
[365] China Islamic Association, *Musilin aiguozhuyi jiaocheng (shiyongben)* [Handbook for Muslim Patriotism (Trial Edition)], 38.
[366] During my 2015 visit, I noticed what looked like an "Efendi" tourist theme park on the outskirts of Kashgar. Unfortunately I could not explore it, and when passing it by it was unclear whether it was open.
[367] Zhang Yubo 张玉波, Dai Yaxiong 戴亚雄, Lan Zedong 兰泽东, *Zongjiao jiduan haisi ren* 宗教极端害死人 [Religious Extremism Harms People] (Urumqi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2014), 55.

One of the more controversial and famous historic figures is Apaq Khoja, whose family shrine lies on the outskirts of Kashgar (see Figure 18). The shrine belongs to one of the most famous Sufi orders of Xinjiang, the White Mountain Khojas, an order which the state sought to defame in their rejection of the feudalist nature of the Khojas. Despite the state's disapproval of Khoja rule, the shrine has become a popular tourist destination, sponsored by the authorities. Choosing not to do away with a place that proved a popular landmark in the region, and which was a profitable source of revenue, the state instead adapted the story attached to the shrine. Since Apaq Khoja's personage was very controversial due to conflicting views concerning his role in the story of Uyghur nationalism,[368] the state focused on another figure that was linked to the shrine: the famous concubine Xiang Fei (Iparkhan in Uyghur). Iparkhan was a woman from Kashgar who became a concubine to the Qianlong emperor in the 1760s. Even though Iparkhan's grave is actually located in Beijing, the state has pushed the association of Iparkhan with the Apaq Khoja shrine, which was based on popular claims that the concubine was buried in Kashgar. Becoming a leading story at the shrine, Iparkhan is portrayed as the perfect symbol of China as an ethnically diverse country united under Chinese rule.[369] The concept of multi-ethnicity is an important one for the nation narrative in Xinjiang. An oft-quoted notion is that of the "three inseparables," the concept launched in 1990 by Jiang Zemin whereby "The Han cannot go without the ethnic minorities, ethnic minorities cannot go without the Han, all ethnic minorities can never go without each other."[370] I encountered the concept multiple times in articles, handbooks, and street propaganda (see Figure 20). As remarked by Rian Thum, a similar tactic was applied to another Sufi order shrine, the one from the Black Mountain Khojas, where the state again chose to shift the attention to a more harmless, feminine personage: the sixteenth-century queen Amannisakhan.[371] Both Amannisakhan and Xiang Fei were pulled from an obscure past and used to exhibit a patriotic religious landscape of Xinjiang.

[368] A biographical novel of Apaq Khoja published by Xinjiang Press in 2000 was deemed dangerous and consequently banned and publicly burned in 2001. Edmund Waite, "From Holy Man to National Villain: Popular Historical Narratives About Apaq Khoja amongst Uyghurs in Contemporary Xinjiang," *Inner Asia* 8, no. 1 (2006): 5-28. Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, 216.

[369] Waite, "From Holy Man to National Villain," 15-16. Fuller and Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," 320-22. Rian Thum remarks that, ironically, at Xiang Fei's actual grave, she is given far less attention. Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History,* 234.

[370] Kang Ding 康定, *Minzu tuanjie jiaoyu: 30 jiang* 民族团结教育: 30 讲[Nationality Solidarity Education: 30 Essays], Shanghai Jiading Nr. 1 High School Training Material (Shanghai: Shanghai Sociology Department Press, 2014), 137-42.

[371] Thum, *The Sacred routes of Uyghur History,* 235. For more information on Amannisakhan and her development as a popular Uyghur historic figure connected to the *muqam* musical tradition, see Elise Anderson, "The Construction of Āmānnisā Khan as a Uyghur Musical Culture Hero," *Asian Music* 43, no. 1 (2012): 64-90.

Figure 18: Apaq Khoja tomb which holds the graves of the White Mountain Khojas (photo by author, Kashgar 2018).

Figure 19: Sign at Apaq Khoja shrine, illustrating the association with Xiang Fei/Iparkhan (photo by author, Kashgar 2018)

Figure 20: Poster in Urumqi street promoting the "Three Inseparables" (photo by author, Urumqi 2018)

Be Vigilant Against Harmful Interpretations

The narrative of Islam in Xinjiang was inextricably tied to the need to be vigilant. The state tried to point out the harm religion can do when following the wrong authority, i.e. when not holding to state-approved religious expressions. These warnings targeted practices that were deemed incompatible with socialist society, such as the "feudalist" practices often associated with Sufism. The term "three forces" (*san gu shili* 三股势力), referring to separatism, religious extremism and terrorism, has been used by Beijing since the early 2000s to describe the threats in Xinjiang. [372] Bovingdon remarked how protests and separatist tendencies were increasingly labelled as "terrorism" in the early 2000s.[373] For example, the January 2002 document called "East Turkestan Terrorist Forces Cannot Escape with Impunity" tried to argue that Xinjiang had had a terrorist problem for years, which is linked to a global terrorist network. As Bovingdon remarked, this rhetoric served to assure foreign support of Beijing's strict policy in the region in a post-9/11 world.[374] The state labelled Hizb al-Tahrir, also known as Izbot (*Yizhabute* 伊扎布特), as a terrorist organization in 2007, and targeted it for organizing demonstrations and accused it of producing weapons.[375] Later on, the most prominent enemy of correct, i.e. state-approved, Islam became "Islamic extremism." In

[372] Patrik Meyer, "China's De-Extremisaton of Uyghurs in Xinjiang," *New America: International Security* (June 2016): 5, https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/policy-papers/china-de-extremization-uyghurs-xinjiang.
[373] Bovingdon notes how in 2004 the 1990 Baren protests, the 1995 Khotan protest, and the 1997 Ghulja protests were called the work of "terrorists" instead of the previous "splittists." Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 120.
[374] Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 71-72, 135-136.
[375] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 22.

