

The Muslims of China and the “Frontier Question” after Empire:

Revisiting Ma Zhongying's 1931 Invasion of Republican Xinjiang

by

Paul Gosselin

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Paul Gosselin

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Introduction

The Gobi Desert frontiers of Gansu province, in China's northwest, traditionally demarcated the westernmost extent of many Chinese-speaking societies and empires.¹ A Manchurian royal house conquered the Chinese Ming empire in the mid-17th century, and proceeded to mount unprecedented conquests in the Central Asian region today known as Xinjiang, but many dissident Chinese scholars expressed horror at the outsider Manchus' incorporation of culturally alien and environmentally "impure" lands with their homeland.² On the walls of the Jiayuguan fortress, the end of the Ming-era Great Wall between Gansu and outlying steppes, travelling Chinese officials anonymously scrawled lamentations about their new postings, sometimes exile, to unfamiliar regions far away from home in the expanding Manchu, or "Qing", empire.³ As Chinese subjects participated in the Qing dynasty's march into Xinjiang, the Jiayuguan fortress embodied the geographic and psychological boundaries of Gansu's desert fringes, but in 1931 its inhabitants witnessed a very different kind of march – not a coerced march of officials, soldiers, and convicts, but an independent expedition of Chinese fighters ostensibly seeking to reunify Xinjiang and its peoples with their national homeland.

The diverse movement of peoples and ideas across the expanded Qing realm had invested the frontiers of Gansu province with other symbolic and administrative meanings. While for some, Gansu remained a natural border between civilization and barbarism, it was now also for many others an interconnected meeting-point of people and place, between the Chinese-speaking subjects of former Ming provinces in the "interior" (*neidi*), and the native, primarily Turkic-

¹ See Map 1 in Appendix B.

² Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 2nd ed, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 6-19; James Millward, *Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp.

³ Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *The Gobi Desert*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946, pp. 15-16.

speaking Muslim subjects of the “New Dominion” (*Xinjiang*). After the abdication of the Qing imperial dynasty and the establishment of a republican state in 1912, new national authorities in Beijing reimagined the lands of the former Qing as the natural abode of a “Han”⁴ Chinese nation-state. The armed march of a regional Chinese army from Gansu into Xinjiang coincided with debates in China’s east-coast metropolises over the “frontier question” (*bianjiang wenti*) of what should be done to reunify and defend the post-Qing borders of the Chinese nation. Even as national authority in republican China fractured between rival militaries and provincial regimes in the 1910s and 1920s, regional actors continued to intervene in contested and breakaway borderlands, purportedly in the name of national unity and on behalf of distant nominal governments in Beijing.

However, the 1931 intervention into Xinjiang evoked a series of puzzling contradictions which coloured contemporary portrayals of the event. In contrast to Tibet and Mongolia during the empire-republic transition, where Qing-era royal elites attempted to separate from the new republic, Xinjiang remained under the control of a Han Chinese provincial government, without significant local attempts at regional independence. The invasion from Gansu pitted one Chinese armed force against another provincial Chinese military, both claiming to rule Qing-era frontiers on behalf of the national government. Moreover, the Gansu fighters claimed to defend Xinjiang’s native Muslims against provincial misrule, initially helping local Turkic rebels to besiege the town of Qumul after government expropriations and Han settlement in the region provoked violent protest. Thus, from the perspective of Han provincial officials in Xinjiang, the Gansu expedition’s alliance with Turkic rebels who attacked Han Chinese homesteaders and garrisons

⁴ The term “Han” originated as a political designation for subjects of the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220). As later dynasties with shifting borders varyingly adapted the term, “Han” evolved a series of complex ethnic, administrative, and geopolitical connotations. By the Qing era, “Han” referred to Chinese-speaking subjects from former Ming provinces who used Chinese script.

in eastern Xinjiang undermined Chinese authority.

The expedition was undertaken at the behest of Chinese-speaking Muslims, an ambiguous ethno-cultural group in the northwest who long exasperated Qing imperial and later republican authorities. Although often indistinguishable in language and physical appearance from non-Muslim Han neighbours, religious and cultural differences overlapped with communal and political conflicts in the Qing and republican eras to produce strong tensions between Han Chinese and Chinese-speaking Muslim communities in early 20th century China. As a result, traditional tropes of Muslim otherness and violence in the northwest filtered contemporary reactions to the Gansu Muslim intervention in Xinjiang. Since the Qing, non-Muslim rulers in Xinjiang worried that Chinese-speaking Muslims, concentrated in Gansu and migrating west in droves, would conspire against imperial authority with the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang's oases and steppes. Now, embattled Chinese authorities denounced the invaders from Gansu as fanatics who massacred Han and sought to separate Xinjiang from Chinese rule, invoking memories of 19th-century rebellions across the Qing empire's west when Chinese-speaking Muslims briefly established their own states. State officials and non-Muslim contemporaries across republican China likewise branded the leader of the Gansu Muslim invasion, Ma Zhongying, as an anti-Chinese rebel and unstable militarist without any consistent ideological goals.

Although caricatures of Muslim warlordism predominate in academic renditions of the 1931 intervention, this paper alternatively argues that they distract from other aspects and motivations behind the Gansu Muslim invasion. The dominant perspective of Ma Zhongying's invasion as a military product of the times in early republican China, when rival "warlords" contested power in endless self-interested feuds, consequently implies that it was unconnected to

other kinds of intellectual and political developments in Chinese Muslim societies.⁵ By contrast, this paper re-appraises several such intellectual and political trends among Chinese-speaking Muslim elites in northwestern China, stemming from the late Qing era, in order to argue that the 1931 invasion also represented the culmination of regional Chinese Muslim responses to the republican transition.

In this context, various Chinese-speaking Muslim actors in early republican Gansu sought to use the pretexts of geography, identity, and post-Qing “frontier questions” to negotiate their place within the Chinese nation-state. Hailing from a minority cultural group in China’s northwest periphery which Qing-era officials and republican-era nationalists long regarded with distrust and antagonism, Ma Zhongying and his fellow Chinese-speaking Muslims seem unlikely purveyors of Chinese nationalism along Gansu’s post-imperial borderlands. However, I contend that the evolution of late Qing imperial authority and early republican authority in Gansu and Xinjiang facilitated the emergence of autonomous Chinese-speaking Muslim elites who relied on the military as the main avenue for local empowerment, and positioned themselves as loyal intermediaries between Chinese political centers and the northwest’s distant frontier peoples such as Mongols, Tibetans, and various Muslim groups. Ma Zhongying and his army not only borrowed from these political precedents in order to legitimate their independent intervention into Xinjiang. They also actively formed part of an emergent set of notions about Muslim identity and interests in China that advocated Muslim inclusion in the Chinese nation-state, but tried to assert subnational ties with Xinjiang Muslims and control over Xinjiang in order to negotiate regional autonomy.

⁵ Forbes, Andrew D.W, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 55; Xu Xianlong, *Zhu Ma Junfa Jituan yu Xibei Musilin Shehui*, Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2001, p. 77.

Literature Review

The historiography of republican-era China overlooks how Chinese-speaking Muslims specifically engaged with the post-Qing “frontier question”. Within the current literature on how Chinese nationalists in the republic sought to reclaim, militarily and discursively, the lands and peoples of the Qing dynasty, leading accounts such as those of James Leibold and Hsiao-ting Lin primarily focus on Mongolia and Tibet, with secondary to little attention on Muslims in Gansu and Xinjiang.⁶ While their approaches largely filter the “frontier question” through a core-periphery binary, Leibold acknowledges the importance of “trans-frontiersmen”, such as Han Chinese who migrated to frontier territories, and through acculturation with frontier communities could negotiate between authorities and local interests.⁷ Dru Gladney also describes Chinese-speaking Muslims as “trans-frontiersmen” who migrated, travelled, and interacted with diverse frontier communities.⁸ Historians of Qing-ruled Xinjiang such as Laura Newby and James Millward acknowledge how Chinese-speaking Muslim migrants to Xinjiang played intermediary roles between imperial rulers and native Muslim subjects *within* Xinjiang. However, the idea that Chinese-speaking Muslim political and military actors outside of Xinjiang, and after the Qing, similarly served as “trans-frontiersmen” between Xinjiang and the national Chinese state is absent.

A quick survey of republican Gansu’s geography and politics exposes the need to re-center the construction of the Chinese republican state in its post-Qing northwest on the agency

⁶ Hsiao-Ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China’s Frontiers: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006; James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes became Chinese*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

⁷ Leibold pp. 181-182.

⁸ Dru C. Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality*, Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998, p. 41.

of its local Chinese-speaking Muslim actors. Gansu bordered Mongolia to the north, Xinjiang to the west, and the Kokonor region (today Qinghai province) of the Tibetan plateau to the southwest. These territories constituted former Qing dominions with majority non-Han populations, whose distance from the Chinese core exposed vulnerability to bordering European empires, and whose cultural diversity and unfamiliarity engendered anxieties over the preservation of Chinese rule. Thus, as Han republicans and nationalists in the Chinese heartland dreamed of “opening up” (*kaifa*) post-Qing frontiers with modern railroads, telegraph poles, and patriotic consciousness, their aspirations staged the geographic and cultural boundaries of Gansu’s frontiers as a major forefront in early 20th century efforts to reclaim the Qing dynasty’s former territories. Consequently, the geography of Gansu province poised its provincial elites to intervene in the northwest’s “frontier questions” and attempt to govern non-Han borderlands as a source of legitimacy in national politics. Many of these republican-era elites were originally Qing-era Muslim commanders, who hailed from the empire’s attempts to incorporate Chinese-speaking Muslims as regional delegates between the Beijing court and distant Muslim subjects, and they actively led a series of independent expeditions to reconquer breakaway Mongol and Tibetan territories in the 1910s and 1920s.

However, these Muslim-led campaigns remain absent within the larger academic story of how the Chinese nation-state managed to retain most of the Qing’s former territorial extent, especially along Gansu’s borderlands, during the empire-to-republic transition in the early 20th century. Jonathan N. Lipman shows how national fragmentation in the post-Qing republican state drove unprecedented, elite-level political and cultural integration between Chinese-speaking Muslims in the northwest and other Han actors across the Chinese interior, as various central governments and regional armies jockeyed for power, and powerful representatives of the

Muslim minority in China sought to negotiate their place in an uncertain future order.⁹ In response, I propose to analyze the ways in which Gansu Muslim officers independently intervened in “frontier issues” as a crucial part of this Muslim periphery-Chinese core integration. European travellers in republican Gansu sometimes remarked on how Chinese-speaking Muslim military authorities used campaigns against Mongol and Tibetan separatism as pretexts to justify their autonomy from Beijing.¹⁰ However, historians have not attempted to incorporate these independent, Chinese Muslim-led expeditions within the larger story of how the Chinese republic largely retained the borders of the Qing in its northwest.

The case of Chinese-speaking Muslims in Gansu and their interventions across Gansu’s frontiers is particularly interesting, given the backdrop of Han-Muslim tensions in the late Qing and early republican periods, and contemporary debates in republican-era China over whether they constituted part of the same ethno-national group as the Han Chinese. Many historians of Islam in China such as Jonathan Lipman, Matsumoto Masumi, and Anthony Garnaut describe how identities and interests among Chinese Muslim communities increasingly favoured greater integration with the Chinese nation-state by the early 20th century.¹¹ However, connections between these evolving Muslim identities and interests in republican China, and Muslim interventions into post-Qing borderlands remain under-researched.

Addressing this gap, this paper investigates Chinese Muslim-led campaigns across Gansu’s frontiers not only as a strategy of preserving local Muslim power and autonomy, but also as part of what Peter Zarrow termed a process of “translating” traditional imperial authority

⁹ Jonathan N. Lipman, “Ethnicity and Politics in Republican China: The Ma Family Warlords of Gansu,” *Modern China* 10, no. 3 (1984), pp. 288, 311.

¹⁰ Robert B. Ekvall, *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939, pp. 24-25;

¹¹ Lipman, “Ethnicity and Politics,” pp. 286, 310-311.

according to new republican and nationalist paradigms in non-Han borderlands.¹² Similar to how interventions from Gansu into Mongol and Tibetan frontiers positioned Chinese Muslim militaries as interlocutors of Chinese national identity in post-empire borderlands, Ma Zhongying's invasion of Xinjiang, and its attempted revision of borders to carve a new autonomous Muslim unit, placed Chinese-speaking Muslims as stand-ins between Turkic Muslims and the Chinese nation-state imaginary. Many historians of the Chinese republic in the northwest rely on the "warlord" paradigm to dismiss Ma Zhongying's invasion of Xinjiang as militarily opportunistic and ideologically incoherent.¹³ Indeed, Ma Zhongying's wartime rhetoric to different audiences appeared to weave two irreconcilable threads: first, to locals, the liberation of Xinjiang's Muslims from Chinese oppression; and second, to national authorities, the preservation of Chinese rule in Xinjiang.

However, Frank Dikötter shows how the predominant academic focus on "warlordism" in republican China masks how many "warlord" leaders and militaries also sought to construct their own regimes for other purposes besides political and economic self-aggrandizement. Could stripping away the "warlord" façade from Ma Zhongying, then, reveal how his army also drew from pre-existing discourses of Muslim identities and interests in the northwest which reconciled "Muslim liberation" and "Chinese unity" as part of the same political-ideological program? Moreover, how did relations between Turkic-speaking and Chinese-speaking Muslims between Xinjiang and Gansu figure within this platform for "Muslim liberation" and "Chinese unity"?

Several recent studies point to Muslim-led attempts to establish various activist connections between Chinese Muslims in the interior and Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang to defend

¹² Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2012, p. 293.

¹³ Forbes, Andrew D.W, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 55; Xu Xianlong p. 77.

their interests during the empire-to-nation transition. For instance, Anthony Garnaut argues for the need to interrogate the possible “Turkic side[s]” of Chinese-speaking Muslims against the backdrop of centuries of cross-cultural contact across the northwest during the Qing empire.¹⁴ Fredrik Fällmann notes that while historians already acknowledge how Chinese-speaking Muslims *within* Xinjiang acted as intermediaries of Chinese provincial rule, the ways in which they functioned as political middlemen on the ground remains poorly understood.¹⁵ Building from this, David Brophy describes how Chinese-speaking Muslims in Gansu at various points in the early republic attempted to assert subnational ties to Muslims in Xinjiang, in order to stake their status as representatives of a “Muslim nationality” in China and lay claim to regional autonomy.¹⁶

However, connections between these budding contexts of Turkic-Chinese Muslim relations and Ma Zhongying’s 1931 invasion remain unacknowledged. Rather, most primary and secondary accounts concentrate on the alleged personality of Ma Zhongying as a capricious militarist to ascribe his motivations and intentions in Xinjiang to purely martial ambition, if not psychological instability.¹⁷ Other accounts from closer allies were written under conditions of political censorship after the Second World War, when Chinese national authorities sought to minimize their previous associations with Ma Zhongying’s destructive and controversial invasion in the 1930s. Thus, these sources bely the extent of premeditated political connections

¹⁴ Anthony Garnaut, “From Yunnan to Xinjiang: Governor Yang Zengxin and his Dungan Generals.” *Etudes Orientales* 25 (2008), p. 95

¹⁵ Fredrik Fällman, “Defining the Past and Shaping the Future: Reflections on Xinjiang Narratives, Uyghur-Han-Hui Relations, and the Perspectives of Research,” in *Kashgar Revisited: Uyghur Studies in Memory of Ambassador Gunnar Jarring*, eds. Ildiko Beller-Hann, Jun Jugawara, and Birgit N. Schlyter, Leiden: Brill, 2017, p. 190.

¹⁶ David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution and the Russia-China Frontier*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 239-242; Forbes p. 55; Lipman, “Ethnicity and Politics,” p. 310; Christian Tyler, *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004, pp. 98-102, 107-109; Xu Xianlong p. 77.

behind Ma Zhongying's 1931 intervention into Xinjiang, portraying Ma Zhongying as an independently-minded and self-interested warlord without any affiliations to other activist quarters.¹⁸ Nonetheless, they still expose glimpses of a much more dynamic picture of Ma Zhongying coalescing a multi-ethnic regime drawn from various local classes to launch the political reshaping of China's northwest in favour of its native Muslims.

The only published archival collection of Ma Zhongying's writings and communiques does not include any documents from before 1931.¹⁹ However, the Records of President Chiang Kai-Shek²⁰ (*Jiang Zongzheng Zongtong Wenwu*, JZZW), currently archived in Taipei, Taiwan, contain telegrams between Ma Zhongying, other regional Chinese and Turkic Muslim figures in the northwest, and the Chinese national government prior to the 1931 invasion. These documents demonstrate that many other regional Turkic and Chinese Muslim actors in the northwest also shared Ma Zhongying's goals to renegotiate local Muslim autonomy. More importantly, they also position the 1931 invasion as part of a larger, pre-existing campaign to negotiate Chinese Muslim integration with the republican nation-state.

Tracing the roots of this campaign backwards, this project argues that its origins lay in how Chinese-speaking Muslims in Gansu navigated the Qing/republican transition at the turn of the 20th century, using their geographic and political positions as intermediaries between evolving states in the Chinese interior and the diverse frontier territories bordering Gansu. Ma Zhongying's intervention in Xinjiang not only constituted a chapter in the story of how Gansu Muslims facilitated the construction of Qing imperial and Chinese republican authority in the

¹⁸ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying ru Xin sui jun jianwen," in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v. 2, ed. Yu Junsheng, pp. 72-75; Yaoleboshi [Yulwas], *Yaoleboshi Huiyilu*, Taipei: Chuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1969, pp. 82-92.

¹⁹ Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Dang'an Guan (XWZDG), ed, *Ma Zhongying zai Xinjiang dang'an shiliao xuanbian*, Urumchi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1997.

²⁰ President of China from roughly 1928 to 1949.

northwest. It also reflected how relations between Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking Muslims and Gansu's Chinese-speaking Muslim served as an important anchor in how Gansu Muslims asserted themselves as frontier power-brokers.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one addresses the development of relations between Turkic-speaking and Chinese-speaking Muslims during the Qing conquest and administration of Xinjiang in the 19th century. It describes the emergence of several native Turkic classes open to acculturation and cooperation with Chinese-speaking Muslim migrants. Chapter two argues that the evolution of Qing imperial authority, particularly in Gansu and Xinjiang, positioned an emergent and increasingly autonomous class of Chinese-speaking Muslim military elites to assume greater administrative roles in the northwest. Chapters three, four, and five relate how various Chinese-speaking Muslim actors in the interior provinces, Xinjiang, and Gansu respectively responded to revolutionary events in 1911-1912 and the abdication of the Qing, primarily as opportunities to strengthen ties across Muslim communities, and/or preserve their Qing-era authority as intermediaries in the northwest, in order to negotiate common political interests in the new republican order. Chapter six describes the advent of Muslim identity politics in the interior and particularly Gansu in the 1910s-1920s which sought to strengthen ties between Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang and Muslims in the rest of China. Finally, chapter seven details the background of Ma Zhongying's military rise in Gansu in the late 1920s and how it drew from political precedents, strategies, and issues laid out in previous chapters.

Thus, this project will challenge the present consensus surrounding the context and implications of Ma Zhongying's 1931 invasion of Xinjiang. Recognizing that the invasion did not occur within a historical void, it asks how the Gansu Muslim intervention drew from the precedents and strategies of other Muslim actors who intervened in post-imperial borderlands and initiated local regime-building efforts on behalf of central authority. Crucially, the attempts of provincial Muslim actors to legitimate their local authority as the best solutions to these "questions" facilitated, rather than obstructed, the construction of the Chinese nation-state in its northwest. Even as national power disintegrated across the Chinese republic between rival "warlords", Muslim military actors and their local regimes along Gansu's frontiers in the 1920s and 1930s served as effective stand-ins for post-imperial authority in post-Qing borderlands. They sought not only to integrate their territories with the Chinese republican state, but also to communicate Chinese national identity to local Muslim, Han, Mongol, and Tibetan populations under their control. Through detailing this historical context, this paper shows that Ma Zhongying's later 1931 invasion of Xinjiang, and his regime-building efforts that preceded it in western Gansu, formed part of a larger story of Chinese-speaking Muslims in early republican Gansu facilitating the republic's claims to former Qing territories.

Chapter One

Chinese-Turkic Muslim Encounters in Qing-Era Xinjiang (ca. 1770s-1870s)

Gansu province historically demarcated the traditional frontiers of Chinese-speaking Muslim society and of most Chinese-speaking imperial dynasties. The expansion of the Manchurian Qing empire in the eighteenth century stretched these frontiers further westwards into Central Asia with the conquest of the “New Dominion”, or Xinjiang. However, the evolution of Qing rule in nineteenth-century Xinjiang combined with local dynamics of social interaction and segregation to engender growing tensions between native Turkic and migrant Chinese communities. In particular, Qing officials alternately viewed Chinese-speaking Muslim migrants in Xinjiang as suspect renegades and as useful intermediaries, while local Turkic subjects varyingly viewed them as potential allies and as potential enemies.

These overlapping contexts of conflict and collaboration between the Qing state and its diverse Muslim subjects in Xinjiang continued to influence Chinese-Turkic Muslim relations into the early twentieth century. The republican-era attempts of Chinese-speaking Muslim actors to intervene in Turkic Muslim borderlands on behalf of the Chinese central government, culminating in Ma Zhongying’s 1931 invasion, would ultimately confront these memories of conflict, but also try to appeal to other long-standing precedents of cooperation. This chapter particularly focuses on three generalized classes in Xinjiang – paupers, aristocrats, and merchants – which form important threads in the story of encounters between Xinjiang natives and the Chinese Muslim “other”, and whose descendants emerged as important players and actors in Ma Zhongying’s 1930s campaigns. This chapter shows that Dungans were not only strangers and

rivals, but also partners and intermediaries who facilitated relationships between these three classes and other non-Muslim Chinese political actors.

The Gansu Frontier before the Creation of Xinjiang

Personal encounters between Chinese-speaking Muslims and the Turkic-speaking native Muslims of the southern Tarim Basin predated eighteenth-century Qing military conquests in modern-day Xinjiang. These exchanges produced significant religious institutions in Gansu, such as spiritual Sufi orders which continued to play important regional roles into the 20th century, but in the Tarim Basin such exchanges remained infrequent and limited until Qing conquests in the mid-18th century. During the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, Chinese-speaking Muslims, variously descended from Arab-Persian travellers and local converts to Islam, increasingly migrated to Gansu as border guards and officials, and sometimes further westwards outside the imperial realm as traders and pilgrims.²¹ In the opposite direction, the overland spread of Islam across the Tarim Basin brought Central Asian Sufi missionaries to Gansu Muslim communities by the sixteenth-century.

Several of these itinerant Central Asian missionaries initiated their Chinese-speaking disciples into new teacher-student lineages that developed into the first Chinese *menhuan*, or local Sufi orders, of Gansu. Originally based out of mosque-attached schools, the Sufi *menhuan* of Gansu evolved into larger networked institutions, managing donations, land endowments, and sites of pilgrimage. While Central Asian Sufi influence did not spread significantly to other

²¹ Anthony Garnaut, "From Yunnan," p. 97; Han Bin, Ma Sukun, and Wang Ping. *Xinjiang Huizushi Gangyao*. Urumchi: n.p., 1995, 14-20.

Along the southern Tarim Basin, Sufi ties between Gansu *menhuan* and native Turkic lineages in the Ming era remained confined to the elite level. Although the Qing conquest of Xinjiang by the 1770s gradually opened the region to more Chinese-speaking Muslim travel and migration, overall numbers of Chinese Muslim students and worshippers at Sufi sites in Xinjiang stayed relatively low.²² As the next section argues, the 19th-century Manchu administration of Xinjiang partly contributed to growing divisions between Turkic-speaking and Chinese-speaking communities. Ultimately, the legacies of Qing rule in Xinjiang significantly limited the range of possible local interactions across the language-culture divide between native Turkic Muslims and migrant Chinese Muslims, generally known as “Dungan” in the local language.

Dungans and the Qing State in Xinjiang

The Qing incorporation of the southern Tarim Basin by the 1770s as a part of Xinjiang coincided with the brief outbreak of Chinese Muslim rebellion in Gansu. As a result, the “dual identity” of Chinese Muslims as familiar Chinese speakers and as unfamiliar, and occasionally rebellious, Muslims caused Manchu Qing officials to survey the growing Dungan population in Xinjiang with concern.²³ As early as the Qing conquests of the Ming a century before, when

Muslims in Gansu resisted Manchu invaders, some Qing military officials already began viewing Muslim subjects in the northwest as a violent and potentially problematic population.²⁴

²² Thierry Zarcone, “Writing the Religious and Social History of Some Sufi Lodges in Kashgar in the 20th Century,” in *Kashgar Revisited*, p. 218.

²³ James Millward and Laura Newby, “The Qing and Islam on the Western Frontier”, in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, eds. Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 124-125; Millward, *Economy*, p. 171.

²⁴ Jonathan N. Lipman, “‘A Fierce and Brutal People’: On Islam and Muslims in Qing Law”, in *Empire at the Margins*, pp. 88-92.

Tensions within early Qing governance of Chinese Muslim subjects in the interior foreshadowed how Qing attitudes to Dungan migrants in Xinjiang later oscillated between suspicion and praise, repression and promotion. Some Manchu generals regarded Chinese Muslims in Gansu favourably for their military skills, and Chinese Muslim soldiers formed a significant bulk of Qing units that served in the conquest and garrisoning of Xinjiang in the 18th-19th centuries.²⁵ However, other Manchu and Chinese officials in the 18th-century Qing protested the military promotion of Chinese Muslims, claiming “they are basically different from ordinary folk”, and “have no loyalty to the state.”²⁶

Thus, prejudices towards the Muslim “Other” challenged early official efforts to use Gansu Muslims as frontier soldiers and commanders. Within this context, early Qing authorities in Xinjiang attempted to manage, from their view, sometimes suspect Chinese-speaking Muslim constituency comprised of Dungan soldiers, early settlers who arrived before the conquest, merchants and labourers who trailed Qing armies in search of economic opportunities, and refugees fleeing violence in Gansu.²⁷

In particular, imperial anxieties that Chinese-speaking Muslims from Gansu would conspire with native Muslims in Xinjiang against Qing rule inspired local officials’ attempts to police interactions between Turkic and Chinese Muslim subjects. When factional conflict between rival Sufi orders (*menhuan*) in Gansu escalated into violence with Qing authorities in the 1780s, Manchu officials classified Muslim populations in Gansu between “orthodox” (*zhengjiao*) and “heterodox” (*xiejiao*, literally “evil teaching”) groups, and attempted to prevent

²⁵ Han Bin pp.21-22.

²⁶ Lipman, “‘A Fierce and Brutal People’”, p. 90

²⁷ Chen Guoguang, “Huizu, Wuzibiekezu he Tata’erzu Musilin xianhou qianru Xinjiang,” in *Zhongguo Xinjiang diqu Yisilanjiao shi* v. 1, ed. Chen Huisheng, Urumchi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2000, p. 389; Millward, *Economy*, pp. 113-114, 169; Newby, “Writing the Sino-Muslims”, pp. 329-330.

“heterodox” Muslims from travelling into Xinjiang.²⁸ With the advent of greater migration from Gansu into Xinjiang, Qing officials worried that “heterodox” Muslims from the interior could incite other Muslims in Xinjiang into disobedience, and thus attempted to regulate Gansu’s borders to prevent suspicious Chinese Muslims from entering Xinjiang.²⁹

On the other hand, Manchu officials also worried about increasing tensions and local violence between settlers from the Chinese interior and Turkic natives. Qing officials generally viewed the economic migration of Han and Muslim Chinese as a leading cause of social conflict with local Turkic Muslims. Presiding over legal cases of Turkic subjects attacking and sometimes killing Han merchants in Xinjiang, Qing authorities typically blamed merchants for driving “unsophisticated” locals into poverty with exploitative commercial practices such as charging interest and forcibly seizing debts.³⁰ Although such records overwhelmingly refer to the cases of Han merchants, Manchu authorities were also aware that Dungan merchants practiced similar forms of money-lending, and enjoyed a similar reputation among Xinjiang locals as swindlers.³¹ Manchu officials thus worried about potential violence between exploitative Dungan merchants and native Muslims.³²

Presuming that the maintenance of boundaries in Xinjiang society between rationally-defined and culturally-incompatible types of subjects would preserve peace, various Qing legal codes in Xinjiang sought to identify and segregate the different “categories” (*tonglei*) of people in Xinjiang. In the past, Chinese dynasties collectively referred to their Muslim subjects as the

²⁸ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 172-173

²⁹ Millward and Newby, “The Qing and Islam”, p. 124

³⁰ Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang 1880-1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur*, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008, p. 127; Millward, *Economy*, pp. 107, 124-125; David C. Porter “Manchu Racial Identity on the Qing Frontier: Donjina and Early Twentieth-Century Ili.” *Modern China* 44, no. 1 (2018), pp. 16-18.

³¹ Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters*, p. 99; Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China*, p. 45.

³² Millward, *Economy*, pp. 174-175.

However, despite the unease with which Qing officials viewed Han-Dungan migration into Xinjiang as a potentially destabilizing force, they also recognized how Dungan migrants could serve the imperial administration of unfamiliar Muslim subjects as middlemen in commercial and military affairs. Han and Dungan merchants within local markets provided essential logistical support for Qing armies in Xinjiang in war and peacetime.³³ Local Manchu authorities preferred to regulate and tax rather than outlaw their activities.³⁴ Moreover, Dungan merchants played an especially important intermediary role between local Muslim markets and Han commercial firms as religious/cultural interlocutors with Turkic Muslims.³⁵ As a result, this emergent picture of lively commercial interactions has led several historians to challenge the extent to which local officials actually implemented such segregationist protocols on the ground. By the mid-nineteenth century, Qing authorities began lifting bans on Han-Dungan migration to various parts of Xinjiang such as the Muslim-majority “Kashgaria” region, and tentatively encouraging greater Han/Dungan settlement.³⁶ James Millward argues that Qing officials rarely enforced the formal segregation of living quarters.³⁷ The development of officially separate “Old Muslim” and “New Manchu/Han” districts in Xinjiang towns by the mid-nineteenth century resulted more from the reconstruction of naturally self-segregating urban areas destroyed during rebellion, than the top-down imposition of new divisions.³⁸

³³ Millward, *Economy*, p. 57; Millward and Newby, “The Qing and Islam,” p. 125.

³⁴ Millward, *Economy*, 89, 193.

³⁵ Kim Hodong, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 67; Millward, *Economy*, pp. 169, 174-175, 216; Millward and Newby p. 124.

³⁶ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, p. 60; Lin Enxian pp. 166, 283; Millward, *Economy*, pp. 149, 226-227.

³⁷ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 125, 127, 151.

³⁸ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 149-152, 234.

Moreover, during these rebellions in the early 1800s, when émigré Turkic princes invaded to reclaim their patrimony from Qing rule, Dungan migrants sided with Qing authorities, demonstrating effective loyalty to the imperial state. Dungans formed self-defense militias against Muslim rebels, and drew on their knowledge of local languages and societies from business dealings to serve Qing officials as wartime spies and interpreters.³⁹ In peacetime, Qing officials continued to employ them in similar intermediary roles as local police, interpreters, and customs agents.⁴⁰ As a result, some Qing officials increasingly encouraged the Dungan merchant-militia presence in southern Xinjiang as a pillar of imperial rule by the mid-1800s, even as other Qing authorities in high office continued to distrust outsider commercial penetration of an unstable frontier and viewed Chinese migrants as low-life, criminals, and potential rebels.⁴¹ Uradyn Bulag describes how Manchu frontier officials in remote regions often attempted to use local classes that interacted across legally-entrenched cultural boundaries as useful intermediaries, such as Chinese migrants in non-Chinese borderlands, despite their formal concern for segregation and inter-ethnic conflict.⁴² Thus, the reality of Chinese migrants' relative mobility among Xinjiang Muslim society afforded opportunities for Dungan subjects in particular to demonstrate their loyalty and utility to the Qing state through local commercial networks with native Muslims.

However, shifting Qing officials' attitudes towards them ironically cast them as useful intermediaries and potential subversives at the same time. Strained relations between the Qing state and Dungan communities in the northwest obstructed tentative attempts to incorporate them

³⁹ Millward, *Economy*, p. 148.

⁴⁰ Millward and Newby, "The Qing and Islam," p. 125

⁴¹ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 174, 226.

⁴² Uradyn Bulag, "Going Imperial: Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism and Nationalisms in China and Inner Asia," in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Yong, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006, p. 262.

more officially into Qing government in Xinjiang. The next section shows how the eruption of large-scale rebellion against the Qing in Xinjiang in 1864, with many Dungan garrisons and settlers leading the first uprisings, again questioned Dungan loyalties to the Manchu dynasty. Ultimately, however, as chapter two describes, it was later political events in Gansu, where other Chinese-speaking Muslim figures proved more “loyal” to the Qing, that rehabilitated the logic of Dungan intermediaries in the northwest and Xinjiang.

Conflict and Collaboration between Dungan Settlers and Xinjiang Locals

In addition to official anxieties towards Muslim loyalty, the lived experiences of Dungan migrants in Xinjiang also undermined their efficacy as intermediaries of the imperial state. Chinese migrant classes were much more mobile among local societies in Xinjiang than their strict legal categorizations suggested, but unofficial forms of segregation precluded the development of strong social ties between Chinese-speaking and local Muslims. As a result, Dungan and Turkic communities remained largely segregated and mutually suspicious throughout 19th-century Xinjiang. Thus, as some Qing officials grew more open to using Dungan intermediaries, the potential Dungan brokers of Qing rule in Xinjiang generally enjoyed limited and tense relations with native Muslim subjects.

However, some class-based contexts of interaction demonstrated how particular groups of migrants and natives across the Gansu-Xinjiang frontier could still cooperate, despite strong cultural and language divides. The elite minority of Turkic-speaking society in Xinjiang, such as aristocratic vassals of the Qing, local civil officials, and prosperous merchants who travelled in

the Chinese interior, sometimes formed lasting connections with other powerful Dungans when it suited their practical interests. Alternately, the poorest of Xinjiang's poor, such as drifters, beggars, and opium addicts, also provided another exceptional class willing to ally with Dungan outsiders during times of political crises. Nonetheless, Chinese-speaking Muslim attempts in the early republic, after the fall of the Qing in 1912, to intervene in the governance of Xinjiang and its Muslims, especially during Ma Zhongying's 1931 invasion, still had to confront and overcome other, much more prevalent legacies of tension and conflict between Dungan and Turkic Muslims stemming from the Qing era.

Dungan migrants to early 19th-century Xinjiang frequently settled in cantons closer to the more culturally familiar environs of Qing official residences and Chinese market quarters, rather than among local Turkic Muslim communities.⁴³ Dungan migrants similarly built their own separate mosques, preferring to worship within same-language congregations with fellow migrants from the same hometown.⁴⁴ Dungan mosques and residential quarters bore the name of their founders' original native locale, and offered inn services for travellers from the same region.⁴⁵ In this way, the communal functions of Dungan mosques mirrored the "native-place associations" of neighbouring Han migrants, helping new arrivals from the interior to integrate within familiar communities, and minimizing interactions with unfamiliar Turkic locals.⁴⁶

Naturally arising segregation between native and Dungan communities in Xinjiang contributed to local perceptions of Dungan otherness, despite sharing a common religion. Many native Muslims in Xinjiang considered the religious customs of Dungan migrants as suspect and

⁴³ Millward, *Economy*, p. 151.

⁴⁴ Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ Millward, *Economy*, p. 169; Millward & Newby p. 124.

⁴⁶ Bao'erhan, "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," p. 152; Millward *Economy*, p. 135.

possibly unorthodox, likely on account of the foreignness of their Chinese language.⁴⁷ Laura Newby argues that the perception of religious difference motivated a local sense of communal identity among Turkic Muslims in the southern Tarim Basin which separated them from neighbouring and outsider Muslim groups.⁴⁸ Many primary sources from Qing-era Xinjiang suggest that local Muslims throughout the region similarly perceived Dungans as religious outsiders due to cultural differences.⁴⁹

Although educated Turkic and Chinese Muslims shared a common lingua franca through literary Arabic and Persian, actual exchanges between religious figures remained limited and apparently rare.⁵⁰ Some Dungan Sufi congregations in Xinjiang and Gansu pledged spiritual allegiance to nearby Turkic Sufi leaders, known as *khojas*.⁵¹ However, the maintenance of formal elite ties between Turkic and Chinese *shaykhs*, or religious leaders, did not translate into frequent contacts between their respective followers, nor did they smooth over growing local suspicions towards newly-arrived Dungan migrants and their different customs. A German archaeologist in late Qing-era Xinjiang noted that while local Dungans sometimes entered a Turkic mosque, Turkic Muslims never entered a Dungan mosque, which they considered taboo.⁵² Even Turkic religious scholars and other literate classes in Xinjiang expressed reservations towards the religious identity of Dungans.⁵³ Thus, local suspicion towards the Dungan in Xinjiang as not truly Muslim was not only the preserve of the illiterate and parochial-minded.

⁴⁷ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, p. 75.

⁴⁸ Laura J. Newby, "'Us' and 'Them' in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Xinjiang," in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, eds. Idliko Beller-Hann, M. Cristina Cesaro, Rachel Harris, and Joanne Smith Finley, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 19-21.

