

## ISLAM, LOCAL ELITES, AND CHINA'S MISSTEPS IN INTEGRATING THE UYGHUR NATION

### *İSLAM, YEREL ELİTLER VE ÇİN'İN UYGURLARI ENTEGRE SÜRECİNDE ATTIĞI YANLIŞ ADIMLAR*

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The following paper examines China's religious and nationality policies aimed at establishing and maintaining political and social control over the Uyghur population of Xinjiang and finds China's policies to be contradictory and self-defeating. The author suggests that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has historically embraced a nationality policy towards Xinjiang aimed at promoting the development of a Uyghur sense of national identity, in which Islam and the Uyghur language have become central unifying characteristics, and fostered class of Uyghur elites loyal to the Chinese state to develop and control a unified Uyghur nation. These attempts, however, have been undermined by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) historical aversion to religion and its refusal to allow Uyghur cadres to openly practice Islam, which has isolated them from the wider Uyghur community and contributed to the erosion of their perceived Uyghur identity. This situation has limited the ability of Uyghur cadres to act as intermediaries between the Chinese state and the Uyghur population, undermining the Chinese government's attempts to integrate Uyghurs into the PRC and challenge the popular appeal of Uyghur separatism.

**Key Words:** Uyghur, Xinjiang, China, Nationalism, Religion

#### **ÖZET**

Bu çalışma, Uygur halkı üzerinde siyasal ve sosyal denetim sağlayıp, bu denetimi sürdürmeyi amaçlayan Çin'in din ile milliyet politikalarını incelemekte ve Çin'in politikalarını kendi içinde tutarsız bulmaktadır. Yazar, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin (ÇHC) tarihsel olarak Sincan'a yönelik başlıca özelliğinin İslam dini ve Uygur dili olan bir Uygur milli kimlik düşüncesinin gelişimini desteklemeyi amaçlayan milliyet siyasetini benimsediğini ve Çin devletine bağlı Uygur eliti aracılığıyla birleşik bir Uygur milleti oluşturmak ve onu kontrol etmek konusunda teşvik ettiğini ileri sürmektedir. Ancak bu girişimler, Çin Komünist Partisi'nin (ÇKP) dine tarihsel karşıtlığı ve Uygur kadrolarının İslam dinini yaşamalarına izin vermeyi reddetmesi sonucunda sarsıntıya uğramıştır. Çin Komünist Partisi'nin Uygur elitine İslamı yaşama konusunda izin vermeyi reddetmesi, bu kadroları Uygur toplumundan izole etmiş ve bu kişilerin Uygur kimliği algısını erozyona uğratmıştır. Bu durum, Uygur kadrolarının Çin devleti ve Uygur halkı arasında arabulucu olma gücünü, Çin hükümetinin Uygurları, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ne entegre etme ve Uygur ayrılıkçı hareketinin popüler çekiciliğine karşı meydan okuma girişimlerini zayıflatarak kısıtlamıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uygur, Sincan, Çin, Milliyetçilik, Din

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## Introduction

One of the persistent governance issues facing the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been the effective integration of the Uyghur Muslims of Xinjiang into the contemporary Chinese state. While the issue of Uyghur national separatism lies at the center of the problem, the difficulty of integrating Uyghur Muslims has not resulted, however, from a 'clash of civilizations' based on the inherent cultural incompatibility between Confucian China and Muslim Xinjiang but rather from the PRC's flawed policies with respect to the management of popular religion. Specifically, the PRC has adopted policies aimed at cultivating and co-opting a class of loyal Uyghur cadres and an urban, educated Uyghur elite, providing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with a potential link into the Uyghur community, but has undermined the perceived Uyghur identity of these elites, primarily vis-à-vis policies aimed at discouraging their public and private adherence to Islam thus excluding them from participating in community-wide social and religious practices. In persisting its ideologically-driven attempts to forbid religion within its ranks, the CCP has undercut the ability of loyal Uyghur elites to win the recognition and respect of the wider Uyghur community, and in 'the battle for hearts and minds' in Xinjiang, allowed opponents of the Chinese state rather than party loyalists to monopolize Islam as a mobilizing force for national separatism.

Throughout most of CCP's rule over Xinjiang, it has promoted the development of a Uyghur sense of national identity by labeling many culturally diverse oasis-based groups as a single unified community, drawing from Bolshevik-modeled nationality policies aimed at creating, co-opting and controlling minority nationalities. Regardless of its backing by the Chinese as a deliberate method for control, the concept of a Uyghur national identity has gained wide currency among the Xinjiang-based residents who it encompasses. In this discussion, 'Uyghur national identity' and 'Uyghur nationalism' are understood according to the conceptualization of nationalities as "imagined political communities" defined by Benedict Anderson (1991).<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the Uyghur nation is imagined by its members as a limited community united by "deep, horizontal comradeship"<sup>3</sup> and limited on its boundaries by particular cultural markers. In the fostering of Uyghur nationalism, substantial regional and cultural markers of identity, often aligned with oasis-based communities have been subsumed into a single Uyghur nation. As a result of these preexisting divisions within the emerging Uyghur nation, the central common cultural elements that transcend regional variations and have come to unify the Uyghur sense of national identity and importantly, distinguish Uyghurs from the ever growing number of Han Chinese residents in Xinjiang, are linguistic, the ability to speak Uyghur, and religious, involving participation in various community-wide rituals demonstrating one's adherence to Islam, such as public prayer or fasting during Ramadan. In short, practicing Islam and speaking

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (Verso: New York: 1991), pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Uyghur have become central cultural markers of a person's claim to be a Uyghur, and those with questionable adherence to Islam or limited ability to speak Uyghur are unlikely to be imagined or accepted as authentic members of the Uyghur nation but rather as outsiders.

In an attempt to integrate Xinjiang and the Uyghur population into the Chinese polity, CCP leaders have attempted to implement one of the party's time-tested strategies for heading off possible political opponents - co-opting them. One of the CCP's great successes in maintaining regime durability during China's transition from state-planned to free-market economics has been its ability to effectively co-opt business entrepreneurs into its political structure and extend CCP party membership to members of the business class. In this manner, the CCP has averted the potential emergence of a rival source of power - an emerging class of capitalists, by bringing them into the party's ranks and enabling business entrepreneurs to use formal institutions to their advantage rather than undermining or avoiding them.

