

THE UYGHUR AND THE SCHOLAR
Competing Narratives of Ethno-religious Identity

by

JOHN CONWAY

An essay submitted to the Department of Religious Studies
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

July, 2010

Copyright © John Conway, 2010

Abstract

This paper engages the nationalist and ethno-religious discourses among and pertaining to the Uyghur of China's Xinjiang province. The purpose of such engagement is to illustrate that the scholarly discourse that has alternately deconstructed or validated the narratives of history that contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur is complicit in this wider discourse. The widely held assertion that the notion of the ethno-religious identity 'Uyghur' is both a construction of the twentieth century, and largely artificial or misleading, challenges the pre-existing discourse among the Uyghur themselves and the governing bodies of the People's Republic of China. A close examination of the scholarly narrative in consideration of theories of ethnicity and semiotic discourse therefore illustrates that this narrative competes among other claims to the 'natural' identity of the Turkic oasis dwellers of Xinjiang. My aim is to illustrate, in view of the case of the Uyghur, that it would be naïve to consider the work of scholars on ethnicity and religion to be mimetic reflections of reality. Indeed I contend that scholars possess the same propensity for myth-making as any given object of their study.

Acknowledgments

It has been my privilege to work on this essay under the supervision of Forough Jahanbakhsh. I am therefore pleased to thank her for her advice, guidance, and sense of humour. Similarly, I am indebted to James Miller for his work as second reader on this project, in addition to his very fine instruction and counsel. I also wish to acknowledge the instruction and support of the Queen's University Religious Studies faculty, including Pamela Dickey Young, Sipiwe Dubé, and William Morrow. More, my colleagues and friends among my fellow MA students remain a source of delight and inspiration. Finally, I would be remiss to omit my family and more distant friends. I wish to acknowledge in particular my exceptional brother, Tom Conway, and his fiancé, Jennifer King.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Abbreviations	iv
Timeline of Significant Events	v
Introduction	1
1. The Uyghur and the Scholar	6
1.1 Problematizing the Ethnonym: the Uyghur and Islam	8
1.2 Problematizing the Ethnonym: the Uyghur and Indigeneity	15
1.3 Xinjiang in the Interwar Period	20
2. Narratives of History and Identity	26
2.1 Competing Narratives	26
2.2 The Uyghur on the Internet	28
2.3 Narratives of Chinese Nationalism	32
3. Theory and the Scholarly Narrative	43
3.1 Theories of Ethnogenesis	43
3.2 Some Implications	49
3.3 Theories of Discourse	51
Conclusion	57
Works Cited	60

Abbreviations

<i>CCP</i>	Chinese Communist Party
<i>ETIM</i>	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
<i>ETR</i>	East Turkestan (Turkistan) Republic/Republic of East Turkestan
<i>GMD</i>	Guomindang/Kuomintang or Chinese Nationalist Party
<i>PRC</i>	People's Republic of China
<i>UAA</i>	Uyghur American Association
<i>XUAR</i>	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Timeline of Significant Events¹

- 1911 – Collapse of Qing Empire
- 1928 – Chiang Kai-shek establishes GMD government in Nanjing
- 1933 – Sheng Shicai’s GMD ‘rule’ over Xinjiang from Urumqi begins
- 1933 – First ETR formed in Kashgar
- numerous Kazakh, Uyghur, Hui rebellions within Xinjiang proper
- 1934 – ETR destroyed by rebel Hui army
- 1944 – Sheng Shicai replaced as GMD governor
- 1944 – Second ETR, or Ili Rebellion, formed in Ghulja
- 1945 – ETR’s “Yili National Army” establishes control over most of northwest Xinjiang
- 1946 – Soviet Union and GMD sign “Treaty of Friendship and Alliance”
- Formation of Xinjiang Coalition Government between GMD in Urumqi and ETR in Ghulja
- 1947 – Collapse of the Xinjiang Coalition Government
- 1949 – Chinese Communist Party’s ‘Peaceful Liberation’ of Xinjiang
- ETR’s leading officials die in mysterious plane crash
- Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
- Creation of China’s Nationalities Affairs Commission
- 1950-1952 – CCP begins project of Xinjiang land reforms, stripping property from Islamic *waqfiya* lands in effort to undermine religious wealth and authority
- 1955 – Official Establishment of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
- 1958-1961 – Great Leap Forward
- 1962 – Mass Exodus of 60 000 Xinjiang minority peoples to USSR
- 1965-1976 – Cultural Revolution
- 1978 – Deng Xiaoping’s Era of Reform begins

¹ For a general history of the Xinjiang region, see Millward (*Crossroads*). For a very detailed history of Xinjiang in the Interwar Period, see Forbes (*Warlords*). For an analysis of China’s system of regional minority ‘autonomy,’ see Bovingdon (*Autonomy*).

- Restoration of Nationalities Affairs Commission
- minority nationality history projects begin

1980 – Xinjiang Islamic Association re-established
- Aqsu demonstration and hunger-strike

1990 – Allegedly Islamist-backed “Baren County Counter-Revolutionary Armed Rebellion”

1991 – Censure of Turghan Almas

1997 – February 5, Ili Incident in Ghulja, constituting, at the time, Xinjiang’s largest protest since 1980
- February 27, Urumqi bus bombings

2001 – September 11 attacks

2002 – China issues the ‘East Turkistan Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity’ white paper
- United Nations declares East Turkistan Islamic Movement to be a terrorist organization
- Censure of Zordun Sabir’s novel, *Motherland*

2009 – July, Uyghur-led Urumqi riots, followed by Han revenge-killings
- September, Han demonstrations demanding greater government protection

2010 – May, internet access restored by Chinese government to Xinjiang region

Introduction

In September 1949 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), having more or less defeated the Guomindang (GMD) for control of China, held its “People’s Political Consultative Conference.” This conference laid out, among other resolutions, a system of self-rule or ‘autonomy’ for China’s non-Han peoples, and began the process of the official recognition of such minority ‘nationalities’ (*minzu*) (Millward *Crossroads* 242-43). Between 1949 and 1955, five hundred applications for nationality status were heard by China’s Nationalities Affairs Commission.² Ultimately, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has recognized fifty-six nationalities, one of which is the eponymous Uyghur of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (Gladney “Development” 104).

Numerous detailed studies of the nature of the Uyghur, and their relationship with the CCP, have illustrated that the appellation ‘Uyghur’ belies the complexities of ethno-religious identity ‘on the ground’ in the Xinjiang region. Although categorized as one of China’s Muslim minorities, the Islam of the Uyghur is by no means monolithic, and not all narratives of Uyghur nationalism or ethnic identity refer to Islam. Although the notion of the Uyghur refers to ‘sedentary Turkic oasis dwellers of Xinjiang,’ the notion of Uyghur-ness does not necessarily bridge distance between regionalism and ethnic factionalism among the Uyghur themselves. Although the standard narrative of Uyghur nationality propagated by CCP and Uyghur voices alike characterizes the Uyghur as the indigenous people of Xinjiang, there is evidence to suggest that this ethnonym originated only in the geo-political machinations of the twentieth century.

² James A. Millward’s *Crossroads* has a brief engagement of the details of this Commission. For a more detailed study, see June Teufel Dreyer’s *40 Millions* (95-98).

The case of the Uyghur illustrates that minority ethno-religious identities are the products of a multi-layered discourse, rather than any perceived primordial allegiances. Additionally however, in consideration of the fact that those individuals and communities that are participant in the living discourses of ethnogenesis take as axioms of their identity that they *are* primordial, the scholarly discourse that deconstructs such notions represents an additional, competing perspective on ‘Uyghurness.’ This perspective challenges the legitimacy of minority ethno-religious identity by arguing that, despite what the Uyghur may think, the notion of the ‘Uyghur’ is a product of China’s nationality policy and little else. The scholar may therefore challenge the agency and ability of ethno-religious minorities to both choose and take part in their own ethnogenesis, by suggesting that the Uyghur have been duped by (superior) imperial historical narratives.³

A cadre of scholars headed by the near-ubiquitous Dru C. Gladney and Justin Rudelson has sought to deconstruct the taxonomies and processes of religio-ethnicity in the XUAR. These scholars, engaged further below, consistently assert that the situation in Xinjiang cannot be ‘understood’ without a nuanced appreciation of the dynamic process of ethnogenesis.⁴ Nevertheless, the perhaps naïve desire to ‘understand’ and ‘describe’ the Uyghur’s ethno-religious identity – however complicated – is itself problematic under the auspices of unreflective academic study. In no sense does this paper intend to argue that the work of Gladney or Rudelson or any given scholar is invalid or simplistic. In fact I rely on the work of these scholars, in addition to that of, for instance, James A

³ This is an argument expanded on in greater detail by Joanne Smith Finley in “Oppression” (629-630). Smith Finley is the first scholar I have encountered to criticize Gladney directly, suggesting that he denies “the modern Uyghurs any social agency” (630).

⁴ Gladney writes that “any adequate understanding of modern Uighur identity must take into account not only ethnohistory and political motivation, but also incorporation into and interaction with the Chinese nation-state” [sic] (“Ethnogenesis” 20).

Millward, Gardner Bovingdon and Ildiko Beller-Hann, for my own ‘understanding’ of the Uyghurs’ situation. Rather my intent is to illustrate that the study of ethno-religious identities, as exemplified by the Uyghur, should not be interpreted as a mimetic reflection of empirical ‘reality.’ Moreover, and more specifically, the scholarly narrative is participant in the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur, rather than being removed from it.

The first section of this paper engages the notion of the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ itself. This section includes details of Gladney’s analysis of the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur, in addition to the historical context of the 1920s through 1950s in Xinjiang during which the nationality policies of the Soviet Union and Chinese Communist Party had their first immediate impacts on the region. Principally, this first section serves to demonstrate the narrative of ethno-religious identity proposed by Gladney for the Uyghur, and illustrate the complexity of the taxonomic forces at work in the region in view of, for instance, the nuanced nature of Islam in the Xinjiang region. These forces demand a thorough problematization, as accomplished by scholars such as Gladney and Schrode. However, it is clear that criticizing the categorization of the Uyghur by the CCP does not have an unambiguous outcome. Scholars may draw conclusions that the ethnic appellations employed by the CCP are, when scrutinized, unsalvageable. It is perhaps more useful to observe that, in regards to ethno-religious identity, the *categorized* may have as much stake in the relevant taxonomy as the *categorizers*. This would mean that there may be some value in continuing to employ (carefully) ethnonyms such as ‘Uyghur.’

This paper’s second section directly engages the narratives of history proposed by both the Chinese Communist Party and Uyghur nationalist movements. This section addresses the circumstances that have contributed to the CCP’s approach both to the

classification of minority ethnicity as opposed to the nominal Han majority, and the myth of the enduring sovereign Chinese state as analyzed by Prasenjit Duara. The narratives of Uyghur nationalists are represented here primarily by examples taken from the online diaspora, which mirror those of the Chinese government in that they lay claim to an ancient, indigenous Uyghur culture in Xinjiang that possesses rights of political independence. What this observation means is that the notion of the ‘Uyghur,’ however nuanced, has legitimate purchasing power ‘on the ground’ among the Uyghur themselves. It could be remarked that the insidious success of such strategies of ethnic division and control employed by the Soviet Union and Chinese Communist Party is such that to deconstruct their outcomes is not, in practice, an emancipatory project.

The third and final section of this paper is concerned with a theoretical analysis of the concepts and questions raised by the data present in the previous two sections. This third portion of this paper addresses theories of ethnogenesis as they pertain to the problematization – and perhaps valorization – of the ethnonym ‘Uyghur.’ Additionally, this section considers theories of discourse, such as the semiotics of religion, in order to support my contention that a scholarly deconstruction of narratives of religion and ethnicity *contributes* to the discourse of ethnogenesis, rather than stands apart from it. This paper is in part informed by the work of Tomoko Masuzawa and Jonathan Z Smith in their deconstruction of the taxonomies of religion present in the field of Religious Studies in general – most notably the notion of ‘World Religions.’ I am likewise informed by Tim Murphy’s efforts to construct a semiotic theory of religion. While the subject of this paper is less ‘religion’ as an abstract concept or subject for study – and more the means by which we may classify and describe ‘religious people’ such as the

Uyghur – the relevance of these theoretical works is that they have implicated scholars in a wider discourse about ‘religion’ and thereby challenged the academic pretension to objectivity. This paper concludes with a reflection on such theoretical concerns, both in regards to the classification and analysis of the Uyghur and academic discourse in general.

1. The Uyghur and the Scholar

The Uyghur are one of the ten *Muslim* nationalities recognized as official minority groups by the People's Republic of China (MacInnis 50).⁵ The Muslim nationalities of China are perhaps unique in that they categorize Islam – or more accurately, Muslims – according to *ethnicity*, rather than profession of belief. In the case of the Uyghur then, those individuals categorized as such by the CCP must be – by definition, according to this taxonomy – Muslim, Turkic, dwelling in Xinjiang, and united by a ‘national’ identity. It seems clear, however, that the nationalities delineated by the PRC do not precisely reflect the complexities of minority ethno-religious identity formation in China beyond the auspices of legal classification. The nationality policies of China do, however, seem to have contributed to the ethnogenesis of its minorities in serving to establish and direct a discourse about, for instance, ‘Uyghur-ness.’

Dru Gladney employs the term ‘ethnogenesis’ to refer to “the emergence of higher-order ethnic collectivities where once there were disparate peoples or dispersed populations” (“Ethnogenesis” 5). According to Gladney:

“most theorists now conclude that ethnicity cannot be reduced to purely interest-based or primordial action, but must involve a combination or dialectical interaction of the two main aspects of ethnicity: culturally defined notions of descent and socio-political circumstance” (5).

