

The Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) of Central Asia: A Case of Multiple Identities in a Changing Context¹

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Chinese-speaking Muslims, called Dungans in Central Asia and Huizu in China, were forced to migrate to present-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan at the end of the nineteenth century. They reconstructed their identity through interrelations with local populations and the soviet categorisation of nationality. But after 1991, their status has been gradually destabilised owing to the changes in economic, social and political rules as well as citizenship regulations in these countries. They have to readapt to the new situation created by the independence of the three former Soviet Republics, which has challenged their unity.

Keywords: *Central Asia, Dungan, ethnic group, identity, interrelation, Islam, kinship, language, unity.*

For the past few decades, anthropological studies on ethnicity have demonstrated various aspects of the construction of ethnicity, such as interactions between groups and the effect of administrative or political factors. This paper will focus on the multiplicity of identities and on the relativity and changing dimension of ethnic affiliation. The experience and the history of Chinese Muslims in Central Asia (Dungans) are a good illustrative example. I shall show how groups with common Chinese and Muslim culture, forced to migrate from different regions of China, have reconstructed their identity. Marked by internal divisions, they constructed the unity of the group around a categorisation applied from outside. But after 1991, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the foundation of independent republics, have compelled the Dungans to make other choices, which promote individual or collective strategies and could eventually lead to the dissolution of the group.

1 This article is the result of our observations over the last ten years in different Dungan villages and towns such as Masanchin, Shortube, Dzhambul and Alma Aty in Kazakhstan. I have also done research in Tokmak, Yrdik, Alexandrova, Ken-Bulun and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Tashkent and in a Dungan Kolkhose in Uzbekistan. I conducted fieldwork in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2003.

Who are the Dungans?

In Central Asia, Chinese-speaking Muslims are called Dungan or Dunganis in Chagatay Turkish.² Imperial Russian officials and later Soviet cadres continued to use the term. After the October Revolution, the Soviet state gave them the status of ‘nationality’, which is still maintained today. Chinese-speaking Muslims in China have also been a nationality (*minzu*) called Hui,³ since 1949. In Central Asia, they used the terms Lao Huihui and Dungan in books, research papers, journals and in contacts with the outside world. Among themselves, Dungans make a distinction between those who came from Gansu and those who came from Shaanxi and, among this second group, there is another subdivision.

Most of the Dungans who became established in the Semerich'e Region (now in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan) arrived from China pursued by the imperial army after unsuccessful rebellions against the Qing authorities in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴ The treaty of 1881, which restored Yili to China, led to further migration. It is estimated that these two migrations involved about 10,000 people.⁵ Some more arrived in the first part of the twentieth century, until the border was closed in the early 1960s. A small number of Dungans also settled in Uzbekistan. They adapted to local conditions and intermarried locally with Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uygurs and also with Tatars or Russians. They still used their specific Chinese local dialects (*Gansuhua* and *Shaanxihua*), but very early they lost familiarity with Chinese characters. They have been using the Cyrillic alphabet for the past century.⁶ The Gansu dialect has been adopted as the official language in Dungan schools, books, newspapers as well as on radio and television. But all Dungans learn Russian at school and can speak the language of the country where they live. So, in addition to Russian, they may also speak Kazakh, Kyrgyz or Uzbek. They also use Arabic and Farsi for religious purposes. Dungans now number around 100,000. In 1999, statistics indicated that there were 36,945 in Kazakhstan, 51,766 in Kirghizstan⁷ and approximately 2,000 in Uzbekistan.⁸

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- 2 On the origin of the word ‘Dungan’, there are numerous interpretations such as ‘eastern branch’, ‘east of the river’ etc., while others refer to the Turkish language. On this see S. Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, ‘Soviet Dungan Nationalism: A Few Comments on Their Origin and Language’, *Monumenta Serica*, 33 (1977–78), pp. 356–60. Su Sanluo, *Zhongya Dongganren de lishi yu wenhua (History and Culture of Dungans in Central Asia)* (Ningxia Renmin chubanshe, Yinchuan, 1996, 1st ed. in Russian 1971), pp. 45–6. Wang Guojie, *Donggan zu xingcheng fazhan shi (History of the Formation of the Dungan Ethnic Group)* (Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, Xi'an, 1997), pp. 3–10. Ding Hong, *Donggan wenhua yanjiu (Studies on Dungan Culture)* (Beijing, Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, Beijing, 1999), pp. 20–4. In Northern Thailand, there still are Chinese Muslims called Ho or Cin-Ho, who found refuge after the nineteenth-century revolt in Yunnan. These names are also used to refer to others Chinese immigrants from Yunnan province. On this subject see A.D.W. Forbes ‘The “Cin-Ho” (Yunnanese Chinese) Muslims of North Thailand’, *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1986), pp. 173–86.
 - 3 Among recent publications on the Hui see Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese. Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge and London, 1991); J. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: a History of Muslims in Northwest China* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, London, 1997); E. Allès, *Musulmans de Chine. Une anthropologie des Hui du Henan* (Ehess, Paris, 2000).
 - 4 On the nineteenth-century revolts, see, Bai Shouyi, *Huimin qi yi (Hui Uprising)* (Shenzhou guoguangshe, Shanghai, vols 3 and 4, 1952), J. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, pp. 117–29.
 - 5 S. Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, *Soviet Dungans in 1985: Birthdays, Weddings, Funerals and Kolkhoz Life* (Center for Chinese Studies, Taipei, 1991), p. 2.
 - 6 A Dungan alphabet was drafted in 1927 in Latin letters and was soon found to be unsuitable. In 1939, the Cyrillic script with five additional letters began to be used. This script was made official during the 1953–55 conference. Rimsky-Korsakoff, *Soviet Dungans in 1985*, pp. 2–3.
 - 7 See the journal *Huizu-Dungane* (2001), pp. 43–5.
 - 8 Estimation given by M. Savurov, President of the Dungan Cultural Center in Tashkent.

