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Emergent Nationalisms and Economic Turmoil

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Descendants of *Dungan* Chinese Migrants in Central Asia: Ethnic Identity in the Midst of Emergent Nationalisms and Economic Turmoil [≈]

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Introduction

This paper looks at the issue of 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 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 Dungsans 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 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. 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,

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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 analyzes how a new Dungan ethnic identity has since emerged due partly to the geographical isolation imposed by the formidable natural barrier of the Tianshan ("Heavenly Mountain") 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 *tʃuŋ-ianziŋ*, i.e. "people of/from Chungyüan" – "Chungyüan" or "Chungt'u", 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 analyzing 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 new Chinese migrants since the early 1990s that has triggered xenophobic response in many Central Asian societies 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 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 2010 which sent a tremor through Kyrgyzstan's delicate ethnic social fabric

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

The Iskra Ethnic Riots

On 6th February 2010, severe ethnic clashes broke out between the Chinese-speaking Dungan (or “Tungan”) 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 (Дунганде *Dungani*), while comprising up to 90 per cent of Iskra’s 3,000 residents, are but one of the smallest minority groups in Kyrgyzstan, numbering around 50300, and in Kazakhstan (numbering also about 50300) and Uzbekistan (about 20200). 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.

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, 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 their independence from Soviet Union that collapsed in 1990.

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 120000-strong Dungans also represent the largest Chinese Muslim community outside China, with 50000 found in Kazakhstan, 50000 in Kyrgyzstan and 20000 in Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, there are 12000 to 13000 Dungans in Sokuluk (*Saohulu*; about 30 km west of Bishkek) including the adjacent Aleksandrovka (Александровка), 5000-10000 in Miliangfan (or Miliangchuan) (about 60 km west of Tokmok and 60 km northeast of Bishkek), about 3300 in Bishkek, 2800 in Yrdyk (*Erdaogou*), 1500 in Ivanovka and 800-2500 in Osh (*Aoshe*). In Kazakhstan, there are 7000-12000 Dungans in Masanchi/Masanchin (Масанч/Масанчин; 8 km north of Kyrgyzstan's Tokmok) which before 1965 was called Karakunuz (Каракуруз, Караконуз, meaning the breeding place of black beetles), 9000-12000 in Sortobe (Сортоб/Шортюб *Xinqu*; a few km downstream from Tokmok and south of Masanchi/Karakunuz) and 3000-5000 in Zhalpak-tobe (Джалпак).

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 the Chinese Overseas* published in 1999.

Other than the traditional Dungan villages, many Dungans also live in the nearby cities, such as Bishkek, Tokmok (Токмок, Russian “Токмак” (Токмак)), Karakol. Masanchin, known to Dungans traditionally as Ingpan (*Yingpan* – Dungan “Йинпан” or Russian “Иньпан”), however, has a particular significance, being the heartland of the Dungan people and their earliest settlement in Central Asia. Karakunuz was renamed in

1965 Masanchi or Masanchin, after Magazi Masanchi or Masanchin, 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 Stalin's purge. The Masanchin village's traditional Dungan name Ёинпан (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* – Dungan “хуэйзү” [*xuejdzü*]), while their Turkic- and Tajik-speaking neighbours in Xinjiang 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 *döñän* (“one who turns”), similar in meaning to the Chinese *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” is different from that in the name of Gansu province. Others attributed the name to Turkic *Turup Qalghan*, meaning “people who have settled down”, or Chinese *dong-an* (“east bank”, referring to the east bank of the Yellow River where these people originally came from), or “Tongguan” (the place and nearby area in today's Shaanxi province where some of these people came from), or even “Dunhuang” (which is situated on the these people's route of migration into Czarist Russia). In the past the Dungans used to call themselves *tşuŋ-ianziŋ* (*zhongyuanren*, literally “people of/from zhongyuan” – “zhongyuan”, literally “Middle Land”, was a common Chinese expression referring to China) (Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 46-47).

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 (former capital),

Bishkek and Toshkent (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 Toshkent). 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 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 ("Ala-Too" in Kyrgyz) ranges 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.

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 (Qing) court during the period 1862-1877. 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, led by *Ahong* (Imam) Ma Yusu or Ma Yuan (also known as 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 Yrdyk (Ырдык/*Erdaogou*, some 15 km southwest from Karakol in Eastern Kyrgyzstan). The second batch, over 10000 fighters and their family members from Shaanxi Province, led by the legendary Mohammad Ayub

Bai Yanhu/Bo Yanhu, 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. The third batch consisted of those from Qinghai and Xinjiang's Turfan, led by Ma Daren ("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.

