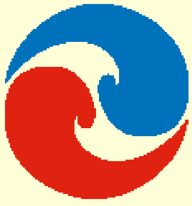

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Close Encounters of an Inner-Asian Kind: Tibetan-Muslim Coexistence and Conflict in Tibet, Past and Present

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Crisis States Research Centre

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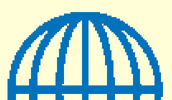

Crisis States Research Centre

Close Encounters of an Inner Asian Kind: Tibetan-Muslim co-existence and conflict in Tibet past and present[1]

Andrew Martin Fischer, Crisis States Research Centre

Abstract

Drawing from the case of Tibetan-Muslim relations from seventh century contact to present Tibetan boycott campaigns against Muslims in Northeast Tibet (Amdo), this paper questions the relevance of the mainstream theoretical disputes on ethnic conflict, i.e. primordialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and so forth, all of which primarily seek to identify the primary causes or origins of conflict. Most ethnic conflicts, together with other forms of ethnic co-existence including cooperation, contain elements of all these theoretical perspectives, which is evident in the case of Tibetan-Muslim relations presented here. Therefore, a focus on issues of primary causes or origins is not particularly insightful, nor does it help to explain why a particular conflictive trajectory supersedes a more cooperative trajectory. As an alternative, this paper suggests a focus on processual factors, such as exclusion, inclusion and the impulse for social protection, which shape or guide the evolution of conflictive relationships, whether these be deemed of a primordial or other nature. Accordingly, the commonalities that tie together the trends of modern ethnic conflict are not found in the origins or primary causes of conflict, but rather, in the underlying forces of dislocation and relocation that are fundamental to modern transformations and capitalism, and which shape the patterns of exclusion and the possible channels for inclusion and social protection.

Introduction

Tibet scholars rarely tread upon the subject of strife between Tibetans and Chinese Muslims (see Glossary),[2] despite a rich wealth of ethnographic knowledge to explore such issues. This is likely due to the fact that such strife in Tibet is a taboo subject inside and outside China.[3] The official line in China is that interethnic relations are harmonious. Alternative views, particularly with respect to contemporary conflicts between Tibetans and Muslims in Northeast Tibet (Amdo), are treated with extreme sensitivity.[4] As a result, Chinese, Tibetan

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[1] This paper compliments the author's previous Crisis States working paper, 'Urban Fault Lines in Shangri-La: Population and economic foundations of interethnic conflict in the Tibetan areas of Western China', *Crisis States Working Paper*, 42, London: Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics, 2004. The Crisis States Research Centre has generously provided funding for field research in 2003 and 2004, all of which directly contributed to this paper. In addition, field research has also been funded by the Central Research Fund of the University of London. General PhD funding has also contributed indirectly to this work, which has been provided by the Québec Government (*Fonds québecois de la recherche sur la société et la culture*), the UK Government (Overseas Research Student Award), the London School of Economics, and the Canadian Section of Amnesty International.

[2] On Chinese Muslims see Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991; and Michael Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community: Migration, Settlement and Sects*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999. On Muslims in Northwest China, see Jonathon N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A history of Muslims in Northwest China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.

[3] In this paper, 'China' refers to the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) and 'Tibet' refers to all of the Tibetan areas in China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) *and* the Tibetan areas that have been incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan.

[4] For instance, in my private discussions with numerous Tibetans in Qinghai, they have generally been very relaxed to discuss the Dalai Lama, but, along with Han Chinese and Chinese Muslims in Qinghai, they are

and foreign scholars working in Tibet usually practice self-censorship with regard to the subject. In the Tibetan exile community the subject is similarly avoided as it reveals a dark underside of Tibetan nationalism. Instead, most references to Muslims in publications from the exile community or from supportive western scholars tend exclusively to focus on the small Muslim communities that settled in Lhasa and other towns of Central Tibet prior to the Chinese take-over in 1950.[5] These are euphemistically referred to as 'Tibetan Muslims' and their relations with local Tibetans were indeed harmonious.

However, these views completely ignore the military confrontations that took place between Tibetans and certain Chinese Muslim warlords in Amdo as recently as the 1930s and 1940s. They also sidestep the fact that during the reforms of the last two decades, Tibetan aggression has come to be increasingly directed against the Muslim minority in Tibet, despite the fact that Han Chinese present by far the strongest exclusionary force in the local economy. In addition, despite popular perceptions of Tibetans as pacifists, the racist and violent backlash against the Nepali Bhutanese minority in Bhutan in the late 1980s and 1990s serves as a poignant reminder of the potential for violent ethnic conflict that lies within even these idealised Himalayan Tibetan Buddhist cultures, particularly towards other vulnerable and stigmatised ethnic minorities.[6]

In addition to making an initial exploration of such rarely charted issues, this paper also sheds light on theories of ethnic conflict, such as primordialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, political economy, or narrowly-defined forms of institutionalism. It argues that these theories are largely inadequate to explain or predict the evolution of ethnic conflict, insofar as they focus on the origins or primary causes of conflict, i.e. strong/weak states versus weak/strong societies, ethno-linguistic or religious fragmentation, enclave economies, and so forth. These sorts of theoretical pursuits inevitably lead into a circular chicken-and-egg quandary, given the fact that ethnic conflicts are invariably the outcome of historical continuities that possess both inheritance and creativity. As a result, various theoretical stances regarding origins or primary causes can be read into any particular case depending on how the case is examined. For example, current Tibetan-Muslim conflict can be easily interpreted as either primordialist, on the basis of deeply entrenched patterns of Tibetan-Muslim encounters since their first contacts in the seventh century, and they can be as easily interpreted as constructivist or instrumentalist on the basis of political economy and power confrontations that have been inherent to the profound dislocations of the modern period.

As an alternative, a focus on processual factors is suggested, i.e. factors that mould or guide conflictive encounters between groups over time, whether the conflicts themselves be deemed of a primordial or other nature. In particular, this paper combines two social science approaches: the analytical framework of social exclusion, as explored for application to developing countries by the International Labour Office in the 1990s; and the Polanyian concept of double movement. In the first case, the term 'exclusion' is used as a concept to analyse exclusionary processes within development and change.[7] The Polanyian concept of

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extremely cautious to discuss Tibetan-Muslim conflict despite having many impassioned opinions on the subject.

[5] For instance, see the discussion by José Ignacio Cabezon, 'Islam in the Tibetan Cultural Sphere', in Gray Henry (ed.), *Islam in Tibet and the Illustrated Narrative Tibetan Caravans*, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1997, pp. 13-34.

[6] See Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. These events started in the mid-1980s and culminated in a refugee exodus of over 100,000 people from the minority Nepali Bhutanese population.

[7] See in particular Charles Gore & José B. Figueiredo (eds), *Social exclusion and anti-poverty policy: A debate*, Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, ILO publications, 1997.

double movement refers to the impulse for social protection among individuals or groups in response to the profoundly dislocating effects of modern transformations.[8]

By combining these two approaches, ethnic conflict can be analysed as one possible outcome of the impulse for social protection, conditioned by the exclusionary propensities within social change. Accordingly, the commonalities that tie together the patterns of modern ethnic conflict are not found in the origins or primary causes of conflict, but rather in the underlying forces of dislocation and relocation that are fundamental to modern transformations and capitalism, and which shape the patterns of exclusion and the possible channels for inclusion and social protection. The advantage of this perspective is that it emphasises the processual factors such as economic polarisation or social exclusion that create the conditions for the conflictive dimensions inherent in any relationship or social order to degenerate or become exacerbated.

This processual approach will be here applied to the example of Tibet, discussed from a Tibetan perspective and with a focus on *Amdo* (Northeast Tibet), where the interface with Chinese Muslims is the most dense and contested. The analysis is divided into two sections. The first sketches a broad historical overview of Tibetan relations with Muslims since initial contact in the seventh century. The second section deals with the current rise of anti-Muslim sentiment throughout the Tibetan areas, culminating in a regional boycott of Muslim businesses in 2003 following the outbreak of Tibetan-Muslim violence in Amdo. This section draws mostly from recent fieldwork in Tibet from 2003 to 2005 and in Tibetan refugee communities in India from 1995 to 2001. The theoretical ramifications of the study are explored further in the conclusion.

Figure 1: Representation of Tibetan Cultural Areas
Source: Fischer (2005), based on maps in the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (University of Virginia)

[8] For instance, see James Putzel, 'Politics, the State and the Impulse for Social Protection: the implications of Karl Polanyi's ideas for understanding development and crisis', *Crisis States Working Papers*, 18, London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2002.

Tracing the roots of Tibetan-Muslim relations in Tibet

Despite its stereotyped isolation, Tibet has been intricately interwoven into international power dynamics since the formation of the Tibetan empire in the seventh century. More recently, the pattern of fragmented integration into larger spheres of power that has dominated most of the second millennium of Tibetan history, and which, to a large extent, pre-empted the revival of centralised rule following the breakdown of the empire, is itself related to what Janet Abu-Lughod refers to as the first wave of globalisation, predicated on the expansion of the Mongolian empire in the thirteenth century.[9] Thus the very inception of Tibetans, conceived as a collectivity inhabiting the Tibetan plateau, speaking Tibetan and, for the most part, practicing a form of Buddhism imported from India and adapted into what is now known as Tibetan Buddhism, runs parallel to the integration of Tibet into the world system.

Throughout the centuries, Tibetan relations with Muslims have been fluid, changing and contested, and by no means were they in some stable or fixed pattern, characterised as either harmony or animosity. Nonetheless, up until the late nineteenth century, these relations evolved along a fairly consistent conception and structuring of hierarchy and local power relations within the Tibetan areas, where Tibetans ruled the turf and controlled land-based wealth, while Muslims generally played subordinate economic roles, mainly specialising in trade, commerce and certain services. This started to erode around the end of the nineteenth century, first in northeast Tibet (Amdo) and in symbiosis with the breakdown of imperial China and the emergence of the modern Chinese nation. Following the victory of the Communists in China, and in particular during the radicalisation of Maoism from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, the erosion of these local hierarchies and power relations was, for a time, overshadowed.

In order to understand the evolving co-existence between Tibetans and Muslims in the more liberalised context of the reform period from the late 1970s onwards, it is necessary to reach deep into Tibetan history in order to understand both the deeply rooted continuity of these historical conceptions of hierarchy and power as well as the conditions that are utterly new, entirely breaking with the past. The historical perspective also helps to decipher Tibetan rhetoric, given that Tibetans themselves draw upon their own historiographic tradition to create discourses and ideologies from which to understand, interpret and act upon their current circumstances. In this manner, notions of primordialism or cultural essentialism can be equally understood as reflections of constructed and instrumented identity over time, albeit these acts of construction are not exclusive to the modern period.