In consideration of this statement then, the notion of the ‘Uyghur,’ as any other ethnic or religious category, is the product of discourses in process rather than ‘primordial’ designation. Gladney’s observation illustrates the utility of the notion of

⁵ The other nine are, in order of population: Hui, (Uyghur), Kazakh, Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baonan, and Tatar (Gladney “Ethnogenesis” 3).

‘ethnogenesis,’ in that it implies changing (generating) relationships and behaviours. In this case, the ‘ethnogenesis’ in question refers to the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC’s) legal demarcation of a number of disparate Turkic-speaking oasis-dwellers in Xinjiang, whose loyalties were once divided between religion, locale, and language, into a single ethno-religious category, “Uyghur,” in addition to the subsequent (and perhaps preceding) discourse that has informed various understandings of ‘Uyghur-ness.’ Gladney, in addition to those scholars that take his analysis as axiomatic, argues that the notion of this nationality, Uyghur, is one invented in its current iteration by the Great Game machinations of China and the former Soviet Union – largely in the 20th century. Gladney suggests, for instance, that the “incorporation of Xinjiang for the first time into a nation-state required unprecedented delineation of the so-called nations involved” (“Ethnogenesis” 12).

One complicating factor in the assertion that this ethnonym is artificial or ‘unprecedented’ is that the Uyghur peoples do seem to share genetic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.⁶ Moreover, subsequent to their categorization as Uyghur, these individuals and communities have taken this nominal identity as a rallying point for self-determination and resistance to imperialism even as it divides them against other official nationalities in the region of Xinjiang. The ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ seems to illustrate legitimate similarities between its ‘members’ and in so doing emphasizes the *differences* between ‘Uyghur’ and ‘everyone else.’ For this reason, at least, this ethnonym seems to retain purchasing power among the Turkic peoples of Xinjiang and the Uyghur diaspora despite the apparent ‘artificiality’ of its origins in the twentieth century.

⁶ Although the extent to which this is true, engaged further below, is the subject of some contention (see for instance Justin Rudelson *Oasis Identities*).

1.1 Problematizing the Ethnonym: the Uyghur and Islam

Gladney suggests that the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party formulated the nationalist policy of China's future during the 1930s, "for the strategic purpose of enlisting the support of peoples disgruntled both with Qing rule and with Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist policy" ("Development" 105). According to Gladney, the CCP leaders, exposed to the diversity of Muslim cultures in China during the Long March, recognized Islam as a potential means of "enlisting" such support. They subsequently assigned a high priority to the integration of Muslims into the system of Chinese socialist control "long before they moved into Xinjiang" (105). That the CCP set up the first Hui Muslim "autonomous region" in the 1930s in Tongxin, southern Ningxia, is perhaps illustrative of the Communists' nominal intent to win the support of China's Muslims. Additionally, there is some evidence to suggest that the CCP have generally moved to accommodate Muslim cultural requirements in the last 20 years – that is, subsequent to the Cultural Revolution (Gladney "Separatism" 99).⁷

The use of the term 'Uyghur' to refer to the Turkic sedentary Muslims of the Xinjiang region is curious for two reasons. First, the blanket use of the ethnonym belies the fact that "the Islamic peoples of Xinjiang have always demonstrated a broad diversity in leadership, politics, and religious practices" (Fuller and Lipman 328). That is, although the Uyghur are understood to be 'Muslim,' they are by no means homogeneously united by virtue of their mutual adherence to Islam. Neither, as engaged

⁷ For instance, a children's book published during the early 1990s that disparaged Muslim culture was swiftly banned – its publishing company shut down, authors arrested, and so on. Gladney observes that the opposite attitude was the norm within the CCP during the Cultural Revolution, as evidenced by the 1975 Yunnan uprising and subsequent massacre of over 1 000 Hui Muslims ("Separatism" 98). Apparently, changing political sentiment in Beijing has brought about "frequent and radical oscillations between poles of pluralism and ethnocentric repression" (Gladney "Development" 108).

further below, do the Uyghur necessarily identify as Muslim at all, although the official CCP position on this matter suggests the opposite. David MacInnis cites the document “Problems Adapting Islam to Chinese Socialist Practice in Xinjiang Province,” in which the author, while describing the Chinese government’s vision of an uncomplicated, singular Islam, writes that “Islam is closely connected with the national character of the believers, and shows strong national features” (249).

Paula Schrode problematizes the notion of a homogenous Islam in Xinjiang by asserting that the question of what ‘Uyghur Islam’ is or is supposed to be is “vigorously” negotiated by the Uyghur themselves (394). Schrode frames this negotiation in terms of a relationship between “orthodox” and “heterodox” Islam, although she observes that such delineation is arbitrary and masks the fluid nature of these two poles (397-398).⁸ For Schrode, understandings of orthodox and heterodox – or legitimate/illegitimate (true/false) – Islam among the Uyghur is informed by the Xinjiang region’s Buddhist, Nestorian, and Manichean history (399). That is, the Islam of the Uyghur evidences the “permeability” of Islamic discourses in that it employs both ‘orthodox’ (Qur’anic) traditions and ‘heterodox’ (local, syncretistic) ones (400-401).⁹ For instance, Schrode notes that Uyghur Muslims believe as much in spiritual “opponents, partners or intercessors” as they do in God (402). Additionally Schrode describes an understanding

⁸ Schrode calls this relationship “interactional” as it pertains to power relations, and “dogmatic” as it pertains to “values and meanings in the broadest sense” (395). Schrode observes that it is critical for the scholar to “highlight the social dynamics and power structures at work [in the definition of orthodoxy] and not to mask them by tacitly reproducing them” (397-398).

⁹ Schrode observes that the dichotomy that could be drawn between “foreign fundamentalism” and “a more authentic, lived local Islam” must be viewed with suspicion (401). The arbitrary nature of divisions between orthodoxy and heterodoxy suggests that any assignment of value to the two (positive or negative) is ill-advised.

of a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead¹⁰ as commonplace among the Uyghur (404). One could perhaps argue that there is no distinction between ‘Islamic’ and ‘non-Islamic’ practice among the Uyghur, but a notion of a harmonious local Islam (identified by Chinese authorities) belies further nuances and intra-Uyghur religious conflict.

Ildiko Beller-Hann is in alignment with this assessment, noting that a careful study of Islamic practice in Xinjiang must consider the ‘syncretistic’ elements of Uyghur traditions. However, a careful study must equally, according to Beller-Hann, be cautious of asserting the existence of a culturally central ‘high’ Islam from which Uyghur ‘little’ traditions are on the periphery (“Oil” 10). Indeed it would be irresponsible, if not “Orientalist,” to suggest that the Islam that is practiced in Xinjiang can be described as a fusion of ‘Islamic’ and ‘non-’ or ‘pre-Islamic’ practices. Such a dichotomy impedes “recognition of the actual syntheses that have been worked out in beliefs and their manifestations in rituals and daily practices.” Instead, Beller-Hann observes that “while it is sometimes possible to trace the origins of specific elements of [any given religious] fusion, such a deconstruction has little justification from the point of view of local understandings and interpretations” (“Oil” 11).

As case-in-point, Schrode identifies the ambiguous status of “religious specialists” such as healers and spirit mediums among the Uyghur. Such practitioners seem to be viewed with some disapproval by Uyghur who consider themselves to practice

¹⁰ This is perhaps suggestive of Han Chinese influence, in that it echoes notions of filial piety. Such a suggestion is pure speculation on my part, however. Beller-Hann argues that the “focus of Inner Asian religious life,” regardless of nominal denominational allegiances, is “communality, which is expressed in the domestic cult of ancestors” (“Oil” 11). He observes, however, that the “ancestor cult among the Han Chinese” is very different than that of the Uyghur, which instead shows affinity “among the Turkic and Iranian speaking peoples of Muslim Central Asia” (11). Beller-Hann asserts that these traditions among the Uyghur are conceived in terms of encounters with specific spirits of the dead – helpful (Muslim saints) or otherwise (angry or neglected spirits) (12)

a “pious” Islam (Schrode 408). However, while “everyone seems to be eager to distance themselves from specialists whose profession is dealing with spirits,” the power and efficacy of “sorcery” is not necessarily challenged (Schrode 407). Not everything deemed ‘un-orthodox’ is necessarily understood to contradict scriptural Islam, (417-418).

Instead, Schrode observes that the Uyghur Muslims of Xinjiang have divided into competing religious factions. The “Jadidist” education movement of the early 20th century built schools that seek to ‘purify’ Islam of local eccentricities and challenge the traditional authority of the *‘ulema’* (Schrode 410-411).¹¹ The Jadidists have sought to discredit, if not combat, practices deemed both un-Islamic and un-rational. Similarly, although not couched as a reform movement, the Naqshbandiyya tradition vouchsafes orthodoxy and “shari’ism” (Schrode 411). Meanwhile, the majority of Uyghur perhaps subscribe to a “traditionalist” Islam that emphasizes the perceived autochthonous culture of the region (412). “Educated” and “pious” Uyghurs claim to be “free” from what they perceive to be fundamentalism – articulated pejoratively as Wahhabism (Schrode 414). And spirit mediums persist.

Additionally, Schrode observes that local practices of spiritual intercession, as integrated with Islam in Xinjiang, are challenged by the legal and official accreditation of Islamic authorities by the Chinese government (408). Mosques and imams that are registered and trained by the Chinese Islamic Association employ the terminology of the

¹¹ According to James Millward’s assessment, the jadidist reform movement – which he attributes to Turkish “enlightenment” – was a contributing factor in the development of claims to “Turkic” nationalism in Xinjiang (*Crossroads* 174-5). Millward observes that one jadidist school used school uniforms modeled on Ottoman court costumes, in which students were told that the Ottoman sultan was their supreme leader (*Crossroads* 173). Some of the leaders of the rebellions and independence movements in Xinjiang of the 1920s and 30s were either affiliated with or educated in the jadidist schools (*Crossroads* 176-77). Millward notes that the nationalist discourse that emerged out of this jadidism was “vague about the actual nature and locus of the ‘nation’ it promoted” – aside, perhaps, from the fact that it was “Turkic.” Therefore, according to Millward, it was “not a long step from more general Turkic nationalism to aspirations for an ‘East Turkestan’ within the boundaries of Chinese Xinjiang” (*Crossroads* 176-77).

Uyghur – “*xurapatliq*,” or superstition (Schrode 407) – to combat what the CCP deems to be the encroachment of potentially rebellious “evil cults.”¹²

The policy of the Chinese Communist Party on religion is that it is basically counter-revolutionary and false. However, the CCP has defined and delimited a concept of ‘official’ – legalized and de-criminalized – religion which is palatable to party ideology and programs of nationalization. Among the consequences of such a policy is the creation of notions of ‘true’ religion under the auspices of the Chinese government, as opposed to ‘false’ evil superstition. Spirit mediums are, doubtless, more evil and more superstitious in the eyes of the CCP than officially mandated Islamic institutions. The Chinese Communist Party is therefore engaged in competition with other explicitly ‘Islamic’ traditions – nominally indigenous or otherwise – in Xinjiang in the process of defining what it is to be Muslim in Xinjiang.¹³

The utility of Schrode’s analysis is its demonstration of the nuanced nature of Islamic practice in Xinjiang that is belied by the official designation of the Uyghur as a Chinese Muslim nationality, according to CCP definitions of religion, nationality, and Islam. According to Schrode’s analysis, the Uyghur *as a whole* do not take ‘Uyghur Islam’ to be a given – although there are clearly Muslim factions among the Uyghur who espouse a vision of a purist, monolithic Islam (415). In observing this fact, Schrode presents a useful insight into the agency and ability of the Uyghur to create both their own problems and solutions.

¹² For a thorough engagement of the relationship between religion proper and the Chinese government, in addition to a description of the “evil cults” and “superstition” designations, see, for instance, Yang (2006), Duara (1991), China’s “Document 19” (MacInnis 1989), Potter (2003), and so on.

¹³ Ironically, Schrode suggest that in order to compete with the “shamanistic” healers, even officially mandated imams offer healing services that they claim to be “in strict conformity with Islam, thereby promoting their own services as the better or safer alternative on the market” (421).

Similarly, Joanne Smith Finley writes that “the individuals in Xinjiang are not merely passive recipients of state representations and policies; they are also agents capable of finding subtle means of representing their own identities” (“Oppression” 630). Smith Finley asserts that a general Islamic “renewal,” tied to notions of Uyghur-ness, has become a means by which to resist the rule of the PRC (628). However, she also is correct to consider that a nuanced consideration of the meaning of ‘Islamic’ renewal is critical to avoiding over-generalization and essentialism (630). This is particularly the case in view of accusations of Uyghur Islamic militancy posed by the Chinese government. Smith Finley argues that there is little evidence to suggest that the XUAR is being overtaken by Islamic ‘terrorist’ ideology. However, it would perhaps be unwise to “under-state the significance of Islam as a symbolic, oppositional force” (Smith Finley 632). Leaving militant resistance aside, it is perhaps possible to identify additional means by which the Uyghur equate their identities with Islam.¹⁴

The concept of a uniform Uyghur Islam then – concocted by the CCP, nominally independent scholars, or the Uyghur themselves – “conceals diversity and conflicts” (Schrode 415). Moreover, so too would an analysis of the context of the Uyghur that denies that such concepts do not exist ‘on the ground.’ The insight advanced by Schrode and Smith Finley is both that universalizing taxonomies of religion and ethnicity must be analyzed carefully, *and* that the creation of arbitrary divisions and categories of religio-ethnicity or orthodoxy/heterodoxy – and the agency to employ these things for self-definition – is not solely the domain of scholars and bureaucrats.

¹⁴ Smith Finley cites a Sufi revival of ritual practice, the “adoption of Muslim appellation and identity while continuing on a secular path,” the observance of Islamic holidays, adoption of strict religious orthopraxy, and the consideration of Islam as “the basis for an alternative political system” to be examples of such means (631-632). Moreover, Smith Finley eschews “the automatic confusion of Islam with Islamism (understood as militant fundamentalism)” (634).

