From the Margins to the Centre: The Uyghur Challenge in Beijing*

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ABSTRACT Recent literature on Uyghur identity in China makes clear that Uyghurs today not only have perceptions and narratives relating to their identity which challenge official ones, but also that these are expressed publicly in literature, art and everyday practice. However, to date this agency has been highlighted only in the context of the Uyghurs' native-place, Xinjiang, while the little that has been written on representations of Uyghur identity in nationally distributed media and culture suggests that Uyghurs are still completely marginalized and voiceless. This article challenges this view by shifting the focus to Uyghurs who migrated to Beijing and by showing that they have been able to achieve an independent public voice that extends not only beyond Xinjiang but also beyond China. The article explores the role that Uyghur artists and entrepreneurs, and Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing play in challenging the orthodox representations of Uyghur identity in China and argues that although there are only a few thousand Uyghurs in the city they play a significant role in the negotiation of Uyghur identity, representation and nationalism. The article also challenges the widely held view that internal migrants in China are silent and politically powerless.

"It would be an extremely odd and peculiar history of this part of the twentieth century if we were not to say that the most profound cultural revolution has come about as a consequence of the margins coming into representation – in art, in painting, in film, in music, in literature, in the modern arts everywhere, in politics, and in social life generally. Our lives have been transformed by the struggle of the margins to come into representation. Not just to be placed by the regime of some other, or imperializing eye but to reclaim some form of representation for themselves … [and] the means to speak for themselves for the first time."[1]

In the last decade there has been a significant increase in studies focusing on China's ethnic minorities, their identities, and the processes involved in the definition, construction and representation of these identities. A large body of literature makes clear that although the state plays a dominant role in the definition and representation of ethnic identities in China, ethnicity is a negotiated process and minorities are active agents in the negotiation of their ethnic identities.[2] Several studies have focused

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1. Stuart Hall, "The local and the global: globalization and ethnicity," in Anthony D. King (ed.), *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), p. 34.

2. See, for instance, Stevan Harrell, "Ethnicity, local interests, and the state: Yi communities in south-west China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (1990), pp. 515–548; Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1991); Ralph A. Litzinger, "Making histories: contending conceptions of the Yao past," in Stevan Harrell

on the Uyghurs (Weiwu'erzu), one of the most politically sensitive minorities among which there exists a strong aspiration to achieve independence from China.[3] Some of these studies have shown that Uyghurs today not only have perceptions relating to their identity which challenge official ones, but also that these are expressed publicly in literature, art, and everyday practice and discourse.[4] However, most of the recent literature about Uyghur identity and agency has limited its focus to Xinjiang. The little that has been written on representations of Uyghur identity in nationally distributed media and culture combined with studies of other minorities in this sphere suggest that beyond local contexts ethnic minorities in China, including the Uyghurs, lack agency and are still marginalized and voiceless.[5]

This article examines some of the efforts made by the Uyghurs to reconstruct and express their ethnic identity, while exploring their sensibilities, intentions and actions in the realm of culture. The article,

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(ed.), *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 117–139; Melissa J. Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1996).

3. In the 20th century Uyghurs have twice achieved a short-lived political independence from China, once in 1933–34, with the establishment of the Turkish Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, and in 1944 with the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic which existed until 1949. For studies of this period, see Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang 1944–1949* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1990); David D. Wang, *Under the Soviet Shadow: The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang 1944–1949* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999).

4. See, for instance, Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Joanne Smith, "Four generations of Uyghurs: the shift towards ethno-political ideologies among Xinjiang's youth," *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2 (2000), pp. 195–224; Gardner Bovingdon, "The not-so-silent majority: Uyghur resistance to Han rule in Xinjiang," *Modern China*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2002), pp. 39–78; Rachel Harris, "Cassettes, bazaars, and saving the nation: the Uyghur music industry in Xinjiang, China," in Timothy Craig and Richard King (eds.), *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001), pp. 265–283; Cristina Cesaro, "Consuming identities: food and resistance among the Uyghur in contemporary Xinjiang," *Inner Asia*, No. 2(2000), pp. 225–238.