Central Tibet

Contact with other cultures in the early Tibetan empire from the seventh century onwards, if not before, played an integral role in the formation of a Tibetan ethno-national psyche. Indeed, the economic resurgence of Central Asia in the sixth and seventh centuries following the Turkic conquest of western Central Asia in part stimulated the northward expansion of the Tibetan empire from its base in Central Tibet and towards the Silk Road.[10] By the same token, the subjugation of the Tibetan plateau under the *tsanpo* (Tibetan emperors) in the seventh to eighth centuries arguably played a foundational role in the construction of a Tibetan identity from among a diverse selection of kingdoms, tribes and other groupings

[9] Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

[10] Christopher Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power Among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs and Chinese During the Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p.9.

scattered across the plateau, in distinction from groups outside the plateau. By the eighth century the Tibetan empire was expanding outside the plateau and into Central Asia and the Gansu Corridor, with the objective of controlling key points along the Silk Road, and even penetrated into the heart of the Chinese Tang Empire, conquering the capital of Chang'an in 763.[11]

Conversion to Buddhism, so central to Tibetan identity in later centuries, played a key role in the early construction of collective identity, alongside its role as a tool of state-craft and ideology.[12] However, contact with Arabs and Islam was also clearly evident in this earlier period. Indeed, Arab encroachments in Central Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries most likely acted as an important catalyst for the consolidation of the Tibetan empire, including the conversion to Buddhism as an ideological system to compete with Islam and in deference to other influential regions of Buddhist Asia. It may even be the case that competition with Islam stimulated certain canonical developments within Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, such as the famous Kalachakra Tantra commentaries, which contain a definite and strong anti-Muslim undertone.[13]

Nonetheless, early contact with Arabs or Muslims was not always adversarial. Commercially, Arabs played increasingly significant roles along the Silk Road along with other Central and West Asians.[14] There might have also been some Arab/Islamic presence in Lhasa at this time related to such commerce.[15] Even in martial terms, military contact with Arab and Central Asian armies often involved strategic alliances against the Chinese, with Tibetans playing a pivotal role in regional diplomacy and warfare.[16] Collusion with both sides demonstrates that the Tibetan empire was operating within its own strategic framework as a competing empire, at least within its short heyday of rapid territorial expansion, which was quickly eroded on both fronts from the ninth century onwards.[17]

The rapid boom and bust of the empire undoubtedly led to the dissemination of many foreign cultural influences into Tibet, including Islam, with a 10th century Arabic text mentioning the presence of a mosque in Lhasa.[18] Indeed, during the period of political anarchy following the demise of the Tibetan empire in the ninth and tenth centuries, a great variety of religious practices were in vogue in Tibet, including influences from China such as Chan Buddhism.[19] This led to sectarian strife in Tibet and it also probably intensified the competitive posturing of Buddhist elites against the ongoing expansion of Islam in Asia.

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[11] See Bianca Horlemann, 'A Re-evaluation of the Tibetan Conquest of Eighth-Century Shaxhou/Dunhuang', in Henk Blezer (ed.), *Tibet, Past and Present: Tibet Studies I*, Leiden: Brill, 2002a, pp.49-66.

[12] Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; Geoffrey Samuel, 'Buddhism and the State in Eighth Century Tibet', in Henk Blezer (ed.), *Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet: Tibetan Studies II*, Leiden: Brill, 2002b, pp.1-19.

[13] The Kalachakra commentaries are generally considered to have been authored in Kashmir, at the time a centre of Buddhist learning and a refuge for Central Asian exiles escaping the Arab conquests, and they were later transmitted to Tibet. The Shambala myth within these commentaries depicts barbarian invasions, which in the contemporary setting were clearly meant to refer to Arab or other Muslim armies. Hiroya Iida, a scholar of the ancient Tibet, suggested to me the connection between the Shambala myth and the Central Asian exiles.

[14] See Beckwith (1987) for the Muslim advance and Lipman (1997) for the dissemination of Islam in China.

[15] Cabezon (1997), p.25.

[16] For details on the power rivalry over Inner Asia during this time, see Beckwith (1987), Cabezon (1997), Lipman (1997), Kapstein (2000), Horlemann (2002) and Samuel (2002).

[17] Beckwith (1987). Cabezon notes that the ruler of Kabul, originally a vassal of the Tibetan emperor, converted from Buddhism to Islam sometime between 812 and 814 A.D and capitulated to the Arabian ruler Al Ma'mun. The Buddhist kingdom of Khotan in East Turkestan was directly controlled by the Tibetan empire during this time but also eventually fell under Muslim control. Cabezon also notes that some historical texts describe Khotan as a Muslim centre as early as 1006 (Cabezon, 1997, pp.16&25).

[18] Cabezon (1997), p.28.

[19] For instance, see Carmen Meinert, 'Chinese Chan and Tibetan Rdzogs Chen: Preliminary remarks on two Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts', in Blezer (2002b), pp.289-307.

Another phase of exposure to Muslims in Central Tibet took place alongside the rapid expansion of the Mongolian empire in the thirteenth century, during which the Mongol court converted to Tibetan Buddhism and Tibet eventually came under control of the Kubilai/Yuan dynasty in China and the Sakya order in Tibet following their power rivalry with the Stod Hor Mongols and Drigung Tibetans that lasted several decades.[20] Given that the rule of the Mongol factions that were competing in Central Tibet stretched as far as Persia, considerable cultural influence was transmitted from Central Asia as well as from Mongol-ruled China.[21] The westward Mongol conquests also initiated eastern migrations of Muslims from Central Asia, thereby entrenching a Muslim presence across Northwest China, particularly in the Gansu region bordering Amdo. Muslims were also closely involved in the Yuan court and they acted as soldiers, merchants and officials who travelled with the Mongol armies in Northwest China.[22] Given these roles, it is probable that Mongol military activity in Central Tibet brought with it a Muslim presence and helped to establish the patterns of Muslim trade throughout the Tibetan areas that still persist with strength today.

In addition to direct contact with Muslims via the Mongols, the ascendancy of Sufism across the Muslim world from the eleventh century onwards also probably had an important indirect influence on the development of Tibetan political and religious ideology. Tibetan elites would have been aware of these developments due to their incorporation into the Mongol empire, as well as the regular traffic of Tibetan scholars to Northern India, where many Sufi refugees had also fled to escape the turmoil wrought by the Mongols in Central Asia.[23]

The similarities between many of the politico-religious evolutions in both Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism during this period are striking. A case in point is the emergence of the *trulku* institution (lineages of recognised incarnations of lamas). This occurred parallel to similar developments of the *shaikh* institution under Sufism, which from its own side was generating a revolution of social and political organisation in Muslim communities throughout the Muslim world.[24] While the *trulku* institution obviously drew inspiration from the earlier Tibetan tradition of 'sacral kingship',[25] the contemporaneity between these two developments, as decentralised forms of political, economic and social organisation, suggests cross-fertilisation between Islamic and Buddhist systems, including doctrinal as well as institutional innovations.

Following the demise of the Yuan dynasty, Central Tibet fell back into renewed civil wars. An invasion by the Khoshot Mongols in 1640 temporarily ended the strife by conquering most of Tibet and establishing the Fifth Dalai Lama as ruler under their protection and patronage.[26] Several scholars trace the emergence of a nascent form of religious proto-nationalism back to this time, if not before.[27] With regard to Muslims, the 'Great Fifth' apparently attempted to counterbalance the Buddhist bias within this religious nationalism by practicing a policy of religious tolerance towards non-Buddhists and he even held a proactive stance towards Muslims as part of a larger policy of encouraging ethnic, cultural and

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[20] Karl-Heinz Everding, 'The Mongol States and their Struggle for Dominance over Tibet in the 13th Century', in Bleker (2002a), pp.109-128.

[21] For instance, in the mid-13th century the Ilkhans of Persia were entrusted by the Mongols with overseeing portions of Western Tibet. At the end of the same century the Ilkhans converted to Islam and apparently suppressed Buddhism in Persia, although by this time Tibet was under the control of the Yuan dynasty (Cabezon, 1997, p.28).

[22] Lipman (1997), pp.32-38; and Dillon (1999), pp.32-38.

[23] Dillon (1999), p.108.

[24] See Lipman (1997), pp.60-72, for the *shaikh* system and its transmission to Muslims in China,.

[25] The cult of the kings is discussed in Kapstein (2000), p.54.

[26] Georges Dreyfus, 'The Shuk-den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 21:2 (1998), pp.227-270; and Kapstein (2000), pp.xvii-xx.

[27] Georges Dreyfus, 'Tibetan Religious Nationalism: Western fantasy or empowering vision?' in P. Christiaan Klieger (ed.), *Voices of Difference*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp.37-56.

economic diversity in Tibet.[28] The presence of Muslim merchants in the main towns and cities of Tibet was undoubtedly deemed vital for interregional trade, especially given that Central Tibet was dependent on imported food and commodities, and the poorer members of the Muslim community also conveniently performed the stigmatised jobs of butchery and vegetable farming.[29]

Nonetheless, up to the twentieth century the small Muslim presence in Central Tibet remained limited. Small groups of traders and workers came from Sichuan or Northwest China and were known in Tibetan as the *Hopaling*, while wealthier Muslim merchants came from Kashmir, Ladakh and Nepal. Both groups mostly settled in Lhasa, Shigatse and several other main towns.[30] By 1959, when the fourteenth Dalai Lama escaped into exile, their combined population in Lhasa, the largest population centre, was estimated at around two thousand.[31] These 'Tibetan Muslims' intermarried with Tibetans and assimilated into the dominant culture, including the adoption of Tibetan language.[32] While these intimate cross-cultural exchanges were restricted to the main urban centres, Tibetans from all Tibetan regions typically made pilgrimages to the centres. Therefore, even Tibetans from remote rural areas would have had at least heard of the Muslims in these more cosmopolitan and interethnic towns.

