

Special Interview - Wu Qina¹, Specialist in Border Affairs: Six Focal Points to View the True Xinjiang; How Can Beijing Break Through Charges of “Genocide”

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Duowei: From the news cycle of “re-education camps” to Xinjiang cotton, Xinjiang has once again found itself at the center of a discursive and political confrontation between China and the West. Many people also question, why Xinjiang? As somebody who has long researched ethnic questions in China as well as visiting Xinjiang many times for research, how do you answer the question of “Why is it Xinjiang?” from a historical and real-time perspective?

Wu Qina: First, no matter if it’s “re-education camps” or Xinjiang cotton, I do not think it merits any discussion, because history in the future will not need to spend long to prove that these topics share much the same nature as the pretext of weapons of mass destruction used by the Americans to attack Iraq. However, is there still something to be discussed about Xinjiang itself? Of course: what we should be worried about is the happiness and the real, core questions of Xinjiang, the Uyghur people, and all other peoples living in Xinjiang. Therefore, I wish to approach Xinjiang’s modern history and current reality from six standpoints to determine the real questions we should be concerned about.

The first question concerns religion in Xinjiang. One should first look at Xinjiang’s tradition. Xinjiang is an Islamicized region, and even though its Islamization has a long historical process since the 7th century,² it is characterized by a high degree of secularization. That is to say, from the perspective of Arabs, the Islam of Xinjiang may not seem so authentic, as it has many secular factors in its practice in modern life. The main people following Islam are the Uyghurs, but many of their daily traditions are not Islamic but Uyghur. For example, the Uyghurs have many shamanistic traditions, and they are very warm and hospitable, with a penchant for song and dance. Relationships between men and women are also relatively free. Much of what they wear are patterned and colorful, and do not conform with the rules under Islam.³ The divorce rate of Xinjiang, from the Qing Dynasty until now, is also quite high when viewed from the present. There are also a number of other aspects of modern life that do not seem to conform with Islam’s provisions. Normally, men would be forbidden from drinking alcohol out of religious prohibition, but in daily life, Uyghur men drinking alcohol is not at all uncommon, although of course in recent years, this practice among youth is steadily decreasing.

From the Qing Dynasty to the Mao era, did Xinjiang’s Islam specifically come into conflict with Han-majority Chinese society? In my view, cases in which Islam specifically came into conflict with Chinese society are few. Conflicts mostly arose between “original nationalism” and “modern nationalism”, and this brings me to my second point.

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² This is probably referring to the Arab conquest of Central Asia in the 7th century, although the Tarim Basin would not turn from Buddhist to Muslim until the late 10th and early 11th century, when the Kingdom of Khotan, a Saka (Iranic) Buddhist kingdom, fell to the Karakhanids, a Turkic Muslim khanate. As a side note, the Karakhanids referred to themselves as “Khans of China.”

³ While these sorts of statements come off as “cultural essentialism” or even racist in the Western context, these types of observations are not uncommon in China itself and do not especially convey any prejudice, degradation, or exoticizing on behalf of the speaker.

“Original nationalism” arose in Xinjiang alongside invasion by Western powers. The invasion of Western powers shook the socio-political order of China to the core. China’s order had already experienced several shifts, including the shift towards a territorial state,⁴ and it was soon forced to shift onto the road of nationalism. This shift soon gradually expanded from the Han majority to the minority peoples of the borderlands. The minority peoples of the borderlands steadily began to develop their own original nationalisms, owing to their half-autonomy of the time. These original nationalisms took form from the melding of their own histories and cultures and also coupled with the involvement of surrounding foreign countries. Applied to Xinjiang, the main interlocutors in the 19th century were Tsarist Russia and Britain, with the United States joining as an interlocutor in the 20th century. Original nationalisms, Han nationalism, and Chinese [zhonghua]⁵ nationalism all go in opposite directions. In the context of foreign intervention, from 1830 onward, Xinjiang experienced much unrest. There were three major unrests: the first was the invasion of Yakub Beg from the Kokand Khanate in the 1860s, who established a “Yattixar Khanate” in a large area of Xinjiang. The second was in 1933, when the East Turkistan Islamic Republic was founded in Kashgar. The third was in 1944 with the founding of the East Turkistan Republic in 1944.