⁴⁹ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, pp. 75-76; Arienne M. Dwyer, "Manuscript Technologies, Writing and Reading in Early Twentieth Century Kashgar, in *Kashgar Revisited*, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Allès, "Chinese Muslim Women," pp. 98, 100-101; Millward, *Economy*, p. 169.

⁵¹ Tan Wutie, "Jiansheng qijian de Xinjiang Yisilanjiao," in *Zhongguo Xinjiang diqu Yisilanjiao shi* v. 2, ed. Chen Huisheng, Urumchi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2000, pp. 104-105, 277.

⁵² Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, p. 75.

⁵³ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, pp. 75-76; Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 89.

The occasional enslavement and sale of some Dungan Muslims, alongside Han settlers and native Mongol nomads, to Turkic Muslim elites in Xinjiang and foreign markets in Central Asia suggests that regional slave-traders similarly did not consider Dungans to be truly Muslim. Jeff Eden describes how slave-trading was a prominent commercial activity along the decentralized caravan networks that connected urban towns, rural settlements, and nomadic encampments across Central Asia in the 18th -19th centuries.⁵⁴ Although Islam forbids the enslavement of other Muslims, many slave-owning elites in Central Asia's Sunni khanates did not consider their slaves – the majority of whom in the 19th-century were Persian Shi'a Muslims – as true believers, but rather as heretics licit for capture and sale.⁵⁵ Slave-traders and owners in 19th-century Turkic societies probably held such attitudes towards other enslaved Dungan and Han Chinese captives from the Qing, who typically passed into slavery in Central Asia after being taken captive during Turkic rebellions in Xinjiang.⁵⁶

In addition to local anxieties about Dungan unbelief, Turkic folklore in Xinjiang also cited physical appearance as a sign of foreign otherness, and such stereotypes in turn reinforced suspicions that they supported foreign Qing rule against native Muslim interests. Local Turkic poems in 19th-century Xinjiang sometimes referred to Dungans, alongside Han, as “flat-nosed”, “displaced” outsiders who did not belong in Xinjiang.⁵⁷ Unlike Turkic Muslim commoners in Xinjiang, Dungan men also wore the queue – the mandatory and conspicuous hairstyle of Qing subjects in the interior Chinese provinces, which clearly differentiated them from other locals.

⁵⁴ Jeff Eden, “Beyond the Bazaars: Geographies of the Slave Trade in Central Asia.” *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2017), pp. 920-922.

⁵⁵ Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic*, New York: U.B. Tauris & Co., 2007, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006, pp. 25, 245-246; Millward, *Economy*, pp. 167-169, 285.

⁵⁷ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, pp. 75-76. The epithet “displaced” is likely a reference to the status of many Chinese migrants in Xinjiang as war refugees and poor day-labourers from Gansu.

Appearance was not necessarily as reliable a marker of Dungan identity as language or residence, and Dungans were sometimes able to surmount these boundaries and pass themselves as locals. In some cases, Dungan migrants learnt local languages and served Qing authorities as effective spies. In another case, a group of Dungan slaves in Bukhara managed to escape and return to Xinjiang after cutting their queues and donning local dress.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, common perceptions of Dungan difference, whether based on language, custom, or appearance, contributed to a prevalent apathy and sometimes antagonism towards Dungans as potentially hostile outsiders who frequently collaborated with Manchu rulers. Tsarist Russian explorers to Kashgar, the frequent site of Dungan merchant collaboration with Manchu garrisons, noted especially poor and tense relations between Dungans and local Muslims in the 1850s.⁵⁹ Significantly, these tropes of Dungan collaboration with non-Muslim outsiders remained particularly powerful in southern Xinjiang into the early republic in the 1910s, and up to Ma Zhongying's invasion in 1931.

The outbreak of widespread rebellion across Xinjiang against the Qing in 1864, and the subsequent decade-long evolution of local Muslim regimes after the Qing's expulsion from Xinjiang, further solidified these communal antagonisms. Mutinying Dungan soldiers initially led most of the local uprisings in Xinjiang, reacting to rumours among Gansu and Shaanxi refugees fleeing to Xinjiang in 1863 that the Qing government was preparing to massacre Muslims across the empire.⁶⁰ According to this Dungan conspiracy, Qing authorities worried that Chinese Muslims in the interior might join other powerful non-Muslim rebels, and pre-emptively prepared pogroms against Muslim communities, which did occur in some areas.⁶¹ Dungan rebels

⁵⁸ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 168-169.

⁵⁹ Millward, *Economy*, p. 299.

⁶⁰ Kim pp. 4-6.

⁶¹ Kim pp. 44-47.

in Xinjiang quickly expelled Qing garrisons from the territory, and brokered power-sharing arrangements in the post-Qing vacuum with other local Muslim civil and religious figures.⁶²

However, such cooperation was short-lived, and the interlude of independent Muslim regime-building in Xinjiang, until Qing reconquest in 1876-1878, strengthened communal divisions between Turkic locals and Dungan “outsiders”. Civil war quickly erupted between a Dungan sultanate controlling Ili and Urumchi, and rival Turkic regimes in northwest Xinjiang and the Kashgar region. Kim Hodong argues that military conflict between Dungans and other local regimes was a politically motivated struggle for power, rather than based on ethnic hostilities.⁶³ Nonetheless, within later Turkic historiographies of the Muslim rebellion and civil war, Ondrej Klimes traces the development of a “protonational” narrative of shared communal identity and interests among the “local Muslims” (*yerlik musulman*) of Xinjiang.⁶⁴ These local histories portrayed a native Muslim homeland in the Tarim Basin that excluded hostile outsiders, such as Dungan rebel leaders in Ili and Urumchi.⁶⁵ Russian travellers to the Ili Valley in the 1890s, after the Qing reconquest, noted the continued popularity of local Turkic folksongs from the civil war era which likened Dungans to conniving foreign oppressors: “When the Khitay [Chinese] are gone, the Dungans take over the plundering!”⁶⁶

At the same time, more positive cross-cultural interactions contrasted with these legacies of tension and conflict, and provided other possibilities for cooperation. Formal historical records omit a more informal range of personal ties across cultural boundaries such as friendships,

⁶² Kim pp. 54-64.

⁶³ Kim p. 68.

⁶⁴ Klimes pp. 42-48.

⁶⁵ Klimes pp. 46-48.

⁶⁶ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, pp. 74-75.

collegial associations, and everyday coincidences that mediated communal tensions. In the Kashgar region in the early to mid-18th century, native Muslims often suspected Dungans who were familiar with local dialects and customs as possible spies for the Manchus, but in other cases such acculturated Dungans could also build strong friendships with locals and support resistance against the Qing.⁶⁷ Exceptions of intermarriage, despite formal proscriptions, also forged stronger community ties in some local cases. Many wealthy Dungan merchants in Qing-era Xinjiang practiced informal polygamy, in which they took local wives and maintained separate households along their trading routes.⁶⁸ Though largely invisible in official records, the children of these mixed marriages populated the major regional thoroughfares of Xinjiang, and arguably provided a sympathetic cultural bridge between local society and successive generations of Dungan arrivals. When Dungan fighters from Gansu later invaded Xinjiang in 1931, local Muslims from mixed Dungan-Turkic households sometimes joined Ma Zhongying's army. Despite the dearth of literate Turkic Muslims who could speak and write Chinese in republican-era Xinjiang, which hampered Ma Zhongying's campaigning in Xinjiang, his fighters often produced propaganda posters in the local dialects of occupied towns, which were probably authored by local Dungans from mixed family backgrounds familiar with the local language.⁶⁹

The social margins of paupers and fugitives among Xinjiang's oases also constituted a lower-class willing to join with other sympathetic outsiders for subsistence and solidarity. A Scottish missionary in late Qing-era Urumchi snobbishly exclaimed that while most commoners and upper classes sensibly kept with their own kind, the marginalized underground of local Turkic, Han, and Dungan poor all loitered together on the streets. His dismay reflected the

⁶⁷ Kim p. 48.

⁶⁸ Beller-Hann, *Community Matters*, pp. 266-269.

⁶⁹ Sven Anders Hedin, *The Flight of Big Horse: The Trail of War in Central Asia*, E.P. Dutton, New York: 1936.

At the other end of the social stratum, some Muslim aristocrats linked their political futures to the Qing court, in contrast to other competing, local notions of a distinct “native Muslim” (*yerlik musulman*) identity in the Tarim Basin that was separate from other surrounding Muslims and non-Muslims. They emphasized native ancestral ties to the Qing empire and later to “China”, as the Manchu dynasty in the 1890s increasingly referred to its non-Chinese territories as an extension of the traditional “Chinese” (*Zhonghua*, or *Zhongguo*) imperial realm.⁷⁰ After the collapse of the Kashgar-based rebel state in 1877 to reconquering Qing armies, one of its former Turkic officials in Artush justified his decision to welcome back the Qing, explaining to locals that Turks and Manchus were part of the same lineage descended from the semi-mythical Oghuz Khan.⁷¹ In the 1890s, the local Muslim rulers of the semi-autonomous Qumul khanate in eastern Xinjiang similarly explained to the Qing governor that his subjects commonly descended from both the “*Huihui*” (Chinese-speaking Muslims in this context) and the Buddhist Uyghurs of the Ming era.⁷²

For Turkic officials in Xinjiang who could read Chinese, the semantic connotations of “*Huihui*” in Chinese as “the returning/ the returners” conjured images among some literate Xinjiang Muslims of Dungan migrants as the returning descendants of Central Asian Muslims who had settled in China.⁷³ This suggests that some Xinjiang native elites recognized the Dungans as part of a shared Muslim ancestral bloodline in “*Zhongguo*”, or China. Thus, intellectual discourses of distinctive and separate Muslim identities within Xinjiang juxtaposed with the emergence of more politically pragmatic discourses among Xinjiang literati and

⁷⁰ Porter pp. 4-5.

⁷¹ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 28.

⁷² Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 38.

⁷³ Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1950, p. 141.

aristocracy of native ties to China and its other Chinese-speaking Muslims. Even as other Turkic literati in Xinjiang emphasized the distinctiveness of the Tarim Basin's Muslims from other outsiders, genealogical narratives of Qing imperial identity among some Xinjiang Muslim aristocrats provided one exceptional example of how regional elites could express political loyalties to empire through new identities such as ancestral kinship with China. Imagined fraternal/genealogical ties to Dungans were especially important in this particular case as an ancestral link between the Muslims of Xinjiang and the distant Chinese interior.

Although native Muslim aristocrats constituted an exceedingly small minority in Xinjiang society, many other regional Turkic elites such as travelling merchants similarly used political loyalty and identity in the Qing empire to their practical advantage, and relations with other Chinese-speaking Muslim partners promoted their identification with China. The Qing incorporation of Xinjiang facilitated not only Chinese migration into the territory, but also Turkic Muslim travel into the interior. David Brophy describes how literate Xinjiang Muslims used imperial borders and statuses while travelling or conducting business abroad to claim special protections in the outside Muslim world as the "Muslims of China".⁷⁴ By contrast, within the Qing empire, mobile Turkic diasporas outside of Xinjiang confronted the implications of subjecthood under a non-Muslim dynasty in other non-Muslim lands. Nonetheless, ties with Chinese-speaking Muslims also helped these migrants and travellers to align their practical interests on similar premises of being the "Muslims of China"

Turkic merchants travelling in the Chinese interior developed relations, personal connections, and political interests with other markets and peoples outside of Xinjiang, particularly in the northwest where Chinese Muslims predominated in commerce. The paucity of

⁷⁴ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 113.

secondary sources makes it difficult to describe the experiences of these mobile classes from Xinjiang in the other provinces of the Qing, as well as specifically the nature of their interactions with other, particularly Muslim, subjects of the Qing. The previous section noted that occasional religious exchanges between Turkic and Chinese-speaking Muslim communities in Xinjiang were typically limited, usually among the figureheads of regional Sufi orders. By contrast, the travel of many diverse classes from Xinjiang through the Chinese interior forced Turkic commoners far from home to interact with the other subjects of the Qing. In particular, James Millward describes the emergence of a large community of Turkic Muslim subjects in Beijing, whose quarters were known to locals as the “Muslim Camp” (*Huizi ying*). Originally descended from resettled Turkic nobility, imperial concubines, and specialized craftsmen and performers, the Muslim Camp expanded by the late Qing era to include many other travelling commoners from Xinjiang such as merchants, labourers, and imams.⁷⁵ The variety of renowned goods, entertainment, and religious knowledge in the Muslim Camp attracted Beijing’s other local Chinese-speaking Muslims. In 1803, Qing border guards in Xinjiang arrested a “Hanified Muslim” from Beijing who had adopted Turkic customs and dress while working as a clerk for a Turkic pawnbroker in the Muslim Camp, and attempted to enter Xinjiang in the employ of another Kashgari merchant returning from Beijing.⁷⁶

Beijing was not the only site for encounters and relationships between Turkic subjects from Xinjiang and other Muslims in the Qing interior. European travellers in northwestern China in the 19th and early 20th centuries remarked on the conspicuous presence of Turkic merchants from Xinjiang throughout the towns and country roads of Gansu, often marked by their different dress and unique produce, and who sometimes settled in Gansu. A fruit vendor from eastern

⁷⁵ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 159-160.

⁷⁶ Millward and Newby, “The Qing and Islam,” p. 125.

As following chapters narrate, the republican transformation of Xinjiang in 1911-1912 offered further opportunities for Turkic-speaking Muslims elites to assert their political interests and reimagine ties to "China" and its other peoples under the aegis of being the "Muslims of China". In the meantime, as the next chapter describes, the evolution of Qing rule in the northwest, after the suppression of Muslim rebellions across Gansu and Xinjiang in the 1870s, situated a new class of Chinese Muslim loyalists in Gansu as emergent power-brokers in northwestern affairs. Their evolving role in Xinjiang ultimately precipitated new rounds of cooperation and conflict between Dungans and Turkic-speaking Muslims. Communal tensions with Dungan migrants persisted among both the poor and elite social extremes of Xinjiang oases. However, many other members of both ends of the social spectrum favoured ties with Dungan and Han Chinese political actors into the republican era, whether through lower-class ties with Chinese secret societies during the attempted republican revolution in 1911-1912, upper-class ties with Chinese Muslim constitutional activists in the interior provinces, or commercial ties with Gansu Muslim communities. Crucially, both Xinjiang's social poor and traditional aristocracies of Xinjiang, in contrast to the trepidation of other local Muslims, responded enthusiastically to Ma Zhongying's intervention in the 1930s civil war, demonstrating the degree of resonance that the distant politics of nationality identity in the republican interior could affect on diverse imperial frontiers.

Relations between peoples and communities are heavily dependent on time and place. This chapter broadly generalized interactions between two cultural-linguistic groups within a nearly century-long period, and across a vast and arbitrarily-bounded territory characterized by

diverse social settings. At the same time, it maintains that the troubled history of segregation, grievance, and conflict between Turkic-speaking and Chinese-speaking Muslims contributed to prevalent local notions of incompatible identities and rival interests, as well as shared memories of persecution. Crucially, communal memories of conflict meant that later efforts of Chinese-speaking Muslim activists in the post-Qing republic, who often lived and politicked outside of Xinjiang, to assert subnational ties to Xinjiang's Muslims confronted local suspicions against them as outsiders. Nonetheless, against the backdrop of growing intercommunal tension and conflict in Qing-era Xinjiang, other countervailing contexts of social interactions and political collaborations proved promising for those republican-era Muslim actors seeking to strengthen national linkages across the diverse Muslims of Xinjiang and China.

Chapter Two

Dungan Military Elites in the Late Qing Northwest (ca. 1870s-1890s)

The Qing suppression of rebellion in Gansu and the reconquest of Xinjiang by the late 1870s produced conflicting but significant legacies for imperial governance in the northwest. In Xinjiang, it decimated once large Dungan settlements, but in Gansu it facilitated the emergence of a Dungan military and political elite that was centrally tied to Qing court efforts to reform the northwest frontier. Highly contrasting fates of Chinese-speaking Muslims between Gansu and Xinjiang exemplified long-running tensions in how different Qing authorities alternately viewed them as potential military allies and as potential rebel zealots. Despite the continuing misgivings and anxieties of many Qing officials towards Chinese Muslims, the recapture of Gansu relied significantly on the cooperation of amnestied Muslim militias, whose powerful commanders assumed important posts in the post-war Gansu government.⁷⁷ As a result, the pacification of the northwest positioned Chinese-speaking Muslims from Gansu as important actors within new administrative linkages that tied Gansu, Xinjiang, and the Qing state together after the 1870s. This chapter shows that ensuing political and military events in the late-Qing era demonstrated the utility of Muslim loyalists to Qing officials who specialized in northwestern affairs and, crucially, grew more open to involving Gansu Muslim elites in the rule of Xinjiang.

Thus, the outbreak of revolutionary conflict in 1911-1912 and the transition to a new republic in the northwest confronted a powerful class of Chinese-speaking Muslim commanders who identified with the former Qing order. This chapter argues that the transformation of late

⁷⁷ Xu Xianlong p. 31.

Qing governance in the northwest after the 1870s deeply affected discourses of imperial identity among local political elites in the region, particularly Chinese Muslim commanders in Gansu, and Turkic aristocrats and merchants in Xinjiang. Chinese Muslim military elites in Gansu linked their regional power and political legitimacy to the defense of imperial borders and the preservation of local autonomy. Frontier geography and governance in the late Qing period situated Chinese Muslim military elites in Gansu as crucial intermediaries between the empire's interior and its northwestern borderlands. Across the border in Xinjiang, Turkic elites in government sought new identities to justify their cooperation with the Qing state, while other Turkic travellers in the Chinese interior learned how to use their subject status under the Qing, and their connections with other Chinese subjects, for their own interests. As the Qing state increasingly identified its many diverse domains with traditional notions of a "Chinese" (*Zhongguo*) territorial empire, other Turkic aristocrats and merchants increasingly aligned themselves with other Dungan actors as the "Muslims of China".

Thus, this chapter contextualizes how Gansu Muslim actors claimed these roles as borderland power-brokers in the republican era in order to assert authority and autonomy in the post-empire Chinese nation. It also contextualizes how the Xinjiang aristocrat-Gansu military axis emerged as an increasingly significant political factor by the time of Ma Zhongying in the 1920s. Ma Zhongying's personal descent from Qing-era Muslim military elites in Gansu highlights the relevance of how his direct ancestors forged ties and negotiated their regional authority with the imperial state. Their responses to the 1911-1912 republican transition drew from evolving roles in the late-Qing northwest, and ultimately shaped Ma Zhongying's emergence in the 1920s as another archetypal Muslim frontier intermediary.

The Qing Reconquest of Xinjiang

Chinese Muslim revolts across Shaanxi, Gansu, Yunnan, and Xinjiang in 1863-1864 added to the Qing's woes with other massive rebellions in the Chinese interior. Embattled on many fronts with widespread revolts in the 1850s-60s, the Qing court commissioned local Han Chinese gentry in affected provinces to raise their own armies against rebels and establish post-war administrations in pacified regions to help defer the costs of war and peace. Whereas Manchu and Mongol officers dominated the Qing army in the past, the successes of these regional armies propelled many provincial Han Chinese gentry elites, scholars, and lower-level officials to unprecedented positions of military and administrative power.⁷⁸ The scholar-cum-commander Zuo Zongtang (1812-1885) was among the most eminent of this new class of Chinese generals.

After defeating the rebel "Taiping Heavenly Kingdom" in southern China, Zuo Zongtang led his Hunanese Army (*Xiang Jun*) into Shaanxi and Gansu, where he defeated or secured the surrender of most Chinese-speaking Muslim rebels by 1874. Shortly afterwards, Zuo Zongtang famously convinced a hesitant Qing court to sanction the expensive reconquest of Xinjiang, at a time when most leading imperial officials believed that the naval defense of the eastern coast was a more pressing concern.⁷⁹ Zuo Zongtang's Han Chinese-dominated Hunanese Army formed a significant backbone of reconstituted Qing rule in the northwest after the 1870s. Many of its officials, who built strong relations with Gansu Muslim elites, continued to dominate frontier affairs in the region into the early republic.

⁷⁸ Garnaut, "Traitors on the Borderlands," pp. 330-331.

⁷⁹ James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 126.

Zuo Zongtang's Hunanese Army entered Xinjiang in 1876 and quickly retook most of the region. Zuo Zongtang encountered little resistance from the former Turkic rebel state, after the death of its leader Yaqub Beg in 1876, which earlier controlled most of Xinjiang from Kashgar to Urumchi and Turpan. Many Turkic officials in Yaqub Beg's state surrendered to Zuo Zongtang, but news of Qing reprisals against Chinese Muslim communities in Gansu motivated desperate Dungan resistance in Xinjiang to the end. Fleeing Chinese Muslim rebels from Shaanxi and Gansu led the resistance, but escaped westwards into Russian territory as they failed to halt Zuo Zongtang's forces.⁸⁰

Zuo Zongtang viewed the reconquest of the Muslim northwest through a moralist lens that differentiated between "bad" and "good" Muslims according to their distance or proximity to traditional Confucian ethics. He likened the native, "turban-wearing" Muslims of Xinjiang to uneducated children who rebelled against authority out of ignorance.⁸¹ Rather than be severely punished, Zuo Zongtang argued that they be shown clemency, and educated in Confucian classics and Chinese language to inculcate loyalty to the Qing.⁸² By contrast, in his view, the Chinese-speaking Muslims of Xinjiang long refused to learn the customs of their Confucian neighbours and persisted in defying the emperor's authority through continuous rebellion, warranting collective punishment.⁸³

Thus, a decade of war and the Qing reconquest reduced significant Dungan settler communities in Xinjiang, predominantly concentrated in the northern plains region, from several hundred thousand to less than a couple ten thousand. Even Dungan rebels and their families who

⁸⁰ Kim Hodong pp. 87, 111; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, pp. 125-129.

⁸¹ June Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 13.

⁸² Fletcher, "Naqshbandiyya in Northwest China," pp. 42-43; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 142.

⁸³ Lattimore pp. 50, 144.

References to surviving Dungan communities in reconquered Xinjiang are sparse. The relative invisibility of the continued Dungan presence in Xinjiang in official records is deceptive, as the post-reconquest reform of Xinjiang into a Chinese-styled province facilitated further Chinese migration from the interior provinces. Chinese border officials between Xinjiang and Gansu noted the consistent migration of Chinese Muslims into Xinjiang in the 1880s and 1890s, in some years reaching rates of several hundred per month.⁸⁴ However, provincial officials in major towns noted that just as many Han and Dungan migrants frequently returned to their hometowns in the interior as arrived in Xinjiang, disappointed by poor economic conditions and destroyed infrastructure after a decade of war.⁸⁵ The Dungan presence in local social affairs remained largely muted until Dungan activists and militiamen re-emerged as prominent leaders on either side of the 1911-1912 Xinhai revolutionary conflict in Xinjiang.

In the meantime, Zuo Zongtang's reconquest of Xinjiang precipitated the reform of the region from a Manchu military administration into a Chinese-styled province with (slightly) more intrusive (but brief) attempts at Chinese cultural reform within local Muslim societies. It also coincided with intensifying debates at the Qing court in Beijing over how to best defend and preserve the empire, in the wake of contemporary events, such as Russian occupation in the Ili valley (1871-1881) and the loss of Vietnam to the French in 1885. The responses of Qing court officials and other Han Chinese intellectuals to the Qing's existential crises elaborated new discourses of "national" strengthening and survival.⁸⁶ As a result, Zuo Zongtang's reform of Xinjiang opened the new province to official discourses of imperial identity from the interior, as

⁸⁴ Han Bin pp. 30-31.

⁸⁵ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 151.

⁸⁶ Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing became China," in *Empire to Nation*, eds. Esherick, Kayali, and Van Yong, p. 234; Zarrow p. 146.

Han Chinese officials reimagined the authority and identity of the Manchu realm that they helped to defend, in its northwestern frontiers which they helped to reclaim.

In turn, the reconquest of Xinjiang also forced local Turkic elites to adapt notions of loyalty and subjecthood in a changing Qing state. The previous chapter described how Turkic nobility in Xinjiang began to develop genealogical narratives of native family ties to China to justify their service of the Qing dynasty. The emphasis on ancestral linkages to China shaped a local viewpoint that was responsive to growing discourses of race and nationhood from the Chinese interior, discussed below, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The ways in which Turkic elites articulated ancestral links to the Qing empire and other subject populations marked a significant change in how they viewed imperial identity and loyalty to the Qing emperor. James Millward and Laura Newby argue that for most of Qing rule in Xinjiang in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, both the Manchu court and Turkic elites viewed their relationship as a highly personalized affair between a beneficent emperor and an obedient vassal.⁸⁷ By the mid- to late 19th century, however, Turkic officials and nobles began noticeably deepening the extent of their ties to the Qing, from personal loyalty to ancestral belonging.

Such a shift in Turkic Muslim elites' political identity arguably reflected the evolution of Qing authority in Xinjiang, as it transformed from a Manchu-dominated military structure into a Han Chinese-dominated bureaucratic structure, and the Manchu court reimagined its vast empire as a continuation of the traditional "Chinese" realm. Outside of Xinjiang, the Qing's territorial and military losses to foreign empires, particularly after the disastrous 1895 war with Japan, radicalized new generations of Chinese revolutionaries seeking to save the Han nation from "backwards" Manchu rulers. In turn, the Qing court also adapted to evolving discourses of

⁸⁷ Millward and Newby, "The Qing and Islam," pp. 119-122.

nationhood, as other reformist officials within government debated how to best implement ideas from Japan, the West, and other Chinese thinkers on national strengthening and survival.⁸⁸ In official rituals and ceremonies throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Qing court typically commemorated its empire *not* as an exclusively Manchu patrimony or a Sinizing Confucian dynasty, but rather as an equal union of five distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic realms: Manchuria, China, Mongolia, Tibet, and Turkic Muslim lands in Xinjiang.⁸⁹ However, by the 1880s-90s, Han Chinese officials, who increasingly held the levers of Qing state power, identified the entire empire as the Chinese realm, and urged national unity among its peoples.⁹⁰

The late Qing court undertook several significant reforms which sought to inculcate a stronger sense of “national” (*guojia*) identity among its subjects towards the Qing empire as the “Chinese” or “*Zhongguo*” homeland.⁹¹ For instance, Laura Newby notes how the late Qing court in the first decade of the 20th century commissioned new gazeteers, or administrative handbooks for officials, to incorporate local histories, cultures, and ethnicized peoples across Xinjiang within larger narratives of national history and culture, “to make people love their country as a first principle.”⁹² Similarly, updated textbooks in the last decade of Qing rule encouraged children in new public schools to love the Qing as “*Zhongguo*”, with maps indicating imperial protectorates such as Tibet and Mongolia and the new province of Xinjiang as part of the Chinese national homeland.⁹³

⁸⁸ Esherick, “How the Qing became China,” p. 234; Zarrow pp. 150-155.

⁸⁹ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 201-202.

⁹⁰ Leibold, p. 26-27, 46; Zarrow p. 100.

⁹¹ Porter pp. 4-5; Zarrow p. 276.

⁹² Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, pp. 38-39; Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 24; Newby, “Writing the Sino-Muslims,” p. 328.

⁹³ Joseph W. Esherick, “How the Qing became China,” in *Empire to Nation*, eds. Esherick, Kayali, and Van Young, p. 251.

Qing-sponsored national identities deeply influenced new generations of Han Chinese officials across the empire's northwest and Chinese Muslim officers in Gansu, described in the next section, in the last decades of Qing rule until 1911. Despite the common framing of the 1911-1912 transition from Qing to Republic as a "revolutionary moment", these Qing-era elite civil and military classes of the northwest, from mixed Han, Dungan, and Turkic backgrounds, continued to play powerful roles in the new post-Qing order. In particular, as chapter three describes, their identification with the former Qing realm as *Zhongguo* also challenged other, more exclusionary visions of a purely "Han Chinese" nation, propelling the "frontier question" of reclaiming post-Qing territories to the forefront of nationalist politics in the early republic.

Within reconquered Xinjiang, from the 1880s to 1911, such imperial-sponsored notions of national identity only reached a very limited audience among native Muslim subjects. In the 1880s, Han Chinese officials established mandatory, Confucian-styled academies for local Muslim children, in part to encourage loyalty to a shared Chinese homeland.⁹⁴ However, many native Muslim communities resisted the intrusion of traditional Chinese education and its idolatrous Confucian rites.⁹⁵ However, other Turkic elites developed their own discourses of loyalty to the transformed late-Qing order in the northwest which often centered on imagined ancestral ties to the Qing's reimagined identity as *Zhongguo*.

Politically, the most significant version of this genealogical discourse emerged in the Qumul (Hami in Chinese) khanate of eastern Xinjiang, near the border with Gansu. Qumul's geography situated its aristocratic elites and merchant commoners to participate in trade with the Chinese interior and in particular the commercially active Chinese Muslims of Gansu. Later, the

⁹⁴ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, pp. 142-144.

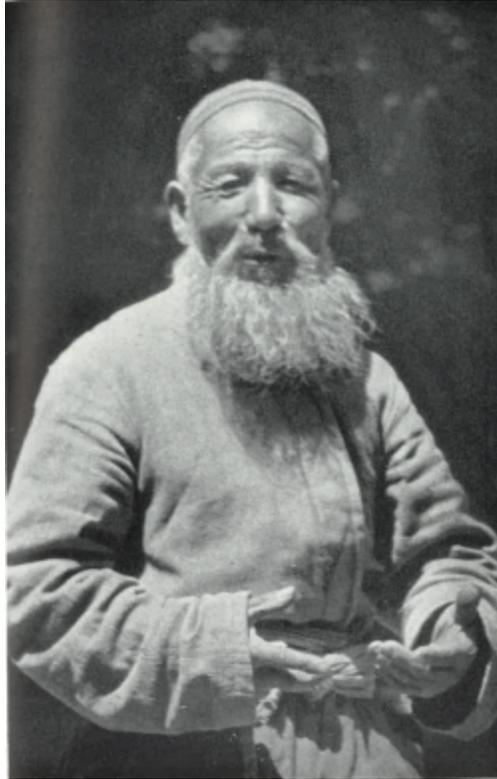
⁹⁵ Han Bin p. 59; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, pp. 144-145; Newby, "Writing the Sino-Muslims," p. 358.

court of Qumul developed as an important site of political cooperation with Chinese Muslim political actors in the interior in the early republic, ultimately including Ma Zhongying, which drew from long-standing ties between Qumul's aristocratic and commercial spheres and the Chinese interior. The hereditary ruler of the Qumul region (Hami in Chinese) was one of two formally recognized Muslim khans (*Huiwang*) in Xinjiang, retaining a large degree of independence in local affairs in exchange for fealty to the Qing dynasty.⁹⁶ Many Turkic aristocrats in the Qumul court frequently boasted to Qing officials the khanate's historic loyalty to the Manchu dynasty and to "*Zhongguo*", and the recent martyrdom of one of Qumul's khans after refusing to join Dungan rebels against Zuo Zongtang added to the khanate's prestige as a loyal Qing vassal.⁹⁷ The Qumul khanate ranked as the most trusted native Turkic institution that Qing rulers retained in Xinjiang, and the khan was even permitted to maintain his own native palace guard and small standing army.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Pan Zuhuan, "Jin Shuren dengtai," p. 5

⁹⁷ Yaoleboshi p. 24.

⁹⁸ Forbes p. 44; Lin Enxian p. 84.



1. Khanate official in Qumul, ca. 1930.

The previous chapter described how various Turkic classes travelled to and sometimes settled in various regions of the Chinese interior following the Qing incorporation of Xinjiang, including the political capital Beijing and various trading towns. Xinjiang Turkic experiences of sojourning in the Chinese interior under the Qing is neither well-documented nor well-understood. However, they likely paralleled the contemporary experiences of other Xinjiang Muslims travelling abroad, which David Brophy describes as a process of negotiation wherein they leveraged imperial identities as Qing subjects to secure legal rights and protections in foreign lands.⁹⁹ As other Turkic Muslims travelled within the Qing's other provinces, they encountered very diverse subjects and legal institutions, and relied on an internal Turkic "diaspora" in the interior with bureaucratic connections to smooth their interactions with local

⁹⁹ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 113.

state structures as well Chinese communities and markets.¹⁰¹

Many historians note Qumul's political and geographic closeness to China as a significant conduit of "Chinese" acculturation among Turkic elites in eastern Xinjiang, but have not remarked on the role that Chinese Muslims in the interior played in these processes of acculturation.¹⁰² However, Chinese Muslim communities across the interior, from Gansu to Beijing, provided a network of restaurants, inns, mosques, and sites of pilgrimage that could accommodate Turkic travellers, merchants, and migrants in unfamiliar Chinese provinces, and satisfy their religious requirements for cuisine and water ablution. European missionaries in late-Qing Gansu noted how local Muslim concerns over community uses of water and the preparation of food, in particular the avoidance of pork, partly drove the segregation of separate Muslim and Han villages in some regions.¹⁰³ Accordingly, Turkic travellers between Xinjiang and the rest of Chinese interior most likely preferred to travel, as much as possible, along self-contained belts of Chinese Muslim villages and communities.

In addition, the steady rise of Chinese Muslim commerce in the northwest after the 1870s elevated a class of culturally sympathetic merchants who could develop strong relations and partnerships with Turkic Muslims moving through the interior. Wealthy Chinese Muslim merchants emerged as particularly prominent in Qumul bazaars by the 20th century.¹⁰⁴ Whereas Chinese Muslim merchants between Gansu and Xinjiang typically operated as lower-level peddlers or middlemen between Xinjiang bazaars and larger Han firms, many began to establish larger mercantile companies with expanding regional operations after the Qing reconquest.

¹⁰¹ Yaoleboshi p. 19.

¹⁰² Wang Ke, *Dong Tujuesitan*, p. 33; Forbes p. 229-232.

¹⁰³ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, pp. 31-51, 57-63, 72; Ekvall pp.19-20; Zhao Siru, "Xinjiang Yisilanjiao jingji," p. 411.

¹⁰⁴ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 134.

Muslim rebellion in the 1860s precipitated a flight of Han capital from Xinjiang, leaving a void for other Muslim merchants from Gansu to fill.¹⁰⁵ However, commercial prosperity for Chinese Muslim merchants was relative to class and region. Many other Muslim farmers in Gansu turned to commerce or work along caravan routes to supplement years of poor harvest in the province's poor agricultural conditions, especially since Zuo Zongtang's pacification policies had resettled many surviving Muslim communities further from Han population centres and into regions with lesser soil quality.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the growing numbers of Chinese Muslims participating in regional trade between Xinjiang and the Chinese interior, whether driven by opportunity or poverty, staffed Gansu's economic corridors with local Muslims who could help smooth the movement of Xinjiang Muslims into the Qing's other Chinese provinces.

Dungan Autonomy and Loyalty in Late-Qing Gansu

In contrast to bitter Dungan resistance to Zuo Zongtang's reconquest of Xinjiang, many other Chinese Muslim elites in Gansu instead chose to cooperate with the dynasty's return to the northwest. Several local Muslim figures rose to regional prominence in Gansu at the head of powerful militias during the anarchy of the 1860s' rebellions, as they defended their communities against other rivals and state reprisals. Their ultimate surrender to Zuo Zongtang, after the entrance of the Hunanese Army in Gansu in the early 1870s, facilitated the incorporation of their militias into the emerging post-war order, and preserved their newfound regional power. As late Qing authority evolved in the pacified northwest, this generation of Chinese Muslim "rebel"-cum-loyalists played increasingly important roles in new administrative and military circuits between

¹⁰⁵ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 238-239; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁶ Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China*, p. 74.

Gansu, Xinjiang, and the central state. Ultimately, this military class was poised to intervene in issues of frontier governance during the 1911-1912 transition to a national republic.

The voluntary surrender of powerful Dungan commanders in Gansu to Zuo Zongtang arguably secured the success of his initially faltering and cash-strapped expedition in the northwest. Zuo Zongtang initially suspected the high-profile surrenders of rebel Muslim commanders in Gansu as possible ruses against the state. For instance, the surrender of the powerful Hezhou rebel Ma Zhan'ao (1830-1886) to the Hunanese Army in 1872 constituted a significant turning point in the Qing's northwest campaigns, but the fact that it followed on the heels of his militia's initial defeat of Zuo Zongtang's main force raised Qing suspicions towards his intentions.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, expensive logistics, limited finances, and several military defeats forced the Hunanese Army to not only accept Ma Zhan'ao's surrender, but increasingly rely on his Muslim militia to help defeat other remaining rebels in Gansu.

As amnestied Muslim fighters proved highly effective in quashing other Chinese Muslim resistance in Gansu, Zuo Zongtang changed his impression towards Ma Zhan'ao. By the late 1870s, Zuo Zongtang even went so far to claim that "the fault [for violence in Gansu] lies entirely with the Han Chinese", rather than Muslims.¹⁰⁸ Even as Zuo Zongtang ordered the indiscriminate massacres of Dungan communities in Xinjiang in 1876-1877, he was willing at the same time to elaborate distinctions between "good" and "bad" Muslims beyond straightforward differences between "reformable" Turkic-speaking Muslims and "un-reformable" Chinese-speaking Muslims, and acknowledge the possibility of Chinese-speaking Muslims faithfully serving and developing loyalty to the Qing dynasty. As described below,

¹⁰⁷ Kim p. 161.

