Familiar Strangers

[The Huihui *minzu*] is not one of those native peoples that has always lived on the ancient soil of China (like the Han, Miao, or Qiang), nor one of those purely immigrant groups that came to China from abroad (like the Koreans or Russians), nor one of the peoples of a border region who have long lived in contact (like the Kazaks or the Dai). Rather, it relied upon the tremendous unifying power of Islamic culture, which concentrates Muslims of different countries and different languages into a single entity, causing a *minzu* to form from a blend of foreign elements and partially domestic inhabitants, creating a new species. On the vast, broad land of China it planted roots, sprouted, bloomed, and produced fruit, becoming an important component of the indivisible, great *minzu* family of China.¹

**THE MULTIVALENCE OF SUBALTERITY**

Part of the scholarly enterprise of late twentieth-century America lies in missing, then finding and reviving the voices of the silenced, revising our histories to include the women and African-Americans and Indians and Gypsies and others who were there, whose actions surely shaped the past as they do the present, but whose presence and power have been excluded from the dominant narrative. The Sino-Muslims have ever been marginal to China’s own history, appearing only as exotics in the Tang-Song, as conquerors and villains in the Yuan, and then disappearing into the category of sinified barbarians until they rise up against the Qing, either as righteous rebels or as murderous and disorderly savages, depending upon the historian’s point of view. Only since the founding of overtly Chinese Muslim organizations by both religious and secular Muslim intellectuals in the 1920s have there been national Muslim voices speaking for and about this “minority nationality.” This

¹. Lin and He, *Huibui lishi*, 1.
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chronology would indicate that the notion of minzu, of particular peoplehood within the “indivisible, great minzu family of China,” had to be invented before those voices could be perceived as legitimate within China. Until then, Chinese conceptions of their own civilization (and all others’ strangeness) demanded that Muslims either laihua, come and be transformed, or remain beyond the pale as irremediable barbarians.

This grandiose ideological principle could not, of course, work in practice. Muslim voices were heard in China from the Tang onward, and they spoke a variety of languages, including Chinese. Most Muslims, however attractive they found living in China, however much particular places in China became home, did not desire to be non-Muslims. As they acculturated in language, first spoken and then written, and in folkways and customs they found or helped to create in their local ecologies, Muslims were not undergoing some process peculiar to China. All over the Eurasian and African worlds, Muslims made such adaptations, sometimes as a culturally dominant class (as in Java), sometimes as a conquering elite ruling a non-Muslim majority (as in India or Spain), sometimes as a mercantile or peripheral acculturating minority (as in the Philippines, east Africa, or China). If this were not so, Muslims would be everywhere and always the same, and Clifford Geertz, among many others, has demonstrated conclusively that they are not.

Muslims never achieved a legitimate voice within the awesome history-making apparatus of the Chinese state and its intellectual minions both in and out of office. The Hai Furun case and the Siku quanshu editor’s comment on the Tianfang dianli clearly demonstrate that Chinese officials could not possibly regard texts in Arabic and Persian, or even Muslim texts written in elegant Chinese, as civilized. Had the Sino-Muslims been completely isolated, cut off from contact with sources of inspiration, knowledge, texts, and experience outside of China, they might well have gone the way of the Jews of Kaifeng, who had utterly lost their sense of differentness from their neighbors, except as a vague memory, by the end of the nineteenth century. That process did take place among the Muslims of southeast China after piracy and

2. Gladney, Muslim Chinese, 81–87, cogently argues this position, insisting on its close relationship to the creation of the Han as the dominant minzu of China.

3. In 1987 I participated in an ACLS-sponsored conference, in New Delhi, on Muslims as minorities in non-Muslim states. We heard papers on European, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian Muslim peoples, wonderfully diverse and adapting in fascinating ways to the cultures within which they live. At the end, we found nothing we could isolate as viable themes to tie them together, except the simple fact of their minority status, so closely were their acculturations and resistances linked to their particular environments.
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Ming defensive policy closed the once-vital sea links between that region and the Muslims to the south and west. Both the formerly Muslim Guo family of northern Taiwan, described by Barbara Pillsbury, and the Ding clan of descendants of Quanzhou Muslims, whose partial re-Islamization is narrated by Dru Gladney, illustrate what can happen in the absence of reviving external contact.4