Upon arrival, the Czarist government gave these refugees 5000 hectares of land and 10-year exemption from tax.⁴ Beginning from Karakunuz (later Masanchin, which the Dungans call *Ingpan*), 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 northwestern Muslim rebellion. Ili's Hui merchant Ma Cong 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), Zhambyl 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 furnitures. Many of the migrants were settled in Almaty, Panfilov (Панфилов), Horgosh 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 feet – nick-named by the earlier migrants as *diaowazi* (the “left-behind kids”) – settled mostly in Panfilov and Horgosh, only about 80 km from China’s border. According to the Russian statistics, a total of 4682 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 (*Xinqu*) 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.

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 (in today's Ningxia) under the attack of the Ch'ing troop led by Zuo Zongtang who just defeated the (Christian) Taiping rebellion. When Jingjibao fell in November 1870, more than 170 members of the various generations of the family of Ma Hualong, 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". When Zuo Zongtang's troops took Suzhou (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 officials. The imperial (Manchu) Ch'ing government was not known to be sympathetic to 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*) 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, and the province's population dropped to 7 million after the war. There was a mass exodus from Xi'an, 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 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 province which was adjacent to Shaanxi, Muslim villages were said to be totally unaffected by the Shaanxi rebellion.

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 Hussin Darurov Shimarovich (An), the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan, recently over the telephone to the authors (10th February 2011). (Like all Dungans, he has a Russified surname Shimarovich when he is outside the Dungan villages, as well as a Chinese surname An known among the Dungan people.⁵ Similarly, Dungans speak Russian outside the Dungan villages, but revert to the Dungan Chinese tongue when they return to the Dungan villages (Li, 2008).) Sortobe (or known to the Dungans as *Xinqu*) has 19000 people, 99 per cent are Dungans, and the rest are Russians and Uyghurs, but these other ethnic group can also speak the Dungan language. According to An, 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 Soviet time. 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 of such new unease 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 Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (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 Dungsans domicile do reflect the unmistakable objective ethnic situation these countries are undergoing. Before the unprecedented violent ethnic clash with the Kyrgyz in February 2010, the Dungsans, 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 Dungsans 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 Dungsans 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 An about the Dungsans 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 Dungsans 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 Dungsans. Besides that, the Dungsans 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 badly hit by these new countries' loss of the important Russian demand, leading to shortage of demand and low prices. While there had been many Dungsans 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. 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 Baiyanhu, now in Naryn (Нарын, in eastern Kyrgyzstan, close to the Chinese border), the first resting place of 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. This is a common phenomenon today.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has had adverse impact on the cultural domain too. During the Soviet era, 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") 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. Due to the political environment, the paper was renamed *Şiyoti tş'i* (in Russian *Znamia Oktâbrîa*, i.e. "October Banner"). In 1980, it was rename again as the *Sulian Huimin Bao* ("Soviet Union Huimin Press" – *Huimin* means "the Hui people"). While not using Chinese characters but the Cyrillic alphabet, the Dungan newspaper *Dongfang Huoxing Bao* can be considered one of the earliest Chinese newspapers published by the Overseas Chinese. Other than a break during the Second World War, the Dungan newspapers had not stop publishing, and the operating expenses of the newspapers and the newspaper publishers were paid for and publicly run 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”. However, now without government sponsorship, the papers are sometimes forced to stop publishing due to problems with operating expenses. The “Huizu Press” of Kazakhstan now only publishes an issue every three months.

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, housing or the Hui Muslim religion 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 survived this “Long March”, the rest died under the swords of the pursuing Ch'ing army, or from cold and hunger on the “Heavenly Mountain”), 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*, *banhu*, *di*, *sheng* etc. and traditional Chinese medicine and medical practices, as well the use of *nongli* (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 marriages (through parents and matchmakers) still survive 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* ("emperor"), government department *yamen*, policeman *yayi* ("yamen runner"), complaining or petitioning *shang zhuangzi*, government officer *daren* ("lord"), shopkeeper *zhangguide*, writer/poet *xiejia*, airplane *fengchuan* ("wind-ship") or *tiefengzheng* ("iron kite"), dowry *peifang*, child *wa*, girl *nüwa*, village cadre *bangban*, matches *yanghuo* ("Western fire"), and people coming from China *qingguoren* ("people from the Ch'ing Empire"). In short, the Dungans' Chinese language has remained the late-Ch'ing version. Liu (2004) in his elegiac poetic travelogue *Bei Yue Tianshan* [Sad exodus over the Heavenly Mountain] 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 Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer (1981) as the most valuable aspect of Dungan conservatism:

The most valuable aspect of the conservatism of both groups lies in the fact that they have preserved many songs, riddles, legends, stories, ceremonies and customs brought from China one hundred years ago.

(Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 49)

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 were 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 (including

Mao Zedong's) at alphabetizing the Chinese writing system have 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 the classifiers and are nowadays using only one general classifier *ki* (*ge* in putonghua pinyin) 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, Qadim and Ikhwan sects; in terms of language, besides the Shaanxi and Gansu regionalects, the 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, 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*, 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 China's Ningxia Hui Zizhiqu ("Autonomous Region") since the end of the Ch'ing dynasty – the Xianmen, the Tonggui and the Hongmen *menhuan* (Yeoh, 2006a: 9-10). 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*), 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/Bai Liuwa (*liuwa* 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 replaced by a Russian surname by the fourth generation⁶), 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." (fieldwork interview, 2001/2002).

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 Zhalpak-tobe are mainly from Xinjiang. In 1877, when Ayub Bai Yanhu and his followers camped at a site 9 km from Tokmok, at the foot of the Alatau ranges, the Russian government allocated 58000 rubles for them to build houses. During the distribution of land, money and property, long-simmering 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.

Sortobe (*Xinqu*) is one of the five largest settlement of the Dungans – the other four being Masanchin (Ingpan), Zhalpak-tobe, Miliangchuan and Sokuluk (including the adjacent Aleksandrovka). The over ten thousand people of Sortobe are mostly descendants of the Dungan 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 the 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 (fieldwork, 2001/2002), who are known as *erzhuanzi* (those with the mixed blood of two ethnicities) and *sanzhuanzi* (mixed with 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 local people was a better option (fieldwork interview, 2001/2002).

Heiyazi Lan'ahong, an intellectual in Masanchin, explained that 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 (fieldwork interview, 2001/2002). The plain, pastoral life of the Dungans is also reflected in their impressive hospitality to guests especially those from their ancestral homeland of Shaanxi (and Gansu), a unique characteristic that has been repeatedly pointed out by visitors to their villages, for instance, as highlighted in Liu (2004)'s sentimental lyrical travelogue, *Bei Yue Tianshan* [Sad exodus over the Heavenly Mountain]. 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).

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* [xweitsu jyjan] (*huizu yuyan*) (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 regional dialect 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 *ь* and *ы* respectively (e.g. ма, маъ, маь) or alternatively by adding *I*, *II* and *III* (e.g. ма I, ма II, ма III). The Dungan language originally used a version of the Arabic alphabet called "Xiao'erjing", and then a writing system composed of 35 Arabic letters introduced by Muslim students in Tashkent in 1927, but when 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) (1906-1988), founder of Dungan literature, published his first anthology of Dungan poems in 1931. "Shiwaza"/"Shivaza" is from Chinese *shiwazi*, 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 regionalect 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 (soviet socialist republics). The Dungan language is very similar to China's *putonghua* (Mandarin), being a variety of Zhongyuan Mandarin (vis-à-vis Lan-Yin

Mandarin) spoken in the southern part of Gansu province and the western part of the Guanzhong 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 into the Chinese language during the 20th century, including neologisms and a huge number of earlier ones adopted from Japanese *kanji* 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. The prominent scholar in China on Dungans Professor Wang Guojie 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?]⁷ 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)

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 are "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 equipment 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, streets of the prosperous “Chinatown” in Bishkek, Kirghizia, were lined with restaurants. Even today, Dungan (Shaan-Gan) cuisine is very well known in the Central Asian states where the Dungans reside. According to Hussin Darurov An in the 2004 interview, there were more than 30 Shaanxi (Dungan) restaurants in Kazakhstan’s capital Astana and the business was very good.⁸ Astana is Kazakhstan’s capital since 1997, after the government moved the capital from the country’s largest city, Almaty. 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 refuse to work, there would be no fresh vegetables found on any family’s dining table.

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* or *Suo'ahong* whose ancestors could respectively be a shopkeeper and an imam). Some Dungans have kept the Shaanxi Hui tradition of nicknames, like *Heiyazi* ("black teeth"), *Wuwa* ("the fifth child"), *Liuwa* ("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 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 mountain, only 3314 survived when they emerged on the other side of the mountain 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.⁹ 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, the Dungans are now among the wealthiest rural dwellers. Since 1994, through the effort and initiative of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan's president Hussin Darurov An, 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 An an audience with the president of Kazakhstan (Zhi, 2004).