the 2013 handbook for Xinjiang Party cadres on religious affairs, Izbot was described as an extensive international organization of religious extremists who aim to recruit and train people for a holy war. According to official Chinese sources, the organization first came to Xinjiang from abroad in 1998, and in July 1999 set up its first branch in Urumqi, after which others followed in every locality. It also says it spread further inward to the mainland in Muslim-populated areas such as Ningxia, Qinghai and Shaanxi.[376] Next to Izbot, the 2013 handbook on religious affairs listed other groups and individuals of religious extremism such as Hijrat, Jama'at al-Tabligh and prominent reformist *molla* Ablikim Makhsum.[377] Hijrat (*Yijilate* 伊吉拉特) was profiled as a terrorist organization that arose in the early 21st century and which trains people in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The handbook warned that in Xinjiang it seeks a holy war and Xinjiang independence and that since crossing the border became ever more difficult, the focus has been on spreading the ideology into Xinjiang. The description went on to say that the organization's ideology is based on false scriptural interpretation, and that it holds a false worldview dividing the world into believers and non-believers. Jama'at al-Tabligh (*Tabilike* 台比力克, Tablighi Jamaat) was described as currently the world's largest Islamic missionary organization, with a network that covers every country in the world and that proselytizes an Islam with extremist ideas. The book states that they are present in Xinjiang and Gansu. The one individual in the cadre handbook described as an Islamic extremist is Ablikim Makhsum from Karghilik. Ablikim was a prominent reformist *molla*, whose schools in Karghilik were closed in 1987 and 1988.[378] Some of my interviewees mentioned him as a popular figure who brought new ideas to the Uyghur community and encouraged criticism of existing Islamic practices.[379] The state profiled him as a religious extremist criminal:

> He is a convicted felon who was convicted up to 20 years, who after his release from jail in the 1980s was a member of the standing committee of Xinjiang's Islamic Association and the head of Karghilik's Islamic Association. He illegally set up an Islamic school and an Islamic college and successively took on about 800 pupils. He preached extremist ideologies to them such as pan-Islamism, fundamentalism, and the holy war. He instigated ethnic hostility and harmed the youth in no small measure. He carried out so-called military trainings with bombings, assassinations, looting, poisoning, and producing weapons, training a large number of violent terrorists. A large part of Xinjiang's terrorist incidents happened at the

[376] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs 国家宗教事务局, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* 新疆宗教工作基础知识干部读本 [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang] (Beijing: Zongjiao Wenhua Chubanshe, 2014), 220-21.
[377] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 220-22.
[378] Castets, "Uyghur Islam," 223. Castets, "The Modern Chinese State and Strategies of Control over Uyghur Islam." 233.
[379] Author's interview with Isa and Jusupjan, December 2016.

> hand of his pupils or his pupils' pupils. According to statistics, since the beginning of the 1990s, around 300 of his "talibs" have been involved in separatist activities, illegal religious activities and terrorist activities.[380]

Makhsum was used as the poster figure representing the possible danger of popular religious leaders in spreading violent separatist ideology. The cadre handbook also described the most important media through which "religious extremism" from inside and outside of China was spread in Xinjiang such as illegal publications, broadcasting stations, the internet, etc. The handbook warned about the internet and audiovisual materials on cell phones and MP3 players as wide-reaching media through which extremist content could be shared, warning of the infectious nature of extremist religious thought which could infect all areas of life in Xinjiang. [381]

The cadre handbook explains how religion and ethnic culture are tied up in Xinjiang, and how the danger of the three forces of separatism, religious extremism and terrorism is acutely present there: "In Xinjiang, the biggest characteristic of religion is that ethnic issues and religious issues are intertwined, and that ethnic feelings and religious feelings are intertwined. Religion is a very important part of the people's traditional culture. The second big characteristic of religion in Xinjiang is that the 'three forces' are in the habit of using religion to engage in separatist harmful activities. The religious world must be clearly demarcated from separatist and extremist forces."[382] Seeing threats in pan-Turkism and transnational Islam, the China Islamic Association spread an official interpretation of Xinjiang history that binds the Islamic minorities' loyalty to the Chinese mainland.

This narrative tries to weaken any claimed ties between Turkic people living in Xinjiang and those living across the border. The handbook claims that Western hostile forces make use of the two forces of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism to organize separatist activities.[383] It uses two arguments to counter the claims of pan-Turkists that the motherland of Turkic-speaking minorities in Xinjiang is the continent-spanning Turan. First, it says that the area has belonged to China since the Han dynasty, and carried names such as Western Territories (*xiyu* 西域) and Hui Border Territories (*huijiang* 回疆) until finally in 1884 it was called Xinjiang. Second, it asserts that the Han minority has been an

[380] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 221-22.
[381] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 220-22. On page 220 the textbook states that "since 2000, we have confiscated over 300 types of illegal publications, counting up to over one million copies. We have confiscated over 100 types of audiovisual material, adding up to about 100.000 copies."
[382] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 199.
[383] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 158.

important part of the province's inhabitants since the 9th century.[384] As an example of the dangers of foreign ideas entering the country, the book explains how students who went to study in Turkey in the early 20th century returned to Xinjiang with pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic ideas. One student it mentions was Masud Sabri, a pupil of the New Method schools in Ghulja who traveled across Europe and Turkey for this studies.[385] He came back to Xinjiang in 1905 after studying in Turkey and founded a Turan school together with Turks, of which it is said that they taught that "our forefathers are the Turks, and our motherland is Turkey."[386] These types of examples as provided by the official narrative emphasize the importance of correct, state-led schooling for the Xinjiang population, since unsupervised schooling will mislead the population to thinking they are not part of the Chinese nation.

