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Philippe Gast

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Secularism in Muslim central Asian Republics : challenges from religious nationalism as linked to upheavals of new silk roads

by Philippe GAST

University of Le Havre Normandie

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“Secularism”, in French *laïcité* comes from the Latin *laicus*, a word meaning “he who is not a member of the clergy”. This concept echoes the idea of separation between religious institutions and the State. The State does not recognize nor subsidize any religious activity; the latter cannot intervene in the normative process of the state¹.

Thus defined, it can be deemed democratic² secularism (for instance in France, Japan, South Korea, etc.), entailing the separation between State and religion but in such a way that freedom of religion is guaranteed, as is equality among all religions. However, some systems can be secular without being democratic (the then USSR, China at the time of the cultural revolution, Vietnam, etc.). And some can be democratic but not secular, recognising freedom of religion but having a State religion (the UK, Denmark, etc.) with privileges in regard to others, thereby maintaining inequality (use of religious monuments free of charge; salaries paid to clergymen, etc.).

This separation between State and religion draws a distinction between legal rules, that come from the State, and moral rules which are of religious essence. Thus, the word ‘morality’ comes from the Latin word ‘*mores*’ that signifies ‘ways of life’ (*mœurs* in French) : we have the morality of our ways of life and the ways of life correspond to our morality. Moral rules are personal and facultative³ : we can change morality as we can change religion; sanctions - paradise, hell or reincarnation, etc.-, all have a metaphysical nature. By legal rules, by contrast, are collective and mandatory (sanctioned *hic et nunc*, positively, nay physically: fines, imprisonment, etc.).

The new Silk Roads are inspired by Xi Jin-Ping, president of China, who imagined the project ‘one belt one road’ developed⁴ towards central Asia, an ancient soviet zone⁵ that had been under Russian influence since the 17th century. There exists a competition between China and Russia in this region. China is attempting to place these nations under its influence by buying gas and petroleum pipelines. It would like to recreate its very old cultural influence as in the Middle Age when some Chinese cities (in Kirghizstan, etc.) were a prolongation of the Chinese province of Xinjiang (“*the new border*” in Chinese), going as far as wanting to re-

¹. As in the Japanese constitution of 3 Novembre 1956, article 20.

². With ‘people in power’, through a voting majority’s will and interest (or referendum on people’s initiative, a ‘*votation*’ in Switzerland), associated with liberty and equality, as Pericles theorised it. Democracy needs to respect *a minima* the majority’s interest and free will in elections, freedom of expression, equality of electors and candidacy in institutional and indirect aspects, necessary even for direct democracy...

³. It is essential to distinguish moral rules from juridical rules. Cf. Thomas of Aquino in his *Summa Theologica* (question 90, article 2) and Kant in his *Metaphysic of mores*: ‘law has the ability to constrain’ (I.D) ; ‘ethical law is the one that cannot be external’ (I.III)

⁴. China has built a railway and a highway between Chongqing, a large industrial city in central China to Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan.

⁵. Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan Tajikistan and, less directly, Mongolia.

educate and convert its Muslim Uyghur population⁶. In the other hand Russia, the former colonial power tries to reconquer these republics, with still between 15% and 20% Russians.

These two countries try to impose themselves in Central Asian Republics by massive investments in their markets, the latter lowly developed due to former soviet policies. These Muslim republics, mostly those that have a common border with Russia (Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan) and are under the pressure of possible Russian intervention, as in Crimea, strive to alleviate that risk by allying with China. Yet, opening up excessively to China, carries the risk, due to their low population, of falling from Charybdis to Scylla : Chinese investments are realised with movements of Chinese citizens into places where China purchases petroleum- or gas-extraction sites, a venture that some might call neocolonialism. The CSTO, a defence organisation of several ex-Soviet Republics without China, was established to tackle these problems from the military point of view. The SCO was set up to monitor economic plans and includes China, Russia, China, Central-Asian Republics and now India and Pakistan. Together, the CSTO and the SCO maintain a balance. An Eurasian Economic Community created in 2014, the 29 th of may that became Union in 2015 including: Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan, Tajikistan, tries to balance Chinese influence, but with difficulty..

