

Silk Road Connectivities and the Construction of Local History in Eastern Xinjiang¹

Ildikó Bellér-Hann

ABSTRACTS

Ausgehend von Jack Goodys These von eurasischen Gemeinsamkeiten untersucht dieser Beitrag indigene Perspektiven transregionaler Konnektivität im Uigurischen Autonomen Gebiet Xinjiang (Xinjiang Uyghur) im Nordwesten Chinas, der für die Bildwelt und die zivilisatorischen Begegnungen der Seidenstraße typischen Region schlechthin. Das Thema wird durch eine dichte Lektüre und Analyse ausgewählter Texte erschlossen, die in einem 2012 in uigurischer Sprache erschienenen biografischen Wörterbuch über herausragende Persönlichkeiten, die im späten 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in der Kumul-Oase lebten und arbeiteten, veröffentlicht wurden. Die Biografien von Wissenschaftlern, Pädagogen, religiösen Würdenträgern, Kaufleuten und Handwerkern aus der vorsozialistischen und sozialistischen Ära bilden ein *régime d'historicité*. Dieses *régime* offenbart nicht nur sehr viel über die Darstellung und die Position dieser Personen in der gesamten türkischsprachigen muslimischen Gesellschaft, sondern auch über die multiskalare räumliche Konstruktion der Ethnohistorie. Oberhalb der Ebene der Oase sind die wichtigsten adressierten Maßstäbe die der Region (Xinjiang oder Provinz), des Nationalstaates (China) und des Transnationalen (insbesondere der muslimischen Welt). Diese Vernetzung der Mikroebene mit dem Globalen ermöglicht der Lokalgeschichte die Hinterfragung der Metaerzählungen und erlaubt neue Einblicke in emische Taxonomien sowie in die komplexe Beziehung zwischen Diachronie und Synchronie.

1 The Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology supported my participation in the Budapest conference, where an earlier version of this paper was presented. It also supported fieldwork in eastern Xinjiang in 2006, which kindled my interests in Qumul local history. I also gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Danish Velux Fonden for the project "Between homogenization and fragmentation: textual practices as strategies of integration and identity maintenance among the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, China (twentieth–twenty-first centuries)," to which this article is a contribution.

Taking Jack Goody's thesis of Eurasian commonalities as its point of departure, the paper explores indigenous perspectives of transregional connectivities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China, a region quintessentially representative of "Silk Road" imagery and civilizational encounters. The subject is approached through a close reading and analysis of selected texts published in 2012 in Uyghur in a biographical dictionary that celebrates outstanding personalities who lived and worked in the oasis of Qumul in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The biographies of scholars, educators, religious dignitaries, merchants and craftsmen that span pre-socialist and socialist eras form a *régime d'historicité*. This *régime* reveals a great deal not only about the representation and position of these individuals in the wider Turkic-speaking Muslim society but also about the multi-scalar spatial construction of ethnohistory. Above the level of the oasis, the most significant scales addressed are those of the region (Xinjiang or province), the nation-state (China), and the transnational (in particular the Muslim world). This integration of the micro-level with the global enables local history to challenge taken for granted meta-narratives. This approach generates new insights into emic taxonomies as well as into the complex relationship between diachrony and synchrony.

Introduction

This paper takes Jack Goody's thesis of the unity of Eurasia as its point of departure.² Goody's broad, comparative approach attacks the Eurocentrism still inherent in much Western scholarship. Yet his conceptualization of an East versus West binary as the key to global history is inadequate. One way to move beyond this binary is to zoom in on particular places at particular times and explore the threads linking micro and macro levels. Privileging a local perspective is by no means alien to Goody, himself a dedicated fieldworker in Africa before turning his attention to world history. In this paper I explore biographical narratives used to construct ethno-religious identity by contemporary Uyghur intellectuals, poised between transnational connectivity and the immediate context of reform socialism in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China's far north-west is a vast area that formerly constituted the central zone of the overland Silk Routes. The legendary caravan route from the east forked at Dunhuang to skirt the Taklamakan desert north and south, before joining again at Kashgar. Also known to Europeans as Eastern or Chinese Turkestan in the era following its definitive incorporation into the Chinese polity in the mid-eighteenth century, Xinjiang exemplifies transregional connectivities. Many historians have viewed this zone as the interface between two *continents* but Jack Goody takes a different view and (drawing on the work of Peter Golden) insists that

Europe and Asia were neither geographically nor culturally distinct. Communication between the two parts was frequent from an early period. Originating in the hinterland

2 Jack Goody, *The Theft of History*, Cambridge 2006; *The East in the West*, Cambridge 1996; *The Eurasian Miracle*, Cambridge 2010.

*of China, [the Turks] not only controlled the Silk Road, which extended as far as Rome, but acted as a channel for the adoption of Near Eastern religions ... their activity extended through the Western steppes as far as the Bulgars. They were thus associated with the metal age and linked to both sides of the Eurasian landmass. Those links were strong and preceded what later became the Silk Road.*³

Thus Goody's grand vision of Eurasian connectivities attributed a pivotal role to the Turkic speaking populations of central Eurasia, well before the advent of Islam. Although often dismissed as a romanticizing, Orientalizing misnomer, Ferdinand von Richthofen's metaphor of the Silk Road continues to loom large in academic discussions of the deep history of Eurasia, where the trading cities of the Oxus civilization with links to Mesopotamia, China and northern India constituted a "natural hub for trans-Eurasian exchanges" as early as 2000 BCE.⁴ Richthofen opens his first volume on China with a chapter on Central Asia (more specifically East Turkestan), thereby emphasizing the region's centrality in the history of overland connectivities.⁵ Xinjiang is often represented as the ultimate "crossroads", both in the pre-modern as well as the modern period.⁶ The Silk Road metaphor has been enthusiastically embraced by post-Soviet nation-builders as well as the politicians behind China's *One Belt One Road* initiative, also referred to as the Silk Road Economic Belt, which promotes Xinjiang as a Silk Road hub. One of its aims is to solve "the Xinjiang problem", i.e. the tension between China's fear of Uyghur separatism and the anxiety of the ten million strong Muslim Uyghur minority that their ethnic identity is being eroded by Beijing's heavy-handed policies toward their religion, language and cultural practices.⁷ The Initiative lauds Silk Road heritage, emphasizing both its role in enabling commercial connectivities and its impact in promoting peace and tolerance between civilizations.⁸

The dogged persistence of the Silk Road metaphor in diverse discursive fields inside and outside academia raises the question as to what impact it has had on local representations

3 Jack Goody, Asia and Europe, in: History and Anthropology, 26 (2015) 3: 263-307, here p. 266.

4 David Christian, The Maps of Time. An Introduction to Big History, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2011, pp. 297-98. For the first use of the term see Ferdinand von Richthofen, China. Ergebnisse eigener Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien, 1, Berlin 1877-1912, pp. 460-62. The global connectivities of Central Eurasia have recently been synthesized by James A. Millward, The Silk Road. A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2013. For the connections to East Asia see Peter Perdue, East Asia and Central Eurasia, in: The Oxford Handbook of World History, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Oxford 2011, Oxford Handbooks Online (2012) DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199235810.013.0023

5 Daniel C. Waugh, Richthofen's 'Silk Roads': Toward the Archeology of a Concept, in: The Silk Road 5 (2007) 1: 1-10, here p. 2.

6 James A. Millward, Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang, New York 2007.

7 The accelerated development launched in 2000 as part of the "Develop the West" programme reflected the hopes of policy makers that improved economic opportunities would satisfy the Uyghurs and guarantee the stability of the Autonomous Region and the security of its international borders. The repressive policies implemented since the appointment of Chen Quanguo as regional party secretary in August 2016 indicate that economic prosperity is no longer seen as sufficient to ensure long-term stability. See Ondřej Klimeš, Advancing 'Ethnic Unity' and 'De-extremization': Ideational Governance in Xinjiang under 'New Circumstances' (2012-2017), in: Journal of Chinese Political Science (2018) 10.1007/s11366-018-9537-8.