Studies on the Dungans

The Dungans have been the subject of a good deal of research. Very early Russian linguists and ethnologists,⁹ including Tsubuzgin and A. Shmakov, showed deep interest in collecting information about this community. The founding of the Soviet Union was followed by a significant improvement in the education level throughout the country, including Central Asia. This enabled the Dungans to become researchers and scholars of their own culture. The late ethnologist Sushanlo (Su Sanluo in Chinese), who was the director of the Dungan Studies Section of the Academy of Sciences in Frunze (now Bishkek), belonged to the first generation of these Soviet-trained scholars. The researchers adopted a highly descriptive approach and followed a very orthodox Soviet model of ethnography. Some of this material is now very useful in the study of changes that have occurred in Central Asian communities over the past half-century. After the independence of the five Central Asian Republics in 1991, Dungan researchers tried to continue their work but faced considerable economic difficulties. As far as Western research is concerned, only one researcher, Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, based at the Australian National University in Canberra (Australia), played an important role in introducing Dungans to the outside world. She has also written many articles about Dungan language, and given us much information on daily life in Dungan villages in the 1970s and the 1980s.¹⁰ In the mid-1980s, with the restoration of the Sino-Soviet relations, Chinese researchers, who were themselves Hui, became interested in Dungan culture. In 1989 and 1990, short reports on Dungan life and Dungan mosques were published in the journal of the Islamic Association of China. Dungan Studies were later expanded through more academically oriented reports published in *Xibei minzu yanjiu* or *Huizu yanjiu*. Chinese books on Dungan issues were published in the 1990s.¹¹

All the Soviet researchers restricted themselves to describing the Dungans from the point of view of the then prevailing political framework. They described Dungans as forming a traditional and fixed society and ascribed any changes to Soviet influence. In the same way, they studied the Dungans without making reference to the changes brought about by their interaction with other local peoples. On her side, Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer tried to examine the influence and the remaining signs of Chinese culture. On the Chinese side, the Hui, like Soviet scholars before them, integrated in their research the existing political framework, and specifically the concept of nationality (*minzu*).¹² They tended sometimes to regard the Dungans as ancestors who had preserved ancient Chinese Muslim tradition.

9 For a complete survey, see S. Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, 'Karakunuz: An Early Settlement of the Chinese Muslims in Russia. With an English translation of V. Tsubuzgin and A. Shmakov's work', *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 51 (1992), pp. 245–8.

10 Among her articles, see also 'Soviet Dungan Nationalism: A Few Comments on Their Origin and Language', *Monumenta Serica*, 33 (1977–78), pp. 349–62; *Soviet Dungan Kolkhozes in the Kirghiz SSR and Kazakh SSR*, Oriental Monograph Series no. 25, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979; 'The Soviet Dungans, The Muslims from China: Their Past, Present and Future', *Monumenta Serica*, 39 (1990–91), pp. 301–23.

11 Su, *Zhongya Donggan ren*, Wang, *Donggan zu xincheng fazhan shi*, Ding, *Donggan wenhua*, and more literary Yang Feng, *Tuokemake zhi lian*, *Tokmake* (Xinjiang Renmin chubanshe, Ürümqi, 2000).

12 About the question of the concept of *minzu* in China, see J. Thoraval, 'Le concept chinois de nation est-il "obscur"? A propos du débat sur la notion de "minzu" dans les années 1980', *Bulletin de Sinologie*, no. 65 (1990), pp. 24–41, F. Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1992).

Strangely, in all these researches, the religious aspect was either neglected or described superficially. Besides, all the researchers regard the Dungans as being a 'natural' ethnic group. People outside the group call them Dungan, but they call themselves Lao Huihui or Huihui, the same term as given to other Chinese Muslims. In fact, the term Dungan is misleading, because it raises no questions about the construction of a community in the specific historical context of Chinese Muslims who fled repression and sought refuge in Central Asia. Authorities and researchers who spoke of the Dungan as an ethnic group have maintained this illusion. However, when they first began to create a Dungan identity, they were simply a population who shared a Chinese and Islamic cultural inheritance. It was their situation of being in exile and the manner that they assumed it that framed their specific identity. This paper shows how the group was very flexible in responding to different situations in space and in time, even though the people were always in a subordinate position and never had their own territory. They reconstructed their identity through migrations or sharing interactive relations and mutual borrowing with their neighbours. Scattered in three Soviet states, Dungans maintained a certain cohesion until the constitution of new Republics in Central Asia challenged this unity.

The first part of this paper will present some ethnological and historical elements from the end of the nineteenth century to 1991, to help us understand the strong anchoring of the Dungans in Central Asia. The second part will introduce the new situation and the changes that have occurred since the independence of the Central Asia Republics.

Exile and Adaptation: Some Brief Ethnological and Historical Elements

The history of the settlement of the Dungans in Central Asia is now very well documented. Svetlana Rimsky Korsakoff Dyer has written a very good synthesis about this subject.¹³ This part will focus on some historical facts and provide some new observations on ordinary life and on some religious aspects.

