



Review article

The role of ideology in creating new nations in the USSR and strengthening a centralised state–The example of the Dungans in central Asia

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the role of the totalitarian state in changing ethnic identity. To solve the question of nationality, the Soviet Union drew upon the ideologies of ultra-radical theorists of the 19th century, whose goal was to change society by removing several major institutions – for example, through the liquidation of family or private property, in addition to creating a national group. Numerous paradoxes emerged when putting these initial theories into practice because they were full of internal contradictions. The example of the Dungans shows how the state created a new ethnic group, which it supported in every possible way, and then, in the next phase, it clearly persecuted this ethnic group. In the implementation of state interventions, it is clear that the main declared elements of ethnic identity are extremely volatile and their meaning varies considerably. Whereas earlier Soviet ideology sought to present the Dungans as a group vastly different from its ancestors in China, contemporary Chinese ideology emphasises the similarities between the two groups.

1. Aim of the paper

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the role of the state in changing the ethnic identity of minority nations. The article shows, using the example of the Soviet Union and Communist China, that the role of the state in nation-building can be quite crucial. It does so through the example of Dungans living in Central Asia (especially in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan).

The article first shows the ideological background of the main actors in the Soviet solution to the national question – it is based on the radical demands of 18th and 19th century philosophers for the transformation of human society and the elimination of many existing institutions (property, family, state, nation). The next part of the article shows the problem of introducing communist ideas into the real conditions of the emerging USSR and their changes in connection with the strengthening of the autocratic rule of J. V. Stalin. The example of the Dungans shows the changes in relations with this nation – from its initial support to the terror against representatives of the Dungan intelligentsia to the use of Dungan support in building relations with China. In this context, the article shows how changes in the understanding of the Dungan nation have also occurred among the Dungans themselves and how they perceive their ethnicity today. The example of the Dungan in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan also shows how completely different manifestations of the Dungan ethnicity emerged within the same state.

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This article also aims to answer questions of ethnicity associated with a minority ethnic group that exhibits numerous differences, but also similarities, with the majority environment. What are the reasons and possibilities that the state has in transforming the ethnic consciousness of members of a particular ethnic group? What are the limits of this procedure? What are the main elements that constitute ethnicity and how are these elements stabilized?

Where the Dungans differ from the majority population is in their traditional way of subsistence: from their arrival in the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to the present day, the Dungans have engaged in intensive settled agriculture. The greatest difference, however, lies in the language: the language of the Dungans is remarkably close to Chinese, while the language spoken by the majority is one of the Turkic languages. Nevertheless, the language barrier is not significant; Russian still works as a lingua franca in the area. Dungans, however, belong because of their move from China to foreign elements – although they are typically not perceived as such by their surroundings. This can be potentially problematic in situations where conflicts occur for an entirely different reason and extraneousness serves as an effective substitute argument. However, unlike a number of nations deported to Central Asia in the 1930s and 1940s, the Dungans settled quite voluntarily in what is now Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, along with the ancestors of today's Uyghurs [2]. The Dungans share geographic origins, religion, and predominantly agricultural occupations with the Uyghurs, while differences include language.

The Dungan ethnic group is found in only four post-Soviet states - 74,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 70,000 in Kazakhstan, 1,800 in Uzbekistan and 1,700 in Russia. Some Dungans also live in Mongolia, numbering 6,300, and like the Central Asian Dungans are descendants of refugees from a suppressed uprising against Chinese rule in the 19th century [7].

2. Research background

The research focused primarily on the Dungan ethnic group, but also included other Central Asian ethnic groups, namely Uyghurs and Uzbeks. These groups underwent a very similar process of controlled ethnogenesis by the Soviet state and were also created on the orders of the Moscow centre. The fieldwork was carried out between 2011 and 2019 in Kyrgyzstan (2011–2013, 2015–2017 and 2019). Both villages with almost exclusive Dungan population (Milyanfan, Yrdyk) and villages where Dungans live as a minority (Dungan villages in Chu region, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, and Osh) were chosen for the research. Research was also conducted in the capital Bishkek where there are Dungan centres and societies. Similarly, the areas for research in Kazakhstan (2015–2017 and 2019) were chosen – in addition to almost exclusively Dungan villages (Sortobe, and Masanchi), research was conducted in areas where Dungans live together with the majority society (Kordai, Zhambul district). The research is largely based on oral history methods and semi-structured interviews. Biographical publications published by Dungan associations in Central Asia were also used. The majority of respondents (43) were over 60 years of age, 28 respondents were of working age and 18 respondents were under 20 years of age. The male to female ratio was 62:38. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, interviews were conducted in Russian, the lingua franca of the region. In China, where additional research was also conducted with Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, interviews were conducted by Kyrgyz minority facilitators who were fluent in Russian, Kyrgyz, Uyghur and Chinese. The use of facilitators helped to overcome the language barrier and facilitate communication with respondents.

This research builds on previously published studies on the transformation of Dungan identity. At least three important works from different periods can be mentioned here. Back in the Soviet era, in the 1980s, Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff [50] carried out extensive research and identified the main elements of their ethnic identity at the time, which proved to be very unstable in the light of later research. A generation or so later, Dru Gladney [15] conducted comparative research on the Dungan, Hui and other Muslim groups in China. In addition to the instability of key elements of ethnic identity among the various groups, he emphasises the role of state intervention, which he argues appears to be the main force behind ethnic change. Recent influential work on the Dungans on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border, published by Jiménez-Tovar [21], shows the considerable ambiguity for the Dungans of the terms 'diaspora', 'foreigner', 'immigrant' or 'home' in relation to the country in which they currently live, but also in relation to China.

The basic ethical principles for research, which reflect general moral principles, were observed in the process of the research, in the processing of the data obtained and in the presentation of the data. The principles of "The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity" were followed during the research. These principles are published by ALLEA (All European Academies), which associates the Academies of Sciences of all European countries.

All respondents were aware of the research objectives and agreed to participate in the research. In the presentation of the results, the respondents were partially anonymised so that the reader could obtain relevant and truthful information about the respondents, but so that it would not be possible to clearly identify a specific person on the basis of this information.

The interviews were conducted and processed in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague (Etický kodex ČZU 08112016/16062022). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted.

3. Nation – an ancient or modern artificial unit?

The consciousness of belonging to a certain nation transcends a purely rational description and precisely defined concepts [18]. This was skilfully exploited by the communist regime in the USSR as well as in neighbouring China in solving the national question. Thus, in the case of the USSR, but also as Gladney [13] argues in the case of China, ethnic identity is officially determined by the state.

The state can effectively create new nations according to its needs while suppressing the original nations [3]. The Soviet state concealed its role in creating nations by presenting them as naturally occurring rather than state-constructed. As an example from Soviet Central Asia can serve as a protocol of September 20, 1924 from the meeting of the Soviet Commission, which calls for the creation of an official history of Kara-Kyrgyz that would conform to the Soviet spirit – in cooperation with Prof. Alexander Brodski and

Prof. Vasily Bartold [5].