A religious dimension, however, clearly exists. These Muslim countries of central Asia are secular (due to their history) but Islamic nationalisms are equally at work, particularly in ‘West-Asian’ Turkey under President Erdoğan power, as they share the cultural linguistic link of Turkish languages (except for Tajik, of Persian origin) and a religious origin with Shiite Iran and with Taliban Afghanistan, and also with Wahabi Saudi Arabia and the latter’s petrodollars.

And so, three main poles of influence exist: the Russian-Orthodox pole, the Sino-Confucian pole and the Islamist pole (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia that finance many mosques); maybe a fourth pole with American influence through the creation of universities, with a Protestant influence.

How then are these secular Muslim republics to resist these various religious, cultural and economic pressures ? The situation of the Muslim republics of central Asia, that are secular and could be models for other Muslim countries (I) is a context in which the New Silk Roads could risk a challenge to this secularism (II)

I - Secularism in the Muslim republics of Central Asia : an exception in the Muslim world

We will study first the position of the *Koran* in regard to secularism (A) and then how some Muslim republics became secular (B).

A) Secularism and the *Koran*

Many suras are used in the Muslim world as legal ones but in reality only few of them are juridical and positively sanctioned.

⁶. See *Le Figaro*, 12/10/2018, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/10/11/01003-20181011ARTFIG00051-la-chine-legalise-les-camps-de-reeducation-pour-ouigours.php>. See *Le monde*, 31/08/2018) : one million ouigours are said to be locked up : <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/10/11/01003-20181011ARTFIG00051-la-chine-legalise-les-camps-de-reeducation-pour-ouigours.php>. See *Libération*, 10/10/2018) : where China recognize 800.000 prisoners https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/10/14/ouighours-la-chine-reconnait-des-camps-pour-eduquer_1685316.

An example of a positive, juridical rule is the death sentence for polytheists: « After sacred months, kill the polytheists wherever you find them (...) » (S.9 : v.5 called ‘*saber*’, same meaning as S.4 : 89)⁷. Thus, a literary and juridical interpretation of the *Koran* is incompatible with democracy both as to public-law fundamentals (a) and to positive private-law rules (b).

a) the *sharia* as juridical rules, that one should better call *fikh*⁸, is an ideological inegalitarian system that rejects the sovereignty of the people to the benefit of that of God⁹ (and of the *Ulemas*). Muhammad, after winning the battle against the Meccas, became a monarch and a cousin of the 3rd Othman caliph, Mu’âwiya, and instituted the Umayyad dynasty. The monarchic principal was imposed. Only Karijites kept the elective principle¹⁰.

b) in regard to private law rules, the *Koran* contains few rules with positive, juridical sanctions. Most are moral rules (with metaphysic sanction as ‘hell’ for the apostate, for example S.4 : v.115). However, some general positive sanctions appear for the Thief (“so the thief must be hand-cut - S.5 : v.38)^{11&12)} and for the unfaithful (“After sacred months, kill the polytheists wherever you find them”, *op. cit.*). Those who fight against Islam must be killed and crucified or their limbs will be cut (S.5 : v.33).