Gladney suggests that notions of an *indigenous* Muslim identity among the Uyghur are emphasized as a common theme of identification against the ‘invading’ Hui Muslims (“Development” 109). Likewise, in comparison to the traditionally nomadic Muslim Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, the Uyghur will identify as *settled* (Gladney “Separatism” 101). However, Islam may not necessarily be the facet of Uyghur identity stressed against the encroachments of the Chinese government according to Gladney’s assessment. Nor, as Rudelson suggests below, is it necessarily a unifying or even defining factor in relation to different oases of origin for the Uyghur. Indeed, as illustrated by the 1996 attacks on the imam of Idgah Mosque in Kashgar *perpetrated by rival Muslim Uyghurs*, the designation of a single Uyghur ‘Muslim’ nationality perhaps masks regional, cultural, and linguistic diversity in Xinjiang (Gladney “Separatism” 101).

The notion of the Uyghur as a ‘Muslim ethnicity’ is further complicated by the *secular* calls for Uyghur nationalism and independence (Gladney “Separatism” 108). Fuller and Lipman suggest that the nationalist rhetoric of the Uyghur intelligentsia resists identification as Islamic (340). The conflation of ‘Uyghur’ with ‘Islam’ seems to illustrate intra-Uyghur class conflict, where educated urbanites refer to an understanding of their identity based on a mythologized history of their own making, and lower classes identify as Muslim.¹⁵ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak also suggest that there are strong social cleavages in Xinjiang’s oasis cultures: intellectual, merchant, and peasant

¹⁵ Fuller and Lipman note that it is possible to draw connections between Uyghur and Palestinian nationalist movements, insofar as both causes ally themselves more closely with ‘Islam’ as pressure from dominant hegemonies increase (345). Even as the notion of Uyghur as a ‘Muslim’ nationality undergoes problematization by scholars, subsequent to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States the CCP has cracked down on inter-Muslim dialogue in Xinjiang – to say nothing of secular Uyghur discourse – citing “illegal religious activity” and “separatism and splittism” (Fuller and Lipman 330). The Uyghur may not universally identify as Muslim, but understandings of the goals of (allegedly revolutionary) transnational Islam clearly influence – or provide a convenient excuse for – Chinese governmental policies of repression and assimilation in Xinjiang.

notions of Uyghur identity differ in regards to the importance of Islam (314). According to Rudelson and Jankowiak, the Uyghur nationalist discourse is characterized on the one hand by nonviolent, anti-Islamic intellectuals; and on the other hand by violent, strongly Muslim peasants.¹⁶

1.2 Problematizing the Ethnonym: the Uyghur and Indigeneity

The second curious aspect of the Chinese government's delineation of nationalities in Xinjiang is that the Turkic peoples in the region – although presently identified as 'Muslim' – possess a history of transition between Manichean, Buddhist, Nestorian, and shamanistic traditions. Gladney observes that between the 10th and 15th centuries CE, the term 'Muslim' designated peoples who were *not* Uyghur. Rather, the Uyghur during this period were Buddhist and Nestorian oasis dwellers (Gladney "Ethnogenesis" 4). These historical Uyghur took on disparate ethnic identities according to their attachment to local settlements. According to this scholarly narrative, the process of Islamic conversion failed to bridge the gaps between these oasis-based loyalties. More significantly, after Islam had thoroughly penetrated the Xinjiang region in the sixteenth century, the term 'Uyghur' seems to have disappeared until its re-implementation by the Soviet Union and CCP (Gladney "Ethnogenesis" 4-8). There was therefore, according to the narrative of history advanced by Gladney, a five-hundred-year break between the uses

¹⁶ In consideration of the notion of scholars as participants in the discourse of ethnogenesis, it is worth considering the possibility that such an assertion on the part of Rudelson and Jankowiak could constitute a kind of elitist Islamophobia. In the absence of hard data regarding the individuals engaged in violent as opposed to non-violent dissent, I must raise the possibility that the particular narrative of Uyghur nationalism that these scholars present privileges the position of Xinjiang's intellectuals (however that position is realized) by trivializing Islamic Uyghur nationalism as violent. Furthermore, Gladney, Rudelson and Jankowiak emphasize the role of Uyghur intellectuals in the construction of Uyghur identity over and above that of the 'peasants.' Beller-Hann, Smith Finley, and Schrode, it seems, tend to avoid an engagement of binary intra-Uyghur class-conflict – instead referring to the 'Uyghur' as a (nuanced) whole.

of the ‘Uyghur’ label, which previously referred to *non-Muslims* as opposed to *Turkic-speaking Muslim oasis dwellers*. Nevertheless, this label has not been disputed by the peoples in question (Gladney “Ethnogenesis” 12).

Gladney holds that the historical narrative within Uyghur nationalist channels holds that the Uyghur are descendants of a “high civilization of Central Asian nomadic people” who had a kingdom based out of Turfan (“Ethnogenesis” 2). Moreover, this 1200-year-old Uyghur kingdom is understood to have possessed artistic and cultural accomplishments “comparable in beauty and sophistication” to those of the Han dynasty. This vision of history, in addition to the fact that over “99.8 per cent” of the Uyghur population in China is located in Xinjiang, perhaps allows the Uyghur to understand themselves as the autochthonous people of the region (Gladney “Ethnogenesis” 3). However, Gladney maintains that it was only during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the peoples deemed ‘Uyghur’ began to conceive of themselves as united vis-à-vis the dominant Soviet and Chinese political hegemonies (“Ethnogenesis” 10). Indeed, Gladney argues that the concept of Uyghur itself seems to be a product of very recent ethnogenesis, “created by Great Game rivalries, Sino-Soviet geopolitical maneuverings, and Chinese nation-building” (“Separatism” 100).

According to such an analysis, the Chinese Communist government, following the precedent set by the Soviet Union, invoked the term ‘Uyghur’ to name the “settled, meaning Turkish-speaking Muslim oasis dwellers” of Xinjiang (“Development” 103). Gladney asserts that the ethnonym was first employed in the twentieth century starting in 1934, under the auspices of the Guomindang’s (GMD’s) national policy that identified the *five* official peoples of China (104). Here, the Uyghur were identified within the

larger rubric of “Hui,” or simply “Chinese Muslims.” This policy changed when the People’s Republic of China established its State Ethnic Affairs Commission in 1952. Thereafter, China’s now fifty-six enumerated ethnic groups received state recognition under the auspices of this organization (Gladney “Development” 104).

The CCP’s policy regarding the legal delineation of nationalities within China’s borders seems to have followed a strategic model based on the model of nationality policy proposed first by Russian and Soviet scholars.¹⁷ First, the model holds that prior to the assumption of power, the CCP would promise rights of self-determination to ethnic minorities while proffering national equality. Second, following the assumption of power, the CCP would terminate the fact but not necessarily the fiction of a given nationality’s right to secession, and “begin the process of assimilation via the dialectical route of providing territorial autonomy to all compact national groups.” Third, the CCP would centralize its power and “keep if free of all nationalist proclivities” (Gladney “Development” 107). Bovingdon writes that the CCP’s policies regarding crackdowns on local nationalism, in addition to the cultivation of ethnic and religious rivalries between Xinjiang’s minority groups, “could have been taken directly from the Soviet playbook” (*Autonomy* 9).

Justin Rudelson’s monograph on *Oasis Identities* takes a somewhat ambiguous position on this facet of the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur. Rudelson’s key thesis is that the notion of the Uyghur as a ‘national’ whole contradicts the reality wherein the different oasis cultures of Xinjiang consider each other to be distinct rivals; nationalist sentiment amongst Xinjiang’s intellectuals “rarely transcend their own parochial oasis identity” (8-

¹⁷ Gladney attributes this model directly to Vladimir Lenin (“Development” 107).

9). Additionally, according to Rudelson's analysis, the Uyghur further divide themselves along sub-ethnic and socio-economic lines (24).¹⁸

Rudelson writes that the modern definition of the Uyghur as encompassing all the oasis Turks of Xinjiang hides two "traditional divisions of Uyghur society" that have existed since the 9th century: strong local oasis identities, and different "strategies" that each oasis has employed in response to "political, social, economic and geographical forces" (39). In Rudelson's view, the oases are the "essential lines along which outside cultural influences were and are transmitted" (42). These lines divide the Uyghur amongst themselves. According to Rudelson's analysis, there has been no abandonment of 'Uyghur' as a classificatory term in Xinjiang, but rather attempts by local groups to make themselves the defining core of the label (117). However, Rudelson also asserts that these attempts will inevitably result in the dissolution any kind of pan-Uyghur identity (144-145).¹⁹

Nevertheless, Rudelson also notes that "the label *Uyghur* recognized a common culture that was already in place" prior to the implementation of Soviet and Chinese nationality policies (7). Indeed he writes that it was the Uyghurs themselves who, in the 1930s, employed the historical symbol of the Uyghur empire to define themselves against

¹⁸ Rudelson cites a "Uyghur folklorist" to assert that there are seven (not government-sanctioned) divisions within the broader Uyghur designation: Dolans, Lopliks, Abdals, Keriyaliks, Kashgarliks, Eastern Uyghurs (from Turpan and Hami), and the Kuldjaliks or Taranchis (from Ili) (24). Rudelson argues that nationalist ideology among the Uyghur is the invention of intellectuals based out of Urumqi, who for all their parochialism have lost touch with the interests of Xinjiang's peasants (34, 121-122, 144-145).

¹⁹ It seems evident that, even if Rudelson is correct, this dissolution has not occurred yet. The fieldwork of Rudelson and Gladney was conducted (separately) in the late 1980s. Beller-Hann does not seem to indicate when his research occurred, although the dates of his publications indicate the mid-late 1990s. Millward was in Kashgar in 2001 and 2004 (*Crossroads* 305). Schrode conducted her fieldwork in 2004 (394). In order to determine the extent to which the Uyghur identify with this ethnonym in 2010, it seems reasonable to suggest that new, long-term, ethnographic research must be conducted. However, in view of the historical narratives proposed by *some* Uyghur – if not all – it seems equally clear that the ethnonym retains, so far, at least some purchasing power in the current context of the XUAR.

foreign influence (31). It seems to be evident that Rudelson's account of the creation of the concept of 'Uyghur' is somewhat contradictory. His use of this term to describe the 'Turks of Xinjiang' for instance, even during periods when 'Uyghur' may not be appropriate to that historical context (30-31), is representative of how easily language can complicate and contradict the assertions of scholars.²⁰

Jankowiak and Rudelson, in their article on "Xinjiang Identities in Flux," assert that the inclusive definition of the term 'Uyghur' in the twentieth century (sedentary Turkic-speaking Muslim oasis-dwellers of Xinjiang) made it acceptable to the majority of the Turkic population in the 1950s. However, 'Uyghur' as a nationality also had "so many cracks and fissures that the newly self-defined Uyghurs would be easy to control" for the Chinese government (Rudelson and Jankowiak 302). Although the notion of 'Uyghur-ness' may have gained strength as a unifying (albeit abstract) identity opposed to Chinese nationalism, it may nevertheless have facilitated the divide-and-conquer policies of the CCP in the form of competing domestic loyalties to clan and/or oasis.

Gladney's analysis agrees with this assessment. He writes that Beijing's original recognition of ethnic groups and identities was a strategic and temporary move in order to elicit support for the communist revolution ("Development" 111). However, Gladney writes that "the Uyghurs continue to conceive of their ancestors as originating in Xinjiang, claiming that 'it is our land, our territory,' all historical evidence to the contrary notwithstanding" ("Development" 112). Gladney's afterthought regarding "historical evidence" is particularly telling. With the invocation of "historical evidence to the contrary," Gladney seems to assert that the Uyghur understanding of history and

²⁰ That is, if the term 'Uyghur' does not reflect the complicated reality of Xinjiang's Turks' ethnic identity, and those narratives of the Uyghur as a persistent nation that have been proposed by intellectuals are rejected by the peasantry (Rudelson 137), why employ the term at all?

indigeneity is at least incorrect, and certainly naïve – whether it is the product of Chinese deception or Uyghur nationalism. The deconstruction and problematization of taxonomies of ethno-religious difference is certainly worthwhile – in this respect Gladney’s challenge to superficially held understandings of Xinjiang’s peoples is sound. However, the suggestion that, with proper historical evidence, the scholar may ascertain more about the Uyghur than the Uyghur know themselves, is not unambiguously correct. Rather, an historical narrative that dissolves the arbitrary divisions within ethno-religious taxonomies (such as those of the CCP’s Han and Uyghur) exists *in competition* with said taxonomies – not objectively apart.

1.3 Xinjiang in the Interwar Period

Xinjiang’s history between 1911 and 1949 is characterized by attempts by both the Soviet Union and the Guomindang (GMD) to maintain at least satellite control over the region, in consideration of its mineral resources and strategic importance. Andrew Forbes, who has compiled what seems to be the widest-cited monograph on the period, describes various conflicts between Muslim nationalists – Turkic, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz – and Soviet- or GMD-sponsored governments, Hui and Han minorities, and Hui military dictatorships. The model of a nominally independent state in the Xinjiang region was established by two short-lived attempts at the creation of an East Turkestan Republic. The first attempt had its capital in Kashgar in 1933,²¹ and the second in Ghulja in 1944.

²¹ According to Rudelson, Kashgar’s oasis region is the one most influenced by Islamic culture to the west (24). The PRC has looked to ‘Islam’ as the cause of violence and ‘splittism’ in the XUAR since the events of September 11, 2001. Millward observes that a white paper issued by the PRC in 2002 attributes unrest in Xinjiang to “East Turkistan Terrorist Forces,” and implicates the so-called ‘East Turkestan Islamic Movement’ (ETIM) in various acts of violence (*Assessment* 12-13). Millward suggests that the acceptance of the notion of ‘Islam’ as fomentor of violence and unrest in the XUAR is normalized by academic tracts

The ‘East Turkestan Republic’ continues to be a symbol of independence for Uyghur nationalists (Gladney “Development” 103). Indeed the notion of East Turkestan²² features heavily in the rhetoric of the online Uyghur diaspora, engaged further below.