What was the reason for this often-brutal form of social engineering? The Soviet Union's goal was to create a new ideal society, but the idea of utopias was not new. Ideal societies, often requiring a highly collectivist and centrally controlled way of life, have been dreamed of throughout history, from St Augustine's "City of God" to the present day. Western European left-wing intellectuals articulated this in their visions of radical social change at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: they rejected traditional marriage and proposed free love (Charles Fourier and Robert Owen); they called for a change in society's understanding of property - property, they argued, was theft [49]. These ideas influenced future Soviet leaders and coincided with the pillars of Soviet ideology, Marx and Engels [10]. Here we can find the beginnings of radicalism in future Soviet leaders, to whom the ideas of ultra-radical intellectuals were extremely close.

In the European environment in the 1890s, left-wing intellectuals deviated from radicalism. However, some important representatives of Russian Bolshevism continued to be impressed by the original form of radicalism and felt it did not have to be solely about property. A similar radicalism was also applied to the national question. For numerous critics of early 19th-century capitalism, one way of fighting this was through anarchism, which rejected the role of the state, considering it to be evil. Social theorists, including F. Engels [9], considered the ideal beginnings of humanity as occurring when no state existed. Marx develops the idea that communism will revive the social relations of primitive communism and add to them the technical achievements developed by later societies [38].

The relationship between the nation and state is crucial, and Engels opposed the national principle and state by connecting the two. Although Engels and Marx didn't face the issue of nationality, socialism had to address it due to developments in mixed countries and smaller nations, according to Masaryk [39].

4. The National situation in Tsarist Russia and the Bolshevik Solution to the National Question

Tsarist Russia was also an ethnically diverse country. According to the 1897 census, only 43% of Russians lived in the empire – this is because Russian territory at that time included Finland and part of Poland, and the Asian part was mainly inhabited by Turkic-speaking peoples. Only when Malorusian-speaking and Belarussian-speaking inhabitants are included, 66% of the population were Russians [46].

The Bolshevik leaders Lenin and Stalin therefore had to prioritise the solution to the national question. Initially, they presented themselves in an extremely accommodating manner in order to acquire as many allies as possible for the proletarian revolution – the smaller nations inside Russia and the nations of the East. The most radical advocates of the creation of a communist society called for the elimination of nations, but they were primarily familiar only with the European understanding of the nation, formed in the 1840s [53].

The radical concept that - as an ultimate goal - excluded nations that would define themselves on the basis of a different culture was close to Stalin. By contrast, in 1922 Lenin proposed the establishment of the USSR as a free association of nation-states. Stalin criticised this approach as he preferred maximum unity of the population.

In criticizing Lenin's approach, Stalin had many supporters. Lenin's proclamation of the right of nations to self-determination was criticized, for example, by Rosa Luxemburg, a Marxist theorist and one of the most important representatives of the European communist movement of the early 20th centuries, because it "gives no practical guidelines for the everyday politics of the proletariat, nor any practical solution to national problems." [33].

During the first years after the Bolshevik revolution, a European "triune" model for solving the national problem was adopted. The three main elements of nationality were an autonomous political unit, to unite inhabitants speaking the same language, and the awareness of a common ethnic origin. The centrally created administrative units were afforded varying degrees of autonomy. According to Ingeborg Baldauf [3], the implementation of this policy in Central Asia created a completely new understanding of the nation (natsiya). Whereas in the pre-Soviet period the term 'nation' in Central Asia was understood primarily in a geographical sense - according to place of residence (e.g. Kashgarlyk = people of Kashgar, Turfanlyk = people of Turfan ...), in the Soviet period a cultural definition prevailed.

The situation in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s may have seemed to outside observers to be a generous offer of support for the cultural development of nations by granting political autonomy. However, the reality was often completely different. For example, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Azerbaijanis in the 1930s assimilated smaller Muslim nations on their periphery [35].

The best synopsis of the creation of new nations (and the simultaneous demise of original ones) is gained through a comparison of data from the tsarist census in 1897 with the census already taking place in the USSR. According to the tsarist census, the largest population in Central Asia were the Kyrgyz-Kaysacs (later referred to as the Kazakhs), who numbered almost 3.8 million people. This was followed by the Sarts (less than 1 million), Uzbeks (0.7 million), speakers of various Turkic dialects (0.4 million), Turkmens (0.2 million), and Kara-Kyrgyz – later referred to as the Kyrgyz (0.2 mil.) [46].

Another census took place in 1926, prior to which there had been a fundamental change in national policy in Central Asia. Soviet statistics clearly illustrate the creation of new nations according to the new union republics; the number of Uzbeks increased 5.37 times in 30 years (comparing the 1897 and 1926 censuses), 3.78 times for Kyrgyz, and 3.04 times for Turkmen [46]. The explanation lies in the fact that ethnic-demographic processes in the 1920s and 1930s in the USSR led to the preference for selected nations only. At the same time, there was a drastic and controlled assimilation of nations marked as un-preferred by political decision makers [35].

The numbers show a clear preference for nations that had been allocated their own union republic. However, in Central Asia, nations that did not have a union republic appeared for the first time in the first Soviet census in 1926; nevertheless, they were created and preferred (at least initially). Examples of such are Uyghurs and Dungans. The Uyghurs, for instance, were using an ancient ethnonym of an ethnic group that had long been considered extinct. In 1923, at an extraordinary session, the leadership of the Central

Asian Communists adopted a special resolution on the use of the Uyghur ethnonym [24]. The Sarts and those who spoke Turkic languages and dialects without belonging to any nation (of whom there were 440,000 in Central Asia at the end of the 19th century) had to gradually enrol as Uyghurs (or Uzbeks). In the 1930s, other ethnic groups (Kashgaris, Turkic Muslims from Kashgar; Taranchi, Turkic Muslims from the Kuldja region; or Kipchaks, Turkic nomads) were erased and assigned to existing groups. Once the Uyghur nationality was recognised in the USSR in the 1920s, its ideological exploitation began to take place [22]. The Soviet Union also took an active part in influencing the political direction of neighbouring China, and members of the newly formed Uyghur nation were to be instrumental in applying ideological pressure.

We can therefore conclude that despite the declared efforts of Soviet ideologues to eradicate national differences, new Soviet nations were “created” according to the political needs of the time, including the Dungans, who officially acquired the status of a nation.

5. The turn in soviet nationality policy

The next phase of the solution of the national question in the USSR completely negated the existence of the first phase. After the creation of autonomous units on a national basis, a sharp turn in Soviet nationality policy took place in the USSR. It was an abandonment of collective decision-making since 1933 that led Stalin to the need to get rid of real and potential critics and to institute terror [25]. The first manifestations of Stalin’s new policy appeared in Ukraine at the turn of 1932 and 1933, where anti-nationalist state terror was introduced. In discussing Stalin’s terror tactics, it should be noted that similar events occurred in other parts of the Soviet Union. For example, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz intelligentsia, such as members of the Alash party (A. Bukeikhanov) [52] and the Turan socialist party (A. Sydykov), also experienced state terror [48]. Stalin justified this change in Soviet policy on the grounds of “the remnants of capitalism in the field of nationality policy” [37].