Strive for a Modern and Wealthy Xinjiang

Finally, the functionalization narrative aligned Islamic doctrine with ideas that promoted modern citizenship and that disqualified ways of life deemed to obstruct Xinjiang's development. It tried to show that the Chinese drive for modernization and development under CCP leadership was in line with being a good Muslim. Following Jiang Zemin's principle of mutual adaptation, Chinese policy stated that people should implement the positive elements of religious doctrine, observance and virtue in order to serve the development and progress of a socialist society.[387]

One of the main pathways for the promotion of modern citizenship was through education. Two 2009 articles in the *China Muslim* journal, the official journal of the China Islamic Association, provide insight into how the state sought to modernize Islamic education in Xinjiang. Traditional religious education in the region was judged as being too irregular and unstructured. It was also said to be ill-equipped to prepare students for participation in a modern society, with the curriculum focusing on passive knowledge of religious scripture. The article entitled "The history and influence of Uyghur mosque education in Xinjiang," spelled out the "historical limitations" (*lishi juxianxing* 历史局限性) of traditional Uyghur Islamic education. Most of the arguments focused on claims that the education was too unstructured, too dependent on the individual teacher's knowledge, and ultimately of little social value because of the almost exclusive emphasis on religious knowledge. Such education, it

[384] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 159.
[385] Later becoming a KMT official in the region, he was known to strive for a Turkic identity for Xinjiang, together with Isa Yusuf and Muhammad Imin Bughra. See David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 95, 267-268.
[386] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 160.
[387] Ren Hong 任红, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" 新疆伊斯兰教教育现状研究 [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], *Zhongguo Musilin* 2 (2009): 50.

claimed, took place at the cost of other kinds of education such as official state schooling.[388] The other article, entitled "Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang," explained how Islamic education organized by the state provided a good knowledge of Islamic teachings, while also preparing students for productive positions in modern society.[389] The article focused on students who were made aware of the importance of science as well as economics, stating that "[m]any religious scholars gasp when they witness the results of the motherland's modernizing structure, and have a firsthand experience of the grand power of science and technology."[390] The following excerpt is one of the profiles that the article hailed as a good example of religious leaders "leading the religious masses to a situation of relying on science and hard work to become wealthy":

> Patriotic religious scholar Abduljan Karachi from Qaraqash county [in Khotan prefecture], who participated in the 1991 training for patriotic religious scholars, took inspiration about how to get wealthy by relying on science after visiting Urumqi's modern factories and enterprises. That same year, he scraped together 4600 yuan, bought 10 "high yielding" sheep, used artificial fertilizing technique, which made every sheep able to produce 5 to 6 sheep. In less than three years, he had made more than 30.000 yuan. In 1995, he and his son went to study how to raise chickens with a veterinarian. They bought 500 German chickens, which soon became 3000 chickens. He further studies breeding techniques, and learned how one rooster could fertilize 24 chickens. By the year 2000, his yearly income had reached 50.000 to 60.000 yuan. The news of Abduljan becoming wealthy by science spread quickly throughout the whole Khotan region, and religious scholars of local religious communities went to his house, calling on the religious masses to study science like him. There was an endless stream throughout the year of people wanting to study science there with him. However, many people started to protest against his artificial fertilizing and breeding technology, saying that one sheep producing five or six sheep was not possible, and that it could not be sheep but pigs. To answer this, Abduljan sought a verse from the hadith where the Prophet Mohammad said that "a sheep that produces one sheep is good, a sheep that produces many sheep is good, but I would not follow the person that kills the sheep that produces many sheep." In this way, Abduljan brought Islamic doctrine and science together,

[388] Ren Hong 任红, "Xinjiang weiwuerzu yisilanjiao jingtangjiaoyu de lishi ji qi yingxiang" 新疆维吾尔族伊斯兰教经堂教育的历史及其影响 [The history and influence of Uyghur mosque education in Xinjiang], *Zhongguo Musilin* 5 (2009): 39.
[389] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 49.
[390] Ren Hong, "Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang," 51.

preaching to the people. Now everybody has accepted his science, and they address him respectfully as their teacher.[391]

Taking inspiration from the state-provided training, Abduljan became the emblem of a successful entrepreneur as well as a knowledgeable religious leader who inspired his community. The message that Islam and modern science did not contradict each other was supported by Abduljan's Hadith quote, thereby portraying Abduljan as a man with religious knowledge, who knew how to cite and correctly interpret Islamic doctrine. State portrayals of their ideal patriotic religious leaders were carefully dotted with signs of their religiosity, while also making sure to focus on the leaders' capability to bring wealth to their communities. A 2015 China Daily article published during Ramadan meant to show "a day in the life of Muslims," hailed a Hui imam as "a transmitter of modern culture," being "first to drive a motorbike, first to put TV in his office, first to use a mobile phone, first to drive a car and first to open a WeChat account. Besides tending to religious services in the mosque, Yang spends most of his time answering phone calls, checking his WeChat, visiting rural tourist enterprises and helping low-income families."[392]

Figure 21: Propaganda poster promoting modern housing (photo by MJ De Maeseneer, Khotan 2015)

[391] Ren Hong, "Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang," 51.
[392] China Daily, "A day in the life of Muslims during Ramadan in NW China," July 14, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/60thxjannivesary/2015-07/14/content_21271913.htm.

5.2. The Methods

Educating Religious Leaders

Religious leaders were seen as key figures in battling social unrest among the Uyghurs. Anthropologist Bellér-Hann writes that in the 1980s and 1990s *molla*s were invited to join study sessions similar to those held for government officials, in which they were informed about "new campaigns, policies and what is required from them to support these,[…]."[393] Several *molla*s whom I interviewed mentioned state-organized "training sessions" after local unrest. One *molla* explained how his father, who preached and taught at a local mosque, had to attend a state-organized gathering after the 1991 Baren unrest: "After that conflict, all *molla*s had to gather, of all villages and cities. And there they let the *mollas* say what they think of the situation, whether it is good or bad. They just let them talk." The interviewee remembered *molla*s being intimidated or taken to prison if they said something which the state did not approve of. This, he said, put many religious leaders in a difficult position: "If they say their own opinion, they go to prison. If they say things that go against their own opinion, then people will hear it and they will be against them. They [the people] will say 'How can he say that? He is no *molla*.'"[394] When not long after the first course another course was organized, he remembered that his father refused to go: "When the second course took place, [my father] left home. They came for him several times, but my father was not at home, he just left." A 1994 Chinese study on Islamic schools in Xinjiang said that it was worried that many of the private Uyghur religious institutes were spreading counterrevolutionary ideas.[395] Trying to get a grip on the activities of religious leaders, the state limited the possibilities for religious leaders to preach and teach. "Underground" religious schools for adults were suppressed, labeled as illegal and accused of stimulating religious extremism and splittism.[396] Since 2002, regulations stipulated that imams in Xinjiang could only take on one or two students, and only with the approval of the Religious Affairs Bureau and local government. Researchers visiting the region have found that since the early 2000s increasingly fewer spaces that had previously been approved as spaces for religious education were currently open and functioning.[397] Although the level of restrictions and monitoring of Islamic clergy and sites of Islamic education differed throughout Xinjiang and were dependent on the perceived threat they presented and on the local administration's relation with the religious community, researchers agree that overall, the tight monitoring of the clergy and religious education since 1990