5. See Paul Clark, "Ethnic minorities in Chinese films: cinema and the exotic," *East-West Film Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1987), pp. 15–32; Kam Louie, "Masculinities and minorities: alienation in *Strange Tales from Strange Lands*," *The China Quarterly*, No. 132 (1992), pp. 1119–35; Dru Gladney, "Representing nationality in China: refiguring majority/minority identities," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1994), pp. 92–123, and "Tian Zhuangzhuang, the fifth generation, and minorities film in China," *Public Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1995), pp. 161–175; Esther Yau, "Is China the end of hermeneutics?; or political and cultural usage of non-Han women in mainland Chinese films," in Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice R. Welsch (eds.), *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 280–292; Yingjin Zhang, "From 'minority film' to 'minority discourse': questions of nationhood and ethnicity in Chinese cinema," in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 81–104. References to Uyghurs are found in Gladney, "Representing nationality in China," pp. 102, 114–15, and in Clark, "Ethnic minorities in Chinese films," pp. 23–24. Gladney's statement in his 1995 article that in minority films "[minorities] have no 'voice,' literal or otherwise, of their own" (p. 170), and Zhang's observation that "minority people hardly if ever occupy the subject position in minority films" (p. 90), are representative of the common thesis in this body of literature.

however, shifts the focus from Xinjiang thousands of kilometres eastward to Beijing, and to Uyghurs who migrated to the city in the last decade, mainly artists, businesspeople, students and other intellectuals. The main aim of this article is to challenge the general view that Uyghurs and ethnic minorities in general are silent in the national public sphere in China. The discussion will show that Uyghurs in Beijing have been able to achieve an independent public voice that often challenges their orthodox representation in nationally distributed culture and media, a voice that extends not only beyond Xinjiang but also beyond China. Drawing upon fieldwork conducted in Beijing in April–August 1995, March–June 1996 and February 2001, including interviews and participant-observation, as well as using sources such as television programmes, CDs of popular music, internet, and local newspapers and magazines, this article explores the cultural and artistic activity of Uyghurs who migrated to Beijing and the implications of this activity for Uyghurs' relationship with Han Chinese and the Chinese state. I contend that although there are only a few thousand Uyghurs in Beijing,[6] they are playing a significant role in the negotiation of Uyghur identity, representation and nationalism.

This study is also relevant to the growing body of literature on internal migration in China. The movement of massive numbers of people since the beginning of reforms from one region to another has resulted in the formation of migrant enclaves based on common native place within China's metropolises. Several studies have suggested that not only do migrants often maintain their native place identity but in some cases such identities may become equivalent to ethnicities.[7] However, most of this research concerns different Han groups and the rural–urban dualism while surprisingly little attention has been paid to migrants belonging to national minorities. Thus, while many studies have mentioned that Beijing has Uyghur migrants and two "Xinjiang Villages" (now demolished), only a few have studied the Uyghur community in the city.[8] This article

6. There is no official figure for how many Uyghurs live today in Beijing. Uyghurs with whom I spoke estimated that there are over ten thousand.

7. For studies of migrant communities in Beijing, see, for instance, Laurence J. C. Ma and Biao Xiang, "Native place, migration and the emergence of peasant enclaves in Beijing," *The China Quarterly*, No. 155 (1998), pp. 546–581; Biao Xiang, "Zhejiang village in Beijing: creating a visible non-state space through migration and marketized networks," in Frank N. Pieke and Hein Mallee (eds.), *Internal Migration and International Migration: Chinese Perspectives* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 215–250; Li Zhang, "Contesting crime, order, and migrant spaces in Beijing," in Nancy N. Chen, Constance D. Clark, Suzanne Z. Gottschang and Lyn Jeffery (eds.), *China Urban: Ethnographies of Contemporary Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 201–222; Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 231–34, 249–256. The main advocate of the notion that native place identity of Han migrants within China may become an ethnicity is Emily Honig in her many publications on Subei people in Shanghai. See, for instance, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1850–1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and "Invisible inequalities: the status of Subei people in contemporary Shanghai," *The China Quarterly* No. 122 (1990), pp. 273–292.