The vision of the East Turkestan Republic as a font of Uyghur nationalism is complicated by its ambiguous sovereignty. Forbes’ monograph, in addition to the brief survey posited by James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, illustrates that the post-Qing Xinjiang region was divided amongst competing warlords with fluctuating foreign loyalties. While the province never declared official independence from China after the collapse of the Qing in 1911, it retained only what amounted to nominal ties with the nationalist GMD. Indeed protracted civil war and ethnic conflict in the 1920s saw a Soviet-sponsored coup in Urumqi in 1933, led by a military officer named Sheng Shicai (71).

Over the course of Sheng’s career as ruler of Xinjiang – or at least those regions under his direct control²³ – he would ingratiate himself alternately with Joseph Stalin,

such as that of Forbes, who suggested that the Kashgar ETR was “Islamist” in character. Millward, however, describes the relationship between Islam and Uyghur nationalism with some ambiguity, describing the first ETR as “jadidist” (*Assessment* 5).

²² Why East ‘Turkestan?’ James Millward observes simply that the Xinjiang region has known many names in the past. According to Millward, the name ‘Turkestan’ originated in medieval Islamic writing to refer to the north and east of Central Asia: “the lands of the Turkic speaking nomads, as opposed to the Persian-speaking dwellers in the oases” (*Crossroads* ix). This designation seems to have persisted under the Tsars, and the Xinjiang region itself was designated ‘Chinese Turkestan’ by European writers to distinguish it from ‘Russian Turkestan.’ Millward uses the term cautiously, noting that the CCP regards the notion of ‘Turkestan’ as basically seditious, and the Uyghur understand ‘Chinese Turkestan’ to be a symbol of imperialism (*Crossroads* x). Millward also indicates that Central Asia has been the home of “Turkic” peoples – defined as the “broader ethnic and linguistic category which includes Turkish, Uyghur, Uzbek...” and so on – for approximately 1 500 years, although not every ‘Turk’ is necessarily to be associated with modern Turkey (*Crossroads* 31).

²³ Millward and Tursun describe the political situation of Xinjiang during this period as though the region were a single unified polity – or several, in the case of the emergent ETR(s). However, Forbes’ engagement of this history demonstrates that competing dictators in Urumqi or Kashgar or wherever not only had limited sovereignty but limited direct control of the Xinjiang region in any sense. Political, legal, and economic power in Xinjiang between 1911 and 1949 depended entirely on the strength of each given warlord’s military might. It is worth observing that while Millward and Tursun engage the East Turkestan Republic(s) as a functioning (puppet) government, Forbes emphasizes the *pretensions* to government held

Mao Zedong, the GMD and even the Japanese according to his political convenience (Millward and Tursun 81). Still, initially, the East Turkestan Republic appears to have been a Soviet satellite (76). Millward and Tursun suggest that it was during the 1934-1941 period that the term ‘Uyghur’ first entered “official” use (80). Russian academics may also have employed the ethnonym as early as the late 19th century (73). Here, the puppet-administration of Sheng adopted the fourteen ethnic categories of Soviet Russia – including ‘Uyghur’ – rather than the GMDs “five races” (Millward and Tursun 73). As ever, this policy of ethnic classification was intended as a means to divide and conquer.

Millward and Tursun describe the “relative stability” of the Soviet presence – in spite of ethnic violence and the purges of 100 000 political prisoners (81-82) – while Forbes notes that conflict between the GMD, Soviet forces, Kazakh and Uyghur rebels, and the Chinese Communist Party continued. Sheng Shicai was ultimately expelled from Urumqi in 1944 by the GMD (Millward and Tursun 81). The GMD proceeded to deny the ‘reality’ of the Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnicities – re-implementing its five-tier nationality policy – and attempted to establish new standards of trade, government bureaucracy, and education (Millward and Tursun 85).

Military conflict in Xinjiang began to come to a temporary close during 1946 and what Forbes describes as the climaxing Chinese civil war (210-211). By 1947, a ‘coalition government’ in Xinjiang had collapsed and the region was split into two mutually hostile zones – one Soviet-sponsored ‘East Turkestan Republic’ and the other

by various different leaders. Forbes perhaps presents a clearer view of the events of this period – although in fairness, Millward and Tursun are limited by the scope of their article. Indeed, Millward’s 2007 monograph delivers a significantly more nuanced analysis of the period that is suggestive of the failed nature of the ETR(s). Meanwhile, Uyghur nationalists themselves hold up the East Turkestan Republics and ‘Uyghuristans’ of the 1920s through 1940s as symbolic of their claims to autochthonous sovereignty over the XUAR.

GMD-sponsored (Forbes 211-215). During the course of this new war – and harried by an additional Soviet-funded Kazakh uprising – the GMD ultimately capitulated in negotiations with the Soviet Union in 1948-1949 while they lost their concurrent war with the CCP (219-220). According to Forbes, the GMD intended to trade ‘goodwill’ with Moscow for full Soviet access to Xinjiang’s mineral rights.

The entry of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into Xinjiang in 1949 – the ‘peaceful revolution’ – marks the beginning of CCP rule in the province (Gladney “Development” 108). According to June Teufel Dreyer, the PLA “did not so much conquer Xinjiang as present the regional power structure with a *fait accompli*” (“Regionalism” 250). Members of the former East Turkestan Republic’s (ETR) military were initially incorporated in to the PLA, along with government officials into the new CCP bureaucracy. Ultimately however, officers employed by the ETR were shuffled off to obscure posts or washed out of the military entirely, and Uyghur, Kyrgyz, or Kazakh soldiers were replaced by Han recruits (Dreyer “Regionalism” 251). The CCP power structure in Xinjiang after 1949 was, it seems, designed to be composed overwhelmingly of Han Chinese.

Forbes writes that by 1951 the PLA had eliminated most of the ‘counter-revolutionaries’ that had been active in Xinjiang in the 1930s and 1940s (225). Indeed a special branch of the PLA was established in Xinjiang with “‘on one shoulder a rifle; on the other, a hoe’” – charged with supplanting counter-revolutionary sentiment while increasing local agricultural production (Dreyer “Regionalism” 252). This branch of the PLA was apparently intended to defend against Soviet influence, but also participated in

reclamation work and the construction of infrastructure for the further exploitation of Xinjiang's mineral wealth.

Anti-Chinese and Muslim-separatist sentiment remained. The CCP began a program of mass Han emigration to Xinjiang in 1950 (Forbes 227). This program was accompanied by the active suppression and persecution of those remaining who were deemed 'counter-revolutionary' by Beijing. According to Forbes, these groups included local landowners and 'ulema.' In 1955, the province was formally reconstituted into the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region according to the policies introduced at the People's Political Consultative Congress.²⁴ The new Xinjiang government was headed by a formerly pro-Soviet Chairman, with Hui and Han executives, whose cabinet held disproportionate amounts of Kazakh and Kyrgyz representatives in a province with a vast 'Uyghur' majority (Forbes 228).

This period in history illustrates that Xinjiang, and the Uyghur, have inherited a legacy of imperialist intervention by both China and the former Soviet Union. The violence in Xinjiang during the period of World War Two represents a significant contributing factor to Uyghur malaise experienced under both Soviet and Chinese rule in that it demonstrates the perhaps legitimate antipathy felt by Xinjiang's minorities against what they perceive to be outside influence. The adoption of the ethnonym Uyghur by the sedentary Turks of Xinjiang may be, then, something of a statement of resistance to Chinese interference insofar as it is a unifying banner under which to rally against foreign manipulation. The irony is that the intention of the CCP and Soviet Union in originally implementing the term was to categorize and control.

²⁴ For further details regarding the process of creating the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, see, for instance, Millward (*Crossroads* 242-244; *Assessment*), Bovingdon (*Autonomy*).

At any rate, it seems that on some level of Uyghur discourse there may be conscious deliberation at work in building ties to the ethnonym as a means to self-determination. At the very least, the adoption of the ethnonym Uyghur implicates the Turkic peoples of Xinjiang in the notion's ethnogenesis. It is perhaps ironic that the policies of the CCP have resulted in a situation in which the Uyghur not only claim autochthonous heritage in Xinjiang, but also that the PRC *recognized and legalized their ethnicity* as 'real' (Gladney "Development" 106). Additionally, Gardner Bovingdon observes that "formalizing the boundaries of Xinjiang and naming it the 'Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region' without doubt gave a convenient frame to Uyghur political imaginings" (*Autonomy* 4).²⁵ It is worth consideration then that it is the academic histories of Gladney and Rudelson that consider the 'Uyghur' to be something artificial. One should perhaps question who precisely is served by the implication that the religio-ethnic identity of the Uyghur is 'inauthentic' or unreal. The subsequent section engages in further detail the relationship between specific Uyghur and CCP narratives of history and ethnicity.

²⁵ Bovingdon suggests that the ethnic, religious, and nationalistic conflicts in Xinjiang, although caused by many participating factors, can be ultimately attributed to the faulty system of "regional autonomy" put in place by the CCP (*Autonomy* vii). Bovingdon contends that this system has contributed to a climate of tension between state interests (total sovereignty and territorial integrity) and local ones ("self-determination" or independence), wherein neither party fulfills its mutual obligations completely. According to Bovingdon, the CCP "has actively and premeditatedly thwarted the emergence of a political elite in Xinjiang capable of pressing for Uyghur collective interests, and it has similarly squelched ordinary Uyghurs' attempts to respond to or influence policies in Xinjiang" (*Autonomy* 2).

2. Narratives of History and Identity

2.1 Competing Narratives

Gardner Bovington and Nabijan Tursun engage the conflict between nationalist Uyghur histories and official CCP (Han) ones. Bovington and Tursun suggest that both Han and Uyghur histories consist of narratives of ‘ancient’ land ownership (353-354). Naturally, the particular focus of each narrative is opposite to its other. Uyghur and Han both, separately, claim natural ties to Xinjiang; both posit a history of imperial control over the region. Like Bovington and Tursun, Rudelson and Jankowiak suggest that Xinjiang hosts clashing intellectualist narratives of indigeneity. The Han claim that they are native to Xinjiang insofar as it has ‘always’ been a part of the Chinese state. Xinjiang’s Uyghur nationalists claim the opposite on the grounds that they are descended from those Uyghur kingdoms and cultures that have ‘always’ ruled there (Jankowiak and Rudelson 315).²⁶

Uyghur histories “retroactively designate most Central Asian polities as Uyghur,” constituting a “re-centered” historiography that aims to establish Xinjiang as home to an exceptional Uyghur civilization (Bovington and Tursun 357).²⁷ Bovington and Tursun,

²⁶ It is perhaps a palpable irony that the Chinese government histories argue that the Han had achieved a civilization so much further advanced than peripheral nations that it was bound, by nature, to rule them (Bovington and Tursun 356). This suggestion is curious in that it seems to be a reversal of roles according to ‘traditional’ Marxist-nationalist themes. Here, *unification* is the dominant narrative, rather than revolution against imperial or capitalist oppressors. Like capitalism in what might be considered orthodox Marxist narratives, *ethnic nationalism* in the histories of the CCP is equally doomed to failure.

²⁷ It should be observed that the presence of these histories in the XUAR, at least in printed, ‘mainstream’ forms, can be traced back only to the early 1980s. Uyghur intellectuals were kept under strict government supervision until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, whereupon they suffered the same willful persecution as any other group deemed undesirable by the Red Guard and Gang of Four. It was only after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, including the legalization of the writing of minority histories in 1978, that Uyghur intellectuals have had the opportunity to *publish* these histories (Rudelson 133-138). Rudelson argues that this is evidence of the artificiality of the notion of the Uyghur and their indigeneity, insofar as they could not be who they say they are if they have only been saying so since 1978. However, I would

in addition to Jankowiak and Rudelson, identify significant Uyghur nationalist historiography in the work of the historian Turghun Almas, and more recently the novelist Zordun Sabir. Both such works were condemned by the CCP, causing Uyghur nationalists to suspect that they may have been touching on “uncomfortable truths,” and contributing to persistent mistrust between the Uyghur and CCP official histories (Bovingdon and Tursun 354-355).

In the mid-1980s Turghun Almas claimed for Uyghurs “all empires built by Turkic-speaking peoples in Inner Asia” (Bovingdon and Tursun 364). He denied any political association between the Uyghur and China before the seventeenth century, and attempted to establish the Uyghur as culturally and historically superior to the Han Chinese. Among the methods Turghun used to lay claim to the history of the Xinjiang region was what Bovingdon and Tursun describe as “dubious” archaeology. According to Bovingdon and Tursun, Turghun argued that the discovery of 7 000 year-old mummies proved the indigeneity of the Uyghur because “(1) The earliest Uyghurs practiced shamanism; (2) the orientation of the buried suggests that they were shamanists; (3) ergo, the mummies were Uyghur” (358). In 1991 Turghun was subjected to direct government criticism. Government-aligned scholars and officials asserted that Turghun should be subject to censure because of his attempts to provide an historical basis for “separatism” (Bovingdon and Tursun 366). Turghun’s works were declared illegal and criticisms of his research published in a lengthy series in the *Xinjiang Daily* newspaper (Bovingdon and Tursun 367).

contend that the lack of printed historiography in the modern academic sense is not necessarily equivalent to a lack of nationalist or ethno-religious sentiment.