As they underwent their evolution in official perceptions from jianke and foreign merchants (Tang-Song) to semu (Yuan) to Huihui (Ming-Qing), Muslims who lived in China became Chinese in a wide variety of places, and they took many professions. The descendants of foreign merchants, artisans, scientists, and soldiers became farmers, officials, ahong, migrant laborers, peddlers, doctors, caravanners, raftmen. They married, the men often taking non-Muslim wives in the early centuries; they began to give their children Chinese names as well as jing ming; and they lived complex lives inside the local politics of their villages, market systems, and counties—material lives not vastly different from those of their non-Muslim neighbors except for adherence to the strictures of the dietary laws and intercommunity solidarity based on common religion. In structure, however, their communities differed substantially from those of non-Muslims in the centrality of the mosque, its education, rituals, and religious professionals, especially the elders and ahong (in Gedimu communities) or the jiaoqzhou and his representatives (in Sufi orders and menhuan). We have no evidence of supralocal organization among them before the arrival of the tariqa in the eighteenth century, though Ma Zhu did try to become the Qing empire’s official sayyid.

If they were aware of the lives of other Muslims in China, it was as Muslims that they knew them. If they traveled, as so many did, they could find halal food, a common vocabulary, and a mosque for prayers only in another Muslim community, and there lay one crucial element of the strangeness of Muslims in China. They could be connected to one another by their religion in ways that non-Muslim Chinese could not, except through pilgrimage or sectarianism. Sino-Muslims shared the jingtang education, the religious and ritual knowledge of insiders, which distinguished them as individuals from non-Muslims. They could use Huihuihua, the Arabic and Persian lexicon of authenticity, which, despite its local Chinese dialectal base, indicated to other Sino-Muslims

4. Pillsbury, "No Pigs for the Ancestors"; and Gladney, Muslim Chinese, chap. 6. The Dings are also one of the clans discussed by Nakada, “Chūgoku Musuriru.” It is, as discussed above, no surprise that these entirely acculturated ex-Muslims lived in central and southeast China, not in the north or west.
that they were dealing with coreligionists. Indeed, the Muslim potential for connection with other Muslims transcended in geography and language the bonds of native place and lineage, which gave most Chinese their primary personal relationships in social life. And thus did the Sino-Muslims fulfill Georg Simmel’s definition of a stranger—though they stayed, they never quite gave up the freedom of coming and going. To non-Muslim Chinese they looked unified, their solidarity foreign and frightening despite their familiar presence. One can imagine the non-Muslims saying of them, “They always stick together,” feeling the uneasy alterity that majorities feel in the face of minority exclusivity.

But they did not stick together. On the contrary, their communities divided along lines of religion, politics, class, gender, and other valences of identity and identification that individuals use to make choices in their lives. As we have seen, everyone in northwest China knew at least one crucial “fact” about the Muslims—they were violent people, and their violence was often directed against one another: “When Old and New Teachings fight, it’s a matter for swords and troops before it’s over!” On the evidence delineated above, we may conclude that in times of conflict, being a Muslim did not determine anyone’s behavior, though it probably influenced everyone’s. Beyond the context of violence, some Sino-Muslims succeeded in business or the examination system or the army, while others did not; some chose to affirm the legitimacy of the ruling sovereign, while others did not; some chose to educate their children in Chinese, others only in Arabic and Persian, while still others could not educate them at all. Outside of the Jahriya and Ikhwan, most of the solidarities that unified and divided the northwestern Muslims did not extend beyond Gansu, and even within that region large-scale Muslim action was the exception rather than the rule. In day-to-day life, their local and regional communities did not have much to do with one another, except for connections created by sojourning merchants and ahong, so they did not create any wide consciousness of unity before the modern period.