8. The few studies on the subject include: Zhuang Kongshao, "Beijing 'Xinjiang jie' shipin wenhua de shikong guocheng" ("The time and space process of food culture in Beijing's 'Xinjiang street' ") *Shehuixue Yanjiu* (*Sociological Research*), No. 6 (2000), pp. 92–104; Yang Shengmin and Wang Hansheng, "Dui da chengshi zhong shaoshuminzu

aims to fill this gap and show that though Uyghur migrants in Beijing certainly share the main aspirations and experiences of Han migrants, such as the hope to improve their economic condition and severe discrimination, respectively, for them migration to Beijing also carries a whole set of additional meanings and possibilities that derive from the unique characteristics of their ethnic minority group and its relationship with the Chinese state and Chinese society and culture. I contend that one important meaning of being in Beijing at least for the Uyghur elite is in improving their ability to speak for their people back in Xinjiang and to challenge their orthodox representation in China and their marginalization at the national and international level. Being China's political, cultural and economic centre, and a relatively liberal, cosmopolitan metropolis, Beijing offers the Uyghur elite a much more extensive exposure to the national and international community than Xinjiang, better access to national and international media, and, ironically, because of the distance from Xinjiang, also more freedom to speak. In arguing that Uyghur migrants in Beijing have achieved a public voice in the general Chinese cultural sphere the article not only challenges the general view that at the national level minorities are voiceless, but also the widely held view that internal migrants tend "to keep silent," that they are "politically powerless," and that they have little control over their representation in the Chinese media.[9]

Much of this article is dedicated to Uyghur pop musicians who live, create and perform in Beijing. I propose that these artists are important agents in the challenge to the orthodox representation of Uyghurs in China and that they are part of a new trend that started in the mid-1990s when a few ethnic minority artists started to achieve an independent public voice in the national cultural sphere.[10] Two important related factors that facilitated the emergence of these new minority voices were the increase in free market activity and the availability of new forms of relatively cheap and technologically simple popular media. Whereas television and film have always been tightly controlled by the Chinese

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liudong renkou jujuqu de renleixue guancha: Beijing 'Xinjiang cun' de diaocha yu yanjiu fang'an" ("An anthropological observation on communities of minority floating population in large cities: a survey of and research plan for Beijing's 'Xinjiang village' "), paper presented at the conference "Work on nationalities in the country," Qingdao, 8–10 April 2000; Ma and Xiang, "Native place, migration and the emergence of peasant enclaves in Beijing," pp. 566–67.

9. See Ma and Xiang, "Native place, migration and the emergence of peasant enclaves in Beijing," p. 579; Zhang, "Contesting crime, order, and migrant spaces in Beijing," p. 216; Dorothy J. Solinger, "The floating population in the cities: chances for assimilation?" in Deborah S. Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton and Elizabeth J. Perry (eds.), *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China* (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 124, 129, 130–31; Delia Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 151–54.

10. See Nimrod Baranovitch, "Between alterity and identity: new voices of minority people in China," *Modern China*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2001), pp. 359–401.

state and the Han elite, cassette, CD and video recording offered minorities the means to produce and disseminate their work.

There is, however, one major feature that distinguishes the Uyghur voice in Beijing from other minority voices and helps to increase its volume and impact, and this is Xinjiang restaurants, a major focus of this article. The restaurant business is the most typical occupation associated with Uyghurs in Beijing and since the 1980s dozens of Xinjiang restaurants have been established in the city. The important thing about these restaurants is that many of them cater to non-Uyghurs, both Chinese and foreigners, and that their Uyghur owners consciously use them to express non-official versions of Uyghur identity through artistic objects and performances, as well as casual conversations with customers. Several studies on urban life in China in the 1990s have explored the "negotiation of space," suggesting that the loosening of state control over social life and the move to a free market economy have created new "urban spaces" and "non-state spaces" where people can enjoy a considerable amount of autonomy from the state and its various institutions.[11] Scholars of internal migration have shown how immigrant enclaves have been able to establish self-governing communities and to "push the limits of state tolerance for economic and social autonomy."[12] Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing obviously provide an example of a non-state space. Yet, the main arguments in this article are based on the less conventional idea that they also constitute a kind of popular media, in the sense that they are a means of communication that reaches the general public, their message is not official and it reaches a large audience. This representation may in the long run, if it has not started to do so yet, exert significant influence on Han and foreign attitudes towards the Uyghurs, on Uyghurs' own sense of identity and on Uyghur nationalism.[13]

Uyghur Migrants in Beijing

Uyghurs started to arrive in Beijing in relatively large numbers in the late 1980s, several years after a free market economy was first introduced into China and after former restrictions on mobility within the country were eased. Hoping to find a better life and better work opportunities, they migrated to the capital like millions of others from all over China. Most of the early Uyghur newcomers concentrated in two neighbourhoods, in Ganjiakou and Weigongcun, which came to be known as "Xinjiang Village(s)" (*Xinjiang cun*). The dominant occupation of the

11. See Chen *et al.*, *China Urban*, especially the essays in part 3; Davis *et al.*, *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, especially the essays in part 1; Xiang, "Zhejiang village in Beijing."