Similarly, Zordun Sabir's historical novel *Motherland* was banned by the Chinese government in 2002. The subject of the novel was the movement that established the second East Turkestan Republic in the 1940s, and contained passages that described "Turkic contempt for Hans" and depicted the ETR as a "fully functioning state" (Bovingdon and Tursun, 369). These components of *Motherland* seem to have aroused the ire of the CCP, despite the fact that, according to Bovingdon and Tursun, Mao Zedong himself had at one point described the formation of the second ETR as part of the wider Communist revolution (369). In the face of the ban, *Motherland* seems to be readily available in stores in Xinjiang (370).

2.2 The Uyghur on the Internet

As far as I can ascertain, neither Turghun nor Zordun have been translated into English. However, examples of the Uyghur nationalist historical narrative can be found on numerous websites constructed by the Uyghur diaspora. Gladney observes that at any given time there are approximately twenty-five international organizations and websites dedicated to the independence of 'East Turkestan' ("Separatism" 102).²⁸ In consideration of China's low tolerance of 'separatism and splittism' in the Xinjiang region, it is worth

²⁸ One of these, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, has been officially declared by both China and the United States a "Uyghur-sponsored terrorist organization" (Gladney "Separatism" 103-104). Gladney observes that this designation has met with some controversy regarding a dearth of evidence linking this organization to any acts of violence. Millward suggests that the PRC's 2002 white paper on 'terrorism' in Xinjiang implies that there is a unified 'East Turkistan' terrorist organization, which "from all other indications" does not seem to be the case. According to his analysis, the United States "amplified" the impressions of this document as part of its strategy for the 'War on Terror,' which China has capitalized on by drawing ties between the ETIR and al-Qaeda in order to strengthen Sino-American relations by way of crackdowns on 'Islamic terrorism' (*Assessment* 13). Millward provides a useful criticism of the notion that Xinjiang is in any way descending into violence in *Crossroads* (324). However, his monograph was of course published before the Urumqi riots of July 2009 and subsequent CCP crackdown in the XUAR. It is therefore difficult to predict with any certainty the future stability of the region.

noting then that “though silenced within China, Uyghur voices can still be heard virtually on the internet” (Gladney “Separatism” 103).

Nevertheless, the online diaspora of the Uyghur nationalist movement should be approached with some caution. It is important to avoid over-stating the importance of online discourse. While the Internet provides a forum for the expression of ideas that may otherwise be unheard, it is worth noting that these ideas may be inaccurate or may not reflect the position of those Uyghur remaining in Xinjiang. Gladney observes that the audience for these websites is “self-selected,” and “rarely reaches beyond those who already support and are interested in the agenda supported” by the sites (“Separatism” 106). Moreover, “many Uyghurs in China and Central Asia have never heard of these sites and government officials in Xinjiang also claim they do not have access” (Gladney 2007; 105). In fairness, such cautions may equally be observed in any engagement of history. Bovingdon and Tursun observe that the competing histories of Xinjiang tend to reach their own audiences regardless of the medium of their message – “very few Hans read Uyghur and many Uyghurs cannot or will not read Mandarin” (354).

However, the online Uyghur diaspora does reflect narratives consistent (if unaligned) with those proposed by official Chinese histories – in that the Uyghur are considered in them to be a persistent historical ‘nation’ – and scrutinized by Western scholarship. In the absence of direct interviews with the Uyghur inhabitants of Xinjiang, the narratives proposed by this online diaspora are representative of the competing discourses at work in the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur. Additionally, Gladney suggests that the construction of Han nationalist identity is “so tenuous, so questionable” that discourses within China that challenge the notion of Han superiority, such as those

presented by Uyghur nationalists, represent a significant threat to the power of the CCP (“Separatism” 110).

The website of the Uyghur American Association (UAA), for example, consists largely of a newsfeed, reporting on daily events in Xinjiang province or related to what the organization deems to be the cause of the Uyghur. Recent articles include an editorial piece on the subject of the re-activation of (censored) Internet access in Xinjiang in the wake of ethnic violence in 2009,²⁹ in addition to a report on successful sex-education policies established by the PRC for the Beijing Olympic Games.³⁰ The Association itself is a state-sanctioned “non-profit membership organization” under the auspices of United States law. The organization’s mission statement is that it “works to promote the preservation and flourishing of the rich, humanistic and diverse Uyghur culture, and to support the right of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, democratic means to determine their own political future.”

The Uyghur American Association asserts that Xinjiang’s true name is “East Turkistan,” and that it was annexed in the “Chinese communist invasion of 1949” (*Uyghur American Association*). According to the Association’s website, East Turkistan is “the homeland of the Turkic speaking Uyghurs and other central Asian peoples such as Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Tatars, Uzbeks, and Tajiks.” The Uyghurs are asserted to “have a history of more than 4000 years in East Turkistan” and, in direct contravention of Chinese nationalist positions, are “not Chinese; they are Turks of Central Asia.”

²⁹ Retrieved at <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/articles/4619/1/Xinjiang-Online-Controls-Remain/index.html>, May 22, 2010.

³⁰ Retrieved at <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/articles/4611/1/Beijing-Olympics-beat-terror-threats-unsafe-sex-report/index.html>, May 22, 2010. Curiously, the report ends with the anachronistic assertion that “many of Xinjiang’s 8 million Uighurs chafe at China’s strict controls on religion and resent the influx of Han Chinese migrant workers and businesses” [sic].

According to this organization, the indigenous Uyghur have been the object of “heavy-handed state repression” under an illegitimate Chinese government.

The UAA website’s section on *History* reflects somewhat on the arbitrary nature of the ethnonym Uyghur. It asserts that “Uyghur is our designation for the peoples of East Turkistan, and we are aware that only a part of the contemporary Uyghur population can be regarded as ‘pure’ descendants of the people who once ruled Mongolia.”³¹

Nevertheless, the UAA asserts that “no matter what we call them, Uyghurs must be regarded as the indigenous people of East Turkistan.” These statements seem to reflect an acknowledgement of the controversy regarding the ‘legitimacy’ of Uyghur claims to indigeneity. However, the UAA employs specific language of race to differentiate Uyghur from Han Chinese and maintain the position that the Uyghur are their own national (religio-ethnic) subject.³² The website goes on to describe the “long and amazing history” of the Uyghur, which is characterized as both “peaceful” and “intellectual.” The UAA website also states that the Uyghurs embraced Islam in the tenth century, and subsequently created “one of the major learning centers of Islam” [sic].³³

Meanwhile, the website of the ‘East Turkestan Information Center’ holds that the “Turkic population of the Uyghuristan which possesses the same blood, language, tradition and religion were artificially divided into Uyghur, Khazak, Kyrgiz, Uzbek and Tatar by the Russian Red Imperialists” [sic].³⁴ In this way the East Turkestan Information Center attempts (perhaps curiously) to hijack the nationalist proclivities of

³¹ Retrieved at <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/categories/About-Uyghurs/History>, May 22, 2010.

³² The *History* article, in describing the origins of the Uyghur, writes that “this dolichocephalous race with a narrow face, very high orbits and very pronounced cheekbones had racially and culturally nothing to do with the Chinese of past and present.”

³³ Retrieved at www.uyghuramerican.org, April 10, 2010.

³⁴ Retrieved at www.uygur.org, April 10, 2010.

every non-Han individual in Xinjiang. The East Turkestan Information Center goes on to describe the high (sovereign) civilization of the Uyghur, and emphasize the racial differences between Han and Uyghur. Similarly, a website described by Gladney as the “East Turkestan National Freedom Center” (“Separatism” 105) – which calls itself the “Government-in-exile of East Turkistan Republic” [sic]³⁵ – asserts that Xinjiang was known “for centuries” as “Sharqi Turkistan: the Land of the East Turks.” This ‘government-in-exile’ website names a President, Vice President, and seated Cabinet, although it is unclear what connections the organization has to the actual (failed) states that were called “East Turkestan Republic” in the 1930s and 1940s.

2.3 Narratives of Chinese Nationalism

Narratives such as these compete with the PRC’s government sponsored ones, which suggest that the current political borders of China reflect those of the ancient Han dynasty. Bovingdon and Tursun illustrate the historiographical policies of the CCP in a 1986 speech delivered by Wang Enmao, the “former first party secretary of the Xinjiang CCP” (361). Wang Enmao addressed the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, and spoke to the need for “ethnological pruning and grafting” in relation to historical work on the region. Bovingdon and Tursun suggest that this speech illustrates the conflation of academics with politics in the minds of the CCP, as well as establishing the explicit intentions of the PRC to deliberately shape Xinjiang’s identity (and that of the Uyghur) through the use of Chinese nationalist historical narratives.

³⁵ Retrieved at http://www.eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us/east_turkistan.html, May 22, 2010.

According to Prasenjit Duara, the practice of tying historical scholarship to Chinese politics stems from a legacy established at the turn of the 20th century. Duara suggests that new linguistic resources, in addition to a narrative of evolutionist, capital-H “History” entered China by way of Japanese (in addition to American and British) imperial intervention (*Narratives* 5). According to Duara, notions such as ‘feudalism,’ ‘self-consciousness,’ ‘superstition,’ and ‘revolution,’ secured the concept of the Chinese nation as the principal subject of the arc of History. China’s perception of its past and present was therefore transformed and re-oriented towards determining “which people and cultures belonged to the time of History and who and what had to be eliminated” (*Narratives* 5). Critically, the Hegelian (and Enlightenment) view of a progressive linear History that Duara engages was communicated at least in part to China via the ideology of Marx (*Narratives* 23).³⁶

Duara notes that history (in addition to a sense of History) may secure for the “contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time” (*Narratives* 4). Duara’s assessment of historical narratives is therefore distinctly similar to Barthes’s analysis of Myth – engaged further in the next section. The utility of Duara’s analysis here is his observation that, while history can be taken to be a “transparent medium of understanding,” it is in fact a “discourse enabling historical players (including historians) to deploy its resources to occlude, repress, appropriate, and, sometimes, negotiate with other modes of depicting the past and, thus, the present and future” (*Narratives* 5).

³⁶ And therefore expressed, perhaps, in the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party.

In considering nationalism in this way, Duara presupposes “a specific conception of the nation that is critical of the claim that nationalism represents a unitary consciousness of identity” (*Narratives* 7). Here, Duara considers ‘identity’ to refer to a “subject position produced by representations in relation to other representations,” as opposed to notions of primordiality or the “prior” absolute self (*Narratives* 7). Nationalism is therefore the “site where different representations of the nation contest and negotiate with each other” (*Narratives* 8). Nationalism therefore for Duara does not reflect “the” nation, although its manifestations – and according to Duara, the gestalt ‘nationalism’ in itself – seek a privileged position “within [this] representational network as the master identity” of its participants. However, nationalist identity exists alongside numerous others in interchanging, competing, or harmonious ways (*ibid*). Bovingdon and Tursun agree, in citing Duara, that nationalist histories consisting of “single-stranded narratives intentionally suppress evidence or historical alternatives” (354).

Duara’s analysis is a reasonable one, and certainly the ideology of nationalism may sell, additionally, the promise of a means of upward mobility for its constituent social formations. Surely Uyghur nationalists seek the establishment of a sovereign Uyghur nation-state in order to achieve both self-determination and general prosperity. Duara notes too, however, that the emergence of the nation-state as the most important “discursive conduit” among identity “representations” enables very specific kinds of ideology – neo-liberal global capitalism, for instance (*Narratives* 9). With this observation of Duara’s in mind, it is possible to note that Uyghur nationalists have, in buying into both the notion of ‘Uyghur-ness’ and the primacy of the nation-state, in a sense ‘succumbed’ to the imperialist agenda of the CCP by becoming complicit in the

very discourses they seek to subvert. As mentioned above, the adoption of the ethnonym Uyghur *by* the Uyghur, in addition to their goal of establishing their own nation state, may illustrate the success of the Chinese nationalist policy regarding minority ethnicities in Xinjiang.

However, this adoption also illustrates the fact that while scholars seek to deconstruct and problematize the perception of the Uyghur as a unified autochthonous Muslim ‘nation,’ this perception is held by the Uyghur themselves. Duara notes that “the multiplicity of nation-views and the idea that political identity is not fixed by shifts between different loci introduces the idea that nationalism is best seen as a relational identity” (*Narratives* 15). Additionally, Duara writes that “to us, in our subject positions as modern historians, the assumed transparency of linear History blinds us to its rhetorical strategies” for containing and preventing ruptures in the body of the nation (*Narratives* 33).³⁷ On the contrary, the engagement of the Great Game machinations of China and Russia by such scholars as Gladney and Rudelson illustrates that academics are entirely aware of the deliberate opacity of history. None of these scholars take the histories of either the Chinese or Uyghur nation at face value. Duara is naturally correct that such reflexivity is essential to both good scholarship and critical awareness in general.

However, it is also critical for scholars to be aware of their own manipulation of history in the service of an allegedly value-neutral ‘understanding.’ Nationalism may indeed be a relational identity, much like narratives of history, but this is not a point that needs be communicated to responsible academics. Instead, scholars may neglect to

³⁷ For example, the “article of faith” among official Chinese historians that each successive dynasty in continental East Asia was “China” (Bovingdon and Tursun 357) – was replicated in my own experiences with undergraduate Chinese history courses.

consider that as they attempt to describe the situation of the Uyghur as it ‘really’ is – nuanced and ‘artificial’ – those individuals under scrutiny may disagree with the scholarly assessment of their lives.

Gladney’s assessment of the ethnonym Uyghur as a tool for political control, for instance, may not reproduce “the ideology of the nation-state” (Duara *Narratives* 33). That is, it is the Uyghur, as much as the Chinese and in the face of well-intentioned academic study, who believe that they are the Uyghur and they are a nation and they want a nation-state! Duara’s engagement of nationalism is therefore interesting both in that it illustrates the complexity of discourses national identity, and that it represents the scholarly attitude that it is the responsibility of the academic to challenge the ‘nation’s’ perception of itself. Duara may be correct, but such a challenge may represent a *competing discourse*³⁸ and not an objective reproduction of reality in the face of naïve (or too-canny) nationalists.