Yet, some positive rules can be identified that are liberticidal (i) and other discriminating (ii) in opposition to democracy, if there is a juridical interpretation.

i) some rules are liberticidal because they undermine sexual freedom. The adulterous woman must be enclosed until death (S.4 : v. 15) but this rule is difficult to apply as it is not precise enough: if a woman is violated, is she adultery ? The woman suspected of infidelity must be beaten (S.4 : v.34). Women do not have the choice of their husband (this affects private life) mostly if he is not Muslim « *don’t marry your daughters to polytheists* » (S.2 : v.221). As there is no positive sanction, this is a moral rule, but in many Muslim countries it became a juridical rule. As to the headscarf, « *o prophet, tell your wives, daughters and believer’s wives to be covered by their vale [djilbab= cloth]* » (S.33 : v. 159). Again, this is a moral rule as there is no positive sanction; yet, in Iran or Afghanistan, women without headscarf (*chador* or *burqa*) are beaten.

ii) the *Koran* also contains several discriminations which, if interpreted juridically, violate democratic principles. i/ Sexual discrimination, as we saw about women adultery (men are beaten not put to death – S.24 : v.2-), women’s inheritance is half that of the men (S.4 : v.11)¹³ to due being sexually submitted to men¹⁴. Yet, these rules, carrying no positive sanctions, are moral ones. ii/ A religious discrimination tax appears in *Koran* as a juridical rule in regard to Christians and Jews qualified as *dhimmi*: « *fight them until they pay directly*

⁷. *The holy Koran*, Masson’s translation, Gallimard, La Pléiade, Paris, 1967.

⁸. The word *sharia*, meaning ‘the way to the source’ differs from *fikh*, meaning ‘law’. This linguistic difference leads precisely to the fact that *sharia* means moral rules and *fikh* juridical rules. A confusion thus makes Islamists, as Muslim theologian Al Ajami says : « the Muslim law must be distinguished from the *sharia* » . See *What really says Coran* (ed. SRBS, Paris 2008, page 7, and page 9, note 4)

⁹. « the One to whom pertains royalty of skies and earth » (S.25 :v.2)

¹⁰. See Mircea Eliade, *History of religious ideas and beliefs*, Paris, Payot, 1978, 3t., see pp. 86, 90, 91 and 92.

¹¹. « Cut the hand of the thief; that will be the retribution for what they have done, a God’s punishment ».

¹². God forgives the one who repents (S.5: v.39) ... more moral than juridical.

¹³. This gender-discrimination comes from the idea that « men have authority upon women by virtue of the preference that God cast upon them » (S.4 :v. 34).

¹⁴. Here, « your wives are for you fields for ploughing; go to the field whenever you want » (S.2 : v. 223) « men have (...) pre-eminence upon them (S.2:v. 228) and can repudiate them unilaterally (S.2 : v. 230, 241).

the tribute » (S.9 : v.29). iii/ A social discrimination through the recognition of slavery in several verses: the « *Law of Talion is prescribed in case of murder : free man for free man, slave for slave* » (S.2 : v.178) ; « *a Muslim slave is better than a polytheist one* » (S.2 : v.221); « *be good (...) toward your slaves* » (S.4 : v. 36). There are also many references to women slaves (S.4 : v. 3 – as takes of war –, 36 ; S.24 : v. 58, “take women as slaves” S.33 : v.52) ; and also the marriage of slaves (S.24 : v.32).

The question boils down to this. Either one interprets the Koran juridically, which yields to an incompatibility with democratic public order (violating equality and liberties). Or one interprets the Koran morally or spiritually, and there is no problem of compatibility because morality is of free application in private life as are the 5 pillars of Islam¹⁵, not in opposition to it¹⁶. Furthermore, the historical evolution shows that some Muslim countries can be secular.

B) Muslim countries formerly part of the USSR

The long-dating Muslim republics of the Russian empire that became the USSR¹⁷ have been *de facto* secular due to an anti-religious communist ideology, for which religion is ‘the opium of the people’ (Marx) or made to ‘contain slaves’ revolt’ (Nietzsche).

Traditionally, central Asian republics practice a moderate Islam among nomads. Under Russian and Soviet influence, Islam still stood moderate. After independence, they became systems claiming democracy, with elections, equality and various private liberties, among which secularism

The Constitution of Kazakhstan proclaims itself as democratic, secular (article 1). It proclaims freedom of consciousness (art. 22-1), no discrimination in regard to personal attitude toward religion (a. 14) which can be secret (a. 19). It forbids religious ‘enmity’ and religious propaganda destined to undermine the constitution (a. 20) and control of foreign religious associations (a. 5-5)¹⁸.