This policy has gradually manifested itself in all the republics of the Union, including Central Asia. In 1938, a decree was issued abolishing schools teaching national minorities because this allegedly drove children away from the Soviet way of life. From the late 1930s, any hint of national specifics began to be described as a nationalist perversion, for which a number of top Soviet officials headed by autonomous national units, and teachers were executed. During this period, internationalist slogans emerged and Russification intensified.

A Dungan respondent Dzhon Ali from Bishkek (65 years old) described this situation using the example of his uncle: *Uncle was one of those who took part in the creation of the alphabet and was the first author of a speller in Latin script Elifbe (Dungan alphabet). That was in the 1920s. Then the work abruptly ended and he had to flee to avoid persecution. Other Dungans, such as the editors of the Dungan newspaper, were arrested, charged, and executed for ridiculous reasons, such as setting up Chinese student circles to overthrow the government. The repression affected the entire Dungan intelligentsia. Zhuma Abdulin, one of the first editors of the Dungan newspaper, was persecuted. If you look through the book “Azali kitap” (Book of Mourning), there are lists of those who were shot. In the second volume, published in Alma-Ata in 1998, there are 48 Dungans in the list of those shot in Jambyl alone, and there were also Dungans shot in Alma-Ata.*

Some easing of pressure on national minorities did not occur until the 1940s. The Soviet leadership again wanted to show support for all the inhabitants of the USSR, who were to come together in defence of the Soviet homeland. However, friendliness towards national minorities was certainly not universal: a list of “unreliable nations” (Germans, Poles, Koreans, Tatars ...) was created, whose members were deported to Central Asia before and during WWII.

Education for minority nations was not resumed until after the war. However, school subjects were already being taught primarily in Russian. Thus, children learned their language as a minor subject, for which the same number of hours was allocated as for a foreign language [25].

6. Understanding nationality in the USSR and China since the 1950s

In 1950, the friendship between China and the Soviet Union began to develop officially, and China began to take on a wide range of Soviet experiences with regard to the economy. At the same time, cultural Russification began in China. Food, dressing, understanding the family, all changed along Soviet lines [32]. By contrast, the USSR presented itself as the protector of minorities that had a connection with China. Apart from the Dungans, these were primarily the more numerous Uyghurs.

After Stalin’s death, there was substantial liberalisation of the cultural expressions of national minorities, which led to the further development of Dungan schools and literature. At the same time, the international concept of the all-embracing Soviet nation, which was deemed superior to ethnic groups, was becoming increasingly popular. In the USSR, the term “ethnos” was used for ethnic groups, introduced in the 1920s by the Russian anthropologist Sergei Shirokogoroff, who had to emigrate from the Soviet authorities. The main elements of a nation (ethnos) – language, territory, cultural elements, physical characteristics and economic connectedness – were adopted by Stalin in his conception. Shirokogoroff [55] did not count on religion being an element creating ethnic awareness, although this was typical among the Dungans.

Stalin’s concept of ethnicity, which linked a specific Soviet ethnos to the Soviet state, to some extent influenced the formation of the national concept of “minzu” in China. Minzu is a Chinese concept denoting an ethnic group or nation. The word is of Japanese origin, where in the second half of the 19th century the term “minzoku” was intended to express the German term “Volk” [30]. The official classification of Chinese ethnic groups (minzu shibie) by the Chinese Communists took place in the 1950s and continues to this day.

At the height of Soviet influence in Xinjiang, during the administration of military leader Sheng Shicai from 1933 to 1941, there were significant changes in the treatment of ethnic groups. During this period, Sheng Shicai relied on the Soviet Union for support and, as a result, implemented a number of policies that were in line with Soviet-style ethnic management.

But Soviet influence on Chinese nationality policy dates back to the 1920s, when Mao Zedong recognised the nationality question as one of the major issues of the Chinese revolution and the liberation of national minorities as part of the liberation of the Chinese people. In the 1930s, the Chinese Communists issued a radical declaration of the right of national minorities in China to self-determination, the right to complete separation from China, and the right of each national minority to form an independent state. During and after the Second World War, China's minority policy underwent significant changes, particularly with the rejection of the right of minorities to self-determination, the right to secession from China, and the rejection of a federal model along the lines of the USSR. While the ethnic situation in China before the 1950s was characterised by considerable diversity, with many different groups and sub-groups, this was drastically reduced by the creation of official *minzu* after the incomplete census of 1951 [19].

Mao Zedong's concept of the nation differed from Stalin's. Stalin assumed the evolutionary sequence of *etnos*, *natsya*, *narod* (nation), while Mao created a unified concept of *minzu*. Stalin also defined the nation in terms of components, all of which must be present, while Mao approached the identification of components flexibly and did not require all of them to be present. Stalin further defined the nation as a product of capitalism, which he saw as a necessary precondition, whereas capitalism as a precondition of the *minzu* was completely ignored by Mao. Another important difference is that Stalin unequivocally excluded religion as a sign of ethnicity (nation), whereas Mao defined some *minzu* as based purely on religious differences [17].

The Dungans, a Muslim group in China, were not officially recognised as a distinct ethnic group or *minzu* in China. Unlike the Uighur ethnonym, the term 'Dungan' was not introduced in China on the Soviet model. Instead, the Dungans were classified as part of the Hui ethnic group, which also includes various Muslim communities with different religious and cultural backgrounds. Despite the heterogeneity of the Hui, China established the Hui Autonomous Region of Ningxia as a unifying administrative unit for the Hui people. This region is often referred to as the 'historic homeland of the Hui', in line with China's official narrative.

The historical and contemporary relationship between the Dungan and China's Hui minority remains complicated. Although some scholars believe that the Dungan are a diaspora of the Hui people who existed in China until the 19th century, called either Dungan or Hui, and who were classified as Hui within the People's Republic of China, this claim is by no means clear. As a result of state intervention, new ethnic groups were created and officially sanctioned (in both China and the USSR). For a long time, the ethnonym Dungan was largely unknown among the Hui ethnic group.

Soviet Dungans saw themselves as part of the Dungan people of China, but Chinese 'Dungans' almost exclusively saw themselves as Hui Zu/Huízú. It is only in recent decades that the term "Dungan Zu" (Dungan nationality) has emerged in China at the instigation of the country's scientific intelligentsia, implying Hui Zu (Dungan) from the former USSR. This reinforces the internal belief that the Dungan ethnicity in Central Asia is distinct from the Hui Zu, the main ethnic mass living in China [8].

Chinese ethnic minority expert Dru Gladney [14] notes the Chinese government's constructivism in creating the *minzu*. The Hui were defined as "Chinese Muslims who did not identify with or be accepted by any of China's other eight Muslim *minzu*." This definition is in line with the fact that the Hui origins of the various communities are both Han and Arabic, Turkic, Tibetan, and so on.