Returning to the originators of the Chinese nationalist *historical* project then, Duara asserts that Chinese historians first wrote in the “narrative of the enlightenment” in the very early 20th century. Liang Qichao, for instance, argued in 1902 that the difference between a “people” and a “nation” lay in the ability of the nation to participate in History in the linear mode (Duara *Narratives* 33). Liang, according to Duara, was influenced by a Western enlightenment model of history that divided the past into evolutionary stages – the first, ancient formation, the second, medieval decay, and the third, modern renewal precipitated by a renaissance (Duara *Narratives* 34). According to Duara these schema of history “‘forge’ the homogenous and continuous national subject” in that they manipulate

³⁸ Or, in consideration of the engagement of discourse theory below, a (discursive) component in a larger meta-discourse.

the past to portray this subject as a discrete evolving entity. For Liang, the “white race” already possessed History in abundance, as evidenced by its immersion in the third, modern (superior) stage of historical evolution. The “yellow race” of China therefore possessed a *potential* to achieve Historical ascendancy (Duara *Narratives* 35).

Duara notes that, with Liang as the seminal Chinese historian of this modernist Hegelian mode, numerous other thinkers built on this notion towards a vision of Chinese nationalist destiny. Wang Jingwei, for instance, in his 1905 “Citizens of a Nation,” described a fourfold “typological scheme” of ethno-national conflict. Duara considers this essay to be a foundational artefact of Chinese nationalism (*Narratives* 36). According to Wang’s typology, the fourth possible encounter – in which a conquering minority nation is assimilated by the conquered majority – described the inevitable situation of twentieth century China. Wang wrote that the Han Chinese recognition of their national identity would absorb or wipe out the Manchu Qing dynasty (*Narratives* 37). Duara notes that this essay was influential in part because of its “recuperation” of the “circular discourse of social Darwinism – race, nation, and History” into a systematic nationalist discourse. Here, a “nation” could progress in History only if it “reflected the qualities of a civilized race” (Duara *Narratives* 36-37). The Han, for Wang, were destined inevitably to overwhelm their Manchu overlords. Moreover, in consideration of the kernels of a notion of Han manifest destiny established by Wang Jinwei, Chinese expansionism in the later 20th century could be justified by the perception of different *inherent qualities* of nations. The Han Chinese could be understood to *deserve* their

Historical progression, and therefore be justified in controlling lesser ‘nations’ (such as, for instance, the Uyghur) who lacked ‘civilized’ qualities.³⁹

Subsequent Chinese historians would emphasize the national integrity of China and the Han in the face of Japanese and European interference (*Duara Narratives* 37-39). Fu Sinian challenged Japanese historical narratives that characterized China as, rather than a “continuous national subject,” a physical territory dominated throughout history by different world powers (*Duara Narratives* 38). Lei Haizong, meanwhile, while attempting to challenge nationalist historiography in general, also argued that Chinese history (properly written and “periodized”), demonstrated “the world’s only truly continuous historical nation” (*Duara Narratives* 41). Therefore, according to Lei, Chinese nationalism was the world’s only alternative to the hegemonic domination of Western historical culture.

Most significant for this foundational historiography as it relates to Xinjiang and the Uyghur, Duara observes explicitly expansionist narratives proposed by Gu Jiegang in the 1930s. For Gu, “the study of the past was important not only in order to attack it as a burden,” but also to “release the true past, the repressed narratives, from under this accumulated burden” (*Duara Narratives* 42). These ‘true narratives’ revealed to Gu that the Han had spread to Manchuria, Mongolia, Korea, and so on, during the Tang and earlier dynasties. China could therefore claim, according to Gu, prior ownership of these or any given frontier region (*Duara Narratives* 42-43). Initially Gu’s claims were intended to challenge Japanese occupation. However, Gu also contributed to the construction of a narrative of the underdog emergent Han nation triumphing inevitably

³⁹ The irony is that this vision of history, and China’s role in it, seems to descend from Western models of imperial domination at whose hands the Chinese initially suffered.

over the barbarian – whether invading (the Japanese) or to be invaded (everyone else). It is worth observing that a similar project could have opposite ends. Certainly the histories of the Uyghur nationalists seek to release the ‘true past,’ and narratives ‘repressed’ by Chinese occupation. Equally, the histories of Western academics such as Gladney – who challenge both Han Chinese and Uyghur nationalism – seek to uncover the ‘true’ past of the artificiality of the Uyghur.

The legacy of nationalist historiography established by Chinese historians in the early 20th century manifests in the CCP’s handling of Xinjiang province subsequent to the Cultural Revolution. The post-1978 official histories of China follow a narrative of China’s ancient ownership of its peripheral territories.⁴⁰ As above, the historians working for the Chinese government assert that the Uyghurs “belong to the Chinese nation and Xinjiang to the territory of China” (Bovingdon and Tursun 353). Such assertions justify the occupation of and immigration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang, and seek to quell attempts to achieve Uyghur independence (355). These histories claim, in line with official government nationalist policies, that the Uyghur are indeed a discrete people with a long history – but operate under the caveat that this history was one of subservience to the dynasties of Han China (Bovingdon and Tursun 360). Any independence of ‘Uyghur’ kingdoms in these historical narratives has been deemed merely temporary.

The narratives of Han sovereignty and China as a persistent nation-state are borne out in, for instance, David Wang’s analysis of Xinjiang during the 1944-1949 Ili Rebellion (second ETR) period. Wang presents a brief and perhaps uncomplicated historical narrative of the Uyghur, asserting that they have been a persistent people in

⁴⁰ Indeed Bovingdon and Tursun observe that, subsequent to the establishment of the PRC, it was only after Deng Xiaoping’s announcement of the reform era that historians dared “to write, and publishers issue histories of peripheral regions and non-Han peoples” (360).

history – although not a ‘nation’ per se (31). He does, however, acknowledge that the name of this people has changed according to different periods in time – observing for instance that the 20th century has called the people in question ‘Taranqi’ as much as it has ‘Uyghur.’ Wang suggests that, in contemporary Xinjiang, the “Uighur people call themselves ‘Uighur,’ which means a ‘Union’ or an ‘assistance’” [sic] (31). It is not clear from Wang’s summary if this meaning comes from the region’s Turkic languages, although that seems to be the implication. Interestingly, Wang attributes the origins of the Uyghur to pastoral nomads dwelling in what is now Russia, north of contemporary Mongolia, near Lake Baykal (31-32). According to Wang, the Uyghur emigrated to Xinjiang in the 9th century CE. This assertion evidently runs contrary to Uyghur nationalist narratives, although it appears to be in line with official PRC understandings of Xinjiang’s ethnic history.⁴¹

The (mythic, Chinese nationalist) notion of persistent Han Chinese presence in Xinjiang is additionally represented by Wang’s engagement of the region’s pre-19th century past. Wang’s monograph begins with the assertion that “while the majority of the population in the province consists of Moslems and other non-Han nationalities, Xinjiang was ruled by Han officials for centuries” [sic] (1). Wang writes that Xinjiang has been

⁴¹ In fairness, it is difficult to precisely ascertain the degree to which David Wang’s monograph is influenced by PRC officialdom. To his credit, Wang spends some amount of his introductory chapter analyzing the hesitance of Chinese mainland scholars to do any scholarship about Xinjiang – particularly the period leading up to the CCP’s “peaceful liberation” of the province in 1949 (2-13). Aside from the fact that archival documents from the GMD, ETR, and Soviet Union have been stored largely out of reach of Chinese scholars, according to Wang, research has been hampered by the ambiguous CCP policy regarding the specific details of Xinjiang’s 1911-1949 past. Wang notes that PRC authorities have deemed relations between the Soviet Union and the various Chinese governments of the period as “sensitive” (13). According to Wang, Chinese scholars must obtain special permission from government authorities in order to do research on or publish anything about Xinjiang, and the dearth of official party declarations on the subject makes academics loathe to broach their own – possibly “sensitive” – analyses. Evidently, Wang’s historiography is not without self-reflection. Nevertheless, it is clear through his engagement of Xinjiang’s past that his monograph illustrates the ubiquitous myth of China’s persistent regional sovereignty.

deemed one of the “major frontier regions outside China Proper” since “ancient times” (35). Moreover, Xinjiang is described as having been brought under Chinese sovereignty in the 1st century CE, during the Han dynasty (36). Wang summarizes the administrative policies of various dynasties, characterizing the region as a consistent member of China’s provinces, save for a relatively brief conquest by a “Turkic Khanate” between the 5th and 7th centuries CE (36-37).

As mentioned above in the case of Wang Enmao above, the CCP have sought to co-opt the intelligentsia of the Uyghur themselves to disseminate official party histories. Bovingdon and Tursun observe, for instance, that a Xinjiang-written school textbook published at the turn of the 21st century met the CCP’s need for popular histories that could tell “the ‘right stories’ in a form palatable to most people” (370-371). This text, titled *A Hundred Questions about Xinjiang History*, features vignettes that depict Uyghur “chieftains kowtowing before upright Confucian officials” and illustrate “the long loyalty of the locals to the central plains dynasties and their struggle for liberation from class exploitation” (Bovingdon and Tursun 371).

Both the Chinese and Uyghur nationalist narratives assert the historical reality of the ethno-religious category ‘Uyghur,’ although they differ significantly in their aims. The historians of the CCP seek to establish the inevitable right of China to rule over its peripheral territories and member nationalities – based on the Marxist-Hegelian paradigm of “History” as surveyed by Duara. Uyghur nationalists, meanwhile, assert that it was in fact the kingdoms of the Uyghur that can claim rightful ownership of the Xinjiang/East Turkestan region, and that the Chinese unlawfully occupy the sovereign territory of the autochthonous Uyghur. Perhaps ironically, these assertions of the Uyghur reflect an

adoption of the very narratives and categories enforced and introduced to them by Chinese imperial interference.

However, the scholarly discourse that identifies and unpacks these characteristics of CCP and Uyghur nationalist historiography is not itself a neutral party. Gladney's engagement of the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur, for instance, challenges the identity of those individuals and groups who understand 'Uyghur-ness' to be *real*. Instead, such scholarship suggests, the concept of the Uyghur – to say nothing, ultimately, of Chinese nationalism – is a modern fabrication clung to by Xinjiang's locals in the face of all evidence. In this respect, the scholarly engagement of the Uyghur, Xinjiang, and nationalist historiography becomes participant in the competition for legitimacy in the region.

3. Theory and the Scholarly Narrative

3.1 Theories of Ethnogenesis

Gladney writes that his engagement of the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur is informed by Eric Hobsbawm's analysis of the "invention of tradition" ("Ethnogenesis" 1). For Hobsbawm, "tradition" refers to a set of practices that "seek to inculcate certain values and norms." Gladney evidently employs Hobsbawm's notion of tradition somewhat more flexibly – that is, it is not merely 'tradition-as-practice' that is 'invented' according to Gladney's analysis of the Uyghur. Hobsbawm's own use of "tradition" begs to be extrapolated beyond the confines of 'practice,' as evidenced by the concept's connection to the inculcation of "values and norms." The value of Hobsbawm's insight is not in regards to 'things people do that are understood as traditional,' but rather in relation '*how people conceive of the things that they do and think.*' Gladney meanwhile characterizes 'traditions' as *groups of people*, which seek to establish a sense of authenticity by establishing continuity with a "suitable historic past" ("Ethnogenesis" 1). This means that "tradition" can be found as much in discourse as it can in 'practice.'

Contrary to the assertions of the proponents of such "invented" traditions, Hobsbawm suggests that traditions in the modern period are "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations" (2). Hobsbawm suggests that the invention of tradition, logically enough, can be expected to occur more frequently during periods of large and rapid social change. Critically however, Hobsbawm writes that there is "probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the 'invention' of tradition," in the sense of establishing deliberate ties to an historic past (4-5).

As illustrated by the case of Uyghur nationalism tying its identity to kingdoms of the ancient Central Asian past, Hobsbawm observes the employment of material from “antiquity” in the construction of “invented traditions of a novel type” (6-7). As Gladney suggested of the Uyghur above, nationalist identities can be unprecedented enough to necessitate the creation of “an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity” (Hobsbawm 7). The case of the Uyghur complicates this suggestion somewhat in that there were, indeed, individuals and groups in the ancient past who were called “Uyghur” – whether or not their connection to the current Xinjinag sedentary Turks can be considered legitimate.

Similarly, George Elwert writes that nationalist and ethnic-activist movements attempt to build group solidarity by tracing historical and cultural roots. Movements towards the creation of nationalities – ethnic or otherwise - propagate a vision of history that is taken to be true. According to Elwert, “the historical discourse is the matrix for a normative model” in the construction of ethnicity (33). Elwert asserts that the creation of the history of an ethnicity is a strategic action, made in order to achieve particular goals of nationalization, self-determination, and so on (34). Elwert writes that nationalisms and ethnicities are explicit on *rhetorical points*, insofar as they attach to history a consciousness of place and belonging for their members while constructing ‘others’ to oppose the in-group. However, in Elwert’s view, the historical narratives tied to the creation of national and ethnic identity lack “*actual*” points. That is, nationalist and ethnic movements, according to Elwert, construct narratives of identity and belonging in

order to disguise ‘true’ purposes – for instance, the striving after resources and the construction of networks of trust and mutual support (33).⁴²

The utility of Elwert’s engagement of ethnic identity is in that he observes that “neither ethnic groups nor nations constitute a ‘natural’ order” (35). Despite claims made by the proponents of a particular ethnic narrative, ethnicity and identity are not primordial. Rather, “nations and ethnic groups are social structures which have to be reproduced” by successive generations of their members (Elwert 35). Moreover, Elwert observes that the “easiest option for the definition of the ‘we’ is the creation of foes” (36). Narratives of ethnic creation therefore normalize what may be arbitrary divisions between different groups of individuals.