Here lies a difficulty and danger of applying the minzu paradigm to the history of the Sino-Muslims (or, I would argue, that of any people). Created only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ap-

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5. These choices, like ours, were not always conscious, instrumental, and rational. An enormous literature provides analyses of the interaction of these valences or elements of identity—which come to the fore when, and how. Prasenjit Duara’s recent summary imposes a refreshing simplicity: “The self is constituted neither primordially nor monolithically but within a network of changing and often conflicting representations” (Rescuing History, 7).
plied consistently as a political tool by an effective central government only after 1949, the notion of minzu asserts that such entities existed as self-consciously unified solidarities long before the technological and social intrusions and capacities of the modern nation-state made that possible. There is no doubt that the Hui minzu now exists in China. But did it come into being in the Ming period as Muslims adapted to being Chinese, or did the rise of Chinese nationalism in its particular forms and with its particular concerns create it? As Dru Gladney has also argued, the narrative presented in this book supports the latter assertion with regard to the Sino-Muslims.6

The Hui minzu, with its wide dispersion and diverse contexts, can exist only as an imagined community, a people with solidarity, as it develops a national leadership, a national consciousness, a sense of China and of itself that transcends the local, particular forms and relationships that governed Sino-Muslim people’s lives before the modern era.7 Thus, I have avoided the term Hui in favor of “Muslim,” avoided Han in favor of “(non-Muslim) Chinese.” The People’s Republic’s minzu ethnonyms certainly did exist in premodern times, but they did not mean the same things as they do now. Hui or Huihui meant “Muslim,” and Han meant “culturally Chinese,” as James Watson and others have defined it, but they were not exclusive minzu categories. Indeed, a common term for the Sino-Muslims, in addition to the Central Asian Donggan, was Han-Hui, the Han Muslims, while some of the Mongolic-speaking members of today’s Dongxiang minzu would have been called Meng-Hui, the Mongol Muslims. These combined terms certainly cannot coexist with the minzu paradigm, which demands exclusive membership in one minzu, but they nonetheless accurately describe the peoples’ cultural conditions.8

6. Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity,” and Orphan Warriors; Gladney, Muslim Chinese, 96—98.

7. This vocabulary for understanding the development of nation-states finds its first expression in Anderson, Imagined Communities.

8. An American graduate student who has lived for years in Xinjiang tells me that he is often asked, in local Turkic, “To what millet do you belong?” This term clearly does not intend its Ottoman meaning, which indicated religious community, for in the context of the People’s Republic, it has come to mean minzu. His interlocutors are not satisfied with “America” as an answer, either, for though millet has important political implications, it is not the same thing as citizenship. They are asking about blood—millet, minzu—and accept “English” as a legitimate response. In this case, I wonder what they would do with the Scotch-Irish-English-French-German reality. We should certainly note the resemblance of this minzu paradigm to ideas of race, especially as constructed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Euro-Americans (Dikötter, Discourse of Race, chaps. 3—5).
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THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE

Here we must confront the question Joseph Fletcher's death left unanswered. Why did divisions among Sufi suborders, usually defined as differences in ritual practice (e.g., vocal vs. silent *dhikr*), result in sanguinary warfare in northwest China, though they did not in other parts of the world? In eighteenth-century Arabia, as we have seen, individuals could even participate in recitation of both kinds of *dhikr* without feeling that they were doing anything odd. We find bloody conflict between Sufis to be sensible in Central Asia—between the Āfāqiya and Ishāqiya, for example—because the stakes lay in political control over territory, the rulership, the state. But in northwest China, such control was beyond the dreams of any sane person, except when the central government was already in a state of collapse, and even then, Milayin and Ding Guodong allied with a Ming pretender, not with a Muslim conqueror. What, then, caused the Gansu Muslims to attack one another so violently?

The narrative presented above argues for multiple causation and for careful examination of the terms of explanation. Certainly we must grant some causal power to pre-existing geographical, social, economic and political conditions, to the pressures inherent in a frontier society with a harsh and unyielding natural environment. The northwest remains China's poorest region, its population overburdening the unproductive arable, its rainfall barely adequate, its infrastructure unprotected against the vagaries of weather and seismic movement. We must also note the presence of many distinctive groups in a restricted space, identifying themselves by culture, religion, language, and local or regional loyalty, competing for scarce resources. In particular, the proximity of agricultural and pastoral peoples and the position of the Muslims as economic middlemen, balanced in a vulnerable position between cultural China and non-China, militate against the region's lying peaceful and serene. Even at Old Taozhou, whose elites resisted splitting along ethnic lines, there was plenty of pressure to do so. Such frontier zones often create communities in arms, ready to resort to the martial arts, men who sleep with their weapons close at hand.