The original nationalism and nationalist imaginations of Xinjiang’s Turkic-speaking Muslims⁶ were in opposition to the goals of nationalism of China as a whole: Chinese [zhonghua] nationalism. The national interests of the Turkic-speaking Muslims and the Han, indeed even of all of China, were also in conflict. However, the results of the development of nationalism in Xinjiang went in a direction different from how the Turkic-speaking Muslim nationalists first imagined. The reason is that the Turkic-speaking Muslim people, those later largely called Uyghurs, gradually discovered that their interests did not conflict substantially with the interests of all of China, but rather that many of their interests were the same in many circumstances. For example, during the first major disturbance when Yakub Beg established the Yattixar Khanate, Yakub Beg used the name of Islam, but as a Kokandi (the Kokand Khanate roughly corresponds to today’s Uzbekistan), he oppressed the power and rights of the Uyghur people. Under this oppression, the murmurs of dissent from the Uyghur people grew. Therefore, once Zuo Zongtang began his westward march, he in fact received the support of a vast majority of Uyghur people, including both upper class and lower class. This can be seen in the historical records of the Uyghurs themselves. They very much welcomed the arrival of Zuo Zongtang and how he restored peace and order.

During the second disturbance of the East Turkistan Islamic Republic, it was Muslims, in this case Sinitic-speaking Muslim forces led by Ma Chongying, who brought about the end of the East Turkistan Islamic Republic [in 1934]. In the third disturbance, the nationalist leader of the East Turkistan Republic Ahmatjan Kasim believed “from a geographical standpoint, our revolution only has one path forward, and that is to join with the Soviet or the Chinese Revolution. We cannot accomplish our own independent revolution. But from a historical, traditional, and geopolitical standpoint, we are but a part of the Chinese Revolution.” This was the deep realization of the leader of the left-wing nationalist movement himself. This realization

⁴ “Territorial state” 领土国家 refers to a state in the Westphalian sense.

⁵ “Zhonghua” 中华 can be translated as “Chinese”, but its meaning extends beyond the Han majority and embraces all the people of China. At its broadest, zhonghua can encompass overseas Chinese diaspora, including both expatriates and persons born abroad who are not Chinese citizens.

⁶ Wu Qina uses the phrase “Turkic-speaking Muslims” to refer to Xinjiang’s settled nationalities (世居民族, those who are native or have long lived in Xinjiang) who are predominantly Muslim and speak a language in the Turkic language family. This includes Uyghurs (officially spelled Uygurs in China), Kazakhs (officially Kazaks), Kyrgyz (officially Kirgiz), Uzbeks, and Tatars. The other settled nationalities of Xinjiang are Han, Mongols, Hui, Manchu, Xibo, Tajiks, Daur, and Russians.

received the support of the elites of the East Turkistan Republic and of the country. Ahmatjan's successor was the now famous Saifuddin Azizi.⁷

This sort of development was not unique to Xinjiang. We can see the thoughts of Gyalo Thondup,⁸ one of the main political figures in today's exiled Dalai Lama clique, that he published in his famous works some 10 years ago, "We are fighting for Tibet's rights, but the Americans do not understand what these rights are. Americans want to use Tibetan independence to reach their own goals, using Tibetan people as tools. In this way they are actually sacrificing the interests of Tibetans." Gyalo Thondup himself never changed his position for Tibetan independence, but he realizes that in reality, Tibetan independence cannot succeed, and his relationship with the United States is not a moral one, but a relationship of use and be used. This is the tragedy of their nationalism.

Returning to Xinjiang and the Uyghur nationalism that stands in opposition to Chinese [zhonghua] nationalism, the participants of Uyghur nationalism eventually discovered a similar result. Because of this similar result, we see today, the political movement of so-called East Turkistan independence does not enjoy any strong support in Xinjiang itself. In fact, in today's Xinjiang, the wish and objectives of the Uyghur intellectuals holding strong national sentiments remains preserving national culture, including Islam, including Uyghur tradition; adjusting and surviving amidst the process of modernization, and; achieving the opportunity for common development alongside all of China's people.

Duowei: In the end, whether Han or Uyghur, people's wish for a better life is basic and also universal, but is often drowned out by political slogans and ethnic problems.

Wu Qina: From here I can move to my third topic: the economy. Xinjiang's fundamental issue is its economy. We can see from Mackinder's geopolitical theory that Xinjiang occupies a position of prime importance because it is at the heart of the world island. In Mackinder's view, whoever controls the heart of the world island can control the world. But do locals in Xinjiang feel this circumstance? In actuality, they do not. For them, the most important reality is the problem of survival and quality of life.

We can see that Xinjiang's area is very large at 1.67 million square kilometers, or 45 Taiwans. In this large area, Xinjiang's population is only about 20 million people, slightly fewer than Taiwan's, and its arable land covers 36,000 square kilometers, with this arable land very dispersed and scattered along Xinjiang's edges. The core region of Xinjiang is made up of two large deserts. The ecology of the oases of these deserts rely on watering from melted water from the mountains, making the local ecology very delicate. In this light, no matter whether development in agriculture or in manufacturing afterwards, Xinjiang faced heavy environmental limitations. If Xinjiang wanted to develop an independent agricultural, industrial, and manufacturing chain, it simply could not under these present circumstances.