Understanding the Hui nation as a group of people with a similar culture is as illusory as it was in the past for European Jews, who adopted material and spiritual culture to a large extent from their neighbours [31]. The same goes for the Hui, who share only the same religion - though sometimes only the memory of Muslim religious tradition.

In the 1980s, several important theories of ethnicity emerged that were completely unacceptable to the Soviet school. The works of J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger [16] introduced the concept of "inventing tradition", which was completely at odds with the Soviet understanding of the nation – although the Soviet regime was extremely resourceful in creating new traditions. Soviet ideology sought to apply a primordialist approach to the study of nations because Soviet leaders did not want to be influenced by concepts that had a significant impact on the understanding of ethnicity in the West. Again, we encounter contradictions in communist ideology – on the one hand, there is the evolutionist thesis of the continuous development of human society towards a perfect communist society, but on the other hand, the fear of admitting that ethnic groups may not be stable. If the possibility of instability were admitted, it could have far-reaching consequences for the Soviet state - all the union republics were created on an ethnic basis. Ethnic instability could destabilize the entire state [37].

Gellner [11] also justified the non-acceptance of Western concepts of ethnicity in the Soviet Union on ideological grounds. He drew a parallel with 19th-century research by Western anthropologists, some of whom favoured the study of "savages" and "primitive societies". Similarly, Soviet scholars studied society before the socialist revolution, which they compared with the present day when communist society was being built.

It's important to consider the Soviet concept of scientific and political discourse, which was very different from other systems. In the USSR, ideology was tightly controlled and scientists weren't expected to test theories. Rather, the ideas of Soviet leaders were considered unassailable. Presenting different facts was seen as an attack on the state and could lead to loss of career, imprisonment and even death, as demonstrated by the execution of Russian folklorists researching religious practices in the 1930s [58].

7. Understanding statehood in the soviet and post-soviet space

The slogans 'state' and 'nation-state', and possibly 'union republic', were frequently used both in Soviet times and in the period after the collapse of the USSR as a formula for the development of a nation. The idea was that a nation could only flourish and develop within its own political entity, whether this was a fully independent state, an autonomous state within a larger union, or a union republic within a federal system. In implementing the idea of the nation-state (or national union republic), it was necessary to overcome several contradictions in Soviet ideology. The building of socialism was considered internationalist, but nation states are based on the concept of nationalism. The ultimate goal was to build a communist society where the state would disappear; however, the USSR was a state with strong central power [20].

To resolve these contradictions, Orwellian “doublethink” must have taken place: to simultaneously maintain two mutually exclusive views; to know that they are contradictory, and to believe in both; use logic versus logic, and so on [44].

Stalin [57] did not conceal the contradictions, but was even proud of them:

We have already entered the era of socialism where national languages are not only united into one common language, they also develop and flourish. As socialism intensifies and enters everyday life, national languages must inevitably merge into one new common language. We are in favour of the abolition of the state, and at the same time we are in favour of the strengthening of dictatorship, which is the strongest form of the state. Is it contradictory? Yes, but this contradiction completely reflects the Marxist dialectic.

After Stalin’s death in 1953, the cultural life of the individual republics of the USSR developed. Towards the end of the decade, however, Khrushchev began to reassert Russia’s general centralisation. The Communist programme of 1961 spoke of achieving complete unity of the Soviet peoples and eliminating national cultural and linguistic differences. On the one hand, Khrushchev and later Brezhnev affirmed the policy of gradual Sovietization of the peoples, on the other hand, they declared with satisfaction that the national question had been solved. When, after Brezhnev’s death, Andropov admitted that the road to “fusion” or assimilation would still be long and that the nations would survive for a long time, it was an acknowledgement that the earlier claims of the success of the Sovietization of the nations were false [41].

Back in the 1970s, the Soviet Uzbek scientist Khakimov [23] highlighted the role of the socialist state in solving the question of nationality: the unification of workers regardless of their ethnicity. He refers to Lenin, according to whom the builders of socialism are unequivocal internationalists forming a union of workers all over the world. In the same article, however, he states that the nation (natsiya) is the basis of the nation-state. These states emerged in Central Asia as federal republics within the self-determination of the original (!) Central Asian nations: the Uzbeks, Turkmen, Tajiks ..., who had not yet managed to create a real nation (natsiya). Only within these national republics could their all-round development take place. Khakimov’s publications are not simply a series of dusty ideological books from the Soviet past. On the contrary, they represent a highly topical issue as this rhetoric has been adopted to varying degrees by all the newly formed Central Asian states. It is a contemporary argument for giving priority to the titular nations of the new republics.

After the dissolution of the USSR, the situation in the newly created states became extremely complicated. The tradition of statehood of individual former union republics received no significant support during the period of the USSR. Moreover, the newly formed Central Asian republics could not invoke and build on statehood in the past: all these republics first appeared on the world map within the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, from the 1990s, a new history began to emerge, supported by the highest representatives of the state, which demonstrated the uniqueness of Central Asian republics and nations. The emphasis on statehood became one of the important elements of new nationalism in the post-Soviet states. Not only was the antiquity of the nations and their “eternal” duration proven, the antiquity was also transferred to the state. This caused a problem for national minorities.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the majority of Dungans live, were among the more moderate states in this respect. The legislation took account of the large Russian minority and Russian became the second official language in both countries – which helped members of other national minorities who were largely Russian-speaking. Representatives of both republics were happy to proclaim that more than 100 different nationalities lived in their republics. Nevertheless, it is patently obvious even here that, after the fall of the USSR, the representatives of the republics tried to secure titular nationalities a leading role in the state. In this respect current Central Asian regimes are remarkably similar to the Soviet regime in their methods. The new language laws, passed before independence, made titular languages a precondition, not for citizenship (as was the case in the Baltics, for example) but for a certain social status. The requirement for knowledge of the titular languages was linked to the attainment of a higher social status, which could give members of the titular nation access to the civil service or government positions. In the case of the Dungan, who have considerable economic capital, their lower social status compared to the titular nation is due to the fact that they do not live in a country that corresponds to their ethnic group (unlike the Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan and the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan).

For those ethnic groups where the proportion of people with higher education was below average, predominantly rural populations (for example, Dungans), there was also a significant change in their situation. Dungan respondents in Kyrgyzstan, for example, explained that it became increasingly difficult and ultimately impossible to sell vegetables and fruits directly at bazaars. This could only be done through intermediaries (wholesale) as it was Kyrgyz who decided on lucrative places and then rented them. At the same time, there was a significant increase in the rental prices of land on Dungani farms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Although the number of Dungans in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan was increasing, an emigration sentiment was also emerging.

8. Dungans – original or fictional nationality?

In the territory of Tsarist Russia – Russian Turkestan – Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) came together with the Turkic Muslim population in the area of modern-day China (Xinjiang) in the second half of the 19th century. With them came other ethnic groups in Russian Turkestan who were seeking a safer life.