Amdo

While Amdo, like Kham (eastern Tibet), was incorporated into the Tibetan empire in the seventh and eighth centuries, the demise of the empire left these regions largely under the control of a heterogeneous mix of petty kingdoms, tribes, powerful monasteries and other localised organisations of power. By the thirteenth century Amdo was well incorporated into the Mongolian empire and various Mongol tribes continued to hold much authority over this area even following the demise of the Yuan dynasty in China.[33] By the eighteenth century, Amdo had been nominally absorbed into the Qing Empire, although in many cases direct rule was applied with much difficulty if at all. Notably, despite Qing dominance, Central Tibet continued to wield considerable influence across Amdo and Kham up to the twentieth century through monastic and *trulku* networks. Monastic and *trulku* estates in turn acted as important centres of political and economic influence, were involved in trade, commerce and finance, and were the organisational centres for militias and local armies.[34]

Due to the borderland location of the main population centres of Amdo alongside the historic Gansu province,[35] which in turn is one of the main centres of Chinese Muslims, Amdo has served as the nerve centre for Tibetan-Muslim relations throughout the centuries, particularly

[28] Cabezon (1997), p.17.
[29] Cabezon (1997), p.15.
[30] Gladney (1991), p.33; and Cabezon (1997), pp.16&25.
[31] Cabezon (1997), p.20. Gladney cites an estimate that there were about 6000 'Tibetan Hui' in Lhasa in the mid-1980s, while apparently almost all of the 'Kashmiri Muslims' fled to India with the Dalai Lama (Gladney, 1991, p.33).
[32] Cabezon (1997), p.20. Gladney remarked that during field work in Lhasa in the mid-1980s these local 'Tibetan Hui' did not interact with the Chinese Muslims who started arriving in Tibet from elsewhere in China in the 1980s. I have also noticed that Tibetans in Lhasa clearly differentiate between 'old' and 'new' Muslims (Gladney, 1991, p.34).
[33] See Uyunbiliq Borjigidai, 'The Hoshuud Polity in Khökhnuur (Kokonor)', *Inner Asia* 4:2 (2002), pp.181-196. Also see Kapstein (2000), p.xix; Paul Nietupski, 'Sino-Tibetan Relations in Eighteenth-Century Labrang', in Katia Buffetrille & Hildegard Diemberger (eds.), *Territory and Identity in Tibet and the Himalayas*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp.121-133; and Paul Kocot Nietupski, *Labrang: A Tibetan Buddhist Monastery at the Crossroads of Four Civilizations*, Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1999. Mongol rule left behind several significantly-sized populations of Mongolians and Tibetanised Mongolians (*Monguor*, Ch. *Tu*) in Amdo.
[34] For instance, see Neitupski (1999; 2002).
[35] The historic Gansu province included present-day Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu Province, and the northeast corner of Qinghai, known as Huangzhong. See Lipman (1997) for further discussion of these regions.

considering the strategic position of Gansu as a crossroad of the Silk Road between the Turkic west, the Mongolian north, the Tibetan south and the Chinese east. To illustrate this proximity, the Muslim centre of Hezhou, today called Linxia in modern Gansu Province and known euphemistically as 'the Chinese Mecca', is very close to the extensive Labrang monastic complex (Ch. Xiahe), which up to the 1950s was one of the largest Tibetan monasteries of Tibet outside Lhasa.[36] Hezhou in particular has served as one of the main sources of Muslim trade in the Tibetan areas, even as far south as Lhasa or southern Kham.[37] Further south in Gansu, the Muslim community in Taozhou (today known as Lintan) was a close neighbour to the influential Tibetan monastery of Chone. Nearby in Qinghai, the Salar Muslims are said to have settled and intermarried with local Tibetans as early as the thirteenth century in what is now the Xunhua Salar Autonomous County in the present-day Haidong District of Qinghai.[38] This county is entirely surrounded by traditionally Tibetan areas and also includes four Tibetan townships. It borders Rebgong, the county that seats the Rongwo (Ch. Longwu) Monastery and Town, another major power and religious centre of Amdo. Kumbum Monastery (Ch. Ta'ersi), the other major monastery of this core area of Amdo founded in the sixteenth century by the Third Dalai Lama, is very close to Xining City. Although Xining has been a Chinese garrison city since the twelfth century and possibly before, there have also been large Muslim populations on its outskirts for almost as long.[39] Thus ironically, although Amdo Tibetans clearly see the Muslims as outsiders in Amdo, most of the Muslims within Amdo are indigenous to very proximate if not overlapping regions of northwest China, and many hail from Muslim families that have been residing in Tibetan towns for over a century, if not several.

The Tibetan-Muslim interface has therefore been much denser and more contested than in Central Tibet, although despite contestation, cooperative synergies were equally dense. For instance, with even more force that in Central Tibet, intermarriage was relatively common between Tibetans and the local Turkic-speaking, Chinese-speaking, Tibetan-speaking or Mongolic-speaking 'Chinese' Muslims,[40] as well as with Mongolians and Monguors, who were mostly Tibetan-Buddhist, and with local Han Chinese, many of whom were also Buddhist.[41] Similarly, Muslims in Amdo filled specialised economic roles that continue to the present. Typically, they were based in market towns and moved between pastoral and agricultural zones as traders, merchants, middlemen, brokers and translators.[42] They controlled much of the trade in livestock products, particularly wool and hides, and also worked as butchers for Tibetans. In many cases Muslims were invited by Tibetan rulers to fill these specialised roles and their settlements and trade routes influenced the development of many Amdo Tibetan towns.[43]

It is important to recall that land and its produce were the dominant source of wealth in China up until the twentieth century. Therefore, Tibetans, and in particular Tibetan nomads, with their abundant land in comparison to neighbouring Muslim or Chinese areas, were relatively wealthy. Local accounts collected during fieldwork confirm this perspective, in that it was repeatedly asserted that Muslims in this region were generally considered to be poorer than Tibetans up until the beginning of the reform period. It has only been since the 1980s that

[36] On Labrang, see Nietupski (1999; 2002); on Hezhou/Linxia, see Lipman (1997).
[37] Even as far south as Lhasa, many of the Muslim migrants that I met during fieldwork were from Linxia.
[38] Interview with Dr Ma Cheng Jun (a Salar professor), Xining, June 2004.
[39] See Lipman (1997), pp.12-14 and pp.159-165; and Goodman (1997), p.384.
[40] Lipman (1997), p.19, notes that intermarriage between Amdo Tibetans and Muslims often acted as a means of solidifying business relationships, among other considerations. Dillon (1999), p.48, also mentions intermarriage.
[41] David S. G. Goodman, 'Qinghai and the Emergence of The West: Nationalities, communal interaction and national integration', *The China Quarterly*, 178 (June 2004), pp.379-399.
[42] Lipman (1997), p.13.
[43] See, for example, Lin Yi, 'Schooling and Cultural Citizenship in Multiethnic Northwest China: the Tibetan Case', in Rachel Murphy & Vanessa L. Fong (eds., *Citizenship at the Margins of Chinese Society: Ethnographies of Education, Identity and Exclusion*, New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2005.

Muslims have come to achieve a perceived economic superiority over Tibetan farmers and herders.[44] In this sense, the trading and service roles of the Muslims would not have necessarily been perceived as a threat by Tibetans in the past, as the Muslims were performing work that was generally stigmatised by Tibetans.

The Tibetan-Muslim symbiosis in Amdo nonetheless came to be underlain by competition and violent confrontations in recent centuries. Increasing tension was probably stimulated by the rise of Muslim militancy in the northwest during the demise of the Ming dynasty in the seventeenth century,[45] which coincided with the spread of Sufism into Gansu. In particular, Xining, Xunhua and Hezhou became key organisational hubs for the Sufi movement through the missionary and political activism of several charismatic sheikhs from Central Asia.[46] Conversion of non-Muslims was particularly emphasised, with some success among Tibetans, Mongols, Turks and Chinese.[47] Rising Muslim influence under Sufism therefore gradually came to contest local Tibetan/Buddhist dominance in these regions.[48]

As previously suggested with regard to Central Tibet, Muslim activism probably also catalysed similar activism among Tibetan/Buddhist elites. This is reflected by the founding of Labrang Monastery at the beginning of the eighteenth century and its subsequent development into a local power centre within a nexus of Tibetan, Mongolian and Qing patronage.[49] Up to the Muslim uprisings in the second half of the nineteenth century, local Tibetan rulers managed to hold the upper hand of Manchu favour under the imperial policy of using minorities to rule minorities in the borderlands. Tibetan armies or militias often assisted the Qing military in various pacification campaigns against Muslim rebellions in neighbouring Muslim strongholds, such as Xunhua or Xining.[50]

However, this particular configuration of ethnic alliance was not cut and dry. Both Chinese and Tibetans had joined earlier Muslim uprisings in the Northwest during the demise of the Ming dynasty and loyal Muslim forces were also often used in Qing pacification campaigns to put down rebellious Muslims.[51] Alliances were also notably local, such as in Chone and Taozhou, where local Tibetans often offered protection or refuge to their Muslim neighbours against attacks by non-local Muslims.[52] Nonetheless, for most of the Qing dynasty, pacification singled out Muslims, who were portrayed as naturally violent and rebellious, while patronising preference was given to Tibetan elites.[53]

This patronage-instilled ethnic power balance slowly reversed towards the end of the Qing dynasty. Several of the loyalist Muslim warlord families in the northwest managed to gain considerable Qing imperial favour (and military co-dependence) due to their role in pacifying the Muslim rebellions and supporting central rule in Gansu in the late nineteenth century. Following the demise of the Qing dynasty in 1911, they successfully navigated both favour and local authority over to Nationalist allegiance.[54] The rise to power of the Ma Muslim

[44] These opinions were expressed to me by numerous Tibetans and Muslims, including several Muslim scholars.
[45] See Lipman (1997), pp.53-57.
[46] Lipman (1997), pp.64-65.
[47] Lipman (1997), pp.63&67; and Gladney (1991), p.59. In interviews, several educated Tibetans in Amdo repeatedly told me about the loss of Tibetans and Tibetan territory to the Muslims over the centuries through conversion.
[48] See Nietupski (2002) and Lipman (1997).
[49] See Nietupski (2002).
[50] For instance, the Qing military leader called in armed militia of Amdo Tibetans and Alashan Mongols to defeat a Salar uprising in Xunhua in 1781 (Lipman, 1997, p.110). Similarly, Tibetan militia were used to put down a Salar rebellion in Xunhua in 1872 (Interview with Dr Ma Cheng Jun, Xining, June 2004). Local Tibetan militia were also enlisted by the Qing to fight a Muslim uprising in Xining in 1895 (Lipman, 1997, p.161).
[51] For instance, see Lipman (1997), p.135.
[52] Lipman (1997), pp.152&188.
[53] Lipton (1997).
[54] Lipton (1997, p.171.

warlord family based in the northeast corner of Qinghai (Ma Qi followed by his nephew Ma Bufang) in the first part of the twentieth century was particularly relevant for Amdo Tibetans. Ma Qi was appointed by the Republican government as governor of the newly created province of Qinghai in 1928 and Ma Bufang took over leadership following the death of his uncle in 1931. They "established essentially a separate, and Islamic, state-within-a-state in Qinghai under the Republic", relying heavily on the Hui and Salar in the administration and military while excluding Tibetans, Monguors and Mongols.[55] For the first time in the history of Amdo, local Tibetans were surpassed by local Muslims in strategic alliance and military strength.