The Constitution of Kirghizstan proclaims also to be democratic and secular, to respect human rights and personal freedoms, to forbid any discrimination based on ‘beliefs’ (a. 16-2). Freedom of religion is guaranteed and no restriction can be put upon religious choice (a. 20). Freedom of expression is also guaranteed, but religious hatred is forbidden (a. 31). Religious associations do not have the right to engage in politics or express religious hatred (a. 4). Secularity is very precise: ‘*religion and all cults shall be separated from the state (...) the involvement of religious associations and ministers of religion in the activity of state authorities shall be prohibited*’ (a. 7). This is a remarkable definition, as in the Japanese Constitution, but no in the French one, where secularism is not defined.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan proclaims also to be democratic and secular (a.1), with equality and no religious discrimination (a. 19); freedom of opinion and expression (a. 28), and of association (a. 30), but forbids religious hatred and politic parties based on religious principles (a. 29).

¹⁵. Profession of faith, five prayers a day, Ramadan, donation, pilgrimage to Mecca.

¹⁶. As explicitly written « *anyone who makes jihad, fights against his own soul [ego]*» (S.29: v. 6).

¹⁷. See <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e414>.

¹⁸. See Abdрахманов, *Islam au Kazakhstan* :

https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/817205/filename/These_-_Abdrakhmanov.pdf.

The Constitution of Tajikistan proclaims to be democratic and secular (a. 1), adding that no (religious) ideology can be recognized as ‘state ideology’; religious organizations will be separated from the state, and will not be able to interfere into state affairs nor to develop religious hatred (a. 18). The state guarantees individual (religious) freedoms (a. 17): anyone is free to determine himself toward religion, individually, collectively or without practice (a. 26). Freedom of expression is also guaranteed, but not if there is religious hatred (a. 30).

The Constitution of Uzbekistan proclaims itself as democratic (a. 1); secularism does not appear explicitly, contrary to previous countries, but it forbids any (religious) state ideology (a. 12). It proclaims freedom and equality, no religious discrimination (a. 18), freedom of thought, of speech, of belief (a. 29) and consciousness (a. 30), and the right to practice or not a religion: imposing a religion is forbidden (a. 31); freedom of (religious) association is guaranteed (a. 34).

As can be seen, central Asian republics are secular, contrary to most Muslim states (except Turkey, secular, maybe not for). Freedom of religion is accepted more (Tunisia, Morocco) or less (Saudi Arabia, Iran). Central Asian republics are really a model for the other Muslim peoples that want modernity, with liberty and equality. But this secular model seems challenged by the changes that occur around the New Silk Roads.

II - Secularism challenged by religious nationalism linked to changes around the New Silk Roads

During the antiquity, the Silk Road was a way of communication , commercial but also pathway for the exchange of ideas, among which religious ones.. Buddhism thus reached Afghanistan (Buddhas of Bamiyan, destroyed by the Talibans) and spread to China as shown by the 7th century Chinese monk Xuanzang, who brought 600 Sanskrit manuscripts from India to China and translated them into Chinese. Peaceful exchanges then. In most cases, however, the Silk Roads proved an invasion paths for Muslims into India (Moghols) or Turks (Constantinople). The New Silk Road presents itself as an economic project (A) but concealing it seems a politico-religious ambition that could threaten the secularity of Muslim central Asian republics (B) .

A) The new Silk Road, ‘one belt, one road’, Chinese neo-colonialism?

The official goal of the NSR is to facilitate international exchange, creating ‘Win-Win’¹⁹ infrastructures (roads, harbours, airports) that enable gas and oil to reach China and, reciprocally, Chinese products to spread West, mostly to Europe as a member of the WTO since 2001²⁰. Chinese products represent 16% imports by Europe²¹. China’s GDP has grown in the double-digits in the last twenty years, making the Chinese economy the second in the

¹⁹. But outside democratic values, where the (majority’s) general interest can manifest itself through free elections and free critics.