[393] Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, 78-79.
[394] Author's interview with Jusupjan, December 2016.
[395] Castets, "Uyghur Islam," 223.
[396] Third Bureau of National Religious Affairs, *Xinjiang zongjiao gongzuo jichu zhishi ganbu duben* [Basic Knowledge Cadre Textbook on Religion Work in Xinjiang], 216.
[397] MacKerras, "Religion in Contemporary Xinjiang," 207.

seems to have successfully eradicated antigovernmental discourses encountered in mosques and *medrese*.[398]

In the 2000s, the state aimed to increase the reach of state control over and through religious leaders with a more comprehensive education program for Islamic clergy. Keeping a check on religious authorities was considered an important way to counter unrest in the Xinjiang province, as stated in the 2009 *China Muslim* article about Islamic education in Xinjiang:

> In reality, whether or not it is effective in withstanding the infiltration of hostile forces, to a large extent depends on the numerous patriotic religious scholars. They only need to imbue the religious masses with the correct thoughts, and guide them in the correct direction, and then the religious masses will not follow the path of splittist extremists. They only need to be able to discern right from wrong and then they can lead the masses in discerning right from wrong.[399]

The state sought to reach the masses by making their religious leaders go through a state-approved training. The trainings and courses of the program could range from months-long specialized training courses to public propaganda campaigns to individual corrective sessions. At the end of such courses, imams had to write a study report, which was then used in their evaluation.[400] In 2001, the Xinjiang government launched a first round of the Xinjiang-wide training program, where religious scholars in Xinjiang had to take patriotic training courses meant to correct unwanted behavior.[401] Every locality, prefecture and municipality was responsible for training imams within the next four years through this patriotic education program. Official numbers state that around 28,600 religious scholars were trained within that four-year campaign.[402] More comprehensive classes were organized for older, influential religious scholars. These courses took four months to complete, and included lessons on legislation concerning ethnicity and religion, contemporary politics, history, culture, and science and technology.[403] A second round of training started in late 2008 and was aimed at training 290,000 people.[404] Some training courses had a specific focus, such as sensitizing clergy and other community

[398] As we saw in chapter three, this meant that the discourses were moved to other platforms. Castets, "Uyghur Islam," 230. Waite, "The Impact of the State on Islam amongst the Uyghurs," 258.
[399] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 50.
[400] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Contex*t, 27.
[401] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 48. See also Castets, "The Modern Chinese State and Strategies of Control over Uyghur Islam," 236-237. De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 27. Castets, "Uyghur Islam," 225-226.
[402] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 48.
[403] Ren Hong, 48.
[404] Ren Hong, 48.

leaders to Wahhabi ideological infiltration.[405] In order to increase the official program's reach throughout the vast province, the state did still allow for limited, state-regulated teacher-apprentice training, but only with the approval of the Religious Affairs Bureau and local government.[406]

Besides the locally organized courses, Xinjiang was home to the Islamic Scriptural Institute (*jingxueyuan* 经学院) in Urumqi for training religious clergy and religious affairs administrators.[407] The Institute offered an undergraduate (*benke* 本科) education of five years as well as semester-long specialization courses.[408] The selection and recommendation of applicants for the Xinjiang Islamic Institute was done by the religious departments of the province's various states, districts, counties and cities, with the United Front Work Department and the Religious Affairs Bureau cooperating to set up regional enrollment workforces.[409] The school only recruited from Xinjiang and was not open to other Chinese provinces. Official regulations stated that the recruits must be unmarried male Muslims between 18 and 25, politically patriotic, support CCP leadership and the socialist system, maintain national unity and ethnic unity, have good character and good health, be willing to engage in a religious career, and understand Uyghur.[410] According to regulations, the Institute could apply for employment of foreign professionals, but they could never take up administrative leadership positions "to ensure that foreign forces do not interfere with mainland religions."[411] The school did send some of its students to institutes in countries such as Egypt and Oman, and in 2007, the provincial government set up a scholarship for the students to apply to Al-Azhar in Cairo.[412]

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[405] Yili News Online, "Xinjiang Yili juban diyu ‚Wahabi' yisilanjiao yuanjiaozhizhuyi sixiang shentou peixun" 新疆伊犁举办抵御"瓦哈比"伊斯兰原教旨主义思想渗透培训 [Xinjiang Yili Holds Training Course to Resist "Wahhabi" Islamic Fundamentalism Infiltration], April 21, 2013, http://www.guancha.cn/local/2013_04_21_140136.shtml.

[406] Allès, "Muslim Religious Education in China," 2-3. Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 48-49.

[407] Located at Yan'an Road in Urumqi, the Xinjiang Institute was founded in 1987. They speak Uyghur and Chinese at the Institute, and it is the only Islamic Institute that uses a minority language. The first undergraduate class officially started school on November 28, 1987 with 45 students, and the Institute has had yearly enrollments since. Liu Dengzhong 劉燈鐘, Liu Zhifeng 劉志峰. "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jingxueyuan banxue ji qi chengxiao xitan" 新疆伊斯蘭教經學院辦學及其成效析探 [A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute], *Prospect and Exploration* 10, no. 5 (2012): 62.