8 "Action plan on the belt and road initiative," The State Council The People's Republic of China, http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm.

within the zone concerned. No populations here can be considered as isolated societies or cultures since all are embedded in wider networks.⁹ Local, emic perspectives are shaped by wider discourses, such as that of national identity in conditions of reform socialism, or the ostensible unity of the Muslim world. This recognition raises the question how, if at all, Silk Road imagery has impacted on Uyghur constructions of ethnic and local identity. I address this question by examining the biographies of persons rooted in a particular oasis, whose lives span pre-socialist and socialist histories, to ascertain what these texts reveal about social change and the position of these subjects in the larger scheme of things. I also investigate which social groups are credited with shaping local society and explore the agency attributed to them in creating and maintaining networks on diverse scales. This is a distinctive application of “relational” paradigms such as *connected*, *shared* and *entangled* histories and *histoire croisée*.¹⁰ My study is distinctive in the sense that, rather than stress “horizontal” relations between entities of comparable scale, I place more emphasis on “vertical” or multi-scalar relations from the perspective of one location. Above the level of the locality, the most significant scales in this study are those of the region (Xinjiang), the nation-state (China), and the transnational (in particular the Muslim world). The integration of the micro-level with the global allows us to use local history “to question the trajectory of the often uncritically assumed metanarrative of ever increasing connections and integrations.”¹¹ It generates insights not only into emic taxonomies but also into “the relationship between diachrony and synchrony, and regimes of historicity and reflexivity.”¹²

The location is the oasis of Qumul (Chinese: Hami) in eastern Xinjiang, an important trading centre approximately mid-way between Dunhuang and Turpan (see the map of Marie Favereau, this issue, p. 53). The biographies I examine were committed to paper in the reform period, which started in the early 1980s when policies toward the Uyghur as an ethnic group (*minzu*) were gradually relaxed, following repression during the Maoist, collectivized period. During these years, minorities throughout the country benefited from certain privileges and affirmative action policies. Minority languages were supported, as were research and publications in ethnic literature, history and culture. However, from the early 1990s, in the case of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, these policies were qualified and gradually reversed. The space within which Uyghurs can express their cultural aspirations using their mother tongue in historical and literary publications has become

9 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley 1982.

10 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Connected Histories: Notes Toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia*, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997) 3: 735-762; Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main 2002; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, *Beyond Comparison: Histoire croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity*, in: *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 30-50, here pp. 30-32.

11 Anna Gerritsen, *Scales of a Local. The Place of Locality in a Globalizing World*, in: *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop, Oxford 2012, 213-26, here p. 219.

12 Werner and Zimmermann, *Beyond comparison*, 32. See also Anthony G. Hopkins (ed.), *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local*, Basingstoke 2006; Anna Gerritsen, *The Tale of Lady Tan: Negotiating Place between Central and Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China*, in: *The Medieval History Journal* 11 (2008) 2: 161-186.

increasingly circumscribed. In this context, published biographies construct a particular *régime d'historicité*, i.e. a vision of the past with implications for the present (and even the future).¹³ As will be shown, the local biographical construction of temporal orders in reform China is a collective exercise that is sensitive to diverse geographical scales; this regime of historicity is necessarily one of careful accommodation to power holders and their policy directives, rather than subversion.

Local History and Temporality

“Local history” is a vague term. It can refer to the history of a specific, sub-national, geographical or administrative locality, or more restrictively to the production of historical knowledge by indigenous authors from and about that locality, in the local language and through the use of a locally salient genre.¹⁴ In this paper the term refers to indigenous renderings of sub-national (regional and sub-regional or oasis-specific) history by members of the Uyghur ethnic group published in the Uyghur language for an Uyghur readership. This kind of knowledge production resembles academic historiography in that its aim is to uncover the past, but methodologically it differs from it in a number of ways, for example in its systematic reliance on oral sources as the primary source of data, and in its “framing”.¹⁵

Sporadic attempts to contest some tenets of national historiography were made during the early years of reform socialism.¹⁶ However, Uyghur voices that deviated from the official narrative were soon silenced and only the latter version of Xinjiang history has been made available for public consumption in the last three decades. All publications concerning indigenous history and culture, and even access to archives, are subject to strict censorship. This is the temporal and political frame in which the biographies to be considered here were planned, written and finally published. The subjects whose lives are presented in terms of a verifiable factuality lived between the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries, thus spanning the late imperial, Republican and socialist eras of modern Chinese history. Qumul came under Qing control from the middle of the eighteenth century in a system of indirect rule under which the indigenous Muslim ruler collected taxes and governed the local population while paying tribute to the Manchu Emperor. The ruling Muslim dynasty, known as the Wang, survived the end of the Qing Empire in 1911 and retained their power until their final demise in 1930. But the privi-

13 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).

14 Svetlana Jacquesson and Ildikó Bellér-Hann, Introduction, in: *Local History as an Identity Discipline*, ed. Svetlana Jacquesson and Ildikó Bellér-Hann, special issue, *Central Asian Survey* 31 (2012) 3: 239-50, here p. 244.

15 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Cambridge, MA 1974).

16 Gardner Bovingdon, The History of the History of Xinjiang, in: *Twentieth Century China* 26 (2001) 2: 95-139; Gardner Bovingdon with contributions by Nabijan Tursun, *Contested Histories*, in: *Xinjiang, China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, Armonk / New York 2004, 353-374; Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs. Strangers in their Own Land*, New York 2010, 23-39; Nabijan Tursun, The formation of Modern Uyghur Historiography and Competing Perspectives toward Uyghur History, in: *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 6 (2008) 3: 87-100.

leges and social prestige of the traditional elites lingered throughout much of the republican era during which the province was governed by a succession of Chinese warlords. In 1949 Xinjiang became part of the People's Republic of China. Important events in the history of the Qumul oasis included major uprisings in 1907, 1912 and 1931. The most frequently mentioned in the biographies is the last of these, a "peasant rebellion" led by Khoja Niyaz Haji.¹⁷

A Modern Uyghur Biographical Dictionary

From the large corpus of local, regional and oasis histories published by indigenous history enthusiasts and professional scholars in Qumul since 1980 to the present day, I have selected sections from a biographical dictionary published in 2012 by Äkhmät Hämdulla under the title "[Outstanding] Personalities in the History of Qumul."¹⁸ The volume can be considered representative of recent post-reform Uyghur ethnic publishing. The biographical dictionary derives from the *tazkirah*, a well-known genre in the literary tradition of Persianate societies, which included the sayings or writings of Muslim saints and poets as well as their biographies. It has also been attested in the Central Asian Chaghatay literary tradition, the joint legacy of all Central Asian Turkic Muslims, including the Muslims of Xinjiang.¹⁹ Its modern, secular materialization within the context of Uyghur minority publishing in reform China is best seen as the result of the fusion of local and external (Chinese and western) traditions. The term *tazkirä* is still used in Xinjiang, but not to describe contemporary biographical dictionaries. Rather, it designates government-sponsored handbooks of prefectures containing detailed information about social, economic and cultural conditions.²⁰ That Hämdulla's compilation was based on earlier, comparable works available in published or manuscript form is indicated by the twenty-one bibliographical entries listed in the end. Indeed the work exudes a sense of collective authorship, since the author lists no fewer than sixty-two persons who provided him with additional relevant information.²¹ This is typical of local historians who often take pride in prioritizing oral sources over written ones, based on the tacit assumption that

17 Although classified by local historians as a peasant rebellion, the uprising of 1931 had complex causes and a broad support base that acquired an inter-ethnic character and province-wide significance (Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 188–201).

18 Äkhmät Hämdulla, *Qumul tarikhidä ötkän shäkhslär*, Beijing 2012 (hereafter "HQTÖSH").

19 Johannes Thomas Pieter de Bruijn, *Tadhkira*, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, X, Leiden 2000, 53–54; Rian Thum, *Modular History: Identity Maintenance before Uyghur Nationalism*, in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71 (2012) 3: 627–53, here p. 632; Rian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, Cambridge 2014, 41–51.

20 Typical titles make reference to the historical figures / persons of the geographical entity they cover, such as "Famous Persons in Xinjiang's Recent History," (Shärip Niyaz Khushtar, *Shinjang yeqinqi zaman tarikhidä ötkän shäkhslär*, Ürümqi 2003; Shärip Khushtar, *Shinjang yeqinqi zaman tarikhidiki mäshhur shäkhslär*, Ürümqi 2000; or "Historical Figures of Xinjiang," (Adil Muhämmät, *Shinjangdiki tarikhi shäkhslär*, Ürümqi 2011); sometimes they are confined to a specific historical period, e.g. "Famous Uyghur Persons during the Yuan Dynasty," without naming the genre specifically (Abiliz Muhämmäd Sayrami and Abdurazaq Tokhti, *Yüan süلالisidä ötkän mäshhur Uyghur shäkhslär*, Ürümqi 1991).

21 HQTÖSH, 349–50.

the former are more reliable than the latter.²² With very few exceptions, the two hundred persons included in Hämdulla's dictionary are considered to be persons of merit. This is underlined by the author's stated intention to inspire young people to dedicate themselves to their homeland (*äl-yurt*) and be worthy descendants (*yaramliq äwlad*).²³

The great majority of the personalities included are men. They are introduced in ten chapters, each based on a profession and associated public engagement. These comprise: 1. Scholars, literati, calligraphers, translators; 2. Officials/Office-holders; 3. Educators; 4. Distinguished social figures, religious dignitaries; 5. Folk heroes; 6. Healers; 7. Merchants; 8. Craftsmen; 9. Folk artists; 10. Famous people who left Qumul for China's inner provinces and their descendants. The list does not embrace the totality of local society. Its evident gaps, such as the sparsity of women and the exclusion of farmers, transhumant pastoralists and other marginalized groups, are indicative of values that attribute certain professional groups and social categories an agency in shaping local history that is denied to others. In what follows I will focus on the five chapters dealing with scholars, educators, religious dignitaries, merchants and craftsmen. These categories include the local knowledge-elite as well as others perceived to have played a significant role in transmitting local knowledge and tradition and in introducing change and innovation in the context of wider connectivities.