Therefore, in approaching the problem of Xinjiang's modern economic development and modernization, Xinjiang's intellectuals and elites need only arrive at the concrete planning and implementation stages to realize they needed to band together with China's economy and, at that time, Russian/Soviet Central Asia's economy in order to allow Xinjiang to play the role of

⁷ The East Turkistan Republic is known in China as the "Three Prefectures Revolution" (三区革命) and is celebrated as stalwart resistance against the Guomindang. The "Three Prefectures" refer to Ili, Tacheng, and Altay Prefectures, which still retain special political status in China today.

⁸ Gyalo Thondup is the Tibetan exile leader who famously expressed regret for cooperating with the CIA.

connector between the two. This role means that there was no way they could disconnect from China's economy. We can see that from 1912 onwards, the rulers of Xinjiang,⁹ in considering the economy and livelihood of Xinjiang, considered that Xinjiang's best development prospects laid in its axial position and function.

Large-scale development and construction in Xinjiang began in the 1950s. This development had a central component which was railroad construction. Xinjiang began erecting railroads in the late 1950s, and opened rail lines in the early 1960s. We know that the Lanzhou-Xinjiang railroad was later extended, and now connects Southern Xinjiang, Northern Xinjiang, and links China with the former Soviet Central Asia region.¹⁰ This is tantamount to extension towards Western Eurasia and Europe. The construction of the railways is a key driver of Xinjiang's economic development. Because of the railway's construction, we can see that Xinjiang's traditional agriculture steadily developed to a large-scale economic crop agriculture¹¹ centered around cotton and tomatoes. From agriculture, Xinjiang developed towards large processed manufacturing chains such as textiles and ketchup. These manufacturing chains are a key factor in allowing the Xinjiang of today to cast aside poverty and into a state of moderate prosperity [xiaokang].

We can see from here, if Xinjiang had disconnected from the entirety of Chinese economic development, it would have arrested its own development. It could grow the cotton but then would have nowhere to sell them. The tomatoes would also rot in the dirt, with no way to advance towards processing. The grape and Hami melon market would not expand past self-sufficiency, and there would be no way to create an economy of scale. This all to say, Xinjiang's progress towards national integration with China and economic integration with China are linked. Therefore, China's national integration, economic integration benefits and promotes the prosperity of Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslims. This key fact naturally speaks to the survival and development of the different nationalities¹² of Turkic-speaking Muslims.

The survival and development Turkic-speaking Muslims naturally touch on the "survival status" of everyday life and social life of Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslim minority peoples, as well as on the preservation of culture and tradition and the promotion of cultural life. "Survival status" contains two considerations: education and gender.

On education, we can see that the issues of traditional Islamic education, Uyghur's traditional knowledge, and modernization are quite distant from each other. From the early 20th century, Uyghur intellectuals began to forge their own intellectual shifts. They drew from modern Islamic education from Turkey and Russian Central Asia (for example, Tatarstan). Modern Islamic education's emphasis was not on religion, but on modern scientific and technical knowledge,

⁹ From 1912 until the 1940s, Xinjiang was ruled by warlords with shifting ties with the Guomindang and the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ Originally, the Lanzhou-Xinjiang line went from Lanzhou to Urumqi. It was later extended to Alashankou, on the border with Kazakhstan. A Southern Xinjiang line was also constructed, connecting Turpan with Kashgar and Hotan.

¹¹ Presumably, he means from traditional subsistence agriculture to an agriculture with economies of scale characterized by surplus, or an agriculture capable of export.

¹² Nationality is often understood in the Western context as country of citizenship. In Hanyu, this is 国籍 guoji. In this context, nationality is 民族 minzu, which in China has taken on the interpretation of Stalin as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."

including foundational computations, measurements, hydroworks, communications, and translation of foreign languages. We see that in the early 20th century that modern Uyghur intellectuals consistently pushed for this mode of education, but by the early 1930s, this type of education stagnated at the foundational level, about the level of the third grade in elementary school. If Xinjiang wished to develop further, then this level was far from sufficient. From the 1930s to the end of the 1970s, the development of secondary and tertiary education in all of Xinjiang was completed under the support of local and central governments, particularly thanks to the financial support of the central government. One can say, if there was no Chinese government fiscal support, then the modern intellectual elites of Xinjiang would have no way to complete their modern educations.

