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## IN THIS ISSUE

**Peter Zieme**

Notes on a Manichaean Turkic Prayer Cycle 3

**Olga Lundysheva, Anna Turanskaya**

Brāhmī glosses of the Uygur blockprint of Sitātapatrā dhāraṇī kept  
in the IOM, RAS 12

**Safarali Shomakhmadov**

Vyākaraṇa as a Method of Rational Cognition  
in the Buddhist Written Sources 24

**Kirill Alekseev, Natalia Yampolskaya**

On the Fragment of the *Naran-u Gerel* Catalogue Preserved  
in IOM, RAS 37

**Zhuangsheng**

The Development of Sibe Ethnic Awareness:  
With Special Consideration of the Sibe People of the Ili River Basin 50

**Anton Popov**

Two Mongolian Official Papers Dated by the 19th c. 77

Reviews

The State Hermitage Museum (ed.): *Brush and Qalam: 200 years  
of the collection of the Institute of Oriental manuscripts. Exhibition  
catalogue*. St. Petersburg: The State Hermitage Publishers, 2018. —  
320 pp. by **Simone-Christiane Raschmann** 94

S.L. Burmistrov. *Rukopisi shkoly Vedanta v sobraniiaxh Instituta  
vostochnykh rukopisei RAN: annotirovannyi katalog* [Manuscripts  
of Vedānta School in the collections of the Institute of Oriental  
Manuscripts of RAS: annotated catalogue]. Moscow: Nauka–  
Vostochnaia Literatura, 2018. — 479 pp. (Pismennii pamiatniki  
Vostoka. CLII) by **Safarali H. Shomakhmadov** 99

On the cover:

Miniature from the collection of Persian poems. Bukhara, the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Persian collection  
of the IOM RAS, call number C-860

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Zhuangsheng

**The Development of Sibe Ethnic Awareness:  
With Special Consideration of the Sibe People  
of the Ili River Basin**

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*Abstract:* In the sixteenth century, the Sibe people emerged as a unique ethnic group, and they remained a unique ethnic group after their migration to the Ili River basin. In the Republic of China, a time when many ethnic systems were created, the Sibe gained official recognition for being an independent ethnic group. Although the creation of a written script is an act of ethnic construction, the Sibe written language could never break free of its close relation to the Manchu written language. The construction of ethnic groups and the creation of written scripts stimulated vigorous development of ethnic histories compiled by the Sibe scholars, and it is their textual research of ethnic origin that best illustrates the birth of this new ethnic group.

*Key words:* ethnic groups, the Sibe people, the Sibe script, ethnic history, the Jurchen people.

During the Emperor Qianlong's reign in the years 1757 and 1759, the Qing government respectively pacified both the Junghar Amoursana's revolt and the revolt of the Altishahr Khojas in the area south of the Tianshan. The following year saw the establishment of a yamen for the General of Ili, to serve the military and general affairs of Xinjiang. Although Ili was both a nomadic and agricultural center during the period of the Junghar rule, its population had been reduced by the long-lasting war. The first General of Ili, Mingrui 明瑞, thus placed special consideration to the borderland area of Ili as a point of strategic significance. For the established border posts — the *karun* — he demanded a replacement of the armed forces and requested

more garrison officers. The central government continued to dispatch troops belonging to such ethnicities as the Manchu, Cahar Mongol, Solon, the Sibe and soon. In 1764, two groups of the Sibe soldiers were dispatched along with their wives and children from the Mukden area. In the seventh month of the following year, they arrived to the Suiding area of Ili, where the Ili general temporarily arranged for them to rest and reorganize in Uhalik. Not long after that, they settled down in the agricultural plains on the southern bank of the Ili River. The general of Ili then divided those Sibe soldiers into 6 *niru* to efficiently administer them, and later for efficient administration another two *niru* were added to make a Sibe “Eight Banners” that would later become the Sibe camp.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Reform of the Writing System

The Sibe have always been a distinct group from the time they began appearing in the Ming-Qing historical materials of the 16th c. They are distinguished as the “Sibe tribe” (Ma. *sibe aiman*) or “*cie-p’i* 諸備 정병”<sup>2</sup> in Manchu and Korean historical materials. During the Kangxi period, the eastward expansion of Russian forces gave rise to the need for increased fortifications in the northeast. In 1692, the central government provided funds for the Sibe troops under the jurisdiction of the Khorchin Mongol nobility. They were assigned to the Manchu Eight Banners and placed for garrison duty respectively in such places as Qiqihar, Bedune and Girin Ula. At that time, the Sibe were described as an independent group in the same way as peoples such as the Guwalca and Dahūr.<sup>3</sup> Although they were all recognized as independent groups, the Qing government divided the Manchus into the two large groups of “Old Manchus” and “New Manchus”. Those tribes who belonged to what was once called the “Cooked Jurchen” 熟女真 were incorporated into the “Old Manchus”, and the “Raw Jurchens” 生女真 who were distinguished from the “Cooked Jurchens” were all incorporated into the “New Manchus” upon being included in the Eight Banners. This gave rise to the two large groups of Manchus, and of course, the Sibe were affiliated with the “New Manchus”. After their migration to Ili, those Sibe were referred to in Manchu as “*Ili i Sibe aiman* (the Sibe tribe of Ili), or in Chi-

<sup>1</sup> WU and ZHAO 2008, 58–60; CHENGZHI 2012, 257–268.

<sup>2</sup> SIN 1940. On the research of the *Geonju gijeong dogi* 建州紀程圖記, see INABA 1937; INABA 1939; I 1954; MITAMURA 1965, 400–443; On the study of the interpretation of *cie-p’i* 諸備, see WADA 1959, 650; MASUI 2007, 70; ZHUANGSHENG 2014, 431.

<sup>3</sup> WU and ZHAO 2008, 38–48; KUZUNOKI 2009, 191–262.

nese as the *Xibo ying* 錫伯營 (the Sibe camp), or the *Xibo buluo* 錫伯部落 (the Sibe tribe)".<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the Qing government also recognized the existence of the Mongol, Tibetan and Hui ethnicities. Although the Qing dynasty advocated a high social position for the Manchus as rulers, on a cultural level they respected the independence of other ethnicities. As for the question of whether or not the Sibe had their own independent culture, we can refer to a memorial from the 22nd day of the 4th month of the 34th year of the Qianlong period from Henglu 恒祿 and others describing the circumstances of the Eight Banner Manchu, Mongolian, and Han officers and soldiers: "Concerning the Manchu language, the officers and soldiers of the new Manchu Sibe and the Mongolian tribes who are either proficient, have a rough understanding, or have no ability in Manchu cannot be equal. Among the soldiers of the Old Manchu and the Hanjun, there are those who can speak and comprehend Manchu, yet there are many who cannot speak or understand the language". Again, Henglu memorialized on the twenty second day of the ninth month of the thirty ninth year of the Qianlong period: "I tried using spoken Manchu with officers and soldiers when inspecting the navies of Gaizhou, Xiongyue, Fuzhou, southern Jinzhou, and Lüshun — those like the Sibe and so on could all speak Manchu, and though a few of the others were making progress in speaking and understanding, still many could not speak or understand Manchu".<sup>5</sup> In addition, according to the records from the 25th day of the 10th month of the 11th year of the Yongzheng period: "Of the fifty stationed troops in Xiong County, except for the armored Sibe soldiers none of them could speak Manchu".<sup>6</sup> Although we can see that the Sibe were referred to as an independent group, there was no difference between them and the Old Manchus regarding linguistic culture. In 1869, the German born Russian turkologist Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff conducted a survey of the language, religion, and social life of the Sibe living in the Ili river basin — and he considered the Sibe language to be a colloquial version of Manchu. In 1906, while he was a student of the Faculty of Oriental Languages at St. Petersburg University, Fedor V. Muromskii went to the Sibe settlement in Ili to study the Sibe language in the third and sixth *niru*. He studied the spoken Sibe language and clarified its relationship to the written Manchu language. He made