Entries covering persons who lived prior to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are short and sketchy, no doubt due at least partly to the limitations of the sources. In general, each entry opens with the date and place of the person's birth and ends with the date and place of his death, and occasionally, the cause of death.²⁴ The entries thus conform to the requirements of a biographical narrative, which has to have a beginning and an end. Each is ordered chronologically according to events pertaining to the individual's professional and political careers, but personal detail is scarce. Children, parents, siblings and other (male) relatives are only mentioned when they are considered to be important in their own right, in which case they may well be listed separately. Each entry specifies the socio-economic position of the subject's family and outlines his educational attainments before elaborating on his social standing and achievements. All entries follow this structure. They generally fall short of providing comprehensive coverage of the career, let alone of family life, changes in character, views, emotional conflicts and so on, but of course it would be futile to criticize omissions according to the evolving conventions of Western literary biography.²⁵

22 Ildikó Bellér-Hann, Oasis History in Eastern Xinjiang: A Contested Field, in: History Making in Central and Northern Eurasia: Contemporary Actors and Practices, ed. Svetlana Jacquesson, Wiesbaden 2016, 79–99, here p. 91.

23 HQTÖSH, 1.

24 The living are explicitly excluded from this dictionary.

25 Cf. Peter Burke, Individuality and Biography in the Renaissance, in: The European Legacy 2 (1997): 1372–82, here p. 1373.

Scholars, Literary Figures, Calligraphers and Translators (*alimlär, adiblär, khättatlar, tärjimanlar*)

Among the thirty-five persons listed under this category, the earliest are a few famous poets of Qumul whose lives and artistic output cannot be precisely dated. From the second half of the nineteenth century the biographies become longer and more detailed. Many subjects combined a multiplicity of activities (e.g. most calligraphers and translators also pursued scholarly and/or literary activities). A few possessed exceptional skills in different fields. An outstanding example for this is Hapiz Niyaz (1896/1898?–1982), an accomplished painter, calligrapher, accountant, master tailor and cobbler, healer and self-taught historian and folklorist. Thanks to his thorough religious education, he was appointed guardian of the saintly tomb of Qays.²⁶ In the early 1930s, his close association with the rebel leader Khoja Niyaz Haji took him to the provincial capital Ürümchi and he may even have visited Mongolia and the Soviet Union.²⁷ If he did, his biography does not attribute any relevance to these sojourns outside China either for his personal development or for his communal commitment. Another example is Asim Haji (1865–1940), a poet, calligrapher and architect who also mastered carpentry and studied medicine. He decorated saintly shrines and mosques as well as secular objects such as wooden chests and domestic utensils. He completed the Haj twice and is said to have made substantial contributions to progress (*täräqqiyat*). While the biographical entry refrains from establishing a causal relationship between Asim Haji's travels and his progressive sympathies, some link is implicit in the laconic statement that his travels “opened up his horizon” (*näzär da'irisini kengäytkän*).²⁸

Hapiz Haji (1865–1940) was born in rural Qumul, but completed his education in Kashgar in southern Xinjiang. As his name suggests, he too must have had substantial travel experience across Eurasia (to earn the honorific title “haji”). His entry emphasizes his accomplishments as a poet and a commitment to the people that manifested itself in criticisms of secular office-holders and religious dignitaries and exposure of the suffering of ordinary people.²⁹ Social injustice was also a principal concern of Molla Hämdulla, identified as a healer but also as someone who could recite traditional songs, whose life was firmly rooted in his native village of Lapchuq (1880–1966).³⁰ Yüsüp Täyribäg (1864–1940), another member of the Muslim aristocracy, boasted an exceptional education: he studied poetry alongside medicine, calligraphy, mathematics, chemistry and geography, and was well-versed in Arabic and Persian as well as in Chinese. He used his own money and his connections to the centre of power to support religious learning and

26 HQTÖSH, 23–32.

27 See also Ildikó Bellér-Hann, Hapiz Niyaz: Cadre, Muslim, Historian. A Local Intellectual in Eastern Xinjiang, in: *Études orientales* 27–28 (2016): 87–115.

28 HQTÖSH, 15–16.

29 Ibid., 17.

30 Ibid., 18. This is an interesting example of how the categories used by the author overlap. Molla Hämdulla and Hapiz Niyaz could equally have been listed under “healers”.

the training of calligraphers. He himself became an accomplished poet as well as a “progressive intellectual” (*ilghar ziyali*). While performing the Haj in 1937 he also visited the Soviet Union, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Syria, accumulating experiences, which made him knowledgeable about the civilization of the Middle East. In spite of his aristocratic origins, he too is said to have remained “committed to the people” (*khalqpärwār*) as well as to education (*maripätpärwār*). Years after his death in 1940, his poetry was still considered subversive; it was burnt during the Cultural Revolution.³¹ Translator-interpreters have long played a key role as mediators between foreign rulers and indigenous subalterns.³² The task of mediating between two antithetical language communities tied to each other by political necessity was attributed high prestige. Manchu Yüsüp (1867–1930) owed his career as well as his nickname to the mobility made possible by royal patronage: as a young man he had the opportunity to accompany the last Qumul Wang on tribute missions to Beijing, where he was trained for four years as a Manchu interpreter and translator. He continued to serve the Wang in this capacity until the demise of the Muslim dynasty in 1930.³³

The acquisition of specialized knowledge, including that of the Chinese language, was also possible locally if royal patronage was forthcoming. Several of Qumul’s distinguished translators and interpreters were trained in the school known as *Iwirgöl Bilim Yurti*, founded by the last Muslim ruler, Shah Mäksud Wang in the 1920s. Ishaq Zaqir (1890–1953) Dawutjan Mollam (1895–1968) and Ibrahim Sopi (1896–1970) all attended this school.³⁴ It was a rare channel for social mobility, e.g. enabling a certain Yaqup Khetip (1890–1962), who hailed from a family of craftsmen, to become a member of the learned elite on the basis of his excellent language skills and calligraphy. Between 1920–1930 he was employed as palace accountant, while continuing the family tradition as a repairer of watches and clocks. In the early decades of socialism he worked as a legal interpreter.³⁵ But most interpreters and translators had more privileged family backgrounds and worked in close proximity to the Wang court, the centre of power until 1930. The skills of these mediators were still in demand later, following the incorporation of Xinjiang into the People’s Republic, but many suffered persecution for their “wrong” class background. Some of those accused of harbouring “anti-revolutionary attitudes” during the 1950s and later during the Cultural Revolution were rehabilitated in the late 1970s. Ibrahim Sopi mentioned above, for example, served as a translator in the administration of the sub-prefecture in the 1930s, later played an active role in the first land reform in the early 1950s, and contributed to the construction of underground irrigation canals and land reclamation. Despite this exemplary record of public service, he was classified as a rich peasant (*bay dikhqan*) and sentenced to three years of forced

31 Ibid., 13–15, 18–19.

32 Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang 1880–1949. Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur*, Leiden / Boston 2008, 126–9.

33 HQTÖSH, 17–18.

34 Ibid., 20, 22, 32.

35 Ibid., 19–20.

labour in Nom, Qumul's notorious labour camp.³⁶ While many subjects treated in this category experienced repeated persecutions, difficulties in publishing, and the trauma of seeing the books they wrote and possessed burned in public, the interpreter Sali Selim (1914–?) had an exceptionally smooth career, probably thanks to his peasant origins. Following a local *madrasa* education, he acquired Chinese and trained approximately fifty interpreters (both minorities and Han) in the course of the 1950s.³⁷

In the pre-socialist era, while translators and interpreters mediated between non-Muslim rulers and their Muslim subaltern subjects, the main task of calligraphers was to serve their community by copying the Koran and other books and decorating religious buildings such as mosques, madrasas and saintly shrines. They also composed petitions for ordinary, illiterate people to submit to the Wang, thus playing a key role in ensuring social stability. But the perpetuation of traditional modes of literacy did not exclude social innovation among these literati. The historian and chronicler Ālishah Bäg (1887–1953) initiated the recording of births in the old oasis centre and royal residence of Shähärichi in Qumul.³⁸ More commonly, however, intellectuals are praised for upholding and transmitting traditional cultural practices, as well as for their dogged commitment to serving their people. Ibrahim Khälpä (1850?–1929) exemplified both. Supported by royal patronage, he opened a three-year course for calligraphers in 1916, where twenty young people were trained at any one time. Simultaneously he worked as a scribe writing petitions for the illiterate for little or no remuneration, and without the authorization of the Wang. Recognizing his talent, which ordinary people related to the supernatural influence of the Prophet Khizir, the Wang excused his subversive behavior. He was appointed to high office as well as to the position of guardian (*shäykh*) of a saintly shrine, a detail that suggests close associations with Sufism.³⁹