¹⁰⁸ Lipman, "A Fierce and Brutal People", p. 103.

other Han Chinese officials within Zuo Zongtang's frontier regime also adapted conventional thinking towards Muslim "loyalty" and "disloyalty", as they recognized the usefulness of "loyal" Muslim commanders, like Ma Zhan'ao, as military intermediaries in remote lands against other "disloyal" Muslims.

In addition, Ma Zhan'ao's surrender also demonstrated how Muslim elites in the northwest could find ways to align their local interests with reconstituted Qing rule in the northwest. Several historians have argued that Ma Zhan'ao's sudden initiative to surrender demonstrated how many Muslim "rebel" leaders in Gansu and Shaanxi did not see themselves as directly defying Qing authority, but rather defending their own communities against pogromist Han officials and other hostile Muslim communities such as rival Sufi orders.¹⁰⁹ When opportune, such Muslim "rebels" were willing to accommodate the Qing's new regional representatives, such as Zuo Zongtang's Hunanese Army, on terms preferable to the safety of their communities and the preservation of their newly-acquired powers.¹¹⁰ Even if Ma Zhan'ao submission to the Qing was primarily pragmatic, his cooperation with Zuo Zongtang consequently shaped how his and his allies' military descendants continued to align their local interests with the preservation of unified imperial rule throughout the late Qing period.

Amnestied Muslim commanders in Gansu like Ma Zhan'ao retained significant autonomy in personally overseeing the administration of their regional locales, even though their Muslim rank-and-file were formally subordinated to Qing army structures.¹¹¹ As a result, the consolidation of a new frontier bureaucracy in Gansu incorporated a large degree of Muslim elite autonomy. Moreover, Gansu's Muslim military elites were closely tied to a new generation of

¹⁰⁹ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 219-221; Xu Xianlong p. 39.

¹¹⁰ Kim p. 161.

¹¹¹ Xu Xianlong p. 32.

Han officials from among the newly-arrived Qing army bureaucracies. Anthony Garnaut argues that the successful strategies of Han-led armies, such as Zuo Zongtang's Hunanese Army, in pacifying Muslim rebellions in the 1870s, through using amnestied Muslim militias, linked post-war reforms across these regions. As Han military officers and officials rotated between these pacified provinces as the Qing's newfound experts on frontier Muslim affairs, they maintained and utilized the relationships they built during wartime with Muslim militias to reform and buttress Qing authority in its borderlands.¹¹²

Symbiotic relationships between Han Chinese officials and Muslim military elites continued to strengthen within the post-pacification order of the late-Qing northwest, as Muslim military elites effectively supported the Qing, and Han officials advocated their greater inclusion in frontier governance. Many amnestied Muslim militias emerged as strong loyalists by the late 1880s and 1890s in Gansu, identifying the preservation of the Qing status quo with their elite interests, and earning an empire-wide reputation as the most loyal fighting forces of the Qing. During a second round of Gansu Muslim revolt in 1895, Muslim loyalist militias notoriously executed thousands of surrendered rebels, including personal relatives, allaying officials' concerns that they might join rebels due to religious and family ties.¹¹³ Later, another loyalist contingent of Gansu Muslim fighters garnered foreign press attention as the fiercest Qing army unit during the 1899-1901 Boxer conflict with Western armies in Beijing.¹¹⁴ The reputation of Chinese Muslims defending the Qing court and attacking European quarters in Beijing strongly convinced many Han Chinese officials in the northwest of the loyalty and martial ability of Chinese Muslims.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Garnaut, "From Yunnan," p. 99.

¹¹³ Xu Xianlong pp. 49-50.

¹¹⁴ Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics,' p. 296; Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de "Guomin,"* p. 247.

¹¹⁵ Garnaut, "From Yunnan," p. 53.

Yang Zengxin was among the most influential of this batch of Han Chinese officials who favoured the greater military incorporation of Muslim loyalists. Crucially, his career in the Qing northwest pioneered stronger linkages between Gansu Muslim units and the Xinjiang provincial government. Yang Zengxin rose in the Gansu bureaucracy in the 1890s as a successful Han magistrate in several districts with large Muslim populations.¹¹⁶ Throughout his career, Yang Zengxin relied on his self-styled expertise and familiarity with Islam and Dungan culture, as well as positive relations with Gansu religious figures, in order to promote unprecedented reforms in the Qing legal treatment of Muslim subjects.¹¹⁷ His expanded recruitment of Chinese Muslim soldiers into the formal military was arguably the most consequential. His greater reliance on Muslim soldiers, rather than other Han Chinese units, during high-level posts in Gansu and later Xinjiang, helped rehabilitate the official image of Dungans in Xinjiang as useful subjects of the Qing, only a few decades after Zuo Zongtang's massacres.

Reflecting an official turn towards incorporating Gansu Muslim elites in the administration of Xinjiang, Qing authorities transferred Yang Zengxin to Aqsu in Xinjiang in 1907, where he introduced a new military precedent in Xinjiang through exclusively recruiting Dungan soldiers to garrison the town.¹¹⁸ Yang Zengxin explicitly preferred the use of Dungan soldiers to garrison and police Xinjiang, contrasting Dungan effectiveness in the 1895 Gansu revolt and Boxer conflict with the state of many Han soldiers and settlers in Xinjiang. Whereas remaining Han soldiers from Zuo Zongtang's reconquest army were now aging, unfit, and often involved in organized crime, and many other Han migrants to Xinjiang were drifters, Yang Zengxin drew from positive experiences in Gansu to praise Chinese Muslims as law-abiding

¹¹⁶ Yaoleboshi p. 36.

¹¹⁷ Lipman, "Border World of Gansu," pp. 174-176.

¹¹⁸ Forbes p. 283.

subjects who led disciplined lives and served the emperor. Signaling official approval for Yang Zengxin's reforms, Qing authorities began transferring distinguished Gansu Muslim officers to high military posts in Xinjiang, including in one case the military governorship of Ili district.¹¹⁹

Yang Zengxin's appointment to Xinjiang not only reflected growing linkages between frontier provinces as part of a trans-regional circuit of shuffling officials. It also reflected how the Qing court, by the turn of the twentieth century, increasingly subordinated frontier Muslim populations to an attenuated spectrum of cultural familiarity that continued to entrench legal differentiations between "Hanified" Muslims and "Turbaned" Muslims. According to this logic, only those specially-trained frontier officials who proved their mettle in handling the more familiar Chinese-speaking, "Hanified" Muslims, through cooperating with local Muslim elites to preserve order in former war-afflicted areas, were qualified to tackle the governance of markedly less familiar, non-Chinese speaking "Turbaned" Muslims in Xinjiang. Yang Zengxin presented himself as an expert who was familiar with Muslim society and "intimately understood Muslim sentiment".¹²⁰ Moreover, Yang Zengxin's military recruitment of Dungans envisioned loyal "Hanified" Muslims as arbiters of the state's monopoly on violence in Xinjiang, and thus cast Dungans as the ideal on-the-ground intermediaries between reinvigorated Qing authority and its unfamiliar Muslim subjects.

Ma Zhongying's Lineage in the Late Qing Era

¹¹⁹ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 146 ; Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 247.

¹²⁰ Yang Zengxin, *Buguozhai Wendu* v. 1, Taipei, Wenhai Chubanshe, 1965, p. 48.

Ma Zhongying's family background¹²¹ from this class of Gansu Muslim elites directly positioned his later military rise within a larger, but often distorted, context of evolving Muslim power along the empire's political divides between the Chinese-speaking core and the Turkic-speaking Xinjiang periphery. Han Chinese officials in the late Qing increasingly relied on Chinese Muslim units in Gansu and Xinjiang to maintain order in the northwest. When Chinese Muslim commanders in the Qing army later intervened in the 1911-1912 revolutionary conflict, their use of independent military power to preserve their authority earned the epithet of "warlord" among contemporary rivals. Succeeding historians likewise framed Ma Zhongying's republican-era military career within this story of the "Ma warlord family" (*Majia junfa jituan*) or "Five Ma warlord clique".¹²²

However, the "warlord" label and its connotations of depoliticized military rule neglects how the late-Qing incorporation of loyalist Muslim militias shaped the military as the main avenue for Muslims in the northwest to achieve formal power and engage the state. By contrast, holding civilian public office in the Qing entailed the study and observance of Confucian rites, as well as official rituals such as temple sacrifices and kowtowing to emperor portraits. Orthodox Islamic precepts against idol worship and iconography did not always prevent Chinese Muslims from participating in public rituals and temple rites with other Han subjects, but the numbers of Chinese Muslim literati and officials willing to make exception to serve the civil bureaucracy exceptionally rare.¹²³ Hence the preponderance of Muslims in the northwest military structure as the main avenue for high-level Muslim participation and power in the late-Qing era bureaucracy.

¹²¹ See Appendix B for the family tree of Ma Zhongying and his other relations described in this paper.

¹²² Forbes p. 116; Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics," p. 310; Xu Xianlong p. 77.

¹²³ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," p. 260; Dru C. Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 65.

With the fall of the Qing state, Gansu Muslim military leaders relied on the authority and army organization that they garnered in the late empire to defend local interests. Moreover, as chapter three details, other movements in the 1911-1912 conflict which advocated Han-racial nationalism threatened regional arrangements of Muslim military power and local autonomy in Gansu. Thus, in response to the encroachment of potentially hostile Han Chinese nationalists, the new Muslim “warlords” of the nascent republic sought to protect not only their pre-existing authority, but other Muslim community interests as well. Arguably, such motivations demonstrated a level of political engagement that extended beyond “warlordism”.

After Qing reconquest in the 1870s, Chinese Muslim commanders managed to cultivate and entrench growing local autonomy in late-Qing era Gansu through their service to the dynastic state, laying the foundations of their “warlord” regimes in the future republic. Ma Zhongying’s grand-uncle, Ma Haiyan (1837-1900), provides an illustrative example. Many aspects of the autonomous military regime that Ma Haiyan established in Gansu’s Xining region significantly influenced how his later successors and relatives attempted to maintain local authority and engage distant central governments into the republican period. In particular, Ma Haiyan consolidated local rule not only through the control of regional trading routes, but also cultivating relations with other non-Muslim and non-Chinese elites in the surrounding countryside, anticipating the ways in which his successors developed these cross-cultural ties and poised themselves as China’s borderland power-brokers in diverse frontier societies.

Ma Haiyan emerged in 1860s Gansu as a close subordinate of the rebel-turned loyalist commander Ma Zhan’ao in Hezhou.¹²⁵ Even before Ma Zhan’ao’s surrender to Zuo Zongtang in 1872, Ma Haiyan’s support for Ma Zhan’ao appeared more concerned with defending local

¹²⁵ Xu Xianlong p. 36.

Muslim communities than with trying to separate from the Qing. Ma Haiyan counseled Ma Zhan'ao's decision to surrender, whereas other Muslim supporters in Hezhou advocated resistance, defied surrender, and fled to Xinjiang and ultimately Russia.¹²⁶ After the pacification of remaining Muslim rebellions by the late 1870s, Ma Haiyan transferred to Xining as a commissioned Qing officer, where he built an effectively autonomous local government resting on Muslim militia power and lucrative trading routes.¹²⁷

Nestled between the Chinese interior and the Kokonor region of the Tibetan plateau, and home to intermixing Chinese-, Mongol-, Tibetan-, and Turkic-speaking populations, Xining's geographical position and cultural diversity challenged the mould of imperial identity. Ma Haiyan's construction of a local regime in Xining prepared his military successors – namely his son Ma Qi (1869–1931) – to exercise local authority and autonomy into the republican period. Moreover, Xining's cultural geography as a political and ethnic frontier cast especial importance on the region and its Muslim rulers with the advent of the “frontier” and “nationality questions” during the abdication of the Qing. In the new national republic, Xining's Muslim rulers would thus be equipped with precedents stemming from Ma Haiyan's time to assert their borderland authority as answers to the republic's quest to preserve former Qing territories and peoples.

Ma Haiyan descended from a Turkic-speaking Salar background, which explains the large Salar support that Ma Haiyan's descendants, particularly Ma Zhongying, later commanded in the early republic. At least one Chinese source refers to Ma Haiyan's father as “Ma Sala” (“Sala” being the Chinese rendition of “Salar”), suggesting for the first time that Ma Zhongying descended from an acculturated Salar line, and demonstrating the degree of Dungan-Salar ties

¹²⁶ Kim pp. 160-161 ; Xu Xianlong p. 36.

¹²⁷ Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics, pp. 297-298.

among Gansu Muslim elites.¹²⁸ Throughout Ma Haiyan's lifetime from the 1830s to the last decade of Qing rule, close interactions between Salar and Chinese Muslims in Gansu contrasted starkly with segregation and tension relations among Turkic-speaking and Chinese-speaking Muslim communities in Xinjiang. Later chapters argue that inter-acculturation between Salar and Chinese-speaking Muslims in Gansu, who frequently inter-married and worshipped in the same mosques and Sufi brotherhoods, encouraged a sense of shared Muslim identity. Such an identity increasingly gained political currency in Gansu Muslim society in the 1920s as the notion of a shared Muslim nationality that transcended cultural and linguistic difference across the Chinese nation and included the Muslims of Xinjiang. Ultimately, this view significantly underpinned Ma Zhongying's 1931 intervention in Xinjiang.

In addition to the prestige of his service under Ma Zhan'ao within regional Muslim society, Ma Haiyan also sought to legitimate his local administration with the region's non-Muslims. Before rising as a military leader, Ma Haiyan originally plied local caravan routes as a muleteer, and once saved the life of a regionally revered Buddhist abbot.¹²⁹ After the Qing pacification of Gansu, Ma Haiyan continued to maintain close relations with regional Buddhist monasteries, which celebrated Ma Haiyan as a defender of the Buddhist Way in public ministrations.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Xu Xianlong p. 28.

¹²⁹ Xu Xianlong pp. 35, 66.

¹³⁰ Xu Xianlong p. 35.



2. *Salar imam on the Kokonor plateau, ca. 1936.*

Thus, the autonomous Muslim elite of late-Qing era Gansu not only sought stronger ties with Han provincial officials and the Qing state, but also with elites among other religious and cultural minorities. As chapter three details, the emergence of the “frontier question” during the revolutionary and early republican politics of 1911-1913, as Chinese nationalist leaders in the post-empire state sought to reclaim the Qing’s non-Chinese territories, poised Muslim elites in Gansu to use their pre-existing ties to various elite classes among the frontier’s mixed Muslim, Han, and Buddhist societies in order to legitimate, and expand, their autonomy in the new era. Chinese Muslim militaries along Gansu’s Mongol and Tibetan frontiers effectively emerged as the new republic’s brokers of national identity to non-Chinese populations in former imperial territories. Ma Zhongying’s later rise in 1920s Gansu and 1931 invasion of Xinjiang reprised similar significance, as he claimed to act on a common national identity for all of China’s Muslims and defend their interests in Gansu and Xinjiang.

Within the shifting sands of identities and roles in imperial borderlands, Dungans increasingly emerged as a mediating bridge between Han power and Turkic subjects. Late Qing officials increasingly viewed Dungan soldiers as an ideal class to support imperial rule in Xinjiang, based on their records of loyal service and their Muslim faith which theoretically recommended them favourably to Muslim locals. Meanwhile in Gansu, the emergence of an autonomous elite of Muslim loyalist commanders prepared a class of Dungan military power to both confront the revolutionaries of the Xinhai period and later negotiate their preserved authority in the new republican order.

Chapter Three

Chinese Muslims and Revolutionary-Era Politics in the Interior (ca. 1890s-1911)

As Dungan military elites climbed the ranks of transformed Qing governance in the northwest, revolutionary activism in central and eastern Chinese provinces conspired to overthrow the Qing. The outbreak of co-ordinated rebellions against the dynasty in 1911, now memorialized as the Xinhai Revolution, culminated in the abdication of the court. The contested transition to a new republican state cast uncertainty over the Qing's former imperial dominions in Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, and Turkic-speaking Xinjiang. Whereas the nationalist imaginaries of many anti-Qing revolutionaries aimed to eject non-Chinese peoples and lands from the restored "Han" nation-state, other conservative Chinese authorities from the Qing military intervened in post-Qing politics and laid national claim to Qing territories outside the traditional pale of the Chinese-speaking realm. With the new nation's borders at stake within these competing political visions, this chapter argues that Chinese Muslims in the interior provinces made significant choices in how they engaged with the revolutionary and early republican period (1911-1914). Ultimately, these choices shaped how Chinese Muslim activists could use Muslim identity as a glue to help affix the nation-state mould over the former Qing realm, from Beijing to Gansu and on to Xinjiang.

Muslim activists in the Chinese interior navigated the republican transition by engaging both revolutionary and conservative military factions in order to defend and promote the interests of their communities. This chapter shows that the development of a religious reform movement among east-coast Chinese Muslim scholars in the last two decades of Qing rule prepared a

generation of Chinese Muslim actors to link their political goals to the national interests and survival of the Chinese state. In engaging early national debates over the “frontier question” (*bianjiang wenti*), many Chinese-speaking Muslim activists identified with a “Chinese Muslim” (*Zhongguo Huijiao*) constituency that was contiguous with the political boundaries of the Qing court, not the racial boundaries of the “Han”. Thus, the consolidation of a republican consensus which envisioned Qing lands as part of a more territorially expansive “China” (*Zhongguo*), or the “Greater China Idea” (*da Zhongguo zhuyi*), appealed more to many Chinese Muslim modernists, who viewed themselves as part of a broad confessional community that extended beyond the Xinhai revolutionaries’ racial nation.

As political and intellectual centers in Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing reimagined the national canvas over post-imperial territories, Chinese Muslim actors from the center began intervening in relations between the national government and the Muslim northwest, demonstrating the expanded possibilities of using Muslim identity in the new China to solidify national linkages between center and periphery. Whereas pre-existing ties between Chinese Muslim communities across the Qing empire were typically very limited and highly localized, Chinese Muslim activists in the interior expanded their civic organizations and independently forged unprecedented institutional ties with other Muslims in distant provinces. The previous chapter argued that the evolution of Qing authority in the northwest cast Chinese-speaking Muslims as political and cultural intermediaries in Xinjiang and Gansu. Now, the nationalism of the new republic, and the initiative of Muslim actors in the center to mediate its claims to national unity in Muslim territories expanded the trans-frontier role of Dungans across Xinjiang and Gansu into a national role across China.

The "Muslims of China" in the Prelude to Revolution

Many historians agree on the years 1895-1898 as a turning point in the development of a fiercely anti-Manchu revolutionary movement within the Qing empire's Chinese-speaking heartland. The Qing army's humiliating loss of Korea, Taiwan, and its modernized naval fleet in war with Meiji Japan in 1895 signalled to shocked reformers among the politically-active gentry the direness of elite efforts to modernize and strengthen the Qing realm against foreign attacks. In 1898, the Empress Dowager's (1835-1908) internal coup against reformers at court convinced many other like-minded Chinese observers of the impossibility of progress within the existing political system.¹³¹

The most radical anti-Qing factions used their knowledge of racial theories about national identity and international conflict from Western and Chinese intellectuals to portray Manchu rulers as an inferior barbarian race, oppressing a superior Han-Chinese nation.¹³² Their vision of a pure Han nation, united by language, culture, history, and blood, rejected Qing court attempts in the late 19th century to identify the multicultural Manchu imperial realm with *Zhongguo* – the traditional designation of previous Chinese-speaking dynasties that anti-Qing revolutionaries now historicized as the homeland of the Han race.¹³³ Accordingly, Han revolutionaries from the mid-1890s to 1911 articulated a national vision that predominantly excluded the Qing's non-Chinese patrimonies in Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, preferring instead the former boundaries of the Ming realm as the traditional extent of the Han nation.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 61.

¹³² Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 43-44, 47-48, 61; Esherick, "How the Qing became China," pp. 235-236; Zarrow pp. 150-155.

¹³³ Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, pp. 19-20; Esherick, "How the Qing became China," p. 232.

¹³⁴ Esherick, "How the Qing became China," pp. 238, 243.

Chinese revolutionary and nationalist theorists seldom referenced the little-known Xinjiang territory, despite its recent reform as a Chinese-styled province and official attempts to represent it as part of the *Zhongguo* national homeland. Instead, exceptional references in the pre-1911 revolutionary corpus to Xinjiang frequently regarded its native Turkic Muslims with apathy as backwards and unrelated foreigners.¹³⁵ In his infamous 1903 tract, *The Revolutionary Army*, the radical Zou Rong identified the “Turks” (*tujue*) of Xinjiang as part of a Siberian racial family that included the Manchu oppressors.¹³⁶ His intellectual collaborator Zhang Binglin similarly addressed the “Turks” of Xinjiang as a foreign race excluded from the future Han nation.¹³⁷ Only a minority of pre-1911 revolutionaries were willing to countenance Xinjiang Muslims as a part of the Chinese nation, but on the condition of complete racial assimilation with the Han.¹³⁸

Han revolutionaries in the interior premised their exclusion of Xinjiang’s Muslims from the Chinese nation on imagined racial grounds, rather than religious or cultural distinctions, reflecting the importance accorded to “race” as the primary unit of national identity. Xinjiang Muslims were seen as backwards outsiders primarily on account of their “Turkic” or “Siberian” pedigree rather than distinct religion, language, and customs.¹³⁹ However, when Han revolutionaries cast their nationalist gaze inwards towards minority customs within the envisioned Han race, such as the Islamic faith of Chinese speakers in the northwest, common anti-Qing discourses of racial preservation against corrupting foreign influences also targeted Chinese-speaking Muslims.

¹³⁵ Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 59.

¹³⁶ Tsou Jung [Zou Rong], *The Revolutionary Army: A Chinese Nationalist Tract of 1903*, ed. and transl. John Lust, Paris: Mouton, 1968, pp. 80, 107.

¹³⁷ Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 76; Esherick, “How the Qing became China,” pp. 237-238.

¹³⁸ Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 53; Esherick, “How the Qing became China,” p. 236.

¹³⁹ Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 53, 59; Esherick, “How the Qing became China,” pp. 236-237.

Within the racializing perspective of Han revolutionaries, it was possible to portray the Chinese-speaking Muslims as internal foreigners descended from non-Han outsiders, or alternately as backwards Han who acculturated to inferior foreign customs. Dikötter argues that the experiences of widespread 19th century “lineage feuds” (*xiedou*) in the Qing empire between rival extended-family communities convinced revolutionary intellectuals of the rational principles of race solidarity and the expulsion of outsiders as the basis of national cohesion.¹⁴⁰ In the northwest, the non-Muslim Han likewise viewed cyclic violence between the Qing state and “heterodox” Muslim “sects” as a recurrent “lineage feud”, contributing to an ethnicized view of local Muslims as hostile foreigners.¹⁴¹ Such views built from long-standing, but often fluid, perceptions of Chinese-speaking Muslims as “basically different from ordinary folk”, which at times even provincial Qing authorities expressed.¹⁴²

Other revolutionary intellectuals posited the infusion of foreign customs and blood as a source of backwardness within the Han nation.¹⁴³ From this perspective, the historical issue of Chinese conversion to Islam challenged, if not undermined, the cultural continuity and lineal heritage of the Chinese nation. Many Chinese-speaking Muslim elites in the Qing’s central and eastern provinces regarded personal descent from Arab-Persian missionaries, merchants, and Mongol-era officials as a mark of prestige, and often partly identified as wanderers from the original Arabian homeland of their faith.¹⁴⁴ In contrast to local pantheons of semi-mythologized,

¹⁴⁰ Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, pp. 43-44, 74.

¹⁴¹ Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *Dispatches from North-west Kansu*, Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, 1925, p. 32, 71; Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 43; Zhang Zhongfu, “Minzu guojia, zuqun yishi yu lishi jieshi de hudong yiyi: yi haixian liang’an ‘Huizu’ rending wei li de tantao”, in *Liang An Fenzhi: Xueshu Jianzhi, Tuxiang Xuanchuan yu Minzu Zhengzhi*, ed. Yu Minling, Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo, 2012, p. 399.

¹⁴² Cable p. 246; Lipman, “A Fierce and Brutal People,” p. 90.

¹⁴³ Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, pp. 70, 83-86, 120.

¹⁴⁴ Françoise Aubin, “Islam on the Wings of Nationalism: The Case of Muslim Intellectuals in Republican China”, in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, eds. Stéphane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, and Kosugi Yasushi, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 257-258.

native ancestors in Han Chinese temples, Muslims identified with foreign Abrahamic narratives of genealogy.¹⁴⁵ Besides suspicion towards the possible loyalty of Chinese Muslims to the birthplace of their foreign prophets, many educated Chinese in the late-Qing era were generally aware of the Muslim avoidance of idol and ancestor worship. Traditional Chinese holiday celebrations, often involving the parading of idols, sometimes precipitated brawling between Han and Muslim neighbourhoods in the northwest.¹⁴⁶ Anti-Qing revolutionaries increasingly appropriated traditional figures of religious veneration such as the semi-mythical Yellow Emperor and the philosopher-sage Confucius as the historicized progenitors of the Han national race and its civilization, and even planned to publicly institute the temple worship of the Yellow Emperor as a basis for racial solidarity among the masses in the new revolutionary state.

¹⁴⁵ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 33; Cable, *Dispatches*, p. 51; Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, 19-20.

¹⁴⁶ Ekvall p. 22.

Unsurprisingly, as chapter four discusses, when Han revolutionaries took arms against the Manchu Qing government in Gansu in 1911 under a banner of “restoring the Han”, many Muslim commanders resisted the revolution as a veiled anti-Muslim pogrom. Anti-Qing Chinese revolutionaries racialized resistance and loyalty to the Qing state, praising the overthrow of the dynasty as national liberation from Manchu foreigners, and excoriating other Han officials who continued to serve the Qing as “race traitors” (*Hanjian*).¹⁴⁷ By contrast, Chinese Muslim officers in the Qing army in Gansu saw their loyalty to the Qing as a negotiation for autonomy and authority in the Muslims’ native places, rather than as a question of direct racial loyalty to Manchu hegemony. However, their military service to the Qing logically placed Gansu Muslim officers in the category of *Hanjian*. The incident of Gansu Muslim commanders suppressing the Qing court’s constitutional reform movement in 1898, on the Empress Dowager’s orders, strengthened revolutionary suspicions that Chinese Muslims were hostile to the national cause of Han liberation and restoration.

By contrast, Gansu Muslim commanders subscribed to a very different, and less racialized, variant of “imperial nationalism” in the late-Qing period: the identification of the Qing realm with *Zhongguo*. Crucially, as chapter four details, even as Gansu Muslim officers intervened in the 1911-1912 revolutionary conflict to crush anti-Qing Han nationalists and preserve their own local authority, they continued to espouse a more territorially broad and inclusive notion of the *Zhongguo* nation, and would play a significant role in motivating a new nationalist consensus in the early republic to reclaim all of the frontiers of the former Qing.

At the same time, other Chinese-speaking Muslims responded enthusiastically to the call for revolution, despite the threats to minority religious culture implied in the racialist turn of

¹⁴⁷ Xu Xianlong p. 263.

many late-Qing era revolutionaries. The revolutionaries' drastic logic of national survival and the concern of Muslims for the preservation of faith motivated some Muslim community activists in the late-Qing era to hinge progress within their religious congregations on racial unity with their Han national brethren.¹⁴⁸ In July 1907, Qing-subject Muslim students in Tokyo gathered to independently form their own civic association, the Eastern Islamic Education Society (*Liudong Qingzhen Jiaoyuhui*). Within a year, the society quickly doubled in size to include all thirty-six Qing Muslim students (none from Xinjiang) in Japan at the time.¹⁴⁹ Though numerically small, its membership reflected the popularity of Chinese racial and nationalist ideas among the handful of progressive Muslim students privileged to study abroad. Frank Dikötter argues that increasingly prominent racial discourses among radical Qing students in Japan in the 1900s were not simply a populist "propaganda tactic" to rouse anti-Manchu sentiment, but instead reflected a central conviction that racial consciousness and unity were the keys to Chinese national survival.¹⁵⁰

Within this intellectual environment, Qing Muslim students in Japan increasingly perceived themselves as "Chinese" after their first personal encounters with other foreign Muslim travellers and residents exposed their differences with the rest of the world's unfamiliar Muslims.¹⁵¹ Many members of their self-formed student society also joined the Tongmenghui, an empire-wide coalition of Han revolutionary groups and cells. In addition to an overall focus on religious and social reform within Chinese Muslim communities, several articles in the society's inaugural publication, the *Xing Hui Bian* ("Articles to Awaken the Muslims") cited common

¹⁴⁸ Matsumoto Masumi, "Rationalizing Patriotism among Muslim Chinese: The Impact of the Middle East on the *Yuehua* Journal," in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World*, eds. Dudoignon, Hisao, and Yasushi, p. 123.

¹⁴⁹ Zhang Zhongfu, "Minzu guojia", p. 406.

¹⁵⁰ Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, pp. 69-72; 151-152; Zarrow p. 160-164.

¹⁵¹ Masumi, "Rationalizing Patriotism," p. 122.

descent from the Yellow Emperor as the basis for Chinese Muslim unity with the Han.¹⁵² The *Xing Hui Bian* flatly rejected any ethnic or racial differences between Muslims and Han in China, and urged its readership to both pursue modernizing reform within their communities as well as greater assimilation with the Han.¹⁵³ Student-writers in the *Xing Hui Bian* argued that without national unity with the Han, the ever-weakening Chinese nation would perish, and with it the Islamic faith of some its inhabitants, at the hands of foreign imperialism.

Other sympathetic Muslim audiences of the gathering revolution continued to cite more broad and traditional territorial identities of being Muslim in China that extended beyond the Han nationalists' narrowly-defined China. Although the society of Muslim students in Tokyo targeted their intellectual output towards the Chinese nation, they continued to equate the Chinese nation with more traditional identities of the Chinese imperial realm, in contrast to the racial definitions of other Han revolutionaries. The naming of their society used "*Qingzhen*" to refer to "Islam", a novel Chinese-language term coined among 16th-century Chinese Muslim scholars which implied loose cultural boundaries between Muslim subjects of the Chinese imperial realm and Muslim foreigners outside of it.¹⁵⁴ Student members prefaced their society's name with the geographical marker "Eastern" (*Liudong*), while the members of a similar-styled "reform society" in Zhejiang, which regularly corresponded with the Tokyo-based students, referred to themselves as the "East Asia Islamic Education General Congress" (*Dongya Qingzhen Jiaoyu Zonghui*).¹⁵⁵ Although responsive to the Han nationalist call for revolution against the Qing dynasty, these names suggested that Muslim activists associated their Chinese Muslim (*Qingzhen*) constituencies with the broad territorial expanse of the Qing empire as the

¹⁵² *Xing Hui Bian*, ed. Zhongguo Yisilan Lishi Baokan Cuibian, Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1992.

¹⁵³ Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 50; Zhang Zhongfu, "Minzu guojia," pp. 403, 406-407.

¹⁵⁴ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," pp. 242-243; Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁵⁵ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," pp. 242-243.

pre-eminent suzerain of East Asia (*Dongya*), including its non-Chinese appendages.

Thus, early Muslim collaborators with anti-Qing revolutionaries engaged with Han racialist and nationalist discourses on the basis of premises that tied the Muslims of the Han nation to a larger territorial body than envisioned by Han revolutionaries themselves. The *Xing Hui Bian* did not address the issue of Xinjiang province and the identity of its native Muslims, which other Han nationalists neglected as a foreign backwater. However, the Muslim revolutionaries' broad-based identification of the Muslims of the Chinese nation as the current Muslim subjects of the Qing notably left leeway for future reinterpretation. When the reincorporation of Xinjiang into the nation-state fold later became more favourable in the early republic's nationalist consensus, Chinese-speaking Muslim actors stood poised to intervene in the reclamation of Xinjiang and exploit the ties of Muslim identity in China.

The "Greater China" Consensus and the "Five-Race Republic"

Before and during 1911, Xinjiang remained a distant and irrelevant, largely unnoted horizon to anti-Qing revolutionaries in the interior provinces. During initial republican uprisings in 1911, partisans chanted "Cast away the Tartars" – in revolutionary parlance a backwards racial caste that included the Manchu rulers and their Turk subjects in Xinjiang – and flew an eighteen-starred flag that symbolized the eighteen provinces of the restored Chinese nation, excluding Xinjiang among other territories deemed non-Han.¹⁵⁶ However, subsequent events in the republican transition forced revolutionaries to re-evaluate the importance of imperial frontiers which they earlier ignored. Nationalist officials in the Qing military intervened during the Xinhai

¹⁵⁶ Esherick, 'How the Qing became China,' pp. 236-238; Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, pp. 49, 110.

conflict to negotiate a new post-Qing government in Beijing that accepted the former empire's borders, and the emergence of independence movements in former imperial territories threatened the break-up of the new state. In response, post-Qing national leaders from revolutionary and army backgrounds espoused a more expansive view of Chinese nationalism, drawing from earlier precedents of imperial identity to argue that the former empire constituted the natural extent of the new nation-state. This section argues that two important intellectual facets of this republican nationalism – the “Greater China Idea” (*da Zhongguo zhuyi*) and the “Five-Race Republic” (*Wuzu Gonghe*) – positioned Chinese-speaking Muslim actors as important actors to arbitrate between central authorities and frontier Muslim communities.

In January 1912, the nominal leader of the Tongmenghui, Sun Yatsen (1866-1925) unilaterally proclaimed a new republic in Nanjing, but his multi-front revolution in the central and south-eastern regions was too weak to topple the Qing court at Beijing and clasp effective national power. Seizing on the impasse, the Qing commander Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) negotiated the Qing abdication in Beijing in February 1912, stipulating the formal transfer of state power to a new government in Beijing. Wang Ke notes the historical importance of the Qing abdication as a turning point in the attitudes of Sun Yatsen's revolutionary coalition towards the Qing's non-Chinese territories. The provisional Nanjing republic's acceptance of the terms of the Qing abdication included the inheritance of sovereignty over the full territorial extent of the former empire; any attempt to carve out a separate Chinese republic from the Qing realm now amounted to illegal separatism.¹⁵⁷

At the same time, nationalist rhetoric and anti-Manchu pogroms in the Xinhai conflict convinced many Mongol and Tibetan elites they had no future in the post-Qing state. Their

¹⁵⁷ Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 110.

Yuan Shikai's Beijing government attempted to appease both nationalist sentiment in the Chinese-speaking core and former Qing elites in strategically important, non-Chinese borderlands through a readapted slogan of "Five Races in Harmony" (*Wuzu Gonghe*). "Five Races in Harmony" borrowed from earlier precedents in Manchu empire-craft, in which Qing emperors publicly addressed their empire not as an exclusively Manchu patrimony or as a Sinicizing Confucian dynasty, but rather as an equal union of five distinct and separate Manchu, Han, Mongol, Tibetan, and Hui ("Muslim") religio-cultural/linguistic realms.¹⁵⁸ Early republican authorities intended to re-adapt Qing-era ideas of five equal realms as a basis for national unity in the new state, positing the Chinese nation-state as a union of five distinct territorial and cultural constituencies, with Han Chinese elites varyingly placed at the center of national political power, and non-Chinese aristocratic elites retaining their Qing-era privileges.¹⁵⁹

However, the ambiguity of ethnicizing language to describe the "races" or "nationalities" of China undermined clear-cut boundaries between the majority Han, the Chinese-speaking Muslims, and the officially-recognized Turkic-speaking "Hui" Muslims of Xinjiang. Within imperial usages of *Wuzu Gonghe* and its contemporary re-adaptation in the early republic, the "Hui" typically referred to the Turkic-speaking Muslims of Xinjiang.¹⁶⁰ Both imperial and new republican leaders typically subsumed the Chinese-speaking Muslims, by contrast, as part of the Han.¹⁶¹ Formerly, in the Xinjiang periphery, the Qing dynasty distinguished between different types (*tonglei*) of Muslim subjects, and effectively treated Dungans in Xinjiang as a subset of the Han. However, other Han Chinese officials in the rest of the empire continued to differentiate

¹⁵⁸ Millward, *Economy*, pp. 201-202.

¹⁵⁹ Bulag, "Going Imperial," p. 265; Esherick, "How the Qing became China," p. 245; Leibold, p. 16.

¹⁶⁰ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 19; Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 78; Lattimore p. 82; Zhang Zhongfu, "Minzu guojia," p. 401.

¹⁶¹ Dreyer pp. 16-17; Klimes p. 34.

Chinese-speaking Muslims among their local Han subjects as the “Hui”. Even into the early republican period, bureaucrats in the interior provinces were unaware of the subtle ethnographic distinctions of distant Muslim populations among frontier officialdom. Moreover, references to *Wuzu Gonghe* in early republican literature seldom explicitly specified the Hui nationality as the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang, thus leading several contemporary historians to conclude that many regional republican actors understood Chinese-speaking Muslims as part of the Hui nationality.¹⁶²

In addition, these “nationality” identities papered over strong regional and local differences across Qing subject communities. Dru Gladney argues that vast differences in customs, cuisine, and even dialect/language challenged nationalist political attempts to impose Han identity on the former Qing’s “Chinese-speaking” peoples.¹⁶³ The boundaries of Han identity remained fluid throughout the republican period, not only in the case of Chinese-speaking Muslims, but among many other diverse communities that varying acculturated with regional Chinese customs and dialects.¹⁶⁴ Geographic distance, practical isolation, and sectarian differences further cleaved many Chinese Muslim communities, precluding strong transregional affinities.¹⁶⁵ The Sufi northwest was especially fractious, and many historians note the strength of sectarian identity among members of particular orders.¹⁶⁶ Meanwhile, in the rest of the Chinese interior, other traditional Muslim elites viewed the Sufi lineages of the northwest as

¹⁶² David Brophy, “Five Races, One Parliament? Xinhai in Xinjiang and the Problem of Minority Representation in the Chinese Republic,” *Inner Asia* 14 (2012), p. 356; Garnaut, “From Yunnan,” p. 119; Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 19; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 207.

