

Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism

Map of China and its neighbours



Administrative Divisions of the People's Republic of China (PRC)



Facts

- ▶ Muslim make up about 2% of Chinese population, around 20 Mio.
 - ▶ More Muslims in China than in Malaysia.
 - ▶ More Muslims in China than in every Middle Eastern Muslim nation except Iran, Turkey and Egypt.
 - ▶ Increasing dependence on Middle Eastern oil.
 - ▶ Muslim groups (census of 1990):
 - ▶ Hui (8.6 Mio), Uyghur (8.3 Mio, census of 2000), Kazakh (1.1 Mio), Dongxiang (373k), Kyrgyz (373k), Salar (87k), Tajik (33k), Uzbek (14k), Bonan (12k), and Tatar (5k)
 - ▶ Shanghai 5: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan; 1996 onwards signed agreements incl. non-tolerance of separatism; 2001 inclusion of Uzbekistan
 - ▶ Islam grows through birth and intermarriage, not through conversion of non-Muslims to Islam
 - ▶ Increasing mobility of Chinese Muslims; 1984: 1400 Muslim went on Hajj; 1987: 2000; late 1990s more than 6000.
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Core questions

- ▶ Is Islam in China almost unavoidably rebellious?
- ▶ Are Muslim communities inherently problematic in a non-Muslim state? (Disraeli, Dillon)
- ▶ Are there examples of successful accommodation and reconciliation between Islam and the Chinese host culture?
- ▶ Are Uyghurs interested in assimilating into dominant Han society or have they rejected Han societal goals? (Kaltman)



Hui Accommodation to Chinese society

- ▶ Cultural Revolution: Hui focus of anti-religious and anti-ethnic nationalism drives → persecutions, Mosque closures
- ▶ 1975 uprising with 1600 casualties in Yunnan, Shadian
- ▶ Hui closer to Han Chinese than other Muslim groups due to geogr. proximity and local cultural accommodation
- ▶ ethnicization and localization
- ▶ Hui unique: religion only unifying category of identity
- ▶ “But their Islamic practice allow them to maintain distinct identities.” (Lipman 2004, p. 3)
- ▶ no overall uniformity



Hui

- ▶ Hui not a unified, self-conscious, organized entity
- ▶ great local variation
- ▶ no leaders or organization outside of China
- ▶ partial resentment against China's minority policies
- ▶ virtually no separatist movements or fundamentalist attitudes



Uyghur interaction with Chinese society

- ▶ Uyghurs – the name means ‘unity’ or ‘alliance’ – believe their ancestors were indigenous people of Tarim basin (Xinjiang)
- ▶ 1930s: recognition of Uyghurs as official Chinese minority (*minzu*) in Xinjiang
- ▶ Establishment of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on 1 Oct 1955 confirmed minority status
- ▶ Islam only one of several identity markers for Uyghurs, another being the attachment to the region or oasis of origin or the language.
- ▶ historical, economic and political aspects



Uyghur

- ▶ revival of Islam among Uyghurs after 1978 (until about 1988)
- ▶ 1985: Koran translated into Uyghur



Autonomy politics

- ▶ Autonomous region; between assimilation into unified nation state and independent state
 - ▶ Uyghurs underrepresented in CCP
 - ▶ single autonomy law for all autonomous regions in China
 - ▶ actual situation sometimes does not correspond with what is usually understood as 'autonomy'
 - ▶ distinction between legal and illegal activity is defined by government action rather than law
 - ▶ simultaneous repression of Muslim practices and liberalization; Hui benefitted from minority politics ('nationality customs') → re-Islamicization
 - ▶ Islamic piety and practice is inseparable from politics
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Outline

- ▶ Ethnogenesis of the Uyghur → flexibility of ethnic labels
- ▶ Muslim visions for the Chinese nation
- ▶ Where does the split between the Uyghur and the Chinese nation come from?



Ethnic groups and nation states

“Traditional state could harbour peoples of diverse ethnic origin in frontier or urban stranger communities without insisting that these communities become part of some ‘nation’. In the modern nation-state, peoples of diverse origins, whether migrants or indigenous people, are compelled not only to recognize state authority but also to become part of the nation. Since sovereignty in the modern nation-state is vested in the people, rather than in a monarch legitimated by descent or religious charisma, the subjects of the modern nation-state must be integrated into the people. It is the process of national integration carried out not only in the so-called ‘new states’ but allowed very much so in states like United States, the Soviet Union and even in ‘old states’ like the United Kingdom and Spain that has markedly stimulated people to reflect upon their ethnic status.” (quoted from Gladney 2004, p. 209)



Xinjiang before 1949

“National consciousness among the Uyghurs was conspicuously absent. They were isolated amongst numerous oasis-settlements, which were backward and self-sufficient economic units. Each oasis was practically a little state having its own capital, small towns, rural settlements, a central market where all the local produce was exchanged by barter and a separate district administration, thus enabling it to maintain its own individuality. Social segregation of these settlements and their respective populations prevented the formation of a united front against oppressive regimes.” (Gladney, 2004, p. 216.)



Islam and Chinese Nationalism

“[The Huihui *minzu*] is not one of those native peoples that has always lived on the ancient soil of China (like the Han, Miao, or Qiang), nor one of those purely immigrant groups that came to China from abroad (like the Koreans or Russians), nor one of the peoples of a border region who have long lived in contact (like the Kazaks or the Dai). Rather, it relied upon the tremendous unifying power of Islamic culture, which concentrates Muslims of different countries and different languages into a single entity, causing a *minzu* to form from a blend of foreign elements and partially domestic inhabitants, creating a new species. On the vast, broad land of China it planted roots, sprouted, bloomed, and produced fruit, becoming an important component of the indivisible, great *minzu* family of China.” (“History of the Hui people and Islamic culture”, quoted from Lipman 2007, p. 212)



“Uyghurs do face problems when they’re living in big cities, but they’re not problems of political sensitivity. It’s broader. It’s an ethnic discrimination problem. But the ethnic discrimination is there because of the politicization of Uyghur identity in the media. It’s a direct of result of the way media represent Uyghurs on the television and in the newspapers and so on.” (Joanne Smith-Findley, <http://religionandpolitics.org/2016/08/09/the-persecution-of-chinas-muslim-uyghurs/>)



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Background

Research

Teaching

Publications

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CHINA POWER

How China Dismantled the Uyghur Internet

In a 10 month period, China destroyed 80% of the Uyghur Internet in a massive digital book burning.

By Henryk Szadziewski & Greg Fay
July 22, 2014



In the early 2000s, Dilshat Perhat, a media studies student in China's northwestern Uyghur region, launched a new kind of website called Diyarim. Describing Perhat as an innate entrepreneur, a friend said he was propelled by a keen interest in offering Uyghurs online services common on websites elsewhere in the world.



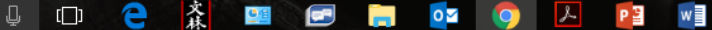
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