<sup>4</sup> *Zhongyang yangjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo cang ming qing dang'an* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所藏明清檔案 [Ming and Qing archives at the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica], 157289-001, 171369-001, 174647-001.

<sup>5</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 49.

<sup>6</sup> WU and ZHAO 2008, 283.

three primary conclusions: 1) There was no difference between the Manchu written language and Beijing Manchu; 2) The official Sibe language and the language used by Sibe intellectuals were similar; 3) The discrepancy in the language used by uneducated Sibe and the written Sibe language was rather significant.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, he found a discrepancy between the written and spoken Sibe language. When Nurhaci unified the Jurchen peoples, he emphasized: “From the east of the Ming and all the way west until the coast, north of Korea and south of Mongolia, that year all of the various kingdoms of the Jurchen were conquered”.<sup>8</sup> The Jurchen language spoken there later became the Manchu language, and of course, the territory indicated by Nurhaci included the area of the Sibe tribe.

Tatiana Pang points out that after the Sibe had migrated to Ili, they emphasized their linguistic superiority in comparison to that of Old Manchu’s: “In the thirtieth year of the Qianlong reign, the Sibe set out from the northeast with Solon and even some Manchu to the Ili river valley. In the beginning, our lives were exceedingly difficult and we even suffered unfair treatment and humiliation from the Manchu. We called them the ‘Old Manchu’. They were all high-ranking officials. The Manchus were harmed by their use of opium, for they had forgotten their ancestral language and traditions. We Sibe people worked hard in the fields. We were without epidemic disease and our population grew. We have schools which require writing and reading of the Manchu language, and our most talented children also study Chinese. All positions which require Manchu are undertaken by the Sibe”.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the Sibe were often discriminated against by the Old Manchu. This is the 1899 record of Bališan (1847–1908), who worked at the Russian consulate in Ili.<sup>10</sup> From this record we can see that the Manchu who lived in the Ili area at that time could not really speak their native language. This was a problem throughout all the Manchu Eight Banner garrisons. In 1907 Hino Tsutomu 日野強 was dispatched by the Japanese military to Ili for an investigation and mentioned a similar question in his 1909 *Iri kikō* 伊犁紀行 (Ili travel notes): “Now Manchu language and customs have been completely Sinicized; these who speak their native language are very few”.<sup>11</sup> However, the Sibe residing in the Sibe camp of the Ili river basin were completely dif-

<sup>7</sup> YAHONTOV 2009, 278.

<sup>8</sup> *Manwen yuandang* 滿文原檔 [Original Manchu archives], 1: 293; *Manzhou shilu* 滿洲實錄 [Manchu memoir], 6: 280.

<sup>9</sup> PANG 2011, 430–434.

<sup>10</sup> YAHONTOV 2009, 276–278.

<sup>11</sup> HINO 1909, 77.

ferent. Not only did they use their superior language skills to hold the Manchu language government positions, they also continued traditional Manchu language education at their schools. Clearly, when the Sibe criticized the Manchus as rulers for having already forgotten their traditional language and culture, the cultural superiority they spoke of was in the Manchu language.

From 1864 to 1871, the rebellion of Dungans and Taranchins in Ili erupted, and that soon after brought ten years of Russian occupation to the area. At that time the ahung of Dungans said to a Sibe garrison commander: “The Dungan people are revolting because we truly cannot stand the pressure of the Han and Manchu, and we will not drop our weapons until there are no more Manchu or Han Chinese in the Ili region. Yet as for the Sibe people, we will not interfere with them”.<sup>12</sup> Here it is evident that the Sibe were distinguished from Han Chinese and Manchu. From that they were able to reconcile and avoid any ethnic persecution from the Taranchi people. After the Russians had occupied Ili, the Ili region was divided into northern and southern areas. The Sibe camp was signed to the southern area and its total population was 2,449 households.<sup>13</sup> In the year of 1877, the total population was 18,321, among whom were 9,305 men and 9,016 women.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, at that time there was no great disparity in the ratio between men and women.

In 1911, when the Chinese Revolution had already brought the collapse of the Qing dynasty, the original system of the Sibe camp continued and was abolished only in 1938.<sup>15</sup> In the year 1909, Hino Tsutomu 日野強 in his *Iri kikō* 伊犁紀行 (Ili travel notes) recorded that the Ili region was divided into 6 ethnicities: “Turbaned Muslims, Kazakh, Hui, Han Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian” Among them, “the Manchu have immigrated from Manchuria to Ili and Tarbaghatay Prefecture and they were garrison troops responsible for opening up wasteland and growing food grain. Yet those called the Manchu are only those from the Changbai Mountain region, those who emigrated from the Shenyang region were called the Sibe, and those from the Heilongjiang area were called the Solon.”<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the Sibe and the Solon were both parts of the greater Manchu ethnic group. Although Hino Tsutomu knew through his fieldwork that the Sibe lived on the left bank of the Ili river, he did not regard them as an independent ethnic group. This kind of distinction is in fact the same as the Qing ethnic distinction.

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<sup>12</sup> BALIŠAN 2010, 269.

<sup>13</sup> NODA 2009, 161–163.

<sup>14</sup> HINO 1909, 77.

<sup>15</sup> WU and ZHAO 2008, 87.

<sup>16</sup> HINO 1909, 60–63.

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In the 1927–1928 period, young Sibe intellectuals who had returned from studying in the Soviet Union such as Yi Hualu 伊華陸, developed new plans for the Sibe characters using the Latin alphabet. Although the Qing had already been overthrown for many years at that time, a special historical reason allowed the Sibe to continue to live in banner camps with their old guard position still taking a dominant position. Under a continuous banner life, the Sibe were limited in their understanding of the outside world; the Sibe had not yet received a new Latin alphabet. Thus, this romanization proposal could not be carried out, and the project was quickly abandoned.<sup>17</sup> Clearly before the establishment of the General Promotion Association of Sibe, Solon, and Manchu Culture — a proposal of young Sibe intellectuals, who were influenced by new cultural ideas, to modernize the Manchu script had begun. Even though this proposal has never been carried out, that plan of script reform still allows us to see that the Sibe people wanted to culturally separate from the Manchu culture. This also means that with the foundations of a unique cultural system, the Sibe had the goal of constructing themselves as a unique group.