¹⁶³ Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 19; Leibold pp. 120-121.

¹⁶⁴ Wing-hoi Chan, “Ethnic Labels in a Mountainous Region: The Case of She Bandits,” and Helen F. Siu and Liu Zhiwei, “Lineage, Market, Piracy, and Dan: Ethnicity in the Pearl River Delta of South China,” in *Empire at the Margins*, pp. 255-257 and pp. 287-290.

¹⁶⁵ Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 49, 159.

¹⁶⁶ Allès, ‘Chinese Muslim Women,’ p. 93; Cable, *Gobi Desert*, pp. 17-18, 26-30.

regressive, superstitious and violent.¹⁶⁷ Thus, various regional differences challenged elite rhetoric of Muslim and national unity.¹⁶⁸

As chapter six argues, prominent Chinese-speaking Muslim activists began emerging several years after the 1911-1912 Xinhai transition as “entrepreneurs” of Muslim political identity within China, attempting to steer this backdrop of confusing and vague interpretations towards a new view of “Muslim nationality” (*Huiminzu*, *Huizu*). Crucially, this view asserted all Muslims of China as part of the same “Muslim nationality”, separate from the Han, and entitled to recognition and specific rights within China.

However, political circumstances in the Xinhai period initially compelled Chinese Muslim actors to affirm loyalty to China on the basis of racial unity with the Han. Against the backdrop of Han nationalist rhetoric and Han-Muslim violence in the late Qing era, many Chinese-speaking Muslim activists in the early republic accepted Chinese-speaking Muslim inclusion within the Han nationality to signal political loyalty to the new nation-state, rather than assert Chinese-speaking Muslims as a part of the “Hui” nationality and risk accusations of betraying Han identity.¹⁶⁹ During the 1911-1912 period, many reformist-minded and politically-active members of east-coast Chinese-speaking ulema attempted to mediate between competing national authorities, and use their religious ties to encourage Muslim loyalty to the new state. For example, Wang Kuan, a leading imam at Beijing’s famous Ox Street mosque, personally visited Sun Yatsen in January 1912 as a self-styled representative of China’s Muslims to profess loyalty to the republican declaration.¹⁷⁰ After Yuan Shikai negotiated the abdication of the Qing court,

¹⁶⁷ Masumi, “Rationalizing Patriotism,” p. 125.

¹⁶⁸ Lipman, “Ethnicity and Politics,” p. 301.

¹⁶⁹ Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de ‘Guomin’*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁰ Masumi, “Rationalizing Patriotism,” p. 122.

Wang Kuan personally telegraphed Qing Muslim commanders in the northwest to convince them to peacefully accept the new national republic under Yuan Shikai's authority.¹⁷¹ As chapter four elaborates, Qing Muslim commanders initially resisted republican uprisings in the northwest, suspecting that Han nationalist rhetoric might provoke local Han-Muslim tensions. However, Wang Kuan's mediation promised inclusion for China's Muslims in the restored Han nation, and Qing Muslim commanders were more willing to accept the conservative military regime of a fellow Qing officer like Yuan Shikai.¹⁷²

Institutionalizing the Muslims of China

Outside of formal political spheres, Wang Kuan and his other religious colleagues at the Beijing Ox Street mosque attempted to develop unprecedented organizational ties between mosques across the national republic, in a tentative campaign to promote national unity among the Muslims of China through formal institutionalized linkages.¹⁷³ Despite pre-existing notions among Chinese Muslim scholars of a distinctive Muslim community within China, separate from the rest of the Muslim world, ties between mosques across the Qing empire ranged from limited to none. Itinerant Chinese imams and their personal travels between disconnected and isolated mosque-based communities comprised the main exception.¹⁷⁴ The more tightly-organized Sufi orders of the northwest, described in chapter one, were primarily limited to Gansu and Xinjiang, and although their inter-mosque linkages spanned the Gansu-Xinjiang frontier, they did not significantly penetrate the rest of the Qing interior. Against this backdrop of relatively weak ties

¹⁷¹ Xu Xianlong p. 59.

¹⁷² Xu Xianlong pp. 59-60.

¹⁷³ Masumi, "Rationalizing Patriotism," p. 123.

¹⁷⁴ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, pp. 48-49.

As final chapters argue, this brand of Muslim civil activism shortly gained particular significance within the context of the post-Qing “frontier question” in the 1920s and 1930s. By then, other Chinese Muslim actors would attempt to assert institutional ties to Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. In addition, central authorities in the Chinese interior recognized the potential value of religion – namely Buddhism, but also increasingly Islam – as a nationally unifying bond that transcended language and cultural divides between core and post-imperial peripheries. The intersection of these trends thus promised to elevate those Chinese Muslim actors who could institutionalize ties between Muslim communities across China, and in particular its unstable frontier regions. In this way, Chinese Muslim actors could game the “frontier and nationality questions” of the new republic, by claiming to central authorities to be able to form and coalesce a nation-wide Muslim constituency loyal to the Chinese nation-state that spanned the northwest-interior divide.

The Ox Street mosque developed as an important node in growing contacts between Chinese Muslim scholars in the interior and the wider Muslim world in the late 19th century. Starting in the 1890s, Wang Kuan and colleagues took advantage of the Qing court’s recent repeal of foreign travel bans to tour India, Arabia, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire. Exposed to ideas of social progress, religious revival, and anti-imperialism in other Islamic countries, Ox Street’s intellectuals articulated their own discourses of reforming Muslim communities in the Qing in order to prepare the faithful to confront the challenges of a European-dominated age. Even as they encountered the international implications of religious identity in the Muslim world beyond China’s borders, they oriented the interests of their Muslim congregations to China’s own political future, in similar vein to how radical student activists in Tokyo who connected the

survival of Islam within China to the survival of the Chinese nation itself.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Aubin, “Islam on the Wings of Nationalism,” pp. 256-259; Masumi, “Rationalizing Patriotism,” p. 121, s123, 126-127.

From Beijing, Wang Kuan presided over the formation of a Chinese Islamic Progress Association in 1912, which built from previous efforts to establish modern pedagogical colleges in Kaifeng and Beijing for religious scholars.¹⁷⁶ Wang Kuan's "Progress Association" inspired similarly-named Muslim organizations across the republic.¹⁷⁷ Françoise Aubin argues that the new precedent of using "*Zhongguo*" in the names of Muslim civil associations, in contrast to previous references to traditional Qing sovereignty over "*Dongya*" or East Asia, demonstrated how Chinese Muslim activists in the interior explicitly identified with the new nationalist order. Several of Wang Kuan's collaborators in the Ox Street mosque's reformist scene travelled to Gansu to bring their nationalized vision of religious reform and progress to the Republic's northwest corner.¹⁷⁹ Among them, Ma Linyi established a regional branch of the Chinese Islamic Progress Association in the provincial capital Lanzhou by 1913, attempting to consolidate formal civic ties between Beijing and the northwest along confessional lines.¹⁸⁰

Although Wang Kuan's organizational activism among Muslim communities in the republic's first years apparently remained constrained to Chinese-speaking provinces, and did not broach relations with Muslims in Xinjiang, it laid the foundations for Chinese Muslim actors' future attempts to engage the distant Muslims of Xinjiang. Whether Wang Kuan's Ox Street mosque developed ties with Beijing's growing Turkic community, described in chapter one, remains unknown. However, the extent of interactions in the past between Beijing's Muslim communities, as well as the ensuing emergence in later years of other Chinese Muslim actors

¹⁷⁶ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," p. 250.

¹⁷⁷ Leila Cherif-Chebbi, "Brothers and Comrades: Muslim Fundamentalists and Communists Allied for the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in China," in *Devout Societies vs. Impious States? Transmitting Islamic Learning in Russia, Central Asia, and China, through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Dudoignon, Stéphane A, Berlin: Klaus Schawrz Verlag, 2004, p. 64.

¹⁷⁹ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," p. 256-257.

¹⁸⁰ Cherif-Chebbi, "Brothers and Comrades," p. 65; Xu Xianlong p. 141.

claiming direct ties to Turkic Muslims in Beijing and Xinjiang, as chapter six describes, underscores this probability.

Specific political views diverged among east-coast *ulema*, or religious scholars, engaged in early republican politics of national unity. Ma Linyi more ardently supported the Tongmenghui and its racial nationalism, while Wang Kuan favoured Yuan Shikai's Beijing government and its slogan of *Wuzu Gonghe*.¹⁸¹ While both specifically identified the Chinese-speaking Muslims as part of the Han people, they also shared a broad notion of Chinese national identity that stretched beyond racial limits of the Han and encompassed all Muslim souls of the former Qing empire. Thus, their attempts to create formal bureaucratic linkages among the nation's Muslims raised the possibility of asserting national ties to China's peripheral Muslims beyond the pale of the Han revolutionaries' originally intended nation, such as the Turkic speakers of Xinjiang.

During the republican transition, the fluidity of Chinese-speaking Muslim identity, and especially its legacies as a trans-frontier intermediary between Xinjiang and Gansu noted in previous chapters, blurred boundaries between the majority Han and the minority "Hui" Muslims within the rhetoric of *Wuzu Gonghe*. The more territorially broad notions of national identity among Chinese Muslim activists poised them to intervene discursively and politically in the new Republic's attempts to renegotiate its post-imperial territories and borders beyond the original 18-province homeland of the Xinhai revolutionaries. Now, the emergence of an irredentist republican order under nationalist military elites, who wanted to reclaim the Qing's imperiled

¹⁸¹ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," p. 256.

frontiers, also provided an attentive political audience for Chinese Muslim activists who could bridge ties between the Chinese interior and the Muslims of the periphery.

Within this activist milieu emerged new “entrepreneurs” of Muslim identity, most notably Li Qian as chapter six describes, who influentially claimed that all Muslims in China belonged to the same nationality. However, before Chinese-speaking Muslim actors could exploit the political opportunities of asserting membership in the Hui nationality in order to claim better Muslim representation and constitutional rights, they would first have to involve themselves in the practical “frontier issues” raised by Wuzu Gonghe. The very different denouement of the Xinhai Revolution in the Qing’s Muslim peripheries of Gansu and Xinjiang, where anti-revolution loyalist forces played more significant roles than Han-centered nationalism in shaping the new regional order, created opportunities and challenges for Li Qian’s efforts to build ties between the Muslims of China’s core and the Muslims of its borderlands.

Chapter Four

The Republican Transformation of Xinjiang (ca. 1900s – 1910s)

Despite the relative disinterest of revolutionists in eastern and central provinces towards Xinjiang, the spread of revolutionary ideas and organizations into the region highlighted the importance of the late Qing military as an inadvertent propagator of Chinese national identity in Manchu imperial domains. Han Chinese revolutionaries in the interior rejected the Qing court's attempts to identify its empire as a continuation of the traditional Chinese realm, or *Zhongguo*. However, their sympathetic Chinese allies in the Qing's frontier garrisons accepted the inclusion of far-away and culturally dissimilar subjects in the coming "national" era. In particular in Xinjiang, the activism of Chinese revolutionaries in local societies and the adaptive responses of native Muslim partners in Xinjiang built from previous imperial identities of being the "Muslims of the Qing" to produce unique discourses and alliances that differed markedly from other revolutionary forms in the interior. Whereas the nationalist and assimilationist rhetoric of anti-Qing revolutionaries in the interior implied threats to minority religious culture, native associates of Chinese revolutionaries in Xinjiang articulated a vision of racial unity between the Muslim and Chinese nations within the Qing empire.

In particular, this chapter argues that local Dungan supporters emerged as important intermediaries between Chinese republicans and local Xinjiang Muslim societies. Underground cooperation between Chinese revolutionaries and other local Turkic classes in Xinjiang, such as literate intellectuals, merchants, aristocrats, and paupers, demonstrated that shifting notions of local identity and interests did not preclude co-existence with other separate peoples within a shared political state. Turkic malcontents of Qing rule in Xinjiang could find common cause to

work with other groups traditionally seen as “outsiders”, such as “Khitay” (Han Chinese) and “Dungan” (Chinese-speaking Muslim) migrants from the interior, and struggle for a new political order in the region, even if the borders of that new state order happened to coincide with present imperial boundaries.

Thus, Dungan activists mediated between Chinese and Turkic partners in Xinjiang’s growing revolutionary underground, facilitating a platform of multi-ethnic cooperation that was more conciliatory towards local religion, culture, and language. Although their attempted revolution sought to overthrow the regional Qing order, Dungan participants demonstrated how Chinese-speaking Muslims continued to intervene in new regime-building initiatives as middlemen between Chinese national authority and distant frontiers. Chapter two described the emergence of Dungan military power in the late Qing northwest as an intermediary between Gansu and Xinjiang. This chapter proceeds to argue that Chinese revolutionaries adapted a similar logic in using Dungan allies in their outreach to local Muslim societies. Moreover, this chapter also argues Dungan-Turkic cooperation during the Xinhai revolution anticipated the forms and discourses of Dungan-Turkic cooperation during Ma Zhongying’s 1931 intervention, such as through secret society channels and the rhetoric of Muslim self-mastery, demonstrating how Ma Zhongying’s intervention borrowed from earlier evolving precedents.

Ultimately, Qing authorities stemmed the revolutionary tide in Xinjiang. However, they similarly relied on Dungan intermediaries to consolidate an autonomous survivor regime of former imperial officials in a new and potentially hostile republican order. Thus, in contrast to how Chinese-speaking Muslim actors in the interior used their national Muslim ties to facilitate the central government’s claims to Muslim territories in the northwest, post-Qing provincial

authorities in Xinjiang used Muslim allies to negotiate and defend autonomy from the center. Political actors in the early republic relied on Chinese Muslim allies for different ends, depending on region and interests. Irredentist actors in the center sought to construct a national state that reincorporated distant, post-imperial frontiers, while other local authorities in those borderlands sought to negotiate their power, and if necessary, autonomy, within the emergent national state. Nevertheless, as the emergence of the post-Qing order in Xinjiang in this chapter, and later in Gansu in chapter five, show, these varying uses of intermediary Dungan power reflected an emergent consensus among Muslim and non-Muslim actors on the unifying ties of Muslim political identities in republican China.

Moreover, Dungan intermediary roles in the northwest, both in Xinjiang and Gansu, manifested significant continuities in the empire-to-republic transition. New republican authorities in Xinjiang and Gansu were commonly late-Qing office-holders, who adapted Qing-era practices to changing political conditions. Thus, Chinese Muslim actors in the northwest drew significantly from imperial-era roles in the ways they poised themselves, and in turned were used, as power-brokers in post-imperial frontiers. At the same time, the use of Dungan military intermediaries in early republican Xinjiang also bred troubled legacies in Dungan-Turkic relations. In particular, Turkic Muslims in southern Xinjiang, where Dungan officers were most dominant, deeply resented brutal military rule. In contrast to other regions such as Qumul in eastern Xinjiang, where more positive interactions with Chinese Muslims facilitated a stronger sense of common interests, Turkic resentment against “outsider” Dungan rulers in southern Xinjiang survived up to and challenged Ma Zhongying’s 1931 invasion.

Xinjiang Muslims in the Xinhai Revolution

The ranks of Zuo Zongtang's late-Qing era Hunanese Army included many underground members of the Gelaohui, a powerful anti-Qing secret society which preached Chinese liberation from Manchu barbarians, and the Hunanese Army's 1876-1878 reconquest of Xinjiang inadvertently helped the Gelaohui expand in the northwest.¹⁸² After settling in Xinjiang, Gelaohui members established new lodges (*shantang*) within Qing garrisons in Urumchi and Ili to recruit local malcontents to the anti-Manchu cause.¹⁸³ The Gelaohui's penchant vision of liberating the Han from an oppressive and alien Manchu race, and restoring the Han to rightful rulership of its homeland, led many Qing officials to worry that expanding Gelaohui activities in Xinjiang would spark violence between nationalist Han settlers and native Muslims.¹⁸⁴ By contrast, the Gelaohui proved surprisingly adaptive in reaching out to a small following of non-Chinese Muslims in northern Xinjiang, promising to redress common local grievances against Qing officials such as the high taxes of new provincial reforms, and the corrupt practices of local Turkic officials, or *begs*.¹⁸⁵

Until 1911, Gelaohui membership in Urumchi and Ili remained predominantly Chinese-speaking Han and Dungan demobilized soldiers who struggled with reclaiming desert land-plots for agriculture, and poor economic migrants from the interior who turned to organized crime for a livelihood. Nonetheless, the ability of a Chinese secret society, with Buddhist, Daoist, and other

¹⁸² Wang Shixiang, "Xinhai Geming shi de Kashi Gelaohui," in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v. 1, ed. Yu Junsheng, Urumchi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1990, p. 9.

¹⁸³ Wei Changhong, "Yili Xinhai Geming shiqi jizhong wenxian jianjie," in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v. 1, ed. Yu Junsheng, p. 38.

¹⁸⁴ Wang Shixiang, "Xinhai Geming," p.9; Yang Zengxin v. 1 pp. 547-549.

¹⁸⁵ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 17; Bao'erhan [Burhan Shahidi], "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v.1, p. 85.

Economic and social frustrations united lower-class Han and Dungans with native Muslims against a common enemy, namely an increasingly Han-dominated provincial status quo supported with Turkic *begs*, or bureaucratic functionaries. The advent of Chinese republican activism in Ili after 1907 lent a more nationalist flavouring to this multi-confessional and multilingual underground coalition. In 1908, Qing authorities transferred a modernized unit to Ili under the command of Yang Zuanxu, secretly a member of the Tongmenghui, an empire-wide alliance of anti-Qing revolutionary organizations.¹⁸⁶ Like many other anti-Qing revolutionaries in the interior who collaborated pragmatically with local “secret societies” that trained in martial arts, practiced mystical ceremonies, and controlled regional black markets, Yang Zuanxu also recognized the mobilization potential of the Ili Gelaohui, and dispatched his aide-de-camp to make contact with society members in local barracks, bazaars, and farms.¹⁸⁷

Importantly, Yang Zuanxu’s collaboration with the local Gelaohui not only sought to take advantage of its organized military structure, but also its connections to anti-Qing segments of local Muslim society which might be sympathetic to his Chinese nationalist rhetoric. Confronting the cultural diversity of his new positing in Ili, Yang Zuanxu assigned great importance to the participation of Xinjiang’s non-Han peoples in the transformation of the present Qing order.¹⁸⁸ As David Brophy notes, histories of underground activism are harder to reconstruct than the public activities and publications of movement leaders.¹⁸⁹ The ensuing collaboration between Ili revolutionaries and Gelaohui members is no exception, but with Yang Zuanxu’s decision to

¹⁸⁶ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 101; Ma Fushou, “Yang Zengxin shangtai qianhou,” in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v. 1, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸⁷ Lewis, “Notes sure le gelaohui,” p. 271 ; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, pp. 165-6 ; Wei Changhong, ‘Yili Xinhai,’ p. 40.

¹⁸⁸ Bao'erhan, “Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi,” p. 85 ; Han, Ma, and Wang p. 141-142.

¹⁸⁹ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 15.

mutiny against the Qing command in Ili in December 1911, the local Gelaohui, as well as other social outcasts such as exiled Dungan convicts, emerged as leading military participants.

Yang Zuanxu's public activities attest to his interest in involving local Muslim society in his political coalition. Even if largely opportunistic, Yang Zuanxu recognized the importance of Turkic and Dungan Muslim sentiment to securing the revolution in Xinjiang. Like many other Chinese officers in Qing units beyond the interior, he viewed the province as part of the same *Zhongguo* homeland. His establishment of a multilingual, periodical press in Ili in 1908 enlisted the region's Tatar diaspora and other local Muslims educated outside the Qing empire to oversee the publication's Turkic-language edition.¹⁹⁰ Yang Zuanxu's patronage for a local Turkic-language press in 1908, before founding a Chinese-language edition in 1910, reflected the premium his revolutionary clique placed on activism within non-Chinese-speaking communities.

The Turkic Muslim writers within Yang Zuanxu's press movement in Ili were self-styled "Jadidists", who identified with the "New Method" (*Usul-i Jadid*) movement of Russian-subject Muslim intellectuals to modernize teaching methods in religious schools.¹⁹¹ They married their ideals of progress in local Muslim communities to a political platform of encouraging racial unity between Turks and Chinese in Xinjiang against European-Christian imperialism.¹⁹² David Brophy stresses that the priorities of cultural reform within present imperial boundaries led Xinjiang Muslim intellectuals to identify their community and homeland as the "Muslims of the Qing" or alternately the "Muslims of China".¹⁹³ This paralleled the similar strategies of other various Qing Muslim subjects described in previous chapters who embraced some variant of

¹⁹⁰ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 110.

¹⁹¹ Alexandre Papas, 'Muslim Reformism in Xinjiang: Reading the Newspaper Yengī Hayāt (1934-1937),' in *Kasghar Revisited*, eds. Beller-Han, Jugawara, and Schlyter, p. 163.

¹⁹² Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, pp. 111, 130.

¹⁹³ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 12-14, 88, 111.

Qing/Chinese Muslim identity, such as Turkic aristocrats in the Qing state (chapters one and two), Qing Muslim students in Tokyo and Chinese-speaking Muslim scholars in central-eastern provinces during the Xinhai revolution (chapter three).

Thus, diverse classes of Muslims in Xinjiang and throughout the Qing empire increasingly conciliated new notions of national identity with pre-existing imperial borders in order to achieve their political interests and social goals. The larger international threat of foreign imperialism motivated Muslim subjects across the Qing to identify the survival of their communities with the survival of the wider “Chinese” nation.¹⁹⁴ As the previous chapter argued, a sense of imminent national crisis in the Chinese interior drove Chinese Muslim scholars in the late Qing period to ally their local projects of religious reform with larger nationalist Chinese movements, under the umbrella of national strengthening. Similarly in Xinjiang, several Turkic writers in Yang Zuanxu’s Ili press even appealed to a religious basis for patriotism among Xinjiang Muslims towards China, quoting a popular prophetic saying in the colonial Middle East: “Love of the homeland is a part of faith.”¹⁹⁵ Xinjiang Muslim collaborators with the Chinese republican project in the northwest frontier could debate the theoretical implications of Muslim identity in China as a nation or race versus political federation, but their common commitment to Muslim progress and rights within a post-Qing republic predisposed them to strengthening ties with local Han and Dungan as partners in a new nation-state imaginary.

The notion of a shared identity as the “Muslims of China” developed as a strong glue in solidifying relations between Turkic and Dungan activists in Ili’s revolutionary scene. By its final year of publication in 1911, shortly before the outbreak of the first republican uprisings in

¹⁹⁴ Masumi, ‘Rationalizing Patriotism,’ p. 123.

¹⁹⁵ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 111; Masumi, ‘Rationalizing Patriotism,’ pp. 126-127.

the interior, Yang Zuanxu's periodical press in Ili readapted *Wuzu Gonghe*, or the Five-Race Republic, discourses from the Chinese interior to appeal for the unity of Xinjiang's own five nationalities (*minzu*): the Han, the "Turbaned" (Turkic) Muslims, the Hui (Dungan), the Mongol, and the Kazakh-Kirghiz. Notably, the Chinese republican movement in Ili altered the contours of *Wuzu Gonghe* in Xinjiang according to local legal categories, likely relying on ethnographic descriptions in Qing gazeteers to identify Xinjiang's native nationalities. However, Turkic and Dungan activists who affiliated with Yang Zuanxu's movement rejected this rhetorical division of Xinjiang Muslim society. Instead, they promoted patriotic unity between Muslims and Chinese, rather than between various separate Muslims groups and the Chinese.

Turkic intellectuals in Ili drew from their studies and travels abroad in Russian- and British-ruled Muslim lands to emphasize the importance of internal Muslim unity in a European-dominated age. They preferred to gloss over prior notions of difference from other Chinese-speaking Muslims in the Qing in order to emphasize Muslim unity in Xinjiang. In 1911, one leading Turkic contributor to Yang Zuanxu's press published an influential textbook which celebrated the virtue of a single, unified Muslim nation.¹⁹⁶ Likewise, Dungan activists in Ili used "Hui" to refer to all Muslims in Xinjiang, and did not accept local Chinese republicans' attempts to differentiate between the different nationalities of Xinjiang Muslims. As such, an emergent imperial identity as the "Muslims of the Qing" among Turkic and Dungan intellectuals in Ili paved further Turkic-Dungan cooperation in the new republican order as the "Muslims of China"

Thus, Ili's anti-Qing coalition developed as an early and significant site of Dungan-Turkic political alliance under the premise of a shared national identity as the "Muslims of

¹⁹⁶ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 130.

China". Unlike in 1864, when pragmatic, short-lived alliances between Dungans and other native Muslims often descended into communal violence, the growing pan-ethnic constellation of activists orbiting Ili afforded new opportunities for local Dungan and Turkic participants to imagine a new, long-term order of Muslim unity and Muslim-Han equality.

In particular, the Dungan activist members of this coalition played an especially important role in bridging communication between Chinese revolutionaries and local Turkic intellectuals. One of the leading journalists of the Chinese press edition was the Dungan intellectual Han Yushu, with strong ties to Dungan mosque communities in Yining town.¹⁹⁷ His Turkic counterparts translated his articles into the local Turkic dialect for fellow Muslim readers across the language divide.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, the exact content of this channel of Dungan-Turkic communication remains to be reconstructed from surviving second-hand Tatar reprints and Chinese accounts of individual publications, since no original manuscripts of the Ili republican press have been found. Historical scholarship has so far focused on intellectual exchange between Han Chinese revolutionaries and native Muslim intellectuals, without addressing the middleman role that Dungan activists like Han Yushu arguably played in mediating the cultural divide between Chinese and Turkic interlocutors.

The first republican uprising against the Qing in Xinjiang broke out in December 1911, not in Ili but in the nearby capital Urumchi, where the Tongmenghui also infiltrated local Chinese units. Although Qing authorities managed to shortly quash the mutiny, Yang Zuanxu took advantage of the disarray, successfully capturing the Ili military district in January 1912, and proclaimed a new republican government. Dungan members of the Gelaohui played leading

¹⁹⁷ Wei Changhong, 'Yili Xinhai,' pp. 40, 50.

¹⁹⁸ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 111.

roles in mobilizing local support for the both uprisings in Urumchi and Ili, where both Gelaohui lodges were now headed by Dungans on the eve of revolution.¹⁹⁹ As later chapters also elaborate, Dungan leadership within the Gelaohui in Xinjiang exposed the extent of local power that Muslims could achieve while cooperating with other Han Chinese in the underworld of Chinese “secret societies”. In particular, the Gelaohui lodge in Ili contributed significantly to Yang Zuanxu’s early campaigns in 1912, recruiting militias of well-armed Dungan convicts and penal labourers who proved to be among his most effective units.²⁰⁰

As Yang Zuanxu’s provisional government in Ili prepared to march on Urumchi, other Dungan revolutionaries outside of the Gelaohui also mobilized local Dungan male society for war against the Qing, and re-applied their successful appeals among Dungan mosques to the rest of local Muslim society more broadly. Dungan associates of Yang Zuanxu spoke on behalf of the anti-Manchu republican cause in Yining’s Dungan mosques. Among them, Han Yushu argued that common oppression under the Qing, not an inescapable Han-Muslim feud, was the true cause of shared suffering in Xinjiang, pointing out that the same Han armies which murdered Muslim rebel heroes and commoners in the 19th century also massacred other Han commoners in crushing rebellions against the Qing elsewhere.²⁰¹ From the content of their mosque appeals, Dungan activists intended to use “Hui” to inspire a sense of Dungan communal unity with all Muslims in Xinjiang within the Chinese nation, and call for Muslim unity with the Han Chinese.

In one surviving fragment of a speech, Han Yushu notably urged Muslims in Xinjiang to “reclaim self-mastery (*zhuquan*) and cast off their slavery”.²⁰² *Zhuquan* is more appropriately

¹⁹⁹ Han Bin pp. 144-145.

²⁰⁰ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 17; Wei Changhong, “Yili Xinhai,” p. 43.

²⁰¹ Wei Changhong, “Yili Xinhai,” p. 40.

²⁰² Han Bin p. 144.

translated as “self-mastery” here, rather than its conventional definition as “sovereignty”. The context of Han Yushu’s declaration makes clear he did not intend to call for Muslim “sovereignty” from China, but rather for greater Muslim freedoms within a new political order as a part of China. Other fragments of Han Yushu’s writings in the Ili press indicate how he stressed the harmony between defending local Muslim interests in Xinjiang and unifying with the rest of China: “It is possible to both struggle for this country [China], and to protect this piece of land [in Xinjiang].”²⁰³ As chapter six notes, the discourse of Muslim “self-mastery” (*zhuquan*) as a platform for national unity with China gained more prominence among Chinese Muslim activists in the interior by the mid- to late 1910s, and particularly in Gansu. The discourse of Muslim *zhuquan* even featured prominently in Ma Zhongying’s 1931 intervention in Xinjiang. Although Han Yushu’s fragmentary writings in Xinjiang in 1910-1911 display the earliest reference found so far to this notion of Muslim *zhuquan* in Chinese Muslim sources, it is unclear whether Han Yushu borrowed from or in turn influenced similar discourses in neighbouring Gansu. Nonetheless, Gansu Muslim activists by the late 1910s increasingly referenced the ideal of Muslim *zhuquan* in China, especially as they began to depict themselves as legitimate representatives of other Muslims in Xinjiang.

Han Yushu’s activism in Ili impacted the direction and rhetoric of Chinese republicanism in Xinjiang in 1911-1912. Han Chinese leaders in the Ili government re-adapted Han Yushu’s logic of a common Han-Muslim front against the Qing in Turkic-language propaganda, by drawing comparisons between Zuo Zongtang’s massacres of Muslims during the Qing reconquest of Xinjiang in 1876-1878, and the infamous massacres of Han commoners at Yangzhou and Jiading during the Manchu conquest of eastern China in 1645.²⁰⁴ The Ili

²⁰³ Han Bin p. 144.

²⁰⁴ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 166.

Republican faction generated its propaganda and political slogans in response to the activism of its local supporters and allies, which included many central Dungan actors.

During the ensuing civil war between Yang Zuanxu's republican coalition and the Qing provincial regime at Urumchi in the spring of 1912, the Gelaohui spread southwards along the Tarim Basin into Kashgar. The Gelaohui was effective not only at assassinating Qing officials, but also in local politics as revolutionary activists, recruiting and collaborating with non-Han members to defend local causes. Gelaohui members introduced popular elections for new county officials in some pockets of territory under their control, and even briefly occupied the "Kashgar Duma", an association of wealthy merchants and notables appointed by Kashgar officials to represent local interests.²⁰⁵ By the middle of 1912, the Gelaohui penetrated a significant extent of the Qing army in Kashgar, and independently organized its own military expedition to Chorla to aid local Muslims in a violent land dispute with self-barricaded Russian subjects.²⁰⁶ Among its local Muslim sympathizers, the Gelaohui garnered a popular reputation for defending Muslim communities against corrupt and abusive local officials.²⁰⁷ Xinjiang Dungans again played an intermediary role in organizing ties between the Gelaohui and its native Muslim members. They likely used their commercial connections to Kasghari Muslim society to facilitate the Gelaohui's rapid penetration of Qing representative institutions for merchants in southern Xinjiang such as the "Kashgar Duma" and even Qing-era consular networks for migrants in the Russian Empire.²⁰⁸

Ili Republicans' military mobilization of local Dungan mosque communities and the Gelaohui's activist outreach to local Muslims thus demonstrated how Xinjiang Dungans played

²⁰⁵ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, pp. 104, 116.

²⁰⁶ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 124; Wang Shixiang, "Xinhai Geming," pp. 13-14.

²⁰⁷ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 127.

intermediary roles between Chinese political aspirations and its base among native Muslim subjects during the breakdown of imperial order. However, it was not a foregone conclusion which side the most powerful Dungans in Xinjiang would pick in the Xinhai conflict. Yang Zengxin, then serving as Xinjiang's judicial commissioner in Urumchi during the first republican mutinies in December 1911, effectively raised a private Dungan army with the help of personal contacts from his native province Yunnan and his earlier posts in Gansu.²⁰⁹ Yang Zengxin's recruitment of the so-called New Muslim Army (*Hui Dui*) from Dungan mosques and villages in the Urumchi region secured his survival during the Xinhai Revolution and the consolidation of a new provincial regime in its aftermath.

Yang Zengxin's Dungan Counter-Revolution

Yang Zengxin's command of Dungan military power to secure a post-Xinhai government in Xinjiang demonstrated how Qing-era officials could use Qing-era precedents to stem 1911-1912 revolutionary conflict and preserve power in the republican transition. It also fulfilled Qing-era reforms in the previous two decades to increasingly integrate Chinese-speaking Muslims as armed intermediaries in the rule of Xinjiang. Yang Zengxin's Dungan counter-revolution crushed the aspirations of Ili's revolutionary coalition to better empower local Turkic Muslims in alliances with other Chinese Muslim supporters. Nonetheless, the counter-revolution placed Dungans in Xinjiang in unprecedented positions of state-endorsed power, even if those positions contributed to greater Dungan-Turkic tensions in Xinjiang.

²⁰⁹ Garnaut, "From Yunnan," pp. 106, 111.

Chapter two previously described how Yang Zengxin rose to prominence in the late Qing's frontier bureaucracies in Gansu and later Xinjiang as a renowned "expert" on Muslim affairs. In particular, Yang Zengxin successfully advocated greater Chinese Muslim incorporation into the Qing military, and his transfer to Xinjiang in 1907 launched a new precedent in local Qing officials tentatively recruiting largely Dungan garrisons. Several Qing superiors in the Xinjiang provincial government concurred with Yang Zengxin's argument that local Dungans were more effective and loyal fighters than aging and mutinous garrisons of Han soldiers from the 1870s, which increasingly joined anti-Qing secret societies.²¹⁰ After becoming judicial commissioner in Urumchi in 1909, Yang Zengxin successfully recommended the reform of the Urumchi district army to the Xinjiang governor through large-scale Dungan recruitment, and promptly assumed responsibility for its command.²¹¹

During fighting between Qing forces and Ili republicans in the winter of 1912, Yang Zengxin's command of the New Muslim Army became a significant source of tension with the Qing governor. When Yang Zengxin refused to deploy the New Muslim Army in spring offensives against the Ili regime, the governor suspected his subordinate of plotting a coup in Urumchi. In the ensuing standoff in April 1912, Dungan soldiers in Urumchi loyally defended their patron, rescuing Yang Zengxin from the governor's assassination attempt and raising large militias to blockade government buildings and force the governor's resignation.²¹²

After succeeding to provincial governorship, Yang Zengxin's New Muslim Army was central to the consolidation of his new regime without reliance on external help. In 1913, the national republican government in Beijing brokered a power-sharing agreement between the

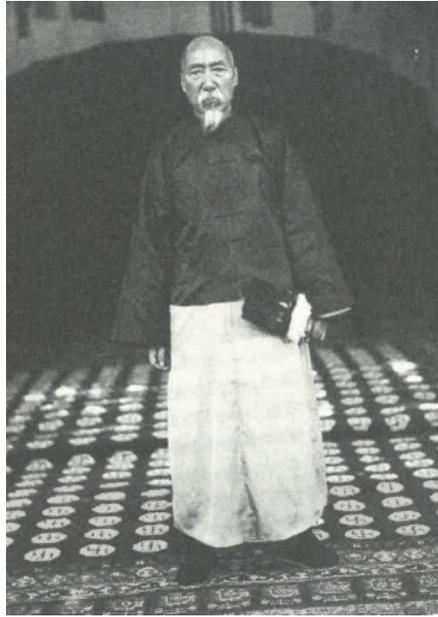
²¹⁰ Bao'erhan, "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," p. 137; Ma Fushou, "Yang Zengxin shangtai qianhou," p. 64.

²¹¹ Yang Zengxin v. 1 pp. 25-29.

²¹² Ma Fushou, "Yang Zengxin shangtai qianhou," pp. 66-69.

Qing government in Urumchi and the Ili republican regime, seeking to smooth the republican transition in its contested territories, and recognizing Yang Zengxin as governor of Xinjiang. Yang Zengxin accepted the nominal arrangement, but used the militia connections of his New Muslim Army to organize the extralegal assassinations of former republican rivals in their new official posts, and suppress the Gelaohui underground.²¹³ Many Dungan militia leaders formerly loyal to the Ili regime now colluded with the New Muslim Army to depose leading republicans.

²¹³ Tan Wutie, "Xinjiang Yisilanjiao zai Minguo chunian de huodong," in *Zhongguo Xinjiang diqu Yisilanjiao shi* v. 2, ed. Chen Huisheng, Urumchi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2000, p. 230-233.