These observations made by Elwert are interesting in the context of the Uyghur in that this particular ethno-religious identity seems to have been formulated by multiple historical narratives. Both the Chinese Communist Party and the Uyghur themselves have engaged in the creation of nationalist histories of the ‘Uyghur’ ethnonym, and both parties are motivated by different goals for the fate of Uyghur identity. The CCP seems to have employed the category ‘Uyghur’ as a means to divide and conquer – in naming the Uyghur the CCP also named the *others* to the Uyghur.⁴³ Perhaps ironically, the Uyghur have adopted the ethnicity as their own, and may now define themselves against

⁴² Elwert writes in the context of a critical analysis of ethnic and nationalist violence. As such, it is clear that his engagement of the construction of narratives of identity is characterized by some cynicism. Elwert asserts that in order to understand the stabilization of “we-groups” against their enemies, the “warlords or political entrepreneurs” of given movements must be analyzed (34). For Elwert, it seems that the construction of ethnic or nationalist identity is *coercive* and *deliberate*, orchestrated by specific individuals for specific (hidden) political purposes. Elwert writes that scholars must be aware of the “flagrant falsification of assumptions about ‘deep-rooted traditions’ which might constitute a given we-group” (34). Further, Elwert suggests that systematic ethnic identities can be described as “traps” (36).

⁴³ The nominal rival ethnicities of the Xinjiang region: Kyrgyz, Hui, Kazakh, and so on.

‘the other’ – for instance, the Chinese government – as a means to *resistance* and nationalist activism.

Elwert notes that the normalization of ethnic identities and divisions between we-groups belies the flexible nature of human relationships. He describes this flexibility with the terms “Switching” and “Polytaxis.” For Elwert, Switching constitutes “a rapid change from one frame of reference to another” (35). This change could constitute a shift from a class movement to a nationalist one to a religious one, for example. Switching could also refer to changing frames of personal reference – from identifying oneself as Uyghur to Kasgharlik to Muslim, for example. Switching also represents “moves between different more-or-less inclusive conceptions of the group’s boundary” (Elwert 36).

Polytaxis, meanwhile, represents the latent multiplicity of order and identity in human relationships (Elwert 39).⁴⁴ Elwert observes that individuals may claim several ‘identity’ affiliations. Polytaxis allows for involuntary situational switching as well as voluntary – for instance, the Uyghur educated in official CCP (‘Han’) fashion are disparagingly referred to as Xinjiang’s ‘fourteenth ethnic group’ (Beller-Hann “Narratives” 64-65). Ultimately, the multiple configurations and conglomerations of identity, although codified by structures of “boundary zones,” are allowed through Polytaxis to express themselves in Switching (Elwert 40).

However, Elwert suggests that “once open (ethnic) groups get transformed into ‘para-national’ bodies with established rights in respect of a state, there starts a painful process of opting between this – quite convenient – multiplicity of options and to negate all but one of them by pseudo-historical text production” (40). Unless one considers the

⁴⁴ Elwert defines “identity” as 1) belongingness 2) self-information and 3) self-valuation.

Uyghur to be currently undergoing such a process of ‘negation,’ this statement is perhaps not true of ethno-religious discourse in Xinjiang. The category ‘Uyghur’ is certainly a “para-national” construction, but, as numerous scholars have illustrated, the construction itself does not precisely describe the nuanced relations of identity and loyalty ‘on the ground’ in Xinjiang. Polytaxis has not been negated among the Uyghur, perhaps in spite of what Elwert might identify as the efforts of Uyghur nationalist historiography.

Nevertheless, simultaneously, the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ has been adopted wholesale by the people it categorizes for particular purposes. The ‘transformation’ of the Uyghur has been successful in that individuals and groups identify as Uyghur within certain – at least activist – contexts, even if not in others. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the agency of the *categorized* in addition to the *categorizer* in the implementation of ethno-religious identity. Although the concept of Uyghur may be an invention of the CCP’s nationalist policy, and its boundaries are delineated by questionable historical narratives, it is nevertheless *real* for those who have adopted it. As Schrode noted above, the Uyghur have their own capacity for the creation of their own problems.

Moreover, Beller-Hann suggests that there is a *conscious* acknowledgement of the complexity of the creation of ‘Uyghur-ness’ among the Uyghur themselves. Beller-Hann observes that the fact that there is discourse regarding the identity of the ‘fourteenth ethnicity’ and the ambiguity of its status among Uyghur illustrates an understanding of the flexible nature of such categories even among the categorized (“Narratives” 78). Beller-Hann notes, consistent with the notion of Polytaxis, that ethnic markers undergo a constant reformulation, dependent on the particularities of social relationships and their

participants. Even within para-national identities, Beller-Hann sees “constantly shifting relations and multiplicities of perceived identities that mask many levels of social simultaneity” (“Narratives” 78). Beller-Hann notes that some markers of ethnicity operate only in the close physical or symbolic presence of another group. These symbols therefore “double-up” and operate as markers of ethnicity both for the insider and outsider (“Narratives” 60). There is a capacity in the application of such markers for both subtlety and self-awareness, as evidenced by emergent discourses of identity markers even within the relatively new category ‘Uyghur.’

The theoretical considerations of Elwert and Beller-Hann seem to be consistent with the model of ethnic “Constructivism” described by D. Bruce MacKay. MacKay notes that ethno-religious identity is tied to circumstances of birth and context. In this respect, ethnicity can be encountered as primordial both according to the narratives proposed by ethnic and nationalist movements – as described by Elwert – and the legitimate experiences of that primordality among members of any given ethno-religious tradition. That is, the primordality of ethnicity is real because members of ethno-religious traditions believe them to be real. Additionally however, the ascriptive aspects of identity that are acquired at birth and in the context of one’s pre-existing social discourse “are continually reconstructed by members of the group for the group” (MacKay 104). The constructed elements of ethnicity – emanating, in the case of the Uyghur, from the establishment of the ethnonym as one among China’s official nationalities – are, according to MacKay, “*responsive* rather than *timeless*” (105).

In consideration of Hobsbawm’s analysis, Gladney notes that the concept of the Uyghur is “re-created in dialectical interaction with imagined historical traditions and

modern geopolitical necessities” (“Ethnogenesis” 1). It is additionally worth observing then that the Uyghur is an example of what may be considered ‘normal’ ethnogenesis. That is, it is not merely the Uyghur that is an ‘invented tradition.’ Instead, perhaps it is worth considering the likelihood that *all* traditions – in addition to ethnicities, mythologies, and so on – are equally inventions. It is worthwhile then to engage the example of the Uyghur in consideration of the complexities involved in the ‘invention of tradition.’⁴⁵ Additionally, however, the notion of ‘authentic’ tradition – that is present, for instance, in Hobsbawm (7-8) – must be considered, therefore, as suspect. The implication in Gladney and Rudelson’s analysis of the Uyghur, that this ethnonym is *inauthentic* – and therefore that there is some other ethno-religious identity that *is* – is equally problematic.

3.2 Some Implications

Indeed Hobsbawm himself suggests that the utility of considering the ‘invention of tradition’ is to render historians aware of their participation in the creation of history. Hobsbawm writes that the invention of tradition “throws a considerable light on the human relation to the past,” noting that history can become the fulcrum of conflict over, for instance, identity. Moreover, according to Hobsbawm, the history that is recorded in the minds of its participants is *deliberate* and *selective* – as in both narratives of Uyghur autochthony and Chinese nationalism. Hobsbawm writes that “all historians, whatever else their objectives,” are engaged in the process of the creation of history – and identity, and ‘myth’ – “inasmuch as they contribute, consciously or not, to the creation,

⁴⁵ Hobsbawm observes that, in all cases of the invention of tradition, “novelty is no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity” (5).

dismantling and restructuring of images of the past which belong not only to the world of specialist investigation but to the public sphere” of human beings (Hobsbawm 12-13). In considering the competing narratives at work in Xinjiang province – that of Uyghur nationalism and that of the CCP – as they pertain to questions of identity and nationalism and sovereignty and so on, it is therefore possible to consider this third narrative: that of the scholar.

Western scholarly discourse, such as that of Dru Gladney, reveals that the modern origin of the term ‘Uyghur’ can be traced to the nationalist policies of China and the Soviet Union in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover according to this narrative, the appellation Uyghur belies the complexity of identities and relationships on the ground in Xinjiang. The Uyghur are hardly united by virtue of being Turkic Muslims. Despite these apparent facts, those people designated Uyghur by the People’s Republic of China seem to have adopted the ethnonym at least as representative of nationalist identity – if not in all cases (at all times) as representative of individual or community identity. The Chinese government’s official histories, designed as part of policies of assimilation and control, compete with narratives designed and adopted by Uyghur nationalists both in Xinjiang and the online diaspora.

The discursive nature of the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur illustrates and is consistent with theories of ethnicity and the ‘invention of tradition.’ In consideration of this fact, the scholarly discourse regarding the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur can be understood to represent a third competing discourse on the nature of Xinjiang’s and Uyghur identity. Scholars challenge the ‘natural’ authenticity of the claims of both Chinese and Uyghur nationalisms. In keeping with universal applicability of the notion

of the ‘invention of tradition’ then, the discourse of scholars must not be privileged in deciding which vision of historical religio-ethnicity is ‘true.’ Rather, it, and the pre-existing discourse on the nature of the Uyghur in Xinjiang, must be considered as illustrative of the overlapping discursive qualities of human relationships and identities as a whole.

3.3 Theories of Discourse

This fact can be illustrated by an engagement of, for instance, the implications of Roland Barthes’s semiotic system of ‘myth’ in his essays on *Mythologies*, which I take here to be analogous to ‘ethno-religious’ or ‘nationalist’ historical narratives.⁴⁶ Barthes understands myth to be a semiotic system of discourse that parasitizes pre-existing linguistic and cultural structures to achieve specific ideological ends. The narratives of ‘myth’ represent, for Barthes, a second-order system that, as it expands ever outwards in the overlapping layers of discourse that are represented by society, contains ‘smaller’ semiotic systems (discourses) within it. Ultimately, the utility of Barthes’s engagement of myth for the purposes of this paper is twofold. First, narratives of ethnogenesis may be interpreted according to their *structural* similarities to Barthes’s semiotic ‘myth.’

Second, and more importantly, Barthes exposes the ideological components of myth’s

⁴⁶ ‘Myth’ and ‘narratives of ethno-religious nationalism’ correlate quite transparently. The equation of Barthes’s semiotic system of myth with ‘religion’ in general is the product of a simple logical exercise. Tim Murphy has asserted, in his semiotic theory of religion, that semiotic systems are all logically equivalent, *structurally speaking* (“Elements” 66). Barthes, likewise, writes that “everything” can be understood in the same fashion as myth (117). Religion can be engaged as a semiotic system. Myth can also be engaged as a semiotic system. Semiotic systems are logically equivalent. Therefore both religion and myth – insofar as they are semiotic systems, can also be understood to be structurally equivalent. The structural or definitional niceties of religion-as-semiotic-system is not critically important here. Rather, theories of semiotics are useful insofar as they pertain to *overlapping fields of discourse* – here exemplified by the competing claims on Uyghur identity made by the CCP, Uyghur nationalists, and academic scholars. These ethno-religious narratives are, by this definition, ‘mythic.’

structure – in the same way that narratives of ethnogenesis are not neutral or natural, but *purport* themselves to be.

One may draw analogies between myth's function, as articulated by Barthes for instance, and the operation of 'religion' and other behaviours that are taken to be mythic – such as nationalist and ethno-religious historiography. Certainly, even in a naïve sense of both myth and religion, myths are *employed* in religion (and history), or feature in it. One might also consider that religion can be considered to be 'mythic,' in that it is a product of 'myth-making' (McCutcheon 201). Likewise myth-making can be considered to contribute to the ideological components of social formation (McCutcheon 203-204),⁴⁷ particularly insofar as myth can be taken to be 'discursive.'

Furthermore, the utility of addressing myth by way of Russell McCutcheon is in consideration of his assertion that acts of myth-making – as in, for instance, ethnogenesis – are *normal and ordinary*. That is, moreover, there is nothing mysterious about myth/tradition/religion/narratives themselves (McCutcheon 199-200). According to McCutcheon, 'myth' then is the domain of scholars "who study the ways by which human beings the world over construct, authorize and contest their social identities" (200). Appropriately, Barthes identifies myth not as "stable stories" but "networks of actions, assumptions and representations – what other scholars might term discourse" (McCutcheon 201). Barthes argues that 'mythology,' or the scholarly analysis of 'myth,' is subject to the same semiotic principles.

In keeping with McCutcheon's engagement of myth-making as 'ordinary,' Bruce Lincoln observes that a constant attribute of society is its "logical structure whereby

⁴⁷ McCutcheon writes that "by means of myth-making local, symbolic worlds of significance are authorized and naturalized by being (mis)taken for or actively portrayed as universal, literal ones" (205).

social hierarchies are recoded in taxonomic form” (133). Moreover, Lincoln notes that the implementation of such taxonomic modules can be multiplied in order to make for more complex systems *and* increase the system’s “persuasive power” (136).

