

Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier.

David Brophy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2016. 368 pp. (ISBN-13: 978-0674660373)

Most certainly, David Brophy's book on the Uyghurs is a welcome addition to a growing recent interest in Uyghur studies. This Turkic Muslim minority with an estimated population of 11 million is the fifth most populous ethnic group among the 56 minority groups officially recognized by the Chinese government. Consequently, the title of the book poses some political challenges to the concept of *Zhonghua minzu* as the Chinese communist party defines it. The CCP treats the Uyghurs as an ethnic minority, not a nation. Uyghurs reside mainly in the Xinjiang autonomous region of northwest China – the largest administrative unit in the country with its 1.6 million km². Although Xinjiang is a province that officially allows unique social, religious and even political rights for Uyghurs native to the region, these privileges are not always applied.

The author details the historical circumstances of the development of Uyghur identity by examining the political formation in the late Qing and early republican era. He exposes the significance of Russia, Ottoman Turkey, and then the Soviet Union for the creation of a specific group within the Muslims of Chinese Turkistan. Brophy identifies Xinjiang not as a periphery but as an intersection of empires in many ways very similar to the Balkans or the Caucasus regions. Equally, he is successful in compiling an impressive and outstanding account of the unfolding events at the turn of the century and their influence on the origins of Uyghur nationhood. In this tumultuous epoch, the Russian, British and Qing empires' geopolitical interests converged with some dramatic implications for Central Asian populations. By extending the Great Game to Xinjiang, Brophy regards China and Russia as the key players while unveiling the connections to the Ottoman Turkey and the British/Japanese disposition vis-a-vis Xinjiang.

The book relies on a rich array of mostly Russian but also some significant Turkic, Chinese and Western sources ranging from the newspaper articles to historical photographs to multilingual publications. The select bibliography offered at the end of the book is valuable for young academics with the aim of specializing in Uyghurs and Central Asia. Brophy eloquently presents all this primary data combined with analytical depth and scientific rigor within an interpretative framework to explain the transformation of Uyghur-ness during the first-half of the twentieth century.

There is no doubt that China has strategic issues at stake in Xinjiang. Throughout Chinese history, this province has been one of the largest buffer zones shielding the core of China from foreign attacks and influences. Equally, Xinjiang has long served as a critical trade route for Chinese commerce through the notorious historical Silk Road, connecting mainland China to Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Currently, the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping gives some good indications about the importance and relevance of the core of Eurasia. Consequently, this timely book by Brophy will shed further light on the contemporary geopolitical contests in Xinjiang.

Brophy's research, by uncovering the period between the 1880s and the 1930s, bridges the history of the Central Asian Soviet republics and the history of Xinjiang within the framework of Turkistan, which in turn provides the rationale behind the adoption of the Uyghur national idea from the Soviet Union to Xinjiang as a part of the Bolshevik revolutionary mission. Three distinct groups of Xinjiang Muslims – Kashgaris, Taranchis, and Dungans – moving back and forth across Russian and Chinese Turkistan were instrumental in the dissemination of the revolutionary or the reformist concepts.

Moreover, the section(s) dedicated to Jadidism yields an exceptionally compelling account of the origins of Uyghur nationhood. No doubt the Jadidist movement in Russian Turkistan has been the subject of considerable research; however, much less is known about the impact of Jadidism on Chinese Turkistan. At this junction, Brophy provides a detailed account of intellectual collaboration taking place between the Muslims of China and the Ottoman Turks. Most certainly, the fall of the Qing Empire in 1912 and the start of First World War in 1914 provided the necessary political vacuum and weak governance structures for pan-Turkic ideas to flourish among Muslims in Xinjiang. According to Brophy, it is possible to find its roots simultaneously in multiple sources, ranging from local Islamic tradition to transnational pan-Turkic ideas and Orientalism. The origins of Uyghur nationhood are closely connected to the redesigning of the Turkic past by the Uyghur intellectuals who flourished in the Russian Muslim and Ottoman avant-garde milieus. The rise of Jadidism is just a reflection of the massive shift of power due to the decline/collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the subordination of Muslims and deprived Central Asia of the intellectual and spiritual guidance of the Sublime Porte. Brophy marvelously diagnoses all the epic changes that were taking place within Xinjiang and the Uyghur

nation. Most certainly, the movement did an excellent service to the development of the national self-consciousness of the Uyghurs and played a fundamental role in the formation and development of a national liberation ideology. Most importantly, the movement reminded the Turkic/Muslim populace of the region of ideals such as freedom, national pride, great ancestors, and rich cultures that were put down in a dormant phase by the Qing Empire. The Jadidist action program became a model for future generations. The historical merit of the Jadids was their attempts to uplift society starting from the smallest, i.e., education, and its development.

This book by David Brophy is an exceptional addition vis-a-vis the study of Uyghurs at the heart of Eurasia. It provides numerous valuable insights into the interaction(s) that took place between China and the Russian Empire, and to a lesser extent with the Ottoman Empire, in the early twentieth century. By doing so, the volume deepens the reader's understanding of the evolving Uyghur nationhood. However, to truly appreciate *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*,

readers should be familiar with the general history of the late Russian Empire/early Soviet period and the late years of the collapsing Qing Empire followed by the tumultuous years of rebellion/civil war. The book has immense value for Uyghur studies in particular and Central Asia studies in general, benefiting specialists as well as graduate students by providing a fresh approach to the hitherto under-researched history of the Uyghurs.

Cagri Erdem
Keimyung University