Xinjiang has a complex history of political and cultural diversity. Although it has been under the control of various empires and governments throughout history, including China’s Qing Dynasty, it has never been culturally or politically homogeneous. The northern part (Dzungaria) was inhabited by Mongolian nomads and there was widespread Tibetan Buddhism. In the southern part (Kashgaria) lived a generally settled Turkic-speaking Muslim population. In the mid-18th century, the Manchu-led Qing dynasty gained direct control of both territories, incorporating them into the Chinese empire. A Russian military official, Alexei Kuropatkin (1877) [28], refers to the massacre of approximately 1 million people in Dzungaria as a result of this. At the same time, large population movements were beginning: the Chinese set up military garrisons and invited Mongolian families and poor Chinese to the area.

Chinese Muslims – Dungans – also come to Dzungaria during this period. According to Millward [40], the Muslim population fled to Xinjiang from central China to escape the chaos caused by the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s. The Qing dynasty government welcomed them and encouraged them to settle in the area. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of these Muslim residents engaged in commercial activities such as trading and moneylending, which made them wealthy. They also set up their own schools and mosques. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, however, their position in Xinjiang became precarious. They faced discrimination from both Chinese and local Turkic nationalists (later known as Uyghurs).

The arrival of the Dungans in Tsarist Russia occurred in two main waves:

- The first wave consisted of refugees from China who came to the territory of modern-day Kyrgyzstan in the winter of 1877/1878. In three groups, they travelled to the town of Osh, to the Lake Issyk-Kul – Yrdyk and to Tokmak (via Naryn). This journey is described by a respondent from Milyanfan: *I was born in Milyanfan, but my mother made this journey. It was in the winter of 1877 and they went through the Torugart Pass. The Chinese had shot almost all the men during the uprising, so it was mainly women and children who fled. Because of the terrible cold and snow, many of the refugees froze to death and only about a third of them made it. As soon as the Dungans crossed the border, the Kyrgyz started shooting at them, thinking they were Chinese. But the Dungans started chanting Arabic prayers, so the Kyrgyz saw that they were also Muslims and immediately stopped shooting. The Dungans split into three groups to make it easier to escape the Chinese soldiers.*
- The second wave (1881–1883) comprised newcomers from areas newly under Chinese administration, and the population was offered Russian serfdom.

Newly arrived Dungans were a highly diverse group, both in terms of social status (from quite poor people to those who soon after came to buy property), and in terms of ethnic origin. In addition to Chinese Muslims from Gansu province and Shaanxi there were also Muslims from Xinjiang. There was also diversity in the languages employed. It is worth noting here that although the tsarist administration, Russian military officials and academics (A. T. Putintsev, Grum-Grshimailo, V. P. Vasilyev) referred to some of the Chinese Muslims as Dungans, they were counted as Chinese in the census. This was later changed under Soviet rule. A Dungan respondent (67 years old) from the village of Yrdyk commented: *The name Dungan was used only in the territory of Tsarist Russia and then in the USSR; it was not used at all in China, where we, actually our ancestors, were called Khuey or Hui, or we were called miscegenates - Dungus.*

Although the Dungans engaged in intensive farming as a traditional mode of subsistence, they were not a homogeneous group in this respect: a large number of them traded.

For the group of refugees who came to the Osh area, the main problem was a lack of land suitable for agriculture. The Dungans were therefore hired by local farmers or remained in the city as artisans or as an auxiliary force. The richer Dungans bought houses in Osh and began to carry out business.

The group that reached the southern shore of Lake Issyk-kul founded the village of Yrdyk in 1880, which used to be larger than the modern city of Karakol [27].

The group that travelled through Naryn did not receive permission to settle and therefore had to continue to Tokmak. Some continued a few kilometres further north to present-day Kazakhstan. This group consisted of the poorest Dungans [54].

The second wave of newcomers were no longer refugees, were organised, and were characterised by the establishment of new villages or the creation of urban neighbourhoods. This is how Dungan “sloboda” emerged in the future Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek. In 1918, the Dungans made up one third of the population in Bishkek [27]. This is described by a respondent from Milyanfan (85 years old): *Those who came to Pishpek all lived in what is now Kiev Street, but before that it was called Dungan Street. Being farmers, they did not want to stay in the city and immediately looked for land. In 1924 they founded the village of Milyanfan (Rice Valley) - in a short time they managed to turn the marshes into fertile fields.*

In 1911, the Russian politician G. Gins described how the Dungans from the northern part of modern Kyrgyzstan were heavily involved in social life during the tsarist era. In addition to rice growing, horticulture, horse breeding and carriage making, the Dungans also ran restaurants that sold typical cuisine. After the rise of Soviet power, the Dungans (using a completely different language) were often associated with Turkic-speaking groups because they also came from China [12].

In the early years of the Civil War, the Dungans were persecuted. However, during the Civil War in the 1920s, some Dungans fought on the side of the “Reds” along with other “Chinese Muslims” who later referred to themselves as the Uyghurs. Nevertheless, the persecution affected all groups of the population that had property. This situation is described by a Dungan historian as follows: *I saw troops with the protocol requirement to move all Dungans out from the city at the end of 1918 because they were an unreliable element. When some Dungans arrived and reached the Red Army patrol, the troops always arrested them, took all their money, and sent them to prison. Dungan representatives of the local Soviet were also imprisoned. Robbery began in Dungan houses. The Dungans had supplies of rice; the soldiers stole them all, stole their dishes, and someone even asked for a wooden leg, which they confiscated from the Dungans. One disabled person was even robbed of his wooden leg [27].*

After the end of the Civil War, the situation gradually began to improve and preparations were being undertaken to make the Dungans a Soviet nation. The situation was similar to that of the Turkic-speaking population, which came from China; a common ethnonym, Uyghur, was even created for them, based on the ethnic group that lived in the distant past. However, there was one significant difference between the Uyghurs and the Dungans. Neither are mentioned in the official tsarist statistics – even though there is a similarity between them. However, the ethnonym Dungan was commonly used by the tsarist government and considerable information can be found on the Dungans in archival materials from the tsarist period. If the ethnonym Uyghur was used in tsarist times, it was certainly not for the same group to whom it was applied in Soviet times.

In the tsarist census, the Dungans were ranked among the Chinese by language. In the first Soviet census, however, the ethnonym Dungan appeared because a new – Dungan – language was codified. This occurred again in accordance with the Stalinist concept of understanding the nation: the nation must have its own language.

9. Dungans in southern Kyrgyzstan

The Dungans in southern Kyrgyzstan provide an extremely good example of the way in which state interventions applied to the same ethnic group in the same administrative unit can result in divergent outcomes.