People may point out exchange students. To that I would say, many of these exchange students were financially supported by the Chinese government. The early such exchange students from Xinjiang were sent in the 1930s and 1940s by Sheng Shicai¹³ to Soviet Central Asia for study, primarily Tashkent. Until the 1950s, among the exchange students sent by China to the Soviet Union, the Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tatars and others made up a large proportion. This was part of an important plan to develop Xinjiang's economy and education through dispatching exchange students to the Soviet Union. If we examine the archives, we would find that the percentage of exchange study funding allocated to Xinjiang far exceeded the average percentage of the whole of China. Compared to the rest of China and on a scale of an average person, a Han person would not be able to have this good of an opportunity to study abroad.

In the mid-1960s, Sino-Soviet relations broke down, and this exchange study plan was brought to a halt. After this, the secondary and tertiary-educated people of Xinjiang experienced progress and development. In the course of development, it was very apparent that resources were being skewed towards local non-Han groups. Aside from the skew of admission enrolment and educational resources towards minorities, we must note that the language of instruction in secondary and tertiary education was often the language of the minorities, including in scientific and medicinal education. If we compare this to contemporaneous Western countries, we would find that Western countries often placed the instruction of and in minority languages on a low level. On the tertiary level, no instruction in minority languages existed. But in Xinjiang, the use of minority languages in modern education played a large role in modernizing the society of Uyghurs and Turkic-speaking Muslims. However, in the post-Mao period, education in China's coastal provinces showed clear progress, and Xinjiang's educational resources once again showed relative deficiency. At this time, Xinjiang was in dire need of new directed educational resources, and new investments in scientific research and industry.

Duowei: What about the issue of women outside the education context? Recently there's been heated controversy over forced birth control over Xinjiang's Uyghur women and controlling Xinjiang's Uyghur population. What is the actual truth?

Wu Qina: The second point under the topic of society is women. Because Xinjiang's Islam is fairly secularized, the rights and status of Xinjiang's women are better in comparison to the status of women in the Arab world. Their living environment is also comparatively better. But even though it is so, the weak relative position of women in Uyghur society remains a phenomenon burdening Xinjiang's society. If we observed Xinjiang's women from before the 1950s, we would see that the work participation rate of Uyghur women of the time practically

¹³ Reigning warlord of War of Resistance against Japan-era Xinjiang with close ties to the Soviet Union.

equalled zero. Even though to a certain extent women had the freedom to divorce, the restraints, restrictions and religious prohibitions proscribed by the mosques experienced by women in the household were all quite strong. In the Sheng Shicai period in the 1930s, Sheng Shicai wanted to adopt the Soviet model and worked to promote women's social and work participation, but the effects were limited, because Sheng Shicai's own resources were very limited.

After the 1950s, Beijing made a major investment towards the first steps in gender equality and labor participation for women in Xinjiang. We need only compare Xinjiang with the rest of Islamic society: the region with the highest labor participation for women is China's Turkic and Sinitic-speaking Muslims, primarily the Uyghurs and the Hui. The rate of their labor participation surprises the world. If the religious personnel, scholars, and ordinary people of Islamic countries come to Xinjiang, to Ningxia, they will realize that the labor participation rate of women in Xinjiang is something hard to imagine in their own countries. Even Turkey and Iran, where women participate in society, politics, economics and policy, would find their proportion of women's participation in such matters far below that of Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu, and other Islamic societies in China.

To tell a not entirely appropriate joke, we saw today Rebiya Kadeer, a leader of the East Turkistan independence movement. She actually found her start as a minority women entrepreneur supported by the CPC. This identity is directly related to the equality movement for all of Xinjiang's women. In the Post-Mao era, when Xinjiang entered into China's marketization and globalization schema, women's opportunities grew further. Under such circumstances, Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking Muslim regions once again fostered pushes for "re-Islamization" and began to restrict women's development. This is a phenomenon of the intertwining of modernization and tradition that we must take note of.