3. *Yang Zengxin, ca. 1928, Xinjiang's first republican governor.*

Although Yang Zengxin nominally recognized the republican government in Beijing, he was cautious towards republican ideals, and wary of ceding too much power to far-away Han Chinese officials who were unfamiliar with the former Qing's non-Chinese borderlands.²¹⁴ Moreover, Yang Zengxin was actively hostile to Han-centric, revolutionary nationalism, blaming it for the loss of *Zhongguo's* territory in Tibet and Mongolia.²¹⁵ In turn, many other Chinese republicans in the interior as a regressive hold-over, attempting to orchestrate his overthrow in several failed coup attempts throughout the 1910s and 1920s.²¹⁶ At the same time, Yang Zengxin also navigated high-level interventions from the Chinese central government, as well as the spillover of violence during revolutionary conflict in the neighbouring Russian Empire from 1916 to 1921. However, as the next section argues, Yang Zengxin relied on Dungan military power as an effective intermediary, both to stem external pressures on Xinjiang, as well control a

²¹⁴ Yang Zengxin v.1 p. 201.

²¹⁵ Lattimore p. 56.

²¹⁶ Ma Fushou, "Yang Zengxin shangtai qianhou," p. 71; Zhang Dajun v. 6 p. 3055.

potentially restive Turkic population.

Dungan Power and Provincial Isolationism under Yang Zengxin

Yang Zengxin explicitly described the use of Dungan military power as a strategy to “contain” (*qianzhi*) other ethnic groups in Xinjiang, especially subversive Han settlers and migrants.²¹⁷ Yang Zengxin argued that the rebellious disposition of Han settlers in Xinjiang, in addition to low numbers and general unfamiliarity with Xinjiang’s Muslim and nomadic societies, disqualified them from loyal military service.²¹⁸ By contrast, the Xinjiang Dungans’ martial loyalty, religious mores, and strong connections to local Muslim communities through generations of family and business ties commended them to manage Xinjiang’s military sphere and “contain” rebellious Han settlers and Turkic-speaking Muslims in the province.²¹⁹ In doing so, Yang Zengxin privileged Chinese-speaking Muslims as intermediaries of coercive power between his autonomous Xinjiang regime and local Turkic Muslims.

Yang Zengxin was aware at the same time that his recruitment of Dungan armies scandalized a lot of Han Chinese opinion in the interior, where many Chinese republicans viewed Muslims in the northwest as a potentially reactionary and pro-Qing force.²²⁰ In 1913-1914 telegrams to Beijing, Yang Zengxin claimed that stability in Xinjiang was impossible without his reformed Muslim units.²²¹ According to him, the loyalty of Chinese-speaking Muslims in past Qing armies which pacified Yunnan, Gansu, and Xinjiang demonstrated the

²¹⁷ Yang Zengxin v. 1 p. 118.

²¹⁸ Yang Zengxin v. 1 pp. 54, 195.

²¹⁹ Yang Zengxin pp. 34-35, 54.

²²⁰ Jonathan N. Lipman, “The Border World of Gansu, 1895-1935,” PhD diss., Stanford University, 1981, pp. 181, 212; Lipman, “Ethnicity and Politics,” p. 305.

²²¹ Yang Zengxin p. 54, 359-360.

wisdom and precedence of his military strategy towards Chinese-speaking Muslims in Xinjiang.²²³ Portraying himself as a career frontier official in Gansu and Xinjiang who intimately understood (Chinese-speaking) Muslim culture, Yang Zengxin believed that he could effectively command a local Dungan frontier army without needing to recruit more outside Han soldiers.²²⁴

Yang Zengxin's self-declared strategy of ethnic containment was central to securing isolationist autonomy in the new republican order. To Beijing, he used his declared familiarity with Muslim custom from the late-Qing era as a pretext to justify greater autonomy from central republican authority.²²⁵ He declared that the laws of the inner provinces were entirely incompatible with the deeply entrenched customs of Xinjiang's Muslims.²²⁶ The special circumstances (*tebie qingxing*) of the province, such as its complicated aristocratic subdivisions, diverse native populations, and unique local customs, required adaptability (*biantong*).²²⁷ In Yang Zengxin's view, his expertise as a former Qing administrator in the Muslim provinces and laissez-faire observance of local customs ensured that he could secure the loyalties of Xinjiang's Muslim subjects, who might otherwise rebel against the nationalist and colonizing attitudes of other Chinese officials from the interior provinces.²²⁸

Although Yang Zengxin promoted the military power of Xinjiang's Dungans as the central pillar of his autonomous regime, the formation of the New Muslim Army did not intend to empower Muslim autonomy. Yang's preference for native (*tuzhu*) Dungans over outsider Han in the new provincial army and his appeals for the protection of local customs against Han

²²³ Bao'erhan, "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," p. 137.

²²⁴ Yang Zengxin, p. 48.

²²⁵ Jacobs pp. 42-43; Yang Zengxin, pp. 48, 188, 201.

²²⁶ Yang Zengxin, p. 197.

²²⁷ Yang Zengxin pp. 186-188, 195-197.

²²⁸ Jacobs p. 44-45.

colonization were still committed to indirect Han Chinese rule, rather than Muslim autonomy, in Xinjiang. In his view, better treatment of local Muslims would prove the virtue of indirect and enlightened Han rule.²²⁹ Against the backdrop of recent declarations of independence in Outer Mongolia in 1912 and Tibet in 1913, Yang Zengxin worried over possible Muslim revolts against continued Chinese rule.²³⁰ Lower-level provincial officials frequently telegraphed Urumchi after 1912 to report on the travels and ideas of foreign Muslims from the Afghan, Ottoman, and Russian empires, who allegedly championed greater Muslim self-determination.²³¹ In reaction to these reports, Yang Zengxin worried about the threat of “pan-Islamism” (*da Yisilanjiao zhuyi*) spreading into Xinjiang and tearing the province from the Chinese republic.²³² Although Yang Zengxin envisioned loyal Dungan soldiers in Xinjiang as the best-suited police force to interact with local Muslim society and stem “pan-Islamism”, he still conceived Dungan military power as a platform for preserved Han authority rather than for greater Muslim self-rule.

Accordingly, in his first decade in power until the early 1920s, Yang Zengxin explicitly assured anxious central authorities that his Qing-styled frontier administration and Dungan military in Xinjiang would prevent the fiasco of another breakup like Tibet or Mongolia.²³³ As the previous chapter argued, declarations of independence in Outer Mongolia and Tibet in 1912-1913 loomed as significant moments in the early Chinese republic, catalyzing the “Greater China” consensus among nationalist audiences in politics and the press that a strong and unified Chinese must protect its frontier territories from imperialist encroachment. Russian influence in

²²⁹ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 276; Lattimore p. 55.

²³⁰ Zarccone, “Writing the Religious and Social History of some Sufi Lodges,” p. 218.

²³¹ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 276.

²³² Tan Wutie, “Xinjiang Yisilanjiao,” p. 241, 256.

²³³ Jacobs pp. 44-45.

Mongolia and British influence in Tibet roused widespread Chinese suspicions that Xinjiang and its Turkic Muslims, nestled between Russian and British empires in Asia, lay in the crosshairs of the next foreign conspiracy to split the republic.²³⁴ Communicating with Beijing, Yang Zengxin equated the threat of “pan-Islamism” in Xinjiang to the threat of “pan-Mongolism” (*da Menggu zhuyi*) in China’s Mongol frontiers in the early 1910s; after the Mongol declaration of independence in December 1911, separatist Mongol armies began fanning southwards and even captured substantial territory in northern Xinjiang (today Khovd province in Mongolia) from Yang Zengxin’s government in 1913-1914.²³⁵ Thus, appealing to the common project of preserving *Zhongguo* after the Qing, Yang Zengxin thus sought to justify his Qing-style regime to other nationalists in the republic as the best option to retain Chinese rule in Xinjiang.²³⁶ As the next chapter argues, Qing authorities in neighbouring Gansu who remained in power during the republican transition, namely Muslim officers, similarly portrayed their preserved authority as China’s best hope to reverse Mongol and Tibetan separatism in the northwest.

Within Xinjiang, Yang Zengxin’s rhetoric of ethnic containment also demonstrated the logic of Muslim military power as an adaption of Qing-era ideologies to the volatility and transformations of the Xinhai period. The formation of the Muslim New Army was not simply a temporary strategy of political survival. It was a long-term strategy of control to ensure indirect Han rule in Xinjiang, through limited forms of Dungan power that “loosely reigned in” (*jimi*) other local Muslims. Meanwhile, isolationist policies such as restrictions on travel across

²³⁴ Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang Fengbao Qishinian* v. 6, Taipei: Lanxi Chubanshe, 1980, pp. 3011-3017.

²³⁵ Esherick, ‘How the Qing became China,’ p. 250; Forbes p. 15; Tan Wutie, “Xinjiang Yisilanjiao,” p. 256; Xu Xianlong p. 61.

²³⁶ Jacobs p. 25, 231.

Yang Zengxin's attempts at self-enforced isolation in Xinjiang from the Chinese interior and Russian-ruled Central Asia in the 1910s also included the initiative to negotiate preferable terms for representing provincial authorities in the Chinese interior and abroad on Russian soil. Yang Zengxin again cast Muslim intermediaries in his relations with the Chinese center in the 1910s and later with the Soviet state in the 1920s in order to preserve his regional autonomy. Particularly in the early 1920s, Yang Zengxin negotiated the opening of the first republican Chinese consulates in the Soviet Union to represent Xinjiang migrants and manage commercial relations.²³⁷ Xinjiang's provincial consulates constituted the first diplomatic institutions of republican China on foreign soil, which Yang Zengxin was able to achieve without the oversight of the center thanks to the degree of autonomy he secured in the 1910s.²³⁸ Yang Zengxin initially staffed his new consulates with primarily Dungan officials and merchants, using their connections to transregional Muslim commerce across the Chinese northwest and Soviet Central Asia to regulate the flow of Xinjiang labour and capital between the USSR and China.²³⁹ Thus, within the context of state authorities attempting to manage evolving commercial and human networks across political borders, Yang Zengxin sought to transplant Dungan intermediaries onto Soviet soil to represent his regime interests across mobile human frontiers.

Dungan Power and Local Muslim Societies in Xinjiang

²³⁷ Sheng Shih-Ts'ai pp. 8-9.

²³⁸ Jacobs pp. 22-25, 74.

²³⁹ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 66.

Yang Zengxin intended the incorporation of Dungan military power primarily to preserve Han Chinese authority over Xinjiang, rather than directly promote local Muslim autonomy. Nonetheless, several New Muslim army commanders practically amassed a large degree of personal independence from Han Chinese superiors in Urumchi, which facilitated greater interactions between Dungan officers, increasingly dominant in local administration in some regions, and local Turkic communities. However, Dungan stand-in military rule commended the provincial government abysmally to local Turkic communities. Despite Yang Zengxin's high-minded rhetoric of stabilizing the frontier, stories of bureaucratic venality are legion, and Dungan military officials, especially in southern Xinjiang, ranked the worst perpetrators.²⁴⁰

After brief civil war between Ili republicans and the Qing provincial government in Urumchi in 1913, the New Muslim Army played an important role in helping Yang Zengxin to strengthen his regime in distant southern Xinjiang. The new national government in Beijing brokered a power-sharing agreement between Ili revolutionaries and Qing officials, which appointed several leading figures of the Chinese republican movement in Xinjiang to high-level posts across the province. In particular, the arrangement designated Ili republican leader Yang Zuanxu as Kashgar district commissioner, which placed him at the helm of southern Xinjiang's major towns, far away from Urumchi. Yang Zengxin dispatched the New Muslim Army commander Ma Fuxing to command Kashgar's garrisons, and more importantly to supervise Yang Zuanxu, far away from Urumchi.²⁴¹ In 1914, Ma Fuxing precipitated a coup against Yang Zuanxu, forcing him to flee Xinjiang, and ascended as Yang Zengxin's personally trusted military ruler of southern Xinjiang for the next decade.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 61; Forbes p. 32; Lattimore p. 53; Wang Ke, *Dong Tujuesitan*, p. 39.

²⁴¹ Zarcone, "Writing the Religious and Social History of some Sufi Lodges," p. 218.

²⁴² Bao'erhan, "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," p. 149; Forbes p. 21-22.

However, Kashgar locals strongly resented Ma Fuxing's military administration. Ma Fuxing transformed his autonomy in southern Xinjiang into a highly exploitative and self-enriching regime that monopolized local markets, imposed high taxes, conscripted virtual slave labour in local precious mines, and instituted a peremptory regime of public amputations and executions.²⁴³ Such excesses deeply antagonized local opinion towards Dungan military authorities in southern Xinjiang.²⁴⁴ Ma Fuxing's draconian controls on local printing presses resulted in a dearth of written Turkic sources from the period, but British consular authorities reported on the fear of Kashgar Muslims towards Dungan garrisons in Kashgar.²⁴⁵



4. *Ma Fuxing, with Kashgari wife and children, 1923.*

²⁴³ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 83; Forbes p. 24.

²⁴⁴ Tan Wutie, "Xinjiang Yisilanjiao," p. 253.

²⁴⁵ Forbes pp. 22-23.



5. *Kashgari convicts displaying amputated fingers, hands, and feet, ca. 1923/1924.*

Dungan military rule strengthened local narratives from the Qing-era of Chinese-speaking Muslims as hostile outsiders who sided with the Chinese over other Muslims.²⁴⁶ Several Kashgari intellectuals fled to Afghanistan in the 1910s and 1920s, where they excoriated Dungan soldiers in southern Xinjiang as “black filth”.²⁴⁷ Ma Fuxing’s own conduct as a scandalous drunk who kidnapped local women into concubinage added the imprint of “infidel” to common local tropes of Dungan oppression.²⁴⁸ Thus, while Yang Zengxin’s New Muslim Army proved militarily effective in buttressing his regime, the use of Dungan garrisons to administer native Muslims failed to win many hearts and minds. Two decades later, these towns emerged as important sites of Dungan-Turkic military conflict in the 1931-1934 civil war, in contrast to how other Turkic Muslims in eastern Xinjiang more actively cooperated with Ma Zhongying’s intervention, as local rebel armies in southern Xinjiang resisted the Gansu army of “black” Dungan oppressors.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Forbes p. 67, 231; Klimes p. 137.

²⁴⁷ Klimes p. 132.

²⁴⁸ Forbes p. 23.

²⁴⁹ Forbes pp. 80-89.

From the perspective of national politics in 1911-1914, Yang Zengxin's Dungan counter-revolution helped the new Xinjiang governor to consolidate an autonomous provincial regime that, although nominally loyal to the republic, continued to resist attempts from the center to intervene in frontier affairs. Within Yang Zengxin's Xinjiang, Dungan military power emerged as a central tool to coercively govern, if not suppress, Turkic locals, as well as discursively discredit rival political actors from the interior – ironically sometimes Chinese-speaking Muslims themselves, as the next section will show – seeking to expand central government authority over China's frontiers. The 1912 transition to a new republican state encouraged Chinese Muslim actors, as chapter three argued and following chapters expand, to claim new ties to Muslims in Xinjiang. However, Yang Zengxin's isolationist regime would significantly obstruct their efforts to intervene in the region and broker national unity to central authorities in the name of Muslim unity in the northwest.

Chapter Five

The Republican Transformation of Gansu (ca. 1911-1920s)

The Xinhai conflict in Gansu demonstrated both the threats that Han revolutionary rhetoric implied for Muslim culture and autonomy, as well as the possibilities for regional Muslim leaders to accept a post-Qing order mediated with more conservative nationalists. The failure of the Xinhai revolutionary movement to overcome elite Muslim resistance in Gansu forced the new republic to accommodate the regional interests of an ascendant Muslim military-political class along China's sensitive borders with former imperial territories in Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Nonetheless, this chapter argues that this Muslim military class, rather than hinder the construction of a post-Qing national state, actively promoted and facilitated the republic's claims to former imperial territories across Gansu's frontiers. Muslim victors of the Xinhai conflict in Gansu exploited geographical advantages, intervening in the early republic's "frontier questions" in order to cement good relations with the center while legitimating their local authority as in line with "national interests" (*guojia liyi*), mirroring the rhetoric of Yang Zengxin's autonomous regime in neighbouring Xinjiang.

After 1912, rivalry and tension fractured the Muslim military elite of Gansu, but the shared interests of negotiating regional power with national authorities sometimes also motivated elite Han-Muslim ties across confessional and communal divides. The shifting sands of regional coalitions directly shaped the complicated context of Ma Zhongying's military rise in the late 1920s. More importantly, from the vantage of this paper, the emergent *realpolitik* of engaging the center through consolidating autonomy in the borderlands shaped relations between regional Muslim military regimes and the national government until Ma Zhongying's time. The

background context of military politics in early republican Gansu thus suggests that Ma Zhongying's later invasion of Xinjiang was not simply an unexpected outcome of the vagaries of local conflict, but a premeditated intervention that re-used the same regional rhetoric of defending the nation-state's interests in distant frontier campaigns.

The convergence of post-Qing Muslim elites in Gansu navigating the republican transition, and central authorities laying claim to former imperial territories, paved new avenues for Gansu Muslim to insert themselves in relations between the central government and Xinjiang. These avenues built from evolving precedents of Dungan intermediary roles between the northwest frontier and the state's political center since the late-Qing era. Significantly, they also opened new opportunities for Muslim actors in Gansu to negotiate their local political interests with the republican state on the basis of ties to Xinjiang's Muslim societies. Thus, while Yang Zengxin used Muslim intermediaries in the formation and rhetoric of his autonomous province to keep outsider Chinese powers at bay, Muslim actors outside of Xinjiang, especially in Gansu, began to reimagine themselves as conduits for national Chinese authority into Xinjiang.

Gansu Muslims in the Xinhai Revolution

The revolutionary movement in Gansu and its self-titled "Han Restoration Armies", although reprising the same symbols of Han-centered nationalism and rhetoric of Han self-determination as in other Chinese provinces, attracted some degree of local collaboration from Chinese-speaking Muslims. Many local Muslims in Gansu shared common grievances against contemporary Qing rulers, such as from state reprisal massacres in the 1870s and later 1895 revolt, as well as the post-pacification resettlement of entire communities to more remote and

less fertile rural districts. Like Qing Muslim students in Tokyo, the handful of anti-Qing Muslim activists who rubbed shoulders with Han Chinese radicals in the northwest sometimes adopted their racial-nationalist language of “protecting the people and protecting the race” (*baomin baozhong*), envisioning Chinese-speaking Muslims as part of the same restored Han nation.²⁵⁰ Many Chinese Muslim revolutionaries in Gansu descended from households who earlier sided with the Qing during rebellions in the 1860s and 1870s. Access to career advancement through official army and bureaucratic avenues exposed the children of these loyalist households to the revolutionary underground of radical activists in the military.²⁵¹ Outside of official circles, the intermixed Gelaohui secret society in Gansu provided another avenue for Muslim commoner recruitment into anti-Qing ranks, spreading along the northwest’s caravan trading routes.²⁵²

However, many other Chinese-speaking Muslim leaders in Gansu, both inside and outside of Qing official society, viewed the Xinhai uprisings and its Han nationalism as a pernicious threat, whether to their own power base or to the survival and traditions of their Muslim societies, given the recent history of Han-Muslim communal tensions. In particular, the case of Ma Yuanzhang, a regional Sufi leader, demonstrates how even regional Muslim authorities outside of the state, who sided with the Qing in defense of local interests, still emerged as significant political actors in the early republic. Crucially, as Anthony Garnaut argues, Ma Yuanzhang did not expressly support the regional revival of the Qing against revolutionary disorder, but rather sought to protect the survival and autonomy of his confessional patrimony from Han nationalists who seemed unwilling to cede any meaningful quarter for local

²⁵⁰ Xu Xianlong p. 263.

²⁵¹ Garnaut, “Traitors on the Borderlands,”

²⁵² Lewis, ‘Notes sur le Gelaohui,’ p. 280; Xu Xianlong pp. 58-59.

religious governance in the future nation.²⁵³ Ma Yuanzhang and his followers still cooperated with other non-Muslim authorities who appeared more tolerant of local Muslim autonomy. When Yuan Shikai's republican government replaced the abdicated Qing court, Ma Yuanzhang promptly telegrammed support for the new "Five-Race Republic" (*Wuzu Gonghe*).

In one 1913 communique with Yuan Shikai, Ma Yuanzhang stressed that national divisions did not separate Chinese-speaking Han and Chinese-speaking Muslims in: "We [Muslims] are the same as the Han except in religion... we have been good citizens among the Five Nationalities!"²⁵⁴ Although Chinese-speaking Muslim elites across the Qing empire responded to revolutionary events in 1911-1912 differently, the backdrop of Han-Muslim tensions in the late Qing era and the prominence of new discourses of nationhood compelled many Chinese Muslims in interior provinces to affirm fundamental unity with the Han to ensure a future Muslim role in the contested transition.²⁵⁵ Accordingly, Ma Yuanzhang dispelled any underlying Muslim difference from the shared Chinese homeland, even as he worked to assure autonomy in Muslim religious affairs in the emergent nation.

Ma Yuanzhang also mirrored the responses of other Chinese Muslim leaders, described in chapters three and four, to assert a nationalized identity for their imagined Muslim constituency, whether as the "Muslims of China" or as "essentially Han". However, as chapter three argued, regional differences in language, cuisine, livelihood, and even religious practice among various diverse Chinese Muslim communities undermined the contemporary strength of such nationalized identities. Politically-active Chinese Muslim elites found these identities attractive and useful, due to the circumstances of positioning themselves in a nationalist republic,

²⁵³ Garnaut, "Traitors on the Borderlands," pp. 334-338.

²⁵⁴ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 185.

²⁵⁵ Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 50.

but such identities sometimes did not resonate strongly within the local Muslim communities they claimed to represent.

Despite local divisions within northwestern Muslim society, Ma Yuanzhang used rhetoric of Muslim unity within China to gird his regional authority. This effort mirrored the early attempts of other Chinese Muslim actors in Beijing in 1912-1914 in chapter three to establish institutional ties between various Muslim civic organisations across China. Staking his political credentials as a loyal leader of regional Muslims, Ma Yuanzhang involved his *menhuan*, or Sufi order, in central government initiatives to practically extend its authority into the post-Qing northwest after 1912 and take greater control over Xinjiang affairs. Whereas Beijing Muslim activists in chapter three did not broach connections with Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, Ma Yuanzhang poised his *menhuan* network to intervene in Xinjiang, and establish formal ties between Gansu Muslims and Xinjiang Muslims under the aegis of national unification. His political usage of *Wuzu Gonghe* distinguished between Chinese-speaking Muslims as part of the Han nationality and Xinjiang's Turkic Muslims as the Muslim nationality (*Huizu*). However, his *menhuan's* involvement in central government's pacification missions to Gansu and Xinjiang exploited the ties of religion across imagined nationality boundaries between Chinese-speaking and Turkic Muslims in the northwest.

Ma Yuanzhang's Diplomacy in Xinjiang

In cementing positive relations with national authorities, Ma Yuanzhang exploited the (relative) advantages of Gansu's peripheral geography by engaging the republic's priorities in settling military issues in its borderlands. Ma Yuanzhang used his connections in Gansu as a

militia leader to secure the appointment of Jin Yunlun, a local imam, to the Ministry of Mongol and Tibetan Affairs (MMTA) as a pacification commissioner.²⁵⁶ The MMTA was the republican successor to the former Li Fan Yuan, a Qing ministerial office that handled the affairs of native aristocracies and Buddhist royalties in non-provincial territories.²⁵⁷ The ministry's renaming in the early republic clearly indicated the new government's foremost concern with breakaway Mongol and Tibetan borderlands. However, while accommodating aristocratic elites in Tibet and Mongolia, and recognizing their Qing-era privileges and stipends in order to retain national claims over their territories, republican officials similarly acknowledged the utility of Qing-ennobled Muslim princes in Xinjiang.²⁵⁸ The MMTA incorporated the affairs of Xinjiang nobility, and, alongside pacification efforts in frontier regions where Mongol princes and Buddhist monks rebelled against Chinese authority, it also dispatched a similarly-purposed mission to Xinjiang to negotiate the surrender of local rebels.²⁵⁹

Thus, Ma Yuanzhang presented his *menhuan* as not only a patriotic community, but the ideal interlocutor to represent the republic's benign intentions to distant Turkic Muslims, based on its own historical links to Xinjiang societies. Despite widespread official recognition of Chinese-speaking Muslims as essentially Han, the MMTA's incorporation of Ma Yuanzhang's *menhuan* recognized the useful position of Chinese-speaking Muslims as a good-faith bridge between the *Wuzu Gonghe's* Han and Turkic Muslim nationalities. While representing the MMTA in Xinjiang, Jin Yunlun hosted amnesty talks with local peasant fighters in the Qumul and Turpan regions who protested corvee obligations to local khans. To provincial and national

²⁵⁶ Anthony Garnaut, "The Shaykh of the Great Northwest: The Religious and Political Life of Ma Yuanzhang (1853-1920), Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, 2011, pp. 244-245; Tan Wutie, "Xinjiang Yisilanjiao," p. 270.

²⁵⁷ Esherick, "How the Qing became China," p. 232; Lin p. 32; Wang Ke, *Dong Tujuesitan*, p. 11.

²⁵⁸ Bulag, "Going Imperial," p. 265.

²⁵⁹ Bao'erhan, "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," p. 142.

Through reinvigorated ties with his revived *menhuan* in Xinjiang, Ma Yuanzhang encouraged his local following to develop stronger ties with republican officials and Turkic Muslim communities in Xinjiang. Jin Yunlun's involvement with the MMTA in Xinjiang also coincided with Ma Yuanzhang's efforts to solidify personal authority over Sufi Dungan communities in Xinjiang.²⁶⁰ Ma Yuanzhang personally corresponded with Ma Shaowu, a Muslim commander in Xinjiang who descended from a Yunnanese branch of the same Sufi order, and patronized many local Sufi sites of pilgrimage and worship.²⁶¹ Ma Yuanzhang encouraged Dungan followers to study at the "New Method" (*Usul-i Jadid*) schools of Turkic Muslim reformers in Xinjiang.²⁶² When Yang Zengxin began closing Kashgar's Jadidist colleges on suspicions of promoting foreign "pan-Islamic" ideas by the mid-1910s, Ma Shaowu convinced the governor to conditionally reopen the school.²⁶³

Thus, Ma Yuanzhang's personal intervention in the republic's frontier affairs bridged his local religious authority across regional political and cultural divides. Jin Yunlun's diplomacy in Xinjiang constituted the earliest example of Chinese Muslims strengthening religious ties to Xinjiang, ostensibly on behalf of national unity. The relationship between Ma Yuanzhang's *menhuan*, the MMTA, and Dungan officers in Xinjiang facilitated political linkages between the national government and its distant frontier province. Ma Yuanzhang's religious authority, spanning Dungan communities across Gansu and Xinjiang, also sought stronger ties with Turkic society, and facilitated provincial officials' efforts to conciliate Xinjiang's Muslims.

²⁶⁰ Chen Guoguang, "Huizu," p. 391; Tan Wutie, "Jiansheng qijian," pp. 107-111; Tan Wutie, "Xinjiang Yisilanjiao," pp. 268-273.

²⁶¹ Garnaut, "From Yunnan," pp. 108, 112-117.

²⁶² Tan Wutie "20 shiji 30 niandai ji 40 niandaichu Xinjiang de Yisilanjiao," in *Zhongguo Xinjiang diqu Yisilanjiao shi* v. 2, ed. Chen Huisheng, Urumchi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2000, p. 332.

²⁶³ Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 173; Tan Wutie, "20 shiji," p. 332.



6. Portrait of Ma Shaowu, ca. 1926, a prominent Dungan commander and Sufi patron in southern Xinjiang.

Nonetheless, beyond elite-level exchanges between *menhuan* envoys and local mosque imams, ties between Dungan and Turkic communities in early republican Xinjiang continued to remain limited, if not overtly tense. As chapter four described, Ma Fuxing's personalist rule over southern Xinjiang outraged local public opinion. Although not as despotic, Ma Shaowu also tracked a reputation as a corrupt authoritarian in his jurisdictions in Kucha and Aqsu.²⁶⁴ After Yang Zengxin ordered Ma Shaowu in 1924 to capture Kashgar and arrest Ma Fuxing for suspected sedition, Ma Shaowu inherited Ma Fuxing's dominion over southern Xinjiang, including local monopolies and corvees.²⁶⁵ Gang-pressed levies of Turkic-speaking miners were the first to rebel against Ma Shaowu's administration in southern Xinjiang in 1932, and their resistance against Dungan oppression ultimately expanded to target Ma Zhongying's interloping Gansu fighters.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Forbes pp. 13, 21.

²⁶⁵ Forbes pp. 24-28, 231.

²⁶⁶ Forbes p. 74.

Against the backdrop of growing Turkic resentment towards Dungan soldiers and officials, Ma Yuanzhang's diplomatic efforts in Xinjiang did not significantly penetrate local communities, and failed to mollify grievances against Dungans. Nonetheless, Ma Yuanzhang's engagement with national authorities demonstrated how Dungan actors in the northwest mobilized regional ties to serve the center's interests in national frontiers. As such, they attempted to legitimate local autonomy, even if their rhetoric of national Muslim unity failed to reflect popular sentiments in Xinjiang itself.

The Gansu Muslim Military after Qing

Muslim military leaders in Gansu also engaged the new republic through similar tactics of investing themselves in national "frontier issues" to preserve the autonomy they consolidated during the Qing breakdown. Although these Muslim commanders originally suppressed Xinhai revolutionaries in Gansu, they were willing to accept a republic under Yuan Shikai's more conservative custodianship. With territorial bases abutting Mongol and Tibetan territories, and the emergence of the "Greater China" consensus in national politics, the post-Qing Muslim military elite of Gansu could now legitimately stake its authority through interventions in distant frontiers to defend China's borders against separatism and imperialism.

Qing Muslim commanders in the northwest who accepted Yuan Shikai's republican state emerged as among both the earliest effective proponents of the "Greater China Idea" and the earliest military actors to confront Mongol and Tibetan revolts. While the declaration of Mongol independence in December 1911 and the perceived Russian role incensed nationalist audiences in the interior provinces over the breakup of Zhongguo, Ma Qi brought news of British intrigues

in Tibet to east-coast nationalists from Xining. In a 1912 letter to the central government and presses in the interior, Qi exposed an alleged secret border treaty between British authorities in India and Tibetan leaders in Lhasa as a pretext for the British empire to carve out more Chinese territory under a future Tibetan protectorate.²⁶⁷ At the time, the Tibetan royalty in Lhasa had not yet declared its independence, and Xinhai revolutionary leaders still debated the Han nation-state's borders. However, Ma Qi expressly favoured a larger Chinese nation that included Tibet, and convinced nationalist audiences in the interior of the dangers of foreign imperialism in China's Tibetan frontiers.

Throughout the early republican period, Ma Qi legitimated his authority not only on the ability to defend the republic in Gansu, suppressing pro-Qing revolts in the mid-1910s, but also on the ability to defend the nation in its Tibetan borderlands.²⁶⁸ Ma Qi rejected Tibetan independence claims as a British conspiracy, and militarily expanded his Xining regime southwards across the Kokonor region towards Lhasa.²⁶⁹ Ma Qi justified his expeditions in nationalist terms, using the ties of nationality between the Tibetans living under his Xining government and the Tibetans in Lhasa to emphasize Tibet's inclusion in the Chinese nation.²⁷⁰

Ma Qi positioned his Xining regime and army as the central government's best hope to reconquer and defend its far-away imperiled frontiers. Later in the early 1920s, Ma Qi unsuccessfully petitioned Beijing to recognize his jurisdiction of Xining and Kokonor as a separate province from Gansu, using his involvement in Tibetan military affairs as a pretext, and local Tibetan allies as his representatives in Beijing.²⁷¹ In one appeal, he drew particular

²⁶⁷ Xu Xianlong pp. 260-262.

²⁶⁸ Lipman, 'Border World of Gansu,' p. 222; Xu Xianlong pp. 60-62.

²⁶⁹ Xu Xianlong pp. 261-262.

²⁷⁰ Xu Xianlong p. 147, 260.

²⁷¹ Xu Xianlong pp. 75-76.

attention to the problems of Tibetan separatism and British imperialism in Lhasa, and to the march of Lhasa's armies on Chinese-held Tibetan territories in Kokonor and Kham (bordering Sichuan province).²⁷² Ma Qi argued that the unique "frontier questions" and "nationality questions" of Kokonor's diverse Mongol, Tibetan, and Muslim communities required a separate provincial government, better empowered to unify frontiers and frontier peoples.

Ma Qi's frontier campaigning was not exceptional, but representative of how many other former Qing Muslim officers during the republican transition in Gansu consolidated their local authority through independently engaging the "frontier questions" of Gansu's borderlands. The decorated Gansu Muslim officer Ma Fuxiang also rose to national prominence in the 1910s through his interventions in former imperial territories. In the late Qing, Ma Fuxiang shuttled through a series of significant frontier postings, including the military governorship of Xinjiang's Ili district, and shared Ma Qi's nationalist view of a Chinese nation that encompassed all of the former Qing realm.²⁷³ After accepting Yuan Shikai's national government, Ma Fuxiang earned national fame for leading expeditions across the Gansu-Mongolia frontier to suppress Mongol revolts against the Chinese state.²⁷⁴

The conventional tag "warlord" to describe Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang's independent army power in republican Gansu neglects how former Qing officers like them in the northwest did not only rely on military means to construct and legitimate their authority. Besides military campaigns, Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang also used local administrative and social reforms, such as the sponsorship of local education and non-Chinese elites, to cultivate the "Greater China" national

²⁷² Xu Xianlong pp. 75-76.

²⁷³ Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics,' p. 296.

²⁷⁴ Xu Xianlong pp. 61-66.

imaginary along the Muslim northwest's Buddhist peripheries.²⁷⁵ For instance, Ma Fuxiang personally financed mosque printing presses and reformed Islamic schools across China, and Mongol-language schools in Gansu, with nationalist curricula that stressed the inclusion of Muslim and Mongol identities within a multi-cultural Chinese nation.²⁷⁶ Ma Fuxiang's personal writings on the "the Mongol and Tibetan questions" (*Mengzang wenti*) in the 1920s emphasized the importance of local education to promote Chinese national consciousness in distant lands.²⁷⁷ Thus, in order to legitimate his authority as a national Muslim leader, Ma Fuxiang linked his military activities in borderlands and his educational patronage for local Muslims and Mongols as part of the same campaign to promote national consciousness and defend the borders of the nation.

Closer to Ma Zhongying's childhood home in Xining, Ma Qi also promoted a nationalist consensus to the public of his territories which placed Mongol-Tibetan cultures, histories, and lands as an inalienable part of the Chinese nation-state. Growing up in Ma Qi's Xining, the diversity of local intermixing Muslim communities, including itinerant merchants from Xinjiang, and the political cosmopolitanism of Ma Qi's autonomous regime, with its Muslim, Han, and Buddhist figureheads, arguably convinced the young Ma Zhongying of the ideological truths of Muslim unity within a multiethnic Chinese republic. Likewise, Ma Qi's regime-building efforts legitimated the Gansu Muslim military as an anchor of that unity in the republic's distant borderlands.

²⁷⁵ Dreyer pp. 40, 288.

²⁷⁶ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," p. 254-256; Cherif-Chebby, "Brothers and Comrades," p. 67; Masumi, "Rationalizing Patriotism," p. 124-125.

²⁷⁷ Ma Fuxiang, *Meng Zang zhuangkuang*, Ningxia: Mengzang Weiyuanhui, 1931, pp. 113, 198.

Ma Qi's initiatives in local regime-building beyond his own Muslim base attempted to stand in for the distant national government in its minority Buddhist peripheries. In order to legitimate Xining's Muslim rulers among Buddhist locals, Ma Qi cultivated elite relations with Buddhist clerics and princes through the patronage of monasteries and the establishment of aristocratic colleges.²⁷⁸ Ma Qi imitated the central government's rapprochement with Qing-era aristocracies in breakaway regions through promoting traditional Mongol and Tibetan leaders in Kokonor to public office, and even secured their official recognition in the Ministry of Mongol and Tibetan Affairs.²⁷⁹ In order to promote Chinese national identity to Xining's Mongols and Tibetans, Ma Qi sponsored local academic research and publications on the Mongol and Tibetan peoples of the Wuzu Gonghe, which included the first Tibetan-Chinese dictionary, as well as the first published history of Gansu's minority nationalities.²⁸⁰ The extent that such rhetoric in the Xining region penetrated surrounding Buddhist society outside of its elite and literate classes was probably very limited.²⁸¹ Nonetheless, it reflected Ma Qi's sincerity in stylizing his regime as a broker of Chinese national authority and identity in distant and diverse frontiers.

²⁷⁸ Ella Maillart, *Forbidden Journey: From Peking to Kashmir*, London: William Heinemann, 1937, p. 57; Xu Xianlong p. 150.

²⁷⁹ Xu Xianlong pp. 66-67, 88, 138.

²⁸⁰ Xu Xianlong p. 117.

²⁸¹ Fleming p. 112.