At present, Dungans are mainly farmers, as their forebears were in China. They arrived in an area with no agricultural activities. There was no conflict with the nomadic or semi-nomadic Kazakhs or Kyrgyz. The first thing Dungans had to change was their Chinese family names. Many created Russian family and patronymic names from their Muslim name; however, the older people keep the memory of their Chinese family name. Until the end of the twentieth century, they built houses showing a mixture of Chinese, Russian and Central Asian styles. They maintain the Chinese way of building houses around an inner courtyard while adopting local elements. For instance, in summer, the family members eat and sleep on a traditional Central Asian platform placed outside the house. Inside the house, they have one or two rooms with *kang*, as in northern China. The reception room is covered with floor and wall carpets and equipped with a Russian heater. Dungans have adopted the same daily dress as the local people.

They live in relatively homogeneous villages along the Chu River from Tokmak to Bishkek and near Lake Issyk-kul. Some of them live in urban areas and are generally intellectuals, such as teachers and researchers, or traders. Expanding from the three

13 Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, 'Karakunuz', pp. 244–6.

original settlements at Yrdyk, Yingpan¹⁴ (formerly Karakonuz and presently Masanchin) and Osh, the Dungans went on to establish new settlements in the three republics. The reasons for these extensions are numerous, some being associated with internal divisions as in the case of the *yakshi* and *yaman* in Yingpan. After the arrival (1877) of Muslim leader Bai Yanhu and his 3,164 people who came from Shaanxi, quarrels increased dramatically inside the group. Some blamed Bai Yanhu for keeping the best lands for his family and friends. Local authorities had to intervene, and the group was divided into those who supported Bai Yanhu called Yakshi (meaning ‘good’ in Turkish), and those who were against him, called Yaman (‘no good’).¹⁵ In this particular instance, a number of villagers moved to the town of Tokmak and the founding of their new village of Shortube sanctioned by the authorities in 1902.¹⁶ The new village was located 6 or 7 kilometres from Yingpan. Natural extension and economical issues are behind the other expansions. An example would be the Dungans who went from Yingpan to Tashkent, from Yrdyk to Bishkek or from Osh to the Fergana Valley.

Dungan settlements were reinforced by new migrations from Yili in 1881, an example being the village of Sokhulu (now Alexandrovka). In 1933, some of Ma Zhongying’s troops¹⁷ crossed the border. In 1962,¹⁸ many Hui, Salar and Uygurs who lived in Gulja (Yining), crossed the Soviet border, as did large numbers of Kazakhs. Many of them settled in Kyrgyzstan in different villages or in the capital Bishkek, and others went to Uzbekistan. This last migration played an important role in the religious renewal.

Family life, kinship and weddings form a very good point of reference to observe a group’s ability to adapt to change. Among Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz or others, weddings are also a time for the expression of cultural identity. For instance, Dungans women wear dresses, while trousers represent Chinese culture. Brides themselves sew and embroider their silk clothes in Chinese traditional style, which is no longer found in China. The groom wears a Soviet- and now Western-style suit. The only mark of his status as bridegroom is the wearing of two scarves, one red and the other green, crossed over his chest.¹⁹

In this paper, I shall concentrate on selected aspects of marriage alliances. The Dungans have a reputation for practising strict endogamy, but the first reports of Russian ethnologists aptly pointed out the absence of women in the settlement of Yingpan. Indeed, very early Dungans had to marry local women. When one tries to reconstitute the history of Dungan families, there are many examples of marriages with

14 Yingpan, means camp in Chinese. Dungans gave themselves this name in the nineteenth century, and it is still used by old people. Karakonuz is the local Turkish name. Since 1965 the official name is Masanchin, who was the name of a famous Dungan military official. When referring to the past I use the name Yingpan and when to the present the name Masanchin.

15 Tsiubuzgin in Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, ‘Karakunuz’, p. 255.

16 Su, *Zhongya dongganren*, p. 259.

17 Mane Savurov, ‘Dungane’, in Alisher Ilkhamov (ed.), *Ethnitcheskii Atlas Ouzbekistana. Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan* (Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation Uzbekistan, Elininas, Istanbul, 2002), pp. 73–7; interviews in Alexandrovka.

18 There was famine in China in the late 1950s, due partly to the policies of the Great Leap Forward. Sino-Soviet relations, which remained bad until the 1980s, began to decline at the same time. On the Ili incident see Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia. From 1368 to the Present Day* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1975), pp. 278–9; René Cagnat, Michel Jan, *Le milieu des empires* (R. Laffont, Paris, 1981), pp. 206–7; Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang, China’s Muslim Far Northwest* (RoutledgeCurzon, London, New York, 2004), pp. 56–7.

19 Elisabeth Allès, ‘The Dungans and the Marriage Ceremony. A Case of Multiple Identities’, *China Perspectives*, no. 27 (2000), pp. 62–9.