This same frontier quality also created a peculiar tension in Gansu Muslim society, caused by its lack of an intellectual elite apart from the religious professionals. In the Middle East, or other entirely Muslim cultural environments, disagreements over religion certainly did become conflictual, were taken to court, or even resulted in brawling, feuding, and war. But they could also be argued in a context of mutually
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accepted rules, of religious curiosity and intellectual interaction. On the Islamic frontiers of Gansu, the rigidity of orthodoxies without the possibility of such dialogue created the nexus for religious conflict. Without the confidence of obvious authenticity, as in solidly Muslim contexts, Sino-Muslims required rigid adherence to rules, especially those received from the Muslim heartlands, and could not question or modify them within a shared intellectual tradition. Instead, they resolved conflicts among themselves with violence, sometimes (but not always) encouraged by their religious leaders.

We can also adduce causes external to the Muslim communities. The corruption and incompetence of Qing officials, negative evolutionary change in government regulations and attitudes toward Muslims, and a special vigilance over social order in the northwest following the final conquest of Xinjiang all contributed to rising tension in Gansu in the late eighteenth century. The Sino-Muslims were not, after all, unique in acting violently against the Qing state. Studies of the Taiping, Nian, Miao, Boxer, and other large-scale antistate actions have also indicated the importance of seeing violence as firmly rooted in local contexts, not just as the result of cultural difference, oppositional ideology, or dissatisfied and therefore rebellious leaders.

The initial innovation within Muslim communities in eighteenth-century Gansu came not from the Jahrīya but from the Khafiya, the first Sufi tariqa to win significant numbers of adherents in the region. Hidayat Allāh’s and Ma Laichi’s success in building cohesive, multicomunity networks of personal loyalty to themselves and their descendants, especially among the Salars, presented a direct threat to the legitimacy and power of the Gedimu elite, both abong and elders. The Mufti suborder of Didao, also descending in religious succession from Hidayat Allāh, had similar success, but not among the Salars, who were always perceived as more volatile and dangerous than other frontier peoples. Ma Yinghuan’s initial lawsuit, however, couchèd in terms of qiankai and houkai factions, did not result in long-term violence. Only with the arrival of the Jahrīya and its conversion of Mongolic- and Chinese-speaking Muslims as well as the Turkic-speaking Salars to a tariqa in direct competition with the Khafiya did street fighting become general at Xunhua.

9. The Miao minzu, as currently constructed in the People’s Republic, resembles the Hui minzu in the wide cultural diversity of its members, who are united primarily by their inclusion in a Chinese category. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some Miao undertook armed struggles against Qing authority, while others did not, another characteristic they share with the Sino-Muslims (Diamond, “Defining the Miao”).

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and then the local Qing administration had to take more invasive notice, given the precedents and responsibility for social order it bore.

That constituted one of the most important causes of "Muslim rebellion" in northwest China, as it did elsewhere in the empire. Despite imperial pronouncements to the contrary, Muslims were regarded as different and dangerous by Gansu local officials both civil and military. Heavy-handed, brutal, often indiscriminate state violence, or the rumor of its impending onslaught, stimulated Muslims engaged in feuding to confront the armed forces of the state in battle. When Su Forty-three (in disguise) met Xinzhu at Baizhuangzi (1781), when Zhang Fei came to negotiate in southeastern Shaanxi (1862), and when Tang Yanhe despoiled villages west of Hezhou (1893), the Muslims heard, believed, amplified, and spread the word that the Qing intended to "wash away" the Muslims, exterminate them all. People with a martial tradition, organized into local militias (Shaanxi) and by the tariqa (Gansu), following their gentry or ahong or jiaozhu, might certainly meet such a challenge violently, especially if they knew that the state's local forces were weakened by the Taiping or Sino-Japanese war.

So we have come to another answer to the Qianlong emperor's self-incriminating question, "Why did they rebel?" They gathered their forces against local enemies—Muslim or, in Shaanxi, non-Muslim. Blockaded in their forts, remembering old massacres or hearing of new ones, they reacted against state or militia violence with violence of their own and thus became rebels in the eyes of the state without any plan to seize territory or set up an antistate or proclaim a jihad. In short, we must see "rebel" as a state-created category in most of these cases, not as a description of what the Muslims intended to do. Only in 1784, when Tian Wu made banners and planned an uprising, do we see more deliberate intention, and that makes sense as revenge for the bloody pacification and decimation of the Jahriya in 1781.

