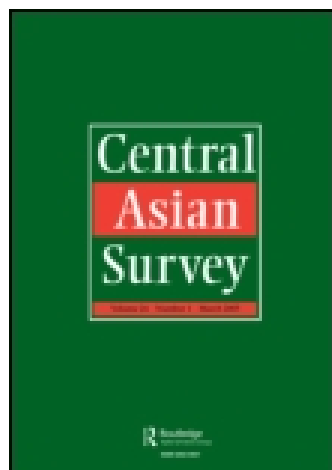


This article was downloaded by: [Newcastle University]

On: 12 March 2015, At: 03:50

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Central Asian Survey

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccas20>

The art of symbolic resistance: Uyghur identities and Uyghur-Han relations in contemporary Xinjiang

Nicholas Tapp^a

^a East China Normal University

Published online: 13 Jan 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Nicholas Tapp (2015) The art of symbolic resistance: Uyghur identities and Uyghur-Han relations in contemporary Xinjiang, Central Asian Survey, 34:1, 140-142, DOI: [10.1080/02634937.2014.1000036](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2014.1000036)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2014.1000036>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

BOOK REVIEWS

The art of symbolic resistance: Uyghur identities and Uyghur-Han relations in contemporary Xinjiang, by Joanne Smith Finley, Leiden and Boston, Brill (Inner Asian Library, Vol. 30), 2013, xxvii + 453 pp., \$194, ISBN 978-90-04-25491-6 (hardcover)

This is a remarkable and authoritative volume, dealing with the problematics of Uyghur identity in Xinjiang, particularly in terms of their relations with the Han Chinese. The book is almost mathematically constructed around its themes and sub-themes, with copious footnotes and 16 useful colour illustrations. The publication is especially timely coming at a time of state repressions of the Uyghur people and culture, and increasingly violent protest incidents of bombings and knifings. The details of what has led up to this are painted for us carefully and meticulously. The argument is that Uyghur resistance to Han domination and the influence of the Chinese state was largely symbolic before the late 1990s, taking the form of negative ethnic stereotypes of the Han, the establishment of ethnic boundaries through the use of the Uyghur language and preferences for ethnic endogamy, and critiques and expressions of identity expressed through Uyghur songs. However, the situation radically changed after the ‘definitive turning point’ (413) of the Ghulja protests of 1997 and their military suppression, preceded by Tiananmen and the breakup of the USSR, and then succeeded by 9/11. Increasingly harsh state policies towards cultural and social expression in the region ushered in a period of ‘silence’, in which ethnic stereotypes and popular protest voiced through song became impossible, but other forms of symbolic resistance, in particular segregation, became still more important (12). There has been an almost absolute ban on intermarriage with Han since then, and symbolic resistance has taken the new form of religious renewal: the ‘current return to prayer’ (238), which, the author stresses, remains a peaceful one and is not to be seen as contributory to violence (292–293). At the same time, however, a kind of ethnic hybridity has now developed among many of the urban Uyghur youth, who have been educated almost exclusively in Chinese-language medium schools; in their ability to negotiate ethnic and cultural boundaries may lie some hope for the future.

The short preface well summarizes the main contours of the book, which is divided into three parts. The introduction (1–23) summarizes much of the previous literature, showing how ‘Uyghur national identity involves a complex interplay between pre-existing intra-group identity and relational identities in contemporary times’ (xxiii) and arguing that culture has been drawn on and deployed as a form of symbolic resistance. Chapter 1 starts just where one would want a book like this to start, with an account of the extreme social and economic inequality which has characterized the growing Chinese stranglehold on the Xinjiang region and the ever-increasing waves of Han migration into the area, which is robbing Uyghurs of jobs and siphoning off the region’s natural resources (60–70). Language policies are perceived as an effective ‘linguicide’ (44), while immigration and birth control policies are seen as genocidal. Part 2 then deals, chapter by chapter, with the three forms of symbolic resistance Smith Finley sees as characterizing the period from 1991 to 1997, as a ‘run-up to imagined independence’ (xxiii; 409). Throughout, secondary data is ably deployed to frame and contextualize first-hand ethnographic data, case studies and the views of different kinds of Uyghur people; and comparisons are drawn with Mexicans,

Native Americans, Albanians, and many others. Chapter 2, on ethnic stereotypes which provided the Uyghur with a 'powerful sense of agency' (81), deals (necessarily) almost as much with positive images of the Uyghur as with negative images of the Han, such as their effeminacy, dirtiness and dishonesty. Chapter 3, leaning on Barth and to some extent Abner Cohen (but not Anthony Cohen), shows how ethnic boundaries – symbolic, spatial and social – were constructed not only around issues of language use and intermarriage but also through approaches to time (sticking to local Uyghur time rather than the official Beijing time), birth control policy, and spatial segregation, typically marked by dietary symbolism and the rejection of commensality through the 'food boundary' (152–153). The reasons for less and less social interaction through the 1990s are traced to a combination of Han in-migration, Han chauvinism and increasingly restrictive government policies (125). Chapter 4 is an exercise in musicology, analysing lyrics and biographies from two very different 'new folk' Uyghur singers (174), one representing an urban, intellectual and moral genre, the other more folksy and with less highbrow appeal. These pointed to cleavages within the Uyghur of religion and class, yet such songs worked towards 'the construction of a viable nationalist discourse' (230) at a time (in the mid-1990s) when the Uyghur were 'arguably more united' than ever before (229).