Kyrgyz, Kazakhs or others, often for the second wife and sometimes the third or the fourth. The intermarriages that occurred in the past are proving to be very important at the present time, because they offer the Dungans the possibility of changing their nationality. People said, generally, the first wife was Dungan. There was a social and economic necessity to keep Dungan women within the villages and the community; this has resulted in the levirate practice.²⁰ It seems that monogamy became a reality only in the 1950s. As far as kinship and the rules of marriage are concerned, we can recognise a common regional practice: preferential marriage with a cross-cousin. The cross-cousin marriage, patrilineal and matrilineal, was also common in China before the new marriage law was adopted in 1981. Besides, Dungan women may explain now that marriage between the children of two brothers is not possible,²¹ but I found some cases of this practice, which is ethnologically known as 'Arabic marriage'. This custom is doubtlessly a result of interrelations with Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, who practice this form of union.²²

Another example of adaptation at the local culture is inheritance. In traditional China, a man shared his estate equally among his sons. Generally, the family house would go to the eldest son and the parents would continue to live there until they died. The importance of the eldest son is emphasised in Chinese Muslim culture. In Dungan society, the eldest brother also plays an important role in many social occasions, but I have observed the prevalence of another custom, both in Central Asia and in Xinjiang. The family house is given to the youngest son. This nomadic tradition is well documented and easy to understand. The father gives a part of his herd to the eldest sons for their marriage. Time is necessary to reconstitute the herd, so the traditional nomadic tent, the *yurt*, and the remaining livestock belong to the youngest son. Dungans have adopted this custom and give the house to the youngest son, who must then take care of his parents when they are old.

One can also see interaction with different cultures even in diet and cooking, which is generally an area where the original culture remains most deeply rooted. If we eat in a Dungan family, we may think we are eating a Chinese meal, because chopsticks are used and, for festive occasions, the hostess brings out many different dishes, at least one of which would include fish. But one can notice two main things that show the effects of cultural interpenetrations and changes. The first is the delicious jam, cream, bread (*nan*),²³ candies and peanuts offered to the guest before the meal. Chinese hosts may offer fruit in summer, but bread, cream and jam are rarely found in Chinese meals. It would be very interesting to detail rituals concerning meals, the number of dishes, and ingredients and innovations in food preparation.²⁴ However, this is outside the scope of this paper.

For my next example, I focus on two points. In most of China, people do not eat much meat in their ordinary meals, and it is well known that meat is more a northwestern traditional dish. To celebrate different Central Asian festivals, usually

20 M. Savurov told the story of his grandmother. She was nineteen years old when her husband died, and she was later remarried to her late husband's eleven-year-old brother. The levirate marriage was also practised in China. Savurov, 'Dungane', p. 78.

21 This practice was also forbidden in traditional China.

22 Thomas Hoppe, *Die ethnischen Gruppen Xinjiangs; Kultureunterschiede und interethnische Beziehungen* (Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 1995), pp. 271–2.

23 *Nan* is a Farsi word meaning bread and is used all over Central Asia.

24 To have an idea of the extreme richness of the Dungan cooking, see M.D. Savurov, *Sekrety dunganskoï kukhni* (*The Secrets of Dungan Cooking*) ('Mekhhat', Tashkent, 1989).

each family has to kill an ox or sometimes a sheep. The meat is presented on large plates and eaten with the hands, which is unusual for the Chinese, even Chinese Muslims in central China. The second is the famous meat–rice–carrots dish, called *plov* (or *polo*) in Central Asia and *zhafan* in Chinese. The *plov* is of Central Asian origin and was introduced in the Dungan menu alongside Chinese dishes. It is used as a complementary dish for weddings, circumcisions or other ceremonies.

All these aspects of social life demonstrate the remarkable ability of the Dungans to adapt to the cultural models where they find themselves. These different models do not fuse, but rather ally or juxtapose themselves to form a whole.

As far as politics is concerned, Dungans are not united, as the Hui tend to be in China, but follow different political orientations. In 1917, Dungans such as Masanchin,²⁵ took part in the October Revolution,²⁶ while others remained faithful to the Russian empire, and many of them were killed in Bishkek in 1918.²⁷ People still remember the first deportations to the *gulag* between 1930 and 1933. Men from Yingpan and Shortube were deported during the agrarian reform. Dungans were not spared during the Stalinist repression (1937–38). According to informants, many imam (*ahong*) and other people were sent to the *gulag* or were executed, even including Comintern members. Nobody survived these deportations. Some Dungans escaped to Yining (Xinjiang) from where they came back in 1961. During the period of Sino-Soviet conflict (1960s–1980s), Dungans tried to suppress any connections they might have had with China. They did so by pointing out not only their separateness from China but also from Chinese Muslims in terms of language and other factors relating to identity.²⁸ People in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan said that, during that period, Dungans sometimes passed themselves off as Koreans or Uygurs,²⁹ because they were afraid that the Soviet authorities would consider them as Chinese.

However, we need to question the meaning of these different political orientations. Dungans used various strategies to avoid the consequences of decisions by the Soviet authorities over which they had absolutely no control. The political differences produced no fractures within the community. While the Soviet Union continued to exist, the community maintained its unity. This is precisely what the 1991 changes might alter.

In the religious domain, Dungans are Sunnis and follow the Hanafi law, like their Muslim neighbours. The Islamic trends are as varied as Islam in China and as Islam elsewhere in the world. During the first two migrations of the nineteenth century, Dungans came from different religious trends. There were the Sufis from Gansu and Ningxia and *laojiao* ('old teaching', *qadim* in arabic) from Shaanxi. The Sufis belonged to the two Naqshanbandiyya branches, Jahriyya and Khufiyya, and to the Qadiriyya order.³⁰

25 Or Masanchi. Wang Guojie transcribes in Chinese, Ma Sancheng. Wang, *Donggan zu xingcheng*, p. 135.

26 Masanchin was a military official who joined the Communist Party in Tashkent in 1918. He organised the fight against the Basmachis in the region. Arrested during the Stalinist purges, he died in 1938. He was rehabilitated in 1956. See his biography in *Dungane. Historia v litskh (Dungan. History in Pictures)* (Karj-karajat, Alma Ata, 1998), pp. 97–8; Maria Vancvanova, *Dungane: lioudi i soud'bi (Dungan: People and Destinies)* (Siezdik, slovar, Alma Ata, 2000), pp. 20–1.