After the 1911 Chinese Revolution, the soldiers of the Eight Banners were disbanded, and the garrison system was abolished, which has created favorable conditions for the bannermen and soldiers who lived in China Proper and Beijing to participate in labor and manufacturing. Even though the *Guanyu Man Meng Hui Zang gezu daiyu zhi tiaojian* 關於滿、蒙、回、藏各族待遇之條件 (Conditions for the Treatment of Manchu, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan Ethnicities) clearly regulated these peoples “be equal with Han Chinese” and even though the Republic of China promoted the slogan of the ‘Harmony of the Five Peoples’, the fact says that the Revolution could not reasonably solve ethnic problems. Many bannermen concealed their identity to survive, that was especially the case for the Manchus who nearly all hid their identity by changing their nationalities and names to these of Han Chinese.<sup>18</sup> Yet in 1936, under the Russian control, the ethnic groups of Xinjiang were subjected to new methods of Sheng Shicai’s 盛世才 governance, and the Soviet method of dividing ethnic groups was employed. This new method of Soviet Russian governance was aimed at splitting and supporting Central Asian ethnic groups in the way of classification: on the one hand, it brought particularly distinct ethnic group boundaries; on the other hand, it fostered the development of culture and education to the greatest extent. At

<sup>17</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 350.

<sup>18</sup> LIU 2011, 169–171.

that time, there were fourteen ethnic groups in Xinjiang including Uyghur, Han Chinese, Hui (Dungan Hui), Kazakh, Mongolian, Uzbek, Taranchins, Tatar, Tajik, Kirgiz, Sibe, Solon, and Manchu.<sup>19</sup> Although Sheng Shicai recognized Sibe as an independent ethnic group, from a linguistic cultural perspective, they still could not be distinguished from the Manchu. The Manchu languages included the Sibe language, the Solon language, and the Manchu language. In order to develop the ethnic culture of each group, the improvement of their cultural level by education was important. Therefore, Sheng Shicai put forth the first method by which the components of the ethnic groups would be united together, establishing cultural promotion associations for each group, among those groups was the General Promotion Association of Sibe, Solon, and Manchu Culture.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, the Sibe, Solon, and Manchu groups were still culturally and linguistically united at a time even though they were unique ethnic groups.

After 1937, the General Promotion Association of Sibe, Solon, and Manchu Culture was primarily undertaken by An Ziying 安子英. That period was the most influential and effective period in the development of the cultural association. An Ziying can be said to be a very talented and active figure amongst Sibe intellectuals in modern times. Being a man from the Huocheng Solon camp, he was one of the first batch of students to study abroad in the Soviet Union during the period of Sheng Shicai 盛世才. He was full of linguistic skills, knowing Chinese, Russian, and the Uyghur language. In 1938, An Ziying studied the unique characteristics of the Sibe language in depth. Then, he diligently studied the Latin alphabet and used innovative way to alphabetize the Sibe language. He earned sympathy and support from many in the cultural association at that time, also gained the approval of the government and compiled textbooks in that new alphabet for Sibe elementary school students. These textbooks were sent to Sibe primary schools and popularized, which has also made some achievement in practice. Yet with the change in Xinjiang's political situation, a group of progressive youths led by An Ziying were arrested and brutally murdered, and the work to form a new Sibe alphabet also died prematurely at this time.<sup>21</sup> The second plan to reform the writing system was different from the first, for this time to plan preceded under conditions whereby the Sibe were already recognized as an independent ethnic group. Yet due to the changes

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<sup>19</sup> ZHANG 1980, 3446.

<sup>20</sup> ZHANG 1980, 3447–3448.

<sup>21</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 350. Besides, see XUELIN 1998.

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in the political situation, this second plan to reform the Sibe writing system ended in nothing.

In 1947, the third attempt to reform the Sibe writing system finally established the position of the Sibe written language. It was from this time that the Sibe people began to refer to their own spoken language and writing as the spoken Sibe and Sibe writing.<sup>22</sup> For the first time the Sibe language appeared in the arena of history with a new look, and this marked a turning point whereby the Sibe language and writing system were universally recognized. With this reform, the famous Sibe scholars Ujala Saracun 兀扎拉·薩拉春 and Guo Jinan 郭基南 compiled the first new Sibe language textbook which was used in all Sibe schools. Saracun also wrote the first *Xibowen wenfa* 錫伯文文法 (Grammar of the Sibe language).<sup>23</sup> This third language reform was carried out on the basis of the Manchu written language: it was only slightly changed to formulate the Sibe alphabet. It was not at all the same as the plans for the Latin alphabetization of the Sibe language.<sup>24</sup> In discussing the new writing system, the meeting records of the Three-district Cultural and Educational Bureau 三區文教所 stated: “the education of the teaching staff is carried out under the policies of the highest authorities, and these methods of vocational study as well as how to manage student life are researched together by new and senior teachers. The new script is used for study whether in the humanities or the sciences”.<sup>25</sup> It is clear that in 1957 the schools of Cabcal County of Ili used the new Sibe script for education. Moreover, at that time the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Language Research Institute also compiled the *Xin Xibowen jiaocai* 新錫文教材 (Textbook for the new Sibe script) which was stored by the Archives Bureau of Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County.

The fourth reform of the script was based on the policy of the China State Council whereby ethnic minorities would base their new scripts on the Roman alphabet. In 1958, the original Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Minority Language Research Committee assembled a conference which included participating researchers of all of the various ethnic groups in accordance with the document no. 85 of the China State Council of 1957. The meeting issued a draft of a plan for writing reform whereby ethnic minority

<sup>22</sup> HU 1980, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 350.

<sup>24</sup> On the similarities and differences between Manchu and Sibe languages, see WANG 1963.