Although not professional politicians themselves, many of these literati engaged in political activities. Several sympathized with popular movements and even actively supported the great peasant rebellion of 1931. Ismail Tahir (1922–1949) launched the newspaper *Qumul geziti* in 1946 and served in the regional government, but he was shot by Guomindang soldiers for his communist sympathies just as he was preparing to welcome the People's Liberation Army.⁴⁰

Some biographies attest to passionate dedication to the modernization of education and advancing social change, usually through participation in the activities of local branches of the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment (*uyghur mädäni aqartish uyushmisi*).⁴¹ By the 1930s these associations were ubiquitous in Xinjiang. They were primarily inspired by Muslim cultural reform in the Russian and the late Ottoman Empire

36 Ibid., 32–33.

37 Ibid., 35.

38 Ibid., 19.

39 Ibid., 10–12.

40 Ibid., 36–37.

41 Ibid., 21, 36.

and “blended Soviet, Turkic, and Chinese models of cultural progress.”⁴² They embodied Muslim intellectuals’ endeavors to modernize traditional Islamic education and bring about societal changes.⁴³ The Qumul branch was founded in the 1930s. Involvement with the activities of the Association was important in the biography of Abdulla Ähmidi (1925–1987), an outstanding representative of local historians. He hailed from the family of a religious dignitary. Having completed his madrasa education, he worked as a teacher in different locations of the oasis. In the 1940s he worked for the association for two years, an experience that served him well for his later career following Xinjiang’s incorporation into the PRC. During socialism he became an influential cultural cadre and in the early 1960s he was entrusted with compiling a new history of Qumul. This work could not be published due to the Cultural Revolution, during which he suffered personally. Following his rehabilitation, he resumed his historical, archeological, folkloristic and literary studies.⁴⁴ His peer and fellow historian Osman Tömür Qumuli (1927–2005) had a comparable career. Osman was born into a farming family. He benefited from education in the Teacher Training College opened by the Qumul branch of the Association. In 1953 he had the opportunity to study museology and archaeology in Xi’an. During the era of collectivization he repeatedly suffered persecution but was rehabilitated in the 1980s.⁴⁵

By far the most famous of Qumul intellectuals included in this section of the dictionary is Abdurehim Ötkür (1923–1995), widely acknowledged to be an outstanding representative of modern Uyghur literature. Having completed his primary education in Qumul and southern Xinjiang, he trained as a teacher and worked both in this capacity and as a journalist, editor and translator. In his poems, epics and dramas he criticized the Japanese aggression as well as the Guomindang. Like many of his contemporaries, he too was subjected to harassment during the Cultural Revolution. During the early reform period he resumed his literary and scholarly activities, the latter focusing on Uyghur literary heritage. His writing is said to display both Soviet and Chinese literary influences, but his best known novels, “Traces” (*Iz*, 1988) and “Awakening Land” (*Oyghanghan zemin*, 1993), were written and published during the years when Uyghur cultural expression was at its apogee and deal with outstanding events of Qumul’s early twentieth century history.⁴⁶

Many of these intellectuals were born into families belonging to the traditional political, religious or commercial elites. Some were polymaths, combining a traditional religious education with a good knowledge of Chinese (or in one case Manchu). Some benefited

42 David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*, Cambridge, Mass. 2016, 323.

43 Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Die Reform des traditionellen islamischen Bildungssystems in Ost-Türkistan, NW China (Ende 19. und Anfang 20. Jahrhundert)*, in: *Bildungsformen und Bildungsträger zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, eds. Stefan Leder and Hanne Schöning, special issue, *Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte* 22 (2007), 17–36.

44 HQTÖS, 40–42.

45 *Ibid.*, 45–47. Others who contributed to the educational and cultural activities of the Association included Naman Qari Mömin, Ismail Tahir and Abdulla Ähmidi.

46 HQTÖSH, 37–39; Bovingdon, *Contested histories*, 365–66. Official recognition of his works has faded, probably as a consequence of his unwavering popularity.

from exposure to modernizing currents through education in the “scientific schools” (*pänni mäktäp*) that emerged under the influence of Muslim cultural reform currents emanating from the Islamic West, more specifically from the Russian and Ottoman Empires. Travel to Mecca along the established pilgrimage routes, mixing religious devotion with commercial enterprise, was both a source of inspiration and a conduit for the transmission of new ideas. The related institutions of the new schools and the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment owed much to such transnational connectivities, even if direct causal links are typically implied rather than clearly articulated in the biographies. While religious and commercial travel to the Middle East contributed to the re-constitution of knowledge among Xinjiang’s Muslims, national integration was also furthered through trade with other parts of China, and the training of Chinese language interpreters and translators who mediated between the non-Muslim rulers and the indigenous subalterns. But not all biographies are situated in the context of supraregional connectivities. Some remain exclusively oasis-centred, and all are embedded in oasis history, some through close proximity to the palace and the Wang dynasty, others through association with social movements and local social institutions, be they traditional Islamic, reform Islamic, or socialist.

Educators (*maripchi*)

Chapter Three is devoted to teachers (educators) and contains twenty-four entries. Many of those included hailed from a relatively privileged social background. But training as a teacher could also be a vehicle of social mobility, as demonstrated by those individuals who originated from families of farmers or pastoralists. Ma’azi Qari, the first listed, was active in the early twentieth century. He is credited with introducing the “progressive scientific civilization of neighbouring Central Asian peoples” to his locality, although the entry gives no hint as to where he acquired his broad knowledge.⁴⁷ Respected teachers usually combined a traditional religious education in the religious primary school (*mäktäp*) with secular training. The latter was pioneered in Qumul in 1936 by the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment mentioned above. The biographies invariably refer to its graduates as “progressive-minded intellectuals” (*ilghar pikirlik ziyalı*). Ämät Qari Sämiri (1906–1964), for example, was born into a family of religious dignitaries in the community of Lapchuq and attended the religious school founded there by Abdurusul Qari, an immigrant from the Ottoman Empire. Ämät Qari Sämiri later helped found a new state primary school in his native Lapchuq. In the 1940s he was imprisoned for five years by the Chinese warlord Sheng Shicai, after which he seems to have abandoned his educational activities: his later jobs included working as a clerk in a coalmine, then as an accountant, followed by farming.⁴⁸ Sawur Akhunum (1907–1939), another native of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Lapchuq, was educated in a madrasa in the neighbouring oasis of Turpan and trained a number of religious students (*talip*) in the early part of his career. After completing the six months crash course organized by the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment in 1936, he too participated in the founding of the first modern school in Lapchuq and became a committed advocate of the “new education”. He, too, fell victim to Sheng’s policies and died in prison.⁴⁹

Abdulla Tursun (1907–1988) came from a pastoralist family and as a child received informal religious education from a neighbor. In 1933 he joined the rebels of Khoja Niyaz Haji, but the following year found him already enrolled at the Faculty of Civil Law at the Central Asian State University in Tashkent, capital of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic.⁵⁰ Later he capitalized on his connections with the Soviet Union. As headmaster of a primary school, between 1942 and 1944 he had school books imported from the Soviet Union. Abdulla continued his career as a teacher until 1958.⁵¹ Born into a farming family in the mountain village of Tarati, Tahir Bosuq (1914–1986) also graduated from the Faculty of Civil Law at the Tashkent State University. For a while he worked as a Russian interpreter and spent half a year in Sheng’s prison. Having held a number of teaching positions in various locations in Qumul in the 1950s, he studied for two years at the Northwest People’s Revolutionary University in Lanzhou before accepting a position at the Qumul Teachers Training College. Between 1956 and 1983 he held a number of political offices at the level of the prefecture, but his career was severely interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. He is said to have contributed significantly to the spread of modern education in Qumul.⁵²

Like Tahir Bosuq, Yunus Iminof (1916–1992) also benefited from repeated enrollments at higher education institutions outside Xinjiang. After five years of religious education, he worked as a farmer for six years. After graduating from the Faculty of Civil Law at Tashkent State University, he started teaching in Qumul. He soon fell victim to Sheng Shicai’s notorious purges but survived prison and went on to complete his education in the 1950s at the Beijing Central Nationalities Institute. This led to a high-level administrative job in Qumul Prefecture, but he too suffered persecution during the Cultural Revolution and spent fourteen years as a farmer before being rehabilitated in old age.⁵³ From a well-to-do family, Abliz Qadiri (1917–1976) attended a religious school for five years before proceeding to study at the first modern, “scientific” school in Qumul. He obtained higher degrees from Tashkent State University and from the Xinjiang Language Institute in Ürümqi before starting to work as a school teacher in Chöchäk. He was instrumental in setting up the first secondary school for national minorities in Qumul

49 Ibid., 98.

50 Ibid., 96.

51 Ibid., 97.

52 Ibid., 99–100.

53 Ibid., 100–101.

in 1946. He was persecuted twice, first for his opposition to Guomindang policies in the 1940s and later during the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁴

