

**From Dungans to *Xinyimin*: China,
Chinese Migration and the Changing
Sociopolitical Fabric of Central Asian Republics⁺**

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Abstract

This paper looks at the issue of ethnic identity of the Dungans – descendants of early Chinese migrants in Central Asia – and its change and preservation in the context of the fragile social fabric of the Central Asian states that were born from the shadow of the now-defunct Soviet Union, the arduous processes of nation-building plagued by often violent, competing emergent nationalisms as well as political and economic turbulence, and the impact brought by the emergence of the *xinyimin* (Chinese new migrants). These Chinese-speaking Dungans staying in compact communities mostly in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are descendants of political and war refugees from China's provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu who moved across the border into the territory of Czarist Russia in the later part of the nineteenth century after the crushing of the Northwest Uprising by the Imperial Ch'ing (the Manchu dynasty) army which bordered on genocide and ethnic cleansing. This paper analyses how a new ethnic identity has since

emerged due partly to the geographical isolation imposed by the formidable natural barrier of the Tianshan (“Heavenly Mountains”) However, their Chinese language in the form of a mixture of the Shaanxi and Gansu regionalects, remarkably written today not in Chinese characters but in the Cyrillic alphabet, and Chinese traditions of the Shaanxi and Gansu varieties have been fiercely preserved through the generations until today, including nineteenth-century vocabulary and traditions which are no longer found in modern China, due both to the cohesiveness of communal life and an aversion to marriage outside the community. After analysing the community’s dilemmas of identity preservation and identity creation, this paper then proceeds to look at the impact of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulting in the birth of the post-Soviet independent Central Asian republics, and the influx of the *xinyimin* from China since the early 1990s that has triggered xenophobic response with varying intensity in many of these Central Asian societies, towards these descendants of early Chinese migrants who are now facing a whole new set of challenges brought about both by the onslaught of nationalisms of the new politically dominant ethnic groups in these Central Asian states and the economic turmoil faced by these new republics following the collapse of the Soviet command economy.

Keywords: *migrants, Dungans, xinyimin, China, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan*

JEL classification: *F22, F52, J15, O15*

1. Introduction

In his iconoclastic 1985 study, Charles Tilly questioned the idea of a social contract in state making, where a society whose shared norms and expectations call forth a certain kind of government, and defined “those peculiar forms of governments we call national states” as “relatively centralized, differentiated organizations the officials of which more or less successfully claim control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a population inhabiting a large, contiguous territory” (Tilly, 1985: 170). Without going so far with Tilly in seeing nation-states as “quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy”, it is still impossible not to question the long taken-for-granted notion of the inviolable sovereignty of the nation-state and even the very essence of the nation-state itself. Benedict Anderson (1991: 6-7), too, defined a nation as a community socially constructed and ultimately *imagined* by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group – essentially forming a nation unto itself – and “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible [...] for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings”. The sovereignty of a nation-state is imagined, according to Anderson, because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm, giving rise to the national dreams of freedom whose gage and emblem were the sovereign state. Similarly, other historicist (in contrast to the primordialists) like Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1990) also posited that nations and nationalism are products of modernity and have been created as means to political and economic ends, and the nation, assuming the nineteenth-century conceptual entity of a nation-state, is the product of nationalism – but not vice versa –

through the unification of various peoples into a common society or community. It is in such context of the nation, nation-state and nationalism that this paper sets out to examine and analyse the issue of the ethnic identity of the descendants of Dungan Chinese migrants and its change and preservation in the context of the fragile social fabric of the Central Asian states that were reborn from the shadow of the non-defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, Soviet Union), and the arduous processes of nation-building plagued by often violent, competing emergent nationalisms as well as political and economic turbulence. These Chinese-speaking Dungans mostly staying in compact communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are descendants of political and war refugees (in contrast to Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia, Europe and the Americas who were mainly economic migrants) from China's provinces of Shaanxi (陝西) and Gansu (甘肅) who moved across the border into the territory of Czarist Russia in the later part of the nineteenth century after the crushing of the Northwest Uprising by the Imperial Ch'ing/Qing (清, the Manchu dynasty) army which bordered on genocide and ethnic cleansing. After arriving in Russian Central Asia, these early landless Chinese migrants were allowed by the Czarist government to reclaim wasteland for farming and engage in livestock husbandry. In early twentieth century, these Chinese migrants and their descendants also actively participated in the construction of the former Soviet Union and Stalin's war against the Third Reich's invasion in the 1940s.

This paper analyses how a new Dungan ethnic identity has since emerged due partly to the geographical isolation imposed by the formidable natural barrier of the Tianshan (T'ien Shan, 天山, "Heavenly Mountains") and partly to the ambiguous sentiments towards the ancestral homeland of Zhongyuan given the collective memory of the tragic exodus (the earlier generations of these Chinese migrants in

Central Asia used to call themselves *tšuy-ianziy*, i.e. “people of/from Chungyüan” – “Chungyüan” or “Chungt’u” (中原 / 中土), literally “Middle Land” or “Middle Earth”, being a common Chinese expression in the old days referring to China). However, the Chinese language in the form of a mixture of the Shaanxi and Gansu regionalects remarkably written today not in Chinese characters but in the Cyrillic alphabet, and Chinese traditions of the Shaanxi and Gansu varieties have been fiercely preserved through the generations until today, including nineteenth-century vocabulary and traditions which are no longer found in modern China, due both to the cohesiveness of communal life and an aversion to marriage outside the community.

Besides analysing the Dungan community’s dilemmas of identity preservation and identity creation, this paper also looks at the impact of the disintegration of the Soviet union in 1991 and the birth of the post-Soviet independent Central Asian republics on these descendants of Chinese migrants. The influx of the *xinyimin* (新移民, “new migrants”) from China since the early 1990s that has triggered xenophobic response in many Central Asian societies (linked to a growing domestic politically charged perception of “China threat” to their nation’s sovereignty which has potentially explosive implications for their bilateral relations with their powerful East Asian neighbour) is also adding a new dimension to the existing set of new challenges faced by the Dungans today brought about both by the onslaught of nationalisms of the new politically dominant ethnic groups especially in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and the economic turmoil faced by these new republics following the collapse of the Soviet command economy, which in a violent form, resulted in the severe interethnic clashes between the Chinese-speaking and Turkic-speaking youths in Iskra, near the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, in February 2006 which sent a tremor through Kyrgyzstan’s delicate ethnic social fabric that was still licking its

wounds after the Kyrgyz-Uzbek clash in 1991 that claimed more than 300 lives.

2. The Iskra Ethnic Riots

On 6th February 2006, severe ethnic clashes broke out between the Chinese-speaking Dungan (“Tungan”, or called “Dolgans” by the Russians) youths and Turkic-speaking Kyrgyz youths in the Dungan-majority village of Iskra, about 70 kilometers from Kyrgyz capital Bishkek (called Frunze in the Soviet period), sending a tremor through Kyrgyzstan’s delicate ethnic social fabric. The Chinese Dungans (Дунгане, *Dungani*), while comprising up to 90 per cent of Iskra’s 3,000 residents, are but one of the smallest minority groups in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The first sign of trouble came a week earlier on the night of 31st January when two Kyrgyz boys were allegedly beaten by six Dungan youths in a dispute over a seat in a local computer center. Tension rapidly escalated, culminating in large Kyrgyz demonstrations on 4th-5th February that demanded the forced removal of the six Dungan youths involved in the brawl, along with their families. Situation got worse when on 5th February four Dungan youths in a speeding car allegedly fired gunshots at the Kyrgyz protesters, triggering a rampage by the Kyrgyz demonstrators in which Dungans were beaten and houses were set on fire, forcing some Dungan families to seek refuge in a local mosque. When order was restored on 6th February, 20 people had been injured, 40 people had been arrested and about 30 homes had been destroyed. Hundreds of Dungan families were forced to seek political asylum in neighbouring Kazakhstan though eventually returned after the tensions had calmed down (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2009: 104-105).

3. Host Environment, Contextual Factors, and Xinyimin from China: Deeper Roots of Conflict

Violent attacks on the Dungans like that in the Iskra riots are rare, so far unseen yet in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, but have deeper roots in the case of Kyrgyzstan – where interethnic tensions between Dungans and Kyrgyz are frequent especially in the Chui region (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2009: 104) – which Nicholas J. Steiner in his thesis submitted to Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies attributes to, firstly, Chinese migrant entities’ “overt presence in Kyrgyzstani society that openly competes with local labor and business”, and, secondly, the inaction of the Kyrgyz government “to stem the flow, or at least compartmentalize, the Chinese presence in the country” (Steiner, 2013: 34-35) in a decentralized state with weak economic development. As the largest Chinese export market among the nations of Central Asia, observes Steiner, the presence of Chinese migrants, goods, and investments in Kyrgyzstan, as seen in the country’s numerous bazars serving “as re-export bases for massive quantities of Chinese wares [...] interacts with society on a much more noticeable level than they do in Kazakhstan”, which unfortunately:

Rather than creating greater prosperity for Kyrgyz society as a whole, however, the Sino-Kyrgyz partnership has actually fostered greater instability in Kyrgyzstan. In a decentralized state with weak economic development, uncertainty surrounding China’s growing influence continues to channel resentment against Chinese interests.

(Steiner, 2013: 28)

According to Amantur Zhaparov (2008: 83), in the major Kyrgyzstan markets in Bishkek and near Osh where the Chinese *xinyimin* have been trading since the late 1990s, local Dungans mostly work as assistants to

Chinese traders, whether Uyghurs or Hans. In terms of ethnic relations, Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse (2009) observe that

Historically, the relations between Uyghurs and the Hui from Xinjiang have been conflictual. The two peoples do not in the least foster Muslim solidarity; indeed the Hui/Dungans are keener on working with the Hans [... yet, it is] very rare that the Central Asian Dungans are able to re-establish familial links in China and can use them as a driver of trade. In confirmation of this absence of family networks, the Dungans involved in trade work almost systematically with Xinjiang, in particular via the Urumqi industrial park and the free-trade zones at the borders, or in the Pearl River Delta, but they do not venture as far as Gansu [which is the ancestral homeland of most Dungans in Kyrgyzstan] and Shaanxi [which is the ancestral homeland of most Dungans in Kazakhstan].

Laruelle and Peyrouse (2009: 107)

Hence, in view of this close link between the local Dungans and the *xinyimin* from China in terms of economic activities, it would be difficult for the Dungans – are usually wealthier than other local ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan due to their business credentials and community networks, as well as gaining from their service together with the Uyghur diaspora as intermediaries of the Han shuttle traders (Steiner, 2013: 31, 34) – to extricate themselves from the local Kyrgyz resentment and aggression channeled against the Chinese interests represented by the Chinese *xinyimin* who to many in the post-Soviet countries represent “an integral part of China's strategy of global economic expansion, aiming at encouraging Chinese business abroad [...] designed to create conditions for the ‘transnational management’ doctrine, whereby the Chinese diaspora in destination countries forms communities and small

businesses for the purposes of economic and geopolitical expansion of China” (Sadovskaya, 2007: 157).