Duowei: Concerning the problem of the "intertwining of modernity with tradition" that you mentioned, modern China's national strategy is modernization, including the modernization of the country's governance system and ability, but in regards to minority nationalities many remark that modernization itself means the erosion of minority tradition. The quicker the pace of modernization, the faster the erosion of tradition. This contradiction was especially apparent in the dispute over Inner Mongolia's educational materials.¹⁴

Wu Qina: The fifth issue is related to this. What is the greatest problem facing modern Xinjiang today? I believe that the core question here is brought about by globalization. The problem faced by old Xinjiang and the problem faced by the West in their relations with Islam are not the same. However, the problem faced by modern Xinjiang and the problem faced by the West regarding their relations with Islam are one and the same: that is to say, globalization's effect of pushing out Islamic communities, which we can see from history. We know that Islamic reform movements have been around since the 17th century,¹⁵ but until the 21st century, Islamic reform

¹⁴ Summer 2020, protests in Inner Mongolia, Tongliao City, concerning rumors that Mongolian language instruction would be phased out. Authorities clarified that standardization of educational materials (including textbooks in language arts, social studies, and government and ethics) did not mean that Mongolian language instruction would be phased out, or that other preferential policies for ethnic minorities were to be phased out. See Qiao Collective's [On Inner Mongolia and Bilingual Education in China](#).

¹⁵ This seems to be referring to reforms of Islamic countries, not necessarily intellectual or religious reform movements like Wahhabism, which finds its origins in the 18th century. Wu Qina might be referring to the

movements have not been very successful. So throughout the entire process of modernization and globalization, Islamic societies around the world were victims to varying degrees, and they were marginalized within the globalization process.

Concretely in the context of Xinjiang, this marginalization manifested on three levels. First, in the time that China had not yet entered the process of liberalization¹⁶ and globalization, Uyghur and other Turkic-speaking minority communities received guarantees from the public sector of China's socialist system. These guarantees included preferential treatment for minorities in exercise of political and economic rights. Concretely, these were privileges for birth, education, housing, entrance into public service, promotion, and other such interests. All minority groups received these guarantees. But once liberalism and globalization were introduced, following the large increase of the role of private enterprises in China's economy, some privately-held companies in Xinjiang preferred to hire Han workers because they felt they were closer to Han labor, whether due to linguistic reasons or from a technical or training perspective, or whether due to so-called "work ethic" as perceived by managers. This caused the opportunities for employment for Turkic-speaking Muslims to shrink relatively. Even though the public sector continued to offer guarantees, society had shifted, and public servants were apprehensive that they would not be able to fully satisfy the needs of minority groups.¹⁷

Secondly, because Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking minorities are Chinese citizens, they also hope to have the same development opportunities as other Chinese societies. But where did China's economy develop [during 90s period of liberalization and globalization]? In the southeastern coastal regions. So in the past 30 years, Xinjiang had many people of all nationalities, but primarily the Uyghur people, seek to find work in China's southeastern coastal regions, or engage in other commercial activities. But engaging in this kind of work required contact with Han people to a level not seen before. The process of this contact produced linguistic, cultural, training, and customs conflicts, situations they had not encountered before. In regards to Han communities, they also had never seen minority peoples from Xinjiang who spoke a different language and looked differently, leading to conflict. These conflicts were aggravated by cultural misunderstandings, and these misunderstandings escalated to dispositions towards religious ideologies, nationalist ideologies, and even separatist ideologies.

Thirdly, following post-Mao Reform and Opening Up, China's religious policy had an element of "reparations" for the religious policy carried out in Mao's Cultural Revolution. Concretely, this manifested as government support to encourage Muslims to go to Mecca for pilgrimage. Many times, this financial support was carried out by a government organ or the institutionalized Islamic Association of China to allow believers to go to Mecca. Afterwards, once the economic situation was improved, many adult Sinitic-speaking and Turkic-speaking Muslim men wanted to go to Mecca for pilgrimage.

Duowei: From "margins" to the "center", one simply cannot avoid entering "confrontation and reaction."

Köprülü era of the Ottoman Empire of the late 17th century, in which the shock of defeats in the War of the Holy League/Great Turkish War (1683-99) prompted reform in the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁶ 市场化 - "market-ization", translated to liberalism for simplification purposes.

¹⁷ This sentence is likely referring to both a policy-level apprehension that the public sector could no longer fulfill those needs as well as an individual-level apprehension that the benefits of a public sector job could no longer match the growing demands of a rapidly changing society (i.e. wages, standard of living concerns, etc.).

Wu Qina: Exactly. As Xinjiang steadily came into contact with the broader Islamic world, it encountered many cultural clashes. The first such clash is coming to believe their Islam was not authentic Islam, and wishing to come closer to the true faith of Islam. The second is discovering during the process of their pilgrimage that they could communicate easily with Turkic peoples from Central and West Asia. This caused a certain degree of shock to the developing Chinese (zhonghua minzu)¹⁸ identity. The third is information sources, a similar issue faced by the entire Chinese mainland in general. All the people believed that outside information was more credible, and they assigned more authoritativeness and respect to outside information than to domestic information. Xinjiang was no exception.