State policies, however, have not effectively adopted an equally successful policy for co-opting and supporting Uyghur elites. While PRC policies have sought to develop a loyal, educated, and 'modernized' class of Uyghur elites well-assimilated into the Chinese state to contribute to the PRC's governance and control of Xinjiang, restrictions on religious practice among these local elites and anti-religious campaigns within the CCP have undermined this group's ability to assert its Uyghur identity in the eyes of the local population. By forbidding local Uyghur cadres and government officials from openly or privately practicing Islam, these restrictive policies drive a wedge between Uyghur elites well integrated into the Chinese state and many religious practices within the Uyghur community. In periods of particularly harsh religious repression during the CCP's rule over Xinjiang, specifically during the turbulent Cultural Revolution, much Islamic practice in Xinjiang has adapted to tight state restrictions by shifting from public areas to households and from community-serving *ulama* to underground or informal religious practitioners. Many religious activities held in the household and all activities at unregistered mosques or religious schools are technically illegal, making it professionally dangerous for Uyghur officials to engage in them. These Uyghur cadres are thus prevented from performing public or private religious acts that would demonstrate their piety and their sustained identification with the Uyghur population, as opposed to a perceived total assimilation into Han Chinese culture.

PRC policies related to the appointment of CCP and bureaucratic positions also challenge the real and perceived power of Uyghur cadres. As a result of the Chinese state's clear preference for leaving almost all decision-making power in Xinjiang in the hands of Han Chinese cadres, Uyghur officials have often appeared as subservient lackeys to their Han superiors and other Uyghurs. In terms of language policy, educational reforms over the last decade have also discouraged the use of Uyghur as a language of instruction in public schools and universities in deference to Mandarin, contributing to a future where Mandarin-speaking Uyghur cadres, who are generally drawn from the ranks of

the highly educated, will face the challenge of overcoming a serious language barrier dividing them from the Uyghur-speaking population, creating a major obstacle in regional governance.

The PRC's effective governance of Xinjiang is therefore troubled by policies that weaken the perceived cultural legitimacy of Uyghur cadres. Religious restrictions prevent Uyghur cadres from publicly observing Islam, denying them the ability to embrace a popular marker of Uyghur identity and weakening their claims of belonging to the community. In the interest of more effective governance, state policies that restrict religious practice among CCP cadres and public officials should be relaxed, allowing Uyghur cadres to fully embrace the religious aspects of their Uyghur national identity without threatening their professional status or marking their disloyalty to the Chinese state.

### **Development of Religious Policy in the PRC**

Following Liberation and the founding of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949, the state's religious policies have been largely defined by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Seeing religion as essentially incompatible with atheistic materialism and as a legacy of "foreign cultural imperialism and feudalism," Mao sought to limit and control its influence over Chinese society.<sup>4</sup> This anti-religious view has been sustained within the CCP, the official ideology have never been effectively reformed to embrace religion or tolerate it among the party membership. The Central Committee of the CCP, in Document 19 (1982), which outlined the Party's religious policy in the post-Mao era, firmly asserted the CCP's official atheism: "We Communists are atheists and must unremittingly propagate atheism."<sup>5</sup> Concurrently, within the CCP, religion has been viewed as undesirable, a potential source of political opposition and weakening influence on the socialist state. The party has accepted Karl Marx's assertion that religion has functioned in feudal societies as 'the opium of the people' that pacifies the impoverished masses and redirects their focus from their material poverty to the rewards of the afterlife.

H.H. Lai suggests that the CCP likewise has viewed religion as a potential rival for political power resources. Religious organizations can draw talented individuals away from more productive activities, tap the population's resources for fundraising, and take from the government by demanding exceptions from taxation.<sup>6</sup> Religious movements are also perceived as possible political threats to the CCP's rules because of their proven ability to unify and mobilize large segments of the population. There have been a large number of historical examples to justify this perception. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and the

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<sup>4</sup> Beatrice Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 184, December 2005, p.895.

<sup>5</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "The People's Republic of China: Document 19, the Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period," March 31, 1982, trans. Donald E. MacInnis, (<http://www.religlaw.org/interdocs/docs/doc19relig1982.htm>).

<sup>6</sup> H.H. Lai, "Religious Policies in Post-Totalitarian China: Maintaining Political Monopoly over a Reviving Society," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol.11, No. 1, Spring 2006, p.58.

Great Muslim Rebellion, for example, were both religiously inspired rebellions that nearly contributed to the toppling of the Qing Dynasty in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Christian missionaries were also associated with the unequal treaties with Western imperialist powers and the related Opium Wars.<sup>7</sup> CCP leaders, already directed to view religion with suspicion based on Marxist atheistic materialism, likewise have been motivated to see religion as potentially destabilizing and threatening to their regime's durability based on the Chinese historical experience.

In line with its official anti-religious ideology, the CCP's religious policy has developed around the central goal of controlling religion and mitigating its threat to the state. As religion is controlled, it is assumed that its prominence will be reduced as the nation modernizes, eventually disappearing from society. The religious policy, however, has not been totally constant but has rather transformed during the CCP's history. Lai has organized the CCP's preferred policy approaches towards religion into corresponding time periods: "cooptation" (1949-1957), "vacillation" (1958-1965), "prohibition" (1966-1979), and a less restrictive "calculated monopoly" in the post-Mao period since 1979.<sup>8</sup> The evolution of the policy has largely followed the pattern of co-opting religious institutions and transforming them into state organs during the early period, aggressively repressing all religion during the Cultural Revolution, and strategically loosening state controls during the last 30 years. It should be noted however that in Xinjiang, the Strike Hard campaign of the early 1990s has introduced a modern wave of religious repression unseen in most other regions of China, particularly areas dominated by ethnic Hans.

After Liberation, the CCP modeled its methods for social control after the Bolsheviks and established a religious bureaucracy within the state's organizational structure. Under the leadership of the United Front Department of the CCP and the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), five official religions, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Taoism and Buddhism, were organized under the authority of corresponding Patriotic Religious Associations (PRAs).<sup>9</sup> The newly established religious bureaucracy and its subordinate PRAs were given the task of monitoring religious activity within the PRC and repressing unofficial religious groups; "tactics included neutralizing the opposition, legitimizing new separatist religious organizations and mobilizing internal dissent in the Party's interest."<sup>10</sup> Religious leaders opposed to the policy were imprisoned, and as PRA places of worship often came to be recognized as promoting CCP propaganda rather than religious doctrine, many religious believers abandoned them and began worshipping among growing underground congregations.<sup>11</sup> The

<sup>7</sup> Tony Lambert, "The Present Religious Policy of the Chinese Communist Party," *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2001, p.121.