Besides local Kyrgyz people’s backlash against perceived economic threat posed by the Chinese *xinyimin*’s economic exploitation including invading local industrial jobs and dominating small and medium-sized enterprises, such resentment against Chinese interests in general also stems from increasing perception among the Kyrgyz people that their government is unwilling to defend the country from perceived Chinese threats to their nation’s sovereignty – whether in the form of the then Askar Akayev government’s concession in 2002 of nearly 100,000 hectares of land to China to resolve a longstanding territorial dispute, or the Kyrgyzstan government’s allowing China to extradite more people, often on loosely-formed terrorism accusations, from Kyrgyzstan than it did from all of the other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) combined, or even China’s submission in 2010 to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) an application to protect the Kyrgyz epic poem “Manas” as a Chinese contribution to world cultural heritage, a move that many Kyrgyz people viewed as part of China’s effort to take ownership over their nation’s cultural icons (Steiner, 2013: 32-33). In addition, élite Kyrgyz social entrepreneurs with political incentives independent of the State also tend to mobilize popular opposition against Chinese entities, contributing further to the occasional violent disputes between the Kyrgyz people and the Chinese *xinyimin* (*ibid.*: 28-29, 33-35):

- Assassination of the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek in the summer of 2002 and a fatal attack on a Chinese bus in March 2003 that left 17 dead – the blame of both of these incidents were placed by the Chinese government on the alleged Uyghur terrorist organization, East Turkestan Liberation Front (ETLF).

- Violent attacks against Uyghur and Dungan neighborhoods, including the abovementioned almost anti-Dungan progrom in Iskra in February 2006, and the attack (including gun attack) on Dungans and Uyghurs in Tokmok during the political protests of April 2010.
- Numerous attacks against Chinese nationals and commercial centers in Bishkek during Kyrgyzstan's political turmoil in the summer of 2010, particularly in the core Chinese areas surrounding Guoying and Tataan plazas. The targets are mostly Han Chinese, but at least one Uyghur restaurant was also attacked, and one Uyghur resident was killed in the disturbance.
- The killing of five Kyrgyz border guards by a colleague in August 2012 led to initial media suspicions of a direct Chinese attack.
- Hostage-taking in Osh Province of locals by drunken Chinese labourers in January 2013.

In the worst among the above incidents, while the Iskra village administration has been blamed by the Dungans for allegedly taking side with the ethnic Kyrgyz and participating in the violence against the Dungans in February 2006, the Kyrgyz government attributed the clashes to three major factors – economic malaise, social problems and interethnic misunderstanding. These severe clashes are particularly alarming given the fact that the two ethnic communities have been living peacefully with each other all along. However, tensions have been accumulating in recent years. Apparently, the Dungans have not been spared in the general rising interethnic tensions that afflicted the Central Asian republics amidst the political and socioeconomic upheavals following the their independence from Soviet Union that collapsed in 1990.

4. Flight from *Zhongyuan*¹: Historical Geography of Ethnicity of a Forgotten People

Referred to by historians as the largest Overseas² Chinese migrant community and the largest overseas Shaanxi(-Gansu) migrant community³, the 100,000-120,000 Dungans also represent the largest Chinese Muslim community outside China, with 50,000 found in Kazakhstan (36,000 persons in the 1999 census, in particular in the Dzhambul region, and in smaller numbers in Almaty, Akmolinsk, Karaganda, Aktiubinsk and West-Kazakhstan)⁴, 60,000 in Kyrgyzstan (60,000 persons according to 2008 statistics, 51,000 persons at the 1999 census, where they constitute the country's fourth largest nationality)⁵ and a much smaller number in Uzbekistan⁶. In Kyrgyzstan, there are 12000 to 13000 Dungans in Sokuluk (*Saohulu*, 騷葫蘆; about 30 km west of Bishkek) including the adjacent Aleksandrovska (Александровка), 5000-10000 in Milianfan (米糧坊, or Miliangchuan) (about 60 km west of Tokmok and 60 km northeast of Bishkek), about 3300 in Bishkek, 2800 in Yrdyk (*Erdaogou*, 二道溝), 1500 in Ivanovka and 800-2500 in Osh (*Aoshe*, 敖什). In Kazakhstan, there are 7000-12000 Dungans in Masanchi/Masanchin (Масанч/Масанчин, 馬三青; 8 km north of Kyrgyzstan's Tokmok) which before 1965 was called Karakunuz (Каракунуз, Каракөнуз, meaning the breeding place of black beetles), 9000-12000 in Sortobe (Сортоб/Шортюб, *Xinqu*, 新渠; a few km downstream from Tokmok and south of Masanchi/Karakunuz) and 3000-5000 in Zhalpak-tobe (Джалпак).⁷

It would not be inappropriate to refer to the Dungan Chinese as a "forgotten people", for despite the fact that, as mentioned above, they constitute the largest Chinese community outside People's Republic of China and Taiwan, there was, for instance, no record of their existence in the authoritative *Encyclopedia of Chinese Overseas* published in Singapore in 1998.

Other than the traditionally Dungan villages, many Dungans also live in the nearby cities, such as Bishkek, Tokmok (Токмок, Russian “Tokmak” (Токмак)), Karakol. Masanchin, known to Dungans traditionally as Ingpan (*Yingpan*, 營盤 – Dungan “Йинпан” or Russian “Иньпан”), however, has a particular significance, being the heartland of the Tungan people and their earliest settlement in Central Asia. Karakunuz was renamed in 1965 Masanchi or Masanchin, after Magazi Masanchi or Masanchin (馬三青), a prominent Dungan during the Communist Revolution and a Soviet Kazakhstan statesman. Magazi Masanchi had great contribution to the building of the Soviet regime in Central Asia and founded the School of Dungan Culture in Almaty in the 1930s. He was killed in 1936 in the Stalin’s purge. The Masanchin village’s traditional Dungan name Йинпан (Ingpan) is a Chinese military term meaning “a camp” or “an encampment”. The military flavour of the name indeed captures well the background of historical geography of the Dungan ethnicity in Central Asia.

The etymology of the name “Dungan” (or “Tungan”) remains uncertain. The Dungans actually continue to refer to themselves, as in China, as the Hui people (*huizu*, 回族 – Dungan “хуэйзү” [*хуейdzü*]), while their Turkic- and Tajik-speaking neighbours in Xinjiang (新疆) and the Central Asian states and the Russians refer to them as the Dungans – Russian plural дунгане (*dungane*), singular дунганин (*dunganin*), probably derived from Turkic *dōñān* (“one who turns”), similar in meaning to the Chinese 回 (*hui*). Some scholar thought that it could have meant Eastern Gansu province from which many of the Dungans’ forefathers came, despite the fact that the character “gan” in the Dungans’ Chinese ethnic name *Donggan* (東干) is different from that in the name of Gansu (甘肅) province. Others attributed the name to Turkic *Turup Qalghan*, meaning “people who have settled down”, or Chinese *dong’an* (東岸, “east bank”, referring to the east bank of the

Yellow River where these people originally came from), or “Tongguan” (潼關, the place and nearby area in today’s Shaanxi province where some of these people came from), or even “Dunhuang” (敦煌, which is situated on the these people’s route of migration into Czarist Russia). In the past the Dungans used to call themselves *tsun-ianziñ* (*zhongyuanren*, 中原人, literally “people of/from zhongyuan” – “zhongyuan”, literally “Middle Land”, is a common Chinese expression in the old days referring to China) (Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 46-47).

According to Liu (2004)’s statistics, the pattern of distribution of the Dungans in Central Asia is similar to that of the Hui Muslims in China – the overall scattering of small concentrations. They are in general scattered among the rural and urban areas of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, in particular their respective capital cities of Almaty, Bishkek and Tashkent (Tashkent). However, whether in the urban or rural areas, the Dungans tend to live closely together in compact communities. The 120000 Dungans in the three Central Asian states are living on/in about 30 farms or urban compact communities. The distances between Dungan communities range from just 2 km (e.g. from Kazakhstan’s Sortobe to Kyrgyzstan’s Tokmok) to thousands of kilometres (e.g. from Kazakhstan’s Almaty to Uzbekistan’s Tashkent (Liu, 2004: 14). The largest number of Dungan farming communities are in Kyrgyzstan; Kazakhstan has a smaller number but with large areas and number of people. Eighty per cent of the Dungans mainly live on the plains on the banks of the Chui River (or “Chuy”, “Chu” or “Shu”; Kazakh “Шы”, Kyrgyz “Чүй”, Russian “Чу”) that forms a natural border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, with the majority on the 200 km long, 80 km wide fertile plain of the Chui River around the capital Bishkek of the otherwise mountainous Kyrgyzstan. From Masanchin/Ingpan, the first Dungan farming community, in the centre of the Alatau mountain ranges (Kazakh “Алатау”, Kyrgyz “Ала-Тоо”,

Russian “Ала-тау”) of the Tianshan, crossing the Chui River about 9 km away is the city of Tokmok, and from around Tokmok the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and to Sokuluk in the south, Dungans are distributed among the 20 or so farms, towns and cities on the plain all within an area of 100 km from east to west, 50 km from north to south (*ibid.*).

There are four phases in the history of the Dungan Chinese migration to Central Asia, reflecting closely the sociopolitical development of China.

The first phase of the Dungan Chinese migration was related to China’s northwestern Muslim rebellion against the imperial Ch’ing court during the period 1862-1877. Following the defeat of the Yakub-Beg state in 1877, thousands of people were forced to escape to Tsarist Central Asia. From late November 1877, defeated rebels retreated in three batches into Russian territory. The first batch consisted of a few thousand people from Gansu Province’s Didaozhou (狄道州), led by Ahong (阿訇, Imam) Ma Yusu or Ma Yuan (馬鬱素夫/馬元, also known as 狄道老人/阿爺老人, i.e. “The Didao Old Man”). The group entered Russian territory by crossing the Tianshan (*tian* “heaven”, *shan* “mountain”) at the northwest of Aksu (in Xinjiang). Many died from the extreme cold while crossing Tianshan, the surviving 1116 people finally settled in late 1877 and the spring of 1878 in the village of Yrдык (Ырдык/*Erdaogou*, 二道溝, some 15 km southwest from Karakol in Eastern Kyrgyzstan) (Liu, 2004: 15). The second batch, over 10000 fighters and their family members from Shaanxi Province, led by the legendary Mohammad Ayub Bai Yanhu/Bo Yanhu (白彥虎), first retreated to Kashgar in Southern Xinjiang and crossed the Tianshan, and reached the Russian territory on 6th December 1877, and then Tokmok (in northwestern Kyrgyzstan) on 27th December 1877, finally settled in the village of Karakunuz (later Masanchin) in Kazakhstan, about 8 km north from Tokmok. Only 3314 out of the original 10000 survived the

Tianshan ordeal on arrival (*ibid.*). The third batch consisted of those from Qinghai (Ts'inghai, 青海) and Xinjiang's Turfan, led by Ma Daren (馬大人 / 馬大老爺, "The Great Master Ma"), who moved southward from Kashgar to Central Asia in early December 1877 and after a few months' trekking reached Osh in February 1878 with a number of 1779 people. Some of them who were from Qinghai continued to move on to Zhambyl in Kazakhstan, while those who remained in Osh were later assimilated by the Uzbeks (*ibid.*).