[408] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 48.

[409] Liu Dengzhong and Liu Zhifeng, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jingxueyuan banxue ji qi chengxiao xitan" [A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute], 64.

[410] Liu and Liu, "A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute," 63-64.

[411] Liu and Liu, "A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute," 66-67.

[412] China Islamic Association, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jingxueyuan jianjie" 新疆伊斯兰教经学院简介 [Xinjiang Islamic Institute Introduction], July 27, 2012, http://www.chinaislam.net.cn/cms/zjjy/xylist/3/jianjie/201207/27-2734.html. See also Liu Dengzhong and Liu Zhifeng, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jingxueyuan banxue ji qi chengxiao xitan" [A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute], 72.

The Institute's classes were managed by the China Islamic Association and were focused on providing the students with knowledge of the state's religious policies. Students studied to become imams, translators and interpreters of Arabic, or state administrators of religious affairs.[413] When the first cohort of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute began in 1987, their curriculum contained the Qur'an, Hadith, religious doctrine, religious law, history of religion, Qur'anic recitation, Qur'anic exegesis, Arabic, modern Uyghur, modern Chinese, basic knowledge of political legislation, history and geography, gymnastics, science and technology.[414] In the late 2000s, the textbooks produced for the *jiejing* project led to a uniform, state-approved curriculum and the Xinjiang program seems to have resembled the program of China's other Islamic Institutes: officially 30% of the classes at the Xinjiang Islamic Institute were oriented towards politics (Deng Xiaoping Theory, ethnic religious policy, law, current political affairs, moral education, etc.), Chinese and Uyghur, literature, computer skills, geography, history and sports, while 70% of classes concerned religion (Arabic, Qur'anic recitation, Hadith, law, ethics, officially sanctioned sermons, etc.).[415] The unified curriculum placed significant emphasis on patriotism and socialism, and especially the ways in which society could be shaped according to socialist ideas.[416] Activities at the Urumqi Institute included annual sports games, a national flag raising, national anthem ceremonies, students visiting the mainland to study, and museum visits.[417] Sultan, the Uyghur graduate of the Islamic Institute in Beijing that I interviewed, who later worked for the Religious Affairs Bureau in Urumqi, said that the Institute's program in Urumqi emphasized politics far more than the Institute in Beijing: "The Islamic Institute in Urumqi training is worse than Beijing. In Beijing it is a bit free. In Urumqi, you had to learn Chinese politics every day."[418] The 2009 *China Muslim* article on state-led religious education in Xinjiang reports of Islamic Institute students who have been convinced of the benefits and the necessity of the "mutual adaptation" policy:

> […], among the religious personnel at the Xinjiang Islamic Scriptural School, there are those who say: "Before, I thought that the mutual adaptation of religion and socialism meant wanting to destroy religion, but now I recognize that was wrong. Socialism not only does not want to destroy religion, it actually allows for the long-term existence of religion. By

[413] Author's interview with Islamic Institute alumnus Sultan, January 2017.
[414] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 48.
[415] "Xinjiang Islamic Institute Introduction". See also Liu Dengzhong and Liu Zhifeng, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jingxueyuan banxue ji qi chengxiao xitan" [A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute], 67.
[416] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 49.
[417] Liu Dengzhong and Liu Zhifeng, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jingxueyuan banxue ji qi chengxiao xitan" [A Study of Functions and Achievements of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute], 67-68. Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 49.
[418] Author's interview with Sultan, January 2017.

> operation of law it protects religious activities. Religious officials need to do a good job of mutually adapting religion and socialism, rebuking the slander of people with other motives, and attacking the different kinds of falsehoods regarding the mutual adaptation of religion and socialism. In this way, they can communicate well to the religious masses, and guide them well." [419]

The students are also said to now welcome China's laws and regulations on religion: "'In the past, I thought regulating religious affairs by law meant limiting freedom of religious belief. Now I realize that regulating religious affairs by law is a necessity of a legalist country to rule the country by law (*yige fazhi guojia yifa zhiguo* 一个法制国家依法治国), and it essentially serves to protect legal religious activities.'"[420] With traditional Uyghur Islamic education being blamed for ethnic discord and stimulating "an attitude of repulsion towards Han culture and other cultures," the state's education was portrayed as a place where misguided clergy are enlightened.[421]

Preaching in the Mosque

Religious clergy were not only targeted because of the perceived danger of unofficial religious schools. They were also seen as community leaders who could communicate state policy to the population. A mosque's Democratic Management Committee, consisting of persons active in the religious community who are considered patriotic, appoints an imam. Imams at larger mosques receive a state salary and are responsible for the appointment of imams in the smaller neighborhood mosques.[422] Imam accreditations are annually revised by the state. One of the conditions for approval is that the imams attend patriotic education courses and seminars.[423] Whether or not a mosque and an imam are considered qualified by the government can be seen on engraved copper shields at a mosque's entrance (see Figures 22 and 23).

[419] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 50.
[420] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang yisilanjiao jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu" [Research into Contemporary Islamic Education in Xinjiang], 50.
[421] Ren Hong, "Xinjiang weiwuerzu yisilanjiao jingtangjiaoyu de lishi ji qi yingxiang" [The History and Influence of Uyghur Mosque Education in Xinjiang], 39.
[422] A larger mosque is associated with an area that more or less corresponds with the administrative category of hamlet (Chin.: *dadui*), see De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 26-27.
[423] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 27.

Figure 22: Signs at the entrance of a mosque in Khotan. One shows the qualifications of the mosque's clergy and the other the qualifications as a religious site (photo by author, Khotan 2015)

Figure 23: A mosque in Khotan displaying the copper shields with its qualifying stars. In 2015, almost all mosque entrances had closed entrances outside of prayer times (photo by author, Khotan 2015)

Anthropologist Bellér-Hann explains that in the 1980s and 1990s the Friday prayer was used to communicate regulations and decisions among the village community. Besides practical administrative issues, principles and morals were also promoted from the mosque, such as campaigns against excessive spending on weddings and funerals.[424] Edmund Waite reports that in the early 1990s state propaganda would be inserted in mosque sermons in Hezret once a month and covered topics like family planning policies and "the supposed Muslim ethic of respect for, and loyalty towards, political authorities."[425] One of my interviewees, who served as an imam in

[424] Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, 78.
[425] Waite, "The Impact of the State on Islam amongst the Uyghurs," 257.