²⁰. But still without respecting the rules of the WTO as its economy is planned and subsidized (ceramic, aluminium, etc) and not yet liberal (see Richard Hault, *Le Figaro*, 1/1/2018. https://www.lesechos.fr/01/01/2018/lesechos.fr/0301073040549_commerce---le-systeme-economique-chinois-dans-le-viseur-de-bruxelles.htm).

²¹. In 2017, \$ 2300 bil. of exportations and 1800 of importations (\$ 500 bil. of commercial benefit), of which \$ 372 bil. of exportation to the EU (and \$ 244 bil. of importations). <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CN/commerce-exterieur>

world with financial reserves of 3 118 billion dollars (July 2018²²) for investments²³. These reserves enabled China to create the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) in 2015²⁴, in which Beijing holds over 30% of the capital²⁵. In the AIIB statutes, China imposed (art. 25)²⁶ that the governing Board be constituted of nine local members and three external members, that the president be local (art. 29) and that the AIIB headquarters be in Beijing (art. 32). Clearly, China created a financial instrument in which she dominates and that enables her industrial production to be exported widely. Central Asia thus appears to be the Chinese “new border” or “*xin jiang*”... As China’s constitution proclaims to be a ‘*popular democratic dictatorship*’ (sic)²⁷ for the benefit of a minority in power, with no popular expression by referendum²⁸ nor by free elections as the system has but one single party) and public liberties are monitored, namely freedom of association, political expression and the right to strike.

Private life is freer nowadays²⁹ but through social-monitoring of a *social card*. This contains a number of points that is reduced with each offense³⁰. Pervasive video surveillance is ensured with facial recognition. Hence, the 5G-system of Huawei is so sustained by the regime and at the international level and many western countries counter this monitoring-oversight system. Similar evolutions exist elsewhere, for instance some GAFAs manipulating personal data, including at the time of elections (2016 in the USA and in the Brexit referendum³¹). Chinese neo-colonialism manifests itself through the new Silk Road, by securing local oligarchies³² in order to get access to public markets, thereby creating huge liabilities to obtain concessions (the British did the same against China for Hong Kong). As the recent example is the Sri-Lankan harbour of Hambantota. In 1997, the Sri-Lankan government gave China the concession of this harbour for 99 years with a 15.000 ha zone (a large area for such a small island) as repayment to China of 1,4 billion dollars necessary to build the harbour. Note that experts have from the onset denied the profitability of the harbour, suggesting that corruption touched the family heading Sri Lanka at the time of the signature of the contract³³.

²². See in *Capital*, 7/08/2018 : <https://www.capital.fr/entreprises-marches/chine-hausse-inattendue-des-reserves-de-change-1301981>.

²³. But China violates in particular liberal rules for foreign investments that have to make joint-ventures with Chinese companies, and that cannot own more than 49% of the capital. See part I.8 of the report of EU commission 20/12/2017 http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2017/december/tradoc_156474.pdf.

²⁴. See Gresillon in *Le Temps*, 27/10/.2014), <https://www.letemps.ch/economie/chine-va-lancer-banque-asiatique-dinvestissement>.

²⁵. See <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/members.aspx>, See *Le Monde*, 24/10/2014. http://www.lemonde.fr/asia-pacifique/article/2014/10/24/pekin-signe-avec-20-pays-pour-etablir-une-banque-regionale-en-asie_4511772_3216.html

²⁶. https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/basic-documents/_download/articles-of-agreement/basic_document_french_bank_articles_of_agreement.pdf

²⁷. See preamble, paragraph 10, modified by 4th amendment *alinea* 18, 14 march 2004: notice the new word for ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.