Although the implementation of the Soviet unified national policy towards national minorities formally affected all Dungan groups in Central Asia in the same way, these groups in fact developed rather differently from an ethnic point of view. When the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic was established in the 1920s, it was a highly disparate autonomous unit. While the northern part of present-day Kyrgyzstan was culturally and linguistically tied to Russia to a considerable degree, the southern part of the country was influenced by the culture of settled farmers in the Fergana lowlands with populations of various ethnicities.

According to official proclamations, the soviet federal/union republics were established in order for the culture of the respective nation to develop in numerous ways. The situation in southern Kyrgyzstan constitutes an enormous paradox in the framework of Soviet national policy because not only was there no development of Kyrgyz culture, it was largely Uzbek.

The beginning of Uzbekisation occurred in the 1920s and, according to the respondents, the main event connected with this was the establishment of the Uzbek SSR in 1924. In Uzbekistan as well as neighbouring southern Kyrgyzstan, the highest party and state positions were occupied by Uzbeks because they formed a better educated and more influential ethnic group. However, the Uzbek group was not completely closed; on the contrary, there was persuasion and pressure from the bureaucracy on members of minority nations (Dungans, Uyghurs) to enrol as Uzbeks, which many then did. In this way, they ensured party and career advancement, and were able to attain higher party and social positions.

The Uzbekisation of the population was also reflected in education. In Soviet times, secondary education in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan was almost exclusively taught in the Russian-language, and the use of national languages was significantly reduced. The peculiarity here is that the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan attended secondary schools that taught in Uzbek, in contrast to the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs whose secondary schools taught only in Russian.

As a result of this situation, a group of Dungans living in southern Kyrgyzstan were substantially assimilated from the very beginning and registered as Uzbeks in the census. This is also evident in their numbers – while estimates of the number of Dungans coming to the Osh region in the Tsarist period are in the order of several thousand, in the Soviet censuses in the 1920s, they numbered only a few hundred. Most of the Dungans in the Osh region now live in the village of Kyzyl-Shark (Red East), which was formerly a kolkhoz/cooperative. The above-average success of this kolkhoz in growing cotton, chaired by Dungan for thirty years from 1932, led to both the chairman of the kolkhoz and some of its members receiving the highest Soviet award, the Hero of Socialist Labour. In this case, being Dungan definitely did not mean experiencing problems with career advancement. In other parts of southern Kyrgyzstan, where there was no support for Dungan nationality, the Dungans quickly adopted the Uzbek nationality, both formally (registration of nationality in documents) and informally (acceptance of Uzbek language and culture).

According to the respondents, only after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s did a certain revival of the relationship with Dungan nationality take place. Some remembered that their ancestors came from China in the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan and wanted to apply for an official change of nationality from Uzbek to Dungan. However, officials refused because if both parents had Uzbek nationality in the documents, it was not possible to state any other nationality.

10. The main elements of the ethnic identity of the Central Asian Dungans

What is typical for Dungans? They speak Russian and Dungan, use chopsticks to eat, have money and pray to Allah.

(Kazakh respondent, neighbour of the Dungans).

10.1. Language

The Dungan language undoubtedly has its own characteristics, but while for Chinese linguists it was clearly only one of the variants of Chinese, for Soviet linguists it was clearly a separate language [51]. Although the Dungans formed two language groups in the USSR – the Gansu and Shaanxi dialects, only the Gansu dialect was chosen for codification. At the time of codification, the Dungans were already using a large number of loan-words from Arabic, which appeared to be from the fourteenth century; a much smaller share was made up of a group of Turkic loans. Russian loans began to be acquired during the nineteenth century and now constitute the largest group of loan-words [1].

In addition to the new codification of the language, the Dungan language in the USSR changed several fonts; from the Arabic alphabet (in 1927) to Latin (1932), and then in the late 1930s preparatory work began on the transition of the Dungan language from Latin to Cyrillic [42].

In the first phase of the controlled development and building of Dungan culture in the 1920s, representatives of the Dungan intelligentsia were given the task of developing Dungan textbooks and spellers. At the same time, the teaching of the Dungan language was introduced in schools to comply with the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia of 1917 [56]. It was one of the first

documents produced by the Soviet government, signed by Lenin and Stalin, that declared the free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups living in Russia. Externally, it was more of an advertising strategy as fully-fledged teaching of (not only) the Dungan language could not be provided. In the 1920s, there were no Dungan teachers, no textbooks, and children had to learn in the Russian (or Tatar) language. Consequently, only a small number of Dungan boys attended the class. In 1931, in the village of Alexandrovka, where 3,000 Dungans lived, only 8 were literate. In the early 1930s, pedagogical schools for Dungan teachers were established in present-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, as well as in Tashkent and St. Petersburg. Their graduates became the authors of the first Dungan textbooks and literary works in Dungan [34].

The heyday of Dungan education lasted for only a short time and ended with Stalin's internationalisation and the rejection of the "nationalist deviation".

Some level of improvement did not occur until the 1940s; however, the final implementation of the teaching of the Dungan language was slowed by WWII. Friendly relations between the USSR and China played an important role in the development of Dungan culture, especially in the post-war period. However, historical research on the Dungans (and also the Uyghurs) was under strong ideological pressure in the USSR and many topics were completely banned [6].

The fact that the Dungan language was taught in schools after the war as the language of a national minority (albeit to a limited extent) was rather exceptional in comparison to other minorities. Members of several small nations had to wait until the 1980s for education in their own language, when there was a policy reform in the USSR as a result of M. Gorbachev coming to power [26]. However, the Dungan language was not taught everywhere – there was a shortage of local qualified teachers in places, so Russians taught instead. Teaching in the 1960s is described by a Dungan respondent from the Issyk-Kul area as follows: *The teachers were only Russians, there were no teachers among the Kyrgyz. They treated us and the Russian children completely differently. When we copied from each other at school, the Russian children got excellent (5) and we only got good (3). I realised that our nation is, to put it bluntly, without a flag ... Then when I studied at the vocational school, it was similar, only there were mostly Kyrgyz. I realised that our nation is a small nation, we cannot complain to anyone, no one will stand up for us.*

The Dungan language remains an important aspect of the ethnic identity of the Dungans of northern Kyrgyzstan, Lake Issyk-Kul and Kazakhstan. Unlike other nationalities in the USSR, over 95% of Dungans spoke their mother tongue. However, the use of Russian is typical of minority nations in Central Asia, while the state language (Kyrgyz, Kazakh) is a second language for only 1%. Although almost two-thirds of Dzungars speak Russian, there is a reluctance among minority groups, including Dungans, Slavs and Koreans, to learn Kyrgyz. Field research shows that Dungans in the capital are less likely to speak Kyrgyz, while many Dungans on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-kul speak Kyrgyz in addition to Dungan and Russian [36,45].

In contrast to other Dungans, those living in the Osh region of southern Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the Kara Suu district, have a low proportion of people who use Dungan as their mother tongue (only 10%). Instead, the majority of people (90%) use Uzbek as their mother tongue. In addition, less than a third of Dungans in this region speak Russian [45].