Üchturpan, recounted how the state began pressing harder to insert state ideology in his mosque sermons in the 1990s. When he refused this, he was sent to jail for 1.5 years. After his release, he was placed under house arrest, which meant weekly police visits, and he could not travel farther than thirty kilometers from his home. With unrest increasing in the region, the pressure became heavier and he decided to flee the country.[426] With tension in the province rising in the 1990s and the perceived danger of terrorism in the 2000s, the pressure on religious leaders to fall in line with the state's propaganda intensified. In his survey of public propaganda in Xinjiang in 2008-2013, researcher Frederick De Jong observed several public texts explaining the requirements for an imam and a mosque to win state approval. Among the requirements are their support for the Party and socialist principles, their consent to state monitoring and supervision, their commitment not to engage in or organize private education or pilgrimage activities, and their rejection of fanatical religious ideas.[427] It also included requirements aimed at avoiding citizen activism such as a prohibition on legal petitioning and "engaging in public disputes."[428] As De Jong observed, state approval was always conditional: "In practice, the status of "qualified" can be withdrawn almost overnight for whatever reason, as happened to at least two hundred mosques in the Khotaen region following the series of violent incidents in 2011."[429]

One of the conditions for a mosque to be labeled as a qualified "safe" mosque was that official sermons were used. Official sermons were considered one of the main tools of the *jiejing* project for influencing the religious masses. The *Collections of Newly Edited Wa'z Sermons* (*xinbian wo'erzi yanjiangji* 新编卧尔兹演讲集) are compilations of speeches arranged by a wide range of topics. The first topic is "nationalism is part of faith," and other topics include "what is *jihad* and how to interpret *jihad* correctly," "respecting and protecting women," "do not jump to unfounded conclusions with *halal* and *haram,*" and "Muslims have to seek knowledge and advocate science."[430] The foreword to every published volume of *Collections of Newly Edited* Wa'z *Sermons* names two main reasons for the necessity of state-approved sermons.[431] First, that societal progress since the Reform and Opening Up campaign in the 1980s had raised new situations and questions and that

[426] Author's interviews with Emet, July and November 2016.
[427] Matching other researchers' observations, interviewees and persons I spoke to in Xinjiang in 2015 and 2018 spoke of the universal awareness that government officials registered the people who entered a mosque, sometimes openly, sometimes covertly. Also see De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 23.
[428] See text "Norms of the City of Aqsu for Establishing a 'Safe Mosque' in De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 153-56.
[429] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 23.
[430] China Islamic Educational Administration Guidance Committee 中国伊斯兰教教务指导委员会, *Xinbian wo'erzi yanbian jiangji (1-4 heji)* 新编卧尔兹演讲集 (1-4 合辑) [Collections of Newly Edited *Wa'z* Sermons (Vol. 1-4)] (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2013), 1-10.
[431] Foreword written in 2001 by Chen Guangyuan, head of the China Islamic Association. China Islamic Educational Administration Guidance Committee, *Collections of Newly Edited Wa'z Sermons (Vol. 1-4)* (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2013), 2-4.

religious clergy were not equipped to answer these questions. It says that the advice given by clergy did not fit the realities of modern times, and that, if questions were raised, clergy would either give advice based on ancient cases, or they would copy things from Arabic countries without differentiation. In this way, the authors claimed, it was very easy to mislead the Muslim masses. Hence, the China Islamic Association started organizing the first national competitions for Qur'anic reading in 1994 and the first national *wa'z* sermon competition in 1995. Out of the best speeches of the *wa'z* competition, the Association compiled the first *Collections of Sermons* (*wo'erzi yanjiangji* 卧尔兹演讲集). The second reason mentioned in the foreword for the new compilation of state-approved sermons was that religious extremism had begun to have an unhealthy influence in China. It mentions false proselytizers of "true Islam" and imams that have, because of their ignorance and lack of deep understanding of Islam, harmed the religious communities. That is why, the foreword says, "it is necessary to have a deep understanding of the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Islamic tradition. Not just so we can meet the demands of current society, but also to guard against religious extremism and to protect ethnic unity."[432] At the opening speech of the second conference of the China Islamic Educational Administration Guidance Committee in 2005, the Xinjiang government was lauded for integrating the state-approved sermons that were compiled under the *jiejing* project in religious clergy training: "At present, imams and khatibs of 8000 Friday mosques and 16,000 middle and small mosques all over the region have studied the first two volumes of *Collections of Newly Edited Wa'z Sermons* and have gradually applied it in practice and have achieved great results."[433] Besides the *Collections of Newly Edited Wa'z Sermons* books, Xinjiang had also published an own compilation of sermons (*wo'erzi xuanbian* 卧尔兹选编). Both publications were used as model speeches for Friday mosques in Xinjiang.[434]

Public Propaganda

While taking over the system of Islamic education in the name of protecting correct religion and helping religious education become more modern, the most visible, public message of the state for the wider public was that religion is an unwanted component in Chinese society. The state only allowed the use of Islamic symbolism and scripture for the nationalist project in environments