Transregional connectivities also furthered the career of Mähmud Ähädi (1921–1994). Having acquired both religious and scientific qualifications, in the 1940s he gave up a teaching job in the Qumul region in order to trade with China's internal provinces. He settled in Shanghai where he successfully accommodated to the new political situation of the PRC and served in various important state-led business and political organizations involved with the management of the religious affairs of minorities. During the liberal atmosphere of the 1980s he educated a total of 32 religious personnel and performed the Haj in 1989. Whereas in his youth he had contributed to the educational development of his native oasis, in his later years he rendered comparable service in Shanghai, but with an emphasis on Islamic education controlled by the state.⁵⁵

Many individuals benefited from the educational opportunities provided for training minority cadres. Such training often built on attainments of the “scientific” schools of the republican era. Eli Hamut (1929–1975) was born into a family of merchants. He was trained initially at the Qumul Teachers Training College in the 1940s and received a further two years of education at the Beijing Central Nationalities Institute between 1961 and 1963. Following persecution during the Cultural Revolution, he died shortly after his rehabilitation. His contemporary Dawut Tahir (1929–2010) combined basic religious and “scientific” education before the onset of socialism. After working for many years as a teacher and school director, in the early 1960s he enrolled at the Xi'an Physical Education Institute in Shaanxi Province: He went on to become a physical education teacher in Ürümchi, but his career too suffered major setbacks during the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁶

By no means all of the teachers included in the dictionary had experience outside their region. Many moved around between schools on a more local scale, as teachers and head teachers. Yunus Baqi (1921–2009) completed his schooling in the city of Qumul and then taught at primary schools in Astana, Toghuchi, Shähärichi, Lapchuq, Rahätbagh, Baghdash, and Qaradöwä. He spent the last 22 years of his working life as the head teacher of Khotuntam school.⁵⁷ Abliz Qurban (?–1993) came from a teaching dynasty of three generations and campaigned relentlessly against illiteracy.⁵⁸ Overall, the local educators' biographies again demonstrate the problems of taxonomy faced by the compiler of the dictionary. Some individuals included here could just as easily fit into the sections devoted to merchants, or religious dignitaries, or scholars. Pedagogical careers were built on a combination of traditional religious education and exposure to “scientific” subjects. The biographies of those who profited from transregional mobilities diverge from this generic pattern in that their protagonists had an opportunity to obtain degrees from

54 Ibid., 104–106.

55 Ibid., 108–109.

56 Ibid., 124–25.

57 Ibid., 111–12.

58 Ibid., 112–13.

modern higher education facilities. As we have seen, in the republican era some benefited from the close ties of the Chinese warlords of Xinjiang to the Soviet Union, which allowed further education at Tashkent's modern Soviet-style university. This qualification became particularly useful during the early socialist decades where the same individuals were sent on to Chinese higher education institutions. Transnational mobility throughout the late republican and early socialist decades was a necessary precondition for obtaining qualifications at institutions of higher education, given the absence of such facilities in Xinjiang at this time. Sending minority cadres to Chinese cities for further education (rather than Soviet universities) reflected the PRC's attempts to integrate Xinjiang more closely into national space. But the lives of individuals with such exceptional transnational educational attainments were also punctuated by persecution (a fate they shared with numerous other intellectuals across China during the political excesses of the collectivized era).

Religious Dignitaries (*dinî zatlar*) and Outstanding Social Personalities (*jäma'ät ärbabliri*)

This chapter comprises the life histories of eighteen persons. Mäktäp Yunus Äläm Akhunum (1868–1940) was the son of a religious dignitary who acquired his religious knowledge initially from his father, whom he accompanied on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and then in the local madrasa. Later he served as *imam* in the mosque of the Wang palace. He lost this prestigious position after criticizing the bloody suppression of the 1907 peasant rebellion. He only escaped physical punishment when a Muslim cleric pronounced that such an act would amount to a sin (*gunah*). Mäktäp Yunus then worked for two years as a scribe, helping ordinary people to write their petitions. After being pardoned by the Wang, he opened a private school where he educated many students. His educational activities were disrupted for the second time in 1931 when he was accused by the Chinese warlord, Jin Shuren, of incitement in support of the rebellion led by Khoja Niyaz Haji.⁵⁹ As in other chapters dealing with literati, certain themes and topoi recur: devotion to the people and to education, performing the Haj, proximity to the centre of power in the pre-modern era, and major ruptures caused by political circumstances. The majority of religious dignitaries were born into such families and carried on this legacy. Those attracted to the new, “scientific” education model were often members of the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment of Qumul Prefecture.⁶⁰ Ablimit Haji was its deputy president between 1938–1944.⁶¹ Abduwahit Äläm Akhunum served as its president in the mid-1940s.⁶² Hapiz Salman (1903–1995) was president of the organization's branch

59 Ibid., 128–29.

60 For example, it is noted that Khoshur Qari Akhunum paid his religious tax (*öshrä-zakat*) to the Association. Ibid., 133.

61 Ibid., 140.

62 Ibid., 136.

in Astana (a peripheral settlement of the oasis of Qumul).⁶³ Members of the younger generation, such as Pars Mäkhsum (1909–1972), son of the famous Mäktäp Yunus Äläm Akhunum, and Osmanshah Haji (1915–1996) attended teacher training courses organized by the Association.⁶⁴ Religious knowledge was acquired both in the domestic sphere and in Islamic schools. As elsewhere in Muslim Central Asia, in Xinjiang too mystical currents blended seamlessly into scriptural Orthodoxy and permeated everyday religious practice. This is exemplified by the biography of Ismail Ishan (1870–1958), who received traditional religious education and gained fame by his ability to recite epics (*dastan*) and wise sayings (*hökmät*) by heart. This gained him royal patronage and an appointment to the coveted position of guardian (*shäykh*) of Altunluq, the prestigious cemetery where the royal tombs of the Muslim Wang were located; he was entrusted with leading the Sufi ceremonies (*zikir-söhbät*) regularly held there.⁶⁵

Support for one or more of the three peasant rebellions, which shook Qumul in the first half of the twentieth century (in 1907, 1912 and 1931) is a recurrent theme. Upon his return from the Haj, Abduwahit Äläm Akhunum (1892–1993) was a close associate of the rebel leader Khoja Niyaz Haji, for which he was later punished by the Chinese warlord Sheng Shicai.⁶⁶ Following the incorporation of Xinjiang into the People's Republic in 1949, most of these persons supported the democratic reforms and the religious policies of the new government, serving on important political and religious committees. A few fell victim to the purges of the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution. They were rehabilitated in the 1970s and some (their age and health permitted) were belatedly elevated to even more senior political positions. Naman Qazi Akhunum (1878–1954) completed his religious education at the age of 18. He then went to Mecca, where he stayed for fourteen years. Upon his return to Qumul he was quickly promoted from being a mosque *imam* to the ranks of Islamic legal arbiter (*mufiti*) and finally Muslim judge (*qazi*) of the oasis. In 1953 he was sent to Beijing to participate in the activities of the National Islam Association as well as provincial and national level political associations.⁶⁷ Naman Qazi's meteoric career and mobility are not unusual. Brief references to the disturbances caused by political events, such as accusations of rightist leanings during the late 1950s and unjust treatment during the Cultural Revolution, are also typical. Among the meritorious deeds of such persons, their contribution to social stability is mentioned repeatedly, usually in combination with their distinctive ways of serving their local community, predicated on their full conformity with the rapidly evolving political conditions.

The contribution of religious personalities to the flow of ideas is manifested in their participation in the Haj, in their acquisition of Arabic and Persian (no matter how rudimentary), and more generally in their transmission of Islamic knowledge. Their madrasa

63 Ibid., 144.

64 Ibid., 146–47.

65 Ibid., 131.

66 Ibid., 135–38.

67 Ibid., 132.

education equipped some with a measure of familiarity with the classics of Central Asian Islamic literature (especially Chaghatay and Persian poetry). They contributed to their communities primarily through their commitment to both religious and modern, “scientific” education, and their support for popular movements in the republican/ warlord period. In the socialist era some used their high rank in the community to ensure that local religious traditions would be respected in practical ways, even under the most dire circumstances. For example, when ten workers died in 1980 due to an explosion during road construction work, Abduwahit Äläm Akhunum was instrumental in securing the recovery and release of their bodies to their families, enabling them to bury their dead quickly in accordance with Islamic traditions. Four years later he rendered a similar service to the families of four miners who died during a tragic accident in the Qumul coal mines.⁶⁸

Craftsmen (*hünärwän-käsiplär*)

The first entry in Chapter 8. is devoted to Mollamät Dihqan whose life must have spanned the last decades of Wang rule over Qumul. Characterized as a resolute person with a vision of the future, with hindsight he is not an unambiguously positive figure. He was instrumental in designing and building a long irrigation canal across several settlements of the oasis of Qumul, with the support of royal patronage. This entailed the use of forced labour and the enlisting of the intercession of religious dignitaries in the form of legal opinions (*patiwä*) in order to gain access to scarce water ahead of a rival engineer. The biography refers to the long-term benefits of large-scale land reclamation, but notes that this was predicated on the ruthless exploitation of local people.⁶⁹