<sup>8</sup> H.H. Lai, "Religious Policies in Post-Totalitarian China: Maintaining Political Monopoly over a Reviving Society", p.59, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Beatrice Leung, "China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Art of Managing Religious Activity," p.896.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 896-97.

<sup>11</sup> Lambert, p.122.

PRAs were nevertheless a concession to the reality of widespread religious observance in the PRC and their functioning represented a measure of government tolerance for religion that would be eliminated in campaigns of intense religious repression during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. It should be emphasized, however, that despite the relative tolerance of public religion presented by PRAs, religion was nevertheless viewed as potential threat that needed to be managed and controlled as it marched along to its eventual death and disappearance as faith in rationality and science came to replace it in the popular consciousness.

In Xinjiang, the Islamic PRA, named the Islamic Association of China (IAC), established under the aforementioned United Front policy in 1953, was given the authority to recruit, train, and appoint officially-sanctioned religious clergy who would in turn disseminate CCP party guidelines to the religious community. During the early 1950s, the IAC absorbed existing Muslim institutions, religious (*sharia*) courts were replaced with people's courts, and secular state-run schools took the place of religious schools. Because the primary policy objective was to consolidate PRC control of Xinjiang and avert popular resistance, official repression of Islam was initially limited. The state, however, did begin to play a significant role in shaping what elements of Islam were to be considered legal, legitimate, and 'real' and what practices were illegal and subversive acts of superstition, and outside the narrowed scope of 'true' Islam. During the Great Leap Forward of 1958-62, however, life in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China was radically transformed through wide-ranging, state-led social and economic restructuring. Mosques were closed, the IAC was formally abolished and its project of narrowly defining and sanctioning Islam halted, mosque lands were seized in land collectivization, and newly established communes interrupted daily Islamic practices, making religious dietary practices, daily prayers, and other rituals impossible to observe.<sup>12</sup> Following the Great Leap Forward, religious policy was again softened as the IAC was reestablished and a level of mosque attendance resumed. Confiscated mosque lands, however, were not returned.<sup>13</sup> The relaxation of religious controls after the Great Leap, however, was short-lived and religious repression would resume in the Cultural Revolution.

During the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution, beginning in 1966, all religion was rejected as a feudal element, one of the "four olds," and zealous Red Guards carried out the widespread suppression of religious institutions. Religious property and buildings were destroyed and religious leaders, including those affiliated with PRAs, were indiscriminately beaten, imprisoned in labor camps, and arrested,<sup>14</sup> and the IAC and other PRAs were closed. In interviews he conducted in the Kashgar area, Edmund Waite found that Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution had raided households for Qurans and other religious

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund Waite, "The Impact of the State on Islam amongst the Uyghurs: Religious Knowledge and Authority in the Kashgar Oasis," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2006, p.253.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.254.

<sup>14</sup> Lambert, p.122.

literature and publicly burned them. Muslims found to have performed religious rituals were subjected to public humiliations at the hands of Red Guards.<sup>15</sup> During this period, when public religious observance became impossible, many Muslims adapted Islamic rituals so that laymen in the household might perform them, hidden from the gaze of outsiders.<sup>16</sup> This marked an important fundamental shift for much religious practice, pushing Islam into a less formal household role, and making the CCP's religious policy, aimed at controlling and framing formal Islamic practice in the public sphere, much less effective in subsequent years. Later attempts by official religious institutions would have difficulty controlling and monitoring the 'appropriate' practice of Islam, as in an attempt to protect themselves and their continued religious observances, many Muslims had transformed their religious practices into domesticated, hidden forms that shielded them from the prying eyes of the authorities.

After the death of Mao, the violent and erratic excesses of repression carried out during the Cultural Revolution were brought to a halt, and on March 31, 1982, the Central Committee of the CCP issued 'Document 19,' which provided the basic framework for Chinese religious policy in the post-Mao era. The document advocated the "the freedom to believe in religion and also the freedom not to believe in religion." In line with traditional Marxism-Leninism, however, religion was nevertheless framed as a tool of the oppressing class used to control the masses. Continued religious adherence was explained as the result of people's general lack of social consciousness and modern thinking. Religion was described as a "historical phenomenon" that had a "cycle of emergence, development, and demise." Its survival in contemporary in China was a symptom of the country's limited development and present backwardness and would thus gradually fade away as China progressed and achieved high levels of culture, education, material wealth, technology and education on its path to socialist development.<sup>17</sup> Document 19 also warned that the party must accept the basic reality that religion would survive for an extended amount of time into the future and excessive repression of religion, as seen in the Cultural Revolution, would not be successful and might be harmful to society.<sup>18</sup> To implement its new approach to religious policy, the CCP developed a strategy making extensive use of PRAs. The more nuanced policy, as described by H.H. Lai, centers around four approaches, the state seeking to "co-opt" religious groups from the five official religions into PRAs, "crack down" on groups that are politically defiant or deviate from the PRAs, "restrict and suppress" underground churches and "discourage" particular kinds of "localized and disorganized" superstitions.<sup>19</sup> The resulting policy and the more ideologically open environment of post-Mao China has allowed much more open religious

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<sup>15</sup> Waite, p.254.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "The People's Republic of China: Document 19, the Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period," March 31, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Lai, 60.

expression than in the past and led to the massive expansion of underground and PRA-affiliated religion during the 1980s and 90s. Islam, however, has since the repression of the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward, substantially changed, shifting away from the public square to the household.

In the Reform and Opening Up era (1978-present), the PRC initially carried out relatively soft religious policies in Xinjiang, allowing for a measure of autonomy.<sup>20</sup> The IAC was restored in 1980<sup>21</sup> in line with the resumption of the state's policy of co-opting religion into patriotic, state-controlled religious orders, and beginning in 1979, mosques that had been damaged during the Cultural Revolution were repaired and rebuilt, with 14,000 mosques reportedly in operation by 1984.<sup>22</sup> Islamic practice would increase substantially during the 1980s amidst the relatively open atmosphere for practicing religion but would again face serious repression when Chinese fears of unrest following the Tiananmen protests in 1989 and concerns about Uyghur separatism and major uprisings that prompted the Strike Hard campaign in the early 1990's.