[432] China Islamic Educational Administration Guidance Committee 中国伊斯兰教教务指导委员会, "Xinbian wo'erzi yanbian jiangji (1-4 heji)" 新编卧尔兹演讲集 (1-4 合辑) [Collections of Newly Edited *Wa'z* Sermons (Vol. 1-4)] (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2013), 2-4.
[433] Jiang Jianshui 蒋坚水, "*Zai zhongguo yisilanjiao jiaowu zhidao weiyuanhui di er jie huiyi kaimuhui shang de jianghua*" 在中国伊斯兰教教务指导委员会第二届会议开幕会的讲话 [The opening speech of the second conference of the China Islamic Educational Administration Guidance Committee], *China Muslim* 6 (2005): 14.
[434] Jin Rubin 金汝彬, "'Jiejing' yu 'wo'erzi' jingyan jiaoliuhui zai Wulumuqi zhaokai" "解经" 与讲新 "卧尔兹" 经验交流会在乌鲁木齐召开 [The conference on *jiejing* and new *wa'z* sermons convenes in Urumqi], *Zhongguo Musilin* 5 (2003): 5-6. DOI: 10:16293/j.cnki.cn11-1345/b.2003.05.001.

specifically designated for religion, i.e., mosques and Islamic educational institutes. It opposed bringing Islamic symbolism out into the non-religious public sphere, such as public schools, and actively worked against tendencies to do so. Party members were not allowed to partake in religious activities or show any public signs of religiosity. Although this had always been official CCP policy, many Xinjiang CCP officials believed and practiced Islam. Bovingdon reports that throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s there were several instances in Xinjiang of CCP cadres making a public statement about their religiosity. The Party grew more intolerant towards these expressions of religiosity, insisting that Party members "only enjoy the freedom not to believe."[435] In 2011, holding an Islamic funeral for a Party official even became an illegal, punishable religious activity.[436] Signs on the streets warned against unwanted forms of religion, in particular. Different types of dress, such as the *jilbāb*, which became more popular in the 2000s, were considered possible signs of religious extremism. In 2011, the Xinjiang government launched "Project beauty," which was a five-year campaign meant to discourage women from wearing veils.[437] In 2012, chairman of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee Zhu Weiqun blamed the spread among Xinjiang's Uyghurs of clothing such as *jilbāb*-style black robes on foreign extremist ideas, stating that such clothing had never been part of "Chinese Islamic tradition."[438] I encountered many posters during my Xinjiang visits in 2015, stating what type of dress was considered appropriate and what clothing was considered a sign of religious extremism (see Figures 24 and 25).

[435] 1997 Xinjiang Party Committee Propaganda Bureau statement, quoted in Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 69.
[436] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 32.
[437] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 20. In 2015, the *burqah* was banned from public places in Urumqi. Mackerras, "Religion and the Uyghurs," 66. Byler, "Uyghur Migrant Life in the City During the ‚People's War'."
[438] Leibold and Grose, "Islamic Veiling in Xinjiang," 80.

Figure 24: Poster on a school playground in the Turpan area. It explains what Uyghur traditional clothing is and what is considered illegal (photo by author, Turpan prefecture 2015)

Figure 25: Sign at the entrance of the Mahmud Kashgari site explaining the types of "incorrect" (非正常) clothing (photo by author, Opal (Kashgar) 2015)

State propaganda and slogans are nothing new in the streets of Xinjiang. Bellér-Hann described how in the 1980s and 1990s the walls of township office buildings were one of the main channels of written communication between the state and villagers. While old production brigade headquarters

still bore slogans from pre-1980s collectivization campaigns, new campaigns were being added to public buildings. Topics ranged from family planning and national unity to environmental protection and economic principles.[439] According to Bellér-Hann's account, the reception of propaganda posters and banners by the Uyghur audience ranged between indifference and contempt.[440] As she explains, Uyghurs had no problems with the state's public propaganda, except when it touched too close on issues such as family planning.[441] A study by Frederick De Jong on public propaganda in Xinjiang between 2008 and 2013 also showed a wide range of topics, such as healthcare and regulations, and also showed a great concern with Islam.[442] De Jong reported that announcements containing rules and directives were read, while texts with ideological contents were countered with indifference.[443] While I encountered several propaganda topics in 2013, 2015, and 2018, the number of new posters in 2015 and 2018 aimed at the dangers of religious extremism was striking. As we will see in the next chapter, this was part of the Chinese government's focus on the negative elements of Islam and the War on Terror.

Figure 26: Part of a larger propaganda mural in Turpan, explaining that one should not protect religious fanatics, hold illegal religious activities or conduct religious activities in public spaces (illustrated here by a man praying on a public square) (photo by MJ De Maeseneer, Turpan 2015)

[439] Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, 81-82.
[440] Bellér-Hann, 82.
[441] Bellér-Hann, 81-82.
[442] De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, xv.
[443] Bellér-Hann, *The Written and the Spoken*, xv-xvi.

Figure 27: Sign outside a Turpan mosque that shows "26 Manifestations of Illegal Religion" (photo by MJ De Maeseneer, Turpan 2015)

Figure 28: Sign in Turpan explaining the prohibition to perform an unofficial religious marriage or a religious divorce (left), as well as an explanation of the new fines for violating the family planning regulation that states that urban families are only allowed two children and rural families three children (right) (photo by MJ De Maeseneer, Turpan 2015)

5.3. The Problem

The paradox of China's functionalization of Islam, especially in Xinjiang, is the state's use of Islam's role as a source of social normativity, on the one hand, and its rejection of it, on the other hand. The

state was very clear in only accepting parts of the Uyghur Islamic tradition that met their terms. More importantly, while a part of the state's Islamic narrative aimed at using "the positive factors of religious doctrines, religious teachings and religious morality in service of socialism,"[444] that was only a secondary purpose of state control over the religious narrative. The *jiejing* project of scripture interpretation was meant to provide the state with a way to claim that Islam and Chinese society were compatible. This compatibility was only possible with obedience to the Chinese government. We should keep in mind that the main target of state functionalization of Islam in Xinjiang is combating Uyghur dissent, not controlling religious orthodoxy. The primary goal of an official interpretation of Islamic tenets was to have a tool for outlawing unwanted opinions and for vilifying voices and actions that undermined the Chinese state. This primary motive of state control overruled the secondary motive of convincing people that God's message supports Chinese rule, with the result that the first often undermined the second.