²⁸. The slogan ‘win-win’ proclaimed for the ‘belt and road’ project concerns really oligarchies in power in China and in the bribed countries. Referendum by citizens’ initiative is the only instrument against corruptions of oligarchies, as Switzerland has shown for centuries.

²⁹. In most authoritarian states today (Russia, China, Turkey, etc), a certain freedom in private life is tolerated by powers, as long as individuals do not contest the regime.

³⁰. See Elsa Trujillo, *Le Figaro*, 27 dec. 2017, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/secteur/high-tech/2017/12/27/32001-20171227ARTFIG00197-la-chine-met-en-place-un-systeme-de-notation-de-ses-citoyens-pour-2020.php>

³¹. See *Le Monde*, 22 March. 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2018/03/22/ce-qu-il-faut-savoir-sur-cambridge-analytica-la-societe-au-c-ur-du-scandale-facebook_5274804_4408996.html

³². See <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/comment-la-chine-fait-main-basse-sur-le-sri-lanka>

³³. <https://www.epochtimes.fr/sri-lankais-protestent-contre-concession-gouvernement-a-chine-dun-important-port-de-pays-492072.html>. It is easy for an authoritarian government to give a bribe to a corrupted one in a fiscal heaven (Singapore for example) in exchange of a concession.

The New Silk Roads appears to be a Chinese expansion, indeed a neo-colonialist one, with large delocalisation of Chinese workers (5.000 Chinese in Kazakhstan, with a total flux of up to 100 000 in one year, for example in 2008)³⁴. But other factors than economic ones are active in Central Asia : religious factors (B).

B) Politico- religious ambitions threat secularism in central Asian Muslim republics

Four poles of religious influence are present in central Asia : Russian-orthodox (a), Sino-Confucian (b), islamist (c) and, less important, Americano-evangelist (d)

a) the Russian-orthodox pole has been present in this region since the Russian empire, from around the 17th century³⁵ and still existed after independence at the collapse of the USSR. Between 15% and 20% of the population of these republics are Russian-orthodox. V. Putin is very close to the patriarch of Moscow, Kirill³⁶. Both were trained under the soviet system and at the time of universalist (international) communism and nationalist hegemony. Kirill ambitions to be the ‘Pope’ of orthodoxy³⁷ even against the main patriarch ‘primus inter pares’ of Orthodoxy³⁸ who recognised the new patriarch of Ukraine³⁹. Putin envisions to recreate the Russian Empire (annexing Georgia’s northern Ossetia, then Crimea, probably Ukrainian Donbas; refusing Chechenia’s independence is the prove of it). Wherever lives a Russian minority, Putin wishes it to “return” to Russia (as Germany in the 1930s did of German-speakers of Alsace, etc).

This suggests an objective common view between Putin and Kirill, in contradiction with Russian constitutional secularism. And an indication that, should Kazakhstan one day contest Putin’s politics, there might be a risk that Russian minority in the north claim (or be said by the Russians to claim re-attachment to Russia (as with the Donbas population).

b) As for the Sino-Confucian pole⁴⁰, recently, China opened a 5th Confucius institute in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in the Ablai Khan University in relation with the ‘one-belt-one-road’⁴¹ initiative. The link is clear between the new Silk Road and the Chinese purpose to create in central Asia an ideological instrument to extend Chinese culture and religion

³⁴. See S. Peyrouse, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cepi/sites/sciencespo.fr.cepri/files/etude148.pdf>, Cahiers du CERI n° 148, Septembre 2008.

³⁵. Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan since the 3rd c. have had Christian Nestorian communities. Apostles Thomas and Matthew are said to have reached these regions. These communities were almost erased by conversion to Islam of Turcoman, but some may have reappeared in the 17th c., with the expansion of Russian Empire.