In spite of these evolving social and economic changes within China, particularly the reemergence of popular religion, the CCP has maintained its official anti-religious platform. Party cadres and government officials are particularly targeted with anti-religious propaganda, and the CCP goes to special lengths to ensure that its members are not secretly carrying on as religious practitioners. The CCP's continued ban of religious belief amongst its members to the present day, however, seems somewhat of an anomaly. The post-Maoist regime has operated, in many respects, as the pinnacle of pragmatism, and the anti-religious campaign within the party seems grounded in an unusually strict and uncompromising adherence to Marxist-Leninist ideology, particularly for a party that has only recently overseen the nationwide adoption of free market capitalism. The emergence of business entrepreneurs was tolerated, in fact, encouraged by national leaders during the early 1980s, in spite of the obvious contradictions inherent in a communist political party overseeing a national transition into free market capitalism. In the case of adopting capitalism, the CCP's official Marxist-Leninist ideology was no small obstacle, but policy adjustments were nevertheless undertaken in the pragmatic interest of promoting national development and improving the material wellbeing of the Chinese masses. In its approach to religious policy, the CCP would be well-advised to follow its own method for integrating business entrepreneurs, by acknowledging the wide scope of religious life in Xinjiang and allowing its cadres to become active participants. This policy adjustment might allow loyal Uyghur cadres to use their state resources to compete for public support within the religious community and embracing Islam as a source of political support, rather

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<sup>20</sup> Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.307.

<sup>21</sup> James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p.277.

<sup>22</sup> Waite, pp.254-255.



than simply forcing cadres to cede the religious battlefield to political separatists.

### Uyghur Nationalism

The concept of a Uyghur national identity has been a highly politicized issue within contemporary China, central to debates between Uyghur national separatists and defenders of the territorial inviolability of the PRC. Historically, the term "Uyghur" itself stretches back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, having first been used to label Turkic nomads practicing shamanism and Manichaeism in Mongolia, then for a sedentary, oasis-based group in the present-day Turpan region practicing Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity and Manichaeism in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and finally, a Turkic group practicing Buddhism in the Turpan region in the 10<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>23</sup> The term, however, fell into disuse for centuries, and by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "the people of the (Xinjiang) oases lacked any coherent sense of identity."<sup>24</sup> Adopting a nationalities model borrowed from the Soviets, the Chinese Guomindang (KMT) government used the term "Uyghur" to identify Turkic Muslims as a subset within a larger Muslim "Hui" category. The CCP likewise used nationality labels, hoping promises of national autonomy in the future CCP state would win the support of ethnic minorities to its side in the Chinese Civil War. Following its 1949 victory, the CCP formally established the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1955, but reneged on promises of granting national autonomy, preferring instead to maintain strong control of the region by the central government. Cultural and political autonomy was never given to the Uyghurs in practice, and Beijing continued to maintain tight control over the region's social and political institutions. In the creation of the XUAR, the CCP maintained the preexisting KMT policy of labeling the disparate oasis-based Turkic Muslims as "Uyghurs."<sup>25</sup> The CCP's nationality policy has since, in the interest of establishing and maintaining control, been central in fostering a sense of Uyghur nationhood among these various groups.<sup>26</sup> Competing histories about the origins of the Uyghurs have since arisen, with PRC official histories emphasizing Xinjiang as a part of China since antiquity, while Uyghur nationalist accounts insist that the Uyghurs have been a proud and unified nation since ancient times.<sup>27</sup> However, Uyghur nationalism has been a form of identity propagated by political motivations, both by the Chinese government's nationality policies aimed at categorizing Uyghurs for the sake of control and by Uyghur national separatists, who have try to draw on Uyghur national identity as a mechanism to unite the

<sup>23</sup> Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.302.

<sup>24</sup> Dru Gladney, "The Chinese Program of Development and Control," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp.104-106, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Rudelson and Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.303.

<sup>27</sup> Gardner Bovington, "Contested Histories," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.359, 363.

various Uyghur peoples against the encroachment of the Han Chinese. It is important to note that the Uyghur label subsumes a great deal of local, oasis-based identities and a wide cultural variation into one single grouping, making the few common unifying threads of Uyghur identity, Islamic practice and the Uyghur language, critical markers of any perceived national identity.

Uyghur national separatism as a political movement become increasingly important during the early 1990s, when the fall of the Soviet Union resulted in the emergence of independent, predominantly Muslim Central Asian states to the immediate west of Xinjiang. The creation of new Central Asian states had a substantial "demonstration effect" on the Uyghur population of Xinjiang, who increasingly agitated for greater regional autonomy or outright independence.<sup>28</sup> Public outcry against the status quo began to manifest in university student protests, the dissemination of alternative histories concerning Uyghur heroes and myths of origins, which conflicted with Chinese official regional histories, and increasingly frequent popular unrest.<sup>29</sup> Beginning in 1988, a wave of demonstrations in Yining (by Kazakhs), Urumqi, and Yarkand was followed by a major uprising in Baren during April 1990. The Baren uprising was unusually large and a reported 6,000 Uyghurs were killed in its suppression by security forces.<sup>30</sup> In response to the unrest, the PRC placed tighter restrictions on Islamic practice, expelling foreign *imams*, shutting down unregistered mosques and religious schools, and forcing all registered *imams* to sign pledges of loyalty to the Chinese government. Chinese authorities, in an attempt to avoid alienating the local population, granted some religious concessions, permitting flights from Urumqi to Saudi Arabia for authorized pilgrimages to Mecca and allowing the continued practice of Islam at PRA-sanctioned mosques.<sup>31</sup> These efforts, which involved both religious restrictions and concessions, should be recognized as a state-sponsored attempt to define Islam into legal, legitimate and illegal, illegitimate forms. Clearly, legitimate or 'true' Islam was associated with religious practices as carried out by the officially-sanctioned PRA organizations, and acts of religious observance that did not fall under the PRA umbrella were illegal, subversive, or foreign - jihadist or Wahhabist elements.

These initial attempts seemed to have only limited effect in reducing the level of social unrest, however, as demonstrations and uprisings persisted in the following years.<sup>32</sup> In 1996, the Chinese government initiated the Strike Hard campaign against separatists, seizing weapons caches, tightening restrictions on Islamic publications, arresting tens of thousands of religious students and accused separatists, and closing unregistered mosques and religious schools. Brent Hierman (2007) observes that the number of "contentious acts" increased

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<sup>28</sup> Eric Hyer, "China's Policy towards Uighur Nationalism," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, April 2006, p.75.