The state picked out some local historical figures or local sites to be part of the unified canon, as it tried to promote a China-oriented history of Xinjiang. But the use of Uyghur religious figures and sites proved to be controversial. As we saw in Gregory Starrett's study, state functionalization of Islam does not lead per se to a conformity with the formulated social normativity, even when a state does identify with Islam. For example, Rian Thum has noticed that both of the previously obscure personages of Ammanisakhan and Xiang Fei proved to be very popular with Han tourists, but were not picked up by the Uyghur population in the form that the Chinese state had mind. They did enter the Uyghur historical consciousness, albeit not necessarily with the story and the image preferred by the government.[445] Reconstruction of historic sites does not always invoke the associations intended by the state, but does serve as a trigger of historical awareness among the local residents. Bellér-Hann has argued that, in Xinjiang, such projects can actually contribute to the "further externalization of the state, which, however, does not remain a distant abstraction but is experienced in its materiality through its attempts to appropriate and control local space."[446] Bovingdon also showed that state rhetoric is far from successful among Uyghurs, and often has the adverse effect of alienating Uyghurs from any official state version of Xinjiang's history: "While the

[444] Following the mutual adaptation policy of Jiang Zemin, "Zai quanguo tongzhan gongzuo huiyishang de jianghua" 在全国统战工作会议上的讲话 [Speech at the National United Front Work Conference], November 7, 1993, published in "Overview of National United Front Work Conference and Literature (1988-1998)" (China Press, September 1998), 163-164. Republished on CPC News "Religious Work", accessed October 29, 2017, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64171/65717/65721/4461297.html.

[445] Thum has noted that whereas official standard dynastic histories as created in Chinese universities do not stand a chance of finding resonance with the larger Uyghur population, the shrine's traditional function as a place for historical remembrance has made it possible for the personages to enter the Uyghur historical imagination. Thum, *The Sacred routes of Uyghur History,* 232-44.

[446] Bellér-Hann, "The Bulldozer State: Chinese Socialist Development in Xinjiang," in *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia: Performing Politics*, eds. Madeleine Reeves Johan Rasanayagam and Judith Beyer (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014): 191. See also Bellér-Hann, "Feudal Villains or Just Rulers?," 319.

Party appears to have persuaded the Han population that Xinjiang and its peoples are part of China, it has not persuaded Uyghurs, nor can it hope to do so by means of nationalist history."[447] Just as is the case with the construction of a state-oriented history of Xinjiang, the policy on Islam has backfired. What is more, the state's use of Islam to fortify its authoritative position enhanced the threat to Islam as the supreme site of social normativity in Uyghur society. To understand this, we need to consider what it means for the state to appropriate Islamic symbols. Shared discursive concepts make it easier for others identifying themselves as acting within the same discursive tradition to accept or support the stated ideas and purposes. In a way, working within the same discursive tradition can provide people with more social capital. But just adopting a narrative does not guarantee a positive reception. Using someone else's vocabulary can in fact have the opposite effect. Simon Harrison, in his article "Identity as a Scarce Resource" (1999), argues that there are situations in which the similarities, "the sharing of a common culture, or of aspects of a common cultural symbolism," can be the cause of divisive action.[448] Too close an identification by others with things considered to be distinct elements of one's own ethnic identity can lead to its fervent protection against imitation or appropriation by others. The Chinese state appropriating Islamic figures and sites for its own purposes has arguably enhanced the gap between the state and the Uyghur citizens and has aggravated the perceived threat on Islam for the Uyghurs.

The appropriation of the Islamic discourse in service of the Chinese state's socialization goals was unsuccessful among most Uyghurs in Xinjiang. In its most common form, Uyghur rejection of the state narrative was shown by avoiding it and paying no attention to it. In its most extreme form, resistance was revealed through violent attacks and assassinations of so-called "red imams," who were considered to be the administration's puppets.[449] For Uyghurs, there is a distinct otherness to

[447] Bovingdon, "The History of the History of Xinjiang," 123-25.
[448] This idea runs against the general assumption in studies on ethnic conflict at the time that it is the perceived cultural *differences* between groups that play a pivotal role in creating and maintaining ethnic strife. Simon Harrison, "Identity as a Scarce Resource," *Social Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (1999): 249-50. Harrison bases his idea on Annette Weiner's economical anthropological work *Inalienable Possessions* (1992), whereby inalienable possessions "are those felt to represent the identities of the transactors themselves." Harrison, "Identity as a Scarce Resource," 239. Harrison states that all practices are capable of being copied, with or without the consent of their possessors. He talks about for example modes of dress, entitlement to specific collective memories, discourses of indigeneity, or forms of religious devotion. But also physical objects like monuments, religious sites, museum objects can be claimed or copied by different groups. In these conflicts over identity symbols, Harrison sees two main issues in these competing groups' interaction: a group is either in power over or powerless against the other group whose symbols it copies, and the group either wishes to eliminate or widen the gap between the groups. Harrison, "Identity as a Scarce Resource," 249.
[449] Mackerras, "Religion and the Uyghurs: A Contemporary Overview," 75. De Jong, *Uyghur Texts in Context*, 28. Joanne Smith, "Four Generations of Uyghurs: The Shift towards Ethno-political Ideologies among Xinjiang's Youth," *Inner Asia* 2, no. 2 (2000): 198. Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*, 262. In July 2014, the well-known imam of the Id Kah Mosque, Juma Tayir, was assassinated in front the mosque in Kashgar. See Cui Jia and Gao Bo, "Islamic institute steps up training to fight extremism," *China Daily*, March 30, 2015. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-03/30/content_19947499.htm.

the Chinese state as well as to the nation narrative of Islam that the state promotes, an otherness that is exacerbated by Chinese policy and discourse. Transforming historic figures and sites into examples of Chinese patriotism and equating a good Muslim with a patriotic, modern Chinese citizen has only served to further estrange Uyghurs from the idea that they and Islam belong to the Chinese nation.

Struggling to mold the Uyghur experience into the Chinese nation narrative, the CCP has further alienated Uyghurs from Chinese citizenship. As we will see in the next chapter, the failure to contain Uyghur discontent as well as changing political orientations in Beijing has led the Chinese government to move away from the functionalization policy in Xinjiang.