The creation of Qinghai nominally incorporated large parts of the vast Tibetan territories of Amdo and Kham (Yushu), which had hitherto never been incorporated into the historic Gansu province per se, beyond the granting of symbolic imperial titles by the Manchu.[56] Ma Bufang attempted to forcefully incorporate these territories through punitive military campaigns as far south as Golok, which in turn were faced with much resistance. Counter-resistance tended to be very violent, often involving the destruction of monasteries and the sacking of towns.[57] Most of Qinghai eventually submitted, although it seems that about half of Golok was never subdued. Ma Bufang was also involved in military campaigns as far south as northern Sichuan in the 1930s, fighting alongside Nationalist and Sichuan warlord forces against Lhasa.[58]

The success of Ma brought a reconfiguration of territory, population and even ethnicity in and around the northeast corner of Qinghai (Huangzhong). In Huangzhong itself, many Tibetans were forcibly converted to Islam and assimilated into Muslim communities, or else they were forced off the more centrally located lands and into higher altitude hinterlands of the region, or outside of the region altogether.[59] This was particularly the case in Hualong, Xunhua and Minhe Counties of the present-day Haidong District, where Ma Bufang sourced his Muslim power base in the midst of sizeable surrounding Tibetan populations.[60] There were also many military confrontations along the southern borders of these counties with neighbouring local Tibetan rulers in Chentsa and Rebgong given that Ma was attempting to extend the same policies of ethnic cleansing further south across the Yellow River. Current ethnic distributions, with Muslims on the north bank of the Yellow River in Hualong and Tibetans on the south bank in Chentsa, were in part wrought by these confrontations.[61]

The aggressive policies of cleansing and assimilation by Ma Bufang also created an exodus of Tibetans and Muslims from these core counties of Huangzhong. Many of these refugees were permitted by Ma to relocate to the west, in the region that is today known as the Tsolho (Ch. Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The refugees were mostly farmers and they established themselves in areas that had hitherto been purely nomadic, thereby reshaping land

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[55] David S. G. Goodman, 'Qinghai and the Emergence of The West: Nationalities, communal interaction and national integration', *The China Quarterly*, 178 (June 2004), p.386.

[56] See p. 246 in Bianca Horlemann, 'Modernisation Efforts in Mgo Log: A chronicle, 1970-2000', in Toni Huber (ed.), *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and culture in the post-Mao era*, Leiden: Brill, 2002b, p.246.

[57] I have collected many accounts of such conflicts during fieldwork in various parts of Qinghai in 2003 and 2004.

[58] Wenbin Peng, 'Frontier Process, Provincial Politics and Movements for Khampa Autonomy during the Republican Period', in Lawrence Epstein (ed.), *Khams Pa Histories: Visions of People, Place and Authority*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, p.66.

[59] These events are briefly mentioned by Goodman (2004), p.386, who refers to them as 'ethnic cleansing'. I have built up my own understanding of these events through interviews and discussions with local scholars (Tibetan, Muslim and Chinese) and a selection of local elderly Tibetans who were alive at the time.

[60] Even today, Tibetans account for about one quarter of the population of Hualong and the county in fact contains the largest Tibetan population of all the counties in Qinghai.

[61] Information concerning twentieth century events in Chentsa County was collected from interviews during visits to the county in 2003 and 2004 and from Tibetan and Muslim scholars in Xining.

use and creating conflict between nomads and the new farmers in these areas.[62] Muslims also followed into Tsolho and other Tibetan areas during this time, some of them also escaping the autarkic rule of Ma, and they account for many of the Muslim households that are rural and agrarian in these areas. Similar cross-cutting of ethnic solidarity can be noted elsewhere, such as during the Muslim warlord attacks on the Xidaotang Muslim compounds in Taozhou in the late 1920s, which were resisted by local Tibetans and Muslims alike and led to the exile of the Xidaotang into Tibetan territory.[63]

Outside of their patronage of Ma rule, the Nationalist government in China had little direct effect on these local power struggles in Amdo given that their energies were monopolised by Japanese invasion and civil war from the 1930s onwards. Communist victory in 1949 was therefore the first time that modern China had the capacity to enforce any direct central rule on these areas. Ironically, the subsequent administrative and economic reorganisation of the rural areas by the Communists had the effect of fixing the de facto configurations of these ethnic power struggles as they had evolved up to the 1950s, including individual administrative ethnic status. Part of Tibetan discontent during this early Communist period, besides the upheaval and bloodshed, derived from this fact that the fixing of territory and identity took place at a time when Tibetans were in a subordinate position to the Muslim warlords, having lost significant amounts of territory and people in several key locations.

The early Communist leadership apparently misinterpreted the complex dynamics of interethnic relations in Amdo. For instance, it seems that they had miscalculated that the Amdo Tibetans would support them because they had defeated Ma Bufang in 1949, but they were themselves faced by resistance from both Tibetans and Muslims from the mid-1950s onwards. In both cases resistance was not necessarily directed towards Chinese rule per se, which had come and gone many times over the centuries and in many cases was received with varying degrees of local support.[64] Rather, the main points of contention were the radical socialist fast forward into collectivisation and the dismantling of the influence of religious institutions, both of which started in earnest in the mid-1950s and reneged on earlier promises made by the CCP.[65] As a result, armed resistance became very stiff in Amdo only from the mid-1950s onwards and in some cases joined forces with resistance movements in Kham. The peak of Amdo Tibetan resistance occurred in 1958, when several Tibetan regions of Qinghai broke out into full scale guerrilla warfare, occurring side by side with an uprising organised by a Salar Muslim in Xunhua.[66] Both were met by a heavy counterinsurgency campaign mounted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), although guerrilla activity continued in some remote Tibetan areas well into the 1960s.[67]

However, with the advent of the reform period in the late 1970s, tensions between Amdo Tibetans and local Muslims have gradually remerged as one of the dominant foci of contestation within the transforming society and economy. Conflicts with Muslims, including occasional flares of violence, have been notably social, dealing with day-to-day interactions, often over issues trade and commerce. Tibetans claim that Muslim traders cheat, charge

[62] These insights have been taken from conversations with several Tibetan scholars from Tsolho Prefecture.
[63] See Lipman (1997), pp.196-197. The Xidaotang was a successful religious-commercial collective operation and it maintained close relations with local Tibetans leaders at Choni and Labrang Monasteries.
[64] For instance, official contacts with the CCP in Golok were allegedly first established only in 1951, after some groups from Golok had taken the initiative (Horlemann, 2002b, pp.247-248).
[65] See Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The demise of the lamaist state*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Melvyn C. Goldstein, 'Introduction and The Revival of Monastic Life in Drepung Monastery', in Melvyn Goldstein & Matthew Kapstein (eds), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Ethnic Identity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, pp.1-45; and Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A history of modern Tibet since 1947*, London: Pimlico, 1999.
[66] Accounts of these events have been collected from interviews and conversations with a variety of local Tibetan scholars. Apparently, some of the strongest resistance took place in the Tsolho (Ch. Hainan) and Yushu Prefectures. The reference to the Salar uprising is from Goodman (2004), p.6.
[67] From one oral history recorded in Yushu, Qinghai, with several elderly men involved.

unfair prices, give fake money, and so forth.[68] Muslims living within or beside Tibetan areas are often accused of crime.[69] Local conflicts have also flared up with respect to the 'purchase' (most likely long-term lease) of land for building mosques or cemeteries near Tibetan towns.[70] Most recently, these various local conflicts have coalesced with sufficient momentum to produce a regional boycott movement by Tibetans against Muslim businesses in Tibetan areas.

Boycotts and Modern Myth Creation in Amdo

The idea of boycotting Muslim businesses appears to have developed in different pockets of Amdo in the 1990s. However, the roots of the idea might possibly be traced further back into the exile community in India, inspired by Gandhian concepts of *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) and *Swaraj* (self-rule) as possible strategies to take against the increasingly marketized Chinese rule during the reform period.[71] It only escalated into a regional movement following a clash between Tibetans and Muslims in Chentsa (Ch. Jianza) County in January 2003.[72] This event, which occurred parallel to several other Tibetan-Muslim clashes in other parts of Amdo, appears to have acted as a catalyst and rallying cry for the boycott to be taken up as a regionally coordinated political movement, spreading as far south as Lhasa and Kham. As a result, Amdo has come to act as an epicentre for Tibetan-Muslim confrontation, influencing Tibetan attitudes towards Muslims across all of Tibet. This section focuses on the emergence of the boycott movement along with the associated racist mythologies that were instigated by Tibetan elites in order to mobilise a largely rural and undereducated Tibetan population.

Economic foundations for Tibetan discontent towards Muslims

Muslim businesses have essentially come to be targeted by Tibetans due to the perception among Tibetans that Muslims have been increasingly dominating the liberalising economies of the Tibetan areas. This perception is particularly strong in Amdo, but it also extends as far south as Lhasa in Central Tibet. In particular, the main concern relates to Muslim dominance in the tertiary businesses of trade, transport and catering, with Muslim restaurants representing a symbolic rallying point.

The notion of Muslim economic dominance requires qualification. Obviously, the Chinese state remains by far the most dominant player in the Tibetan economy, a role that has been intensifying since the mid-1990s under various western development strategies (WDS).[73] However, rising Tibetan-Muslim tensions relate to two issues that are residual to this rapid state-led growth. One has been the marked economic advantage accrued during the reform

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[68] A Salar Muslim professor in Xining confirmed to me these Tibetan claims by noting that some Muslims took advantage of the ignorance of Tibetans in many remote areas of Qinghai, thereby creating a bad impression of Muslims in general. He insisted though that these cases were exceptions.

[69] For instance, there is one well-known and sophisticated Muslim motorcycle theft ring in Hualong and several smaller ones in Chentsa. Ironically many of these rings also include Tibetans. Bagyathang, a Muslim village in Hualong, near Chentsa Town, is known as a smuggling centre for drugs and arms.

[70] I collected numerous reports of several of such recent conflicts during fieldwork, particularly two well-known clashes that occurred in Rebgong County, Qinghai.

[71] These Gandhian concepts have been vigorously promoted in recent years by Prof Samdhong Rimpoche, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile. I therefore suspect that the resemblance is no coincidence.

[72] CNN, 'Tibetans, Muslim Huis clash in China', CNN (23 February 2003). I have collected most of my own accounts of this event during fieldwork in Chentsa County in 2003 and 2004. The clash began when a group of Tibetan and Muslim youths bickered. Fighting ensued until one elderly Tibetan was stabbed to death by two Hui youths. Hundreds of Tibetans then went rioting in the town, destroying Muslim-owned property. The military was quickly called in and a strong security presence remained for several months in order to avert further communal fighting. Apparently, most of the Muslims who were fighting were from Bagyathang.