7. Chinese Muslim trader (seated) with wares at Kumbum monastery, a significant center of Buddhist pilgrimage and study near Xining, whose abbots received government posts and patronage from Ma Qi's regime, ca. 1936.

In some cases, Ma Qi even enlisted Han intellectuals and bureaucrats to lead these academic projects, highlighting the degree of collaboration with Han actors in his local regime-building.²⁸² The strengthening of elite ties with Han allies demonstrated how Muslim military regimes in the republican northwest maintained their inclusion within the Chinese nation and developed ties to the state's political centers, even as they sought to consolidate regional authority through unique forms of local autonomy and governance. Rather than expel remaining local Han officials of the Zuo Zongtang era from their military regimes, Muslim commanders retained them for their bureaucratic expertise and, from a rhetorical perspective, as national partners. Chapter two described how Ma Haiyan, formerly a militia leader from Hezhou in the 1860s, constructed an autonomous regime in Gansu's Xining district in the 1880s after submitting to the Qing, and built alliances with Han officials and local Buddhist elites. His son,

²⁸² Xu Xianlong p. 117.

Ma Qi, continued to promote many Qing-era Han frontier officials in Xining, despite his increasing involvement with local Muslim *shaykhs* to style his regime as an orthodox Islamic government.²⁸³ Later, Ma Qi's cousin, Ma Zhongying, growing up in early republican Xining, continued to incorporate Han officials and activists in his later campaigns across Gansu and Xinjiang in the 1920s-30s, as chapter seven details, despite his contemporary treatment as a fanatically anti-Chinese "Muslim separatist".

Religion and Regime-Building in Early Republican Gansu

Religion provided an important lever for Ma Qi's regime in Xining to communicate Chinese national identity to local Muslim populations. His enforcement of orthodox religious practices elicited some suspicions from non-Muslim contemporaries outside Xining that he was a religious zealot, or worst disinterested in remaining a part of China, and Ma Zhongying later tracked more severe accusations of being an anti-Chinese fanatic for his associations with official Islamic figures from Xining.²⁸⁴ However, the rhetorical substance behind Ma Qi's attempts to use religion to politically legitimate his regime promoted integration with the majority non-Muslim Chinese nation-state.

Thus, Ma Qi's association with Islamic movements in Xining ultimately shaped how Ma Zhongying, and many other members of his generation in Gansu in the 1920s-1930s, reconciled regional religious unity with national Chinese identity. Within Ma Qi's endorsement of local Tibetan and Mongol nationality, other Muslim minorities of Gansu, such as the Turkic-speaking

²⁸³ Xu Xianlong p. 114.

²⁸⁴ Hedin, *Flight of Big Horse*, p. 5; W. Petro, *Triple Commission*, London: Cox and Wyman, 1968, p. 128, 130; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 77.

Salars and Mongol-speaking Dongxiang, with whom Chinese-speaking Muslims were long familiar, did not achieve special recognition as a separate nationality. Arguably, Muslim political and scholarly society in Gansu did not consider the Salars and Dongxiang to be separate from the Chinese-speaking Muslim majority, but rather as part of the same subnational constituency, and the bonds of religion in turn bound them to the Chinese nation-state. As chapter six elaborates, Gansu Muslim actors later responded enthusiastically to new forms of Muslim political activism by the 1920s, which claimed national ties across all Muslims in China, including Xinjiang. Local experiences of close interactions between Chinese, Turkic, and Mongol-speaking Muslim communities prepared a generation of Gansu elites, such as Ma Zhongying's acculturated Salar lineage, to accept the notion of fundamental affinity with Xinjiang's distant Muslims.

The increasing orientation of northwestern Muslim identities towards accepting some variant of Chinese nationalism, whether in the form of racial and cultural assimilation, or national membership within the *Wuzu Gonghe*, not only reflected the pragmatism of various Muslim elites, such as the Sufi shaykhs of Gansu, in negotiating political power and communal autonomy. It also reflected a growing intellectual consensus among diverse, Chinese-speaking Muslim congregations about the compatibilities of religious identity within an overwhelmingly non-Muslim national imaginary. More importantly, Muslim military elites exploited such a logic of compatibility between religious and national identities to bridge the gulf between religious faith, which in theory transcends national divisions, and political-military activism on behalf of the nation-state. Muslim military actors in Gansu not only sought to legitimate their regimes with distant central authorities, but with local Muslim subjects and elites as well.

For instance, Ma Fuxiang's nationwide patronage of Chinese-language Islamic education from Gansu to the east coast stressed the harmony of Islamic religion and Chinese national identity. In order to preach Muslim loyalty to the Chinese political order, Ma Fuxiang's religious nationalism drew from Ming-era Chinese Muslim scholarship, which stressed the compatibility of God's eternal sovereignty with Confucian precepts of the Emperor's Heavenly Mandate.²⁸⁵ By contrast, Sufi orders in the northwest often descended from shaykhs who actively confronted non-Sufi and non-Muslim authorities across Central Asia to spread and purify Islam.²⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the example of Ma Yuanzhang in the previous section demonstrated how the gradual alignment of regional autonomy and interests with the Qing and later republican states convinced many Chinese Sufi shaykhs to accept co-existence with non-Muslim authority.

Ma Qi's local regime-building in Xining in the 1910s-1920s also presided over a significant shift in regional religious opinion among another Chinese Islamic movement, the Ahl al-Sunnah ("People of the Prophetic Traditions"), which until the end of the 1910s continued to condone Muslim resistance against non-Muslim rule. The state of local Islam in Gansu appalled the founders of the Ahl al-Sunnah in the 1890s, with unorthodox Sufi customs and blasphemous accretions from Chinese culture prompting them to declare a return to the earliest prophetic traditions.²⁸⁷ As part of its campaign against non-Muslim customs, the movement advocated separation from surrounding non-Muslim societies, and celebrated the "noble martyrdom" of "shedding blood for Islam against non-believers".²⁸⁸ However, Jonathan Lipman argues that Ma Qi's personal intervention in the Ahl al-Sunnah movement in 1918, saving its leaders from death

²⁸⁵ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, pp. 72-85, 175-176; Masumi, "Rationalizing Patriotism," p. 120.

²⁸⁶ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 178.

²⁸⁷ Leila Cherif-Chebbi, "L'Yihewani, une machine de Guerre contre le Soufisme en Chine?" in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 578-580; Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 51.

²⁸⁸ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 208.

row on charges of sedition and relocating them to Xining, secured its transformation “into a less divisive, more China-centered reformist movement.”²⁸⁹

More importantly, Ma Qi’s association with the reformed Ahl al-Sunnah helped the Xining regime broadcast Chinese national identity to its local Muslim base. Moreover, the degree of integration between the Ahl al-Sunnah and local army and bureaucratic structures in Xining directly shaped the political environment in which Ma Zhongying grew up and emerged. Non-Muslim contemporaries noted the presence of imams from Xining among Ma Zhongying’s leadership as evidence of his religious “fanaticism”, but neglected how these imams descended from an intellectual tradition that promoted Chinese national identity by the 1920s.²⁹⁰

Ahl al-Sunnah leaders centred their revived movement on Xining’s Dongguan Mosque, renaming themselves “Brothers in Islam” (*Yihewani*), and educating new disciples to conciliate religious purification with membership in a non-Muslim state. Ma Qi militarily supported the transformed movement, both to break up the *menhuan* power bases of other rival Muslim officials in Gansu, and to legitimate his own regime among regional mosques. In 1922, Ma Qi declared the establishment of an “Islamic Educational Progress Society”, with himself as president, to monitor the education of new *Yihewani* imams at Dongguan, and oversee a centralizing administration of other regional mosques with newly-appointed *Yihewani* imams.²⁹¹ Soldiers from Ma Qi’s army accompanied *Yihewani* imams, appointed from the movement’s center in Dongguan, to smaller local mosques in order to suppress occasional local resistance to their arrival and reforms.²⁹² In turn, *Yihewani* imams served as “representatives” of Ma Qi’s

²⁸⁹ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 207.

²⁹⁰ Hedin, *Flight of Big Horse*, p. 5; Petro p. 130; Yang Boqing, “Ma Zhongying,” p. 77.

²⁹¹ Cherif-Chebbi, “L’Yihewani,” pp. 588-589; Xu Xianlong p. 134.

²⁹² Cherif-Chebbi, “Brothers and Comrades,” pp. 67-68; Cherif-Chebbi, “L’Yihewani,” p. 584; Xu Xianlong p. 134.

regime, communicating to local Muslim society the religious legitimacy of Ma Qi as a Muslim leader committed to safeguarding Islam.²⁹³ Most officers in Ma Qi's army adhered to the Xining-based *Yihewani* movement, and its imams even led military units within Ma Qi's army through a combination of religious and political functions as "military commissars" (*jianjun*).²⁹⁴

Ultimately, the incorporation of the reformed *Yihewani* movement within Ma Qi's regime-building efforts ensured the transmission of its accommodationist approach towards Chinese state authority to the next generation of imams and officers – Ma Zhongying's generation – in the Xining government. Later contemporaries misinterpreted Ma Zhongying's association with *Yihewani* religious figures in late 1920s Gansu as evidence of his anti-Chinese "fanaticism" and "separatism".²⁹⁵ In reality, the *Yihewani*'s evolution as an important partner within Ma Qi's attempts to broadcast Chinese national identity to local Muslim audiences shaped the movement's growing acceptance of co-existence in a majority non-Muslim political order.

Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang sparingly referenced the identity and fate of Xinjiang, in contrast to their preoccupation with Mongol and Tibetan frontier questions where the threat of territorial loss was more immediate. However, other Gansu Muslim actors such as the Sufi shaykh Ma Yuanzhong also opened the possibility of Chinese Muslim leaders inserting themselves within Xinjiang provincial politics and its relationship to the center in order to legitimate their regional authority and autonomy, in similar vein to Ma Qi's interventions in Tibet and Ma Fuxiang's interventions in Mongolia. However, as the last chapters describe, the advent of Li Qian's

²⁹³ Cherif-Chebbi, "Brothers and Comrades," p. 71; Xu Xianlong p. 135.

²⁹⁴ Cherif-Chebbi, "Brothers and Comrades," p. 71; Xu Xianlong p. 96; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying ru Xin sui jun jianwen," in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v. 2, ed. Yu Junsheng, p. 70.

²⁹⁵ Hedin, *Flight of Big Horse*, p. 5; Petro pp. 128, 130; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 77.

identity politics and constitutional reform, which reimagined ties between Xinjiang's Muslims and Muslims in the rest of China excited interest in Gansu military circles towards incorporating claims to Xinjiang within their construction of regional autonomy. In this way, regional precedents of local military actors intervening in frontier issues and governing post-imperial territories on behalf of the nation-state directly shaped the context of Ma Zhongying's later interventions in Xinjiang.

Thus, Ma Zhongying's upbringing in Ma Qi's Xining situates his military rise within the regional context of Muslim regime-building in the northwest. Within these patterns of frontier regime-building, Muslim military leaders sought to balance effective autonomy from the center and legitimate authority within the national government through intervening in and facilitating the center's efforts to reclaim neighbouring frontiers. Subsequent historiography predominantly casts military actors in the northwest such as Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang as "warlords". However, the labelling of "warlordism" and its connotations of political and economic self-interest glosses other aspects of their regional military regimes that constituted genuine and unique attempts to fulfill republican claims to former imperial territories.

Such attempts included the regulation of religious life in order to promote the acceptance of non-Muslim republican authority among local Muslims. They also included the promotion of Chinese national identities among Tibetan and Mongol minorities, and the inclusion of minority elites within local government structures. The consolidation of autonomy through engaging and aligning with the center's irredentist claims to lost frontiers emerged as key strategies of independent regime-building and legitimation. Ultimately, Ma Zhongying combined these military avenues to power in national borderlands with evolving discourses of Chinese Muslim

identity in order to mount his invasion and attempted transformation of Xinjiang.

Chapter Six

The Emergence of Li Qian's Nationality Politics (ca. 1913-1924)

The movement to assert subnational ties between the Muslims of Xinjiang and the Chinese-speaking Muslims of the interior came not from Muslim military actors in Gansu, despite their involvement in parallel issues of national unity in Tibet and Mongolia, but rather from more activist civilian quarters. Previous chapters described how many republican authorities opposed the narrowed nationalism of Xinhai revolutionaries, and instead favoured a Chinese nation-state that inherited the boundaries of the Qing dynasty. At the same time, the emergence of autonomous Muslim actors in post-Qing Gansu positioned Chinese-speaking Muslim militaries, religious leaders, and activists to intervene across Gansu's borders with non-Chinese peripheries, ostensibly on behalf of the central government's territorial claims.

While more pressing circumstances in breakaway Tibetan and Mongol regions convinced Muslim commanders such as Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang to focus less attention on Xinjiang, other community authorities in Gansu such as the Sufi leader Ma Yuanzhang were interested in consolidating relations with Muslims in Xinjiang. Ma Yuanzhang cleaved closely to dominant rhetoric in the Xinhai period which insisted that Chinese-speaking Muslim and Han were fundamentally the same, in order to allay suspicions that Muslims in the interior were a potentially unpatriotic bloc. However, by the mid-1910s, another activist milieu of Muslim constitutional reformists and civil associations emerged in eastern Chinese metropolises to confront the growing pressures of nationalist and assimilationist rhetoric on Chinese Muslim culture and autonomy. Initially spearheaded by a Muslim officer in Beijing named Li Qian, the movement quickly evolved among its diverse supporters, exploiting the ambiguity of "Hui"

identity in "*Wuzu Gonghe*"²⁹⁶ sloganism to assert all Muslims, including Chinese speakers in the interior, as part of one Muslim nationality entitled to constitutional recognition and protections.

David Brophy has already described the short-lived evolution of Li Qian's relations with Xinjiang Turkic aristocracy, from initial cooperation in 1913, when the Qumul khan appointed Li Qian as his personal representative in Beijing, to failure by 1920, when Xinjiang governor Yang Zengxin pressured Turkic elites to renounce Li Qian.²⁹⁷ However, beyond elite-level politicking and failures, Li Qian's activism also resonated with Muslim public sentiments across China, and more significantly impacted the evolution of national Muslim identity. This chapter thus argues that the Chinese-speaking Muslim interlocutors who discussed Li Qian's ideas outside of Xinjiang shaped an emergent identity among various Chinese-speaking Muslim classes and regions, particularly in Gansu, as part of the same Muslim constituency as Muslims in Xinjiang, entitled to the same constitutional rights.

This chapter shows for the first time that several leading allies of Ma Zhongying in the 1920s and 1930s enthusiastically corresponded with Li Qian, excited at the prospects of strengthening Muslim ties across China, including Xinjiang, to achieve Muslim freedom and self-mastery (*zhuquan*) while remaining part of China. This evolving discourse sought to reconcile Muslim political freedom and Chinese national unity under a single, majority non-Muslim state. The historical literature has so far not acknowledged the development of this kind of discourse in 1920s Gansu, instead preferring conventional tropes of "warlordism". However, as such a view

²⁹⁶ Chapter three introduces how "*Wuzu Gonghe*", or literally the "Five-Race Republic", developed as the main state formula of national identity, which envisioned China as a union of its Manchu, Han, Tibetan, Mongol, and "Hui" races. In central government circles, "Hui" generally referred to Turkic-speaking Muslims.

²⁹⁷ Brophy, "Five Races," pp. 354-357.

increasingly attracted interest in some military circles in Gansu, it stood poised to motivate Muslim military actors to intervene across Gansu-Xinjiang borders to realize its political ideals. Much of the later rhetoric of Muslim liberation and Chinese unification from Ma Zhongying's 1931 invasion of Xinjiang first appeared in his supporters' earlier exchanges with Li Qian, roughly from 1914 to 1924. Rather than cobble together incongruent slogans to justify an impromptu invasion, Ma Zhongying directly drew from pre-existing discourses from his own allies which articulated an evolving vision of Muslim unity within China, with implications for the fate of Xinjiang's Muslims.



8. *Ma Zhongying official portrait, ca. 1932, in national army (ie. Guomindang – see chapter seven) uniform.*

Republican Activism and the Evolution of Muslim Nationality

Li Qian first met the Qumul khan in 1913 while serving in the presidential bodyguard in Beijing during the khan's oath-swearing ceremony to the republic. Inspiring his confidence, the khan appointed Li Qian as his representative to the national government in Beijing.²⁹⁸ Li Qian officially designated himself representative of the eight recognized Muslim princes of Xinjiang, which included the autonomous khans of Qumul and Turpan, and several other princes along the northern Tianshan range.²⁹⁹ Li Qian collectively referred to their lands stretching from Qumul to Aqsu as the "*Huibu*", or "Muslim Quarter".³⁰⁰ Qing-era records used "*Huibu*" as a loose administrative term that included eastern and southern Xinjiang as well as its native Turkic-speaking "Turbaned Muslims" (*Chantou Hui*).³⁰¹ Now, Li Qian repurposed it as a national subdivision distinct from the rest of Xinjiang and China because it was the territorial patrimony of the Muslim, or Hui, nationality, and thus entitled to autonomy under the terms of *Wuzu Gonghe*.³⁰² However, Xinjiang governor Yang Zengxin viewed Li Qian's activism in Beijing for *Huibu* autonomy as a threat to his provincial regime, and by 1915 pressured Xinjiang's khans and princes to publicly repudiate Li Qian, and announce to Beijing their contentment with the current status quo.³⁰³

Li Qian's constitutional movement emerged in Beijing in 1914-1915 in response to a shared sense of disenfranchisement among politically observant Chinese-speaking Muslims.

²⁹⁸ Brophy, 'Five Races,' p. 354-355.

²⁹⁹ Li Qian, *Huibu Gongdu*, Shanghai: Zhonghua Yinshuachang, 1924, p. 4.

³⁰⁰ Li Qian p. 8.

³⁰¹ Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*, p. 33; Kim p. 218.

³⁰² Brophy, "Five Races," pp. 355-356.

³⁰³ Brophy, "Five Races," pp. 356-357.

Turkic and Chinese Muslim elites increasingly worried that the new constitutional order did not extend the same due rights to Muslim minorities as it did to Mongols and Tibetans.³⁰⁴ During electoral preparations for the first national legislature and senate, constitutional drafters determined quotas for each province in proportion to population, while non-provincial territories (namely Mongolia, Tibet, and Kokonor) were entitled to larger numbers of representatives, despite their drastically smaller populations, as a concession to traditional non-Chinese elites.³⁰⁵ By contrast, Xinjiang, as an official province, and its Turkic Muslims could only elect two parliamentary representatives, despite the implied concessions of *Wuzu Gonghe* which elsewhere entailed higher quotas in Tibet and Mongolia.³⁰⁶ Similarly, the national government did not accord any special representation for Chinese-speaking Muslim minorities in the interior, despite their high level of self-organisation in some regions with their own printing presses and civil societies.³⁰⁷

David Brophy frames the brief episode of political cooperation between Li Qian and Maqsud as an instance of Turkic elites attempting to forge new political ties to the Chinese interior in order to secure their aristocratic position in the republic.³⁰⁸ However, Li Qian's activist outreach to Turkic aristocrats also triggered an enthusiastic response from many other Chinese Muslim observers in the interior, who considered the cause of *Huibu* autonomy in Xinjiang as a potent platform to defend and promote their own community interests.

The Chinese Muslim response to Li Qian's activism demonstrated how the early republican politics of reimagining imperial borders and the identity of its inhabitants shaped new

³⁰⁴ Brophy, "Five Races," p. 352.

³⁰⁵ Brophy, "Five Races," pp. 350-351.

³⁰⁶ Brophy, "Five Races," pp. 350, 352.

³⁰⁷ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," p. 252-53.

³⁰⁸ Brophy, "Five Races," pp. 355-356.

civic and activist linkages, outside of state officialdom and its militaries, between core and periphery. Despite Li Qian's provincial focus on representing Xinjiang's Turkic elites, the bulk of his self-published 1924 compilation of correspondence comprised letters from self-styled "Islamic Progress Societies" across the interior provinces. Chapter three described how many Chinese Muslim civic associations and self-organized assemblies blossomed in the late-Qing era, debating issues of education, cultural reform, and political participation.³⁰⁹ Frank Dikötter shows that the convening of national parliamentary elections in 1913-1914 was not simply an isolated political incident or a top-down experiment, but intersected with growing public interest in bottom-up "participatory politics".³¹⁰ Accordingly, Chinese Muslim civic bodies also engaged this activist scene, approaching new local and national elections in the early republic as an opportunity to represent communal interests and promote their reformist projects.

As a result, Li Qian's grievance that the central government denied the promises of *Wuzu Gonghe* to Xinjiang's Muslim Quarter resonated with Chinese Muslim activists outside of Xinjiang who felt like an increasingly embattled minority in national politics. From the Chinese Muslims standpoint, not only did the republic fail to deliver ethnic equality to Xinjiang's Muslims, but more importantly failed to deliver civic equality with the Han for their own Muslim communities. Despite the national government's nominal recognition of other nationalities and their territorial claims within China, many Chinese nationalists in eastern metropolitan cores pragmatically viewed *Wuzu Gonghe* as a temporary compromise, and expressly advocated a strong and unified Han nation through racial assimilation and economic colonization of non-Han borderlands.³¹¹ Chinese Muslim actors worried about the implications of Han-centric nationalism

³⁰⁹ Aubin, "Islam on the Wings of Nationalism," pp. 242-243; Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 37-38.

³¹⁰ Dikötter, *Age of Openness*, pp. 19-20.

³¹¹ Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 108-119, 127; Dreyer pp. 16-17; Esherick, "How the Qing became China," p. 245-247; Klimes p. 189; Leibold, pp. 15-16, 43.

for the survival of their religious traditions. Nationalist and assimilationist discourses portrayed minority cultures and their racial pedigree as obstacles to national progress. Several popular eugenicist publications, which attracted widespread political elite interest, described infusions of foreign culture and blood into the nation as agents of biological and intellectual regression, sometimes citing the Chinese-speaking Muslims of the northwest as an academic example.³¹²

Common prejudices against Chinese Muslims from the late Qing era continued to manifest in the early republic, often in the form of elite Han anxieties over increasingly powerful Muslim military factions in Gansu who once fought for the Qing.³¹³ As a result, the redress of Muslim grievances against prejudice and persecution from the late Qing era remained a central element of Chinese Muslim civic activism during the republican transition.³¹⁴ Among the first legal measures of Gansu's newly-elected provincial assembly was the repeal of Qing-era discriminatory laws against Muslims, constitutional guarantees of Muslim equality and freedom of religion, and banning anti-Muslim slurs.³¹⁵

Chinese Muslim activists who corresponded with Li Qian between 1914 and 1924 echoed these concerns, demonstrating how they adapted Li Qian's activism on behalf of Xinjiang princes as a wider political platform for Muslim interests elsewhere in China. The sense that the republic's constitutional arrangement disadvantaged Muslims nationally - not just in Xinjiang - pervaded telegrams of support. Self-declared Muslim citizen congresses in Henan and Hubei connected the political under-representation of Xinjiang Muslims to feelings of marginalization

³¹² Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, pp. 83-86, 117-120.

³¹³ Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 17.

³¹⁴ Wang Ke, *Xiaoshi de 'Guomin'*, p. 44.

³¹⁵ Xu Xianlong p. 87.

among Muslims across China as a nationwide phenomenon.³¹⁶ One Sufi leader in Gansu even cited the military contributions of Chinese Muslims to protest their perceived exclusion. He exclaimed that the central government continually denied Chinese Muslims equal concessions as the Mongols and Tibetans, despite the sacrifices of Muslims in Gansu and Xinjiang to protect the nation's borders and defend the livelihoods of the Han majority in the interior!³¹⁷ Another group from Anhui province complained that the combined Muslim population of Xinjiang and the interior vastly outnumbered other preferentially-treated Manchu, Mongol, and Tibetan minorities, and worried that without similar ethnic quotas for Muslims in national government, the Muslims of China would never achieve true equality with the Han majority.³¹⁸

As a result, Li Qian's Xinjiang-centric activism elicited a widespread consensus among other Chinese-speaking Muslim activists outside of Xinjiang that voting quotas should be expanded not only for Xinjiang Muslims but Muslims generally across China. Many correspondents expressed the view that Chinese-speaking Muslims in the interior and the native Muslims of Xinjiang essentially comprised the same Muslim nationality, and were thus entitled to the same concessions as other minorities on the premise of equality between China's nationalities.³¹⁹ This view of shared Muslim nationality contrasted with how other Chinese Muslim leaders in the Xinhai period viewed Han and Chinese-speaking Muslims as essentially the same people. It still asserted Muslim belonging to a common Chinese homeland, but this time with more express claims to Muslim communal autonomy. Moreover, as the next section elaborates, the development of this view further demonstrated the agency of Li Qian's

³¹⁶ Li Qian, pp. 13-14.

³¹⁷ Li Qian pp. 36-37, 114.

³¹⁸ Li Qian p. 11.

³¹⁹ Li Qian pp. 35-37, 114, 129-130, 165-168.

interlocutors in adapting Li Qian's ideas towards their own local activist goals.

The Gansu Interlocutors of Muslim Nationality

Li Qian received many supportive telegrams from Gansu, the province that bordered Xinjiang, and whose Muslim political aspirants made careers of engaging "frontier questions" to ensure their fate in the new republic. Gansu Muslim leaders viewed the prospects of Li Qian's activism in asserting subnational ties to Xinjiang Muslims as a way to bolster their own claims to legitimate autonomy in Gansu from the center. Most importantly, some of Li Qian's Gansu interlocutors, who contributed to a nationwide sense of shared Muslim identity and interests across China, later re-emerged in the 1920s civil wars of Gansu and its spillover into Xinjiang as allies of Ma Zhongying. In contrast to the predominant image of Ma Zhongying as a capricious militarist who invaded Xinjiang in 1931 primarily for self-preservation, his military camp included a cast of Gansu personages long involved in local Muslim political and communal issues. Until now, scholars neglected the personal backgrounds and views of Ma Zhongying's key supporters in Gansu, but evidence from Li Qian's correspondence shows that they supported the ideals of autonomous Muslim unity in a shared homeland, and debated the implications of Muslim freedom in the northwest and national unification with China as early as before 1924.

Ma Quanlu was one such future ally who corresponded with Li Qian, and he later rose as a leading commander in Ma Zhongying's second invasion of Xinjiang in 1932. As a military officer in Gansu during the republican transition, Ma Quanlu joined an influential "Muslim citizens' congress" in Lanzhou which forwarded a series of petitions to the national government through Li Qian in Beijing. The gradual increase in signatories for the congress's petitions in the 1910s, from several dozens to several hundreds, reflected the growing popularity among elite

Muslim opinion in Gansu, whether as pragmatic activism or national idealism, of claiming a common identity with Xinjiang Muslims to defend and advance their own interests. Ma Quanlu co-drafted one petition which argued that without the introduction of specific voting quotas for China's Muslim nationality, Muslims would ultimately lose *mastery* (*zhuquan*) over their own communities and lands. Crucially, the rhetoric of Muslim *zhuquan* was not a call for political separation and independence from China, but for greater Muslim autonomy and self-rule within China per a vision of national unity that linked the Muslims of Xinjiang to the Muslims of the rest of China. Ma Quanlu also co-signed a follow-up petition which supported Li Qian's proposals for voting reform in Xinjiang, but argued that *Wuzu Gonghe* still obliged national authorities to increase Muslim parliamentary delegates for other provinces as well.³²⁰

The military officer Ma Tingxiang was another significant partner of Li Qian in the early 1920s, who later emerged as one of Ma Zhongying's earliest allies by the late 1920s. His defense of Muslim interests in Gansu frequently sought out coalitions with other Han and non-Chinese Muslim partners, evincing a strong commitment to balancing the ideals of national unity and Muslim equality under the aegis of *Wuzu Gonghe*. Ma Tingxiang's collaboration with other non-Muslim actors paralleled how Ma Qi propped his "Islamic regime" in Xining in the 1910s-1920s with Han bureaucratic support, as chapter five described, and how Ma Zhongying later enlisted Han revolutionaries to back his 1931 intervention in Xinjiang. Crucially, these examples typified how Muslim military actors sought to cooperate with, rather than confront, non-Muslim authorities in order to achieve local Muslim demands. As chapter seven expands, Ma Tingxiang's early association with Chinese nationalists outside Gansu ultimately facilitated Ma Zhongying's own connections with central authorities. Although Ma Zhongying's later

³²⁰ Li Qian pp. 165-168.

associations with other kinds of marginalized Han actors, such as secret society members and underground communists, elicited condemnations of banditry, such activist ties still drew from other precedents of Muslim actors seeking alliances with Han authorities to achieve local goals.

Ma Tingxiang descended from an influential background in Gansu society, the line of Qing general Ma Zhan'ao. His father was an eminent commander in provincial politics, who often mediated between Han and Muslim rivals, while his uncle headed the powerful "Flowery Mosque" *menhuan*.³²¹ In the early republic, Ma Tingxiang served in Beijing's presidential bodyguard, where he probably met Li Qian, but also began collaborating with Tongmenghui Muslim activists.³²² Returning to Gansu to help organize the post-revolution Tongmenghui movement, now nationally rebranded as the Guomintang national party, Ma Tingxiang's provincial activism, sometimes taking the form of revolutionary coup-plotting, frequently involved alliances with other Han and Salar actors.³²³ After an aborted coup attempt in 1917, Ma Tingxiang settled to the military command of Gansu's Liangzhou district, where he initiated a productive correspondence with Li Qian.

Despite the ambivalence of Guomintang leaders towards *Wuzu Gonghe* and their preference for racial assimilation in the Han nation-state, Ma Tingxiang's correspondence with Li Qian expressed support for regional Muslim autonomy and the expansion of political rights for the Muslim nationality.³²⁴ In addition to his contacts with military and political activists, Ma

³²¹ Lipman, "Border World of Gansu," p. 209; Xu Xianlong p. 28, 35, 134. See appendix B for Ma Tingxiang's lineage.

³²² Xu Xianlong p. 64. The Tongmenghui was a leading anti-Qing organization during the 1911-1912 Xinhai revolution.

³²³ Lipman, "Border World of Gansu," 220-221; Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics," p. 307; Xu Xianlong p. 88.

³²⁴ Dikotter, *Discourse of Race*, p. 78; Klimes p. 189; Li Qian pp. 49-50.

Tingxiang also strengthened ties with religious community figures, presumably through his uncle's dominant *menhuan* network based in Lanzhou's "Flowery Mosque". Ma Tingxiang's association with religious figures in Gansu and their joint correspondence with Li Qian highlighted the significant degree of agency that Gansu Muslim interlocutors exercised in articulating Muslim "nationality" Rather than borrow from other precedents in Han Chinese nationalist thought, proponents of a unified Muslim nationality in Gansu drew from local traditions and political interests.

In particular, Ma Tingxiang developed a strong relationship with several Sufi imams in Gansu, who supported Muslim unity in China as the "Hui" nationality, and used religious discourses to legitimate *Wuzu Gonghe* as a divinely-ordained principle. Their approach, which emphasized religion as the basis of Muslim nationality, typified how many of Li Qian's correspondents expressed Muslim national identity in China through religious, communal, and civic ties rather than through racialized unity. In contrast, the concept of "nationality" in Han intellectual discourses often drew on racialized characteristics such as skin colour, physiology, and blood to denote unity and identity. While some Chinese Muslim activists in the late Qing and revolutionary periods internalized some premise of blood/racial unity with the Han, or nominally accepted it as a political condition in the changing order, the overwhelming majority of Chinese-speaking Muslim leaders in the early republic advocated Chinese nationalism in civic and religious, rather than racial, terms.

Whereas Qing authorities in chapters one and two used ethnicized differences between Turkic- and Chinese-speaking Muslims in Xinjiang to differentiate them, Gansu Muslim elites now sought to paper over these fluid distinctions in language, culture, and sometimes appearance

to impose a common national identity. Chinese Muslim elites in Gansu acknowledged that Muslims from Xinjiang appeared very different, but relied on their own self-directed attempts at constructing Muslim nationality in order to justify why Muslims across Xinjiang and Gansu should share common political treatment. As chapter seven also argues, Muslim nationality construction in Gansu significantly influenced Ma Zhongying's political thinking during his 1930s campaigns across Xinjiang, who continued to espouse the unified interests of China's Muslims, even as he struggled to overcome language barriers in unfamiliar oases and steppes.³²⁵

Thus, Li Qian's attempt to assert political linkages between Xinjiang Muslims and Chinese-speaking Muslims in other provinces elicited significant interest among Chinese-speaking Muslim civil associations towards the fate of other Muslims in Xinjiang, if only to extend those greater constitutional protections envisioned for Xinjiang to their own communities in the interior. Similarly, Li Qian also attracted a lot of sympathy from Muslim political-military activists who were interested in the prospects of mobilizing the northwest's patriotic Muslim masses to unite and defend China's frontiers. This would also include a generation of younger military officers in Gansu such as Ma Tingxiang and Ma Zhongying, who would redeploy Li Qian's rhetoric of Muslim unity during the civil wars of 1920s Gansu to court favour from the Chinese political center, as well as, in the case of Ma Zhongying, justify military expansion and the attempted revision of political borders in Xinjiang. The intellectual and social climates of Gansu, with the diverse languages and cultures of its Muslims and non-Muslims and its elite rhetoric of Chinese and Muslim unity, predisposed a generation of Gansu Muslim officers and activists in the early republican period to more readily internalize the identity of a distinct

³²⁵ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 214.

Muslim nationality in the Chinese homeland.

Chapter Seven

Ma Zhongying's Military Rise in Gansu (ca. 1925-1931)

Despite the nominal establishment of a national republic in Beijing in 1912, political and military authority across China fractured between rival regional regimes. Within ensuing rounds of political intriguing and military mobilization for “national unity”, the northwest emerged as a strategically and rhetorically important site from which to mount the reunification of China, because of its geography as a secure military base, and its proximity to high-stakes “frontier problems” (*bianjiang wenti*) in Mongol, Tibetan, and Xinjiang territories. As Muslim commanders in the republican northwest such as Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang demonstrated in chapter five, Chinese military actors intervened in distant, post-imperial borderlands on behalf of weak central governments as a source of legitimacy and political capital.

Fragmentation of military power in early republican China did not always produce conflict, and the rhetoric of national unity sometimes motivated, albeit temporarily, elite cooperation between unlikely partners. By 1915, Gansu developed a practical, if tense, *détente* among its rival Han and Muslim officers, who often preferred coalition-building and petitions over warfare to pursue interests and resolve conflict. When national military leader Feng Yuxiang and his Han-dominated army invaded eastern Gansu in 1925 on the pretext of unifying the northwest, Muslim commanders in the province's west chose to accommodate the occupation. Although Feng Yuxiang's rhetoric of expanding centralized authority entailed greater non-Muslim control over the northwest, Gansu Muslim officers nonetheless sought a pragmatic alliance in order to negotiate their own authority with the changing order. Some rallied to Feng Yuxiang's banner of national unity, inaugurating a new round of frontier politics in Gansu in

which Muslim commanders began actively considering intervention in Xinjiang.

Ma Zhongying did not rise to prominence in Gansu within this axis of Han centralists and autonomous Muslim militaries planning the reconquest of isolated Xinjiang, but rather as the first Muslim officer to rebel against Feng Yuxiang's occupation in 1928. Imbibing the identity of a shared Muslim nationality of China from his upbringing, Ma Zhongying claimed to defend local interests against outsiders. However, rather than resist all incursions of centralist power in the Muslim northwest, Ma Zhongying presented himself as a legitimate representative of national central authority to the Muslim northwest. He sought to forge ties with the Guomindang (GMD) movement and its military expeditions in 1927-1928 to unify all rival governments in China under one national authority. In effect, he attempted to trade one "center" for another, and exchange Feng Yuxiang's destabilizing occupation of Gansu for a more distant "center", potentially more amenable to regional Muslim autonomy: the GMD's national government in Nanjing.

Thus, coming of age during republican Gansu's integrative *détente* in the 1910s and 1920s, Ma Zhongying evinced similar pragmatism in the late 1920s in allying with the distant Guomindang government in eastern China. On paper, the Guomindang's priorities to centralize control over the northwest, open its frontiers to Han Chinese settlement, and racially assimilate the Chinese nation were markedly incompatible with Ma Zhongying's support for regional Muslim autonomy, just as Feng Yuxiang's centralist position on national unity conflicted with Gansu elites' local autonomy.³²⁶ However, the distances of the northwest, the cultural unfamiliarity of its potentially restive inhabitants, and the financial and human limitations of war machines in the interior confronted even the most ardent centralists, and beckoned the need for

³²⁶ Leibold p. 142; Masumi, "Rationalizing Patriotism," pp. 117-118.

allied intermediaries to carry on the struggle of national unification to the furthest borders. Ma Zhongying positioned himself as precisely that intermediary between core and periphery. His engagement with rival national regimes of the Chinese interior thus places him within the context of Muslim borderlands actors who claimed to be best able to defend and rule the nation's remote borders on behalf of the national government. Ultimately, these two early features of his military rise in Gansu in the late 1920s – the defense of local Muslim interests and the promotion of Muslim loyalism to the GMD national government – remained central characteristics of his campaigning and rhetoric up to the invasion of Xinjiang.