<sup>25</sup> *Wenjiao huiyi jilu (Sanqu)* 文教會議記錄(三區) [Records of the meeting of culture and education (Three-district)], September 25, 1957. Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County Archive.

groups such as the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kirgiz, and Sibe would base their new writing systems on the Latin script, and this was given to the relevant authorities and specialists for discussion. After that various meetings were organized in minority regions, such as Cabcal, to collect opinions on such changes of written languages from people of all levels of society. A draft was then submitted in June of 1959 to use the Latin alphabet as the basis for a *Xibo Xinwenzi fangan* 錫伯新文字方案 (Plan for the new Sibe script). On August 29, 1960, two opinions were raised at the meeting in the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County on the Sibe written language. The first opinion was that the Sibe script should be reformed on the basis of the Scheme for *Hanyu Pinyin* (Chinese Phonetic Alphabet); the other opinion was that the current Sibe language would not be able to adjust to the needs of the new situation and had already completed its historical role. This second opinion was considered the fact that the vast majority of the Sibe people at that time had a grasp of the Chinese language, and that there was no need to create another script, as Chinese language and writing could be the tool of Sibe communication. In 1962, the Cabcal County followed the instructions approved by the higher authorities in which the Sibe would simply adopt the Chinese script and writing as their tool of communication, and the Sibe language should be used as a language for the transition period. Besides, the Cabcal County also instructed its education departments to organize manpower to compile new Sibe language textbooks for elementary education in accordance with the actual situation of Sibe elementary schools. Yet, there was no specific implementation of this instruction due to the influence of political circumstances.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. The Writing of Ethnohistory

On June 2, 1931, the Nanjing National Government issued the *Shezhiju zuzhi tiaoli* 設治局組織條例 (Regulations on the organization of government offices), stipulating that the various provinces which did not have county-level administration could establish temporary government offices which would in time be reformed to county jurisdiction. The establishment and abolition of these government offices and the division of regions were done in the same way as new counties. The provincial government would draft a plan to consult the Ministry of the Interior and the Executive Yuan which would transfer the plan to the National Government for approval of the Ministry of Works. These government offices would have one director to

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<sup>26</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 350–351.

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Pl. 1: Henan County Government Seal (GUAN and GUAN 2009)

be appointed by recommendation of the civil affairs department who would promote qualified personnel. The director would be assigned by the council of the provincial government who would reach a decision after deliberation and report this to the Ministry of the Interior for record. Under the command and supervision of the provincial government, these offices would handle all administrative affairs within the area. Within the scope of not contravening the central and provincial decrees, these government offices could issue bureaucratic orders and establish separate rules. This system of the government offices continued throughout the Republic of China period with a total of a hundred and fifty-four administration bureaus established in nineteen provinces, of which the four provinces with the most number of these offices were Heilongjiang with thirty-two, Xinjiang with twenty-eight, Yunnan with seventeen, and Qinghai with thirteen.<sup>27</sup> Those offices established in Xinjiang included the Henan Administration Bureau whose predecessor was the Sibe camp. In 1937, the Sibe camp area was separated from Yining County to be set as the Henan Administration Bureau. This area was located south of the Ili river, so the government office established there was named Henan meaning “south of the river”. In the 28th year of the Republic of China, Henan County was set up. (see Pl. 1) Then it was renamed Ningxi County in the

<sup>27</sup> FU and ZHENG 2007, 101–105.

33rd year of the Republic of China, because it shared the same name as Henan Province.<sup>28</sup> In the Three-district revolutionary period, it was renamed Sumul County, and the old name of Ningxi County was restored at the end of 1949. In 1950, the People's Congress of All Ethnic Groups and All Levels of Society was convened in Ningxi County and the Ningxi County People's Government was established.<sup>29</sup>

On September 9, 1952, the second meeting of the first session of the People's Congress of All Ethnic Groups and All Levels of Society in Xinjiang established the Preparatory Meeting for the Implementation of Regional Ethnic Minority Autonomy in Xinjiang Province in accordance with the opinions and requirements of the *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo minzu quyuzizhi shishi gangyao* 中華人民共和國民族區域自治實施綱要 (Implementation outline of ethnic regional autonomy in the People's Republic of China). Among them, the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County is the only autonomous county in Ili Prefecture as well as the only in all of China. In June of 1953, the Xinjing People's Government Committee and representatives of various ethnic minority groups met at an enlarged meeting to confirm that Ningxi would become a county-level Sibe autonomous region. On December 25th of that same year, this county established the Preparatory Committee for Regional Ethnic Minority Autonomy and Shatuo 沙陀 (a Sibe) was assigned as director of this committee.<sup>30</sup> On January 20, 1954, the Preparatory Committee for Regional Ethnic Minority Autonomy of Ningxi County convened its first conference. The conference was directed by Shatuo and the primary proposal was: "From the beginning of March this year, our county will be established as a county-level autonomous region which is dominated by the Sibe people and includes other ethnic minorities. Autonomous regions for ethnic minorities were a fundamental Marxist-Leninist policy used by Chairman Mao to solve China's ethnic minority problem. China was a country of many ethnic minorities, and in Xinjiang alone there are thirty ethnic minorities including Uyghur, Kazakh, Han Chinese, Hui, Kirgiz, Mongolian, Russian, Uzbek, Tajik, Sibe, Tatar, Manchu, etc. Ningxi County alone has dozens of various ethnic groups of which the Uyghur are the most numerous contributing to seventy-eight percent of the total population; the Kazakh account for ten percent of the population; the

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<sup>28</sup> FU and ZHENG 2007, 495.

<sup>29</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 192.

<sup>30</sup> *Zhongguo Gongchandang Yili Hasake zizhizhou jianshi (1939.3–2001.3)* 中國共產黨伊犁哈薩克自治州簡史 (1939.3–2001.3) [A brief history of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of the Communist Party of China (1939.3–2001.3)], 114–116.

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Han Chinese account for five percent of the population; the Hui account for two point three percent of the population; the Kirgiz account for one point three percent of the population; the Mongolian account for one point two percent of the population; and the other ethnic groups including Russian, Uzbek, Tajik, Sibe, Tatar, Solon, and Manchu altogether account for less than one percent of the total population. Xinjiang has established eight autonomous regions for the various ethnicities, among which the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is controlled directly by the Central People's Government. Its three special regions, namely Ili, Tarbaghatay, and Ashan established an autonomous region dominated by the Kazak ethnic group. The autonomous regions for other ethnic groups such as Kirgiz, Mongolian, and Hui, are all directly controlled by the People's Government of Autonomous Region of Xinjiang Province; there is also an autonomous region created for the Tajik and Solon ethnic groups; the Sibe autonomous region belongs to Ili and Ningxi County established a county-level autonomous region dominated by the Sibe ethnic group".<sup>31</sup>

On September 2, 1954, the Ili United Front Work Department of the prefectural party committee of Ili proposed a change to the name of Ningxi County: "Concerning the question of the naming of the Sibe autonomous region in Ningxi County, and through the consultation of the Sibe cadre at Urumqi, the overwhelming majority believe that it is appropriate to change the name of Ningxi to Cabcal, as this is the largest irrigation channel in Ningxi County and is also the great canal with a long history of one hundred and forty or fifty years which the Sibe have personally dug out since their migration to Xinjiang from the northeast. This name (Cabcal) is a portmanteau of two Sibe words: 'cabu' which means the most delicious food, and 'calu' which means a granary storehouse. They chose this name because the excavation of this canal was truly the Sibe's economic lifeline. So, please consider this name, and report your decision to us after the local Sibe party cadres and the masses have thought about it. Sub-branch of the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (United Front Work Department No. 43)".<sup>32</sup> Here we can see that when consulted about a name change for Ningxi County in the Sibe auto-

<sup>31</sup> *Dui minzu quyue zizhi yingyou de renshi* 對民族區域自治應有的認識 [Required understanding of regional ethnic autonomy], January 20, 1954. Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County Archive.