27 Interviews on family stories in 2000 and 2003. On the history of Dungans and the October revolution period, see Wang, *Donggan zu xingcheng*, pp. 83–144.

28 S. Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, 'The Soviet Dungans', pp. 307–8.

29 Interviews in 1992–93. In 1937, Soviet authorities forced Korean and Chinese inhabitants to move to Siberia or Central Asia on the pretext that they could encourage Japanese spying. Cagnat and Jan, *Le milieu des empires*, p. 177.

30 Su, *Zhongya Dongganren*, p. 261.

Among the Sufis, the Jahriyya brotherhood is the biggest group.³¹ When they arrived, they settled in Yrdyk near Przheval'sk (present Karakol) and in Osh. In November 1877, one member of the Ma Hualong family,³² named Ma and also known by his Islamic name of Yussuf, crossed the border with 1,130 people and moved along the Chinese Muslim trading routes.³³ A *gongbei* (tomb) with three generations of the family of Yussuf can be found in Yrdyk, but only men are allowed to visit it. Very early Dungans opened prayerhouses, called *daotang* in Chinese Sufi tradition. A mosque was built later in Yrdyk and, in 1910, in the town of Przheval'sk in Chinese style³⁴. During the Soviet period, religious activities were limited. Recently a Jahriyya *ahong* said that he was upset about the villagers' religious laxity:

They don't know how to pray, they don't know the difference between Jahriyya and the other trends; this is the result of the communist rule. Besides, when young men from the village follow Islamic training, they learn in Uzbek schools or in other schools. They learn Arabic but know nothing about the Jahriyya!!

Some elements of this brotherhood's religious characteristics persist to this day and are displayed especially during weddings. Many people whose families originated from Yrdyk have been living for some generations in the capital Bishkek. Many of them have achieved good social positions. They feel themselves to be more modern than the Shaanxi members. In general, the urban Gansu Dungans tend to look down upon their rural Shaanxi brethren.

On the Shaanxi side, people claimed to adhere to the 'old teaching', which has spread all over China since the tenth century and especially during the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368). Some of them now say that they belong to the *xinjiao* ('new teaching'). In 1897, when the two Russian ethnologists, Tsibuzgin and Shmakov, were doing research work in Yingpan, their attention was drawn to the content of the book of Lan Xu.³⁵ This is called *Tianfang Zhengxue (The Correct Doctrine of Arabia)*³⁶ and was published in 1852 in China. The book describes the history of Islam and its introduction into China. It was read by the *laojiao*, and it seems that it was used mainly by Sufi followers. It is possible that there were also some Dungans from Shaanxi who may have belonged to the khufiyya order, which is also called *laojiao*. However, the absence of the two main Sufi practices, *dhikr* and the cult of saints, suggests that the *qadim* made up the vast majority of the Shaanxi Dungans.

31 Inside this brotherhood, they belonged to the *banqiao* branch. Interviews with Jahriyya *ahung* in Kyrgyzstan and in Xinjiang. But generally people do not know the name of their *menhuan*, they only know that they belong to the Jahriyya. On the different branches (*menhuan*) in Chinese Sufi trends, see Ma Tong, *Zhongguo yisilan jiaopai yu menhuan shidu shilüe (History of Muslim Religious Trends and Menhuan System in China)* (Ningxia Renmin chubanshe, Yinchuan, 1983).

32 Ma Hualong was a descendant of Ma Mingxin, the founder of the Jahriyya. He played an important role during the Muslim revolts in the middle of nineteenth century in China.

33 After the repression of the Jahriyya in China at the end of the eighteenth century, some of them were exiled to Xinjiang. The tombs of the wife and of one of Ma Mingxin's daughters are near Gulja. The tomb of the second daughter is near Turpan. According to Dungans, Jahriyya members have been coming along Lake Issyk-kul as far as Samarkand or Tashkent to do business since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

34 Su, *Zhonggya Dongganren*, p. 234; Ding, *Donggan wenhua*, p. 227.

35 Tsibuzgin in Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, 'Karakunuz', p. 249.

36 See the entry on *Tianfang zhengxue* in *Zhongguo Huizu dacidian (Great Dictionary of the Hui in China)* (Shanghai Cishu chubanshe, Shanghai, 1993), p. 221, *Zhongguo Iisilan baike quanshu, Chinese Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Sichuan Cishu chubanshe, Chengdu, 1994) p. 556.

Ethnological investigations carried out at the end of the nineteenth century showed that there were already a large number of prayerhouses and religious schools. Statistical data from 1887,³⁷ indicate that there were 36 imams³⁸ or teachers for a population of 2,639 people in Yingpan, 19 for 1,158 people in Yrdyk and 13 for 1,705 people in Sokhulu (Alexandrovka). The relatively large number of prayerhouses (*daotang*) is characteristic of the Sufi practices. A small group of families join together to carry out the special Sufi prayer called *dhikr*. They go to the mosque only for *Jum'a* (Friday prayer). This is also the ordinary process for the *laojiao* in China. Initially, a small group of families with specific affinities, lineage or place of origin, organise a prayerhouse, and it is only a number of years later that a mosque is built. During the Soviet period, it was not allowed to have more than one mosque in any given village, so people continued to go to *ahong* houses. Many mosques were built after the 1980s. In 2003, there were 8 mosques in Masanchin, 11 in Shortube, 2 in Yrdyk, and 4 in Alexandrovka (2 of which were principal ones). This shows that the religious activities were strong enough to survive even during the most difficult period of religious repression in the Soviet era. This is important, as it helps us to understand the success of the renewal that took place inside the community in the 1960s. The new wave of migration in 1961–62 is one of the main reasons for the renewal that took place in the Shaanxi villages of Masanchin and Shortube and also in the Gansu village of Alexandrovka.