The Occupation of Gansu and the Fate of Xinjiang

Feng Yuxiang formed part of a larger cast of Han military actors in the Chinese interior in the 1910s and 1920s who linked their legitimacy to the defense of the nation's vulnerable frontiers. His occupation of Gansu in 1925 initially facilitated cooperation with other local Muslim officers on a shared platform of reunifying Gansu's borderlands with the Chinese state. Feng Yuxiang particularly set sights on reclaiming Xinjiang, then under isolationist rule, and subordinating it to more direct central control. Whereas the most powerful Muslim military actors in Gansu in the past largely neglected Xinjiang, and other activist attempts to penetrate Xinjiang's local Muslim societies fizzled by the mid-1910s, cooperation with Feng Yuxiang's campaign to "open up" (*kaiifa*) the northwest now steered more Gansu Muslim military resources towards the "frontier question" of Xinjiang than ever before. However, the growing human costs of the Citizen Army occupation in Gansu sparked large local uprisings by 1928, led by a relatively unknown Muslim officer named Ma Zhongying, which ultimately disrupted elite plans

in Gansu for a joint Han-Muslim intervention into Xinjiang. Nonetheless, the transformation of Ma Zhongying's army along Gansu's northwestern edges by 1930-1931, from guerilla movement to settled political-military organization with powerful backing, repositioned Chinese Muslim military actors to engage the frontier question of Xinjiang.

The turn of military events in Beijing in the early 1920s originally encouraged Feng Yuxiang to hedge his political legitimacy on his ability to reunify and develop the nation's remote northwestern frontiers. Earlier, as an officer in Hebei province in 1918, Feng Yuxiang offered to the Beijing central government to garrison Xinjiang with his own units and "open up" the reclusive province with more economic investment and Han migration from the interior.³²⁷ As a long-time supporter of the anti-Qing Tongmenghui and its successor Guomindang (GMD) party, Feng Yuxiang led a coup in Beijing in 1924 to install the GMD in national government. The brief GMD government in Beijing appointed Feng Yuxiang as "military superintendent" (*duban*) of the northwest, but a successive counter-coup forced Feng Yuxiang to flee west.

From his new base in Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, the northwest's *duban* applied his authority to centralize and develop China's Mongol and Muslim frontiers.³²⁸ In particular, Feng Yuxiang used relations between his expanding regime and local Muslim elites to legitimate his military authority on the ability to unify Muslim borderlands under one government. In 1925, Feng Yuxiang ordered his lieutenant Liu Yufen to invade Gansu, ostensibly to reconsolidate the province's fragmented order, but also to strengthen his military's economic base through control of Gansu's profitable trading routes.³²⁹ Liu Yufen quickly suppressed resisting Han commanders in eastern Gansu, while other Muslim commanders remained neutral or accepted the new status

³²⁷ Bao'erhan, "Yang Zengxin tongzhi shiqi," p. 93.

³²⁸ Bulag, "Going Imperial," p. 269.

³²⁹ Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics," pp. 302, 307.

quo.³³⁰ Despite several early incidents in which Liu Yufen's occupying soldiers incensed local Muslim opinion, many Muslim military leaders in Gansu counseled peace.³³¹

Ma Fuxiang, now serving as a military governor in Inner Mongolia, emerged as an influential backer of Feng Yuxiang, securing the alliance of other Muslim leaders in Gansu.³³² Ma Fuxiang found common cause with Feng Yuxiang through their shared involvement in "frontier issues", and his support for Feng Yuxiang demonstrated how regional Muslim leaders navigated their integration into a changing, and often unstable, national order through accommodating local interests with centralist impulses from the interior. Ma Fuxiang advocated the many benefits that Feng Yuxiang brought to Chinese Muslims, most importantly including unity and peace in China's fragmented northwest.³³³ Accordingly, Ma Fuxiang supported Feng Yuxiang's widely-expected invasion of Xinjiang to remove its isolationist provincial government and secure national authority over vulnerable borders in Central Asia.³³⁴

For his part, Feng Yuxiang actively included local Muslim elites in preparations for a possible military intervention into Xinjiang. Aiming to reunify the northwest through local military initiatives and renegotiate the region's political relationship with the interior, Feng Yuxiang and Ma Fuxiang's partnership paralleled the scope of late Qing-era pacification campaigns at the behest of Chinese gentry-commanders and regional Muslim partners. After 1925, Feng Yuxiang planned the reorganization of Xinjiang into three new provinces, copying recent reforms in other Chinese-held Mongol territories to facilitate greater central control, economic investment, and Han Chinese immigration. The following year, his agents in Kashgar

³³⁰ Xu Xianlong p. 73.

³³¹ Xu Xianlong p. 74, 166-167.

³³² Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics," p. 308.

³³³ Li Qian p. 44.

³³⁴ Li Qian pp. 240-241.

Feng Yuxiang's expansion into the northwest signaled a new military thrust to reclaim national frontiers under a single authority, paving new paths for Gansu Muslims like Ma Tingxiang to achieve political influence in Xinjiang. As the next section argues, Ma Zhongying's rebellion against Liu Yufen's occupation in Gansu in 1928 ultimately disrupted the Citizen Army's march into Xinjiang. Nonetheless, cooperation between Gansu Muslim military leaders and the Citizen Army in the mid-1920s dramatically strengthened the prospects of a Chinese Muslim-led intervention into Xinjiang, which loomed large in the expectations of many regional actors and observers through the late 1920s.³³⁵ Understood in its immediate historical context, Ma Zhongying's premeditated invasion of Xinjiang in 1931 appears less as a random military event, and more as an attempt to use the evolving regional politics of frontier unification along the Xinjiang-Gansu border to consolidate local Muslim power and autonomy.

Enter Ma Zhongying

While many Chinese and European contemporaries who knew Ma Zhongying agreed on his egoistic ambition and volatile charisma, specific military events behind his rise often remain unclear.³³⁶ As a result, decontextualized depictions of Ma Zhongying's personality as a violent militarist often led historians to dismiss the wider contexts of his activities leading up to the 1931 invasion of Xinjiang.³³⁷ However, Ma Zhongying and his supporters actually drew from the rhetoric and strategies of, and evinced similar political goals as, other elite Muslim contemporaries in Gansu, from rebellion against Feng Yuxiang to later interactions with Chinese

³³⁵ Forbes p. 267.

³³⁶ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, pp. 239-242; Tyler pp. 107-109; Yang Boqing, 'Ma Zhongying,' pp. 77-78; XWZDG, p. 12.

³³⁷ Forbes p. 55; Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics," p. 310; Xu Xianlong p. 77.

national authorities. As such, Ma Zhongying attempted to style himself as a Muslim power-broker between center and periphery in the northwest. Ultimately, his invasion of Xinjiang formed part of a larger story of Muslim power-brokers in the nation's frontiers trying to intervene in the politics of distant, post-imperial borderlands.

As previous chapters noted, Ma Zhongying (born 1910/1911) grew up in Xining, where his father and grandfather served in the powerful commander Ma Qi's regional regime, and where the cosmopolitan environment of intermixing Muslim communities and political cooperation with non-Muslim elites influenced Ma Zhongying's early thinking on Muslim and national unity.³³⁸ Ma Zhongying first stepped onto the provincial scene when, as an unknown teenaged officer in 1927, he independently led a militia from Xining to suddenly besiege and capture the strategic town of Hezhou, and defend it. While Ma Zhongying's insubordinate occupation of Hezhou scandalized elite opinion in Xining, prompting his formal dismissal, it sparked an enduring legacy in Gansu society as alternately hero and marauder, genius and warmonger. Among young Muslim soldiers in Gansu, socialized in the republic's military politics, Ma Zhongying's defeat of more experienced commanders earned fame as a bold strategist.³³⁹ By contrast, Han commoners throughout Gansu interpreted Ma Zhongying's improbable success as an omen that he was spiritually possessed.³⁴⁰ This trope of psychological instability gradually evolved in later Chinese accounts into a caricature of an erratic warlord.

Ma Zhongying arguably hoped to launch popular rebellion against Feng Yuxiang's occupation and its Muslim allies in attacking Hezhou. Unable to hold Hezhou much longer due to the elite consensus against him, Ma Zhongying returned to the Xining countryside as persona

³³⁸ Xu Xianlong p. 70.

³³⁹ Forbes p. 52; Yaoleboshi p. 85.

³⁴⁰ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 222.

non grata. He was active again by early 1928, proclaiming the formation of a new “Black Tiger Army to Suck the Blood of Feng Yuxiang”, evocatively revealing his intentions to inspire popular resistance. When the Muslim officer corps in Xining attempted to quash Ma Zhongying’s rabble-rousing, Ma Zhongying decamped for the second time on the war-path to Hezhou in the spring of 1928, quickly expanding his small following into a large army of several thousand, including many Salar and Mongol-speaking Muslims.³⁴¹

Whereas Muslim commanders in western Gansu originally accepted Feng Yuxiang’s invasion of eastern Gansu, local Muslim opinion increasingly intensified against Liu Yufen’s new provincial regime in the first years of occupation. Liu Yufen’s attempts to transform eastern Gansu into an engine of manpower, materiel, and financing for Feng Yuxiang’s campaigns in eastern China imposed higher conscription and expropriations on local populations.³⁴² Adding to local misery, the continued resistance of local Han commanders in eastern Gansu, and the Citizen Army’s exacting market controls, reduced caravan traffic between Central Asia and inner China, an important livelihood for Muslim across Gansu, while a devastating 1927 earthquake in northern Gansu compounded regional drought and famines.³⁴³

Ma Zhongying’s armed following of several thousands indicates that his resistance resonated with local Muslim grievances. Unable to rally an elite coalition against Feng Yuxiang in Gansu, Ma Zhongying recruited from the most marginalized Muslim communities who harboured the strongest resentment against occupation authorities. Previous chapters noted how the Qing dynasty resettled many “pacified” Muslim communities further from predominantly

³⁴¹ Forbes p. 52; Lipman, ‘Ethnicity and Politics,’ pp. 309-310; Yaoleboshi pp. 84-85; Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2749.

³⁴² Lipman, ‘Ethnicity and Politics,’ pp. 308-309.

³⁴³ Forbes pp. 41-42; Lipman “Ethnicity and Politics,” pp. 298-299; Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 41; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, p. 155; Millward, *Economy*, p. 169.

Han areas and on to less arable lands after the reconquest of Gansu in the 1870s.³⁴⁴ Increasingly forced to rely on commerce to compensate poor agricultural yields, such communities were most vulnerable to the ravages of war on markets and trade.³⁴⁵ Many of Ma Zhongying's most loyal and effective lieutenants were originally bankrupted Muslim farmers who turned to soldiering to support their families.³⁴⁶

As Ma Zhongying recruited from the most victimized segments of Gansu Muslims, pre-existing tensions between Muslim and Han communities drove the 1928 conflict towards communal violence. Prior to 1928, social conflict such as legal lawsuits, local official persecution, and public brawling already drove deteriorating Han-Muslim relations at the village level in republican Gansu.³⁴⁷ Common depictions of Gansu Muslims as fanatical and violent caused some Gansu Han to worry that failure to subjugate growing Muslim army power spelt imminent domination and the death of Chinese traditions in the region.³⁴⁸ The prevalence of local Han prejudice and aggressive rhetoric in turn motivated similar anxieties for communal survival among the most impoverished and vulnerable Muslim communities. Feng Yuxiang's Han officers in Gansu viewed Ma Zhongying's largely Muslim army as another iteration of long-standing Muslim feuds against Han society.³⁴⁹ Vowing to quiet Gansu's troublesome Muslims once and for all, Liu Yufen ordered reprisal massacres against affected Muslim areas.³⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Ma Zhongying seldom intervened when his Muslim fighters looted and massacred self-defending Han villages, despite proclaiming he only targeted Feng Yuxiang's occupation.

³⁴⁴ Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 74.

³⁴⁵ Ekvall pp. 17-18.

³⁴⁶ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 130.

³⁴⁷ Ekvall pp. 19-24, 28.

³⁴⁸ Zhang Zhongfu, "Minzu guojia," p. 400.

³⁴⁹ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," pp. 70-71.

³⁵⁰ Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics," p. 311.

However, the common portrayal of Ma Zhongying as a “Muslim warlord” (*Huizu junfa*) manipulating “ethnic tensions” (*minzu jiufen*) neglects Ma Zhongying’s desire for Han partners in his northwestern campaigning.³⁵¹ Witness to the violence, European and Chinese contemporaries alleged that deep-rooted hatred for the Han drove Ma Zhongying to rebel against Feng Yuxiang’s occupation.³⁵² In reality, Ma Zhongying actively searched for Han allies against Feng Yuxiang. In surviving telegrams, Ma Zhongying used populist rhetoric that broadly appealed to the defense of all “peoples of Gansu” (*Ganmin*) regardless of faith, against “wolves” and “warlords” like Feng Yuxiang and Liu Yufen.³⁵³ Apparently, Ma Zhongying never referenced Muslim identity, except when declaring to potential Han allies that religious distinctions did not direct his struggle against Feng Yuxiang.³⁵⁴

Whereas Ma Zhongying’s rebellion initially defied elite Muslim opinion, Liu Yufen’s draconian response alienated some of the Citizen Army’s other Muslim allies in Gansu, notably convincing Ma Tingxiang and his Muslim garrison in Liangzhou to break ties with Feng Yuxiang and join Ma Zhongying.³⁵⁵ Ma Tingxiang’s entrance in the rebellion influenced Ma Zhongying’s desire to seek Han Chinese allies beyond Gansu. A long-time supporter of Chinese nationalist organisations like the GMD, Ma Tingxiang did not envision a post-rebellion provincial order rid of its native Han.

Crucially, as the next section argues, Ma Tingxiang’s ties to other Han Chinese actors outside of Gansu ultimately facilitated Ma Zhongying’s rapprochement with central Chinese

³⁵¹ Ma Sukun, “Ma Zhongying he Xinjiang Yisilanjiao,” in *Zhongguo Xinjiang diqu Yisilanjiao shi* v. 2, ed. Chen Huisheng, Urumchi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2000, p. 312; Yang Boqing, “Ma Zhongying,” p. 71-2.

³⁵² Hedin, *Flight of Big Horse*, p. 5; Maillart p. 212.

³⁵³ XWZDG, p. 4.

³⁵⁴ XWZDG, p. 6.

³⁵⁵ Xu Xianlong p. 167.

authorities, while other Han officials in Gansu decried Ma Zhongying as a Muslim fanatic. As Ma Tingxiang contacted other Chinese generals who opposed Feng Yuxiang, rapidly changing political events in the Chinese interior allowed Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang to canvass for military support among a newly ascendant Guominang (GMD) national government.

Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang Engage the Center

The ways in which Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang engaged the new GMD center drew from earlier precedents of Muslim military power-brokers in the northwest, demonstrating how they sought a new order for Gansu's Muslims with central backing. The outbreak of Muslim rebellion in Gansu in spring 1928 originally coincided with the closing stages of the GMD's 1926-1928 Northern Expedition to militarily subjugate rival armies and unify China under its own national government. Initially, Feng Yuxiang declared his support for the Northern Expedition, and secured his own position in the northwest as he pushed both Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang to the brink of complete defeat by 1929. However, the GMD's attempts to expand centralized authority across China, and Feng Yuxiang's increasingly tense relations with the GMD, evolved as significant dynamics in northwestern affairs. The outbreak of civil war between Feng Yuxiang and the GMD by the spring of 1929 offered new lease to Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang's faltering rebellions to seek support from the GMD.

Despite Feng Yuxiang's veteran support for the GMD party, and their nominal coalition on the national scene, tensions grew between their separate political-military structures after the Northern Expedition. In January 1929, the GMD government convened a national conference on

demilitarization. Although many GMD-allied leaders agreed in principle on the need to reduce armed forces across China, they suspected GMD President Chiang Kai-shek of disproportionately reducing other regional armies in order to strengthen his own regime base in the new capital, Nanjing.³⁵⁶ Thus, as the GMD government sought to extend direct authority over potential rivals, Chiang Kai-shek took particular interest in Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang as possible proxies against Feng Yuxiang. With Feng Yuxiang's mobilization against the GMD by April 1929, Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang's rebellion against the Citizen Army in Gansu increasingly appeared to Nanjing as a sympathetic front, and Chiang Kai-shek ordered agents to establish contact with Ma Zhongying and Ma Tingxiang in Gansu.³⁵⁷

The dramatic turns of national politics similarly shifted regional elite attitudes in Gansu, as leading Muslim commanders, previously neutral, now denounced Feng Yuxiang and declared support for Chiang Kai-shek.³⁵⁸ In particular, the Chiang-Feng civil war elicited a declaration of support for the GMD from Turkic elites in Xinjiang, which suggests that a new activist coalition emerged by 1929 between Muslim leaders in eastern Xinjiang and western Gansu, centering on Li Qian's earlier network of contacts in the 1910s and 1920s (described in chapter six). In late May 1929, the khan of Qumul and the Turkic prince (*qinwang*) of Turpan telegraphed Nanjing to declare their political support for the GMD, and celebrated Gansu Muslim resistance against Feng Yuxiang as a struggle for national unity.³⁵⁹ Although the 1927 Northern Expedition did not directly touch Xinjiang, several sympathetic Chinese officials assassinated the isolationist governor Yang Zengxin in July 1928, and the ensuing transition opened opportunities for local

³⁵⁶ Lloyd E. Eastman, "Nationalist China during the Nanking decade 1927-1937," in *The Cambridge History of China vol. 13: Republican China 1912-1949, pt. 2*, eds. John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 126.

³⁵⁷ Yang Boqing, 'Ma Zhongying,' p. 71.

³⁵⁸ Xu Xianlong p. 169.

³⁵⁹ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 143.

actors in Xinjiang to re-establish political ties to the Chinese interior. As such, the telegram's primary authors also reclaimed Li Qian as the legitimate representative of the "Muslim Quarter" (*Huibu*).³⁶⁰ Responding to changing political prospects in the northwest, with rebellion in Gansu and civil war in the interior, and hedging its bet on GMD victory, the Xinjiang-Gansu Muslim coalition – or at least its khanate and princely spokesmen from Xinjiang – sought to renegotiate post-war autonomy for a unified "Muslim nationality" on the pretext of loyalty to the GMD.

Significantly, the Qumul khan and Turpan prince praised two of Li Qian's previous supporters for actively leading rebellion against Feng Yuxiang in Gansu: Ma Quanlu, a prominent supporter of Muslim autonomy in Lanzhou civil assemblies and now local commander against the Citizen Army, and Ma Tingxiang. Incredibly, the khan and prince even referred to Ma Tingxiang as "supreme commander of the Muslim Quarters' Army".³⁶¹ Previously in political discussions among Muslim northwestern elites in the 1910s and 1920s, the "Muslim Quarter" (*Huibu*) referred to the eastern and southern regions of Xinjiang, where traditional Turkic aristocrats held some form of public office, and where the uniqueness of native Muslim society warranted special recognition and autonomy. Now, Turkic elites extended the geographic concept to encompass the Muslims of Gansu, arguably attempting to exploit political changes in the northwest. Feng Yuxiang's anticipated collapse in the central provinces in war with the GMD, combined with the death of Yang Zengxin, augured a more integrated frontier order under the expanding GMD. Expecting a revision of Xinjiang's political borders, Turkic Muslim figures took initiative to re-establish alliances with Chinese Muslim military elites in Gansu. Through this alliance, they sought to assert shared Muslim interests for regional self-rule.

³⁶⁰ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 143.

³⁶¹ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 143.

Crucially, the telegram from Qumul reinvigorated a rhetoric of Muslim unity which posited Muslim actors as the best representatives of the central government in northwest frontiers.³⁶² Muslim resistance to Feng Yuxiang vindicated that logic. As Ma Zhongying began engaging the GMD in the following months, he also articulated a similarly styled discourse of marshalling the Muslims of the northwest, which took cues from his ally Ma Tingxiang, and promised to mediate between the Chinese interior and its Muslim frontiers.

In July 1929, after Ma Tingxiang temporarily retreated from Gansu to regroup and receive official GMD appointments in Nanjing, he requested permission to lead a military expedition into break-away Outer Mongolia against Russian agents.³⁶³ Whatever the reasons for Ma Tingxiang's change of heart towards Gansu, his appeal to the dire situation in Outer Mongolia, invoking the threat of losing territory to imperialists in China's northwest, marked a significant change in tack. It demonstrated how Ma Tingxiang was gaming the new GMD government's priorities for national reunification in order to assure his own future. The outbreak of regional rebellions against Chiang Kai-shek, led by former allies who resisted his perceived usurpation of state power, by March-April 1929 exposed how the GMD's program of national centralization could also threaten the autonomy of Muslim military elites in the northwest. However, Ma Tingxiang chose to engage the post-Northern Expedition rounds of the "frontier question" to negotiate his integration and role in the military structures of the GMD. Ma Tingxiang's strategy demonstrated an alternative option for other regional Muslim figures to integrate their regimes in far-away frontiers with the new GMD party-state, by stylizing their armies as loyal servants of the central government, pacifying and administering the nation's remote territories in its stead.

³⁶² Ding Xicheng, "Kashi Huimin daibiao Ding Xicheng baogao Xinjiang jinzhuang." *Geming Qianfeng* 4 (1928), p. 54.

³⁶³ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 322.

Although not yet enjoying any pretensions to his own regional Muslim regime, Ma Zhongying echoed similar promises in his earliest contacts with the GMD in the summer of 1929. His telegram broached the same issue of Soviet influence in Outer Mongolia, but Ma Zhongying more explicitly linked his frontier Muslim identity to his service of the GMD state. Reacting to reports of Soviet interference in Chinese-held Mongol territories, Ma Zhongying declared his ability to lead his Muslim army to pacify China's unstable border regions in the northwest and mobilize China's Muslim masses in defense of the GMD state.³⁶⁴

Interestingly, Ma Zhongying referred to Muslims as the "masses of the Muslim nationality" (*Huizu minzhong*), rather than less politically-charged terms such as Muslim religion (*Huijiaotu*) or Muslim people (*Huimin*).³⁶⁵ Chapter six described how, beginning in the mid-1910s in Gansu, political discussions of Muslim identity and interests in China increasingly appropriated the notion of a "Muslim nationality" or "race" (*Huizu*) from the early republican sloganism of *Wuzu Gonghe* ("Five-Race Republic"). Although Han Chinese nationalists only used "Huizu" to refer to Xinjiang's distinctive Turkic-speaking Muslims, many other Chinese-speaking Muslims in Gansu sought inclusion within the umbrella of "Huizu" on the basis of shared civic and religious interests. Given Ma Zhongying's close relations with proponents of Muslim nationality across Gansu, Ma Zhongying was arguably referencing the "Muslim nationality" of the "Five-Race Republic" ideal. More specifically, Ma Zhongying was referencing how the "Muslim nationality" was understood among Gansu's politically-active Muslim circles: the corporate, unified and national identity of all Muslims in China.

³⁶⁴ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 355.

³⁶⁵ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 355.

Thus, Ma Zhongying posited his army as an answer to the central authorities' long-standing "frontier" and "nationality" questions over the political fate of China's borders and the political identity of its inhabitants. His linkage of Muslim nationality and Chinese national unity sought to underscore his usefulness to the national government. His populist rhetoric claimed to mobilize Muslims on behalf of national authorities, and promised to secure the loyalties of China's Muslims living in vulnerable border regions across the expansive northwest, including Xinjiang.³⁶⁶ In doing so, he mirrored the strategies of other Muslim military contemporaries such as Ma Qi and Ma Fuxiang in chapter five, who depicted their power as China's best hope to reclaim breakaway Tibetan and Mongol territories.

As central authorities in Nanjing weighed their options against Feng Yuxiang, Chiang Kai-shek's agents first ordered Ma Zhongying to leave Gansu in the summer of 1929 and regroup his fighters in Inner Mongolia to await further instructions. Finally, they ordered Ma Zhongying and his army to travel to Nanjing to receive formal party indoctrination and military training.³⁶⁷ Ma Zhongying's grandiose rhetoric of delivering the Muslim northwest to Guomindang rule may not necessarily have convinced Chiang Kai-shek and his closest advisers. Still, Ma Zhongying's military potential commended his immediate usefulness to central authorities as a proxy against Feng Yuxiang, if not to their post-war plans to consolidate and further extend direct rule across the rest of the northwest after the defeat of Feng Yuxiang. Ma Zhongying's budding relationship with the GMD, and his own rhetoric of rousing the Muslim national masses, anticipated how his future return to the northwest dove-tailed with the GMD's own efforts to negotiate with regional Muslim interests.

³⁶⁶ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090400, d. 00005, l. 355.

³⁶⁷ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 71.

Banditry versus Regime-building in northwestern Gansu?

Most of Ma Zhongying's remaining men in Inner Mongolia in the summer of 1929 refused GMD orders to report in Nanjing for training. Mutinying, they elected one of Ma Zhongying's cousins, Ma Qian, to lead them back to Gansu, while Ma Zhongying proceeded to Nanjing to meet Chiang Kai-shek with only a small band of followers. In the ensuing two years leading up to the 1931 invasion of Xinjiang, both Ma Qian in northwestern Gansu and Ma Zhongying, first in the interior and later returning to Gansu in 1930, developed a series of highly consequential regional alliances with secret society lodges and Communist networks. Although contemporaries and historians interpreted these relationships as evidence of Ma Zhongying's "banditry", he and his cousin in fact relied on these connections as regime-building strategies, using the bureaucratic and military expertise of a diverse underground cast of Han Chinese revolutionaries to consolidate their power in remote Xinjiang-Gansu borderlands. These alliances not only demonstrated Ma Zhongying's willingness to seek out Han partners in Gansu, but also facilitated his ability to penetrate eastern Xinjiang through regional political and commercial ties.

By March 1931, when Turkic Muslims in Qumul revolted against the Xinjiang provincial government over local grievances, Ma Zhongying commanded a frontier military regime ready to intervene in Xinjiang. Crucially, Ma Zhongying already began building ties with Qumul aristocrats and moreover with Li Qian by 1930-1931, and these relations situated Ma Zhongying's preparations to intervene in Xinjiang in 1931 as part of a re-emerging Turkic-

Chinese Muslim coalition, which sought to renegotiate local Muslim power and autonomy. Rather than a contingency of shifting military conflict, Ma Zhongying's 1931 invasion of Xinjiang was a premeditated campaign that consciously drew from local Muslim interests and regional strategies of engaging with national authorities.

In the meantime, Ma Qian led the defecting, war-weary majority of Ma Zhongying's army to return to Gansu, taking refuge in the province's remote Hexi corridor which abutted eastern Xinjiang and hosted main trading routes between China and inland Central Asia.³⁶⁸ With growing autonomy over the Hexi corridor's oasis towns and desert tracks, Ma Qian presided over a combination of self-enrichment and tentative regime-building that laid the foundation of local military rule in the borderlands between Xinjiang and Gansu, as well as challenged typical distinctions between "military" and "banditry", "institution" and "crime". When Ma Zhongying returned to western Gansu a year later, in the summer of 1930, he inherited, and continued to build, not only Ma Qian's frontier military organization, but also its legacies of "warlordism". The main primary source for Ma Qian's brief tenure in Hexi in 1929-1930 accuses him of focusing exclusively on riches and pleasure, while his independent officers joined the local Gelaohui secret society and colluded with nearby outlaws to rob highway caravans between Xinjiang and Gansu.³⁶⁹

However, the narrowed "warlord" portrayal of Ma Qian neglects other facets of his military presence in Hexi, such as how it interacted with and attempted to manage frontier oasis societies, and in particular its ties to Xinjiang. Frank Dikötter argues that the predominant focus on military power and military elites in the scholarship of republican-era regions under military

³⁶⁸ See map 4 for the geography of the Hexi corridor between Gansu and Xinjiang.

³⁶⁹ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," pp. 71-72. The Gelaohui was a prominent secret society in northwestern China in the late Qing and early republican periods involved in lower-class activism and organized crime.

command obscures the underlying realities of relative bureaucratic stability. In contrast to high rates of nominal regime changes in militarily-contested areas, the administrative corps of local institutions remained largely consistent and predominantly civilian, drawing from local, family, mercantile, and educated elites that continued to adhere to the standard legal codes of the national government's titular ministries.³⁷⁰ Contextual evidence strongly suggests that Ma Qian and his officers in Hexi likewise attempted to consolidate ties with local civilian elites and bureaucrats to support their regional garrison.

As Feng Yuxiang's regime in Gansu collapsed by 1930, several of his former Han officials travelled to Hexi to avoid prosecution by GMD victors. In Hexi, they joined Ma Qian's staff, overseeing the everyday affairs of local bureaucracy, and achieved a high degree of influence over Ma Qian, helping to smooth the necessary integration and interactions of Ma Qian's Muslim army with pre-existing formal institutions in Hexi such as market guilds, local courts, Han Chinese temples, and the local mint.³⁷¹

Similarly, the membership of some of Ma Qian's leading officers in the regional Gelaohui provided one significant avenue for his military officials to engage local social organisations. In addition to some activities more akin to "banditry", such as robbery, the Gelaohui also played a significant – if unofficial or illegal – role in local markets, collecting protection money and taxes, controlling smuggling routes, defending labour union strikes, and enforcing price controls and monopolies.³⁷² One author even argues that the dispersed and decentralized organisation of the Gelaohui across regional autonomous lodges, with their own

³⁷⁰ Dikötter, *Age of Openness*, pp. 13-16.

³⁷¹ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 72.

³⁷² Feiling Davis, 'Le rôle économique et social des sociétés secrètes,' in *Mouvements Populaires*, eds. Chesneaux, Davis, and Ho, pp. 58-62.

leadership and strict hierarchies, rivalled the complexity of local civil bureaucracy.³⁷³

As a result, Ma Qian's ties to the Gelaohui in Hexi supported the consolidation of a settled military regime with strong connections to local business interests, markets, and smuggling networks, and other Han actors in the region. Some of Ma Qian's officers began recruiting Han members from regional Gelaohui lodges to serve as military trainers and secretaries, handling administrative documents, laying Hexi's first telegraph lines, and contacting other local mercenaries and smugglers to supply garrisons.³⁷⁴ Chapter three noted Jonathan Lipman's thesis that political fragmentation in early republican China drove stronger elite ties between Han and Muslim leaders in the northwest, particularly as Muslim military regimes sought to negotiate their local autonomy with the evolving republican order.³⁷⁵ Ma Qian also sought to accommodate his local military authority with other regional Han elites – but non-official “elites” of a different strip from the borderlands' outlaw worlds. When Ma Zhongying returned to Gansu the following year in the summer of 1930, he continued to develop Ma Qian's precedent, incorporating Gelaohui connections into his local regime-building efforts to organize and discipline his army.

The Gelaohui also provided another social context where militarily and politically active Han and Muslims in northwestern China could collaborate and acculturate with one another, outside of the elite worlds of official bureaucracies and militaries. Chapter four described how several Dungan members of the Gelaohui in Xinjiang even achieved leading positions within its formal lodge hierarchies by 1911-1912. In the northwest's other provinces, many Chinese-speaking Muslims also climbed the Gelaohui ranks, using connections to regional commerce and

³⁷³ Lewis, 'Notes sur le Gelaohui,' p. 275.

³⁷⁴ Yang Boqing, 'Ma Zhongying,' p. 72.

³⁷⁵ Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics,' pp. 288, 310-311.

contraband smuggling to help secure the spread and influence of the organization. In the 1890s, one Hunanese Muslim used connections to Muslim caravan businesses and merchant firms to enlarge and expand his own Gelaohui lodge into one of the most powerful in the northwest by 1911.³⁷⁶ In 1914, another Muslim leader of a predominantly Muslim lodge in Gansu moved to Xinjiang in an attempt to revive the suppressed movement, recruit Dungan provincial garrisons in Xinjiang and expand his organization along Central Asian trading routes.

³⁷⁶ Lewis, 'Notes sur le Gelaohui,' p. 280.

Thus, regional Gelaohui lodges and their connections to various social-economic facets of village life provided an important avenue for greater Han-Muslim “elite” integration in the non-official worlds of organized crime and revolutionary activism. These forms of local Han-Muslim cooperation in Hexi in 1929-1930 appear striking against the general trend of segregation within many districts in Gansu, as well as Ma Zhongying’s forces’ earlier atrocities against Han districts during the 1928 rebellion. Ma Qian tapped into its local organization to help prop his own regime, and in turn the Gelaohui introduced his military subordinates to greater cooperation with other Han members. Previous chapters argued that Ma Zhongying’s mixed Chinese-Salar background in cosmopolitan Xining partly inspired his rhetoric of Chinese-Muslim national unity. Similarly, the lived experiences of his varied soldiers and followers, first collaborating with diverse Muslim communities across Gansu during war against the Citizen Army, and now interacting with Han clerks, trainers, mercenaries, and secret society members in the Hexi corridor, arguably internalized similar notions of national Chinese and local Muslim fraternity.



9. *A Han muleteer, crossing between Xinjiang and Gansu, ca. 1930-1931.*

In addition, the embedment of Gelaohui lodges in regional trade and smuggling routes also provided Ma Qian a network of cross-border connections into eastern Xinjiang. Ma Qian's tenure in Hexi, from roughly the summer of 1929 to the summer/fall of 1930, positioned his regime to control and monitor the flow of people, goods, and information between eastern Xinjiang and western Gansu, just as local Turkic rebellion stirred again in Qumul. After the death of the Qumul khan in January 1930, Chinese provincial authorities in Xinjiang dissolved the khanate, and began reforming local government under more direct Chinese rule. The recently deceased khan was already unpopular among his subjects, and misrule, high taxation, and forced labour provoked local rebellions in the past.³⁷⁷ Accordingly, provincial Chinese officials claimed that the dissolution of the khanate and Qumul's integration (*gaitu guiliu*) with the republican system satisfied local grievances.³⁷⁸ However, the reforms and behaviour of Qumul's new Chinese administrators quickly alienated both the former aristocrats of the khanate and its Muslim subjects. Chinese authorities dismissed former Muslim nobility from office, parceled their lands to local farmers, and commandeered their estates and wealth for military use.³⁷⁹ Chinese provincial officials also provoked significant grievances in the Qumul countryside, resettling mostly Han refugees from Gansu on more favourable land-plots, while allotting less fertile lands to other local Qumul farmers and charging them for the khanate's back-logged taxes

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Although armed resistance against Chinese reforms in Qumul did not erupt for another year until May 1931, the former captain of the khan's bodyguard, Khoja Niyaz, at some point

³⁷⁷ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 126; Forbes p. 275; Hedin, *Across the Gobi Desert*, p. 312; Pan Zuhuan, "Jin Shuren dengtai," p. 6

³⁷⁸ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 128; Pan Zuhuan, "Jin Shuren dengtai he Hami shibian," in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Jingxuan* v. 2, ed. Yu Junsheng, p. 6; Wang Ke, *Dong Tujuesitan*, p. 33.

³⁷⁹ Pan Zuhuan, "Jin Shuren dengtai," p. 8; Zhang Dajun v. 5 pp. 2735-38, v. 6 pp. 3147-49.

³⁸⁰ Forbes pp. 45-46; Lattimore p. 68; Zhang Dajun v. 6 p. 3150.

began organizing an armed conspiracy among the former khanate's disenfranchised elite. British

Other pieces of evidence suggest that Dungan armies in western Gansu continued to follow developments and underground politics in Xinjiang, at the same time as Ma Qian sought to consolidate his garrisons in Hexi through ties with secret society members who controlled cross-border smuggling routes. Thus, even if Ma Qian was unaware of local rebel plans within the mountains of Qumul, his regime along the Gansu-Xinjiang border and his connections with the Gelaohui poised his army to control and profit from the smuggling of weapons into eastern Xinjiang. The memoirs of one GMD representative in Urumchi in the 1930s briefly relates a vague incident in neighbouring Turpan in 1930, where a local religious leader solicited military intervention from a Dungan officer stationed along to the Gansu-Xinjiang border to support an armed uprising against the Xinjiang provincial government.³⁸¹ Xinjiang provincial forces nonetheless managed to detect the Dungan officer's intrusion at the head of several dozen fighters, harry his desert crossing, and ultimately suppress the brief revolt in Turpan.³⁸²

Ma Zhongying's Return to Gansu

When Ma Zhongying returned to Gansu from the Chinese interior by the fall of 1930 to reclaim his former army, he took over a military apparatus that, if not already intervening in cross-border flows between Xinjiang and Gansu, was at least capable of exploiting its local ties to smuggling routes and rebel conspiracies in eastern Xinjiang. After Khoja Niyaz began leading guerilla attacks against Chinese garrisons in Qumul the next year in May 1931, the extent of Ma

³⁸¹ Tyler p. 96.

³⁸² Tyler p. 96.

Zhongying's premeditated ties to Muslim rebels in eastern Xinjiang suggests that he relied on pre-existing contacts across the border established during Ma Qian's brief rule in Hexi. In addition to adopting Ma Qian's connections with the Gelaohui, Ma Zhongying also collaborated with a very different stripe of contemporary "banditry" – the splintered, underground Communist movement of the east coast's urban centers – in order to secure his return to Gansu.