<sup>32</sup> *Guanyu Ningxixian Xibozu zizhi de mingcheng wenti* 關於寧西縣錫伯族自治區的名稱問題 [On the name of Sibe Autonomous Region in Ningxi County], February 9, 1954. Ili Prefecture Archive.

mous region, the Sibe living in Urumqi all thought it suitable for the name to be changed to “Cabcal”. This is because Cabcal was the canal which the Sibe used for the development of agriculture after migrating to the southern side of the Ili river. They even took the time to explain the meaning of the name. Clearly, their explanation of this name is not entirely correct. According to the records in *Xiyu shuidao ji* 西域水道記 (“Records of the Waterways of the Western Regions”): “In the thirtieth year of the Qianlong reign, a thousand and ten Sibe officers and soldiers migrated from Shengjing to the southern bank of the Ili river. In the past there was a canal which was several *li* away from the river. The north side of the canal was narrow and lacked good fields; the south side of the canal was blocked by cliffs and lacked water. In the early Jiaqing period, a member of the Sibe tribe, Tübet, was the first to propose that water be drawn from the mouth of the Cabcal mountain. A canal was chiseled from the mountain cliff, and it stretched for two hundred *li*”.<sup>33</sup> From the map drafted in the *Xiyu shuidao ji*, we can determine the location of Mt. Cabcal, which is near the Cabcal water inlet. From this we know that the Cabcal canal got its name from this mountain. In fact, Cabcal comes from a Mongolian word *cabciyal* which means “being precipitous or a deep valley”. Its meaning has nothing to do with the Sibe words for a granary storehouse or the most delicious food.

On March 17, 1954, Ningxi County convened the first People’s Congress. This conference decided to abandon the old name of Ningxi County and changed the name to “Cabcal Sibe Autonomous Region”,<sup>34</sup> which is also called the “Cabcal Sibe Ethnic Group Autonomous Region”. In February, 1955, the Xinjiang People’s Government published edicts on the division of administrative districts according to the constitution. Those places which were department-level or special-district level autonomous regions became autonomous prefectures, while those autonomous places which were county-level became autonomous counties. Those places which were only the size of a district or town became known as minority towns. These People’s Governments of autonomous prefectures, autonomous counties, and minority towns were all changed to the People’s Committees. From November of that year, according to a directive of the People’s Committee of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Ili Kazak Ethnic Group Autonomous Prefecture

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<sup>33</sup> XU 1966, 4:18.

<sup>34</sup> *Xibozu jianshi jianzhi hebian* 錫伯族簡史簡志合編 [Compilations of brief history and gazetteer of the Sibe] (draft), 26. This book states that the name of the new county was “Cabcal Sibe Ethnic Group Autonomous County”, but the actual new name was “Cabcal Sibe Autonomous Region People’s Government”, not an autonomous county.

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would no longer use the Chinese character “zu 族” (ethnic group), and they would be known simply as the Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture. At the same time, the other ethnic group autonomous areas at various levels also dropped the character for “zu”.<sup>35</sup> From the above documents which have formed since the Ningxi County was built, there was always a delay in the time it took for the official government seal to change in reflecting the new official name. The Uyghur which reflects the Chinese of “*Ningxi Xian renmin zhengfu yin* 寧西縣人民政府印” is “سومول ناحيدلك خلق حكومت تامغاسى” (Ch: *Sumu'er renmin zhengfu yin* 蘇木爾縣人民政府印). Clearly, the Uyghur language still used the Three-district Revolution’s old name (see Pl. 2). On January 27, 1955, the State Council issued the *Guanyu guojia jiguan yin-chang de guiding* 關於國家機關印章的規定 (Regulations on the seals of national organizations). In 1956, the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County, in accordance with the spirit of the original Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region People’s Committee’s “Notice on the Production and Issuance of Government Stamps of Different Levels”, inspected and revised the stamps and seals of government offices at all levels of the whole county.<sup>36</sup>

On March 18, 1954, the first People’s Congress held in the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous Region submitted the ten great proposals, including those on such topics as agriculture, water conservation, medical care, culture and education. Among these, the Article No. 11 concerning culture and education states that: “Other ethnic groups all have handed down complete records of their ethnic histories which are convenient for them to study and research. Yet, up to now the Sibe have no complete history. Please organize special groups to collect historical materials, so that we will be able to teach the history of



Pl. 2: Ningxi County People’s Government Seal  
(Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County Archive)

<sup>35</sup> *Zhongguo Gongchandang Yili Hasake zizhizhou jianshi (1939.3–2001.3)* 中國共產黨伊犁哈薩克自治州簡史 (1939.3–2001.3) [A brief history of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of the Communist Party of China (1939.3–2001.3)], 119–120. However, of the essays introducing the minority autonomous county in 1957, Cabcal was still called the “Cabcal Sibe Ethnic Group Autonomous County”. When the word “ethnic group” (Ch: zu 族) was officially removed from the name remains to be verified. See HUANG 1957.

<sup>36</sup> *Xibozu baike quanshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 407.

our people”.<sup>37</sup> In the twelfth month of the twenty-seventh year of the Guangxu period (1901), during a time when the provincial scholars of China were concerned with current affairs, many of them went to study at the universities in other countries.<sup>38</sup> In the twenty-eighth year of the Guangxu period, the General of Ili selected and appointed more than ten Sibe students to go to Almaty for study, and after they completed their education, they returned to China greatly contributing to Chinese-Russian diplomatic affairs. Among these students going abroad was Ujala Saracun 兀扎拉·薩拉春 (1885–1960), of the Plain White Banner Sibe camp, who wrote *Xibowen wenfa* 錫伯文文法 (Grammar of the Sibe language). After he returned to China in 1914, he and some progressive intellectuals in Sibe camp organized cultural groups such as Shangxue Association 尚學會 and Qicheng Association 期成會, initiated educational reform, and advocated for modern Western learning.<sup>39</sup> In 1924, Saracun became the leader of the Sibe camp, and in 1926 he took the post as consul of the Chinese embassy in Soviet Almaty (Kazakhstan), a position which he kept for four years. In 1936, he again took a post at the Chinese embassy in Andijian (Uzbekistan). Not only did Saracun have rich experience in such fields as education, society, politics, he also was among those who worked for the third Sibe script reform. This is the Sibe script which is currently used. In 1946, Saracun also founded the Manchu language newspaper, *Ziyou zhi sheng bao* 自由之聲報 (Voice of freedom) which was the previous incarnation of the current Sibe language newspaper, *Chabucha'er bao* 察布查爾報 (Cabcal newspaper). He even translated many works of foreign literature. Saracun made great contributions to the development of Sibe culture and education. By virtue of his overseas study experience, he later participated in politics, education and other activities. He was truly a person with great life experiences.