[73] See, for instance, Andrew Martin Fischer, *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges of recent economic growth*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2005.

period in the activities that have traditionally been the specialisation of Muslims versus those of Tibetans, i.e. trade, commerce and services versus farming and herding. The second has been the entry of Muslims into the new, albeit limited economic opportunities that have come about in the wake of state-induced growth and that are largely concentrated in the rapidly growing Tibetan towns. The fact that Muslim are perceived as advantaged in the newly emerging urban economies compounds the disadvantages felt by Tibetans in these same areas, particularly within the context of intensified migration since the mid-1990s.[74]

The first issue is poignantly summarised by the story of wool. From the late 1980s to 2004, the terms of trade of raw wool, relative to general consumer prices, have dropped by more than three quarters.[75] The cause of this dramatic collapse in wool prices lies in the gradual economic reforms of the 1980s in China, whereby the practice inherited from Maoist economic planning of under pricing raw materials (such as wool) was continued while fiscal regional redistribution was reduced.[76] This in turn catalysed the 'wool wars' of the mid- to late-1980s in the major wool producing provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, along with other 'commodity wars' elsewhere in the interior of China. Local governments in the wool- producing regions were trying to protect the development of local wool-processing industries as a means of using the undervalued wool to promote local production and wealth. Meanwhile, coastal processing industries were trying to maintain a secure supply of wool and the national government was trying to regulate the rapid proliferation of production as well as a stable inter-regional supply of wool. It was precisely these conditions of intense competition, within a chaotic structure of fixed, negotiated and market prices, that led the national government to make wool into one of the first raw commodities to become fully deregulated and, more importantly, liberalised to international trade as a means to circumvent local protectionism and to guarantee supply to the coastal industries. The inflow of higher quality and relatively cheap (and heavily subsidised) wool from the late 1980s onwards, primarily from Australia and New Zealand, has been one of the main factors underlying the collapse of wool prices in the 1990s.[77]

The impact of collapsing wool prices has been enormous for Tibetans, rendering the monetary value of their main surplus tradable commodity almost worthless. On the other hand, Muslims in Tibetan areas have not been adversely affected by such dramatically falling terms of trade given that they have traditionally specialised in the trade of wool products. Although wool had been undervalued during the Maoist period (although less severely than in the 1990s), strict control over the economy via collectivisation prevented such pricing issues from degenerating into local distributional conflicts. In particular, total state monopoly over local trade in commodities removed Muslims from their traditional niche role as regional traders across the Tibetan areas, thus removing them as objects of interethnic communal tension. However, Muslims reverted to this traditional role with the freeing of migration, markets and individual entrepreneurship from the beginning of the reform period onwards. In some cases, they have almost completely taken over the trading role of the state by buying up county-owned trading companies during waves of privatisation in the 1990s.[78]

In other words, the liberalisation of the wool trade occurred alongside an increasing presence of Muslims in the Tibetan areas, some of whom were regular residents in these areas, but

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[74] See Fischer (2004; 2005).

[75] Essentially, current farm-gate prices for wool have fallen by more than half since the late 1980s whereas general rural consumer prices have more than doubled over the same period. See Fischer (2005) and Chapter 4 in Dali Yang, *Beyond Beijing: Liberalization and the Regions in China*, London: Routledge, 1997.

[76] See Fischer (2005), Chapter 2; Yang (1997); and Yehua Dennis Wei, *Regional development in China: states, globalization and inequality*, London: Routledge, 2000.

[77] For a detailed account of the wool wars, see Yang (1997), Chapter 4. With respect to Qinghai, I have supplemented the insights of Yang with my own field work.

[78] Many cases of the privatisation of state-owned trading companies to Muslims were recounted to me by Tibetan, Muslim and Chinese scholars and officials during field work.

many of whom were not necessarily settled within any particular Tibetan community, although generally native to the larger Qinghai-Gansu region.[79] Therefore, by the time wool prices started to collapse in the 1990s in the midst of a range of other liberalisations, the face mediating the collapse was the private Muslim trader, not the local Chinese or Tibetan officials, whose wool trading and processing operations were largely perceived to be defunct. Whether or not Muslims engaged in unfair trading practices, Tibetan discontent was undoubtedly felt and expressed through their trading interactions with Muslims. For this reason, many of the accounts of fighting between Tibetans and Muslims over the last ten years that I collected during field work, particularly in nomadic areas, pertained to the wool trade, and in particular, wool prices.

This brings us to the second issue of Tibetan discontent with Muslims; the entry of Muslim migrants into new areas of economic activity in Tibetan towns. Again, this partly relates to the story of wool. Within the context of the wool wars in the 1980s, wool processing proliferated in many Tibetan counties of Qinghai, as well as in the other wool-producing provinces. Tibetans were involved in these efforts, either at the level of workers or management. However, the collapse of wool prices in the 1990s, along with national government carrot and stick strategies aimed at controlling the proliferation of wool processing, led to a consolidation of the industry in the western wool-producing provinces.

One of the disciplinary strategies involved the removal of subsidies for county-owned factories, in line with the national policy to streamline the state-owned industrial sector by shedding less profitable enterprises, particularly those in non-strategic sectors such as textiles. Unfortunately, most of the Tibetan efforts to enter wool processing had been led by county-run ventures, typically (and often poorly) run by local Tibetan (and Chinese and Muslim) managers selected by (and often related to) county officials.[80] The removal of subsidies therefore caused the closure or privatisation of most of these local government-run operations by the late 1990s or early 2000s. During my fieldwork in 2004, I was not able to identify a single Tibetan wool-processing factory in Qinghai that was still viable.[81]

This does not imply, however, that the wool-processing industry in Qinghai is underdeveloped. On the contrary, by the late 1990s it had consolidated into a small number of large private players, with the largest acting as a monopsonistic buyer of higher quality wool. As it happens, these players were mostly Muslim. Indeed, the market for higher quality wool has come to be dominated by a sophisticated wool-processing enterprise based in Xunhua County, known as the Qinghai Snowboat Three Wool Group. This private group was formed in the 1980s on the purchase of privatised government factories in Xunhua by four Salar Muslims, one of whom, although illiterate, is apparently the richest man in Qinghai today. It has since been tightly managed by these four owners, together with considerable logistical support from the local Xunhua County government. The operations of the main factory in Xunhua, which employs 1100 people, are based entirely on the processing of Tibetan yak, sheep and camel wool. Notably, this company came to dominate the industry in Qinghai after they scaled up their operations by importing high-tech processing machinery from Japan and Germany.[82] Smaller, less sophisticated private Muslim processing businesses have also

[79] The local officials (Tibetan and Chinese) and Muslim scholars or teachers that I interviewed typically blamed cheating on Muslims from outside the community, insisting that Muslims who are settled within Tibetan communities have harmonious (or at least neutral and respectful) relationships with other Tibetans.

[80] This insight was recounted to me by several Tibetan scholars, who noted that the management of these processing ventures was often characterised by high degrees of nepotism and diversion of funds, which was accentuated by the fact that officials and managers were often related (and in most of the cases cited, Tibetan).

[81] My search was aided by the insights of numerous Tibetans, including several Tibetan scholars, during my field work in several of the key Tibetan towns of Qinghai, such as Chentsa, Rongwo (Rebgong), Chabcha, Jyekundo (Yushu), and Dawu (Golok).

[82] Most of this information was told to me by Dr Ma Cheng Jun, a Salar professor in Xining, and by several interviews with county officials and the factory manager during a visit to Xunhua County in June 2004.

remained active in the region, capturing the supply of lower quality wool. As a result, the only processing operations that seem to have survived this period of industrial restructuring have been the private Muslim ones and most of the trade in Tibetan wool in Qinghai is currently dominated by these players.

It is interesting to note that the industrial processing of wool has not necessarily been a traditional niche of these local Muslims. For instance, the Salar in Xunhua had not been involved in industry prior to the 1980s, concentrating instead on agriculture and trade.[83] Nevertheless, by the late 1990s, the ladder for Amdo Tibetans to progress into higher value-added processing and marketing of their main commodity had been effectively kicked away. The resultant de-industrialisation of the main Tibetan towns in Amdo has left Amdo Tibetans with slim options for non-farm employment, which they have sorely needed precisely due to the sharp decline in prices for wool and their other commodities, such as barley or wheat.

This has intensified competition in the remaining new areas of economic activity, again mostly concentrated in the towns. Public employment is a coveted option, such as work in the government or as teachers, although this tends to be restricted to the educated few (of which Tibetans are very few). It is also very competitive and opportunities are possibly shrinking despite the rapid expansion of the public sector as an economic category.[84] The much higher education standards of Chinese migrants as well as their cultural advantages within regional political and economic circles result in the fact that elite Tibetans are increasingly pressured from this side of higher skilled employment, particularly considering government efforts to streamline public employment. However, given the extremely low education standards of most Tibetans, these positions are not the object of their employment covets.

Rather, the only areas of employment in which most Tibetans could conceivably compete are restricted to low-skill construction work or the residual tertiary opportunities that have come in the wake of the subsidised expansion of Tibetan towns, including petty trade and commerce, and a variety of services, in particular catering. In certain locations, tourism can be added to this list. Yet these are precisely the areas where Muslim migrants have also entered into the employment foray in Tibetan towns, taking advantage of their larger regional trading networks and their more astute business sense. Also, in the case of catering, almost everyone agrees, Tibetans included, that Muslims make the tastiest food of all. Finally, a further hurdle relates to the fact that manual employed labour (outside family farming or herding) and petty trade and commerce are generally stigmatised by Tibetans. The culmination of all of these factors results in the sidelining of Tibetans from even those residual low-skill opportunities that have arisen in the new economies of the burgeoning Tibetan towns of Amdo.

Effectively, these processes are contentious for Tibetans because they challenge the deeply set notions of hierarchy and dignity that, ironically, had been preserved throughout Maoism and up until the 1980s. The challenge works across social class, from the level of farmers and nomads up the level of elites. Tibetan elites are undoubtedly better placed to weather the displacements within the local economy, particularly the new elite of local government cadres and others who have positioned themselves as junior partners within Chinese rule. However, even among such elites, the relative employment security up to the 1980s has eroded considerably since the 1990s, as mentioned above. Notably, employment strategies for laid-off staff or workers or for unemployed high school and university graduates are largely

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[83] Interview with Prof Ma Cheng Jun, a Salar professor, in Xining, June 2005.