"At the end of 1877 [...]", as recorded in the report of a Russian official, "around 12,000 Kashgaris and Dungans immigrated to our territories. Approximately 7,000 of them went to Semirechie region whereas the others went through Osh to the Fergana Valley." (Zhaparov, 2008: 80)⁸ Upon arrival, the Czarist government gave these refugees 5000 hectares of land and 10-year exemption from tax.⁹ Beginning from Ingpan (later Masanchin), Dungan farming villages gradually proliferated to the surrounding areas.

The second phase of the Dungan Chinese migration was related to the Treaty of Saint Petersburg signed in February 1881, whose terms required the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the Upper Ili Basin (the Kulja area). With the return of Ili, which was annexed by Czarist Russia on 4th July 1871, to China in March 1882 and the leaving of the Russian troops, the Hui in Ili were in fear of vengeance by the Ch'ing army due to their sympathy for the 1862-1877 anti-Ch'ing northeastern Muslim rebellion (Liu, 2004: 16). Ili's Hui merchant Ma Cong (馬聰) led six others on 3rd July 1881 to explore places including Verny (Almaty was called Verny before 1921, and Alma-Ata from 1921 to 1992), Zhambil and Bishkek, and finally selected the fertile Sokuluk by the Chui River, which was sparsely populated. Many hence moved to Sokuluk. Ili was returned to China on 18th March 1882. According to Russian customs record, on 20th March 1882 there was an exodus of

486 families (comprising 2457 people) from Ili, with 916 carriage of goods and furniture (*ibid.*). Many of the migrants settled in Almaty, Panfilov (Панфилов), Khorgas/Khorgos and Sokuluk. Following the departure of these wealthy residents, another group of Hui – mostly poor families – also migrated in the same direction in the spring of the following year. However, unlike the richer migrants in the previous year, this batch of 5000 people who migrated on foot – nick-named by the earlier migrants as *diaowazi* (掉娃子, i.e. the “left-behind kids”) – settled mostly in Panfilov and Huoerguosi, only about 80 km from China’s border (*ibid.*). According to the Russian statistics, a total of 4,682 Hui Chinese moved to the Russian Empire under the Treaty of Saint Petersburg. With these waves of migration, there were about a total of 15000 Dungan Chinese migrants in Russian territory by the year 1883.

The third phase of Dungan Chinese migration occurred during the period 1957-1962, and the migrants were Muslims from Xinjiang. A large number of Kazakhs, Uighurs and Hui Chinese Muslims crossed the border into Russian territory in early May 1962 and settled in the village of Sortobe and the town of Ivanovka between Tokmok and Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. These new migrants from China were called “No. 8” by the local Dungans, probably following the contingent number of the Chinese border troop there at that time (*ibid.*).

We could add a fourth phase of migrants – these are the familiar new migrants (*xinyimin*) after China implemented the “Reform and Open” policy, especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.

While the present Dungan people are the third (ageing) or fourth generations of descendants of their forefathers who migrated from Shaan-Gan (China’s provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu) over a century ago, they have maintained their Chinese ethnic identity both through the

fiercely guarded traditions and way of life, including the Shaanxi dialect of the Chinese language uniquely written phonetically in the Cyrillic alphabet, and a strong sense of being the descendants of a persecuted people, exiled in a foreign land, especially among the third generation who are today in their seventies or eighties. Unlike Chinese in Southeast Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas who are in the main descendants of economic migrants from the eastern coastal region of China, the Dungans in Central Asia are mostly descendants of political/war refugees from northwestern China escaping the genocidal troops of the imperial Ch'ing dynasty government.

The term “genocidal” is not an exaggeration. Close to a million Hui Chinese Muslims were slaughtered in Shaanxi alone and 800 mosques burnt when in November 1869 Ayub Bai Yanhu led his Shaanxi Muslim rebels retreating to Jingjibao (金積堡, in today's Ningxia, 寧夏) under the attack of the Ch'ing troop led by Zuo Zongtang (Tso Tsung-t'ang, 左宗棠) who had just suppressed the (Christian) Taiping (太平天國) rebellion (Liu, 2004: 24). When Jingjibao fell in November 1870, more than 170 members of the various generations of the family of Ma Hualong (馬化龍), the Muslim leader who surrendered, were executed. Ma Hualong was tortured and killed in 1872, his heart dug out, his head paraded and burnt. A total of 1800 people were mass slaughtered, and it was alleged that during the gruesome torture of Ma Hualong and his people, seven layers of carpets were used to avoid the “rebel blood” from getting into the ground and “breeding rebel seed” (*ibid.*: 25). When Zuo Zongtang's troops took Suzhou (肅州, in today's Gansu), up to about 10000 Hui Muslims were slaughtered, including the old, the women and the children. Zuo's military crime against humanity was so gruesome that it was even chided by the Ch'ing court's civilian officers (*ibid.*). The imperial (Manchu) Ch'ing government was not known to be soft-hearted towards rebels. Between 1648 and 1878, around twelve

million Hui and Han Chinese were killed in ten unsuccessful uprisings, and the Ch'ing court's harsh suppression of these revolts was nothing less than genocidal, including the mass slaughtering of several million Hui Muslims in the "Hui-cleansing" (*xi hui*, 洗回) policy that had been long advocated by officials in the Ch'ing government. Before the war against the rebels, there was a total population of about 13 million people in Shaanxi province, at least 1,750,000 of whom were Hui Muslims, but the province's population dropped to just 7 million after the war. There was a mass exodus from Xi'an (西安), the capital of Shaanxi province, which was the holy city of the Hui Muslims before the revolt, and Shaanxi province's once-flourishing Hui Muslim population suffered a decline of 93 per cent. The Ch'ing court's Hui-cleansing campaigns, hence, were quite a success. However, to be fair to the Ch'ing government, while not denying the gruesome war atrocities committed against the Muslim civilians, the Ch'ing armies only massacred the Muslims in areas that had rebelled, and spared Muslims in areas which took no part in the uprisings. Many Hui Muslim generals who helped the Ch'ing court to defeat the Muslim rebels were rewarded and their followers were spared from the genocide. General Zuo Zongtang, who was a Han Chinese, even relocated the Han people from the Hezhou (河州) suburbs to reward the Muslims there who surrendered and were granted amnesty and allowed to live as long as they stayed outside the city. Muslims in eastern and southern China did not revolt and hence were not affected by the rebellion and experienced no genocide. In fact, in Henan (河南) province which was adjacent to Shaanxi, Muslim villages were said to be totally unaffected by the Shaanxi rebellion.

5. Dungans' Challenges in the Transition Economies

Today's Dungan people in Sortobe work mainly as traders (50 per cent) and farmers (30 per cent), followed by government employees (10 per cent) and others (10 per cent, mainly in companies and as entrepreneurs), according to information conveyed by Husei Daurov Shimarovich (達吾勞夫·胡賽·西瑪勞維赤) or An Husei (安胡賽), the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan (and a member of the People's Committee of Kazakhstan and the chairman of the Dungan Collective Farm of the Zhambyl Oblast), over the telephone (10th February 2011)¹⁰. (Like all Dungans, he has a Russified surname Shimarovich (西瑪勞維赤) when he is outside the Dungan villages, as well as a Chinese surname An (安) known among the Dungan people.¹¹ Similarly, Dungans speak Russian outside the Dungan villages, but revert to the Dungan (Shaan-Gan) Chinese tongue when they return to the Dungan villages (Li, 2008).) Sortobe – known to the Dungans as *Xinqu* – has 19000 people; 99 per cent of them are Dungans, and the rest are Russians and Uyghurs, but these other ethnic groups can also speak the Dungan language. According to Husei Daurov, 99 per cent of the population has education up to the secondary-school level, but today only 30 per cent have university education, in contrast to 60 per cent during the Soviet times. The latter fact that An conveyed is a reflection of the new challenges faced by the Dungans in the new-born Central Asian states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The February 2010 Dungan-Kyrgyz ethnic clash in Iskra was the climax to which such new unease has risen since the leaving of the Russian overlord and the upsurge of the local Kyrgyz/Kazakh/Uzbek nationalisms from the peripheral in former Soviet Union to the mainstream in these new-born Central Asian republics after the dissolution of USSR. The rise of Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek nationalism since Kazakhstan's, Kyrgyzstan's and Uzbekistan's

independence in 1991, with alarming war cries like “Kazakhstan belongs to the Kazakhs” and “Kyrgyzstan is for the Kyrgyz”, and the leaving of many Russian (e.g., over 2 million Russians have moved to Russia, reducing Kazakhstan’s population from 17 million to 15 million) and the Kazakh-, Kyrgyz- and Uzbek-ization of the civil service in these three states where Dungans domicile do reflect the unmistakable objective ethnic situation these countries are undergoing. Before the unprecedented violent ethnic clash with the Kyrgyz in February 2006, the Dungans, partly due to their small number, usually stay out of such conflicts, such as the large-scale interethnic violence between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1991 which resulted in tremendous loss of lives.

Just like other communities of the Chinese diaspora worldwide, the Dungans are economically successful – and doing better economically in general than the local dominant ethnic group (Kyrgyz/Kazakhs/Uzbeks) but they are usually politically inactive, again, partly due to their small number. The mounting challenges the Dungans are facing right now in the post-Soviet Union era is most apparently reflected in the negative impact on education, as shown above by the figures conveyed by Husei Daurov about the Dungans in Sortobe. During the Soviet era, before the present rise of local ethnic nationalism, university education was encouraged and paid by the government, hence the number of Dungan university students was substantial and the Dungans as a whole enjoyed high education standards. In fact, it is truly remarkable that while the early political and war refugees escaping through Tianshan into Central Asia more than a century ago were mostly poor illiterate peasants, their descendants would soon boast of a rich body of poets, scholars, academics, teachers, medical doctors and other professionals. However, with the new-found independence of these Central Asian states and the accompanying economic and fiscal problems, the new governments no

longer pay for university education, and that has led to an apparent decline in the university enrolment of Dungans. Besides that, the Dungans are also facing new economic challenges because their wealth which depended formerly on high income from the sales of their vegetables and other crops is now badly hit by these new countries' loss of the important Russian demand, leading to shortage of demand and low prices (Liu, 2004: 141). While there had been many Dungans working in the government departments and universities of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan during the Soviet era, this is no longer so today since the independence of these countries. In fact, many Dungan university graduates today are forced to become vegetable farmers or go into business. For example, in Kyrgyzstan in 2002, the monthly salary of a university professor is merely US\$25, and the researchers in the renowned Institute of Dungan Studies of the Kyrgyzstan National Science Academy have a monthly salary of only about US\$15, hence they are forced to supplement their incomes by working also as hawkers in the streets (*ibid.*). Some Dungan professionals in fact lost their jobs overnight at the dissolution of the Soviet Union and turned into hawkers. Take the case of a prominent descendant of Mohammad Ayub Bai Yanhu, the legendary leader of the 1877 "Long March" through Tianshan – Abdullah Ayub Bai Yanhu, now in Naryn (Нарын, 納戎, in eastern Kyrgyzstan, close to the Chinese border), the first resting place of Mohammad Ayub Bai Yanhu and his followers when they crossed Tianshan in December 1877. Originally a professional with university degree, now he is a restaurant owner (*ibid.*: 142). This is a common phenomenon today.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has had adverse impact on the cultural domain too. During the Soviet times, publication of Dungan newspapers and school textbooks were the responsibility of the government. No longer now. Dungan presses virtually died overnight at

