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Review of Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*

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At the time of publication, author Christopher P. Atwood was affiliated with Indiana University. Currently, he is a faculty member in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Comments

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Lipman, Jonathan N.: *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), xxxvi + 266 pp., \$ 22.50. ISBN 0-295-97644-6.

In *Familiar Strangers*, Jonathan Lipman dissolves the simplistic categories that he sees as obscuring the received views of the Muslim people of China. Chinese Muslims, he argues, dwell at the intersection of two powerful essentialized categories, Chinese and Muslim. To be Chinese is to be heir to a monolithic culture of unique assimilative power, while to be Muslim is to be a fanatic follower of a world religion homogenous from Morocco to Indonesia. To be Chinese and Muslim is thus to be a standing anomaly, someone either whose fidelity to Islam or whose Chinese identity is perpetually in doubt. Professor Lipman's endeavor is to demonstrate historically that the Chinese Muslims must be understood from both sides of their identity – truly Chinese and truly Muslim – and whose lives cannot be therefore reduced to either broad-brush formula. In so doing he aims to recast the meaning both of “Islam” and of “China”.

The result is a useful and welcome introduction to Chinese Muslim history, focusing on the old area of Gansu province (including the Hui Autonomous Region of Ningxia, and the Xining area in Qinghai). Professor Lipman draws heavily on the renaissance of Hui historical studies in recent decades in China. While appreciating the new discoveries of this research in China, he dissents from the *minzu* paradigm that underlines it. In his view, Chinese scholars make a fundamental error when they treat the Chinese Muslims as discrete nationalities – the Hui, or the Salar, or the Dongxiang – that have possessed coherent boundaries since their “ethnogenesis” in the Yuan-Ming transition. Like Dru Gladney, whose *Muslim Chinese* the present work nicely complements, he sees these *minzu* categories as the creation of China's twentieth-century nationalist discourse. Thus Professor Lipman treats all Muslims native to Northwest China together and eschews the term Hui, considering its usage before 1949 to be so different in nuance from that after as to be seriously misleading.

An introductory chapter argues for the author's refusal to center his narrative on any one Chinese Muslim community or behavior. Instead he sees the Chinese Muslims of Northwest China as a “patchwork society”, the pieces of which he describes in brief but vivid sketches. (The historic photographs are also helpful.) He then surveys the early Muslim settlements in China, from the Tang through the Ming. In chapters three and four, the focus narrows to Northwest China, and the linked themes of how the introduction of Sufism led to internecine conflicts within the Chinese Muslim patchwork society, and how the lengthening shadows of anti-Muslim prejudice progressively poisoned relations between Muslims and both their non-Muslim neighbors and the Qing state. The confluence of these two trends led to the violent events of 1781–1784, 1862–1873, and 1895. Professor Lipman notes that conflicts between different Sufi methods of *dhikr* (remembrance of God) did not lead to violence in the rest of the Islamic world and suggests that from 1762 on the interference of an increasingly corrupt and anti-Muslim Qing state, along with the militarization of local communities committed to the legend of Muslim violence, created the conditions for the occasional outbursts of intra-communal friction to be defined as “Muslim rebellions” or “New Teaching banditry” and so treated in ways that provoked more violence.

Finally in chapter five, rather than continue a single-threaded narrative history, Professor Lipman examines four figures as representative of the different ways in which Muslims in the Republican period paradoxically drew closer to Chinese nationalism, just as the central government's power to coerce obedience virtually disappeared. Ma Fuxiang as a militarist, Ma Yuanzhang as a re-builder of the Jahriya Sufi lineage, Ma Qixi as the charismatic creator of an Islamically-based collective on the Gansu-Tibetan frontier, and Ma Wanfu as founder of the anti-Sufi, reformist Ikhwan movement all pledged their allegiance to the Chinese Republic in word and deed. As the author demonstrates, all four pictured the Chinese Muslims as good citizens whose Islamic faith sought no political expression outside the Chinese nation. In the conclusion, Professor Lipman reiterates the multivalence of all the categories historians used to package events, a multivalence that refutes any simple attribution of behavior to "Muslims".

Indeed my major objection would be that the author almost creates in place of the "Muslim bandit" a converse myth of the bigoted Qing official and the paranoid non-Muslim villager. (The use of the negative term "non-Muslims" for the Han Chinese, while perhaps justified historically, is symptomatic of Professor Lipman's tendency to view them solely through the eyes of the Muslims.) At several places in the narrative, I found myself unconvinced by the weight he assigns to unreasoning anti-Muslim prejudice as an explanatory factor. Such a criticism, however, does not negate the substantial achievement of *Familiar Strangers*, one that students of Northwest China, and Chinese minorities will be acknowledging for many years.

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Cheek, Timothy: *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xv + 390 pp., \$ 85.00. ISBN 0-19-829066-7.

Scholars are interested in the key role of intellectuals in China during Mao's era. Were the Chinese intellectuals potential dissidents or actual servants of the Chinese Communist Party? Could Mao take over China or govern it without a coalition of forces that included the intellectuals who articulated its goals and administered its complex bureaucracy. Timothy Cheek's book *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*, tries to answer these questions.

Relying in part on interviews Cheek carried out in China and on documentary materials, this book, a biography of Deng Tuo, is social history of intellectuals as agents in China's socialist revolution. As a top Communist Party propagandist and a Marxist-Leninist theorist, Deng Tuo (1912–1966) was the founding editor of *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. He was also an accomplished traditional scholar and a critical commentator on political issues.

Although Deng Tuo was an excellent propagandist of the Chinese Communist Party, he was effectively fired by Mao in 1957 and formally left the *People's Daily* in 1959. Like many Chinese intellectuals, Deng Tuo was criticized by Mao and