Several entries praise the achievements of those who contributed to the religious architecture of the oasis, either as architects or as carpenters or painters. Special attention is paid to the activities of Abdulbasit Haji (1848–1916) and Abdulhapiz Haji (1854–1931), two brothers born into a craftsman’s family. Abdulbasit displayed multiple talents as architect, carpenter, smith and painter and also taught himself calligraphy and folk medicine. His experiences during the pilgrimage to Mecca served as an inspiration for his religious and secular architectural plans, but also for technical innovation, since he brought back new tools and instruments. He manufactured a wide range of agricultural tools, cut mirrors, repaired watches and sewing machines. In cooperation with the famous calligrapher Molla Märup, the brothers copied and bound more than a hundred books, predominantly the Koran and popular religious literature. Abdulbasit was instrumental in opening a new school where children were taught religion, morality but also some scientific subjects.⁷⁰ His brother Abdulhapiz’s life followed a very similar pattern

68 Ibid., 137–38.

69 Ibid., 259–60.

70 Ibid., 263–64.

guided by diligence and natural dexterity, greatly stimulated by travel experiences in the Islamic West. Abdulbasit trained a new generation of craftsmen within the traditional semi-institutionalized framework of master-apprenticeship relations. One of his best students was Abdulhimit Ustam, who died in southern Xinjiang after being forced to leave Qumul due to his involvement in the 1912 peasant rebellion. Abdurehim Khāzinichi (1876–1928), another apprentice of Abdulbasit, later rose to the rank of Palace treasurer and trained the calligrapher and jack-of-all-trades Hapiz Niyaz (discussed above). Having completed the Haj, Sopa Haji (1878–1962), the son of Abdulbasit, besides engaging in bridge and road construction as well as the building and repair of religious buildings, also participated in the management of pious foundations and water distribution. He contributed to managing the financial affairs of the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment, as well as to the activities of the first modern, “scientific” school of the oasis.⁷¹ Imin Qari (1900–1994) studied in the new school in Lapchuq (established by Abdurusul Qari) and specialized as a tailor, learning some techniques while working for the Soviet garrison stationed in Qumul in the republican era.⁷² During the collectivized period he worked both as a tailor and as an imam. In the first decade of reform socialism (1980–1992) he served the Friday mosque of Qumul and practised circumcision. That the Soviet garrison must have generated work for numerous craftsmen is suggested by the fact that in 1941 the shoemaker Ghojamniyaz invited Qasim Haji, originally from the oasis of Kucha, at the time active in Ürümchi, to come and join his workshop.⁷³ Some craftsmen were educated in Qumul’s Chinese school: this was the case of the goldsmith Niyaz Altunchi (1858–1954) and the prominent engineer Nurullakhun (1900–1985).⁷⁴ The goldsmith Imin (1908–1986) seems to have benefited from his Chinese language education the most because in 1950 he moved to Lanzhou, where he started a business trading goods between Shanghai and Qumul.⁷⁵

Prominent craftsmen in Qumul history include architects, engineers and other men with practical skills and talents. They constructed religious buildings but also roads, bridges, and irrigation canals. Some of them also engaged in more scholarly activities, such as calligraphy, while others served their communities as shoemakers, tailors, goldsmiths, clockmakers, successful melon cultivators, cooks, felt-makers, leather workers and barbers. A few were close to the Wang Palace. Only one, the above-mentioned Sopa Haji, worked actively for the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment and was involved in the modernization of local education. Some were inspired by their travels to the Middle East while performing the Haj, and some were educated in the Chinese school in Qumul, while a few benefited from Soviet presence in the province. Few craftsmen participated in the peasant rebellions and their biographies rarely make reference to political victimization, either during the late 1950s or during the Cultural Revolution.

71 Ibid., 271–72.

72 Ibid., 281.

73 Ibid., 291.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 289–90.

Overall, this chapter paints a very different picture from that outlined by the polymath historian Hapiz Niyaz in his description of “Qumul civilization,” an account built around the activities of Abdulbasit, his brother Abdulhapiz, their children and pupils. Hapiz Niyaz stresses religious knowledge, artistic engagement and the ethical and social responsibility that motivated the most notable craftsmen to set up schools and engage in charitable activities.⁷⁶ He demonstrates the successful integration of some members of this technical elite into the young socialist state, which badly needed their expertise. Their contributions to progress and innovation were inspired by travel abroad as well as intimate links at home in Qumul (including fictive kinship and apprenticeship). Hapiz Niyaz saw himself as the culmination of this distinguished genealogical lineage. In contrast, Hämdulla’s compilation provides a much broader, richer panorama of craftsmen in Qumul, and places less emphasis on travel as a source of inspiration. He extends this lineage by covering a diverse range of crafts – perhaps to counteract the self-perception one often hears in this oasis even in the twenty-first century, according to which crafts and trade were underdeveloped in comparison to southern Xinjiang, the reason being Wang rule and its repressive monopolies.⁷⁷

Merchants (*sodigärlär*)

Chapter 7 of Hämdulla’s biographical dictionary comprises twenty-two entries devoted to merchants, the quintessential agents of transregional and transnational connectivities. Many listed in this category were not natives of Qumul. Qasim Haji Sähärchi (1852–1915) who originally hailed from Atush in southern Xinjiang, arrived in Qumul as a young man with a trading caravan and settled permanently. He had profitable trade relations with Chinese cities such as Lanzhou and Chengdu, but also with Muslims in Central Asia. According to his biography, he exercised fair trade, kept his promises and often displayed generosity. His charitable distributions of food and clothing to the poor and needy as well as to homeless strangers were admired, as were his regular donations toward a communal meal (*näzir*) every Friday to benefit his mosque community. His diligence and hard-work were informed by his firm religious faith, but this was not incompatible with a progressive mindset. He subsidized both traditional religious and modern (Muslim reformist) schools. Like others, Qasim Haji combined long-distance trade with the pilgrimage to Mecca, which underscored his religious authority. A prominent, rich trader of Qumul, he was widely respected for both his personal qualities and communal devotion.⁷⁸

Häsän Bala Haji (1866–1931) also originated from Atush and completed the Haj as a child. He came to Qumul with business, where he married and settled down. He owned

76 Bellér-Hann, Hapiz Niyaz, 103–4.

77 It is unclear whether Hämdulla had access to Hapiz Niyaz’s unpublished manuscript. It is not included in his bibliography.

78 HQTÖSH, 233–34.

arable land and animals in the countryside, shops and houses in urban areas, in addition to a wool factory and a mill. He traded in partnership with his sister's children and on occasion even with Shah Mäxhsud, the last Wang of Qumul. His camel caravans carried goods to and from Russia and Russian Central Asia as well as China proper. His biography emphasizes his generosity and affable, kind nature. During the uprisings of 1912 and 1931 he acted as representative of the local government in negotiations with the rebels.⁷⁹

Shüyichi Mollakhun (1875–1935) was born in Qumul and received a thorough religious education thanks to his brother's efforts who was a distinguished religious notable. Then he attended the Chinese school, and his familiarity with the Chinese language gave him a huge advantage in his later business ventures. Under Shah Mäxhsud Wang he was in charge of the tax affairs of the Palace, and acted also as Palace interpreter. He accompanied Shah Mäxhsud to Beijing on one of his official visits and relentlessly continued his business ventures, often in partnership with Chinese merchants, trading, among other things, in silk.

Yarmuhämmät Dorgħa (1880s–1931) was the son of high-ranking official under Shah Mäxhsud Wang. His Chinese language education prepared him for his office in the Palace, but he also served as tax-collector and landlord in Töwäntur, where he promoted land-reclamation, owned a mill, had several mosques and schools built and donated seed gratis to poor farmers in the spring. His political sympathies with the rebels of Khoja Niyaz Haji cost him his life in 1931.⁸⁰ Others who fell victim to Sheng's purges included Ismail Sidiq Haji (1890–1931) and Ismail Haji (1880–1935).⁸¹ Merchants were also persecuted during the collectivized period. Yüsüpjanbay (1898–1972), who mostly traded within Xinjiang (notably Ghulja, Ürümchi, Altay and Turpan), was branded a "landowner" (*pomeshchik*) during the first land reform in the 1950s. Another successful merchant, Niyaz Khuyzhang (1906–1969), was beaten during the Cultural Revolution. Ghopur Haji (1897–1992) and Ibrahim Tokhtiyaz (1906–1991) had their property confiscated.⁸²

The biographies give relatively little insight into what was actually traded. Seyitakhun (1880–1956), who descended from a family of traders, imported silk cloth and velvet from Shanghai and Hangzhou, while from the Xinjiang oasis of Kucha he bought fur hats and furcoats. Ibrahim Qutlugh (1880–1957) traded in animal products, especially wool, moving between Qumul, the nearby oasis of Turpan, the provincial capital of Ürümchi and China proper.⁸³ Dölätbay Qurban (1887–1957), whose family originated in Atush, exported dried fruit and homespun clothes to Lanzhou and Tienjin and imported tea and silk.⁸⁴

79 Ibid., 236.

80 Ibid., 239–41.

81 Ibid., 248, 249.

82 Ibid., 253–57.

83 Ibid., 243–44.

84 Ibid., 246–47.

It would seem that most successful merchants originated from well-to-do trading families, or from families of secular or religious office holders. Trading was not a prime channel for social mobility, although it usually entailed considerable geographical mobility. Five of the traders included originated from families who had come to Qumul from southern Xinjiang (three from Atush, one from Kashgar and one from Khotan). Most, however, were locally born and bred in Qumul.