<sup>29</sup> Dru Gladney, "Responses to Chinese Rule: Patterns of Cooperation and Opposition," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.379.

<sup>30</sup> Brent Hierman, "The Pacification of Xinjiang: Uighur Protest and the Chinese State, 1988-2002," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 54, No. 3, May/June 2007, p.49, 54.

<sup>31</sup> Hierman, p.52.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

sharply after the initiation of the Strike Hard campaign but then declined sharply by the end of 1999. He suggests that the campaign and its heavy-handed and repressive tactics were successful in the shorter term goal of eliminating the "wave of contention in the late 1990s," but may have unified the Uyghur population against the Chinese state by providing it with "shared grievances" that transcend regional, socio-economic and demographic differences within the Uyghur community, making efforts to pacify and control the region much more problematic.<sup>33</sup> During this wave of repression, the Chinese government, as noted by Hierman, may well have contributed to solidifying Uyghur nationalism. By distinguishing Islamic practices as being either under the narrow definition allowed by sanctioned PRA activities or else illegal, subversive, and subject to repression, Chinese authorities likely persecuted a great deal of otherwise apolitical unregistered household religious practitioners, unnecessarily upsetting residents uninvolved or unaware of the separatist movement, and framing its attempt to suppress separatism as a perceived attempt to eliminate Islam.

### **Official Atheism and the New Uyghur Elite**

Throughout most of its nearly 60-year occupation of Xinjiang, the CCP has worked to develop a class of local Uyghur elites who loyally embrace the party's socialist vision for the region who might contribute to local governance. These local leaders could legitimize the PRC's presence in the region by presenting the local Chinese government as multicultural and open to talented individuals from local ethnicities and not simply a Han Chinese imperial occupation. As noted by Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman (2004), during the history of the CCP since 1949, the party has viewed religion as a backward and reactionary element, and in its governance of Xinjiang, worked to replace the traditionally important leadership rule of the *ulama* within Uyghur society, with that of a more modern, enlightened and secular class of Uyghur leaders.<sup>34</sup> This emerging class of Uyghur officials, however, has enjoyed limited respect and legitimacy in the eyes of the wider Uyghur population as the result of Uyghur officials' real and perceived lack of authority within the PRC's political apparatus relative to Han Chinese officials, with Uyghur officials generally limited to the lowest levels of the provincial government, and also their inability to openly espouse their faith in Islam, an important component of Uyghur national identity. This delegitimizes their claim to be 'true' Uyghurs and excludes them from participating in community-wide religious activities, making them perceived as cultural outsiders. Through this process, informal and popularly practiced Islam might better be integrated into the Chinese state apparatus and become a force of stability in support of the existing regime rather than a fueling element for revolutionary or separatist movements. Should Uyghur officials and CCP cadres be allowed to openly espouse their faith in Islam, they might become better connected to the wider Uyghur community and assume greater legitimacy and

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp.58-61.

<sup>34</sup> Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. Frederick S. Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp.332-333.

influence, attracting others to 'buy into' the Chinese state, and allowing the Xinjiang provincial and local government to become more responsive to local needs, and with more local support, more capable of combating the appeal of separatism.

After the PLA took control of Xinjiang in 1949, the PRC created a "unified Xinjiang Provincial People's Government" but only gradually replaced preexisting non-CCP administrators. In the 1950s, the CCP recruited and trained non-Han party members who increasingly came to assume more power in Xinjiang as former ETR and KMT officials were eliminated in purges. Non-Han cadres generally assumed low-level local positions within the regional government, with Han dominating vice-chairmanships and top provincial positions.<sup>35</sup> Gardner Bovingdon (2004) argues that Uyghur cadres brought into the CCP have held relatively little actual decision-making power: "through careful selection, training and promotion," Uyghur cadres have been given relatively little autonomous decision-making power but are rather used to "announce the party's unpopular policies" and reduce the perception that it is Han Chinese who alone rule Xinjiang and not local peoples.<sup>36</sup> Bovingdon notes that while the Chinese state has incorporated many non-Han officials into its governing structure, non-Han officials, in addition to being concentrated at the lower levels of government (county-level or below), have had much more limited involvement within the more powerful CCP political hierarchy compared to Han Chinese, underrepresented in proportion to their share of Xinjiang's population. While non-Han citizens reportedly make up more than 60% of the total Xinjiang population, in 1994, non-Han party membership was 36.7%, a slight reduction from the 38.4% proportion in 1987.<sup>37</sup> Bovingdon notes that in interviews, Uyghurs and Han Chinese alike have been aware of the CCP's tendency to preference Han cadres over their Uyghur counterparts, with Han members generally approving of this practice and Uyghur members "strongly object(ing)."<sup>38</sup> In a 2001 survey carried out in Xinjiang, Herbert S. Yee found that while a large number of Uyghur (37.3%) and Han (56.8%) respondents considered "mutual misunderstanding" as the main reason for "conflicts among nationality groups in the working unit," a comparable number (34.5%) of Uyghurs polled reported "that Hans do not respect minorities" was the main reason. A substantially lower number of Hans (22.3%) gave the answer ("Hans do not respect minorities") when posed the same question.<sup>39</sup> The results are not specific to government officials and cadres but nevertheless reflect a common perception held by many Uyghurs that their Han counterparts do not show them equal respect. The perception that Uyghur and other non-Han cadres and state officials face discrimination within state and CCP institutions

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<sup>35</sup> James A. Millward, pp.237-239.

<sup>36</sup> Gardner Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent," *Policy Studies* Vol. 11, 2004, p.28.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang," p.30.

<sup>39</sup> Herbert S. Yee, "Ethnic Consciousness and Identity: A Research Report on Uyghur – Han Relations in Xinjiang," *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 6, No.1, February 2005, p.42.

and are subservient to Han Chinese officials, the ultimate decision-makers, erodes the perceived legitimacy of Uyghur elites who do cooperate with the state, and may reduce their morale and loyalty to the PRC.