the disintegration of the USSR. The first Dungan newspaper, the *Dongfang Huoxing Bao* “Eastern Fire Seeds” (東方火星報) was born in 1932, the year the Dungan script switched from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet, which later was further converted into the Cyrillic in 1954 (Liu, 2004: 56). Due to the political environment, the paper was renamed *Şiŋyöti tş’i* (十月的旗, in Russian *Znamia Oktjabria*, i.e. “October Banner”). In 1980, it was rename again as the *Sulian Huimin Bao*, i.e. “Soviet Union Huimin Press” (蘇聯回民報; *huimin* means “the Hui people”, i.e. Muslims). Other than a break during the Second World War, the Dungan newspapers had never stop publishing, and the operating expenses of the newspapers and the newspaper publishers were paid for and supported by the Soviet government. With Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan attaining independence upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Dungan Association of Kyrgyzstan took up the responsibility of publishing the “Huimin Press”, and Dungan Association of Kazakhstan took up the publication of the “Huizu Press” (*huizu* means “the Hui race”) or “Shaanxi Huizu Press” (陝西回族報). However, now without government sponsorship, the papers are sometimes forced to stop publishing due to problems with operating expenses (*ibid.*). The “Huizu Press” of Kazakhstan now only publishes an issue every three months. Besides, the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan also finances the publication of new Dungan-language textbooks and literature and sends them to the neighboring republics, though interestingly, according to Laruelle and Peyrouse (2009: 107), the relationship between the Dungan associations in the different Central Asian republics is relatively bad, in particular between those of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Laruelle and Peyrouse further note the difficulties facing these associations within the sociopolitical milieu of the post-Soviet republics:

The Dungans have an association in each of the four Central Asian republics (Turkmenistan excepted), but they are often limited to the organization of folkloric activities (songs, dance, cuisine) and, in Almaty and Bishkek, to the editing of association newspapers [...]. Like all the other minorities, the Dungans are dependent on their environment: in Uzbekistan, they are forbidden from engaging in political activities whereas in Kyrgyzstan, many associations competed against one another prior to unification in 2008, but this multiplicity impeded the Dungans from organizing and seeking out private sponsors.

(ibid.)

6. Preservation of Chinese Culture and Creation of New Ethnic Identity

While having been living for more than a century scattering around Central Asia which is inhabited by a great many ethnic groups, the Dungans' cultural memory of their Chinese homeland has not bedimmed with the passage of time. Today, over 90 per cent of the Dungans still speak the Shaanxi and Gansu regionalects of China and follow closely their forefathers' traditional way of life, whether in dietetic habits, dressing or housing, of the Hui Muslim region of northwest China.

From the original 10941 people who survived the exodus through Tianshan to move into Czarist Russia in 1877, 1878 and 1879, the Dungan Chinese Muslim population in Central Asia has today increased nine-fold over the hundred years. As the descendants of early migrants from Shaanxi and Gansu who escaped persecution and genocide at home and who were survivals of the ordeal through Tianshan (only about 30 per cent of those who set out on this "Long March" eventually survived; the rest died under the swords of the pursuing Ch'ing army, or from cold

and hunger on the “Heavenly Mountains”), the Dungan Chinese have long been noted for their fierceness in preserving the Chinese culture within their diasporic communities. Besides, the Dungans also retain the use of all traditional Chinese musical instruments like *erhu* (二胡), *banhu* (板胡), *di* (笛), *sheng* (笙) etc. and traditional Chinese medicine and medical practices, as well the use of *nongli* (農曆, the Chinese lunar calendar) in farming activities (Zhi, 2004). Besides their preservation of the Shaan-Gan regionalect (the so-called Dungan language written not in Chinese characters but in a phonetic script) and the publication of the Dungan language newspapers and the use of the Dungan language textbooks from primary school to secondary school, the preservation of the Chinese culture is also reflected in women’s attire and headgears that are Ch’ing dynasty in origin which no longer survive in the Chinese communities elsewhere, and Ch’ing-era bride and bridegroom costumes in marriage ceremonies. Arranged marriage (through parents and matchmakers) still survives in today’s Dungan communities, especially rural.

Even everyday vocabulary reflects the archaic Ch’ing-dynasty influence, e.g. calling a premier or president *huangshang* or *huangdi* (皇上 / 皇帝, i.e. “emperor”), government department *yamen* (衙門), policeman *yayi* (衙役, i.e. “*yamen* runner”), complaining or petitioning *shang zhuangzi* (上狀子), government officer *daren* (大人, i.e. “lord”), shopkeeper *zhangguide* (掌櫃的), writer/poet *xiejia* (寫家), airplane *fengchuan* (風船, i.e. “wind-ship”) or *tiefengzheng* (鐵風箏, i.e. “iron kite”), dowry *peifang* (陪房), child *wa* (娃), girl *nüwa* (女娃), village cadre *bangban* (幫辦), matches *yanghuo* (洋火, i.e. “Western fire”), and people coming from China *qingguoren* (清國人, i.e. “people from the Ch’ing Empire”). In short, the Dungans’ Chinese language has remained the late-Ch’ing version. Yusuf Liu in his elegiac poetic travelogue *Bei yue Tianshan* [sad exodus over the Heavenly Mountains]

(2004) told of hearing Shaanxi children's rhymes, which are now mostly lost in Shaanxi, still being sung in the Dungan villages – a remarkable preservation of traditions of their forefathers who escaped to Central Asia more than a century ago, as described by Svetlana Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer (1981) as the most valuable aspect of Dungan conservatism. “The most valuable aspect of the conservatism of both groups”, said Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer (1981: 49), “lies in the fact that they have preserved many songs, riddles, legends, stories, ceremonies and customs brought from China one hundred years ago.” The two groups Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer referred to are the Shensi (Shaanxi) Dungans and the Kansu (Gansu) Dungans. Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer observed that the more conservative of the two were the Shaanxi Dungans whose women still observed the custom of foot-binding as recently as 1948 and who dislike their daughters marrying Kazakhs or Kyrgyz (even though all are Muslims) or even the Gansu Dungans who often live just nearby (Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 49) Hence, the Dungans have often been seen as the most conservative in terms of interethnic integration. Most Dungans, in general, still value intra-Dungan marriages.

Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, while noting the remarkable conservatism of the Dungans, also described that in some way they could be the most progressive among the Chinese communities in terms of language. Firstly, while all the past attempts at alphabetizing the Chinese writing system, including Mao Zedong (毛澤東)'s, had failed, the Dungans have succeeded. Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer attributed this to several crucial factors:

While the Chinese are very attached to their characters, the Dungans, with the exception of the mullahs, arrived in Russian territory one hundred years ago as illiterate peasants. Consequently for them there

was no emotional trauma involved in changing their way of writing and abandoning the characters that mean so much to most Chinese [...] The reasons why the Dungans could survive without characters is because they knew no characters in the first place; because they speak only two dialects which are similar to each other; and because they live among people who are all familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet.

(Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 50)

Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer also gave a second reason why she considered the Dungans linguistically progressive: while all other varieties of the Chinese language have many classifiers, the Dungans are gradually abolishing most of the classifiers and are nowadays using only one general classifier *ki* (*ge*, 个) at least in speech. If it has been a fact that many Chinese speakers (including the speakers of the regionalects) frequently in informal speech unconsciously replacing the correct classifiers with *ge*, then the Dungans are indeed progressive in gradually phasing out all classifiers but one far ahead of the Chinese speakers elsewhere.

In fact, the Dungans also embody a microcosm of the Hui people of China. In terms of geographical origin, their forefathers came from mainly Shaanxi and Gansu, but also Qinghai and Xinjiang of China; in sectarian terms, the Dungans comprise Muslims of the Jahriyya (哲赫忍耶), Qadim (*Gedimu*, 格迪目) and Ikhwan (伊赫瓦尼) sects; in terms of language, besides the Shaanxi and Gansu regionalects, Dungans also speak the Qinghai and Hezhou regionalects of China. The majority of the Dungans in Yrdyk belong to the Jahriyya sect – one of the many sects of China's Hui which also include Qadim, Khufiyya (虎夫耶), Ikhwan, etc. Like the Khufiyya, the Jahriyya is a branch of the Naqshbandiyya, the largest Sufi brotherhood in Central Asia. The Jahriyya is one of the four main groups of *menhuan* (門宦), which also include the

Kubrawiyya, the Khufiyya and the Qadariyya. *Menhuan* is the Sufi order of the Hui people. For instance, there are three main Khufiyya *menhuan* evolved in Ningxia since the end of the Ch'ing dynasty (Yeoh, 2006a: 9-10) – the Xianmen (鮮門), the Tonggui (通貴) and the Hongmen *menhuan* (洪門門宦) whose founder Hong Hairu (洪海儒) – also known as Hong Shoulin (洪壽林) – was said to have very close personal relationship with the Red Army (Sun, 2006: 202). In a way, the Dungan exodus can also be seen as an epitome of the Chinese migration overseas from the late 19th Century to early 20th Century, and the Dungans in Central Asia are but a microcosm of the Hui of China. In fact, the early Hui who escaped from China in 1877 seemed to have fled in batches according to provincial origin and sect. In terms of provincial origin (*jiguan*, 籍貫), they were almost all from Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Xinjiang. In terms of language, they spoke the Chinese regionalects common to China's Hui, i.e. the local dialects of Shaanxi, Qinghai, Hezhou and Gansu. The Dungans' food and cuisine are basically identical to those of the Hui people in northwestern China, and their Islamic sects include all sects of China's Hui. Cultural memory is also, e.g., reflected in the building of the mosques. For instance, the "Shaanxi Grand Mosque" in Masanchi has its door facing east. According to Liuwa Baiyanhu (*liuwa*, 六娃, means "the sixth child"; usually the full name of the grandfather was turned into a Dungan surname by the third generation reflecting the process of Russification, and this surname might disappear completely and be replaced by a Russian surname by the fourth generation¹²), the grandson of Bai Yanhu, who is a Qadim, "When we pray we face Mecca, while the door of the mosque faces our old hometown in China." (Liu, 2004: 49).