[84] TIN (Andrew Fischer), 'Tibetans lose ground in public sector employment in the TAR: Streamlining effectively discriminates against Tibetans', *Tibet Information Network* (20 January 2005). The data in this article deals with the TAR, although qualitative accounts from field work in both Qinghai and the TAR suggest that the experience has been very similar.

based on efforts to encourage self-employment in the start-up of small private businesses.[85] Yet such strategies imply a downward mobility in the Tibetan conception of local social hierarchy. They therefore precisely irk the dignity of these once-privileged Tibetan elites as well as the graduates aspiring for upward-mobility. In particular, the downward mobility aims at a social level occupied by and competing with the Muslim merchants. Given that these elites are also keenly aware of the legitimate need for their non-elite rural compatriots to move up the economic hierarchy in the towns, moving into the economic space that has come to be dominated by these same Muslims, a powerful common purpose across class has coalesced within these Tibetan communities, with its target the Muslim businesses.

Enter the boycott

It is within this context that *Swadeshi*-type discourses of boycott started to emerge among Amdo Tibetans. The common argument is that, if Tibetans would not spend their money in Muslim businesses in Tibetan areas (which largely cater to Tibetans), the Muslim businesses would not be able to survive or profit from Tibetan wealth and the Muslims would leave. Moral legitimacy is also added to this argument by noting that the departure of Muslims would also reduce the amount of animal slaughter in the Tibetan areas, given that the abattoirs are largely run by Muslims, whereas Tibetans only slaughter for their own subsistence needs. Conversely, if Tibetans were to set up their own businesses or spend their money in such businesses, they could capture these areas within the emerging urban economies of Tibet.

Curiously, while similar arguments have been made with respect to Chinese migrants, the boycott idea seems to have only taken hold of collective Tibetan inspiration with respect to Muslims. Even though many so-called ‘spontaneous’ Chinese migrants are also involved in commerce, catering, or a variety of low-skilled jobs, economic activism has been reserved for Muslims. While this is in part due to historical antagonism with Muslims and a closer cultural affinity with the Chinese, it is also due to the variety of contemporary contextual factors discussed above. In addition, many Chinese migrants are directly or indirectly sustained by local governments, are often attracted in the first place by relatives in the government, and they tend to cluster in the more sinicised parts of Tibetan towns. Any activism directed against them would therefore be treated severely by the local authorities. Due to all of these factors, Muslims are much more vulnerable to demand-side collective action than Chinese migrants. Thus, historical animosity is conditioned by these contemporary factors to result in the fact that Muslims bear the brunt of economic activism, whereas Chinese migrants escape largely unscathed, if not better off given that they reap much of the clientele lost by the boycotted Muslim businesses.

While the idea of boycotting Muslim businesses had been around in Amdo since the 1990s, actual boycotts remained localised events up until 2003, concentrated in a few townships within certain counties. One Tibetan scholar identified to me three principle townships of localised boycotts that were active in the late 1990s: two were in Qinghai, one in Chabcha County and one in Gande County in Golok; and one was in Sichuan, in Ngawa County in Ngawa (Ch. Aba) Prefecture. It seems that these townships developed as centres of anti-Muslim activism due to the presence of local leaders. Ngawa County has been especially important given the leadership of one lama who has been particularly vocal in promoting the

[85] For instance, during a visit to Chentsa (Ch. Jianza) in 2004, I met one young unemployed Tibetan university graduate who was attending a county-run workshop on how to set up and run a business, based on translated ILO course material on this subject. Attendance to these workshops was required in order to receive unemployment benefits of 150 yuan a month. This system of welfare conjoined with training was more generally part of measures related to the ending of guaranteed employment for high school and university graduates, which was implemented in Chentsa County and most other Tibetan counties of Qinghai between 2001 and 2002.

anti-Muslim boycott cause. The connection to Ngawa is interesting because the county is also known for a strong tradition of entrepreneurship in trade and is the home of many wealthy Tibetan businessmen. Given that the Ngawa business community extends strong financial support to the local Ngawa monasteries, it is likely that this lama advocating the boycott movement had at least several powerful or wealthy sponsors. Despite the local nature of these movements, the message of the boycott was well known throughout Amdo, following on the back of anti-Muslim sentiment that was equally widespread. Even in Central Tibet, far removed from Amdo, anti-Muslim sentiment was reportedly strong as early as the mid-1990s, resulting in several clashes, typically involving Muslim restaurants or commercial disputes.[86]

The clash in Chentsa Town in January 2003 served as a call to action for Tibetans, an incitement to take matters into their own hands, especially considering the widespread Tibetan belief that the state-imposed resolution of this episode was biased in favour of the Muslims.[87] Interestingly, it seems that the bravado of Tibetans had also been stoked up by the events of 9/11, the Afghan war and the lead up to the Iraq war, the latter two of which appear to have been overwhelmingly supported by Tibetans in Tibet.[88] A regional boycott of Muslim businesses therefore quickly gained momentum soon after the Chentsa clash and even extended into areas of Kham in Sichuan that had little Muslim presence. Although the Tibetans in Lhasa that I interviewed were hesitant to talk about it, the boycott had evidently reached Central Tibet as well, finding an accord with the anti-Muslim sentiment already built up over the last decade. While the boycott was meant to target all types of Muslim businesses and trade interactions, including Muslim-owned buses, the main symbolic focus became the Muslim restaurants that dominate catering throughout Amdo.

The boycott appears to have been strongest, most cohesive and most sustained in the more remote nomadic areas such as Golok, Yushu and Ngawa, in many cases continuing with force up until my last field visit in late 2004. In Golok, the boycott took off with an event that occurred soon after the Chentsa clash, involving the poisoning of three Tibetans in a Muslim restaurant, one of whom died. The poisoning, which was recorded in the local newspaper, served as a key local trigger for the boycott, although the question remains whether the poisoning took place only after the restaurant was heavily harassed by bravado Tibetan youths, who were no doubt stoked up by the events in Chentsa. Within a year of the poisoning, the local newspaper reported that the number of Muslim restaurants in the entire prefecture of Golok had fallen from over 70 to just over 20. Jikdrel Town, which was sacked by Ma Bufang in the 1930s, was the first town of Golok to entirely rid itself of Muslim restaurants.[89]

In the farming regions of Amdo that are closer to Muslim areas in the northwest, such as Rebgong, Chentsa, Labrang and Chabcha, or even in cities such as Xining and Lanzhou, the

[86] Several people interviewed in Lhasa in 2004 told me that in 1994 there were rumours that 'the Muslims were coming' to Lhasa, possibly referring to the liberalisation of inter-provincial migration to the TAR in that year. In early 1995, one particular incident broke out when some Tibetans claimed to have found a human finger in a soup served in a Muslim restaurant near the Jokhang Temple. This led Tibetans to claim that the Muslims were practicing cannibalism. Apparently there were some demonstrations outside the Muslim restaurant. The army was then quickly called in and Martial Law was declared for several days. I was also told of other conflicts similar to the commercial tensions in Amdo, such as fights breaking out over prices with Muslim traders. In recent years, there was also one well publicised case of Muslims trafficking young Tibetan village girls.
[87] This perception was expressed to me by many Tibetans from Chentsa and nearby Rebgong during fieldwork in 2004, along with several Tibetan scholars in Xining.
[88] The detonation of the two Buddha statues in Afghanistan in 2001, which was well known to educated Tibetans in Tibet and India, did not do much to endear the Tibetans to the Taliban either.
[89] The events surrounding the poisoning, including the newspaper articles, were recounted to me during a field visit to Golok in 2004 by a western scholar who had been living there during the time. It seems that some young Tibetan men in the prefecture capital, many of who are sons of county or prefecture officials and thereby act with relative impunity, are known to harass and taunt Muslim restaurant owners. In any case, most local police are also Tibetan.

boycott did start with a bang but soon petered out within less than a year. In many cases the advent of the boycott was enforced with some degree of moralistic coercion by Tibetan activists, many of them monks. For instance, Tibetans found eating in Muslim restaurants were shamed or even beaten up afterwards on the street. In Rongwo Town, the seat of Rebgong County, it was reported that activists, in particular monks from the nearby Rongwo Monastery, would impose fines on Tibetans for eating in Muslim restaurants. In this way, Tibetans who were opposed to the boycott were silenced or at least quietened, thereby imposing an appearance of consensus, which is highly valued in Tibetan communities.

The boycott gradually ran out of steam in these more central areas due to the difficulties of boycotting neighbours in towns that have had a long history of ethnic coexistence and where Muslims play an important symbiotic role in the local economy. The popularity of Muslim food together with the poor quality of Tibetan catering alternatives played important roles as well. Even in Golok, many of the Muslim restaurants were simply taken over by Chinese migrants from Sichuan, who often display their colours by advertising their new establishments as 'pork restaurants'. While very popular as tasty alternatives to Muslim food, the displacement of Muslim by Chinese restaurateurs has in part defeated the more instrumental purpose of the boycott movement, which was to allow local Tibetans the chance to enter into these areas of the urban service economy that had been hitherto dominated by Muslims.

The tale of the Muslim cook and other modern racist mythologies

Parallel to the rapid spread of the boycott, a racist mythology emerged among Tibetans throughout Amdo. The most typical among these myths is what I have come to call 'The Tale of the Muslim Cook'. Its appearance in the collective consciousness of Amdo Tibetans, along with similar non-culinary spin-offs, seems to have taken place more or less around the time of the clash at Chentsa. In any case, whatever the origins of the tale, whenever it was told to me the time reference was always recent, i.e. within the last year or two.

A typical version of the tale, told in all seriousness by the average Tibetan, including relatively educated Tibetans such as high school students, follows a standard formula, although elements vary from locality to locality. Here or there, a Muslim cook prepared the food they served to Tibetans using their left-over dirty bath water. Or, they used the bath water of an imam. Or, in the most extreme accounts, they put the ashes of the cremated bones of an imam or even their parents in the cooking water, according to an alleged Muslim belief that this will cause the eater to convert to Islam, or at the very least, make them sympathise with Islam.[90] An almost identical event apparently took place in many counties. Some tellers sourced the exact event to Ngawa County, others to the neighbouring county, and yet others to their own county. According to one rendition of the story (that apparently happened in several different counties if all renditions are to be believed), a Muslim cook was working for a Tibetan boss and business was very good. One day the Muslim decided to leave, after which business worsened because the food was not as good. The Tibetan boss phoned the Muslim cook and requested him to come back, at which point the cook told the boss that he would never come back and that all the while he had been cooking with his used bath water. It is told that this is how this Muslim practice of disrespect was exposed. I was told by several Tibetans in Rongwo that this event actually took place within the Rongwo Monastery itself, although this was denied by one lama of the monastery.

[90] I asked one Hui Muslim secondary school teacher about this in Rebgong and he insisted that there was no such belief among local Muslims. On reading Lipman (1997), p.69, I have come to wonder whether this belief among Tibetans is in part a misconstrued interpretation of certain mystical esoteric Sufi practices such as sand blowing.