In fact, before the first People's Congress of Ningxi County, Ujala Saracun wrote the academic work, *Xibo minzu jianshi* 錫伯民族簡史 (A brief history of the Sibe) in 1953. He writes in the preface of this work, “In compiling a history of the Sibe, I carried on these following ideas. First, the history of the Sibe in Xinjiang can be divided into three historical periods. The first period would be from remote antiquity until the formation of the Qing dynasty; the second would be from the founding of the Qing dynasty to

<sup>37</sup> *Chabucha'er Xibo zizhiqu diyijie renmin daibiao dahui ti'an* 察布查爾錫伯自治區第一屆人民代表大會提案 [Proposal of the First People's Congress of the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous Region], March 18, 1954. Cabcal Xibe Autonomous County Archive.

<sup>38</sup> *Daqing Dezong shilu* 大清德宗實錄 [Daqing Dezong memoir], 492: 9–10.

<sup>39</sup> *Xibozu baike qianshu* 錫伯族百科全書 [Encyclopedia of the Sibe people], 321.

the migration of the Sibe to Xinjiang, and the third would be from the migration of the Sibe to Xinjiang until the present. Second, the name ‘Sibe’ is not a name from antiquity but rather is a name which has undergone several variations before arriving at this present name. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the history of many ethnic groups from China’s northeast, especially the history of Manchu, to understand Sibe history clearly. These thirty years I have collected many historical materials on the Sibe including such works as *Shiji* 史記 (Historical records), *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han dynasty), *Houhanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han dynasty), *Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui dynasty), *Tangshu* 唐書 (History of the Tang dynasty), *Wudaishi* 五代史 (History of the Five dynasties), *Shengwuji* 聖武記 (Saint military records), *Baqi Manzhou shizu tongpu* 八旗滿洲氏族通譜 (The comprehensive genealogy of the Manchu families of the Eight Banners), Chinese history textbooks, the Japanese *Tōyō rekishi* 東洋歷史 (History of East Asia), Iwakichi Inaba’s 稻葉岩吉 *Shinchō zensho* 清朝全史 (Complete history of the Qing dynasty), Russian language materials, old Sibe achieves, and conducted research on village songs, legends of Sibe elders, *Jinshi* 金史 (History of the Jin dynasty) and *Liaoshi* 遼史 (History of the Liao dynasty)”.<sup>40</sup> He considered that, “although the Sibe are from the same origin as the Manchu, after they broke off with the Manchus, they preserved their original language and became a new Sibe ethnic group. Ethnic groups of the past went along with all the uncertainties of the world and lived by the principle to change whenever necessary following the constant change of culture and economy. The ancient Sibe (Xianbei 鮮卑) came to Ili in 1765 to establish themselves as an ethnic unit once more. With over two-hundred years of history they became a new Sibe ethnic group”.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, Saracun believed that the Sibe and the Manchu came from the same origin. This is the same ethnic consciousness as found in the *Liubian jilüe* 柳邊紀略 (Brief records of willow borders) that the Manchu and the Sibe were the same ethnic group. Yet, the Sibe became a new ethnic group after migrating to Ili, and the ancient Sibe were the same as the Xianbei. He had some additional remarks on the origins of the Sibe people: “The Sibe language and script had a great advancement after they had moved to Ili. The Sibe language with a long history is from many Northeast ethnic groups who were termed Eastern Hu 東胡, such as the Sushen, Xianbei, Mohe, Fuyu, Jurchen, Jin... These were all passed down and greatly developed and were organized in the Qing. The

<sup>40</sup> UJALA 1953.

<sup>41</sup> UJALA 1953.

Sibe script is the same as the Manchu script”.<sup>42</sup> Evidently, the system by which the Jurchens came from the Sushen and Xianbei could be traced linearly; their reciprocal origins were very clear. Thus, the Sibe were considered to be the descendants of Xianbei, and the Sibe script is the same as the Manchu script. Besides, by saying that there are no fundamental differences between these two languages, Saracun admitted that the Sibe script which was reformed in 1947 could also be considered as Manchu language. After this he pointed out: “Even though in modern times the Han chauvinists of the Nationalist Party regarded Sibe as a “dead language”, as Sibe is the fundamental language of the Sibe people in Xinjiang, it has developed very fast in only the three short years since Xinjiang was liberated and the Xinjiang new Sibe language and culture has been led under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party and the People’s Government. With the help of our other ethnic group brothers, we have had even more rapid development. During this time the Sibe have compiled such works as *Xibo wenfa* 錫伯文法 (Sibe grammar) and *Xiaoxue keben* 小學課本 (Elementary school textbook). At present Ili publishes Sibe language newspapers and several varieties of magazines, and aspects of the articles such as the content and spirit have broken free of their decaying outer shells and are in the process of embracing progressive thought. Therefore, the Sibe is clearly a singular ethnic unit with an independent language and culture in the process of development. Moreover, it can also be said that the new Sibe of Xinjiang are the preservers of the Eastern Hu lineage”.<sup>43</sup> Saracun advocated that while the so-called “dead language” is referred to Manchu, not only did this language not become a dead language but rather became the language tool used by the new Sibe, an independent group, and continued to develop. He also emphasized that the new Sibe is only an ethnic group within a greater Manchu system, nothing more than a branch of the Jurchen. This is because later historians all considered that the ancestors of the Manchu were the Sushen, Yilou, Wuji, Mohe, and Jurchen.<sup>44</sup>

The Qing emperor Hong Taiji also recognized that the Sibe were the descendants of the Jurchen, for example: “Our country’s name was originally Manchu, Hada, Ula, Yehe, and Hoifa. Those unclear of this call us Jurchen. The Jurchens are the descendants of the *Sibei coo mergen*, but what relation do they have to those like us? Henceforth all those who call our original

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<sup>42</sup> UJALA 1953.

<sup>43</sup> UJALA 1953.

<sup>44</sup> *Manzu jianshi* 滿族簡史 [A brief history of the Manchu], 1.

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name of Manchu as Jurchen will be punished”.<sup>45</sup> The Japanese scholar Shimada Konomu 島田好 analyzed this, pointing out: “The Manchu are the same as the Jurchen, which is a clear fact. Yet, Hong Taiji denied this reality. He made it a taboo to use the Qing’s initial dynastic name of ‘Jin’ which was the same dynastic name used by the Jurchens in their twelfth century. Jin dynasty and therefore this dynastic name had to be altered. Yet, from this example we can see that both the Manchu and the Sibe are Jurchens”.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, Hong Taiji changed the dynastic name because he was afraid of the fact that the Jurchen’s “Jin dynasty” was the same name that the early Qing used. Of course, on the other hand it could not be ignored that Hong Taiji altered the dynastic name in order to avoid the meaning of the common people.