To add another multivalent conclusion, not all Muslims agreed with the decision to fight the Qing. We know that some actively opposed it, including Khafiya adherents in 1781, Wang Dagui and many others in the 1860s, Ma Zhan'ao after his surrender to Zuo Zongtang, and the entire contingent of Muslims in the Qing military in the 1890s. We know far less about those who chose not to fight at all, to run or to hide rather than confront either the armed might of the state or the armed wrath of fellow Muslims. They may have hated the Qing for its violence against their people, mistrusted their (or others') leaders for starting the troubles, but we can only surmise that plenty of people took the passive option when they could. We cannot know if they acted on fear or on principle, out of
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loyalty to the Qing or in quiet solidarity with fellow Muslims, for they have left no traces in our historical record to date, a record dominated by martial action, sweeping generalization, and stereotypical characterization. We can certainly conclude that violence is no more natural to the Muslims of northwest China than it is to other people.

THE PROBLEM OF NAMES

We have already noted the difficulty in understanding the words *minzu* and “rebel” in the context of northwest China. Other terms have figured in this narrative as obfuscators rather than clarifiers of peoples and events, chief among them New Teaching and its putative opposite, Old Teaching. As we have seen, these words have no permanent referents but rather vary over time and space. That is, they are applied in particular contexts to reformist or conservative groups within Sino-Muslim society. If they were neutral terms, they might simply indicate chronological sequence—which teaching arrived first? But in a politicolegal culture that demanded social order, took officials’ ranks and lives in chaotic times, and asserted tradition as a crucial arbiter of rectitude, the New and Old labels were far from neutral. Though not invariably proscribed or punished by local judges, especially before 1781, any group targeted as New Teaching had already lost part of the battle for legitimacy in Sino-Muslim society. After the internecine slaughter and state repression of 1781 and 1784, New Teaching, which at that time meant the Jahriya, had come to be associated with violence, with rending the social fabric, with innovation, heterodoxy, and deceiving the people. The Old Teaching, which meant the Khafiya and Gedimu Muslims, could be viewed as potentially accommodating the legitimate authority of the dynasty, even fighting on the side of Agui and his ethnically diverse troops against Su Forty-three’s intractable “rebels.”

Other words have often been used to describe the violence narrated above—in Chinese, *minzu douzheng* and *shengzhan,*—“*minzu* conflict” and “holy war.” On the evidence presented here, we may conclude that these are far too general to apply conclusively to any of these events. If *minzu* conflict pits one *minzu* against a repressive authority or another *minzu,* how can we use the term when Sino-Muslims fight on both sides, as they did in most of the wars in this book? If Ma Hualong was fighting a holy war, how can we understand his decision to surrender, to take a Qing title, or his unwillingness to unite wholeheartedly with the Shaanxi Muslims? These wars began as local conflicts, between Muslims (in Gansu) or between Muslims and non-Muslims (in Shaanxi), which became polarized by state intervention along lines not purely religious,
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ethnic, or geographical, though all three identities surely played parts in people's decisions to join one side or another. Some historians are very careful in their application and understanding of these terms, but many are not, and we must beware of the easy characterization, the facile descriptive term.

After all, it was the state that eventually determined what many of the words meant. Categories such as “rebel,” “heterodoxy,” “New Teaching,” and “bandit” are not natural or inherent descriptors but rather legally and politically defined black boxes, into which state authority can place a wide variety of people and behaviors. “A winner a king, a loser a bandit” summarizes useful folk wisdom on the subject. For religious ideologies, one might say, “A winner a teaching, a loser a heterodoxy.” By the mid-nineteenth century, some Qing officials had decided that menhuan and gongbei—that is, Sufi orders with their saintly lineages and saints' tombs—lay at the root of Gansu's sanguinary history, but never did the state try to proscribe them all. Rather, they selected those leaders and solidarities which appeared most dangerous to social order and labeled them as “weeds,” evil Muslims who deceive the people, while maintaining that all others were “good” Muslims. This could not work in a local atmosphere laden with fear, bloody memory, and desire for revenge. To many Gansu non-Muslims, and Qing officials as well, the only “good” Muslim was a dead one, or at least one who lived far away from non-Muslims, especially Chinese non-Muslims. From the seventeenth-century official's recommendation of radical separation of Muslims from civilized society until settled agriculture could work its deracinating magic, to the late-nineteenth-century generals' slaughter of Muslim civilians around Xining, this conviction was proposed and sometimes put into practice.