³⁶. See Costil in *La Croix*, 19/3/2018) <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Orthodoxie/Presidentielle-russe-Poutine-beneficie-soutien-Patriarcat-Moscou-2018-03-19-1200922064>

³⁷. <https://www.la-croix.com/Culture/TV-Radio/Le-patriarche-Kirill-lautre-voix-Russie-2018-09-04-1200966059>

³⁸. See Lieven in *La Croix* (3/12/2017) <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Orthodoxie/Le-patriarche-Kirill-convoque-lorthodoxie-mondiale-Moscou-2017-12-03-1200896659>

³⁹. See Vilarene, in *La Croix* (19/3/2018) <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Orthodoxie/Presidentielle-russe-Poutine-beneficie-soutien-Patriarcat-Moscou-2018-03-19-1200922064>. See also in *La Croix* (10/11/2018) based on an AFP despatch, <https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Le-Patriarcat-Constantinople-reconnait-Eglise-orthodoxe-independante-Ukraine-2018-10-11-1300975366>.

⁴⁰. The creation by China of numerous ‘Confucius’ cultural centres relates to the cultural and religious nationalist purpose. China did not promote Buddhist culture and philosophy although it has been the dominant practiced religion in China...

⁴¹. See http://french.hanban.org/article/2017-04/25/content_682471.htm

(Confucius was the founder of the traditional Chinese religion). These Confucius institutes monitor eight teaching centres and have already trained 8.500 students in this country⁴².

Confucius institutes also exist in Kirghizstan, with the same purpose: to spread the Chinese culture (and then Chinese religion). Most recently, such an Institute was created on 26th December 2016, in Jalal Abad, an ancient city of the old Silk Road, not a random location⁴³. There are in total four Confucius institutes in Kirghizstan⁴⁴. The situation in the rest of the region is the following. In Uzbekistan, there are also two Confucius institutes, one in Samarkand and another in Tashkent, totalling 4000 students⁴⁵. In Tajikistan, there has been a Confucius institute for ten years, with 4000 students trained each year⁴⁶. There is none, yet, in Turkmenistan⁴⁷, but probably soon, through the development of the SCO.

This Chinese ‘soft power’ spreads along the Chinese language (for business) and Chinese culture (martial arts, acupuncture, Chinese medicine related to Taoism etc.), in itself a good thing as traditional Chinese culture is rich and of great quality. But behind these Confucius institutes, however, there occurs also a capturing of information about these host-countries⁴⁸.

Does this suggests a return Taoism, against communism⁴⁹ ? Is Confucianism back, as President Hu Jintao suggested in 2005, after creating many Confucius institutes all over the world⁵⁰ ? Possibly. If so, however, not *a priori* in the ancient sense of humanistic values (harmony, mastering passions⁵¹ by study, education, a certain equality of access to education and administrative jobs, according to competence - not to hereditary rules- etc.). Rather in the sense of respect toward the people, the weakest (the elderly, the poor) and, above all, respect of authorities (family, ancestors)⁵² and mostly in the sense of obeying state authority, which are all also Confucianist values. The diversion of Confucianism is easily swept towards imperialism, as in the Chinese secular imperial tradition ...

In reality, Taoism in a general way and Confucianism (or political Taoism) a particular way, with its aspiration to harmony (in the family, the society, the Sky-and-Earth where the Emperor balances out both with his good morality). The latter would be closer to modern ecological ideas, with a circular economy, recycling garbage, non-polluting energies, short distribution circuits, balanced social relations with participative democracy than to an

⁴². See http://french.hanban.org/article/2017-06/29/content_691810.htm

⁴³. See http://french.hanban.org/article/2017-01/20/content_671450.htm

⁴⁴. See <http://fr.cctv.com/2016/11/03/ARTIWYF4CJz7hmslKh0JDNg3161103.shtml>

⁴⁵. See http://french.hanban.org/article/2016-12/09/content_667786.htm

⁴⁶. See <https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/archives/diplomacy/pt20180729151525.html>

⁴⁷. See <https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/archives/diplomacy/pt20180729151525.html>