12. "Introduction," in Chen *et al.*, *China Urban*, p. 17.

13. At least five restaurants have capacity of around 200 or more (one has a capacity of over 400), which means that many tens of thousands of people visit these restaurants every year. In addition, millions are exposed to the cultural activity that some of the restaurants support through journalistic reports, TV, radio and internet, cassettes and CDs, as well as performances outside the restaurants. I suggest that the exposure through these types of media, most of which are obviously mass media, was not possible if the restaurants did not exist in the first place. I elaborate on these higher-level media later in the article.

newcomers was in the food business. Hundreds of young Uyghurs started to sell Xinjiang-style barbecued mutton (shish-kebab, or *yangrouchuan(r)* in Chinese) from mobile stands throughout the city. Those with more capital opened restaurants which offered more luxurious Xinjiang food.[14] By the mid-1990s the popularity of Xinjiang cuisine in Beijing soared and Uyghur shish-kebab vendors became an inseparable part of the city's landscape. Its popularity was also manifested in the number of visitors to the Xinjiang Villages which by then already boasted more than 40 small and medium-sized restaurants.[15] Most Han Chinese and foreigners visited the Villages to taste a different kind of food, but some went there also to experience a different world; people in the Villages looked different and spoke a different language, restaurants were decorated with paintings of mosques displaying the Islamic crescent and inscribed with Arabic script, and the sounds of Uyghur folk and popular music could be heard everywhere.[16] The rise of Beijing's Xinjiang Villages in the mid-1990s was inseparable from the world-wide fascination in recent years with things ethnic. As part of this global trend, China, too, rediscovered its own minorities, which soon turned into an exotic cultural commodity both for self consumption and marketing to others.[17]

The burgeoning of the Xinjiang community in Beijing, however, did not last long. In 1998 and 1999 city authorities demolished the Xinjiang Villages and clamped down on illegal street vending, apparently as part of large-scale efforts to turn Beijing into a modern city. However, some Han Chinese suggested that the Village in Weigongcun was demolished because it became "too chaotic" (*tai luan*), as a result of drug dealing and violence. Uyghurs admitted that criminal activity had taken place in the Village, but nevertheless insisted that the demolition was part of a general official policy aimed at deporting Uyghurs back to Xinjiang. They also mentioned that it coincided with the general crackdown on Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang following the riot that took place in the Ili (Yili) region in February 1997.[18]

14. The most typical Xinjiang dishes include various kinds of roasted mutton, flat breads known as *nan*, hand-made noodles that are often served with tomato sauce known in Uyghur as *laghman* and in Chinese as *latiaozi*, and pilaf rice with carrot and mutton known as *polo*. For an article that discusses the role of food in expressing Uyghur identity, see Cesaro, "Consuming identities."

15. Ma and Xiang, "Native place, migration and the emergence of peasant enclaves in Beijing," p. 566.

16. For a foreign TV report on the Xinjiang Villages in Beijing, see Stefan Niemann's "Die Moslems von Peking" which was broadcast on German TV (NDR) on 19 December 1996.

17. For discussions of the marketing in China and abroad of different minority cultures, see, for instance, Janet L. Upton, "The politics and poetics of *Sister Drum*: 'Tibetan' music in the global marketplace," in Craig and King, *Global Goes Local*, pp. 99–119; Margaret Byrne Swain, "Commoditizing ethnicity in southwest China," *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1990), pp. 26–30; Timothy S. Oakes, "Tourism in Guizhou: the legacy of internal colonialism," in Alan A. Lew and Lawrence Yu (eds.), *Tourism in China: Geographic, Political, and Economic Perspectives* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 203–221.

18. On the riot, see, for example, "Curfew after Xinjiang riot," *The Times*, 11 February 1997, p. 10. On the demolition of the Villages, see AFP, Hong Kong, "Demolition of Beijing Moslem minority 'village'," 26 January 1999, FBIS, FTS19990126000251 (26 January 1999), and AFP, Hong Kong, "Last of Xinjiang 'villages' demolished in Beijing," 15 March 1999, FBIS, FTS19990315000043 (15 March 1999).

