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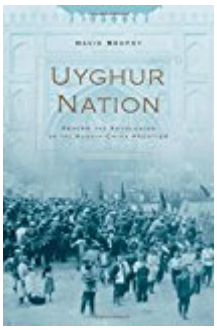

David Brophy. *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016. 368 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-66037-3.

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The Uyghurs, a Turkic-speaking people living in Central Asia, are the forgotten ones of modern history. Whereas Soviet historiography and sovietology quite systematically excluded the Tarim Basin from Central Asian area studies, historians of China, especially but not only those trained in the Chinese academy, usually condone the very existence of a ten-million minority. Over the last two decades, a small group of scholars coming from various backgrounds across the globe strove to fill the void. David Brophy is one of them, and one of the most erudite. In *Uyghur Nation*, he rewrites the political and intellectual history of the Uyghur people by maintaining throughout the book (although he does not use the notion) what the French historian Jacques Revel called *jeux d'échelles* (scale shifts), that is, a constant back-and-forth movement between the individual itineraries, the course of events, and the empire and state policies, as opposed to the great phenomena, such as modernization and state domination.[1]

In short, the thesis of the book is that a Uyghur nation emerged when the ideas of Muslim Reformists on what should be a modern society converged with the activism of diaspora groups in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Uyghur nationhood, at least in its early history, was neither a state creature born within the cradle of Soviet nationalities policy nor the invention of an ethnic identity fetish brandished against the Chinese domination. In support of this thesis, Brophy makes use of a great variety of sources: Russian and Central Asian state archives, Chinese documents, Turkic writings including newspaper articles, and historical photographs, in addition to multilingual publications. It is unfortunate that only a selected bibliography is given.

In the first chapter, Brophy reviews the communal narratives of the Turkic identity that were en vogue in the nineteenth century, thus providing readers an introduction to the region and its people as well as an archaeology—especially Turkological—of the Uyghur national discourse. The author refuses any top-down analysis and steps back from the Uyghur stories to reconstruct the sociopolitical history of a colonial frontier

area. In the second chapter, he explains how the "New Frontier" (***xinjiang***) became in the 1880s not only a meeting point between the Qing and the Russian empires but also a borderland where both Turkestans, in other words, eastern and western, were linked by new population flows and existing diasporas. Among these social groups, the ***aqsaqal***s (literally "white beards") receive particular attention. They were trading headmen placed at the core of the native administration in the northwestern part of Xinjiang under Russian occupation between 1871 and 1881. In the restored Xinjiang Province, they reemerged as a widespread network of middlemen who dealt with both the Qing officials and the tsarist authorities, acquiring a strong influence among Qing and Russian subjects. The third and fourth chapters explore the main intellectual trends that entered Xinjiang around the 1900s: Muslim Reformism or Jadidism, and racial theories. What started as a reform of traditional primary schooling (***maktab***) turned into social criticism and calls for modernization. While substantial work has been done on Jadidism in western Turkestan, much less is known about eastern Turkestan. Brophy offers a well-documented discussion on intellectual exchanges between Muslims of China and Ottomans and on two important figures, namely, Shami Damolla (d. 1932) and Abdulqadir Damolla (d. 1924). The fall of the Qing Empire and the First World War, it is argued, gave Turkish nationalists the opportunity to introduce Turkist representations among Muslims in Xinjiang. Besides the Young Turks and Young Kashgaris reformer groups who played a decisive role in spreading new ideas hand in hand with the Kashgar's mercantile elite, we read that Russia's ***aqsaqals*** in Xinjiang and Chinese-subject ***aqsaqals*** in Russian Turkestan also acted as powerful representatives of this elite on both sides of the border.

This focus on specific actors caught in the hustle and bustle of history counts among the most original aspects of *Uyghur Nation*. When, in the fifth chapter, Brophy details the events that led to the 1917 revolution and to the civil war that ensued in the Xinjiang context, he reveals the fate of Abdullah Rozibaqiev (d. 1937, executed) and the Uyghur Club: the political ideas promoted by the club (close to prerevolutionary Jadid cultural societies) took on practical meaning as his former member, the Taranchi (a Turkic population in Ili and Semirechye) Bolshevik from Verny Rozibaqiev, led revolutionary activities toward Xinjiang. The case of Qadir Haji, a Kashgari merchant based in Verny, is equally interesting in that he rivaled the authority of the ***aqsaqal*** appointed by the Chinese with the endorsement of the Soviet authorities; then his group of politicized migrants moved closer to the Uyghur Club, Rozibaqiev, and the Communist Party to conduct the revolution.

In the next two chapters, the book, before ending its story with the 1931-33 rebellion and the creation of the first East Turkestan Republic as told by Muslim actors themselves (chapter 8), elucidates the complex processes by which Chinese and Russian revolutions made possible the birth of the Uyghur nation. Here, beyond the usual view that the date of this birth is 1921, when during a Congress of Kashgari and Jungharian Workers held in Tashkent the name "Uyghur" was revived and adopted, the emphasis is on the ambiguities of political situations and strategic decisions. To the shifts in Sino-Soviet relations during the 1920s, Turkestani Muslims on the Xinjiang frontier responded differently: the Kashgaris relied on the network of traders to get influence whereas the Taranchis relied on party affiliation and pro-Soviet activism. The conception of Uyghur nationhood crystallized with the implementation of the Stalinist theory of nations but both groups diverged on the way to construct it: while the Kashgaris "sought to substantiate the idea through action in Xinjiang, the [Taranchis] did so through nation building on Soviet soil, drawing both on the Jadidist template of the folkloric nation and the new Stalinist orthodoxy. We

might say that by 1930 there was not one Uyghur nation but two" (p. 231).

Note

[1]. Jacques Revel, ed., ***Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience*** (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1996), 15-36.