The Chinese government is clearly not unaware of the benefits of incorporating ethnic minorities into CCP and government offices and has taken some action in that direction. In his 2008 study, "Ethnic Minority Elites in China's Party-State Leadership," Cheng Li (2008) has noted the PRC government's dedicated attempts to bring non-Han into its leadership in recent years. The five ethnic minority autonomous regions, including Xinjiang with its Uyghur governor, Nur Bekri, have governors from ethnic minority groups. The most powerful positions within the provincial governments, the CCP secretaries, however, are all occupied by Han Chinese cadres.<sup>40</sup> Li also notes that every provincial-level government except Xinjiang has a non-CCP vice governor. He attributes this notable exception to PRC fears of separatism in the region, which makes assurances of political loyalty, in the form of CCP membership, more important.<sup>41</sup> Li's investigation also reveals that as of 2008, two Uyghurs have risen to prominent high-ranking positions within the PRC government, Ismail Tiliwaldi, Vice-Chair of the National People's Congress (NPC), and Abdulahat Aburixit, Vice Chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).<sup>42</sup> The author concludes that "top Chinese leaders have recognized the value of having ethnic minority cadres serve in the Party-state elite, both for propaganda purposes as well as to inspire minority peoples to view the system as containing opportunities for their own advancement and therefore work within the system rather than against it."<sup>43</sup> In his discussion of the more volatile regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, Li however suggests, in concurrence with Bovingdon and others that the PRC leadership has dealt with fears of separatism by leaving Han Chinese cadres in command of the most important decision-making posts in these two regions.<sup>44</sup> Li's analysis is instructive in this investigation; it reveals that while the PRC has progressed substantially in incorporating ethnic minority cadres into the country's leadership, increasing the 10,000 total of non-Han party members in 1950 to nearly 3 million in 2007,<sup>45</sup> and realized the necessity of incorporating minorities into the governmental and political leadership, it has viewed Xinjiang (and Tibet) with particular suspicion and maintained Han-domination of key posts.

The general suspicion of the CCP towards Uyghur cadres was also revealed in 'Document No.7,' released by the CCP Central Committee in 1996 before the initiation of the Strike Hard campaign, which implicitly questioned the loyalty of non-Han cadres. It suggested that in the interest of combating national separatism, local governments should be restructured to include more cadres

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<sup>40</sup> Cheng Li, "Ethnic Minority Elites in China's Party-State Leadership: An Empirical Assessment," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 25, Summer 2008, p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.5.

from the PLA and the *bingtuan* (the construction corps composed of resettled Hans), essentially assigning 'more loyal' Han cadres to the county and township governments. The document also advises the training and resettlement of "a large number of Han cadres who love Xinjiang" from other places in China to Xinjiang.<sup>46</sup> Both measures suggest that local non-Han cadres are of dubious loyalty to the state, and the PRC's interests in averting separatism would be benefited by placing more Han cadres in more influential positions within Xinjiang. These initiatives reflect a deeper ethnic bias that Hans are more politically loyal than other non-Hans, specifically Uyghurs. This wide preference for Han party members within the Xinjiang provincial government and CCP and general suspicion towards Uyghur officials contributes to undermining the local legitimacy of the PRC, which appears as biased towards non-Han cadres and government officials. To foster the popular perception that ethnic minorities have opportunities and a role to play in the Chinese government, PRC leaders should make more of an effort to promote non-Han leaders in the CCP and the state into real decision-making positions, and train its officials to curb their blatant bias against non-Han cadres in internal documents and discussions. Reducing the accepted perception among PRC officials that non-Han cadres are of questionable political loyalty is crucial to integrating and legitimizing the local Uyghur cadres.

One of the PRC's points of emphasis in better integrating Xinjiang into the Chinese state has been to encourage regional economic development, assuming that increasing economic growth will improve the standard of living for average people and dull the appeal of national separatists. Ironically, however, the geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic inequalities that have come with economic growth may well be contributing to isolating better-integrated Uyghur elites away from the wider Uyghur community. Clearly, the economic reforms of the post-Mao era have benefited citizens throughout China, not to the exclusion of Xinjiang, and many Uyghurs and other residents have reaped substantial material rewards from the expanding economic opportunities. During 1978-2000, Xinjiang's GDP has grown rapidly, at an average of 10.3% per year, exceeding the PRC's overall annual growth of 9.5% during the same period.<sup>47</sup> Dru Gladney (2004) identifies the development of the emerging class of Xinjiang residents, including many Uyghurs, that has benefited from the reforms of the Deng period and the resulting economic development in the region. These residents have typically been loyal to the Beijing government and "generally share the government's vision of a modernized, developed Xinjiang."<sup>48</sup> They have served as public officials, party cadres, and employees of public and private ventures. Gladney suggests these loyal citizens have been less likely to accept criticism of the Chinese state or support notions of political separatism. The scholar notes, however, that "given the lack of public polling or uncensored media in the region, it is difficult to ascertain if these supporters of

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<sup>46</sup> Millward, p.342.

<sup>47</sup> Calla Wiemer, "The Economy of Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. Frederick S. Starr, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p.164.

<sup>48</sup> Gladney, p.378.

Beijing's policies are a silent majority or a tiny minority.<sup>49</sup> Gladney's observation reveals that economic and social incentives have drawn at least a small segment of Xinjiang residents towards integration into the PRC system, with many joining the CCP and/or taking leadership positions. These 'loyalist' Uyghur elites, however, likely represent a thin sliver of the Uyghur population that has benefited substantially from the region's economic growth. Because the economic growth in Xinjiang has been distributed unequally according to geography and ethnicity, with wealthier Han, who generally live in more economically-developed urban areas, and poorer Turkic peoples, who concentrate more in the less developed countryside,<sup>50</sup> it is apparent that many affluent Uyghurs are geographically isolated from the larger Uyghur population. The urban Uyghur elites concentrate in Han-dominated workplaces, evidenced by the fact that Hans dominate nonagricultural jobs (59.9%) compared to non-Hans (30.1%) and that the Uyghur population is frequently *not* self-employed – recent polls show that only 15.99% of Uyghurs are self-employed (compared to 25.33% among the Han). This suggests that while the new Uyghur elites may be well connected to Hans in the workplace, well-integrated into the Chinese state, and loyal to the PRC, their influence on average Uyghurs is limited by their relative isolation from the wider Uyghur community in terms of socio-economic class, income, industry and geographic region.