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 northern Kyrgyzstan.

Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer (1981: 43-44) 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" kolkozoes 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.

Impact of the New Chinese Migrants

The phenomenon of the new Chinese migrants in Central Asia mainly began since the establishment of formal diplomatic relationship between China and the new CIS 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, has acted as strong stimulus 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 those university graduates or 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), was expected to reach only 15.4 million by 2025 but to decline to 13.9 million by 2050. 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 shows 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. 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.

The Chinese new migrants in Kazakhstan have various unique characteristics: 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, US and UK. Of the 2100 foreign labour in 1993, a total of 559 (26.7 per cent) were from China. There was a rapid increase in foreign labour during the period 2004-2006, reaching 40897 by 2006, including 5008 (12.2 per cent) from China. Hence from 1993 to 2006, the number of Chinese migrant labour in Kazakhstan had increased ninefold. During the period 2004-2006 alone, the number of Chinese migrant labour increased from 1457 to 5008, with an increase of 3.4 times. 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 labour 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 being an instrument for China to reduce its population surplus, of resource exploitation and of 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 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 a 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.¹⁰

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 these 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 section.

Concluding Remarks

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 their 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, 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. 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 2005.¹¹ Besides Dungan prosperity mentioned above, Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer had derived her conclusion of Dungans' rejection of China based on another 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 Hussin Darurov Shimarovich (An), the president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan (who is also a Member of the People's Committee of Kazakhstan and the Chairman of the Dungan

Kolkhoz (collective farm) of Zhambyl Province), in an interview in 2004, after the former president of the Dungan Association of Kazakhstan visited Shaanxi in 1989, news about the ancestral homeland of Shaanxi, China, had spread among the Dungan, thanks much to a special “home-going” feature in the *Dungan Press*, there had been great interest and enthusiasm among the Dungan there to visit or return to the homeland, despite the troublesome procedures.¹² 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 Hussin Darurov An said in the 2004 interview, there is no lack of the feeling of disadvantage and regret that while the Shaanxi(-Gansu) regional dialect 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”.¹³ 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 An, “We are scared that if we lose the language, then we would not be able to go home.” “Home”, as An referred to, was of course Shaanxi Province, China. There is indeed a less romantic, rather mundane and practical aspect, as An 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, An 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.¹⁴ 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 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, the Jahariyya and the Qadim, 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 dynasty 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.¹⁵: 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 the communities of Dungan migrants’ descendants, Mahmud’s worries, as cited earlier above, may not be farfetched, especially after the severe Kyrgyz-Dungan clashes in Iskra on 6th February 2010. 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 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 Rimski-Korsakoff Dyer observed two decades ago (Rimski-

Korsakoff Dyer, 1981: 51). Even without the ominous shadow of impending majority oppression, such a re-ethnicization still makes economic sense, given the growing economic power of China. For instance, Hussin Darurov An, 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) in his Dungan village¹⁶, although the birthplace of Li Bai, the ancient Suiyecheng, was actually a few kilometers away in Kyrgyzstan at what is today 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.

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Notes

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 regional dialect.

² "Overseas" here is used to mean "outside China" since Central Asia is linked to China by land, not "sea".

³ "Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?: Zhongguo Haiwai Zuida Yimin Tuan Haguo Shaanxi Cun" [Are you from the Ch'ing Empire?: the largest overseas Chinese migrant community – the Shaanxi villages of Kazakhstan], *Xin Jing Bao*, Qingdao Xinwen Wang, 13th April 2004 <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

⁴ "Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?" <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

⁵ "Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?" <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

⁶ Huizu Zaixian Luntan [Hui online forum] <<http://www.huizucn.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=2822>>.

⁷ "Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?" <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

⁸ "Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?" <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

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¹¹ "IRIN: Kyrgyzstan: Ethnic minorities say they face an uncertain future", 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>>

¹² "Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?" <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

¹³ “Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?” <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>.

¹⁴ “Yingpan Riji: Shaanxi Cun Jishi (Shang)” [The Ingpan diaries: the story of the Shaanxi villages (part 1)], 23rd February 2004 <<http://big5.ifeng.com/gate/big5/www.ifeng.com/home/phoenixtv/200402/23/204032.html>>.

¹⁵ Year refers to publication date of English translation. Weber's original manuscript was written between 1910 and 1914.

¹⁶ “Ni Shi Cong Da-Qing-Guo Lai de?” <http://www.qingdaonews.com/content/2004-04/13/content_2998678.htm>

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