Interestingly, the Dungans' pattern of settlement and domicile is characterized by provincial origin and sect. The Dungans in Kazakhstan's Masanchi (Ingpan) and Sotorbe (*Xinqu*) are of Shaanxi

origin, those in Kyrgyzstan's Sokuluk are mainly of Gansu origin, those in Kazakhstan's Zhambyl are mainly from Qinghai, and those in Kazakhstan's Zhalkpak-tobe are mainly from Xinjiang. In 1877, when Ayub Bai Yanhu and his followers camped, at the foot of the Alatau ranges, about 9 km from Tokmok, the Russian government allocated 58000 rubles for them to build houses (Liu, 2004: 49). During the distribution of land, money and property, internal contradictions rose to the surface. The puzzled Kazakh officials in charge at that time divided these Chinese migrants into the pro-Bai Yanhu *Ashi* and the anti-Bai Yanhu *Aman* (meaning "bad" in the Kazakh language). The Dungans there, including those in Masanchi (Ingpan) and the neighbouring areas, have since consisted of the two factions of "Ashi" and "Aman" which also took on religious sectarian flavour – the "Aman" being Ikhwan and the "Ashi" being Qadim (*ibid.*)

Sortobe (*Xinqu*) is one of the five largest settlements of the Dungans – the other four being Masanchin (Ingpan), Zhalkpak-tobe, Miliangchuan and Sokuluk (including the adjacent Aleksandrovka). The over ten thousand people of Sortobe are mostly descendants of migrants, hence the lingua franca there is the Shaanxi regionalect. Sortobe is the result of the branching out of the first major Dungan settlement, Ingpan, after the latter had grown too crowded. Later, more and more Dungan farms were born, branching out from Sortobe. Among them, two became new Dungan farms only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in the exodus of their main population who were German descendants, their houses and land being then bought up by the Dungans. The Dungans in Sortobe are almost all vegetable farmers and vegetable vendors, though there are businessmen among them too. Some have moved to farm vegetables in Belarus, Ukraine, Moscow and Siberia, allegedly being attracted by high vegetable prices and hence good income there. There are also in Sortobe Sino-Kazakhs, Sino-

Kyrgyz and Sino-Uzbeks who can still speak fluent Shaanxi regionalect (*ibid.*: 9), who are known as *erzhuanzi* (二轉子, i.e. those with the mixed blood of two ethnicities) and *sanzhuanzi* (三轉子, i.e. those with the mixed blood of three ethnicities) – terms which are usually considered as somehow impolite or derogatory.

Living in compact communities is part of the legacy of the first generation of these political and war refugees from northwestern China. As related by Bai Liuwa, Mohammad Ayub Bai Yanhu's grandson living in Masanchin (Ingpan), there had been unwillingness among these refugees of not settling in the cities but instead in the desolate Karakunuz (the former name of Masanchin, meaning “breeding place of black beetles” in the Kyrgyz language). His grandfather then convinced them that this was a good place to settle because, firstly, the terrain would facilitate their escape in case the Ch'ing army pursued across the border, and secondly, being such a huge number of refugees, conflicts would be unavoidable in the long term if they were to stay together with the local people; hence, staying apart from the locals was considered a better option (*ibid.*: 31).

According to Heiyazi Lan'ahong (黑牙子·藍阿訇), an intellectual in Masanchin, Ingpan (i.e. Masanchin) was much higher in terrain than Tokmok. Watching out from Ingpan to the direction of Tokmok, which is on the ancient Silk Road that linked China in the East and Uzbekistan in the west, there was nowhere for the enemy to hide. For the refugee migrants led by Bai Yanhu, they were ready to escape into the mountains at the back of Ingpan on the first sign of attack. Leaving Tokmok to camp at Ingpan made strategic sense, and in fact, “Ingpan” meant an army camp – it was a compact community of the generation of comrades who had fought together for 17 years before fleeing the Ch'ing Empire to continue to stay closely together and take care of each other (*ibid.*). The plain, pastoral life of the Dungans is also reflected in their

impressive hospitality to guests especially those from their ancestral homeland of Shaanxi-Gansu, a unique characteristic that has been repeatedly pointed by visitors to their villages, for instance, as highlighted in Yusuf Liu's sentimental lyrical travelogue, *Bei yue Tianshan* [sad exodus over the Heavenly Mountains] (2004). The same heartwarming hospitality was also vividly recorded by Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer who visited the Dungans twenty years earlier: "During my stay in Frunze, Alma-Ata and the kolkhozes, I was treated with friendliness and overwhelming hospitality [and the Dungans] went out of their way to make my stay as fruitful and interesting as possible [...]" (Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 51).

While not using Chinese characters but the Cyrillic alphabet, the Dungan newspaper "Eastern Fire Seeds" (東方火星) can be considered one of the earliest Chinese newspapers published by the Overseas Chinese.

The Dungan language is particularly unique in the fact that it is the only variety of the Chinese language which is not written in Chinese characters. The drastic break with the Overseas Chinese in other parts of the world in writing system is incidental. The 50000 speakers of the Dungan language in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan actually call their language "Хуэйзү йүян" [*hwěitsu jyjan*] (*huizu yuyan*, 回族語言) (or Romanized *Huejzw jyian*; in Russian "дунганский язык" / *dunganskij jazyk*) which means "language of the Hui". There are two, mutually intelligible, varieties of the Dungan language – the Gansu regionalect with three tones (to be more exact, three tones in the final position in phonetic words and four tones in the nonfinal position) which serves as the standard, official, textbook form of the Dungan language, and the other which is the Shaanxi regionalect with four tones. However, standard Dungan's three tones are not indicated in writing, except in dictionaries and children's primers, where

the second and third tones are marked by the Cyrillics ъ and ь respectively (e.g. ма, маъ, маь) or alternatively by adding I, II and III (e.g. ма I, ма II, ма III). Originally using a version of the Arabic alphabet called “Xiao’erjing” (小兒經) and then a writing system composed of 35 Arabic letters introduced by Muslim students in Tashkent in 1927 before the Soviet Union banned all Arabic scripts in the late 1920s, it switched to the Latin alphabet in 1928 after that year’s Convention on Turkic Studies in Baku, which spearheaded the Latinization campaign in the Turkic world, produced a Latinized alphabet of 31 letters for the Dungan language – the writing system in which Yasir Shiwaza (Я.Шиваза/*Iasyr Shivaza*, 葉塞·十娃子) (1906-1988), founder of Dungan literature, published his first anthology of Dungan poems in 1931. Shiwaza/*Shivaza* is from Chinese *shiwazi* (十娃子), meaning “the tenth child” – reflecting a usual way of naming a child among the early Dungans. Then at a conference on 27th May 1953 in Frunze, Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic (or Kirghizia, later the independent Republic of Kyrgyzstan after 1991), a system of writing Dungan in a Cyrillic alphabet with 38 letters was devised and has since been in use from 1953 till today. The “Xiao’erjing” Arabic alphabet which remains in limited use today by some Hui communities in China is practically dead among the Dungans.

Long isolation from China, written in an alphabet instead of Chinese characters, and significant influence from Russian and the Turkic languages of their neighbours have led to the Dungan language taking on a distinctive identity of its own, though this archaic form of Shaanxi/Gansu regionalekt is today still mutually intelligible with the present Shaanxi and Gansu tongues of the two Chinese provinces. Soviet census statistics had revealed that the Dungans seemed to have maintained the use of their mother tongue much more successfully as compared with the other ethnic minorities in the Central Asian SSRs.

However, that may no longer be the case in the post-USSR era since 1991.

The Dungan language is very similar to China's *putonghua* (普通話, i.e. Standard Chinese Vernacular or "Mandarin"), being a variety of Zhongyuan Mandarin (中原官話 vis-à-vis Lan-Yin Mandarin, 蘭銀官話) spoken in the southern part of Gansu province and the western part of the Guanzhong (關中) valley in Shaanxi province. While basically mutually intelligible with today's Gansu or Shaanxi regionalects, like Bahasa Malaysia vis-à-vis Bahasa Indonesia or Urdu vis-à-vis Hindi, Dungan vocabulary contains many Arabic and Persian loanwords not present in modern Chinese, as well as, like being trapped in a time capsule due to the isolation, many archaic terms of the Ch'ing-dynasty era which are no longer in use in modern Chinese. On the other hand, the large number of political, scientific and other technical terms introduced during the 20th century, including neologisms and a huge number of earlier ones adopted from Japanese *kanji* (漢字) compounds, are unknown to the Dungan language (partly due to geopolitical isolation and partly to the orthographical barrier) which instead borrowed such related vocabulary from Russian, the language medium of political governance and higher education in the former USSR.

To use the term "time capsule" is not an exaggeration. Professor Wang Guojie (王國杰), a prominent scholar in China on Dungans, reported that in his first visit to an old Dungan in Uzbekistan in 1990, the old man, in full surprise, asked Wang, "*Ni shi cong Da Qing Guo lai de? ... Zuo Zongtang de ren hai zai bu?*" [Are you from the Ch'ing Empire? ... Are [the Ch'ing General] Zuo Zongtang's people still there?]¹³ Today's visitors to the Dungan villages sometimes still report the same question about Zuo Zongtang being posed to them. In fact, it is reported that in these villages culturally virtually trapped in the late-Ch'ing era, when children throw tantrums, sometimes the adults'

response to stop their crying is to warn them that Zuo Zongtang will come to kill them if they do not stop crying! (Li, 2008)

7. Dungans in the Local Environment: Identity, Relations and Interactions

While the Central Asian states are now facing the problem of sharp decline in birth rate, the Dungans' birth rate remains high. The second generation usually had about 7 to 15 children per family, partly due to the encouragement from the Soviet government. Among the farming families in Masanchi, Sotorbe and Sokuluk, many Dungan women were "hero mothers" who had given birth to more than 10 children. As observed in Vansvanova (2000) in the case of Kazakhstan, a Dungan rural family each still had about 5 or 6 children, though in the 1980s the number was 7 or 8. Vansvanova also noted that there were more than 300 "hero mother" in Masanchi and Sortobe. These refugee-migrants were originally peasants in Shaanxi and Gansu, hence the vast land in Central Asia had proven to be to their advantage. For instance in Masanchi, the first-generation migrants purchased some farming equipments with settlement subsidies from the local government as well as crafted some others for the planting of vegetables and wheat, and were out of poverty in just a few years. Sharing the common trait of Overseas Chinese elsewhere, these hardworking and persevering Dungans had managed to enjoy a relatively high standard of living during the Soviet times. While being of Shaan-Gan peasant origin, the Dungans were also good at business besides farming. It was reported that before the October Revolution, the prosperous "Chinatown" in Bishkek, Kirghizia, was lined with restaurants. In the campaign against the rich after the Revolution, these shrewd Dungan businessmen were chased out of the city and became successful farmers of Miliangchuan.

In farming, the Dungans have preserved the primordial traditions of peasantry till the today. In Kyrgyzstan and in fact throughout Central Asia, the Dungans are well recognized as hard-working peasants producing high-quality rice, fruits and vegetables. Originally being the people who introduced farming and vegetable-growing knowledge and practices into a Central Asia populated with nomads, Dungan's vegetables and other agricultural products practically dominate or even "monopolize" Central Asia's local food markets in Almaty and Biskek and elsewhere, giving rise to the local joke that if the Dungans refused to work, there would be no fresh vegetables found on any family's dining table.

Dungan (Shaan-Gan) cuisine is very well known in the Central Asian states where Dungans reside. According to Husei Daurov, the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan, in a 2004 interview, there were more than 30 Dungan restaurants in Kazakhstan's capital Astana and the business was very good.¹⁴ Astana is Kazakhstan's capital since 1997, after the government moved the capital from the country's largest city, Almaty.