THE PARADOX OF PERIPHERIES

The names of places, like those of groups of people, carry a heavy political load. This book has dealt extensively with “frontier” as a name for Gansu, for the whole northwest. Gu Jiegang was ashamed of the fact that the frontier lay so close to the geographical center of his nation-state. Clearly, Gansu was a frontier of China, a zone outside of which Chinese people would find themselves culturally, if not politically, foreign. But Gansu was also a frontier of Tibet, Mongolia, and Central Asia—a meeting ground of cultures—and we might write a very different history if we saw Tibetans, Mongols, or Central Asians as the main characters in this narrative.

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Not only do frontiers have at least two sides, but they also have residents, for whom the frontier is home. The spatial arrangements we privilege—positionings that define terms such as cores, peripheries, and frontiers—follow closely the relative power and productivity of their inhabitants. China’s many centers and edges have been carefully mapped and defined by G. William Skinner and others, but China’s Muslim space has been invisible within that mapping, and the two are not congruent. Ningxia, Hezhou, Xunhua, and Xining lie on the periphery of the periphery if one’s perspective centers on China, but they are the cores of concern for Sino-Muslims and local non-Chinese. Certainly the Muslims interacted with the systems centering on Lanzhou and Xi’an, with prefectural capitals at places such as Tianshui and Didao, and they participated in an economy with those cities as cores. But they also participated in a Muslim economy, political and religious as well as productive, and that Muslim arrangement influenced their lives as surely as did the “dominant” Chinese patterns. Its symbolic capital flowed among Muslim communities in the persons and ideas of ahong and jiaozhu, students and pilgrims, while its goods flowed between cultural China and non-China in Muslim hands.

This book’s challenge thus lies in identifying parallel structures and positions within which parallel narratives, such as this history of Muslims in China, actually take place. We do not find a simple arrival and transformation here, though Muslims do arrive, and the Muslims of the Qing are certainly very different from those of the Song. But the transformation is mutual, always partial, evolutionary, and unpredictable. Chinese perceptions of themselves and their own culture have been deeply affected by the presence of cultural Others in their local systems and on their frontiers. Northwest China certainly would not be what it has become without the constant mediating presence of its Muslim communities, but they have not all behaved consistently or alike.

Through pilgrimages, missionaries, and trade, Muslims in the northwest also maintained close connections with the Muslim heartlands and were deeply affected by institutions and ideas flowing into China from the west. Even in east China, where Muslims were more acculturated in language and material life than were their Gansu coreligionists, many nonetheless continue to practice their religion, especially its dietary laws and endogamy, to the present day.10 So we cannot conclude that the Sino-Muslims were somehow not sufficiently Islamic to be a distinctive population. Nonetheless, Lao Huihui aided Li Zicheng (1630s-44), Milayin

10. Gladney, Muslim Chinese, chaps. 4 and 5.
and Ding Guodong backed a Ming pretender (1648), and the Khafiya leaders saw their solidarity’s best interest in alliance with the Qing (1781). Indeed, this history demonstrates that the most effective Islamic revivals in the past century of Chinese history have directly engaged their own Chineseness: the Ikhwan, which failed as Wahhabi-influenced fundamentalism and succeeded when it allied itself with Chinese nationalism; and Hanxue, centering on the Han kitab and expressing Islamic meanings in current Chinese, a movement that began and flourished in Nanjing, Beijing, Suzhou, and Jinan before it reached Gansu.

That recent history leads to a final conclusion regarding space: China incorporated its northwestern frontier most effectively during a period of extraordinary central weakness. During the height of Qing power the tusi system allowed considerable local autonomy for frontier elites, and powerful religious figures such as the high rinpoches of Tibetan monasteries and Sufi shaikhs (e.g., Ma Laichi and Ma Hualong) could establish legitimate local authority parallel to the distant dynasty in Beijing and its local representatives. Even the Qing conquest of Xinjiang between the 1690s and 1750s did not result in decisive central control over Gansu. Only Zuo Zongtang’s reconquest, followed by the cooptation of local elites such as the Ma families of Qing generals, later to be warlords, finally guaranteed dominance from the east. Without the active support of Ma Anliang, Ma Qi, and Ma Fuxiang, neither the late Qing nor the Republic could have controlled Gansu as they did.