In regards to Xinjiang specifically, local Turkic-speaking Muslim communities comparatively preferred to receive information from Turkey, India, or the Arab world. Their ability to read and comprehend this information was limited, so often they reinterpreted the information based on their own imaginations. Yet amidst the information were topics that undid the unity of the Chinese [zhonghua] nation and Chinese socialism, creating shock for the Turkic-speaking Muslim communities. This shock manifested as a predisposition towards a type of fundamentalism from so-called “religious teachings”, as well as nationalism and even separatism.

This type of tendency can be seen in today’s Europe, North America, even Australia, New Zealand. Western countries have taken all sorts of measures to handle this phenomenon. Whether it is setting new laws or through subtle indoctrination, they have done it all. For example in France, men are not allowed to grow large beards, as large beards would reduce facial recognition capabilities and the police would have a hard time enforcing the law. On French beaches, Muslim women cannot wear one-piece swimsuits, as authorities felt such a swimsuit was not appropriate for swimming. Canada’s school have prohibited Muslim schoolchildren from wearing head scarves, holding that this was disrespectful of Canada’s mainstream values. Other countries are also less convenient for Muslim’s dietary needs. In China, Muslims care much about access to halal foods, but in Western countries and other regions, there is not as much care or attention paid to Muslim’s dietary needs, although it is not a total disregard.

Duowei: In all Western societies there is certainly strong Islamophobic sentiments. The major religious, ethnic, and national conflicts in the last 30 years are all related to the tight relationship between the West and Islamic societies. In comparison to the measures taken by Western countries, what measures have China taken to respond to this question?

Wu Qina: In Mao Zedong’s time, China never used the measures Western countries used vis-a-vis Muslims, but after Mao, due to rising globalization, and in facing similar challenges and problems faced by Western countries in regards to Islam, China could not help but adopt some of the measures of Western countries. But these measures have been moderated, for instance, certain restrictions on wearing long black robes¹⁹, face coverings, and beards. In real life, these restrictions are not necessarily enforceable. Authorities make a few superficial rules, regulate some content of religious education, and strengthen education surrounding national identity. These all are policies found in the West, and to a particularly greater degree. The West more

¹⁸ *Zhonghua minzu* or the Chinese nation is the Chinese national identity that extends to all the people of China. It is not a nationalism limited to the Han majority, which would be Han chauvinism that is rejected by the Communist Party of China.

¹⁹ Likely referring to abaya.

forcefully emphasizes conformity with Western values, belonging, and integration. Aside from this, China, in targeting prevention of terrorist attacks, also adopts comparatively severe inspection measures. These measures are nothing the West does not also do, they're all the same.

Therefore, the West's questioning of China's policy towards Uyghurs and the Muslims is highly contradictory, and it is exceptionally clear that there is a double standard at play. If the West wishes to question China's policy, it would do well to first question its own policies towards Muslims and the policies of all Muslim countries. It should examine its own long history of hatred of Islamic culture, psychology, and political structures, but of course the West does not do this. Muslims in China and in the West face similar challenges. Shouldn't we not care about that instead? Without question, the shocks experienced by Muslims in the context of modernization, globalization, and liberalization are hot topics we should pay very close attention to. In the process, restrictions on cultural transmission and religious freedom may arise, but these restrictions are things that we learned from watching how the West handled these issues. If the West so cared about religious and cultural freedom and human rights, then it should do more, take care of its own affairs well first, and then make requests of others on the same standard.

Duowei: But at this time, the West has a stranglehold on discursive power. On this issue, even though there is a clear double standard, even though there's a greater need for the West to self-reflect, in the end China has become the bull's eye, the target for crusade.

Wu Qina: I think there are many imperfections in Chinese society, and without doubt, Chinese society should pay more attention to this aspect. But the crux that Chinese society should be attentive to is that, while under Mao the country was quite stable and fixed, in the post-Mao era after the 1990s, China has steadily become a mobile country. Aside from relaxation of the hukou system,²⁰ China is the most mobile country on the technological front. Three-fourths of the world's high-speed railways are in China, and their speed is a marvel to people worldwide. This mobility has led to an unprecedented level of interaction, scale, content, and depth between ethnic groups. In this context, the Han majority must understand the history and culture of minority peoples, which would work towards dissolving misunderstandings towards minority peoples.

Similarly, minority peoples must understand the unity and integration of modern China in the face of Western invasion. This topic concerns all Chinese people, including Han and minorities, and it is a topic every person must face. I think approaching these two topics well is an urgent task for all of modern China's people. At least from an everyday living point of view, Han and minorities should completely dissolve misunderstandings about the other. This takes us back to your question. If other countries use the issues of Xinjiang, Islam and Muslims in China as political tools in service of their own national interests out of international political calculations, then the first to suffer will be China's Uyghurs and Muslims, their happiness and their rights.