During the hundred years of the Dungans' residence in Soviet Central Asia, Dungan names have undergone distinctive transformation under Russian influence, usually with a Russified Muslim first name (with the typical Russian name-suffixes) followed by the paternal last name (family name). A typical Dungan family name is often a combination of a Chinese surname (e.g. *Bai* as in "Bai Yanhu") and a distinctive noun (e.g. derived from ancestral calling, say, *Baizhangguide* and *Suo'ahong* whose ancestors could respectively be a shopkeeper and an imam). Some Dungans have kept the Shaanxi Hui tradition of nicknames, like *Heiyazi* (黑牙子, "black teeth"), *Wuwa* (五娃, "the fifth child"), *Liuwa* (六娃, "the sixth child"), etc. The second-generation and third-generation Dungans are very different from their first-

generation migrant forefathers. While the first-generation migrants were mostly illiterate peasants, the cultural level of the Dungans has risen since the second generation, during the Soviet times. According to the Soviet Union's 1976 population census, out of the 80000 Dungans there were 4 professors and 40 associate professors – the Dungans hence at that time represented the ethnic group with the highest education level among the 120 ethnic minorities of the Soviet Union.

Phenotypically, alternate-generation heredity is common among the Dungans, partly because of the huge casualty incurred during the exodus through the harsh Tianshan – e.g. among Bai Yanhu's followers, about three quarters or 27000 people were killed in the harsh climate on the snow mountains, only 3314 survived when they emerged on the other side of the mountains on 27th December 1877, days after they began the fateful trek through the 3800-meter high snow mountain in harsh winter – but partly also because there were among them less womenfolk many of whom were victims of footbinding at that time and were thus unable to scale the formidable mountain roads.¹⁵ Hence, with the approval of the Czarist government, many early Dungan migrants had married Russian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz women (Li, 2008).

The Dungans are good farmers. Due to the high prices of vegetables and fruits in the Central Asian region, and the short distance between the major Dungan villages such as Masanchi and Sortobe by the Chui River and the big cities like Bishkek and Almaty (just about 60 km and 268 km respectively), vegetable farming brought good income yearly for the Dungans. Hence, compared to their local Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek neighbours, the Dungans are comparatively rich, with an average of two private cars per family (Zhi, 2004). Hence, through farming and peasantry, Dungans are now among the wealthiest rural dwellers. Since 1994, through the effort and initiative of Husei Daurov, the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan, modern technology and

equipments (e.g. greenhouse) for the production of vegetables, especially mushroom, brick, biscuits, paint etc. have been imported on a large scale into the Dungan villages from China's Shaanxi province, a phenomenon that made the Dungan villages a sort of celebrity in Kazakhstan via newspaper and television reports and attracted the visits of Kazakhstan's Members of Parliament, Minister of Agriculture, Governor of Zhambyl Province, and gained Husei Daurov an audience with the president of Kazakhstan (Zhi, 2004). For all these achievements, the efforts of Husei Daurov has to be positively evaluated, as here is a man, in the words of Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse (2009: 109), who "has skilfully turned himself into the virtually obligatory intermediary for Sino-Kazakhstani relations, not only thanks to his status at the People's Assembly, which gives him access to administrative networks, but also thanks to his familiarity with economic circles [... and being] a member of the Sino-Kazakhstani interstate council of entrepreneurs, and [who] was part of Nursultan Nazarbaev's delegation to China in 2004". Such rise to community leadership is a common phenomenon among successful Overseas Chinese businessmen. The possibility of exploiting linkages with his counterparts in other Overseas Chinese Muslim communities for business and economic opportunities must be in his mind when in 2008 for the 130-year jubilee of the arrival of the Dungans in Central Asia, Husei Daurov canvassed the idea of creating a World Association of Dungans with the principal objective of developing contact not just with the Hui people of China, but also with those in Malaysia and Hong Kong (*ibid.*: 110). In fact, Husei Daurov's rise to successful businessman and Dungan community leader found a parallel in his colourful counterpart in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, where Esen Ismailov, president of the Dungan Association of Kyrgyzstan, was the founder of the first kung-fu (功夫, Chinese martial arts) school in the former Soviet Union, later on the director of a large martial arts

training centre at Bishkek, and then obtained the title of Kyrgyzstan's national artist, followed by a political career of a elected deputy between 1995 and 2000, as well as becoming one of Kyrgyzstan's 100 wealthiest men (*ibid.*: 108).

Besides economic success (doing better economically in general than the local dominant ethnic group), which has always been observed to be a common trait among the Overseas Chinese communities which tends to attract both admiration and envy from other locals, Svetlana Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer (1981: 43-44) has noted the Dungans' ability to "Dunganize" people, i.e. to convert people of other ethnicities to Dungan food, custom and speech. Despite the multiethnic mixture of the *kolkhozes* she visited, they were regarded as "Dungan" *kolkhozes* for the fact 1) the Dungans were in majority, 2) the key figures (*kolkhoz* and village chairmen, doctors, librarians and teachers) were nearly all Dungans, and 3) this "Dunganization" ability through mixed marriages or just everyday contact with those around them. Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer wondered if such "Dunganization" of the people in close contact with the Dungans is connected to the similar historical ability of the Chinese culture that Sinicized the Mongols and the Manchu who at one time or another conquered Chinese territory. In Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz have in fact adopted quite remarkably some features of the Dungan culture, especially the Dungan cuisine and farming skills which have actually been well incorporated in daily life throughout the northern part of the country.

8. Impact of the Chinese *Xinyimin*

The phenomenon of the Chinese *xinyimin* (new Chinese migrants) in Central Asia mainly began since the establishment of formal diplomatic relationship between China and the new CIS (CHГ – Содружество

Независимых Государств, Commonwealth of Independent States) countries in the region. For instance, the large-scale influx of the new Chinese migrants into Kazakhstan can be traced back to the establishment of diplomatic relationship between China and Kazakhstan in 1992. According to Liu (2009), advancement in bilateral economic relations, with trade volume increasing at an annual rate of above 30 per cent, and the steady increase of China's investment in Kazakhstan, with over 300 Chinese enterprises having registered in Kazakhstan by the end of 2006 and the total amount of China's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Kazakhstan reaching US\$1.54 billion for the period of 2002-2007, have acted as strong stimuli for the huge influx of Chinese workers into Kazakhstan. Besides, since 1992, a total of over 3.1 million former inhabitants have left Kazakhstan to return to their "historic nation", and out of the net emigrants totaling about 2 million people 63-65 per cent are within the working-age cohort and about 45 per cent are university graduates or those having professional diplomas. This has led to an acute shortage in the industrial, agricultural, education, medical and various other sectors in Kazakhstan especially during the economic recovery since 2000.

In terms of demography, the population's natural growth rate has been unstable and in fact dropping. For instance, the population of Kazakhstan in 2005 was 15.1 million (with a natural growth rate of 0.01218 million), and was expected to reach only 15.4 million by 2025 but to decline to 13.9 million by 2050 (*ibid.*). Economic recovery has led to continuous increase in demand for labour from abroad given its acute domestic labour shortage, and in terms of attracting migrants, the World Bank has placed Kazakhstan as the world's number nine. As Kazakhstan's neighbour sharing a long land border, China is well poised as a migrant labour supplier for Kazakhstan. With visa exemption for Chinese business visitors since Kazakhstan's independence from the

former USSR, the number of Chinese business migrants soon reached the peak during the period of 1989-1993. In fact, Kazakhstan's custom figures show that from 1993 to 1995 there were 150-200 Chinese "tourists" entering Kazakhstan every day, and out of these about 30-50 people were staying on in Kazakhstan, taking up permanent residence there or moving on to other CIS (ex-USSR) countries or the Western countries, while official estimates put the number of Chinese citizens migrating into Kazakhstan or using Kazakhstan as a migration transit point during the three-year period at not less than 0.13-0.15 million (*ibid.*).

The Chinese new migrants in Kazakhstan have various unique characteristics, as summarized in Liu (2009): the rapid increase in number since the beginning of the 21st Century; the great varieties of the pattern of mobility; the rapid expansion of the volumes of both legal and illegal migrant labour; the coexistence of "commercial migrants" and "mobile vendors"; the mixed ethnic composition of these migrants who include not only the Han Chinese, but also China's Kazakhs, Uighurs and other ethnic groups; the continuous strengthening of Chinese social networking in organizing migration and commercial activities. Kazakhstan's large-scale import of foreign labour began in 1993, mostly from Turkey, China, Russia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Of the 2100 foreign workers in 1993, a total of 559 (26.7 per cent) were from China, and there was a rapid increase in foreign labour during the period 2004-2006, reaching 40897 workers by 2006, including 5008 (12.2 per cent) from China – hence from 1993 to 2006, the number of Chinese migrant workers in Kazakhstan had increased ninefold, while during the period 2004-2006 alone, the number of Chinese migrant workers went up from 1457 to 5008, representing an increase of 3.4 times (*ibid.*). Besides, according to Kazakhstan's immigration statistics, there were 46000 Chinese entering Kazakhstan in

2000, and 103700 during the first ten months of 2006, including a huge number of those without working agreements or contracts. Hence, the real number of Chinese migrant workers in Kazakhstan could be far higher than the official statistics released by both countries. While such migration is in fact two-way, with over 1.3 million Kazakhstan migrants now staying in China (99 per cent of them in Xinjiang), constituting Kazakhstan's largest migrant community abroad, the large-scale Chinese influx into Kazakhstan has attracted acute resentment from the local Kazakhs and raised the fear of "Sino-cization" and of these new Chinese migrants being an instrument for China to reduce its population surplus, of resource exploitation and of Kazakhstan being a dumping target for Chinese goods (*ibid.*).

In the recent large-scale mass protest involving about 2000 people, organized by Kazakhstan's opposition, including the United Social Democratic Party (Kazakhstan's largest opposition party), Kazakh Communist Party, Kazakh Liberal Party, Progressive Movement, the independent labour union activist organization Social Defense and the Kazakh nationalistic forces, the participants demonstrated against "Chinese capitalist expansion" in Kazakhstan and the Kazakh government's plan to lease land to China, referring to the Kazakh president's revelation at an FDI meeting of China's suggestion to lease one million hectare of land from Kazakhstan for planting crops and Kazakhstan's counter-suggestion of reducing it to 200000 hectares for joint-ventures for this purpose. The land targeted for leasing are in four provinces including the province of Almaty and the province of South Kazakhstan. The protesters saw this leasing as a national security issue that would, in addition to the large-scale invasion by Chinese capital and the large-scale Chinese acquisition of Kazakh energy and resource company shares, lead to large-scale Chinese migration into Kazakhstan and the turning of Kazakhstan into China's transport base for energy and

resources. On the banners in the demonstration, the protesters drew a Chinese dragon over the Kazakh national emblem and Mao Zedong's head on Kazakh currency to signify Chinese capitalist expansion and the threat of Chinese colonialism. However, there were no extreme slogans that directly attacked China or asked the Chinese people to leave Kazakhstan.¹⁶

Similarly, in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan which was declared by the United Nations in 2005 as one of the world's poorest countries, the over 10000 Chinese new migrants (mostly migrant workers) residing in Bishkek and the southern part of the country (mainly ethnic Uighurs from western China) had attracted resentment from the Kyrgyz, which was manifested in several attacks, often fatal, on the Chinese migrant workers, including a race-hatred murder that occurred shortly following the former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev's ceding of 87000 hectares of the country's southern territories to China for the settlement of a border dispute (Marat, 2008). In fact, Chinese merchants and migrant workers (mostly Muslim Uighurs) were living in secluded areas in Bishkek, apart from the local Kyrgyz residents.