Knowledge of Chinese among the traders was a huge asset in cultivating transregional exchanges, which extended from the interior provinces of China to Mongolia, Tashkent, Kashmir, the Ottoman Empire/Turkey and the Middle East. Some careers blossomed after the individual had been appointed to high office at the royal court, an engagement that proved to be fully compatible with the pursuit of long distance caravan trade. It is frequently noted that the caravan trade “opened their eyes [to the world]” (*közi echilgan*) and caused them to become “progressive-minded” (*ilghar pikirlik*). In the case of at least five individuals, this open-mindedness led to membership of the Qumul branch of the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment and to philanthropic deeds. Significantly, there is no mention of money-lending, usury or any other potentially exploitative activity. On the contrary, the merchants are repeatedly praised for their selfless service of their communities. Although the inclusion of merchants is fully in line with the market principles of post-reform China, it is not their profit-making activities but their dedication to their local community and their personal qualities which are emphasized. Pursuit of trade (*tijarät*) and religious devotion (*ibadät*) were predicated upon each other.

Summary and Analysis

All the personages discussed above are deeply embedded in local social relationships. In spite of Hämdulla's classifications, they have a number of general characteristics in common: personal talent, communal commitment and adherence to modernization and progress. Religious devotion is as important in these accounts as materializations of generosity in support of the needy. This suggests values still rooted in customary practice to reproduce societal stability, but at the same time those selected for inclusion in this dictionary were not adverse to social change. All groups were open to reform and featured numerous members of the Association of Uyghur Cultural Enlightenment. While Muslim cultural reform, especially in the field of education, evidently had foreign origins, the schools and Associations that disseminated these reforms are depicted as home-grown, autochthonous achievements. International networks were important for all: people in all categories went on the Haj, traders engaged in long distance business in both directions of the Silk Road, educators studied in Tashkent or (especially interpreters) in the interior Chinese provinces. Almost all the members of these elites had some basic informal or institutionalized religious education and as a result were immersed in what might be termed the civilization of Islamic Central Asia. The representation of craftsmen in a separate text by the polymath Hapiz Niyaz provides a parallel account. Hämdulla opts to

present a broader panorama of local skills, perhaps in an effort to counter locally upheld stereotypes of the underdevelopment of crafts in Qumul. The biographies present the craftsmen as a technical intelligentsia, serving their communities through their innovations but also through contributing to social stability, with little emphasis on individuals' political or institutional embeddedness.

The protagonists' participation in public life is narrated without value judgments or emotions. It is not their actions but their characters that are described using a limited pool of adjectives and recurring phrases. External political events are presented as contingencies over which the protagonists have little or no control. They serve as "historical glue", while the subjects' pragmatic communal agency on the micro-level contributes to narrative coherence.⁸⁵ The scholars, teachers and religious dignitaries comprise the local knowledge elite. By virtue of their exceptional education and talents, they gravitated toward high offices, a fact which later rendered them vulnerable to political upheavals. The religious elite is highly praised for its high level of integration into the socialist state. By comparison, craftsmen and especially merchants were further away from the centre of power. Yet these groups were not immune to political changes either, while their commitment to social progress was just as impressive as that of the literati. The dictionary entries leave the impression that craftsmen and merchants provided a broader range of services to their community than the literati, whose contributions were overwhelmingly linked to educational initiatives. The repeated references to the redistribution of resources by rich merchants are striking, since this is a function conventionally associated with the ruling Muslim dynasty. One suspects a deliberate strategy to counteract their profit-making activities in market exchange. All groups are rooted in local tradition and all are open to innovation and new impulses from multiple directions. The agency they display while navigating between tradition and social and political change is celebrated; yet many protagonists also fall victim, if only temporarily, to political circumstances.

The biographies can be read simultaneously as the "materiality of the socio-historical process", in other words lived and experienced history (historicity I.) and as "sociopolitical management" of the former, as its representation that needs ordering, sequencing and narrating (historicity II).⁸⁶ This narrating, "as either an explicit ideology or as tailored by unconscious political dispositions, can distort, mystify, and inevitably 'silence' certain aspects of past events and processes."⁸⁷ Since we postulate collective authorship to the biographies under scrutiny, a degree of narrative intervention must be attributed to all those who participated in their construction. The protagonists themselves may have played an important part, either directly when interviewed, or indirectly, when their life story was mediated through their family members, friends, colleagues, thus uniting the

85 Kenneth Pomeranz, *Social History and World History: From Daily Life to Patterns of Change*, in: *Journal of World History* 18 (2007) 1: 69-98, here p. 72.

86 Michel R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston 1995, pp. 29, 106.

87 Edward Swenson and Andrew P. Roddick, *Introduction: Rethinking Temporality and Historicity from the Perspective of Andean Archaeology*, in: *Constructions of Time and History in the Pre-Columbian Andes*, eds. Edward Swenson and Andrew P. Roddick, Boulder 2018, 3-43, here p. 12.

conceptually separate figures of the historical actor and the narrator. The author / editor then acts as yet another filter whose primary role was the selection of certain narratives for inclusion and exclusion of others.

As is the case with other local histories produced by the Uyghur in the era of reform socialism, the local relevance of this biographical dictionary is manifested in diverse ways: by the language of publication, by the choice of topic and geographical focus, by the ethnicity of the protagonists and by the cursory manner in which national, regional, local political histories are treated. Historical events are implicitly connected to nested geographical entities. Individual lives are summarized against the backdrop of often dramatic events including rebellions, major social and political upheavals, waves of persecution and repression; these are referred to in a perfunctory way with no explanation provided, assuming that the reader will know what needs to be known about the given period, event or historical figure. References to the notorious events of national history abound, among them the first land reform and the anti-rightist campaign in the 1950s, the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and early 1970s and the subsequent waves of persecution followed by rehabilitation. The republican period is presented within the framework of provincial history, marked by the frequent reference to the warlord Sheng Shicai, who is repeatedly mentioned as the person responsible for the imprisonment and even the death of numerous protagonists throughout the 1940s. History becomes even more local in connection with the three major peasant uprisings that shook the oasis of Qumul in 1907, 1912 and 1931 respectively, even if the last one led by Khoja Niyaz Haji had important repercussions for the whole province. The frequent references to the Wang, the Turkic speaking Muslim rulers governing the oasis of Qumul from the late seventeenth century to 1930, represent another important point of local significance. The smaller the scale, the more detailed the knowledge expected of the reader.

Scales of place are inextricably intertwined with temporal nodes creating time-space configurations reminiscent of Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope".⁸⁸ However, the references made to events and actors of these histories remain brief and cursory. They are rarely explanatory. They function as props holding together the scaffolding upon which the biographies rest, without which the life stories would remain incomprehensible. The biographies' reliance on a comprehensive background familiarity with oasis and a basic knowledge of national and even transnational history implies that the collectively constructed biographies and their intended oasis-based readership together constitute not only a speech community but a tight-knit knowledge community. This lends the entries an underlying coherence that demonstrates local society's keen awareness of its own history as well as the latter's role in building and further strengthening group identity on both the oasis and the regional levels.⁸⁹

88 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin 1981, 84-258.

89 Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Cambridge 2013, 6-7. In view of this it is tempting to characterize the whole book as an elite or intellectual history, but this would amount to an unwarranted imposition of etic classificatory categories. "Ziyali", the Uyghur term for intellectual, is frequently used in connection with certain groups of people but not others.

The matter-of-fact, prosaic representation of the life stories against this “scaffolding” suggests that the stories are intended to be read as true stories, as historicity I. in Trouillot’s formulation, as opposed to literary renderings. It has been noted that the genre of biography continues to represent an epistemological challenge partly because it is built on a “metaleptic relationship between fictionality and historicity.”⁹⁰ It is a branch of fiction that is grounded in history in a particular way.⁹¹ The biographies constitute chronologically ordered *curricula vitae* that include frequent references to other individuals who figure under separate headings or who are known from other genres of local history. They are embedded in a web of social relations, institutions and specific historical contexts. Nevertheless, several of the personages mentioned straddle the boundaries of conceptual scales. Abdurehim Ötkür, perhaps the most famous modern Uyghur writer, enjoys fame and recognition throughout Xinjiang. Hapiz Niyaz’s name is also well-known in intellectual circles throughout the region, while the historian and archeologist Osman Tömür Qumuli’s scholarly articles have been published in widely circulating historical journals throughout the reform era. The inclusion of such persons who have achieved fame beyond the oasis level underlines the factual nature of all the narratives included in the volume.