Ujala Saracun wrote on the cover of *Xibo minzu jianshi* 錫伯民族簡史 (A brief history of the Sibe), “consulted by secretary Lü, Prefectural Party Committee Department of Propaganda, March 23”. This refers to the fact that Saracun operated through the inspection of the Ili Prefectural Party Committee Department of Propaganda; his books were thus passed on for approval by the then Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County party secretary Lü Xingying 呂興銀, who held this position from March 1950 to August 1955. So, the original manuscript was left behind in the county archives. Because

<sup>45</sup> *Manwen yuandang* 滿文原檔 [Original Manchu archives], 9: 408. Manchu original text: (#juwan ilan de)(+tere inenggi:) han hendume musei gurun i gebu daci/ manju: hada. ula. yehe. hoifa kai: tere be ulhirakū niyalma jušen/ sembi: jušen serengge sibe coo mergen i hūncihin kai: tere/ muse de ai dalji: ereci julesi yaya niyalma musei gurun i /da manju sere gebu be hūla: jušen seme hūlaha de weile: Translation: (The thirteenth) (+On that day) the Khan said, “The original names of our nation Manchu: Hada, Ula, Yehe, and Hoifa. People who do not know this call us Jurchens. These ‘Jurchens’ are blood relatives of the Sibe coo mergen. What relationship are they with us? From this onwards everybody will call our nation Manchu. Those that call us Jurchens will be punished”. Another version in the *Manwen nei Guoshiyuan dang* 滿文內國史院檔 [Manchu archives of the Inner Historical Academy] of the First Historical Archives of China is as follows: tere inenggi sure han (#hendume) (+hese wasimbume) musei gurun i gebu daci manju. hada. ula. yehe. hoifa kai./ tere be ulhirakū niyalma jušen sembi: jušen serengge sibe coo mergen i hūncihin kai:/ tere muse de ai dalji: ereci julesi yaya niyalma musei gurun i da manju sere gebu be/ hūla: jušen seme hūlaha de weile sehe: Translation: On that day Sure Han (Heavenly Wisdom) (#said) (+gave down an edict:) “the original names of our nation was Manchu, Hada, Ula, Yehe, and Hoifa. People who do not know this call us Jurchens. These ‘Jurchens’ are blood relatives of the Sibe coo mergen. What relationship are they with us? From this onwards everybody will call our nation Manchu. Those that call us Jurchens will be punished”. On the Chinese text, see *Daqing Taizong shilu* 大清太宗實錄 [Daqing Taizong memoir], Chinese language (compiled in early Shunzhi period), 20: 46. On the research of the *coo mergen*, see ZHUANG SHENG 2014, 427–441.

<sup>46</sup> SHIMADA 1941, 1–2.

of a lack of historical materials we are unable to know what the results of this review for approval were. Nevertheless, on October 26, 1958, the Chinese Communist Party Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County Committee, together with the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County People's Committee and the Sibe Sub-division of the Investigation Team on Society and History of Xinjiang Ethnic Minority Group, gave the Sibe scholar Guan Xingcai 管興才 a message: "Now we are sending the historical parts of the compilations of history and gazetteer of the Sibe, *Chabucha'er Xibo zizhixian* 察布查爾錫伯自治縣 (Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County) and *Xibo minzu jianshi jianzhi hebian* 錫伯民族簡史簡志合編 (Compilations of Brief History and gazetteer of the Sibe) which are namely the first part of the first chapter, the second chapter and the forth chapter of the compilations of history and gazetteer. Please review them".<sup>47</sup> From this we can know that after Saracun submitted his manuscript, the county committee organized a special team to write two monographs. In the manuscript for soliciting advice, several important points on the review of the content were included. One of those was the question of "whether the ethnic origin was appropriate". In the end, it is impossible for us to know what advice Guan Xingcai had given them when solicited.

After the liberation of the entirety of China, there was a nationwide development of investigation and research work on the society and history of various ethnic minority groups. At the beginning of liberation, the major task was the work on ethnic classification. From the year 1956 until the present, this main task laid out the plan of conducting comprehensive and in-depth investigations and studies of the society and history of ethnic minorities, and on this foundation were compiled such publications as survey reports, "brief histories", "short gazetteers", and three kinds of collections of the minority problems about the general situations of the autonomous areas of each ethnic group.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in January and April of 1959, the Institute of Ethnic Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences published by mimeograph the first draft of two works: *Xibozu jianshi jianzhi hebian* 錫伯族簡史簡志合編 (Compilations of brief history and gazetteer of the Sibe) and *Chabucha'er Xibo zizhixian gaikuang* 察布查爾錫伯自治縣概況 (General survey of the Cabcal Sibe Autonomous County). Concerning the problem of ethnic origins, the former work writes: "The ethnic origins of the Sibe people so far cannot be systematically discussed due to a lack of historical materials. Even though the Chinese classics mention names such as Bobo 燮伯, Xibai 席百, Xibei

<sup>47</sup> This correspondence is in my collection.

<sup>48</sup> Su 1959, 41.

西北, and Xibo 錫伯, all these records are extremely brief. As for the Sibe view of their own ethnic origins, there is only a legend that they are descendants of the Xianbei”. Clearly from a historical point of view there is no way to prove historically the origins of the Sibe people. There is only the legend that their ancestors were the Xianbei people. From the information compiled in *Xibozu jianshi jianzhi hebian* 錫伯族簡史簡志合編 (Compilations of brief history and gazetteer of the Sibe), we can know that the authors did not consult *Xibo minzu jianshi* 錫伯民族簡史 (A brief history of the Sibe) written by Ujala Saracun. The referenced sources of these two works are also completely different.

In 1963, apart from the intention of preserving materials and keeping them from being lost, there was another more important goal which developed — this is the widespread solicitation of advice. Therefore, the Institute of Ethnic Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences officially published a first draft of the *Xibozu jianshi jianzhi hebian* 錫伯族簡史簡志合編 (Compilations of brief history and gazetteer of the Sibe), which was one of the series of books on the history and gazetteer of minorities. This work included more chapters than the first compilation, and the content was richer. Its discussion of the question of ethnic origins also differed from the previous work, and it gave two different hypotheses about this: “One explanation is that the Sibe and the Manchu are of the same origin, and that they are both the descendants of the Jurchen; another explanation says that they are the descendants of the ancient Xianbei, a branch of the Eastern Hu, and a legend circulates among the Sibe people that they are the descendants of the Xianbei people”.<sup>49</sup> Clearly this book synthesizes Saracun’s textual research and the conclusions of the first edition. Even though this book could not confirm these two ideas concerning the question of the ancestors of the Sibe, it emphasizes the idea that the name Sibe is a phonetic alteration of “Xianbei” and this name came from “Xianbei”. This argument is primarily based on the following research conclusion in He Qiutao’s 何秋濤 *Shuofang beisheng* 朔方備乘 (Prepared historical records on northern areas): “The pronunciation of Xianbei changed to become Sibe, who are the descendants of the Xianbei”.<sup>50</sup> We can see that He Qiutao’s conclusion was very thoughtless, as he did not provide any proof. His biography in the *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 (A draft history of the Qing dynasty) states:

<sup>49</sup> *Xibozu jianshi jianzhi hebian* 錫伯族簡史簡志合編 [Compilations of Brief History and Gazetteer of the Sibe] (draft), 6–7.