In 1962, two *ahong* belonging to the fundamentalist and reformist trend *xinjiao*³⁹ (new teaching) or *yihewani* in China,⁴⁰ arrived in Masanchin, both from Gansu. Qian⁴¹ *ahong* (called Yussuf) stayed in this village, while his maternal uncle *ahong* Ma Zhengui⁴² later went to Alexandrovka, where he died in 1981. Yussuf was very active and succeeded in spreading his influence in the Yaman group, which made up the majority in the village. Today, the Yaman villagers all declare themselves as *xinjiao* followers. He taught over many years and his students all became *ahong* in Masanchin and Shortube. Yussuf died in 1993, having promoted a reform in religious education emphasising the correct pronunciation of the Arabic language and, according to his students, the reading of 28 Surats, compared with the 23 Surats⁴³ read by *laojiao*. An *ahong* explained to me in 2003 that 'the main problem for the *laojiao ahong* is their bad pronunciation in Arabic, which causes changes in the original meaning of the words'. He reformed the religious practices in such areas as the suppression of payments for community celebrations (*nietie*); the suppression of the covered coffin for the transportation to the cemetery; a three-day waiting time before killing an ox upon the death of the community member (the *laojiao* killed the ox the same day the death occurred). For ordinary religious life, the distinction between *xinjiao* and *laojiao* is marked by the fact that after prayers, the *xinjiao* people raise their hands to the face

37 Wang, *Dongganzu xingcheng*, p. 69.

38 The references to the statistical data use the term imam, but it seems more realistic to consider them as *ahong*. In Central Asia, to become an imam, a person needs to study many years at advanced level in an Islamic school and obtain a diploma. A trainee *ahong* studying with other *ahong* in the village does not need to have any specific academic qualifications.

39 I reconstructed this story after many interviews with old students of this *xinjiao ahong*, members of the *yaman* group and of the *yakshi* group.

40 In Central Asia, it is not possible to use *Yihewani* which is the transcription of the Arabic name *ikhwan* (brother), because it implies the inspiration of wahhabism, which in this region is currently associated with religious extremism, for which people could be arrested.

41 According to the pronunciation of local people.

42 According to the pronunciation of local people.

43 The Koran contains 114 Surats.

only once, while the *laojiao* do it twice. In this way the religious confrontation came to be superimposed on the old political split between *yakshi* and *yaman*, the first remaining *laojiao*, the latter becoming *xinjiao*. In the village of Alexandrovka, the situation was different. The fundamentalist trend seemed to be present with people who had crossed the Sino-Soviet border during the 1930s and the 1960s. In this village, there were still some Sufi trends (Khufiyya, Jahriyya) in 2003, but the majority are now *xinjiao*, and all recently built mosques belong to this trend. With the 1980s and Perestroïka, the Dungans, like their Muslim neighbours in Central Asia experienced an Islamic revival,⁴⁴ with the building of mosques, the distribution of religious books, pilgrimage to Mecca and the arrival of preachers from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. All this strengthened the position of the *xinjiao* followers. Currently, the young imams⁴⁵ of the villages study in Islamic schools in Tashkent or in Bishkek, such as the Koranic school established by religious people from Dagestan.

In the 1990s, a new development occurred within the *laojiao*, when an *ahong*, who was a native of Shaanxi, came to the village of Shortube. The fact that he could speak the Shaanxi dialect was important for the expansion of his religious training. He provided a new impetus for religious education. In one year, he replaced the old generation of *ahong* with a new one. His *xinjiao* and other Muslim preacher detractors accused him of being in reality a member of a Sufi order. He sent some young students to study in *laojiao* mosques in China.⁴⁶ After a year, after failing to obtain permission to stay, he was obliged to return to China.

As we saw previously, the religious sphere has constituted a kind of 'space of freedom' for the Dungans. However, they have made sure that this space of freedom does not compromise their relations with authorities. They have always respected Soviet state laws and regulations, their main concern being to preserve the existence and future of the community.

Women were not allowed into mosques, so they organised their own religious activities in women's assemblies. Unlike men who go to mosques owned by a group of Dungan families, women share their activities with Tatar, Uzbeks or Kyrgyz women. In the house of one of them, generally a woman from a rich family, they would read the Koran together with an *otine* (female *ahong*),⁴⁷ comment on the hadith and learn religious rules. They read the Koran in Arabic and comment in their common language, Russian. Sometimes Dungans congregate in a small group and use their own language. A group of these women with an *otine* go to the family houses during celebrations, such as weddings, to read the Koran and tell Islamic stories. This common religious area created by women coming from different nationalities of the region is a good example of the Dungans' basis within the local society.