The methods of nation-building learned or created in the hostile international world of European imperialism served both the old and the new regimes well in the northwest, so Gansu history reflects accurately the processes of transformation from empire to nation-state, frontier to border, imperial virtue to national sovereignty. Sino-Muslim history, however, must also take into account the waves and currents of Central Asia and the Middle East, especially the growth and flourishing of Sufi orders as revivalist movements and the fundamentalist upheavals associated with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scripturalism. They, too, stimulated change in northwest China, in parallel and sometimes in conflict with the evolution of the late Qing and the rise of New China.

THE PARADOXES OF IDENTITY

Echoing the Chinese logician Gongsun Long, this book has asked, “When is a Chinese not a Chinese?” Answer: When the Chinese is a Sino-Muslim. What does it mean to belong to two cultures at once, when both demand at least a measure of exclusive dominance in individ-
ual and collective life? Historians, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have analyzed a wide variety of elements that make up human identity. In this study of the Sino-Muslims, I have focused particularly on language, religion, and place, coming to the conclusion that none can be isolated as somehow *more* fundamental than the others, and that all operate all the time. If I have erred on the side of choice, of individual and collective decisions as expressions of identity, I must plead the complex and contradictory nature of the sources, which do not allow simple generalizations to stand.

In a moving essay, the cosmopolitan intellectual Slavenka Drakulic writes of discovering her national identity amidst the slaughter of a disintegrating Yugoslavia:

> Along with millions of other Croats, I was pinned to the wall of nationhood—not only by outside pressure from Serbia and the Federal Army but by national homogenization within Croatia itself. That is what the war is doing to us, reducing us to one dimension: the Nation. The trouble with this nationhood, however, is that whereas before, I was defined by my education, my job, my ideas, my character—and, yes, my nationality too—now I feel stripped of all that. I am nobody because I am not a person any more. I am one of 4.5 million Croats.¹¹

This feels like what happened to some northwestern Muslims, though few if any of them articulated their dilemma in prose. In specific times and places, they could be reduced by outside force to their Muslimness, to that one crucial facet of their identities. When Meng Qiaofang, Xinzhu, Zhang Fei, Yang Changjun, Tang Yanhe, Dong Fuxiang, or even Ma Fuxiang or Ma Anliang started killing (or threatening to kill) Muslims, the rumors flew: They are going to *xi Hui*, kill Muslims just for being themselves, and for being at home. In northwest China, with its rich memory of massacre and the protagonists’ bellicose reputations, the rumors of extermination edicts would be believed, and some Muslims would react to them, killing local others in self-defense or in revenge.

But they did not act simply as “Muslims.” Especially after the arrival of Sufi orders in Gansu, and the militarization of local society in both Gansu and Shaanxi, they also acted as members of local solidarities, as rivals of other Muslims as well as non-Muslims, as residents of particular communities and members of lineages, as Chinese- or Mongolic- or

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Turkic- or Tibetan-speakers. And they did not all act in the same way. Drakulic’s disintegrating Yugoslavia was divided among rival political factions, all of which strove to mobilize ethnicity as a weapon against the others, to control “homeland” and claim authenticity and homogenizing centrality. Some Gansu Muslim leaders used the same tactics, but without the possibility of territorial autonomy. Rather, they utilized the tariqa, the charismatic power of the ahong and the jiaozhu, the fear of indiscriminate violence, and the slogans of Muslim unity to motivate their followers to violence, in defense of their homes or for revenge against evil others.

Under such circumstances, did individual Muslims in northwest China really have choices? In Shaanxi in 1862, perhaps they did not. Perhaps they had to fight, run, or die, homogenized into a monolithic enemy by their neighbors in the non-Muslim militias and by the Qing army. But in Gansu, Muslims fought on both sides, and some communities, like Taozhou’s, chose not to participate if they could avoid it. Overarching all these choices lies the theme of home, of one’s own place. The mid-nineteenth-century Shaanxi Muslims retained their defensive rage, fled and regrouped and attacked again, in order to go home. The Ningxia, Hezhou, Taozhou, Xunhua, and Xining Muslims all evinced a deep attachment to their own territory, using its familiarity both for strategic purposes and to motivate soldiers and civilians to fight. On the other side, many non-Muslims defended their villages and stockades with ferocity, suffering massacres at Muslim hands or holding out against lengthy siege.