<sup>50</sup> HE, 17: 3.

He Qiutao's style name was Yuanchuan 願船. He was born in Guangze 光澤. In the twenty-fourth year of the Daoguang period (1844), he was a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations and received a position as director of the Board of Punishments. He paid close attention to managing state affairs. Thinking there should be a monograph on the Chinese-Russian border, he started writing six *juan* of *Beijiao huibian* 北徼彙編 (Compilations of northern borders). He later added and examined detailed illustrations, which began in the Han and Jin dynasties all the way until the Daoguang period. This increased the volume of the work to eighty *juan*. When the Xianfeng emperor read this work, he gave it the name *Shuofang beisheng* 朔方備乘 (Prepared historical records on northern areas). He Qiutao was then summoned for a meeting and promoted to be a counsellor, obtaining an unofficial position at the Maoqin Palace, but soon resigned for filial mourning. On the year of the change to the Tongzhi reign he passed away at the age of thirty-nine.<sup>51</sup>

He Qiutao was born in Guangze County, Fujian Province, which is considered part of the Northern Min 閩北 topolect region. As early as the Yongzheng period there were officials from Fujian and Guangdong who memorialized to the emperor on the phenomena whereby: "Whenever a personal record is submitted by memorial to the emperor, it is alone those from Fujian and Guangdong who use their local accents which are difficult to understand".<sup>52</sup> Such a situation did not improve during the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, it was possible that He Qiutao still used his local accent during the Daoguang period.

Just as Cheng Di 陳第 says, "Time includes both ancient and modern times; the earth has the south and north; characters are changing, and pronunciations are diverging".<sup>54</sup> Chinese characters are not phonetic alphabets and they are unable to show the different pronunciations of different time periods and areas, which is extremely difficult to understand ancient pronunciations based on the form of a Chinese character.<sup>55</sup> He Qiutao used the pronunciation of ancient Chinese characters and compared them with the nineteenth century pronunciation of "Sibe", but he ignored differences in the pronunciation of the past and the present. There have been many pro-

<sup>51</sup> ZHAO 1976, 13400.

<sup>52</sup> *Daqing Shizong shilu* 大清世宗實錄 [Daqing Shizong memoir], 72: 4-5. Besides, see TAKADA 1997.

<sup>53</sup> YU 2003, 269.

<sup>54</sup> CHEN 1988, 7.

<sup>55</sup> LUO and ZHOU 1958, 1.

found changes from the earliest three dynasties — the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, through the Sui-Tang period, and into modern times.<sup>56</sup> For this reason, there exist serious doubts about He Qiutao's hypothesis that "Xianbei" is the same as "Sibe" from phonological and etymological perspectives. According to the textual research of Paul Pelliot (1930), the Xianbei are not a Tungusic people, as have been generally believed, but are rather a kind of Turkic or Mongolian people.<sup>57</sup> In addition to this is the phenomena whereby the common endings found in the Xianbei language are also found in Turkic languages.<sup>58</sup>

At the end of the Jin dynasty there were also individuals who had "Xianbei" as their double surname in *Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan dynasty), and furthermore one of them became a general during the Mongolian period and held an office as military commissioner (*jiedushi* 節度使) of Luanzhou 灤州 in Hebei.<sup>59</sup> In the Phags-pa script this surname is pronounced "sen bi",<sup>60</sup> which is almost identical with the pronunciation of Chinese characters phonetically transferred from medieval Tibetan and Sogdian languages.<sup>61</sup> The pronunciation of this surname is also similar to that of "sien pi" in the language books written by the western missionaries of the early seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the pronunciation of "sien pi" and "sibe" are quite different though they have the same meaning. He Qiutao did not employ any phonological methodology in his consideration of this problem. From this the research concerning the question of the origins of the Sibe people has all come from the research conclusion of He Qiutao. Undoubtedly, there is no sufficient textual research backing these claims and there is no way for the evidence of historical materials to empirically prove this hypothesis.

## Conclusion

The Sibe has been an independent group since the sixteenth century when historical materials were recorded, and their migration to Ili did not change

<sup>56</sup> LUO 1949, 7.

<sup>57</sup> PELLIOU 1930, 21; GROUSSET 1996, 325.

<sup>58</sup> ZHUO 2010, 64; NIE 2001.

<sup>59</sup> SONG 1976, 165: 3885–3886.

<sup>60</sup> ZHAONASITU and YANG 1987, 50, 100; LUO and CAI 2004.

<sup>61</sup> LUO 1933, 111, 197; YOSHIDA 1994, 380–271. In these two works, there is only the pronunciation of "bei 碑", which is homophonic with "bei 卑". Besides, according to *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 [Annotation on *Shuowen Jiezi*], part. 9: "The word 'bei 碑' means solid rock, pronounced as 'bei 卑'".

<sup>62</sup> TRIGAULT 1957, 8–10, 118–119.

this. Other ethnic groups also recognized them as an independent group and during the Republic of China period they were designated as the Sibe ethnicity. Yet, in terms of the cause of cultural development, the Sibe and the Manchu were still a community, and as before, the Sibe still used Manchu language and script. To this end these Sibe cultural figures initiated reforms of the new Sibe script, but due to a variety of factors these attempts at reform were unsuccessful. As a recognized ethnic group, the Sibe supported the idea that they should have their own unique culture, and therefore they proposed a plan for the third reform of their written script. Even though this reform was comparatively more successful, this Sibe script was still based on Manchu. By the 1950s, Chinese national policy permitted various ethnic groups to formulate new written scripts that suited them. It was for this reason that the Sibe drafted a new Sibe script which was based on the Cyrillic alphabet, but later various experts were quite divided in their opinions, and this project also came to nothing.

Under the banner of the national ethnic district policy, the Sibe recognized that their history was a blank space, and this led them to compile their own ethnohistory with vigor. Some of the Sibe scholars who had studied abroad in Russia also participated in this compilation process, and on the issue of the origins of the Sibe people, these scholars and the specialists organized by governments to write their own ethnohistory of the Sibe each persisted in their own views. Ultimately only these government-organized specialists were able to publish their research results while these unofficial Sibe written ethnohistories remained confined away in the archive and were completely forgotten until now. Although the textual analysis of folk scholars contains some mistaken views, the accuracy of the argumentation of their ethnic origin was far superior to that of official publications.

From now on historians must consider a problem: although with the passage of time and space, the two nationalities — the Sibe and the Manchu became independent ethnic groups, fundamentally at a linguistic and cultural level, they are not independent. To stress their independence is only to go along with the narrative whereby they were artificially reconstructed to be two different ethnic groups.

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