During the Soviet period, Dungans modelled their identity in accordance with the fixed frame of the nationality (*narod*) and citizenship politics, by interacting with local populations and internal strategies of reinforcement. However, the majority of Dungans remain hard-working peasants. Other peoples, especially Kyrgyz, consider them to be a prosperous community. Their villages are indeed wealthier than those of

44 Rashid Ahmed, *Asie Centrale, champ de guerres. Cinq républiques face à l'islam radical* (Paris, Ed. Autrement Frontières, Paris, 2002), pp. 48–51; Olivier Roy, *L'islam mondialisé* (Seuil, Paris, 2002), pp. 45–51.

45 On the difference between imam and *ahong* in Central Asia, see note 38.

46 I met one of them in Kaifeng in 1993.

47 Atun in Farsi. On the Otine in Central Asia, see Habiba Fathi, 'Olines: The Unknown Women Clerics of Central Asian Islam', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1997), pp. 27–43.

Kyrgyz people and the Dungans impress us as a strong, and remarkably united group. Other local people tend to be prejudiced against them and sometimes show a certain degree of animosity towards them.⁴⁸ The independence of the republics, proclaimed in 1991, created a new situation for the Dungans, the effects of which had become apparent at the end of the decade.

The Dungans in the New Republics: Collective and Individual Strategies

With independence, the Dungans had to confront a situation that questions the image of the unity of the group and their identity. The setting up of real borders with guard posts between republics seriously started to hinder communication. The free movement of people and goods depends upon the political relations between the states concerned. New and unclear cross-border regulations made it more difficult for people to travel. The new borders isolate Dungan groups from one another, as they now live in different independent states. For the same reason, they also have to demonstrate their loyalty to the new republic in which they live. All this takes place in a politically sensitive context. There are authoritarian and repressive governments in place in the three republics, which suffer from weak economic conditions and widespread corruption. The new republics' political orientation was also affected by the civil war in Tajikistan which came to an end only in 1997, by pre-Taliban warlords in Afghanistan and later by concerns about possible Taliban influence in Central Asia.

Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the political situation is most sensitive and, with its 25 million inhabitants, the country has the largest population among Central Asian countries. The relations with its neighbours are not always smooth. It is very complicated for people to cross the Kazakh border near Tashkent, and the Kazakh authorities try to limit the importation of goods from Uzbekistan. For the past two or three years, Dungan people who have families in all republics have to ask for a visa or an authorisation to enter Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. So corruption at border points has become serious. Inside the country, Dungans are faced with two different situations. One group who live in Andijan (Fergana Valley) have forgotten their native language, speak only Uzbek and are scattered among the local population. The other group who arrived near Tashkent during the 1930s still remain together. Many of them are families originating from the village of Masanchin. The Dungans are readily given recognition for being honest and hard workers and for having introduced locally the big red radish and the Chinese green bean. In this area, Dungans are generally well respected by Uzbeks and the other communities.

If they are gathered mainly in one village, their position is delicate, as they depend on the political goodwill of the Uzbek district authorities. They have a reputation for extreme tolerance. For instance, after Uzbeks expelled the Meshketian Turks⁴⁹ from

48 In spring 1992, team members of a European NGO, who were conducting a study on the need for food in villages in Kyrgyzstan, were prevented by Kyrgyz villagers from visiting Dungan villages. Kyrgyz seemed to consider Dungans as rich people who were not entitled to any help.

49 For some elements of the Meshketian history, see Aydingün Aysegül, 'Creating, Recreating and Redefining Ethnic Identity: Ahiska/Meskhetian Turks in Soviet and Post-Soviet Contexts', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2002), pp. 185–97.

local villages, including the Dungan village, in 1989–90, some Korean families settled in the Meschketian houses and reared pigs without conflict with their Dungan neighbours.⁵⁰ A Dungan academic took the initiative to found a Dungan association in 1990. Following the model of minority activities during the Soviet period, Dungans try to maintain cultural events, like other minorities in the country. All minority associations are now based in an International Culture Centre, which is directly under the State Committee of Uzbekistan. There is no political representation for the minorities.

In the early years of independence, the Dungan Association tried to develop relations with China through the Chinese embassy. At first, Chinese officials helped them to introduce the culture of one variety of white mushrooms and to buy a machine to de-husk rice. They also sent Chinese teachers to work in Dungan schools. This assistance did not continue for long. The Chinese connection was designed to help them strengthen their role in local society. However, it seems that the Chinese authorities have not made the choice to develop privileged relations with the Dungans. It would appear that, from the Chinese point of view, since the Dungans speak Russian and Uzbek very well, they do not constitute a political force. However, economic difficulties forced the Dungans to concentrate their efforts on survival. Some of them have to cross the border with Russia or with Kazakhstan to sell their vegetables for a better price. These trading trips are often marred by unforeseen events and incidents.

Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, the situation of the Dungans is also complicated. In this poorest and relatively less authoritarian Central Asian country, the Dungans are most numerous. Some of them live in Bishkek, and others have settled in villages. Kyrgyz citizens have the same difficulties in going to Kazakhstan as Uzbeks. Most require a visa. However, during my last fieldwork in spring 2003, people who live near the border could still cross without authorisation. Before independence, Dungans enjoyed real recognition and were adequately represented politically in this country. Now there still is a Dungan Studies Department in the Social Science Academy. A Dungan association continues to exist; radio and TV programs continue to be broadcast and their newspaper previously called *October (Shiyue)*, is now entitled *Huizu-Dungane*. Dungan now have to deal with many different problems, one of them being the rise of Kyrgyz nationalism. Members of Kyrgyzstan's minorities are given Kirghiz citizenship but not Kyrgyz nationality. Minority communities have to endure unofficial discrimination. Higher administrative posts are routinely given only to people with Kyrgyz nationality. This occurs also when students apply to go abroad, it is usually only those of Kyrgyz nationality who can leave the country.