These latest events involving the influx of the new Chinese migrants will definitely have an impact upon the Dungans – an issue that will be discussed in the next, concluding, section.

9. Concluding Remarks: Ethnic Identity in Times of Politico-economic Transition

The future of the Dungans in the Central Asian states especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan where they exist in large numbers depends on a nexus of many factors to which the impact of the phenomenon of the new Chinese migrants is but a latest addition. To think that the recent backlash by the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz against these new Chinese

migrants would also adversely affect the Kazakh-Dungan and Kyrgyz-Dungan relations may be premature. The close relationship developed between the Dungans and the Kazakhs/Kyrgyz over the hundred years of staying together in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia/Kyrgyzstan should be more closely examined in relation to the Dungans' century-long isolation from China. The Dungans' cultural memory includes an element of historical gratitude towards the Russians, the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz who took their forefathers in when they had nowhere to go, freshly escaping from the genocidal army of Zuo Zongtang, gave them land and exempt them from taxes, thus giving them a new lease of life in this foreign land. On the other hand, the Dungans' ethnic allegiance with the Chinese across the borders could be intriguing. Svetlana Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer recorded her surprise when during her visit she was told by her Dungan hosts that

[the Dungan language] was an independent language, phonetically and syntactically quite different from Chinese, and that there are two "Dungan" dialects – the Kansu and Shensi dialects, which are quite different from the Kansu and Shensi dialects in China. There was also "Dungan" food which the Dungans thought was different from the Chinese food and yet, to me, as one who lived in China for many years, many of the dishes were familiar ones I had eaten in China quite frequently.

(Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 51)

While Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer's conclusion that "the Dungans have turned their backs on present-day China and have cut their ties with the country in which their ancestors lived" might be disputed by some other scholars of Dungan studies, especially those in China, it is worth noting that it was derived from observation at a time when the Dungans were

prospering, “both as city dwellers and collective farmers, under Soviet rule [and they] are happy and settled and have no need to look back into the past with longing” (*ibid.*). Ethnic allegiance is fluid. The Bosnian Muslims’ ethnic ties with Christian Slavs were supplanted by religious solidarity with the Muslim world only after the collapse of Yugoslavia brought about their agonizing defeat in the ensuing ethnic war, and similarly, the Pomaks’ ethnic identification with Muslim Turks rather than Slavic Christian Bulgarians results mainly from the socioeconomic discrimination they suffer (Yeoh, 2003: 27). When politico-economic circumstances undergo drastic changes, ethnic allegiance may not be as ascriptive as ethnic identity itself. “Based on the current situation I do not think that there will be a conflict, if so what can I do? Go back to China?” – a 23-year-old ethnic Dungan, Mahmud, was cited commenting on the uncertain future facing Kyrgyzstan’s ethnic minorities caused by the ethnic tension-filled presidential poll in 2005.¹⁷

Besides Dungan prosperity mentioned above, Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer had derived her conclusion of Dungans’ rejection of China based on the other four reasons: their century-long residence in the Russian empire/Soviet Union; their memory that Hui Muslims were suppressed and massacred by Chinese/Chinese government during the Ch’ing dynasty; being an exiled community attempting to preserve their ethnic identity had led to extreme conservatism and nationalism/ethnocentrism; being a small ethnic minority had led to the consciousness to be regarded as an independent community speaking an independent language, “hence their use of ‘Dungan language’, ‘Dungan dialects’, ‘Dungan people’, ‘Dungan food’, ‘Dungan vinegar’” (Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 51-52). However, the recent economic rise of China and the increasing contact between these once isolated people and Shaanxi and Gansu where their forefathers came from – in terms of both tourism and commerce – might have affected ethnic allegiance. According to Husei

Daurov, the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan, in the interview in 2004, after the president of the former Dungan Association of the Soviet Union returned to Kazakhstan from a visit to Shaanxi in 1989, news about the ancestral homeland of Shaanxi, China, had spread among the Dungans, thanks much to a special “home-going” feature in the *Dungan Press*, and there had been great interest and enthusiasm among the Dungans there to visit or return to the homeland, despite the troublesome procedures.¹⁸ Similarly, the feeling of the Dungans themselves towards the uniqueness of their language as being a Chinese language not written in Chinese characters could be much more mixed than as Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer reported earlier in 1981. As Husei Daurov said in the 2004 interview, there was no lack of the feeling of disadvantage and regret that while the Shaanxi(-Gansu) regionalect was very well preserved among the Dungans, it was indeed unfortunate that the Chinese writing system was not preserved as well, and there had been meetings and agreement signings during his trips to Shaanxi to set a priority for education, paving the way for Kazakhstan’s Dungans to come to China “to learn the mother tongue”.¹⁹ In fact, the Dungan students were enjoying the preferential treatment provided by the Shaanxi provincial government who treated them as local rather than foreign students in terms of school fees. In the words of Husei Daurov, “We are scared that if we lose the language, then we would not be able to go home.” “Home”, as he referred to, was of course Shaanxi Province, China.

There is indeed a less romantic, rather mundane and practical aspect, as Husei Daurov also highlighted in the interview. As a lot of goods are imported from China today into Kazakhstan and Central Asia at large, it is thus useful for the Dungan youths to learn modern Chinese. Every year since 2000, Husei Daurov has been sending some children from the Dungan villages to Xi’an, China, to learn Chinese who will

later come back to teach others, and it is considered by the parents as a great honour if their children were selected for this.²⁰ As one of the most important contributors to cultural distinctions, education has been seen as *pseudoethnicity*, said to be “a subcase of the same processes that also produce ethnicity”, according to Randall Collins (1975: 86) who further remarked:

Schools everywhere are established originally to pass on a particular form of religion or elite class culture, and are expanded in the interests of political indoctrination or ethnic hegemony. In these situations, education is nothing more than ethnic or class culture, although it can be taught to those who are not born into it.

(Collins, 1975: 87)

Seeing education, especially cultural and language education, in this light, the long-term impact of such educational arrangement for Dungan children on the re-Sinicization of the Dungans could probably not be easily dismissed.

That said, there remains the possible contention between ethnoreligious allegiance and ethnolinguistic allegiance – here referring to the two “cultural” components of ethnic boundary as a process that tends to be tenacious and uncompromising, the manifestation of the age-old fourfold ascriptive loyalty of race, territoriality, language and religion (Yeoh, 2006b: 224). The strength of the co-religionist ties between the Dungans and their Muslim neighbours in the Central Asian states may not be taken for granted. Such ties may break down during a time of political instability and economic turmoil or deprivation, when acute resource contest for politico-economic survival may take precedence, as amply attested by the deadly Kyrgyz-Uzbek clash in 1991 that claimed more than 300 lives in Kirghizia (Kyrgyzstan).

Sectarian distrust is another crucial issue. Going back to the early history of Dungan migration, there had been an apparent sectarian element in the 1800s' Muslim revolt. Infighting between different Muslim Sufi sects, namely the Khufiyya (Khafiya), the Jahariyya and the Qadim (*Gedimu*), allegedly had played an important role in the revolt. Intrusion of Sufism into China has been said to have led to massive tension among the Hui people, and the 1862-1877 Muslim revolt and a subsequent one have been attributed mainly to the Muslim inter-sect fighting. During the 1862-1877 revolt, Qadim Hanafi Sunni Muslims had tried to distance themselves from the Jahriyya Sufi rebels, and some of the Qadim Muslims even helped the Ch'ing government to crush the Sufi rebels. Hui Chinese Muslims also participated in attacks on the Muslim Uyghurs and several Chinese Muslim generals defected to the Ch'ing government and assisted Ch'ing forces in attacking the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Commenting on the case of Xinjiang as being much more complicated than a simple Muslim struggle for independence against Han colonizers, Dru C. Gladney cautioned:

Poor past relations between the three main Muslim groups, Uyghur, Kazak, and Hui, suggest that conflicts among Muslims would be as great as those between Muslims and Han Chinese. Most local residents believe that independence would lead to significant conflicts between these groups, along ethnic, religious, urban-rural, and territorial lines.

Gladney (2003: 24-25)

While Geertz (1963: 109) saw that the “congruities of [the primordial attachments of] blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves”, the Weberian approach views ethnic group as being not

“natural” (as kinship group is) but “rational” and primarily political:

Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity.

(Weber, 1968 tr.²¹: 389)

In this light, ethnicity can be seen in intergroup relations not as a “‘given’ of social existence”, but a political construct linked directly to power relations and resource competition, and a boundary marker frequently mobilized to meet the rising need of identity investment for economic and political purposes (Yeoh, 2010b: 576). If the recent Kazakh and Kyrgyz backlash against the perceived Chinese capitalist expansion and the influx of the new Chinese migrants were to spread to further adversely affect Kazakh-Dungan and Kyrgyz-Dungan relations, Mahmud’s worries, as cited earlier above, may not be farfetched, especially after the severe Kyrgyz-Dungan clashes in Iskra on 6th February 2006. In such a context, with increasing contact between the once isolated Dungans and their ethnic brethren in northwestern China, the prospect of a process of re-Sinicization – in a way representing the undoing of the long process of Dungan identity creation that germinated more than a hundred years ago when Bai Yanhu and his people first crossed the Tianshan, and culminated in a partly State-sponsored ethnogenesis during the Soviet times – cannot be ruled out, thus overturning the conscious isolation from China “by indifference on the part of most of the collective farmers and hostility on the part of some of

the Dungan scholars” that Svetlana Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer observed two decades ago (Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 51).

In fact, the resiliency of the unique Dungan language and culture could turn out to be a myth, as Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse noted:

Moreover, Dungans are divided between the Gansu and the Shaanxi dialects, while nearly half the young generation has no mastery at all of Dungan and can only speak Russian, sometimes also/or Kazakh and Kyrgyz. Lastly, the few still existing Dungan-language primary schools (approximately fifteen in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan) are lacking in means, textbooks, and teachers, and once again are divided in their linguistic strategy: some want to maintain the learning of the Dungan language, which since 1958 has been written in Cyrillic (and between 1929 and 1958 in Latin), and therefore the dialects of Northern China; others want to see a shift to *putonghua* (Mandarin). But here, once again, there is a division between those who endorse the learning of pinyin (Romanized Chinese) and those who prefer Chinese characters. The stake is not exclusively cultural; it is also economic: having writing skills in Chinese in fact opens multiple prospects for work with China, where the preservation of the Cyrillic writing hinders breaking out of the Soviet framework.

(Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2009: 105)

Even without the ominous shadow of impending majority oppression, such a re-ethnicization still makes economic sense, given the growing economic power of China. In fact, according to the representative of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan at Xi'an, Nurik Ma, in an interview by Laruelle and Peyrouse (*ibid.*: 106), “approximately 30 percent of Dungans from Kazakhstan and from

Kyrgyzstan work in the area of trade with China”, being involved mainly in four types of professions – in the shuttle trade; the tourist agency sector; serving the Chinese businesspeople as assistants, intermediaries or translators; and launching into commerce by opening stands at bazaars with some attempting “to get agreements signed directly with Chinese clothing and shoe factories based in Shenzhen and Guangzhou”. In contrast to the Uyghurs (51000 persons in Kyrgyzstan according to 2008 statistics, compared with 60000 Dungans), a significant number of Dungans are today involved in the trade niche with China. From China’s point of view, the Dungans are a “politically correct” “exotic” minority²² in Central Asia, in contrast to the Uyghurs who are seen as exiled agents of separatism from Xinjiang. From the point of view of the governments of the Central Asian republics, the Dungans, in contrast to the Uyghurs, are a well integrated “localized” minority and are not suspected of Islamist, jihadist activities and hence are not seen as a threat and do not elicit their reprobation. Nevertheless, that is not to say that the geopolitical “China threat” does not feature at all in assessing the local image of the Dungans, as evident in the occasional protests against China’s interests – in Kazakhstan too, but more frequently and more violent in Kyrgyzstan. Then there was the case of Uzbekistan, as highlighted by Laruelle and Peyrouse (2009: 107), when the Dungan Association of Uzbekistan tried at the beginning of the 1990s to develop contacts with the Chinese embassy to receive Chinese language teachers as well as agricultural aid, “Uzbek authorities’ suspicions of all collaborations that are not under their control quickly put paid to these special relations.”

On the other hand, many Dungans are also taking full advantage of their linguistic abilities and their cultural capacity to serve as intermediaries for people not familiar with China, aided in no small measure by entrepreneurial figures such as Husei Daurov or Esen

Ismailov who “have been skilfully able to take advantage of their associative positions [...] in transforming cultural exchanges into commercial partnerships, and in going from the non-governmental sector to the governmental one” (*ibid.*: 111). Husei Daurov, the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan, has talked about the plan to build a monument and a memorial hall for the great Tang-dynasty poet Li Bai (Li Po, 李白) in his Dungan village²³, although the birthplace of Li Bai, the ancient Silk Road city of Suyab (*Suiyecheng*, 碎葉城), was actually a few kilometers away in present-day Kyrgyzstan at where is near today’s Tokmok. Cultural memory aside, the plan is of course good for tourism. Ultimately, the economic situations in these Central Asian states would play a crucial role in determining the future course of interethnic relations which would in turn impact upon the Dungans’ dilemma between preserving a created identity – the fruit of their unique process of ethnogenesis – and re-Sinicization, for economic deprivation or desperate poverty tends to unduly heighten sensitivity and engender an atmosphere of unreasonableness and interethnic distrust, and as economic conditions deteriorates the greater would be the tendency for separate ethnic groups to coalesce along the lines of collective interests leading to acute societal polarization while the publics become more receptive to scapegoat myths (Yeoh, 2010a: 16, 62) like those going around blaming the new Chinese migrants for taking up jobs in Kyrgyzstan and squeezing out the local population – perceptions that were apparently behind those racially motivated brutal, sometimes fatal, attacks on the Chinese migrants in Bishkek.

Notes

- ⁺ Acknowledgements: The early history of Bai Yanhu leading his people on an exodus over the Tianshan mountains (as well as other batches led by Didao Old Man, Great Master Ma and Ma Cong, all in the late 19th Century) related in this paper, as cited, is mainly based on Yusuf Liu Baojun's account in his 2004 elegiac poetic travelogue *Bei yue Tianshan* [sad exodus over the Heavenly Mountains]. Liu, who is from Gansu and a speaker of the Shaan-Gan regionalect, also helped as interpreter in speaking over telephone to Husei Daurov Shimarovich (An Husei) about the occupation structure of the Dungan people in Sortobe (see note 10). Fan Pik Shy has helped to locate some of the Chinese online references on the Dungans; Zhang Yemo and Chang Le have helped in locating further reference sources on the *xinyimin* (new Chinese migrants).
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challenges amidst rapid economic development” (article, *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, 2014), “The long shadow of Tiananmen: Political economy of State-civil societal relations in the People’s Republic of China twenty-five years on” (article, *International Journal of China Studies*, 2014), “Poverty reduction, welfare provision and social security challenges in China in the context of fiscal reform and the 12th Five-Year Plan” (book chapter, Routledge, 2014), “Taiwan and Mainland China: Impacts of economic progress and international environment on political trajectory in comparative perspective” (article, *IJCS*, 2013), “Evolving agencies amid rapid social change: Political leadership and State-civil society relations in China” (book chapter, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), China – State, public policy and society (guest edited special issue, *CJAS*, 2014), June Fourth at 25: The quarter-century legacy of Tiananmen (edited special issue, *IJCS*, 2014), Taiwan: Democracy, cross-Strait relations and regional security (edited special issue, *IJCS*, 2014) and China: Developmental model, State-civil societal interplay and foreign relations (edited volume, 745 pp. + xxi, Institute of China Studies, 2013). His latest research projects include the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education/University of Malaya High-Impact Research (HIR) Grant project “The China Model: Implications of the contemporary rise of China” (2013-2016, principal investigator) at the Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya; Suntory Foundation/University of Tokyo international research grant project “Beyond ‘China threat theory’: Dialogue with China experts on the rise of China” (2014-2015, Malaysian component) and University of Malaya UMRG project “Public sector leadership and performance” (2014-2015, co-researcher). <Email: yeohkk@um.edu.my, emileyeo@gmail.com; website: <http://emileyeo5.wix.com/emileyeoh>>

1. For convenience, terms from the Dungan vocabulary are spelt in this paper in Roman alphabet with China’s pinyin system with *putonghua* (the

- modern Standard Chinese Vernacular) pronunciation, instead of in the Dungan Cyrillic alphabet with the more accurate pronunciation of the Shaan-Gan regionalect (or alternatively in international phonetic alphabet).
2. “Overseas” here is used to mean “outside China” since Central Asia is linked to China by land, not “sea”.
 3. Zhongguo haiwai zuida yimin tuan Hanguo Shaanxi cun – Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (中國海外最大移民團哈國陝西村——你是從大清國來的?) [China’s largest overseas migrant community, Shaanxi villages – “Are you from the Great Ch’ing Empire?”. 新京報，青島新聞網，13th April 2004. <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>
 4. The common estimate of 50000-50300 in Kazakhstan according to Chinese sources is doubtful (similar number in Kyrgyzstan), as the 1999 census gave only 36000 Dungans in Kazakhstan (see Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2009: 104).
 5. See Laruelle and Peyrouse (2009: 104).
 6. Here in Uzbekistan the number varies from the highest estimate of 20000-20200 to a minimal presence of just about some sparsely populated 2500 persons, according to Laruelle and Peyrouse (2009: 104), mostly in the Tashkent region and in the Fergana Valley (Andijan).
 7. Estimates of the Dungan populations in the Central Asian republics vary between sources of statistics. Such differences have been taken into consideration in this paper.
 8. Cited in Zhaparov (2008) from Sergei Abashin, *Natsionalism v Srednei Azii* [Nationalism in Middle Asia] (Saint-Petersburg, 2007), p. 53.
 9. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>
 10. In the Shaanxi-Gansu regionalect, with Yusuf Liu helping as interpreter.
 11. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>

12. 回族在線論壇 » 史話評說 » 營盤日記 —— 陝西村記事 (上) [Huizu online forum – historical commentary – the Ingpan diaries: the story of the Shaanxi villages – part I]. <<http://www.huizucn.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=2822>>
13. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>
14. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>
15. Jujiao Zhongya Shaanxi cun: Dongganren you Zhongguo de gen (聚焦中亞陝西村：東干人有中國的根) [focus on the Shaanxi villages in Central Asia: Dungans have Chinese roots]. Xinhuanet.com, 1st September 2005. <http://news.xinhuanet.com/overseas/2005-09/01/content_3430398.htm>
16. Hasakesitan qunzhong shiwei, kangyi Zhongguo ziben kuozhang (哈薩克斯坦群眾示威 抗議中國資本擴張) [Kazakhstan's demonstration protesting against China's capitalist expansion]. <<http://forum.xitek.com/showthread.php?threadid=703208>>.
17. IRIN: Kyrgyzstan: Ethnic minorities say they face an uncertain future. Uyghur American Association (UAA), 5th May 2005. <<http://www.uhrp.org/articles/71/1/IRIN-Kyrgyzstan-Ethnic-minorities-say-they-face-an-uncertain-future/IRIN-Kyrgyzstan-Ethnic-minorities-say-they-face-an-uncertain-future.html>>
18. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>
19. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>
20. Yingpan riji: Shaanxi cun jishi (shang) (營盤日記 —— 陝西村記事 (上)) [the Ingpan diaries: the story of the Shaanxi villages – part I]. 23rd February 2004. <<http://big5.ifeng.com/gate/big5/www.ifeng.com/home/phoenixtv/200402/23/204032.html>>

21. Year refers to publication date of English translation. Weber's original manuscript was written between 1910 and 1914.
22. In the context of the political economy of ethnic relations, it should be noted that the dominant group may perceive a subordinate group as "exotic" rather than "real" (Hoetink, 1973: 177-91). An example of such an "exotic" minority in Malaysia, besides the Orang Asli (i.e. "aborigines"), is the small Gente Kristang community (autoglossonym, from Portuguese "Gente Cristã") in the state of Melaka, descended from the 16th century Portuguese settlers and occupiers. Defined as "deviating in somatic and/or cultural respects, without being conceived subjectively as a menace to the existing social order" (Hoetink, 1967), "exotic" groups (or Cox (1948)'s socioracial "strangers") are not perceived as "real", because they are not subjectively comprised within the "societal image" of the dominant. Thus they do not attract the latter's hostility, as do "real" subordinate groups viewed as a menace. The case of the Ainu (アイヌ) and the "burakumin" (部落民) in Japan and that of the Amerindian natives and Afro-Americans in the United States today are good examples of these two polar subordinate situations – the Ainu and Amerindians being in some way viewed as "exotic" vis-à-vis the other two "real" minorities; instead of bitterness and hostility, they are met with "a mild benevolence, a condescending philanthropy" on the part of the dominant society (Hoetink, 1973: 179). Such distinction between the two types of subordinate groups was vividly described by DeVos in his study of the "burakumin": "The basic attitudes held [by the dominant Japanese society] toward the Ainu are not as pejorative as towards the outcastes [i.e. the "burakumin"] [...] the Ainu have been treated ambivalently very much as the American Indians have been, in contrast to the caste distinctions which underlie the treatment of American blacks." (DeVos, 1972: 326) Paradoxically, China's largest minority, the Zhuang (壮), could actually be more "exotic" than "real". Being the most assimilated of minorities, the Zhuang's ethnic

consciousness was virtually created by the Han-dominated central Communist Party-State in the early 1950s (see, for instance, Kaup, 2000).

23. Ni shi cong Da-Qing-Guo lai de? (你是從大清國來的?) <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>

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