In the non-culinary spin-offs, the medium of cooking is not even necessary. For instance, in Yushu it is said that passing Muslim motorists throw the ashes of cremated imams in the air, which then lands on or is inhaled by hapless Tibetan pedestrians and has the same effect as eating a tasty noodle soup. It does not seem to perturb these story tellers that Muslims in fact do not cremate the bodies of their dead, but bury them according to prescriptions given by the Koran. Indeed, Rebgong County itself has been the scene of several well known conflicts over Muslim attempts to rent or buy land for the purpose of establishing cemeteries, in which case it should be obvious that even local Muslims bury their dead. However, this lack of corroboration does not seem to perturb ongoing embellishments of the ashy versions of the myth.

Origins of the myths

Racist conceptions of Muslims are not new to Tibetans. For instance, when Muslim migration from the northwest to Lhasa started to increase in the mid-1990s, racist rumours apparently abounded in Lhasa. Muslim bread was yellow because they urinated in it, or they put their scabs in their food, or else, as mentioned previously, they practiced cannibalism and ate children.[91] Similarly, Lipman notes that in the Gansu region, the Xunhua Salar and the Hezhou Chinese Muslims were portrayed by non-Muslim locals, including Tibetans, as a ferocious lot as far back as the seventeenth century and Gansu mothers would discipline their children with the threat of the Hezhou Muslim boogieman.[92] Certainly, as noted by many scholars of Chinese Muslims, the prejudice that Chinese Muslims are naturally violent and driven by jihadist impulses has been well ingrained among both Chinese and Tibetans for centuries. Such attitudes are still very present among Tibetans today.

However, what is striking in the recent events has been the tight synchronicity between the boycott movement and the culinary racist myths, along with the rapid dissemination of both throughout most of Amdo and other parts of Tibet within a matter of months. The most coherent explanation that I have managed to assemble from my discussions with a variety people in Qinghai, including local and foreign scholars, Tibetan and Chinese officials, lamas, and Tibetan journalists, teachers and students, is that The Muslim Cook myth was initiated by certain Tibetan elites. These elites would have principally included certain secular intellectuals from some of the main urban centres in and around Amdo, such as Chabcha, Rebgong, Xining and Lanzhou, along with certain lamas and religious intellectuals, such as the Ngawa lama mentioned above. The dissemination of the myth subsequently took place through students, businesspeople or others who travel regularly between these key urban centres and the dispersed villages and towns of Amdo and beyond.[93]

These elite actors can be broadly considered as part of a Tibetan intellectual community that circulates within both secular and religious Tibetan institutions in Amdo. The secular include the minority universities, research or cultural institutes, Tibetan newspapers, and other organisations, all of which have functioned under the auspices of the PRC since the 1980s as part of the policy of promoting nominal ‘minority autonomy’. Many of these secular actors maintain a tight interaction with the religious elites; because one of the main foci of secular minority education is the study of culture and language, the secular scholars often seek out close formal or informal collaboration with monastic scholars given that the monasteries play a key role in maintaining high standards of literacy and scholarship in classical Tibetan and Buddhism. Interaction is further supported by the fact that close family, kinship or other social ties often bind the secular and religious intellectual communities. In turn, the same

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[91] These insights were told to me by one western scholar who was living in Lhasa in the 1990s.
[92] Lipman (1997), p.145.
[93] Notably, the clash in Chentsa occurred just before both the Tibetan and Chinese New Years, when many Tibetans residing in towns and cities return to their home villages.

social ties also bind both communities to broader elite networks, principally Tibetan cadres and businesspeople, who in turn act to various degrees within the limited space sanctioned by the state to support the projects of either the secular or the religious intellectuals.[94]

From the religious side, it has already been noted that many members of the religious community have been actively involved in boycott activism, from lamas playing key roles in defining the normative dimensions of the boycott down to heavy-handed monks enforcing the boycott through either their moral or muscular authority. In particular, the leadership of lamas has been tacitly acknowledged by even state authorities, highlighted by the fact that several key meetings with religious leaders were reportedly convened by the Qinghai government in efforts to diffuse the boycott. In one meeting in Golok that was reported to me, most of the leading lamas from the prefecture were assembled in the prefecture capital and officials requested them to tell the Golok Tibetans to eat in Muslim restaurants in the name of preserving interethnic harmony. It was said that one of the most senior lamas present at the meeting replied to the officials with the observation that Chinese and Muslim people never eat in Tibetan restaurants. He therefore concluded that they would tell their people to eat in Muslim restaurants only if the Chinese authorities would tell Chinese and Muslim people to eat in Tibetan restaurants.

According to the explanation that I have assembled, many of these elites had been brewing the boycott idea for a while. Following the events at Chentsa, as well as the general level of excitement that was surrounding the events in Iraq in early 2003, some of these elites took advantage of the general feelings of frustration and agitation to disseminate The Muslim Cook myth in various versions, playing off local events. According to several particularly frank Tibetan scholars and several western scholars, the myth was created and disseminated as a means to incite Tibetans to embark on a regional movement.[95] In other words, events such as Chentsa were capable of mobilising rural Tibetans into collective acts of retribution in manners typical of Tibetan feuding,[96] but these were not effective in moving most of them beyond revenge and into more far reaching strategies. This required that Tibetans become motivated to attack and take over the economic foundations of the Muslim advance into their local economies. However, a direct and logically analytical discourse, à la *Swadeshi*, has so far proved ineffective to mobilise on a large scale the largely uneducated rural population.

The myths therefore served this purpose by motivating Tibetans to view Muslim businesses in an antagonistic manner and to avoid them, thereby providing the breathing space for Tibetan businesses to enter the service and trade foray and to capture some of the urban economic space from Muslim businesses. Essentially, the myths were a means justified by an end; awareness was raised among Tibetans that, even under the yoke of Chinese rule, they have the power to affect their progressively marginalised position by using their collectively manoeuvred consumer power.

According to this understanding, the concoction of the myths suggests a classic case of instrumentalism, i.e. elites fomenting ethnic conflict in order to advance their own strategic agendas; or expressed in more subtle terms, grievances operating through structures of entitlements such that they result in open conflict.[97] However, the myths are equally primordialist; locations of previous conflict with Ma Bufang in the 1930s, such as in Golok,

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[94] For instance, see Susan E. Costello, 'The Economics of Cultural Production in Contemporary Amdo', in Toni Huber (ed.), *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and culture in the post-Mao era*, Leiden: Brill, 2002.
[95] I was given this specific explanation by several Tibetan scholars in Xining, including one Tibetan journalist, as well as by several western scholars who had been living in the area up to and during the boycott.
[96] See Fernanda Pirie, 'Feuding, Mediation and the Negotiation of Authority among the Nomads of Eastern Tibet', *Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper*, 72, Halle: Max Plank Institute for Social Anthropology, 2005.
[97] Thanks are due to David Keen who pointed out this more subtle formulation of instrumentalism.

experienced some of the strongest and most sustained boycotts, and more generally, the rhetoric behind the boycott draws from a deep historical sense of religious competition with Muslims. Indeed, the roots of current conflicts are believed by many Tibetans to have been prophesised more than a thousand years earlier in the Kalachakra Tantra commentaries, and many of the historical examples that educated Tibetans drawn upon to make their case refer to informed examples of competition between Islam and Buddhism, such as the loss of Buddhist centres in Afghanistan, Iran, Kashmir, Khotan, and even Sumatra, to Islam.

Furthermore, on closer examination the direct benefits of the boycott to the Tibetan elite are not clear. Some Tibetan businesspeople might have possibly benefited from the takeover of urban economic space, and, as mentioned previously, it is interesting that one of the main sources of the boycott movement, Ngawa County in Sichuan, is also known for its very successful business community. Nonetheless, businesspeople do not appear to have been the primary instigators of the boycott movement, although they probably helped in its financing or circulation, as they would have done for any other nationalist or religious movement. Members of the secular and religious educated elite, on the other hand, seem to have played primary leadership roles, yet their personal benefit is also not clear. Most secular intellectuals are rooted in state or para-state sector employment that is generally not threatened by Muslims, yet which could be threatened if their activities would be deemed contrary to state interests, as in the case of fomenting of nationalism or ethnic conflict. Similarly, the new policies concerning the employment of high school and university graduates have intensified competition with Chinese rather than Muslim graduates. Lamas and the religious elite from their own side are also more or less immune to economic competition from Muslims and, similar to the secular elites, becoming identified with politically sensitive activities would only serve to further strain the already tenuous relations between the religious institutions and the state. From the cost-benefit, self-interested rational choice side of the equation, all signs point to the Han Chinese as the main contenders of elite rivalry, besides the fact of course that the Han Chinese are also overwhelmingly dominant in almost all aspects of the polity and economy.

Effectively, an instrumental interpretation only takes us to a partial understanding of these events, particularly with respect to the backlash against Muslims. This is because a strong normative concern for the general situation of their group, defined in terms of Tibeto-Buddhist solidarity, exists within the instrumental strategies of the elite. In this case, ethnic animosity does not necessarily follow a purely economistic or entitlement rational, although certain economic/entitlement aspects of a larger malaise become the symbolic rallying points. Yet these rallying points are those that most closely touch the nerve of dignity, rooted in conceptions of hierarchy and culture, and that are further conditioned by a sense of expediency. Along these lines, Muslims receive the brunt of Tibetan animosity because, on one hand, they are upwardly mobile in the economic hierarchy from a lower and stigmatised positions, and on the other hand, they are not necessarily mobile in the social or political hierarchy, at least not within the Tibetan areas, given that both Tibetans and Chinese share similar prejudices against Muslims. The former touches a symbolic sensitivity with regard to the exclusionary dynamics faced by both common and elite Tibetans within their local economies, while the latter makes it expedient for Tibetans to scapegoat the Muslims. On this contemporary basis, it becomes easy for Tibetans to construct a historiography of conflict with Muslims that draws on potent religious symbols precisely because of the primordialist nature of Tibetan-Muslim co-existence.

In this sense, it is interesting to note that even among Tibetan religious leaders who were opposed to or abstained from the boycott, many nonetheless share a certain degree of consensus with other Tibetan elites on the need for Tibetans to take a more competitive stance towards Muslims. For instance, in the case of two extensive interviews that I carried

out with two lamas from different parts of Amdo, both of whom did not overtly support the boycott and could be considered moderates in their communities,[98] both implicitly supported the larger principles underlying the boycott. They explained their positions through a subtle and skilful circular reasoning that mixed Buddhist reasoning with informed interpretations of history as well as rhetorical stereotypes that bordered on racism. In particular, both lamas portrayed the competition between Tibetans and Muslims in terms of a fundamental antagonism that has existed between Buddhism and Islam throughout history and one which placed Tibetans on the defensive. Both focused on differences of orthopraxy to justify their cautiously racist characterisations of Muslims as naturally violent, tricky and cheating, thereby explaining the reasons for Muslim success in the Tibetan economy as well as the reasons for Tibetan insecurity.