10.2. Historical awareness

When Dungans talk about their "relatives" in China, they always use the name Dungan and consider themselves part of one large nation of Dungans, one part of which is in Central Asia and the other in China. For Central Asian Dungans, the ethnonym Hui (Chinese Muslim) is more of a synonym for Dungans.

In fact, in most respects the two groups (Dungans and Hui) are quite different in terms of their demarcation from the surroundings. The Soviet Dungans in present-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan emphasise their Chinese origins in their local folklore. By contrast, the Hui living in China set themselves against their surroundings on a religious basis, and their folklore elements contain Qur'anic and Muslim figures and themes [13]. The main difference, which remains to this day, is that the Dungans in Central Asia emphasise their Chineseness to strengthen their identity, while the Hui in China seek to distinguish themselves from the Chinese (although they do adopt Chinese architectural elements in building mosques, for example, and are strongly influenced by other elements of Chinese culture).

Following the collapse of the USSR, the Dungans' relationship with the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs changed due to the diminishing prestige of their nationality. The Kyrgyz and Kazakhs often highlighted that they were titular nationalities in the new state, while the Dungans were just a small nation without their own state.

This is one of the reasons why respondents often remember the past, when Soviet nationality was more important. They point to the Dungans who became famous for their military prowess, especially during WWII, although the Dungans who actively participated in the formation of the Soviet government also have an important place in their national history.

Masanchi is a Dungan national hero who fought against anti-Soviet forces in Semirechye Oblast, and a Dungan village in Kazakhstan is named after him. The heroism of the Dungans during the Second World War is also an important element in their relations with the majority population, as both groups fought together for a common cause. The common destiny is also remembered in the context of Soviet national repression, where Kyrgyzstan (or Kazakhstan) became a second home for persecuted nations, who were protected by the local population. These stories are often revived, for example during celebrations of the arrival of the Dungans in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and are familiar to most interviewees: *When our ancestors settled, the Russians did not help us, increasing food prices tenfold, but the Kyrgyz did help us. In 1916, when the Kyrgyz fled to China, some of them went to work for the Dungans* (Male, Milyanfan, 86 years old).

The state employs these storylines to convey the smooth coexistence of multiple nations and as part of a declared effort to put citizenship above ethnicity: The Kyrgyz or Kazakhs (along with the Dungans and other ethnicities) should be primarily Kyrgyzstani or Kazakhstani (more loyal to the state than the nation) [43].

10.3. The religion of the Dungans

In the 1930s, the Soviet state pursued a strongly anti-religious policy that lasted, with various fluctuations, practically until the period of Gorbachev's perestroika. During the Stalinist purges, religious affiliation was always an aggravating factor. As a Dungan interviewee (65 years old, Bishkek) put it: *During the period of persecution in the 1930s, the government closed most mosques to Dungans, and many were imprisoned or executed. There are two religious currents among the Dungans, and some brotherhoods were formed at that time, whether it was the Sufi brotherhood or some other brotherhood, no one has investigated. But many people from these two streams were condemned on religious grounds. For example, in 1937, Dungan Khashanlo, a mullah, was sentenced to a heavier punishment under section 68-6, which meant shooting.*

The religion of the Soviet Dungans and the Hui ethnic group in China was explored in detail by Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff in 1985. In her research, she identified enormous differences between the Soviet Dungans and their Chinese counterparts. From a religious point of view, Soviet Dungans were an ethnic group that did not have a significant religious expression and Islam was not important to them. If a foreigner came to a Dungan village, he/she did not feel as if they were in a Muslim environment. There was no offer of religious literature and no religious schools and institutions. By contrast, these institutions operated in China and, in areas where Chinese Muslims lived, belonging to the Muslim religion was visible at first glance.

Adherence to the Muslim customs of the Soviet Dungans is now evident only among the older generation: fasting in the month of Ramadan is observed only by a small part of the oldest generation, and no one saves money for the pilgrimage to Mecca. Nevertheless, Dungans do not eat pork and most men in kolkhozes wear typical skull-caps. Many Dungans even actively oppose religion. In her research, however, Rimsky-Korsakoff shows that the rejection of religion was in some cases only for show as resisting anti-religious propaganda could result in problems in employment and personal life.

Soviet Dungan authors, such as Sushanlo, described religious practices of the Dungans as a vanishing relic and contrasted them with the Soviet present. At the same time, they pointed to Dungan traditions that had an ancient but not Muslim origin [50].

According to this description from the 1980s, the Soviet Dungans certainly did not base their identity on Islam; on the contrary, this was the most important distinguishing feature of their ancestors in China. Although the Soviet Dungans had a common origin that formed part of their ethnic identity, they did not look admiringly at China, the land of their ancestors. Even after more than a hundred years, memories of oppression by the Chinese continue to form an important part of their narratives. They considered life in the USSR to be extremely comfortable compared with China, even though they had almost no contact with China due to the closure of the Soviet-Chinese border. They also considered their language, dishes, customs, clothes, and the telling of Dungan stories to be entirely original – although Chinese parallels are easy to find for all these elements.

There is a vast difference between the current Dungans and Hui in China (Chinese Dungans). Religion has become one of the most important elements of ethnic identity for some Dungans, distinguishing them from Chinese Dungans. When the USSR disintegrated, the search for a new identity began to take place on a massive scale in the newly formed states. Religion became a crucially important element on which a new perception of ethnicity was to be built. Although religion was generally suppressed during the USSR, members of individual nations were not in the same starting position.

For unequivocally Muslim nations, an intense revival of religious life began: radio stations provided advice on how to pray properly and how to fast during the month of Ramadan. The ethnicity of some nations began to be associated with Christianity (Russians, Germans, Poles) and after the loosening of conditions they could develop their religious life, although this meant they were now perceived as a foreign element by local Muslims. This was a substantial change compared with the period under the USSR. At that time, members of disparate religions (Islam, Christianity) united as a result of atheistic repression. Differences within one religion in the USSR were considered petty. A respondent from the Batken region (Zoya, 82, Russian) described how Kyrgyz (Muslims) and Russians (Orthodox) lived in their village. The Russians were often not allowed to have a priest attend funerals. The ceremony was therefore conducted by a Muslim cleric, albeit in such a way that the ceremony was as similar as possible to the Orthodox ceremony, including Orthodox prayers.

In the case of smaller Muslim nations, it was natural in the Soviet era for their members to be on the same side of the "battlefield" as the major nations (Kyrgyz, Kazakhs) against the atheist government. After the demise of the USSR, there was a change and subsequent regrouping of forces on the "battlefield". The Soviet government as the main actor entirely disappeared, leaving the former allies to suddenly stand against each other in religious matters. They now fought for more than just the opportunity to freely live a religious life, fighting instead for the social space that individual ethnic groups will acquire.