Similarly, Lincoln observes that the taxonomic modules present in myth inform those of society. According to Lincoln, while such systems may encompass more or less ‘modules,’ they are identical to one another in “formal structure” (137-139). ‘Myth,’ for Lincoln, in its formation of taxonomic models, “leads its audience to infer a social module” (140). Its politic and ideological element is ‘silent’ in and of itself, in contrast to Barthes’s notion of myth gaining silence only in success. Lincoln reaffirms that myth – and religion, or at least narratives of ethno-religious identity – represent arbitrary social hierarchies “as if given by nature” (141). Lincoln goes on to illustrate that social hierarchies are subject to challenge and revision (145, 174), a fact which is consistent with the theories of ethnogenesis engaged above – and the direct context of the Uyghur – in addition to the notion that no historical narrative of ethnicity or religion portrays, strictly speaking, ‘naturally’ occurring phenomena. Beyond the practical level of discourses of power in the Xinjiang region, scholarly assertions regarding the Uyghur may be understood to be participant in competing narratives of ethnogenesis on a *structural theoretical* level as well.⁴⁸

As above, Barthes suggests that ‘myth’ is a secondary semiotic system that parasitizes the pre-existing one, which is *language itself*.⁴⁹ According to Barthes, myth

⁴⁸ Tim Murphy’s work on a semiotic theory of religion and Religious Studies, itself a spiritual successor to the work of Barthes, bears the implication that scholarly discourse cannot – by structural definition – be understood to exist separately from the (religious) discourses that it engages (see Murphy 2003, 2006).

⁴⁹ According to Bruce Lincoln, Barthes considers myth to be a “form of metalanguage in which preexisting signs are appropriated and stripped of their original context, history and signification only to be infused with new and mystificatory conceptual content of particular use to the bourgeoisie” (Lincoln 5). Myth can

“transforms history into nature.” In “the eyes of the myth-consumer,” the cause of mythic speech is explicit, but is “frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason” (129). Myth is experienced as innocent because its intentions are naturalized. For Barthes, where there is only equivalence, the “myth-consumer” sees a causal process, and “myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” (130-131). Indeed, Barthes writes that “semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (142). The world supplies myth an historical reality, and ‘myth’ supplies the world with a *natural* image of this reality.

Barthes writes that “society is the privileged field of mythical significations” (137). According to Barthes, myth becomes successful when it is “silent” – that is, when everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation that the myth “*has and makes us have* of the relations between man and the world” (140). ‘Myth’ is therefore intended to be experienced as representative of self-evident laws of a natural order. It is clear, then, that the PRC’s effort to demarcate its fifty-six nationalities according to the supposition of historical Han domination is representative of Barthes’s “task” of myth. Likewise, so too is the narrative of Uyghur autochthonous nationalism which is structured, ironically perhaps, along the same lines. Furthermore however, scholarly deconstruction of these narratives also claims to represent the ‘natural order’ of things in Xinjiang – namely that the ‘Han’ and ‘Uyghur’ and so on are artificial taxonomies.

be contrasted with its dialectic opposite: Revolution (which is a direct and transformative act of speech). Lincoln suggest that this position is similar to that of Maurice Bloch, who engages “ritual” as characterized by various parameters of discourse. Lincoln notes that both Barthes and Bloch present the notion of revolution in romanticized (mythologized) form. Revolution, Lincoln observes, “is hardly a sphere in which thought and discourse are conditioned solely by nature in the absence of society” – conceptual modes of revolution are themselves socially determined. For Lincoln it is preferable to argue that what one might find in a “revolutionary” schema “is ideological systems that differ from those that dominate in other spheres of activity (myth and ritual included)” (6).

Gladney's analysis of the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur may therefore be understood to represent a competing narrative of 'normalcy' for the region, rather than the observations of a strictly neutral party.

It is possible to suggest, as Tim Murphy does, that the taxonomic systems that human beings inherit are, taken individually, "not adequate to the larger world in which they live" ("Teaching" 214). Murphy observes that such theoretical work flies in the face of native categories of thought, and can result in the "radical dislocation" of pre-existing categories. However, the point of engaging in theoretical practice, for Murphy, is that "without substantive comparison, the specific, *operational nature* of our inherited taxonomy cannot be understood" ("Teaching" 215-216). That is, it is critically important that human beings equip themselves to observe and interpret the "ways in which language and other kinds of cultural practices actively shape *a* world, and do not merely passively reflect *the* world" (Murphy "Teaching" 216).

It is possible to observe this line of reasoning within Gladney's analysis of the Uyghur and Han narratives of religio-ethnicity, but scholarly histories of this nature lack a self-reflective component. That is, for Gladney, it seems, while the notion of 'Uyghur-ness' advanced by competing voices in the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur does not reflect "the" world so much as "a" world, Gladney's vision of history does! Theories of discourse implicate scholarly assertions regarding the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur in a wider discourse, thus making them complicit in such a process along with, for instance, the CCP and Uyghur nationalists. Additionally, in consideration of theories that indicate the ubiquitous nature of myth, and the very *ordinary* nature of the process by which the

Uyghur are being identified – according to theories of ethnicity – scholarly narratives are revealed to be equally ‘mythic’ as any other given discourse.

Conclusion

It may be worthwhile to summarize. The work of Gladney and, to a slightly lesser extent, Rudelson, on the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur has contributed to the general scholarly consensus that the ethnonym ‘Uyghur’ is an artificial one. The Soviet Union and Chinese Communist Party employed this ethnonym in the early 20th century in order to facilitate nationality policies of division and control. The notion of the ‘Uyghur’ belies the complexity and fluidity of ethno-religious identity in Xinjiang. There is an additional consensus among scholars that the Uyghur themselves have largely accepted the ethnonym as descriptive of their ethno-religious identity.

Some scholars differ in their assessment of the legitimacy of such acceptance. Gladney and Rudelson argue for instance that the Uyghur only identify as such in selective circumstances. Instead, according to these analyses, the Uyghur emphasize individual oasis-allegiances or Islamic identity against rival ethnicities or Han Chinese interference in Xinjiang according to convenience, employing ‘Uyghur-ness’ as a means to national self-determination. The analyses of Schrode, Beller-Hann, and Bovington however – in view of, for instance, Elwert – suggest that however multi-layered the ethno-religiosity of the Uyghur may be, ‘switching’ between different facets of ‘Uyghurness’ does not necessarily conflict with an over-arching sense of ethno-religious identity. Moreover, the Uyghur seem to be complicit in their own ethnogenesis, illustrating the capacity and agency of minority ethnicities in dialogue with government categorizers such as the CCP to participate in their own self-construction.

The challenge to the legitimacy of the Uyghur ethnonym posed by, for instance, Gladney, is ultimately belied by the deliberate adoption of the category by the people in

question for – at the least – the purposes of nationalist self-determination. Whatever the origins of the notion ‘Uyghur,’ the Uyghur believe themselves to be just that. In the context of this very complicated discourse, scholars are implicated as participant in the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur. This is true in consideration of the fact that both the CCP and the sedentary oasis-dwelling Turkic-speaking Muslim peoples of Xinjiang seem to agree that the Uyghur are ‘real.’ The fact that scholars may not agree, per se, does not prove the *unreality* of the ethnonym but challenges pre-existing notions by *joining the conversation*. This statement is *structurally* true in view of theories of discourse.

It is perhaps useful to consider the taxonomic utility of deconstructing the notion of the Uyghur. Should this term be deemed sufficiently inappropriate – say in acceptance of the assertion that it is entirely the product of 20th century Soviet and Chinese fabrication – those peoples of Xinjiang that were once named under this heading still may require some ‘naming’ for the purposes of analysis. We are left, in this case, with something to the effect of ‘sedentary oasis-dwelling Turkic-speaking (often) Muslim peoples of Xinjiang (or Central Asia?),’ an inelegant phrase that has several taxonomic implications of its own. First, however appropriately or otherwise, it legitimizes claims to pan-Turkic nationalism by deeming the people in question ‘Turkic’ in alignment with Jadidist reform movements of the early 20th century. In addition this atomized ethnonym raises questions about a definition of the ‘authentic’ Islamic experience, in its tacit assertion that one should be judged ‘Muslim’ (or not) according to declarations of faith – as opposed to the taxonomy of the Chinese government, which categorizes ‘Muslims’ according to *nationality*.

In deconstructing the concept of the Uyghur for ‘clarity’ or ‘proper understanding,’ one may run contrary to the experiences of those people who deem themselves Uyghur. Additionally, this newly-problematized ethnonym hardly abandons taxonomic pretense, but merely exchanges one set of categorical presuppositions for another. Lastly, the task of analyzing the undoubtedly complicated situation of Xinjiang’s inhabitants may be obfuscated unnecessarily by too-strong criticism of a tidy (if arbitrary) system of classification. As Jonathan Z Smith has suggested, “scholarly labor is a disciplined exaggeration in the direction of knowledge; taxonomy is a valuable tool in achieving that necessary distortion” [sic] (2004; 175).

By the same token, taxonomies of religion and ethnicity should not go unquestioned. It would certainly be irresponsible to engage the ‘Uyghur’ at face value, according to the narratives of nationality within the People’s Republic of China, without careful consideration of the dynamics of power involved. JZ Smith’s engagement of the notion of ‘World Religions’ sufficiently demonstrates that academic – or indeed any – taxonomies should be problematized, although perhaps not abandoned wholesale. The situation of the Uyghur seems to be a peculiar one, in that this particular ‘crab’ might not necessarily protest the appellation of ‘crustacean,’ but rather consider the latter to be representative of its true ethnic identity. We are left, then, with the responsibility as scholars not only to reflect on the “shifting nature and created identities” of the people that we study, as Gladney does (1990; 1), but also our own depiction of such things, which may compete with other actors in the (mythic) process of ethnogenesis.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today," *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Beller-Hann, Ildiko. "Temperamental Neighbours: Uighur-Han Relations in Xinjiang, Northwest China," *Imagined Differences: Hatred and the construction of identity*. Ed. Gunther Schlee. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 57-81.
- . "Making the Oil Fragrant: Dealings with the Supernatural among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang," *Asian Ethnicity*. 2.1 (2001): 9-23.
- Bovingdon, Gardner. *Policy Studies 11: Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent*. Washington: East-West Center, 2004.
- Bovingdon, Gardner and Tursun, Nabijan. "Contested Histories," *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Ed. Starr, S. Frederick. New York: M.E Sharpe, 2004. 353-374.
- Dreyer, June Teufel. *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China*. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1976.
- . "The PLA and Regionalism: Xinjiang," *Chinese Regionalism: The Security Dimension*. Eds Richard H. Yang, Jason C. Hu, et al. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994.
- Duara, Prasenjit. "Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 50.1 (1991): 67-83.
- . *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

East Turkestan Government in Exile. Web. 7 July 2010.

http://www.eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us/east_turkistan.html

East Turkistan Information Center. Web. 10 April 2010.

www.uygur.org

Elwert, George. "Switching Identity Discourses: Primordial Emotions and the Social Construction of We-Groups," *Imagined Differences: Hatred and the construction of identity*. Ed. Gunther Schlee. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 33-54.

Forbes, Andrew D.W. *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Fuller, Graham E. and Lipman, Jonathan N. "Islam in Xinjiang," *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Ed. Starr, S. Frederick. New York: M.E Sharpe, 2004. 320-352.

Frankel, James D. "'Apoliticization:' One Facet of Chinese Islam," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 28.3 (2008): 421-434.

Gladney, Dru C. "The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978-2001," *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Ed. Starr, S. Frederick. New York: M.E Sharpe, 2004. 101-119.

---. "Cyber Separatism, Islam and the State in China." *Identity Conflicts: Can Violence be Regulated?* Eds Jenkins, J. Craig and Esther E. Gottlieb. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007.

---. "The ethnogenesis of the Uyghur," *Central Asian Survey*. 9.1 (1990): 1-28.

---. "Responses to Chinese Rule: Patterns of Cooperation and Opposition,"

- Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Ed. Starr, S. Frederick. New York: M.E Sharpe, 2004. 375-296.
- . "Islam in China: State Policing and Identity Politics," *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. 151-178.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," *The Invention of Tradition*. Eds. Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Jankowiak, William and Rudelson, Justin. "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Ed. Starr, S. Frederick. New York: M.E Sharpe, 2004. 299-319.
- Lincoln, Bruce. *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. USA: Oxford UP, 1989.
- MacInnis, Donald E. *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice*. New York: Orbis Books, 1989.
- MacKay, D. Bruce. "Ethnicity," *Guide to the Study of Religion*. Eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- . *The Invention of World Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- McCutcheon, Russell T. "Myth," *Guide to the Study of Religion*. Eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Millward, James. *Policy Studies 6: Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical*

- Assessment*. Washington: East-West Center, 2004.
- Millward, James A. and Tursun, Nabijan. "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Ed. Starr, S. Frederick. New York: M.E Sharpe, 2004. 63-98.
- Millward, James A. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. New York: Colombia University Press, 2007.
- Murphy, Tim. "Cultural Understandings of "Religion": The Hermeneutical Context of Teaching Religious Studies in North America," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*. 18.3 2006. 197-218.
- . "Discourse," *Guide to the Study of Religion*. Eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- . "Elements of a Semiotic Theory of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*. 15. 2003. 48-67.
- Potter, Pitman B. "Belief in Control: Regulation of Religion in China," *The China Quarterly*. 174 (2003): 317-337.
- Rudelson, Justin Jon. *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road*. New York: Colombia UP, 1997.
- Schrode, Paula. "The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Uyghur Religious Practice," *Die Welt des Islams*. 48 (2008): 394-433.
- Smith, Joanne N. "Making Culture Matter: Symbolic Spatial and Social Boundaries Between Uyghurs and Han Chinese," *Asian Ethnicity*. 3.2 (2002): 153-174.
- Smith Finley, Joanne. "Chinese Oppression in Xinjiang, Middle Easter Conflicts and

- Global Islamic Solidarities among the Uyghurs,” *Journal of Contemporary China*. 16.53 (2007): 627-654.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- . *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Uyghur American Association Website*. Web. 07 Jul. 2009.
<http://www.uyghuramerican.org/>
- Yang, Fenggang. “The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China,” *The Sociological Quarterly*. 47 (2006): 93-122.
- Ed. Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*. UC Berkeley, GAIA Books, 2008.