Part 3 deals with the situation after 1997, up to very nearly the present. Chapter 5 is an interesting discussion of the various reasons for Islamic 'revival' since 1997. It is all kinds of things in relation to inequality and oppression, modernity and failed development, but it is *not* derived 'from violent fundamentalist ideology' (xxvi), contrary to Chinese government claims. Islam is a symbolic form of discontent and mostly 'not the root of disaffection' but 'a vehicle for alternative ethnic representation' (291). Chapter 6 deals with the new barriers erected around Han intermarriage, asking whether endogamy is the last weapon of national resistance (348). It deals sympathetically with the difficulties of mixed marriages and their children (324–334), 'ethnic anomalies' somewhat like the hybridized Uyghur youth considered in the final chapter (Chapter 7). Yet these 'ethnic anomalies' are now becoming 'subaltern cosmopolitans' in a new kind of hybridity (402). This last chapter deals with a range of options among urban youth and the fissions between those who are Chinese-educated and those who have received more traditional Islamic and cultural training. Despite the internal conflicts and agonies well shown here, the conclusion gently suggests that much may depend on the abilities of these globalizing, cosmopolitan youths, turned as much towards the Turkic and Arabic and Western (407) as towards Beijing, to successfully negotiate the impasse there currently is between Uyghur aspirations for at least a fair measure of cultural and social autonomy, and what I see as an increasingly paranoid, aggressive and repressive Chinese leadership. There is a new sense of belonging to an international Muslim community (288), and a 'critical reflexivity' encouraged by new media (254), moving away from an earlier 'reactive identity' (404).

Back in 1990, in this journal, anthropologist Dru Gladney argued for the 'invented tradition' of Uyghur ethnic identity as a fairly recent construct of Chinese nationalist history. For Smith Finley, as for some others, this is too Sinocentric a view, and understates the Uyghurs' own role as 'creative agents' (6). The point is made that there has long been a commonality of culture and tradition among the oasis-dwelling ancestors of the modern nationality, which has allowed them to draw on cultural resources for a sense of common identity (289), whether or not they formed a unitary people under this ethnonym in the past. The author uses the Sartrean distinction between 'we-hood' and 'us-hood' (7) to explicate this, yet locates the shift towards 'us-hood', which Gladney elsewhere called a 'relational alterity', only in the post-1997 phase (7; cf. p.132, n2). The jury may still be out on this matter, and we must look to Uyghur historians to shed more light on the issue or argue, as here, for the avoidance of general formulations in favour of more complex analyses of identity formation.

A book review cannot do justice to the many wonderful stories and penetrating informant comments contained in this book. One of the most illuminating comments occurs in the context of Han intermarriage. An informant complains that the Han have taken their country, their language and their culture, and now they want to take their women too, threatening group survival (345). Two recurring themes, however, may be noted. One is the great difference between the earlier Han settlers (it would have been nice to hear a little more about their views of the Uyghur in this book) and those who have come since the 1990s. The earlier migrants were much more easily accepted by the Uyghur, since many of them respected the culture and learned some of the language, and their children often played together (33; 74–75). When one contrasts this earlier situation of effective accommodation to the tragic situation today, where ‘Uyghur attitudes towards Han migrants are characterized by disgust, anger, bitterness, passion, and a strong sense of injustice’ (93), one can only marvel at how crass the official policies have been. Another recurrent theme is the position of women in relation to the Han and to the new coalescence of reformist Islam with Uyghur cultural identity. Some young women have adopted the new religiosity (241), and yet there are also young Uyghur women punks, and women out at night drinking or in internet cafés (388–391). These women express in their bodies and their lives much of the agony of the Uyghur people. Women are the bearers of culture, and their sexual domination symbolizes political dominance (340).

This is a very impressive work indeed and well fulfils its remit of providing a detailed analysis of the effects of Han migration on Uyghur social identity and ‘patterns of ethnic interaction and segregation’ (xxii)!

Nicholas Tapp

East China Normal University

Email: Nicholas.Tapp@anu.edu.au

© 2015, Nicholas Tapp

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2014.1000036>

Organized crime, political transitions and state formation in post-Soviet Eurasia, by Alexander Kupatadze, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, 256 pp., ISBN: 978-0-230-29980-1

The demise of the transition paradigm in the study of post-Soviet polities ushered in a variety of new avenues of research. Amongst these new pathways were the study of the state and state-building (and the attendant problem of so-called ‘weak states’), theories of factionalism (both ethnic and sub-ethnic) and political economy approaches (to explain the endurance, transformation and rivalry between clientelistic networks). Arguably, it was political economy approaches that proved best able to explain the mobilizations that took place as part of the so-called ‘coloured revolutions’ and removed regimes successively in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan between 2003 and 2005. Some empirical studies of these events made clear that networks of mobilization in these countries were characterized by links between formally legal (state) and illegal (organized crime) actors. However, it was not always clear where the preponderance of infrastructural power lay across this divide. The difficulty of organized criminal groups as an object of study made detailed analysis of their precise roles in the coloured revolutions nearly impossible.

Alexander Kupatadze’s new book is both a well-designed attempt to identify causal processes and an object lesson in the persistent but not insurmountable obstacles to the study of organized crime in post-Soviet Eurasia. The strengths of the work lie in Kupatadze’s ambitious project to