An increasing number of people in Kyrgyzstan want to leave the country. To try to alleviate the situation, in the mid-1990s, the government introduced Russian as a second national language. However, economic problems seem to remain prevalent even though some improvement appears to have occurred since 2002. Dungan have difficulty in financing the publication of their journal, which is not subsidised by the state. Disaffection has increased in the educational system. Young Dungan female teachers

50 In 2003, the new situation prompted Korean families to leave the village and settle in Tashkent where they opened businesses.

sometimes prefer to stay at home rather than work at school for a monthly salary of US\$20. Many people have to travel a long way to sell their agricultural produce, sometimes as far as Moscow or other parts of Russia. Some others trade in Xinjiang. Though nobody thinks of going to live in China, many have already begun to settle in Russia. Land is available there, and the life is easier in Russia, as Dungans are usually fluent in Russian. Others have made the choice of applying for Kyrgyz nationality or, as in Osh, have become largely assimilated in the Uzbek community. Dungan intellectuals are concerned by the scattering of their community, believing that this trend will result in a weakening of their identity. In the past, the establishment of relatively homogeneous villages played an important role in the process of adaptation and the construction of their identity. The present situation is not favourable for them to engage in collective action, so individual strategies are been adopted.

Kazakhstan

Since 1999, the standard of living has improved in Kazakhstan and is now higher than in the two neighbouring republics. Kazakhstan has raw materials, plenty of space and at the end of the twentieth century the population was about 16 million. The situation of Kazakhstan's Dungans is quite different from that in the other two countries. Besides the better global economic situation, the most important factor contributing to this difference is certainly the organisation of a real political representation inside this essentially non-democratic state. The Dungans have an association that was founded in 1994. In 2000, all Dungans in the country elected the president of the association. Called Khusei Davurov, he was born in 1957 and completed his training as an engineer in 1983. He was also the young leader of the Shortube Communist Party. Now he sits in the National Committee which advises the government on important policy issues. After independence he succeeded in organising one large cooperative⁵¹ in Shortube and decided to cooperate with China, and especially with Xi'an County, which is the original home ground of the Shaanxi Dungans. This cooperation helps technological transfer in agriculture. The Xi'an authorities have helped the cooperative to construct solar greenhouses, which enables them to produce agricultural goods in winter. Besides agricultural activities, he organises cultural activities in Almaty and especially promotes studies in China and in other Asian countries, such as Malaysia. The Dungan villages remain homogeneous and well populated, and there is no sign of people wanting to leave. In fact, the Dungans are more united in Kazakhstan than in either of its neighbouring countries.

However, they have language difficulties, reflecting the complexity of their social position. All Dungan students learn Kazakh, Russian and the Dungan language based on the Gansu dialect. They are also beginning to learn English. As far as the Dungan language is concerned, many people think that because they all speak the Shaanxi dialect at home, it is not very useful for them to learn the Gansu dialect. At the same time, they also feel that learning only one dialect is not very beneficial, and they would prefer to learn *Putonghua*, the official Chinese language. On this point, there is a degree of internal disagreement within the Dungan community, and especially from Dungan academics circles in Bishkek, who are all Gansu dialect speakers and therefore stand to lose their pre-eminence. If it is decided to introduce *Putonghua*, another question arises:

51 In 2003, there were two big cooperatives and 72 small ones in the village.

should the study be limited to the official PRC Romanisation system (pinyin) or use Cyrillic script? Or should they introduce both pinyin and Chinese characters? On the whole, people regard characters as too complicated. Even on the simple issue of whether or not to introduce pinyin, there may be political difficulties. Pinyin is based on the Latin alphabet, the use of which runs counter to the Kazakh government's rejection of pan-Turkish influence. The Kazakh state does not want to be seen to favour anything that brings its education system closer to Uzbekistan, which has adopted the Latin alphabet.

The second problem concerns relations with China. President Nazerbayev is suspicious of China. He does not want to give too many opportunities to Chinese people to come to Kazakhstan, and he does not want to see a higher degree of social intercourse between Kazakh Dungans and his powerful neighbour. Dungans in this country have to demonstrate their loyalty to the Kazakh state and must handle their links with China very carefully. In this situation, collective strategies and a reinforcement of their specific identity can help them.

Conclusion

From a unified community during the Soviet period, the Dungans are now confronted with three different situations. In each country where they live, in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, they have to adapt themselves to three new economic and political contexts. They now have to show their loyalty to each new state. Even though they can still use the concept of nationality to protect themselves, this has been effective only in Kazakhstan. Besides, they have to diversify their economic activities in order to survive, and this process of diversification naturally takes them to Russia rather than to China, because of their greater affinity with language, style of life and social rules. In this situation, their unity and identity tends to be diluted by the individual or collective strategies they have to adopt. This would tend to confirm the hypothesis that the unity of the group is imposed from outside since, when the external constraint changes and divides, the unity is immediately weakened and even imperilled. However, also significant is the ambivalent relationship with China. Depending on the intensity of political feelings and the state of the relationships with China in each of these three countries, Dungans can have more, or fewer, connections with China. But at the same time, they have to be circumspect in the process of establishing these contacts.

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