Duowei: The six points you have raised have touched on all aspects of Xinjiang. Aside from all those, people have fixed consternation on the population structure of Xinjiang. The data shows that due to reductions in birth rate and population migration, Xinjiang's future population

²⁰ The hukou or household registration system fixes a person's residence in a certain place. Residents cannot avail themselves of certain social services in a city/region unless their household is registered in that city/region.

structure will change greatly and is bound to be a severe issue. We have previously interviewed Professor Xu Jianying of the Institute of Frontier Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He pointed out that population security in the borderlands necessitates close attention, that in order for there to be true communication, interaction, and intermingling between all the people, the borderlands must be kept stable and ethnic population structure must be reformed or optimized.²¹ What do you think of this?

Wu Qina: I believe that Xinjiang's population structure is not something to really worry about. In Xinjiang's traditional political structure, since 1758 when it integrated with China's political order,²² there has in fact always been a certain approach to interactions between different ethnic groups. This approach is a bit too far removed by time, but it was also not entirely ineffectual, so it merits study in today's world.

In the post-Mao and Reform and Opening Up era, Xinjiang experienced two population trends. The first is that many Han begin to migrate to Xinjiang independently of state planning. This was due to economic incentive. The other trend is that due to discrepancies in the family planning policy, the population of Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslim communities is growing at a much faster rate than the Han population. All in all, in considering the proportion of Han and minorities in Xinjiang's population, the Han population which once at its highest reached 40% is now steadily decreasing, and this trend has been ongoing for several years.

So when the West describes the "explosive increase" in the Han population squeezing out the living space of the Uyghurs, we can see that this is just ignorance of history and the facts. This is because the time when Han population in Xinjiang was at its height is not the current day, as it is in fact decreasing in the current day. However, from here on out, we must consider two trends in the future of Xinjiang's population development. The first trend is the great trend of Uyghurs and other minorities of Xinjiang participating in the entire Chinese economy. There is no way to stop this trend, as we have seen more and more Uyghurs go to other parts of China to work, and that there are more and more visible and successful people, such as those in the entertainment industry or in entrepreneurship. More will come down the line, and the image of Uyghurs will appear in the line of sight for all Chinese people.

The second trend is whether Xinjiang's own economic development will prevent Han or other Chinese people from going to Xinjiang to search for development opportunities. This trend is also unstoppable. Especially in regards to Westerners, if they truly believe Chinese people should have the right to move, then it is simply an unavoidable trend that Han and other Chinese peoples would move to Xinjiang. But this trend will not turn into squeezing out minority peoples. I don't believe this is something that could actually happen. This is because Xinjiang's economic group is limited by its natural conditions, so there is a ceiling. In any case, China's

²¹ Xu Jianying conducted a study of population in Southern Xinjiang in 2014 and proposed "optimizing the population structure", which appears to mean that he proposes sponsoring more Han migration into Southern Xinjiang, which is roughly 85% minority nationalities, mostly Uyghur. Wu Qina does not seem to see the need for this, and, his affiliation with CASS notwithstanding, Xu Jianying does not represent official state policy.

²² The Qing Dynasty became the sole government over modern-day Xinjiang in 1755, defeating the Dzungar Khanate, an Oirat Mongol khanate. Shortly after, Amursana, an Oirat collaborator with the Qing who helped bring about the end of the Dzungar Khanate, rebelled against the Qing seeking to seize power. His rebellion was defeated in 1757. During Amursana's rebellion, another rebellion arose in Southern Xinjiang, led by the Khoja brothers. Their rebellion was defeated in 1759.

current population crisis is not population explosion, but population decline. This crisis, to exaggerate a bit, could greatly reduce the speed of China's growth.

Under these circumstances, the core issue that China and the world should concern themselves with is how to advance interethnic cultural interaction and advance interethnic interests, promoting the common development of the interests of all groups, in the context of a slowdown in the speed of economic development. That is the focal point.

Duowei: About the importance and necessity of understanding between Han and ethnic minorities that you mentioned, it actually appears to be the case that in the past few years the situation has been “two-way discrimination.” Concretely stated, Han people believe that too many policies coddle and favor minorities, such as adding points to the college entrance examinations.²³ Tempers can run high on these issues. There are also minorities who believe that emphasizing the special qualities of minorities²⁴ and emphasizing their ethnic identity are themselves a sort of discrimination. After Xi Jinping gained office, he emphasized the development of the Chinese nation [zhonghua minzu gongtongti]. In your view, how can the “two-way discrimination” between Han and minorities become two-way understanding? Will ceasing emphasizing the special qualities of minorities be an effective measure? What is the biggest challenge for the development of the Chinese nation?