Uyghur cadres and government officials may also come increasingly isolated from the larger Uyghur community in terms of language. According to James A. Millward (2007), since the beginning of the 2000s, the multilingual education system in Xinjiang, which allowed for teaching in languages other than Chinese, most frequently Uyghur, was reformed to encourage more use of Mandarin.<sup>51</sup> Xinjiang University, in 2002, abandoned its bilingual approach that offered coursework in Chinese and Uyghur and announced it would be teaching classes only in Chinese, and a number of Uyghur-language schools were reportedly merged with Chinese-language schools.<sup>52</sup> The initiative, which was justified by PRC officials as giving students from Xinjiang greater opportunity to study and work in other areas of China, led to condemnations from overseas Uyghur groups that the Chinese government was trying to eliminate the Uyghur language.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of the intentions of the Chinese government, any effort to end the teaching of Uyghur in schools and universities will have the effect of reducing Uyghur fluency among many of the well-educated Uyghur youth who will fill the future ranks of the Chinese government in Xinjiang. Should these future cadres and officials have a diminished ability to communicate with average Uyghurs in their native language, they will be even further culturally isolated from the greater Uyghur community, and become unable to fulfill their potential ability to bridge divisions between PRC governmental institutions and the local population and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Wiemer, pp.177-178.

<sup>51</sup> Millward, p.345.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

better communicate and address the grievances of the Uyghur population to the regional government.

In addition to their lack of political authority within the PRC's political apparatus and their geographic and socio-economic separation from rural populations, Uyghur cadres and state officials are also, in the eyes of the larger Uyghur community, delegitimized by the official CCP requirement that they must publicly advocate atheism and reject Islam.<sup>54</sup> This restriction exists because despite the expansion of religious freedom for average citizens in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, CCP members were specifically forbidden from believing in religion. "A Communist Party member cannot be a religious believer; s/he cannot take part in religious activities. Any member who persists in going against this proscription should be told to leave the Party."<sup>55</sup> Bovingdon (2004) has pointed out that since 1978, these restrictions have not been entirely effective, and amidst the loosening restrictions on religion, many Muslim CCP cadres had become religiously observant. The Xinjiang regional government, concerned with the proliferation of religious belief within its ranks, issued a document in 1997 asserting that CCP members and students, as well, enjoyed only one of the constitution's religious freedoms, "the freedom not to believe" in religion.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, the CCP has maintained its basic assumption that religious belief and party loyalty are mutually exclusive elements, and an openly religious CCP member or government official faces expulsion from office and the loss of his/her position. Since the more recent reemphasis on deterring Uyghur (and other Muslim) cadres from practicing religion has corresponded with the Strike Hard campaigns against national separatists, it can be assumed that the CCP leadership has linked Islamic practice among party and government officials with disloyalty to the PRC and potential sympathy for the separatist movement. While it is difficult to determine how effective the CCP anti-religious campaign has actually been among its Uyghur officials and party members, it is clear that the party has made it very difficult for the official Uyghur elites to publicly join the Uyghur community religious rituals, such as prayers at official or unofficial mosques, the observance of Ramadan of the *hajj*, or the attendance of religious schools, contributing to the perception that they are not 'real' Uyghurs.

To enforce its ban on religious participation among CCP members and government officials, which was particularly restrictive during the Strike Hard campaigns, the Xinjiang CCP has carried out lectures promoting atheism and distributed anti-religious "educational materials," distributed books and TV programs highlighting 'heroic' CCP cadres who had stopped illegal Islamic leaders from preaching and illegal mosques from being built, and taken members on trips to local sites and Beijing as alternatives to pilgrimages to local

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<sup>54</sup> Fuller and Lipman, pp.332-3.

<sup>55</sup> Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, "The People's Republic of China: Document 19, the Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period," March 31, 1982.

<sup>56</sup> XUAR Party Committee Propaganda Bureau, ed. 1997. *Minzu tuanjie jiaoyu duben* ('A reader on education in *minzu* unity'), (Ürümci: Xinjiang Qingshaonian Chubanshe), quoted in Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang," p.35.



Sufi shrines or the *hajj*.<sup>57</sup> CCP members and state employees are likewise prevented from attending mosque and participating in religious holidays and festivals, such as the holy month of Ramadan.<sup>58</sup> Fuller and Lipman have heard reports that government employees, cadres and others have been presented with 'specially prepared meals' to tempt them to break their Ramadan fasting. Should they refuse to eat the meals, these government employees are reportedly "subjected to ridicule or even lose their positions."<sup>59</sup> These actions restrict the ability of CCP cadres and government officials from practicing Islam and are designed to create a working environment hostile to religious belief.

In addition to forbidding Islamic belief among CCP party members, the PRC official policies have implemented the teaching of anti-religious lectures and lessons taught in public schools and universities and banned religious instruction and observance for minors, including activities carried out by registered religious organizations. The ban on religious education for minors is legally justified under Document 19, which states "every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion and also the freedom *not* to believe in religion" (emphasis added).<sup>60</sup> Persons under 18 are deemed not sufficiently mature to independently decide whether or not to believe in religion and giving them instruction would deprive them of their freedom *not* to believe. As a result, CCP regulations forbid that children be given religious instruction or take part in religious rituals,<sup>61</sup> and signs are posted at the entrances of mosques stating that minors are not to be admitted entry.<sup>62</sup> Fuller and Lipman report that state security forces in Xinjiang have attended nighttime gatherings during Ramadan to ensure that children are not fasting or receiving Islamic teachings.<sup>63</sup> Anti-religious education in schools is standard. An examination of school textbooks used in Xinjiang revealed that they specifically stated that students were not free to believe in religion and "teenagers must become atheists."<sup>64</sup> The aim of these efforts among the youth is to develop a secular, 'modern' way of thinking among the younger generations and develop a class of future leaders who reject religious ideas.

Religious restrictions on Uyghur cadres and government employees and the CCP's official anti-religious ideology force them to make a hard decision, choosing between loyalty to the Chinese state and the party and their adherence to Islam, an important part of their Uyghur identity. Their exclusion from public Islamic rituals isolates cadres and officials from the wider Uyghur Islamic community delegitimizes their status as authentic Uyghurs in the eyes of many others. Fuller and Lipman have suggested that with the arrival of many

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 90-91.

<sup>58</sup> Waite, pp.255-256.

<sup>59</sup> Fuller and Lipman, p.338.

<sup>60</sup> Central Committee of the CCP, 1982.

<sup>61</sup> Fuller and Lipman, p.338.

<sup>62</sup> Millward, p.343.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang," p.35.