Although the biographies are presented as historical, the frequent shibboleths as moral judgements render them *metaleptic*.⁹² Most display a conspicuous absence of interpretation and causality. Taken together with the lack of psychological characterization typical of literary biographies, these gaps can be construed as manifestations of a minimalist approach to both literary style and interpretation, and further emphasize the factual nature of the entries, the “silences” that allow the reader to make connections based on implicit local knowledge. Using the conceptual tools of the Russian formalists, one could say that the fictional sequence (*fabula*) and spatial-causal-temporal sequence (*sjuzhet*) of the narrative are collapsed precisely through the sparseness of causality and interpretation.⁹³ But, since both the leaving and the filling of the gaps are prescribed and constrained by parameters set jointly by the state’s regime of historicity and tacitly accepted and respected by local historians, this narrative strategy corresponds more closely to Trouillot’s concept of historicity II.

In summary, the biographies present local, embedded, situated knowledge, *metis*, which may fall short of scientific standards but offers extensive detail not usually found in scientific investigations.⁹⁴ The salience of this *metis* for time-space configurations which feed into local (Qumul) and regional (Xinjiang-wide) Uyghur identities turn them into

90 Edward Saunders, Introduction: Theory of Biography or Biography in Theory?, in: *Biography in Theory, Key Texts with Commentaries*, ed. Wilhelm W. Hemecker and Edward Saunders, Berlin / Boston 2017, p. 4.

91 Michael Benton, Towards a Poetics of Literary Biography, in: *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 45 (2011) 3: 67-87.

92 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca [1972] 1980, 234-35.

93 Leona Toker, *Eloquent Reticence: Withholding Information in Fictional Narrative*, Kentucky 1993, 5.

94 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven 1998, 309-41.

“ethnobiographies.”⁹⁵ For all their sparseness, they are sufficiently detailed to reveal ethnically relevant patterns of cultural expectations. Such works enable a deeper insight into Uyghur discursive strategies to construct exemplariness, a topic that cannot be pursued further here.⁹⁶ But they also have other uses. Biographies as a genre constitute one of many possible forms that such reflection can assume. They can be used to gauge indigenous perceptions of social taxonomies in a given period, the projected relationship of local people to the traditions they identify with, social change and progress. To the extent that they are rooted in a specific social context, they reflect, along with other genres, the indigenous elite’s self-positioning in networks of connectivities of varying scales, both in space and through time.

Returning to Goody

In spite of the inevitable selectivity and silencing that inform any narrative enterprise, the ways in which the biographies I have discussed above are embedded in historical events and social practices enhance their credibility and *legitimate* them. The main recurring topoi drive home the fact that local societies have been influenced by transnational encounters and exchanges. Impulses for change came from the West (not western Europe), primarily in the form of Muslim reformism emanating from the Russian and Ottoman Empires. China provided the political framework throughout the late imperial, republican and socialist periods and continued to remain a significant trading partner. The prestige and tangible advantages attached to knowing Chinese are a clear sign of the province’s further integration into the Chinese polity.

While these biographies derive as much from oral transmission as from written sources, similar messages can be found in recent international scholarship based on archival sources. It has been established that Uyghur nationhood had its roots in multiple sources, ranging from local Islamic tradition to transnational pan-Turkic ideologies and foreign Orientalism. While Russian empire building was crucial, Muslim reformist discourse could not have flourished as it did but for the Qing Empire’s relative indifference towards religion. The Western historian’s narrative that envisages Xinjiang as a multiple imperial periphery is entirely compatible with Hämdulla’s depiction of influences emanating from multiple geographical directions through diverse forms of encounters and exchanges. David Brophy and other contributors to the so-called New Qing History consciously distance themselves from the Sino-centric approaches of earlier schol-

95 James Clifford, 2011 [1978], “Hanging up Looking-Glasses at Odd Corners”: Ethnobiographical Prospects, in: *Biography in Theory*, pp. 186–97, here p. 186.

96 Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Setting an Example: Narrative Strategies and Values in the Shaping of Local History in Xinjiang*, in: *Aus den tiefen Schichten der Texte*, eds. Nader Purnaqcheband and Florian Saalfeld, Wiesbaden (forthcoming).

arship. Kwangmin Kim's recent study has a similar goal.⁹⁷ Taking the Qing expansion into Xinjiang in the middle of the eighteenth century as his point of departure, Kim argues that the indigenous elites' collaboration with the Qing in oases such as Qumul has been, by and large, ignored or deliberately overlooked both by contemporary Uyghur elites and by scholarship focusing on Uyghur ethno-nationalism. Even if Turkic speaking Muslim begs are the principal agents in Kim's narrative, their collaboration undermines the dominant contemporary narrative of the "Xinjiang problem," which presents the Uyghurs as victims and the Han, represented by party and government leaders, as perpetrators. Kim, drawing on archival materials, argues that the Muslim headmen of sedentary farming communities supported the Qing in order to pursue their own economic interests, thereby contributing to the capitalist transformation of the political economy of Xinjiang's oases. They did this through developing and commercializing agriculture, controlling human labor, organizing capital, and moving goods. These developments are interpreted as part of the global expansion of commerce, a phenomenon which international scholarship has tended to attribute to the exceptional developmental path taken by Europe. Challenging the narrative of European exceptionalism, Kim argues that Europe and China followed comparable paths of capitalist and imperialist development in their colonies and borderlands respectively, and that in the case of China the oasis economies of Xinjiang played a pivotal role.⁹⁸

In his later writings about East-West connectivities, Jack Goody frequently referred to merchant cultures, emphasizing the importance of trade for the flow of goods, and ideas, and even for the development of cognitive capacities. Goody would probably approve of Kim's critique of European exceptionalism and his assumptions of comparable, parallel capitalist developments in East Asia. At the same time, he might be suspicious of a thesis that reeks of "Xinjiang exceptionalism," because this is at odds with Goody's basic assumption that mercantile capitalism was omnipresent. Though they explore different historical periods, Kim's focus on the economic activities of the local elite and Häm-dulla's biographies reinforce each other at the point where both attribute to trade and travel an important role in local development. Both reject (explicitly in the case of Kim and implicitly in the case of Häm-dulla) stereotypical projections of Xinjiang as backward vis-à-vis either China or western Europe. This would surely be congenial to Jack Goody.

Conclusion

Using selected materials from a recently published Uyghur biographical dictionary, I have demonstrated that indigenous perspectives on the local can reveal a great deal about connectivities, exchanges and entanglements across time and space, in addition to self-

97 Kwangmin Kim, *Borderland Capitalism, Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market*, Stanford 2016.

98 See Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Xinjiang Close-up* (Review article), in: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76 (2017) 44: 1092–1100, here 1092–94.

identifications and accommodation to politically dominant forces. While the materials considered generally provide support for Jack Goody's critique of "the European miracle", they also point to the need to be more attentive than he is to the role of the state. In Qumul there can be little doubt that the Wangs' efforts to control oasis trade exerted a negative influence, while the thesis of Kwangmin Kim is that the commercial enterprise of the Uyghur elite in Eastern Xinjiang was stimulated by the post-conquest Qing political constellation. The dictionary suggests that commerce (and by extension the economy in general) was thoroughly embedded into the political, social and religious contexts. Traders were both rooted in their local communities and acted as agents of progress comparable to categories of the knowledge elite.

Despite omissions and limitations due to political and narrative constraints, the dictionary succeeds in presenting an integrative vision of a localized ethnohistory.⁹⁹ The biographies represent a careful balancing act between the typical / exemplary and the individually specific.¹⁰⁰ They are valuable historical sources on account of their embeddedness in local society, but at the same time they challenge western assumptions that define biography in terms of individual subjectivity. My analysis of the Qumul dictionary suggests that locals have been fully aware of their oasis society's multiple linkages both to East and West, although the extent to which they emphasize some connections over others was always a delicate political decision. But their self-perception cannot be grasped with the metaphors I discussed in the introduction, those of Silk Roads and crossroads, implying incessant transregional flows. Nor do they fully correspond to scholarly analyses of multiple imperial peripheries. Rather, Qumul itself is placed at the centre and perceived as being the target and beneficiary (and sometimes the victim) of movements, flows and connectivities. Positive influences such as intellectual innovation, spiritual inspiration, and technological modernization are hailed as contributions to the progress and development of the local community, local efforts are foregrounded and integration into the Chinese polity is readily acknowledged. Negative occurrences such as persecutions are mentioned as facts, without broader contextualization or causal analysis. The biographical entries, in spite of their brevity and the emphasis on facticity, constitute a nuanced self-historicization that connects local lives to national and regional historical events, revealing significant incidence of social and spatial mobilities. An excessive emphasis on movement, on flows and exchange, would run the risk of failing to recognize local societies' integrity, reducing their inhabitants to middlemen, the hyperactive agents of material and cultural transmission. Such a view would not do justice to self-representations. It can be corrected by taking seriously the work of indigenous historians and tradition bearers and integrating their work at the micro-level into national and global narratives.

99 Pomeranz, *Social history*, 70.

100 Cf. James Clifford: "In a complex sense, every possible subject for a biography is both typical and extraordinary." Clifford, "Hanging up looking-glasses", 195.