Could not the Muslims have left, settled to the west, among coreligionists? Some certainly did. Bai Yanhu fled to Xinjiang and then Russia (1870s); some of the survivors of Duoba did, too (1890s); and Ma Zhongying followed them almost forty years later. But very few made that choice. However hostile, however conflict ridden, Gansu and Shaanxi were home to these Sino-Muslims, the only places they wanted to live, with familiar livelihoods, mosques, holy tombs, and graves. The four leaders whose stories close this history all spent their lives trying to establish a viable home for the Muslims of northwest China—Ma Fuxiang by connecting Gansu and Ningxia to the nation-state; Ma Qixi and Ma Yuanzhang by creating Muslim solidarities of protection and religious, social, economic, and political stability; and Ma Wanfu by leading the Sino-Muslims to a purer, more authentic religion. Before coming under Ma Qi’s aegis, Ma Wanfu failed to provide enough safety for adherents to his vision of Islamic truth, so it was left to the second generation of Ikhwan leaders to follow the path already taken by the Ma
family warlords, the Jahriya, and the Xidaotang. They came to terms with New China and imbedded their religious communities in the rising nation-state.

FAMILIAR STRANGERS

In the early eighteenth century Liu Zhi wrote his *Han kitab* in Nanjing. A few decades later Hidayat Allah, Ma Mingxin, and 'Abd Allah of the Qadiriya arrived in the northwest and began the creation of new social institutions, the Sufi orders. These two currents, originally only chronologically linked, have collided and developed and changed one another over the course of over two centuries, producing a rich harvest of conflict and insight. Once the northwest was brought irreversibly into the Qing empire, after Zuo Zongtang’s reconquest, the leaders of the Sino-Muslims turned decisively eastward. Never ignoring the Muslim heartlands, many of them still open to new inspiration, texts, and experiences from the west, they nonetheless cast their lot with China and took the *Han kitab* as their guide. Liu Zhi’s Confucian vision of Islam has not yet gained final victory, for he wished to construct an identity that would not separate the Muslims from China but unify them with it, an impossible task as long as they remain, to any extent, strangers. But those who read Chinese can find in his books a familiar vocabulary of belief and devotion, a discourse dedicated to making China a home for believing Muslims.  

For the writers of the *Han kitab*—and their readers—were and are serious Muslims, not assimilated half-breeds or betrayers of the faith in comparison to Ma Wanfu or Ma Hualong. In the face of ordinary acculturative pressures faced by any strangers—to learn the language, eat the food, wear the clothes, become normal and familiar—they complied and resisted as their mixed culture demanded. For example, many Sino-Muslims retain pork avoidance long after they abandon other Islamic practices, but they all speak Chinese as their native tongue. In the face of the incorporative political and cultural power of the modern nation-state, all the Sino-Muslims have become citizens of China, no longer subjects of the empire. Their story after the 1930s must await another study, but we can say with confidence that they have remained

12. Wang Jianping informs me in a personal communication that Muslim scholars in Yunnan, teaching among Muslims who read Arabic and Persian but not Chinese, have translated some of the *Han kitab* texts into Arabic for instruction in the madrasa. I cannot say whether they realize the extraordinary irony inherent in this act.
different from their non-Muslim neighbors, some only in possessing memories of Otherness, others more completely, while working to make a place for themselves in China, the only home they have ever known.

We conclude with a final warning against established categories, against stereotyped characterizations and facile generalizations. Muslims, like many other kinds of people, have been subjected to a variety of analytical oversimplifications, their behavior measured always by some narrow textual standard or predicted by some putatively universal religious ideology. The narrative told in this book cannot be simplified accurately; to the extent that it succeeds, it reflects the messiness of what actually happened in northwest China over the past millennium. Our histories should not be reducible to dichotomies ("Are they more Muslim or more Chinese?") or to black boxes ("the indivisible, great minzu family of China"), for they must take into account what Harold Isaacs has called "the essential disorderliness of the truth." In a more human, less cogent history, categories give way to decisions made by individuals and effective solidarities in particular contexts. Only by learning and constructing a myriad of such stories can we piece together what it actually meant, and actually means, to be a Muslim in China.