Thus despite their opposition to the boycott in its overt aggressive form, both lamas ended by giving very similar justifications for the boycott. These ultimately returned to the economic issues that have been contemporary to the reform period of the last 25 years – the idea that Muslims are slowly taking over the economy in the Tibetan areas. Both thought that the boycott could, in the end, have a positive outcome by stimulating Tibetans to start thinking about these issues, such as developing businesses and moving into new areas of the economy.

Nonetheless, despite the apparent Buddhist principles of non-violence, Amdo Tibetans have not hesitated in the past to rise up in armed resistance against both invading Muslim and Chinese armies, and in these previous instances the religious leadership played central mobilising roles. This martial memory and pride is still very much alive in Amdo, with older generations having experienced periods of resistance against both Ma Bufang in the 1930s and the PLA in the 1950s. In effect, the advice to resist Muslim economic dominance can be easily misconstrued, if indeed it was not a covert signal to take a heavy handed stance towards Muslims. Such covert messages would be a necessity under current Chinese dominance, given that any open call to conflict would bring immediate retribution from the state, as it did in the case of events in Chentsa.

Conclusion

Superficially, these trends appear to follow a rough historical pattern of animosity towards Muslims, which in turn suggests a primordialist pattern of conflict. However, this observation is not very interesting in itself, besides the fact that it refutes a purely instrumentalist or constructivist interpretation of conflict. Because Tibetans and Muslims have been coexisting for most of the millennium, during which time China, in its various manifestations, has held a regional dominance, most relationships, whether conflictive or cooperative, are infused with primordialism, even those that are instrumented or constructed. Conversely, primordialism in the present is also usually the ghost of instrumentalism or constructivism in the past, in the negotiation and renegotiation of all of these relations.

Furthermore, the explanation of primordialism does not explain why a conflictive primordial pattern supersedes a cooperative primordial pattern. Prior to the twentieth century, Tibetans and Muslims had a long history of coexistence that was generally symbiotic and cooperative in nature, religious disdain aside. On the other hand, the violence directed towards Tibetans during the period of radical Maoism from the 1950s to the 1970s was largely perpetrated by Chinese and far exceeded earlier localised episodes of Muslim aggression in the first half of the twentieth century, which were experienced mostly in Amdo. Even today, Chinese

[98] By moderate I refer not only to a generally tolerant attitude towards Muslims, but also to a modern reading and interpretation of religious teachings, and to a more liberal attitude on the mixing of secular and monastic activities.

migrants in the Tibetan areas represent a more exclusionary force in the local economy than Muslims. Why then are the Chinese gradually redeemed within a generation of the worst episode of interethnic violence ever experienced by Tibetans, while the Muslims are gradually ostracised for much less? Again, is this primordialism at work or something else?

A processual analysis of social exclusion and social protection helps to break out of this circular reasoning. The Tibetan-Muslim scenario is particularly notable for shifts in local ethnic power hierarchies that have largely taken place in the twentieth century. Obviously, the most fundamental of these was the creation of the PRC in 1949 and its achievement of complete dominance in the direct rule of all the Tibetan areas in the 1950s. Direct rule by China has since been implicitly understood by all to imply the hegemony of Han Chinese ethnicity, despite the claims of official rhetoric. Population and structural economic transformations also underlie this colossal reconfiguration of state power, most significant of which have been population and urban growth, together with the relative decline of agriculture and the relative rise of trade, industry and services in the economy, all of which have unbalanced the niche specialisations between Tibetans and Muslims and undermined the traditional economic dominance of Tibetans in the Tibetan areas. Together, these shifts have intensified competitive posturing between Tibetans and Muslims under the shadow of a sudden leap in Chinese supremacy.

In this context, the impulse for social protection comes into play. On one hand, Tibetans act to prevent long term economic exclusion by attempting to capture old or new Muslim niches in the newly emerging urban economies of the Tibetan areas, or else to negotiate better terms of trade in the rural economies. These instrumental strategic considerations thereby lay the basis for much of the recent Tibetan-Muslim conflict, even while such conflicts are legitimated on the basis of a religiously-inspired historiography of conflict with Muslims that refers back 1300 years. Such competitive conflict is grudgingly tolerated by the state, so long as it does not break out into open violence, because it is directed towards another non-hegemonic minority group that is also stigmatised by the Chinese. While the instrumental concerns of the strategies of social protection are rooted in political economy, they are more importantly rooted in a sense of cultural and social dignity that is inherited from an indigenous conception of local hierarchy and power. In other words, the political and economic cannot be extracted from the cultural and social, just as the instrumental cannot be extracted from the primordial.

In this sense, while Tibetan-Muslim co-existence and conflict has gone through many phases over the centuries, a critical difference distinguishes the current phase, dating from the beginning of the reforms, from all earlier phases. Due to a variety of factors, Muslims have been quicker to urbanise and they have also been quicker and more successful to move into industry during the reform period, even if industry had not necessarily been part of their traditional niche specialisations in the Tibetan areas. In contrast, Tibetans have remained entrenched in agriculture, despite attempts by local governments to enter wool-processing industries over the same period. Although agriculture was once a source or status and wealth, the sharply declining terms of trade for agricultural goods since the 1950s have eroded this relative position, which in turn has privileged those in trade and manufacturing. Policies of national and international integration accelerated these trends in the 1980s and 1990s, exemplified by the dramatic collapse in wool prices. The specialisation of Tibetans in wool production and of Muslims in wool trading or processing has therefore had a dramatic impact on the terms of trade between these two groups, reinforcing the rise of Muslims in trade and commerce in the Tibetan areas, while eroding the relative wealth of Tibetans. These polarising dynamics can be seen to provide critical ripening conditions for the re-emergence of older ethnic rivalries between these two groups.

Notably, all of these relative changes break down the whole logic that an imagined harmonious equilibrium of inter-ethnic relations in China is rooted in these ethnic niche specialisations, which is the position taken by many Chinese scholars and the government. On the contrary, conflictive posturing of Tibetans towards Muslims is exacerbated on the basis of winning and losing niches, old and new, and overt boycott movements and racist discourses have been innovated as means to mobilise Tibetans into preventing the erosion of their economic power and capturing new areas of economic space. These tendencies lead, in some cases, to overt violence between Tibetans and Muslims, motivated by this competitive posturing. While the confrontations are rooted in historical cleavages, modern conditions have added critical ingredients to maintain the coalescence of conflict across political and social lines.

Within all of these perspectives, interethnic relations can be seen to be shaped and conditioned by defensive responses to exclusion on one hand and 'contested inclusion' on the other,[99] as various groups seek to defend, negotiate, leverage or innovate existing or new modes of integration into the changing matrices of power within a transforming setting, in cultural, social, political and economic spheres. These responses are driven by the impulse for social protection, which in turn is shaped by the perceived paths for seeking social protection, framed within the context of discursive and moral notions of dignity and decency. In this sense, the evolution of a more conflictive posturing of one group towards another is critically influenced by their relative position with respect to the other and with respect to possibilities for social protection.

The resultant strategies of social protection may be conceived on historically-rooted identities or else on constructed or 'imagined' identities in the modern period. Similarly, motivations may be political and economic, or else they may be morally-based, drawing off ideas of redemption, generosity, retribution, preservation of religion or the advocacy of any particular ideology. In any particular ethnic relation, any or all of these various influences may be interacting. However, the plurality of sources and motivations is not the main point; rather, the commonality that bonds them all together, that fuels them all, that identifies them as modern conflicts, representative of a broad modern systemic trend, are the underlying forces of dislocation and relocation that are fundamental to modern transformations and capitalism, which shape the patterns of exclusion and avenues for social protection..

Conflictive evolutions must therefore be understood in terms of the continuity of historical fissures within the dislocating transformations wrought by modernity. Dislocation becomes exacerbated in poor peripheral areas or under the disempowering conditions of conquest or forced and subordinated integration into larger political, economic or cultural spheres. These conditioning factors leave communities with less capacity to absorb and adapt to dislocation and thus more vulnerable to associated exclusionary dynamics. This understanding is important because it draws attention towards the responsibility of the larger macro-environment – whether national or international – for the prevention of potential conflict. The role of developmental processes, the impact of economic models and policies, or the manner of integrating peripheral regions into larger entities all act as critical conditions that can throw a symbiotic relationship into a violent one, by exacerbating the basis for conflictive elements to emerge and become the mobilising point for defensive reactions.

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[99] See this term in Gore & Figueiredo (1997), p.xx.

Glossary

Chinese Muslims

In this paper, the term 'Chinese Muslims' refers to an amalgamation of a broad range of Muslim groups across China, although generally it is not used to refer to the Uighurs in Xinjiang given their distinct Turkic identity and language. By and large the Chinese Muslims are Chinese-speaking, having adopted the Chinese language sometime during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and intermixed with Chinese people even before that time. The largest group is the Hui, although the Hui itself is also an amalgamation of a diverse range of groups, leading many scholars to question the relevance of considering the Hui as a single ethnic group. An important concentration of Chinese Muslims is based in the historical Gansu Province, which included the present-day jurisdictions of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, modern Gansu Province and the northeast corner of Qinghai (Huangzhong), the latter two bordering Northeast Tibet (Amdo). In this region the 'Chinese Muslims' are particularly diverse, including non-Chinese speaking groups such as the Turkic-speaking Salar, the Mongolic-speaking Dongxiang, and Tibetan-speaking Muslims (i.e. small groups in Central Tibet and Qinghai who were classified as Hui in the 1950s). For an excellent history of Muslims in Northwest China, see Jonathon N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A history of Muslims in Northwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997. With respect to Chinese Muslims in China more generally, two other well known western sources include Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991; and; Michael Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community: Migration, Settlement and Sects*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999.

Tibet

In this paper, 'Tibet' refers to all of the Tibetan areas in China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) *and* the Tibetan areas that have been incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. This use of the term 'Tibet' conforms to administrative definitions of Tibetan autonomous areas in China and it also conforms to indigenous self-definition, that is, the people who call themselves *Bodpa* (Tibetan) refer to the regions that they have traditionally inhabited as *Bod* (Tibet), broadly divided into *Utsang* (Central Tibet), *Kham* (Eastern Tibet), *Amdo* (North-eastern Tibet) and *Ngari* and *Changtang* (Western Tibet). Notably, more than half of these Tibetan areas are located outside the TAR.

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The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

Crisis States Programme collaborators

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Research Objectives

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.
- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.

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