Han Chinese migrants into Xinjiang, many Uyghurs believe that their culture and religion are under serious threat. As a result, they have placed special importance on those cultural characteristics that distinguish themselves from the Hans. Most prominent among those distinguishing Uyghur characteristics is Islam (and also speaking Uyghur), and attending mosque and engaging in other public religious rituals is "consciously recognized as a means of reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Uyghur community from the dominant Han population and the Chinese state."<sup>65</sup> The arrival of increasing numbers of Hans, which has been encouraged by PRC policies, has provided the Uyghur population with a very clear 'other' from which to define itself. Because Uyghur cadres and government officials are forbidden from practicing Islam, they cannot engage in community-wide religious rituals and their close working relationship with Han Chinese in a Han-dominated government blurs their connection to the Uyghur community and their very status as Uyghurs. Their collaboration with the local government thus loses its status as a source of respect and indicates to some that they have rejected Islam and turned from their fellow Uyghurs. Incidents of violence in recent months may point towards resentment against those Uyghurs who have joined the CCP, the government or the security forces. In August and September 2008, Uyghur militants, who denounce them as "collaborators with the ethnic Han Chinese", have frequently targeted Uyghur state officials, cadres, and members of the security forces.<sup>66</sup> While it is hard to determine the local population's support for these acts of violence, it is noteworthy that many attacks by Uyghur separatists have been aimed not only at Han Chinese cadres and security forces but also fellow Uyghurs who have cooperated with the regional government.

When assessing the role that Islam has played in defining Uyghur national identity and distinguishing Uyghurs from Han Chinese, it is instructive to compare the social status of the Uyghurs as compared to Huis, China's largest Muslim nationality. Huis, like the Uyghurs, are identified by their collective adherence to Islam, but have not faced religious repression in recent years to the extent that Uyghurs have. With their population scattered throughout China, historical interactions between Hui and Han Chinese stretching back over 700 to 800 years have been frequent and the Huis have adopted many Han Chinese customs and become integrated into the Chinese state.<sup>67</sup> Because Huis are better integrated and are not connected to a substantial piece of outlying territory, forming a majority only in tiny Ningxia, the Chinese state has not suppressed the Huis out of fear of political separatism. Huis are generally considered politically loyal and because they are Muslim co-religionists with the Uyghurs, Han Chinese rulers have, since the mid-1800s, viewed Huis as the "ideal cultural intermediaries" between themselves and the Uyghurs.<sup>68</sup> The CCP government has likewise sought to make use of the Huis' intermediary position

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<sup>65</sup> Fuller and Lipman, p.339.

<sup>66</sup> Edward Wong and Huang Yuanxi, "Uighurs on Both Sides of Conflict in China," *New York Times*, September 3, 2008, Section A, Foreign Desk, p.9.

<sup>67</sup> Rudelson and Jankowiak, pp.311-312

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

to reduce ethnic tensions in Xinjiang and better integrate the Uyghurs into the Chinese state. The effort, however, has had mixed results. The Uyghurs, Hans, and Hui have lived in separate communities within Xinjiang, with some ethnic boundaries rarely being crossed. Uyghurs, for example, often refuse to eat meat prepared by Hui butchers, because they believe it has not been prepared purely, and the two groups practice Islam in different mosques and study at different religious schools.<sup>69</sup> The Uyghurs often view Huis with suspicion, believing that the many cultural and linguistic connections between Hans and Huis (with many Huis using Chinese as a first language) will result in the Huis backing the Hans over the Uyghurs during times of conflict.<sup>70</sup> The Huis' high level of assimilation within the Chinese state and their adoption of Mandarin have therefore reduced the salience of their shared religious background with the Uyghurs. Characteristics such as speaking Uyghur, performing community-wide religious activities (which the Huis observe separately), and sharing a common sense of Uyghur history mark one's Uyghur identity. By speaking Mandarin, mixing more frequently with Han Chinese than Uyghurs in daily interactions, and living in largely urban isolation from the wider Uyghur community, Huis clearly stand apart, and a larger pan-Islamic community combining the two groups has not formed. Ironically, many of the same characteristics that distinguish Huis from Uyghurs likewise separate the urban Uyghur elites, who serve as CCP cadres and government officials, from the wider Uyghur community. Uyghurs who work in government are additionally isolated by their inability to openly observe Islam, denying them the one tenuous bond that connects average Uyghur and Hui citizens. The Mandarin-speaking urban Uyghurs who have integrated into the Chinese state and serve as its functionaries, are as a result, described by many in Xinjiang as "the thirteenth minority" – neither Han nor Uyghur but an entirely different group altogether.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

In its administration of Xinjiang, the Chinese state has shown an appreciation for the value of co-opting local Uyghur elites into the government ranks, demonstrated by its well-established efforts to recruit and train Uyghur cadres and assign them to posts in the CCP and the Xinjiang regional government. The PRC has, however, adopted incoherent and ineffective policies with regards to both Islam and Uyghur nationalism. While implementing a Bolshevik-style nationality policy that attempts to unify a heterogeneous group of local identities under the single national label of 'Uyghur,' it has worked to cultivate a common sense of identity among the Uyghurs. The Uyghurs, however, have few unifying markers that transcend the entire grouping other than Islam, the Uyghur language, and an emerging sense of an imagined collective history. While promoting identification with a group defined largely by religion, the PRC has simultaneously deployed intermittent waves of religious repression and categorically denied the class of Uyghur cadres it has cultivated the ability to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.313.

practice Islam, isolating them from the Uyghur general public, and challenging their perceived identification as 'real' Uyghurs. In its repressive Strike Hard campaigns, the Chinese state has only highlighted these divisions by engaging in the widespread persecution of unregistered Islam, failing to distinguish separatist activities from apolitical household religious observances. In these campaigns of repression, Uyghur cadres and security forces have been deployed in the clampdown on unregistered Islam, while the Chinese government, in an attempt to assure the loyalty of these officials, has targeted them in efforts to root out Islam from within its ranks, stepping up anti-religious education and strengthening in-party directives that ban the practice of religion. These efforts aimed at stamping out unregistered Islam and promoting atheism among CCP cadres and government officials are inherently self-defeating. The Chinese state is effectively framing itself as an enemy of Islam and making religion a wedge issue between itself and political separatists. Uyghur cadres, the Chinese state's best link into the Uyghur community, are forbidden from practicing Islam, significantly hobbling them in their battle with political separatists for the hearts and minds of the general Uyghur population. If the Chinese state persists in its ideologically motivated repression of religion within its ranks, it will make the control and management of Xinjiang unnecessarily costly. By denying itself the alternative of cultivating or co-opting respected Uyghur community leaders, the Chinese state makes violent state repression the only viable option for maintaining control of the region, accruing substantial costs in funds, manpower, and the state's image abroad as it manages Xinjiang as a police state.

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