A respondent from the Issyk-Kul region (86 years old) mentions the religious situation and atheist propaganda in the USSR: *As a child I only knew about Islam from my parents, and at school we were taught that there was no God. There were no mosques or imams, and being a believer was a challenge. My family and I avoided anything to do with religion because of the possible consequences, and I lived according to communist ideals, not even observing Ramadan. Nevertheless, I always believed in God, and when the religious climate became more relaxed in the 1970s, I began to identify as a believer. However, I didn't fully express myself until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now I perform almost all Muslim rituals, including praying, giving to the poor and fasting during Ramadan. I've even made the pilgrimage to Mecca.*

Some Dungan respondents from the Kyrgyz village of Ivanovka (2013, age 45–67) described their recent visit to China, where they visited the "Chinese Dungans". They were extremely disappointed with their compatriots – they themselves were immensely proud to be a Muslim and the Dungans as a whole maintained the Muslim faith. The "Chinese Dungans" did not maintain the Muslim religion at all, nor did they look like Muslims, and even practiced a number of pagan rites.

This example effectively illustrates the instability of the individual elements – in this case religion – that make up ethnic identity. During her research in 1985, Rimsky-Korsakoff describes the Soviet Dungan and their way of life as involving extraordinarily little in the way of religion, while religious life was clearly evident among their counterparts in China. Thirty years later, members of the young

generation of Soviet Dungans, described by Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff as active opponents of religion, are proud Muslims who see religion as an integral part of their ethnic identity, whereas Islam does not play much of a role for the “Chinese Dungans”.

10.4. Economic relations

Dungans in Central Asia are known for their above-average capital, typically earned through their own agricultural work. The dissolution of the USSR had a significant impact on Dungan livelihoods, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, where they lost access to the main market. Dungans today monetize their production through wholesale and Kyrgyz intermediaries as the bazaar trade is mainly organized by Kyrgyz.

Laruelle [29] notes changes in Dungan livelihoods since the 1990s, when many Dungans invested in restaurants because their “Muslim” cuisine is renowned in Central Asia and they have good relationships with other Dungan farms that reliably supply them with fresh produce.

Due to the high price of land, the Dungans move and, of course, choose places that are close to them in some way. As well as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan they are also choosing Russia and China. Russia is popular among the Dungans because of its common Soviet history and its linguistic proximity. According to the 2010 census, there are approximately 1,700 Dungans living in Russia, double the number reported in the 2002 census [59]. However, a connection with Central Asia remains: at harvest time, the Dungans hire workers from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in Russia, while in the winter some of the Dungans leave Russia for relatives in Central Asia.

They no longer consider China to be an enemy of the Dungans, as explained by a respondent from Kazakhstan (Masanchi, 52 years) who has relatives in China: *Everything is different in China. There, people don't have to worry so much to survive at all.*

However, economic relations between Chinese Muslims and Muslims from other countries are highly dependent on China's central policy [4]. Before 1949, international relations between Chinese and other Muslims were largely weak, and after 1950 they ceased entirely. Although cross-border trade between China and its neighbouring Muslim republics of the USSR took place mainly between the Turkic Muslims, the Hui in Xinjiang were also engaged in establishing contacts with Dungans in the Central Asian republics of the USSR [13].

China is currently supporting Central Asian Dungans in several ways, which is evident from the websites of all Dungan associations in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and the Dungans themselves do not oppose this support. They have extensive trade relations with China and are increasingly inclined towards Chinese slogans emphasising their natural proximity to China. While opium was the most important trade item in cross-border trade between Russia and Xinjiang at the turn of the 19th century [47], the present is different. Laruelle talks about the so-called ethnic entrepreneurship of the Dungan, who use their knowledge of Chinese and Russian to trade across borders between the Central Asian republics and China. These are mainly goods of everyday consumption that have a permanent place in the bazaars of Kyrgyz and Kazakh cities. She estimates that about one-third of the Dungans from the border areas are involved in this trade [29].

11. Conclusion

This research places the ethnic situation of the Dungans in a much broader context related to Soviet nationality policy. The article demonstrates on the national question the interconnectedness of Soviet ideology with 19th century European ultra-radical left theorists and the inherent contradictions of Soviet policy in its practical implementation. The Soviet state (like the Maoist regime in China) was able to create entirely new peoples and assimilate the former ones. The example of the Dungans shows that the reasons for this state social engineering may have been different. In the USSR during the Stalinist period, it was an attempt to introduce a new order that was supposed to eliminate all existing institutions. Although these institutions were to be eliminated, in the initial stages of building the new society some were given at least formal support. This created a paradoxical situation in which the state supported the all-round development of the “Soviet peoples” while cultural unification sought to eliminate national and linguistic differences altogether. The example of the Dungans shows that state intervention can have a huge impact on changing ethnic perceptions. At the same time, they show the instability of both the main ethnic categories (Central Asians have changed their ethnicity several times over several decades) and the attributes that define each ethnic category (religion, language, geographic affiliation, historical awareness, etc.).

The support of some nations (including the Dungans) was also provided for geopolitical reasons – to arouse the sympathy of other nations for the global socialist revolution. However, the example of the Dungans shows that even a centrally controlled change of nationality has its limits and depends on a number of other factors. In the northern part of Soviet Kyrgyzstan, there was no particular problem with consolidating Dungan nationality nor with significantly differentiating Soviet Dungans from “Chinese Muslims”, even on a linguistic basis. The state created a codified form of the Dungan language, which demonstrated a fundamental difference between the Soviet Dungans and their Chinese “relatives”. However, in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the majority of the elites were Uzbeks, this policy was completely unsuccessful. In the same period there was also a massive assimilation of Dungans who adopted the Uzbek culture.

The declared primary attribute of Dungan nationality – the Muslim religion – also varies considerably. Islam became the foremost difference between the Dungan ancestors and other ethnic groups in China, whereas in the USSR, where religion was suppressed, it disappeared into the background. Some Dungans even became involved in the anti-religious movement during the Soviet era. The change in the relationship with religion occurred after religious liberation following the establishment of independent post-Soviet states; Islam once again became one of the main elements of the ethnic consciousness of (not only) the Dungans.

Since the 1990s, after the end of the USSR, ideological pressure has again been exerted on the Dungan nationality. Especially evident is the effort of communist China (which supports the Dungan associations in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) to ideologically influence the Dungans and disseminate theses highlighting the proximity of Dungan culture with Chinese culture. The Central Asian Dungans accept this approach and acknowledge their proximity to China by strengthening economic relations and developing trade.

The Dungans' ties to Russia should also be mentioned. Like most ethnic minorities in the former USSR, the Dungans have adopted the use of the Russian language – some are entirely bilingual. Knowledge of Russian leads to preferences in finding business partners, especially from the countries of the former Soviet Union, and Russia is also becoming a popular destination for many Dungans who have moved their business there.

The Dungan ethnic group, which was in fact created by the Soviet regime, is not unique in terms of changes of ethnic identity in Central Asia. Soviet support for national development was exercised for a completely different reason – to strengthen relations with China and increase the possibility of exporting the socialist revolution. The support or persecution of the Dungan ethnic group and its representatives thus depended on the improvement or deterioration of relations with China.

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