Wu Qina: I believe this question has two parts. The first part is that the development of the Chinese nation [zhonghua minzu] has not yet been completed. This development must be accelerated. The main substance of the national identity is that all Chinese citizens are Chinese [zhongguo ren], and their only political identity is that of a Chinese [zhongguo ren]. There should be no second political identity. There are currently 55 minority groups who are considered “nationalities” [minzu]. The term “nationality” [minzu] itself has a political implication, an implication that can widen the divide between the Han and minority peoples. If this divide widens, it can develop into a political divide. That to say, to confirm the sole political identity of Chinese people [zhongguo ren] is of highest importance. But indeed this identity confirmation absolutely does not mean harming the traditional culture of minority peoples. On the contrary, in the process of developing the Chinese nation [zhonghua minzu], we should exert much effort in protecting and developing the culture of all ethnic groups. These cultures, after all, are part of the soft power of all of Chinese culture.

I'll give an example. If today, the Confucius Institutes overseas teach Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian and other minority languages alongside Hanyu, then China could tell the West and the entire world: if you want to close these Confucius Institutes, you will be suppressing the diversity of China's culture, you would be suppressing the diversity of humanity's culture, and you would be promoting the hegemony of the English language.

²³ As the college entrance examination in China (gaokao) is the only standard for admission to universities, many provincial governments in China simply add a flat number of points to students of minority background when they take the college examination exam. For instance, in 2021, certain students from Southern Xinjiang (Hotan, Kashgar, Kizisu, Aksu) received 10 additional points to their final score. Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Mongols, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Xibo, Uzbek, Tatar, Daur, Tibetan, and Russian students received 15 additional points to their final score. Hui students received 5 additional points. In the highly competitive context of the gaokao, these points could prove decisive.

²⁴ 特殊化 - “distinct-ilizing”/“distinct-ilization” - in other words emphasizing the distinctiveness of ethnic minority society, culture, people, or emphasizing their minority status in society.

The second part is that the substance of the Chinese nation must fall on the equality of the personal rights of every member of the Chinese nation [zhonghua minzu]. The relationship between a citizen with another citizen is not at all a relationship of this ethnicity with that ethnicity, but rather the relationship between two people, whose rights are absolutely equal. This is the issue facing China of developing and improving human rights. No matter which nationality a citizen belongs to, their job, their social strata, or their occupation, they are all completely equal in the eyes of the law. I believe this is a key directive.

Duowei: Compared to a long-term mission such as the construction of the Chinese nation, a current pressing problem China faces is the censure from all sides about China's "genocide" in Xinjiang. This issue is yet another core agenda in the West after forced labor. Even though these accusations are treated in China largely as total nonsense, but from the perspective of the Islamic world and Turkic countries, a lie spoken a thousand times could possibly be believed to be the truth. What's more is that these countries' understanding of Chinese history, culture, and political reality is limited. If the West continues to set the agenda on genocide, what challenges will this bring to China's relations with the Islamic world and Turkic countries? How can China seize the initiative?

Wu Qina: The machinations of the West have great power within their own borders. On the other hand, the space for their machinations in the Islamic world and Turkic world is limited, because in Islamic and Turkic countries there are also complex issues on ethnicity and the confrontation between religion and secularization. In fact, the confrontation they are experiencing are quite similar to the conflict between Islam and secular society that has occurred in China, so if they were to try to manipulate this issue, they would only need to wait before finding that they would hurt themselves.

But bringing it back to China, does China not have a direct way to respond? I believe this direction is one that the Chinese government has always promoted, and that is furthering "Opening Up." "Opening Up" cannot end. If only "Opening Up" continues, the charge of genocide will collapse on its own.

Many people proclaim that they care about Xinjiang, but they have never went there, and they have no interest in the actual problems that Xinjiang faces now. Today's Xinjiang, its every level, its nature, its diverse culture manifesting in front of people's eyes, its charm, all can naturally destroy the charge of genocide. China and Taiwan have a common musical legacy, and that is Wang Luobin. Wang Luobin is a symbol of the synthesis of modern Chinese [zhonghua] folk culture. Wang Luobin is Han, he is a Beijinger, but he is also a person from Xinjiang, he is Chinese. China's development will improve its soft power through "Opening Up", and in the process, it will display the limitless diversity of Chinese culture to the peoples of the world. This is something that Westerners, in actuality bent for so long on pushing a global monoculture, cannot even imagine.