Ultimately, Ma Zhongying's relationship with Communist agents inaugurated another significant aspect of his later military campaigning in Gansu and Xinjiang typically overlooked in secondary literature: the participation of Han Chinese revolutionaries in his 1931 intervention to "liberate" Xinjiang's Muslims. The involvement of Han Chinese allies demonstrates how the invasion of Xinjiang was not an exclusively Muslim affair. It also proves Ma Zhongying intended to politically integrate his vision of an autonomous Muslim province in the northwest with the rest of China. As Ma Zhongying worked with Communist allies to strengthen his military prospects in 1930-1931, Ma Zhongying's regime in Hexi established connections with rebelling Turkic elites in Qumul, and with Li Qian in Beijing. This demonstrates for the first time that Ma Zhongying's premeditated intervention into Xinjiang used pre-existing political ties between Turkic Muslim in Qumul and Chinese Muslims in the interior, in order to legitimate his campaigns as a part of a wider struggle of Muslims in China's northwest to mediate their inclusion in the Chinese nation under a more equitable order.

Little is known about Ma Zhongying's one-year stint in the Chinese interior in 1929-1930, as he enrolled first in the GMD's Central Military Academy, then transferred to another GMD military college in Jinan, capital of Shandong province. With the second round of civil war between Feng Yuxiang and Chiang Kai-shek in February 1930, Ma Zhongying furtively returned

to Gansu through Inner Mongolia, sensing an opportunity to regain military power in the northwest on the heels of Feng Yuxiang's expected collapse, and recruiting many Chinese Muslim fighters along the way.³⁸³ Ma Zhongying reached Zhangye in the Hexi corridor by November 1930, where he unilaterally proclaimed himself the new district commander of Hexi.

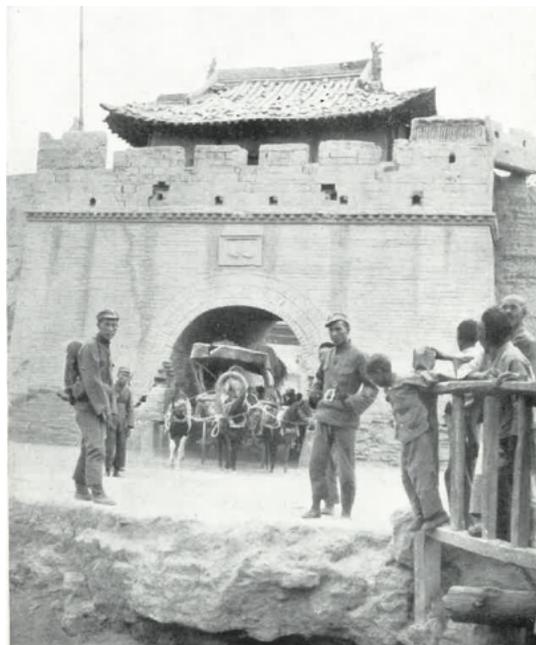
In contrast to previous guerilla campaigning, Ma Zhongying's military clique now switched to settled administration, but continued to mobilize hundreds of Muslim locals frustrated and unsupported by the Gansu status quo. With a rapidly growing army, Ma Zhongying ousted Ma Qian and assumed control of the frontier army organization his cousin honed in the last year.³⁸⁵ Ma Zhongying immediately set upon military and administrative reforms as part of an effective regime-building campaign, as his headquarters at Zhangye attracted a diverse cast of followers such as deserting Muslim soldiers from other garrisons, bankrupted Muslim farmers, war refugees, and dissident intellectuals such as Han Chinese Communists fleeing GMD political persecution.³⁸⁶ In particular, Ma Zhongying employed new Communist arrivals, many of whom having technical and administrative experience, in overseeing his expanding military and bureaucracy in the Hexi corridor.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 73.

³⁸⁵ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," pp. 73, 76; Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2750.

³⁸⁶ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 130; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 73, 78; Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2750.

³⁸⁷ Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 73.



10. Ma Zhongying's soldiers in Dunhuang, western Gansu, ca. 1931.

Ma Zhongying's reforms targeted not only internal military organization, but also local civil society. The degree of military intrusion within Hexi communities highlights the sincerity of Ma Zhongying's "regime-building" efforts in attempting to design a local government that more effectively penetrated and mobilized local populations for its own ideological goals, rather than simply gear a mobile military for war. As during his first rebellion against the Citizen Army in 1928, Ma Zhongying relied on directly appealing to Gansu's poor, hungry, and powerless to mobilize mass support. The propaganda work of Ma Zhongying's Communist allies while reorganizing Ma Qian's former bureaucracy in Hexi, introduced new political strategies of engaging public opinion, convening mass rallies and using new telegraph offices to distribute public leaflets.³⁸⁸ Ma Zhongying's Communist-styled propaganda in Hexi appealed to all local populations with economic and class-based slogans, rather than religious themes, denouncing rival commanders as "oppressors of the people", "robbers of the farmer's grain", and "devourers

³⁸⁸ Yang Boqing, 'Ma Zhongying,' p. 74.

of the poor".³⁸⁹

Despite his later treatment as a Muslim "separatist" and "fanatic", existing primary sources continue to evidence that Ma Zhongying's incipient regime deployed populist, rather than sectarian, propaganda that targeted all diverse local communities.³⁹⁰ Clearly, Ma Zhongying intended to keep his evolving military government in remote Gansu as a part of China, but drew from the precedents of other Muslim actors in Gansu to preserve his regime. Ma Zhongying replaced all county magistrates in the Hexi corridor with his own allies, and even briefly declared Hexi as its own separate province.³⁹¹ The administrative overhaul suggests that Ma Zhongying intended to implant his frontier regime in the region long-term, rather than simply stage a temporary base. Moreover, the attempt to separate Hexi from Gansu paralleled Ma Qi's earlier efforts, described in chapter five, to achieve provincial recognition for his own frontier regime in Xining and Kokonor in order to legitimate his autonomy from other authorities in Gansu.

In addition to his Communist allies, Ma Zhongying also strengthened ties with the local Gelaohui to back his reorganization of Ma Qian's loose military.³⁹² One Communist agent who worked on Ma Zhongying's staff even claims Ma Zhongying joined the Gelaohui and established his own lodge in order to tighten discipline among Ma Qian's former fighters, particularly those lieutenants who were also members.³⁹³ One of Ma Zhongying's cousins and close followers was a senior Gelaohui member, who helped Ma Zhongying's burgeoning movement at Zhangye to establish contacts with other secret society networks in, and sometimes outside, Gansu, and purchase weapons and recruit followers.

³⁸⁹ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 235.

³⁹⁰ Forbes pp. 55, 279; XWZDG, pp. 4-6.

³⁹¹ Ma Sukun, 'Ma Zhongying he Xinjiang Yisilanjiao,' p. 312; XWZDG, p. 11.

³⁹² Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," pp. 73, 75.

³⁹³ Yang Boqing, 'Ma Zhongying,' p. 72.

Ma Zhongying's associations with Communists and the Gelaohui also paved a significant avenue of local Muslim acculturation with non-Muslim Han societies in Gansu. The paucity of sources makes it difficult to judge the degree of ideological sincerity, versus pragmatism, behind Ma Zhongying's collaboration with Communists and Gelaohui lodges at Zhangye. However, the varied political goals of his emergent coalition were not necessarily mutually exclusive with each other, nor with Muslim interests and religion in northwestern Gansu. Gelaohui organization among marginalized highwaymen and paupers in frontier Muslim society, as well as the focus of Communist activism towards laboring classes, broadly overlapped with Ma Zhongying's mobilizations of Gansu's dispossessed and hungry Muslim farmers, and his vague populist rhetoric of defending Gansu's poor. Previous chapters described how the Gelaohui was a tightly organized and highly ritualized society, with its leadership presiding over Buddhist, Daoist, and Chinese folk rites to imbue their local causes with spiritual significance. Although Chinese Muslim participation in the Gelaohui remains under-researched, previous chapters also construed how many Chinese Muslims in the northwest gained regional power through the Gelaohui, and Ma Zhongying's participation in Gelaohui religious ceremonies vividly encapsulates the political acculturation of Chinese Muslim nationalists with various Han "elites" in republican China.

Many other, more "official" Han and Muslim commanders in Gansu, who remained largely neutral during the 1928 rebellion and now opposed Ma Zhongying's return, denounced Ma Zhongying's "banditry" and "sovietization" to the GMD central government.³⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Ma Zhongying continued to present himself to central authorities as a Muslim intermediary in Muslim frontiers in order to court support from the GMD. In communications with other

³⁹⁴ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 130; Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 235; Cherif-Chebbi, "Brothers and Comrades," p. 71; Ekvall p. 25; Petro p. 121; Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2750.

regional Chinese officials, Ma Zhongying stylized himself as a populist revolutionary who supported the centralization of the GMD party-state in order to reverse Gansu's political and cultural backwardness.³⁹⁵ In turn, the GMD also viewed Ma Zhongying, despite his local alliances with dissidents against the GMD regime, as an effective proxy in the northwest, or at least as a useful counter-balance against other potential rivals in the region.

Divide-and-conquer tactics in the region figured prominently in the GMD's approach to the region, and particularly its oscillating support for Ma Zhongying during both his return to Gansu and later independent interventions into Xinjiang. Ma Zhongying's desertion to Gansu coincided with Chiang Kai-shek's personal borderlands tour of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia in the fall-winter of 1930.³⁹⁶ Despite the suggestions of leading Muslim commanders in Gansu, like Ma Fuxiang and Ma Qi, to bring Ma Zhongying to justice for insubordination, Chiang Kai-shek did not sanction immediate action against Ma Zhongying.³⁹⁷ Instead, listening to more favourable reports from GMD officials in Inner Mongolia about Ma Zhongying's activities in Hexi, Chiang Kai-shek invited Ma Zhongying for another round of personal meetings in Hohhot. The content of these GMD reports and meetings is unavailable, but suggests that Chiang Kai-shek at least viewed Ma Zhongying as a useful asset to the party-state's long-term project of centralizing authority over border regions and moreover to keeping potential national rivals like Ma Fuxiang in check. Against the opposition of many other regional authorities in Gansu, Chiang Kai-shek officially incorporated Ma Zhongying into the province's post-Feng Yuxiang order. In the spring of 1931, when Nanjing announced the appointment of a delegation to reorganize a new provincial government in Gansu, Chiang Kai-shek directly ordered the team to

³⁹⁵ XWZDG, p. 4

³⁹⁶ Yaoleboshi p. 85; Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2751.

³⁹⁷ JZZW, f. 002, op. 060100, d. 00038, l. 018; Xu Xianlong p. 197; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 72.

officially promote Ma Zhongying to the rank of garrison officer and incorporate him within a new, unified provincial army.³⁹⁹

The degree to which the GMD defended Ma Zhongying, despite growing elite hostility in Gansu to him, highlights how Chiang Kai-shek viewed him as a useful ally in the region. After the announcement of Ma Zhongying's promotion in April 1931, a coalition of Gansu military officials defied the GMD delegation in Lanzhou and attacked Ma Zhongying's army near Ganzhou, forcing him to flee westwards to Suzhou and Anxi.⁴⁰⁰ The GMD military liaison in Lanzhou sympathized with the provincial coalition against Ma Zhongying, telegramming local intelligence to Chiang Kai-shek that Ma Zhongying's headquarters recruited known Communist agents and used profits from the opium trade to purchase weapons in defiance of official regulations.⁴⁰¹

Whether local government and press reports about Ma Zhongying's Communist connections changed Chiang Kai-shek's mind towards his Muslim frontier proxy, Nanjing gradually acceded to the pressures of widespread regional elite resistance to Ma Zhongying. However, Chiang Kai-shek notably hesitated to condone the suppression of Ma Zhongying, and did not order direct orders against him until mid-July 1931, by which time he had already crossed into Xinjiang.⁴⁰² Chiang Kai-shek's prevarication in condemning Ma Zhongying arguably demonstrates the extent to which the central government viewed Ma Zhongying as a useful asset that they were unwilling to surrender, a proxy Muslim commander in a strategic region where border-defense and Muslim minority affairs intersected.

³⁹⁹ JZZW, f. 002, op. 060100, d. 00034, l. 004; Xu Xianlong p. 197.

⁴⁰⁰ Ma Sukun, "Ma Zhongying he Xinjiang Yisilanjiao," p. 312; XWZDG pp. 8-9; Zhang Dajun v. 5 pp. 2750-2751.

⁴⁰¹ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090300, d. 00038, l. 255; f. 002, op. 090300, d. 00017, l. 043.

⁴⁰² JZZW, f. 002, op. 060100, d. 00038, l. 018; f. 002, op. 090300, d. 00040, l. 100.

Historians generally link Ma Zhongying's westwards retreat from the Gansu provincial coalition in April-May 1931 to his subsequent invasion of Xinjiang in July 1931, in order to explain his intervention as an apolitical event dictated by military events in the warlord era.⁴⁰³ While military factors certainly influenced Ma Zhongying's decision to enter eastern Xinjiang and evade his rivals in Gansu, this explanation neglects pre-existing ties that Ma Zhongying already established with Turkic Muslim elites across the border in Qumul. Chapter six described how several of Ma Zhongying's close Muslim allies in Gansu were long attentive to developments in neighbouring Xinjiang and its implications for Muslim political rights in China, and previous sections similarly argued that Ma Zhongying's own rhetoric supported a regional political platform for northwestern Muslim unity and autonomy. Earlier Gansu Muslim cooperation with Feng Yuxiang's Citizen Army in 1925-1927 to intervene in Xinjiang and reshape its provincial order previously exposed the possibility of a Muslim military invasion from Gansu to impose a more favourable political arrangement. Now, Xinjiang provincial authorities worried again in 1930-1931 that Ma Zhongying's regime-building in northwestern Gansu portended another round of cross-border Muslim conspiracy, especially with the advent of Turkic rebellion in Qumul in May 1931.

⁴⁰³ Forbes p. 66; Xu Xianlong p. 197; Yang Boqing, 'Ma Zhongying,' pp. 74-75; Zhang Dajun v. 5 pp. 2752.



11. Ma Zhongying, ca. 1931, before crossing into eastern Xinjiang, and wearing the Guomindang party emblem on his left shoulder.

Crucially, Xinjiang government reports on Ma Zhongying in 1930-1931 provide one of the few windows on Ma Zhongying's evolving Muslim alliances in the Hexi corridor. They repeatedly voiced concerns that Ma Zhongying prepared for an invasion of Xinjiang, even before the Gansu coalition offensive against him in April 1931.⁴⁰⁴ Most notably, Xinjiang border posts' reports on Ma Zhongying's activities in Hexi offer the first evidence that Ma Zhongying directly communicated with Li Qian, one of the most influential proponents in Beijing of official Muslim autonomy in the northwest. As Ma Zhongying independently strengthened his Muslim frontier army in 1930-1931, he dispatched close associates outside of Gansu, often relying on

⁴⁰⁴ XWZDG, pp. 9-14, 17-18.

underground Communist and secret society networks, to gather more weapons, funds, and followers.⁴⁰⁵ Nervous provincial authorities in Urumchi, fretting over Ma Zhongying's growing military power in western Gansu, repeatedly denounced Ma Zhongying's "bandit" contacts to the GMD, attempting to convince the GMD to sanction his suppression. One such report from governor Jin Shuren in April 1931 indicated that Ma Zhongying's allies even established contact with Li Qian in Beijing, accusing the Beijing Muslim activist of canvassing rhetorical support among Beijing's Muslims and political actors for a proposed intervention to defend Qumul's Muslims against the Xinjiang provincial government, where local rebellions recently erupted against Chinese settlers and officials.⁴⁰⁶

Significantly, Ma Zhongying's associations with Li Qian demonstrated that his military activism in northwestern Gansu, far from an isolated military incident in Gansu's far-flung border regions, excited the Chinese interior's Muslim political circles which were long interested in the fate of Xinjiang. Li Qian's long-standing interests in representing Xinjiang's aristocratic elites to negotiate Muslim autonomy in the Chinese republic arguably aligned with Ma Zhongying's potential plans to invade eastern Xinjiang in the winter/spring of 1931, especially given the recent disenfranchisement of Li Qian's allies in the dissolved Qumul khanate. Ma Zhongying's activism effectively signalled the continuation of Li Qian's previously failed constitutional activism to assert closer ties between Xinjiang's Turkic Muslims and Gansu's Chinese-speaking Muslims as a platform for regional Muslim autonomy, but now through military means. As early as January 1931, provincial army stations in Xinjiang reported that Ma Zhongying's town-wall propaganda across Hexi promised to "liberate the Muslims of Xinjiang in the name of Islam".

⁴⁰⁵ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 156.

⁴⁰⁶ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 156; JZZW, f. 002, op. 090300, d. 00040, l. 156.

Ma Zhongying also established strong ties with former aristocratic elites in Qumul as they first conspired against the Xinjiang government in 1930-1931, and later openly rebelled against Chinese provincial authorities in May 1931, before military events in Gansu forced Ma Zhongying to flee towards the Xinjiang border by July 1931. The main, oft-cited source – the autobiography of Qumul khanate minister Yulwas – for Ma Zhongying’s decision to invade Xinjiang in mid-July 1931 claims that it was improvised and spontaneous. According to Yulwas’s account, the former Qumul minister travelled through Gansu in June 1931 after being elected by an assembly of Qumul rebel leaders to petition Nanjing for support against Jin Shuren’s government.⁴⁰⁷ He claims, improbably, to have unintentionally met Ma Zhongying in an impromptu meeting, during which Ma Zhongying suddenly declared his support for the Qumul rebellion and devised a unilateral intervention into eastern Xinjiang.⁴⁰⁸ However, several historians criticize the reliability of Yulwas’s memoirs on the Qumul rebellion, given how it was published in 1969 under political censorship in GMD-occupied Taiwan, when Yulwas nominally held the post of Xinjiang governor in the GMD’s government-in-exile, and therefore sought to avoid exposing any premeditated links to Ma Zhongying’s infamously destructive invasion of Xinjiang in 1931.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Yaoleboshi pp. 82-83.

⁴⁰⁸ Yaoleboshi pp. 87-92.

⁴⁰⁹ Brophy, “The Qumul Rebels’ Appeal to Outer Mongolia.” *Turcica* 42 (2010), p. 331; Forbes p. 54, 279 ; Klimes p. 190.



12. Yulwas, ca. 1932, Ma Zhongying's closest ally in Xinjiang.

By contrast, other primary accounts demonstrate that Ma Zhongying maintained contacts with Qumul rebels and prepared an intervention into eastern Xinjiang before meeting Yulwas in June 1931. Ma Zhongying met with at least two other Qumul rebel delegations before June, and was known to run an effective spy network through eastern Xinjiang.⁴¹⁰ Chinese provincial commanders in Qumul accused local Turkic rebels of receiving support from Ma Zhongying in April.⁴¹¹ One of Ma Zhongying's officers referred in 1948 memoirs to a large invasion force, attached to Ma Zhongying's army, departing Anxi in May.⁴¹² Other memoirs of Xinjiang officials cite frequent border skirmishes between Ma Zhongying's fighters and Xinjiang provincial garrisons throughout the spring of 1931.⁴¹³ In June 1931, Jin Shuren appealed to Gansu provincial authorities to prevent Ma Zhongying's fighters from *re-entering* Xinjiang.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 223; Yaoleboshi p. 86 ; Zhang Dajun v. 5 pp. 2751-2753.

⁴¹¹ XWZDG, p. 14, 17.

⁴¹² Zhang Dajun v. 5 pp. 2758-2759.

⁴¹³ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 130 ; XWZDG, pp. 9-12, 16-20.

⁴¹⁴ JZZW, f. 002, op. 090300, d. 00039, l. 277.

Thus, the circumstantial evidence of local conspirators against the Xinjiang government smuggling weapons into Qumul from Gansu and Ma Zhongying pre-emptively attacking Xinjiang border stations strongly suggests that Qumul rebels already collaborated with Ma Zhongying's army before Yulwas travelled to Gansu. Therefore, Ma Zhongying's ultimate invasion of Xinjiang in July 1931 was not simply in response to the warlord era's shifting and contingent military events, but also drew from premeditated ties with other Turkic and Chinese Muslim actors within Xinjiang as well as earlier plans to invade Xinjiang and expand Ma Zhongying's regime pretensions in the northwest. Ma Zhongying's incipient ties with Yulwas, other Qumul rebels and Li Qian on the eve of invasion repositioned his attempts at local regime-building within a revived movement between Muslim elites in Xinjiang and the Chinese interior to assert national Muslim ties as a basis for regional autonomy in the majority-Muslim northwest . As most of the Qumul rebels' military leadership were former khanate officials, they likely did seek support from Nanjing on the basis of former ties between the Qumul court and the central government in order to advance their main political demand of re-instituting the autonomous khanate.⁴¹⁵ As such, Ma Zhongying's continued proclamation of loyalty to the central government, despite growing regional elite opposition to his independently-minded actions, likely struck Yulwas and other rebel leaders as a Chinese ally of Muslim autonomy who could mediate between nearby Qumul and far-away Nanjing. Yulwas's personal background as a Chinese-speaking local merchant with commercial connections to the Chinese interior and as a leading court official, with command over Qumul's border guard since 1926, situated him at the center of local elite efforts to engage other Chinese political and military authorities in their struggle against the Xinjiang government.

⁴¹⁵ Forbes p. 49; Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2748.

Ma Zhongying's association with the national Muslim activist Li Qian confirmed to the former elite of the Qumul khanate that he was committed to the goals of Muslim autonomy in the Chinese republic. This was a political platform which supported the Qumul rebel leadership's immediate interests in resisting the abolition of khanate privilege and the incursions of centralized Chinese authority. Throughout the Xinjiang civil war in the early 1930s, Ma Zhongying continually proclaimed to local Turkic elites that his intervention enjoyed the backing of the GMD central government to establish a new, separate government for Xinjiang's Muslims.

Li Qian used the identity of shared religion across the Xinjiang -Gansu language divide to mediate the cultural and institutional differences across the republic's vast Muslim constituencies , and rhetorically unite khans and aristocrats in Xinjiang with Muslim nationalists and social modernists in the Chinese-speaking provinces on the broad basis of common interests for regional autonomy and constitutional protections. Political collaboration across the Xinjiang-Gansu frontier epitomized the foundation of these shared interests between aristocrats and republicans in a vision of unified Muslim nationality. Ma Zhongying's two-way cooperation between Yulwas and Li Qian thus positions his premeditated intervention in Xinjiang within continued attempts to maintain and repurpose political ties between Muslim leaders in Xinjiang and the northwest in response to the new opportunities and challenges, such as national reunification under the Guomindang and the dissolution of the Qumul khanate, for fulfilling the rights of China's Muslim nationality. While the initiative of other regional militaries against Ma Zhongying forced the central government to abandon its brief proxy in volatile frontier affairs, other borderland actors in the story of Chinese Muslim identity saw Ma Zhongying and his talent for armed mass mobilization as an alternative military approach to campaigning for Muslim rights in an increasingly violent and unstable region.

Conclusion

The biographies of several of Ma Zhongying's closest followers and allies illustrate the various facets and meanings of the 1931 invasion. Ma Tingxiang ultimately died in a Xi'an prison in 1931, after being captured by the remnants of Feng Yuxiang's once-mighty northwestern regime, and did not participate in the invasion of Xinjiang that many Gansu Muslim actors had come to expect and sometimes actively plot since the mid-1920s.⁴¹⁶ By contrast, Ma Quanlu, whom chapter six described as an active proponent of Muslim self-mastery (*zhuquan*) in the northwest within a unified China, joined Ma Zhongying's invasion and emerged as one of its most effective lieutenants, almost capturing the capital Urumchi in the winter of 1932-1933.⁴¹⁷ Whereas the Xinjiang provincial government decried Ma Quanlu as a Muslim pogromist who preached heavenly rewards for killing Han "infidels", Ma Quanlu came from an activist background in Gansu that promoted Muslim integration with the Chinese state, and other neutral observers to the conflict noted how Ma Zhongying's commanders fiercely prohibited collective violence against Han communities.⁴¹⁸

Other prominent figures in Ma Zhongying's invading army represented the diverse backgrounds of many followers during his military rise in the late 1920s Gansu, which contributed to Ma Zhongying's overall orientation towards Muslim inclusion in the Chinese nation-state. For instance, Ma Heying emerged as one of Ma Zhongying's most powerful lieutenants by the early 1930s, roaming northern Xinjiang to recruit Kazakh and other Turkic peasant fighters for the war against the Chinese provincial government.⁴¹⁹ He originally rose to

⁴¹⁶ Xu pp. 75, 169-170.

⁴¹⁷ Zhang Dajun v. 5 p. 2794.

⁴¹⁸ Ma Sukun, "Ma Zhongying he Xinjiang," p. 315;

⁴¹⁹ GZ, f. 001, op. 072420, d. 00002, l. 000; JZZW, f. 002, op. 080200, d. 00127, l. 155.

local power in the Hexi corridor as a poor Muslim farmer who joined the Gelaohui for protection.⁴²⁰ Another one of Ma Zhongying's closest advisers, an imam known only in historical sources by his pseudonym, also represented the religious backgrounds of many of Ma Zhongying's military supporters from the regional *Yihewani* movement, described in chapter five, which sought to conciliate Islamic identity in a non-Muslim state. While Ma Zhongying's particular association with *Yihewani* imams and officers, stemming from his background in Xining where the religious movement liaised with the local regime, elicited accusations from other Chinese contemporaries and rivals that Ma Zhongying was a fanatic and separatist, his imam-advisers consistently counseled acceptance of Chinese state sovereignty and coexistence with non-Muslims.

Xinjiang's provincial government and army in the 1930s was staffed with many Han Chinese officials, soldiers, and poor conscripts originally from Gansu, and they continued to view Ma Zhongying's activities up to the 1931 invasion and throughout the ensuing civil war through the lens of a perennial Han-Muslim feud.⁴²¹ They dismissed the participation of Han Chinese revolutionaries in Ma Zhongying's campaigns under the general, depoliticized category of "banditry", and this distortion of the significance of the 1931 intervention has filtered down to predominant characterizations of Ma Zhongying as a "Muslim warlord" and "anti-Chinese".⁴²² Certainly, the subsequent descent of civil war in Xinjiang into collective, ethnic-based violence on both "government" and "rebel" sides reinforced the historical image of Ma Zhongying as murderously anti-Han, and the outbreak of factional conflict between Ma Zhongying's Gansu

⁴²⁰ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, p. 201 ; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," pp. 72-74.

⁴²¹ Bao'erhan, *Xinjiang Wushinian*, pp. 161-163, 180; Forbes, p. 39; Jin Guozhen, '1933 nian dong zhi 1934 nian chun baowei shengcheng zhanyi,' in *Xinjiang Wenshi Ziliao Xuanbian* vol. 2, ed. Yu Junsheng, p. 91; Pan Zuhuan, "Jin Shuren dengtai," p. 3; XWZDG pp. 6-12.

⁴²² Ekvall p. 24; Hedin, *Flight of Big Horse*, p. 5; Jacobs p. 102; Yang Boqing, "Ma Zhongying," p. 77.

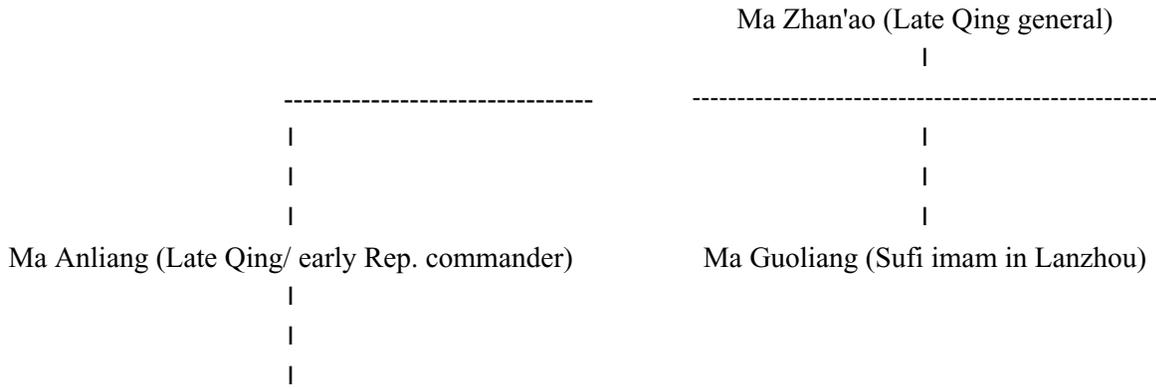
army and various Turkic allies and movements likewise exposed the hollowness of Ma Zhongying's rhetoric for Muslim unity.⁴²³

However, these depictions neglect how Ma Zhongying's 1931 invasion constituted a significant historical moment in the evolution of political ties between Xinjiang Turkic elites and Gansu Muslim military actors, stemming back to the 18th century incorporation of Xinjiang into the Qing empire, and thus formed part of a wider context of Chinese Muslim actors independently engaging "frontier questions" during the early 20th century's empire-to-republic transition. Thus, Ma Zhongying's 1931 invasion of Xinjiang formed part of a larger story of Chinese-speaking Muslims in early republican Gansu facilitating the republic's claims to former Qing territories. The Gansu Muslim intervention drew from the precedents and strategies of other Muslim actors who intervened in post-imperial borderlands and initiated local regime-building efforts on behalf of central authority in the 1910s and 1920s. These strategies in turn borrowed from earlier imperial roles in how Chinese-speaking Muslim military elites acted as intermediaries between the Qing court and Muslim territories in the northwest. Even as national power disintegrated across the Chinese republic between rival "warlords", Muslim military actors and their local regimes along Gansu's frontiers in the 1920s and 1930s served as effective stand-ins for post-imperial authority in post-Qing borderlands, and thus played crucial regional roles in unfurling the canvas of republican China's nation-state pretensions over the realm of the former empire.

⁴²³ Forbes pp. 55, 279 ; Lattimore pp. 142-43 ; Zhang Dajun v. 5 pp. 2761-2788.

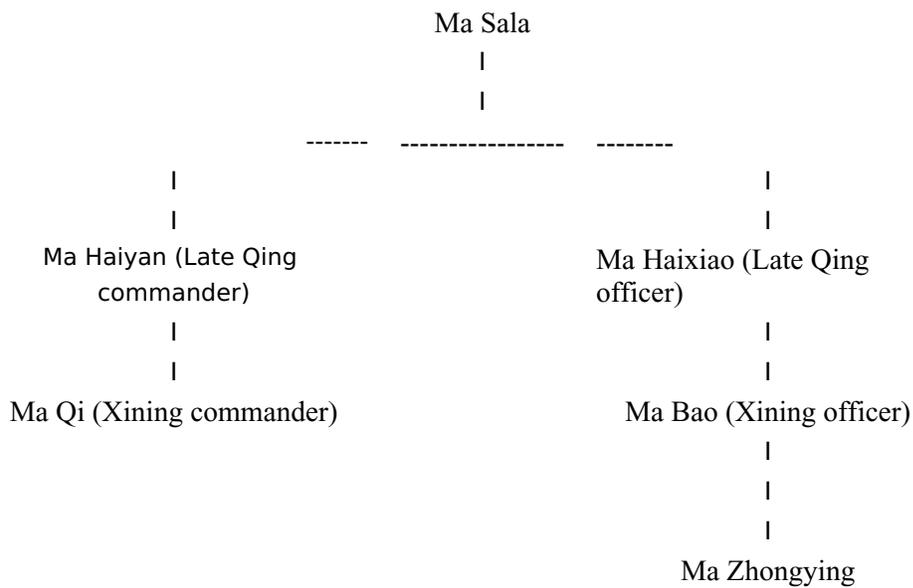
Appendix A: Prominent Muslim lineages in early republican Gansu

Ma Tingxiang's Lineage in Lanzhou.



Ma Tingxiang (Rep. officer and GMD supporter)

Ma Zhongying's Lineage in Xining.



Ma Qi (Xining commander)

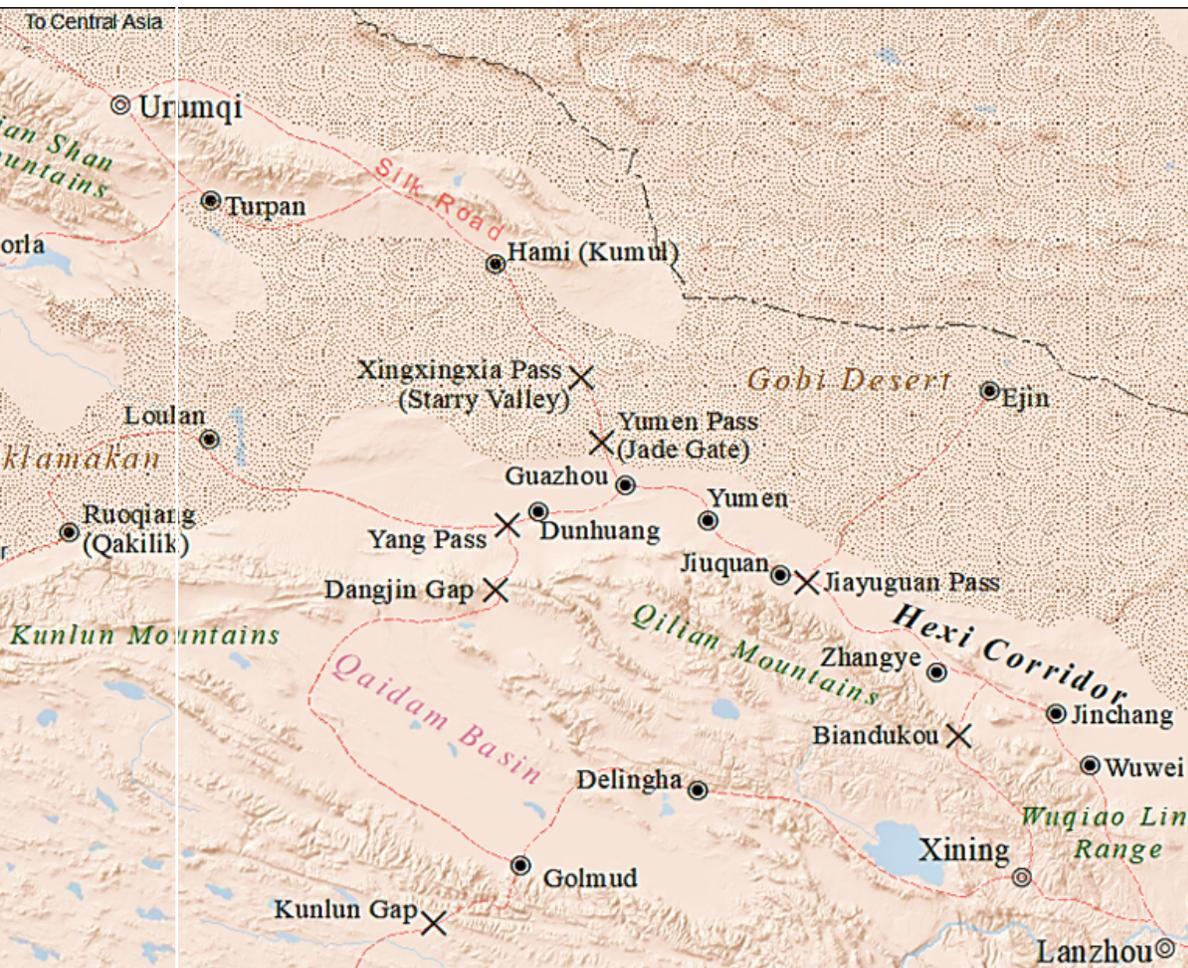
Ma Bao (Xining officer)

Ma Zhongying

Appendix B: Maps



Map 1. The 19th century Qing empire. Gansu province – wedged between Qing-conquered Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Kokonor – originally delineated the northwestern-most extent of the Ming dynasty. Source: Peter Perdue. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005, p. 2.



Map 4. Traditional caravan (red) routes between western Gansu and eastern Xinjiang. National boundary between republican China and break-away Outer Mongolia indicated in black; provincial boundaries between Gansu, Xinjiang, and Kokonor/Qinghai are not indicated. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Illustration Credits

1. Khanate official in Qumul, ca. 1930. Source: Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 141.
2. Salar imam on the Kokonor plateau, ca. 1936. Source: Fleming p. 208.
3. Yang Zengxin, ca. 1928, Xinjiang's first republican governor. Source: Jacobs p. 24.
4. Ma Fuxing, with Kashgari wife and children, 1923. Source: Forbes, Andrew D. W. "Muslim Separatism in Northwest China during the Republican Era." Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1981, p. 89.
5. Kashgari convicts displaying amputated fingers, hands, and feet, ca. 1923/1924. Source: Forbes, "Muslim Separatism," p. 94.
6. Portrait of Ma Shaowu, ca. 1926. Source: Forbes, "Muslim Separatism," p. 89.
7. Chinese Muslim trader (seated) with wares at Kumbum monastery, watching monk and Tibetan passerby, ca. 1936. Source: Fleming p. 81.
8. Ma Zhongying official portrait, ca. 1932, in GMD uniform. Source: Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 225.
9. A Han muleteer, crossing between Xinjiang and Gansu, ca. 1930-1931. Source: Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 85.
10. Ma Zhongying's soldiers in Dunhuang, ca. 1931. Source: Cable, *Gobi Desert*, p. 228.
11. Ma Zhongying, ca. 1931, before crossing into eastern Xinjiang. Source: Zhang Dajun, vol

12. Yulwas, ca. 1932, Ma Zhongying's closest ally in Xinjiang. Source: Forbes, "Muslim Separatism," p. 131.

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