⁴⁸. <https://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/archives/diplomacy/pt20180729151525.html>

⁴⁹. See in *Le Nouvel Economiste* (8/12/2015) <https://www.lenouveleconomiste.fr/le-retour-au-confucianisme-28330/>

⁵⁰. See Puig, July 2012), “The contemporary influence of confucianism in chinese politic”, at http://www.centreasia.eu/sites/default/files/publications_pdf/note_linfluence_contemporaine_du_confucianisme_dans_la_politique_chinoise_1.pdf

⁵¹. In this, Confucianism is close to Greek antique morality as taught by Aristotle in *The politics* (chap. 2) where he talks about those who have the political intelligence and can master their passions by using their reason, then to master others : those who, like animals, ar driven by their bodily passions and obey them ... This objective of mastering passions is almost universal : in Buddhism, Christianity, Islam....

⁵². See Mencius (Meng Zeu), Book 1, chap.1 of *The four books* tr. Couvreur isbn n°957-546-075-8 ; Taipei, Taiwan 1972 p.308).

imperialistic economic system where national or multinational companies impose their rules onto politics, only motivated by oligarchic interests, etc.⁵³

c) The islamist pole is partly Turkish,⁵⁴ Iranian and Saudi. It finances many mosques and madrasas. Since the independence of Central Asian Muslim republics, a large number of mosques have been built. Their architectural style shows frequently, and clearly so, the origin of the funding: either Turkish (the main Mosque of Bishkek, for example), or Saudi style⁵⁵ etc.

The link with Turkey is obvious. These Republics are members of an international organisation created on 12 July 1993 by the Turkish government, called TURKSOY⁵⁶ and based in Ankara. It is named after “Turk” and “soy” or “ancestor”, thereby grouping peoples with a Turkish origin – at least by the language. The TURKSOY has a cultural purpose and is related to UNESCO (Paris agreement of 4 April 1996)⁵⁷. Such an organisation cannot balance out Chinese economic power through the new Silk Road. Mostly so, as these Republics have understood early on the danger of opening their borders to Islamist religious organisations. Hence the numerous restrictions imposed onto these religious organisations.

d) As for the American-evangelist pole, some protestant cults exist in the region in the form of evangelist groups. These proclaim a primary reading of the Jewish *Torah*, a juridical one – as there are many juridical rules in *Torah* -, as Islamists do. Attempts to penetrate this region are made through people who are in a weak situation. Recent independence, as in Central Asia, often entails poverty or low education, as in Brazil for President Bolsonaro, in Africa (Rwanda), who feel drawn to puritans. The USA have created American universities in these countries, for example the AUCA in Bishkek, that are open doors to these organisations. Yet, at the moment, this influence in central Asian countries is low⁵⁸.

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The best that these Republics could do in order to protect their democratic secularism, would be to impose reciprocity in exchanges. At present, China invests everywhere but does not accept that foreigners own more than 49% of the capital of a company. It is virtually impossible for a person to own a building in China. Yet, the most efficient would be to create a specific local organization including all these Muslim secular countries, as a regional community, or better still a confederation. The question as Europe suggests is a tricky one.

Philippe GAST
Lecturer at Normandy /Le havre university
Ancient barrister at Paris Court

⁵³. See China's project of the world's largest farm with 100 000 cows ! see Joagri (10/11/2017) at <http://www.agriavis.com/news-9678-la+chine+construit+la+plus+grande+ferme+du+monde%25E2%2580%25A6+91+millions+d%25E2%2580%2599hectares+.html>.

⁵⁴. See <https://www.trt.net.tr/francais/turquie/2018/08/21/deux-types-de-diplomatie-publique-en-asie-centrale-la-turquie-et-la-chine-1033851>

⁵⁵. See Abdrakhmanov's doctoral thesis, *op. cit.*, p. 284...

⁵⁶. *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷. See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000103511>

⁵⁸. As Abdrakhmanov puts it, *op. cit.*