But despite this blow, or perhaps because of it, Uyghur culture started to thrive in other parts of the city where many Xinjiang restaurants now began to appear. Most of those restaurants which remain today are of medium size with a capacity of a few dozen diners. But there are also large ones which can seat several hundred clients. The latter are considered to be among Beijing's top attractions because they offer impressive performances of Uyghur music and dance. Though it may seem that these restaurants are engaged solely in selling exoticism (belly dancing performed by young beautiful women is probably the best example) and thus perpetuate the orthodox representation of Uyghurs in China, some nevertheless are simultaneously engaged in contending much of this representation. Before discussing the contesting representations, the following section examines what is it that these representations contest.

Images of Uyghurs and Their Orthodox Representation in China

In a way similar to the orthodox representation of other minorities in the general Chinese culture, representation of the Uyghurs has traditionally been controlled and often produced by Han Chinese. It has traditionally combined both fascination and denigration so that Uyghurs have often been depicted as colourful, exotic and erotic people who excel in music and dance and have a highly developed sense of humour, but are also backward and uncivilized. Though the alterity of Uyghurs has usually been stressed, it has simultaneously been trivialized and neutralized,[19] partly because of lack of knowledge and understanding, partly because of lack of respect, and partly in an attempt to neutralize symbolically the threat that Uyghurs have always posed to China because of their significant otherness.

The little that most Chinese know about Xinjiang and the Uyghurs derives in large part from artistic representations produced during the last few decades. Two individuals in particular have dominated these representations. The first is Wang Luobin (1913–96), a Han Chinese songwriter who spent many years in north-west China and who is often referred to as "the song king of the West" (*xibu ge wang*). Most of Wang's famous "Xinjiang folk songs" (*Xinjiang minge*) articulate the voice of a (Han) male who falls in love with the local girls. Full of detailed physical depictions of these girls, Wang's songs can probably be held responsible for much of the widespread association of Xinjiang in China with beautiful girls, conforming to a common tendency in Chinese

19. The idea of "neutralized alterity" is borrowed from Almaz Khan, "Who are the Mongols? State, ethnicity, and the politics of representation in the PRC," in Brown, *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, p. 144.

culture to feminize minorities.[20] The following are representative lines from Wang's songs:

> The stones of Daban City are hard and flat, the watermelons are big and sweet, the girls over there have long braids and beautiful eyes. If you want to get married, do not marry anyone else, you must marry me … (from "The girls of Daban city" ["Daban cheng de guniang"])

> What is Alamuhan like? Her body is not fat and not thin. Her eyebrows are like a crescent moon, her waist is like a soft willow, her little mouth is full of love, her eyes make you tremble … (from "Alamuhan")[21]

The second individual whose name in China became synonymous with the Uyghurs is a Uyghur composer and performer named Kelimu (Kerim in Uyghur). A member of the Song and Dance Troupe of the General Political Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (*Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zong zhengzhibu gewutuan*) for many years, Kelimu belonged to the top league of minority artists who having been enlisted and trained by governmental units have served as agents of the Chinese state in praising the regime, idealizing life in minority areas, and propagating official ideologies such as loyalty to the state and unity and harmony among all nationalities. Since the 1950s Kelimu has performed many famous Xinjiang songs, among them "Xinjiang is good" ("Xinjiang hao"), "Day and night missing Chairman Mao" ("Riye xiangnian Mao zhuxi") and "My mother is called China" ("Wo de muqin jiao Zhongguo"), some of which he also composed.[22] Like Wang Luobin's songs, these are usually referred to as "Xinjiang folksongs" and Kelimu has always performed them on television and in officially organized concerts dressed in traditional-style Uyghur costumes.

In the 1990s, although Kelimu and his other state-sponsored colleagues continued to perform their orthodox ethnic praise songs and Wang Luobin's songs enjoyed renewed popularity, the image of Xinjiang people changed dramatically when thousands of Uyghurs started to appear in the streets of Beijing and other major cities. The popularity of the shish-kebab notwithstanding, the dominant influence of the new direct interaction was to increase friction and denigration towards Uyghurs and

20. See, for instance, Gladney, "Representing nationality in China"; Louisa Schein, "Multiple alterities: the contouring of gender in Miao and Chinese nationalism," in Brackette F. Williams (ed.), *Women Out of Place: The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 79–102, and her "Gender and internal orientalism in China," *Modern China*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1997), pp. 69–98.

21. See, for example, *Wang Luobin: xibu ge wang* (*Wang Luobin: The Song King of the West*) (cassette album) (Shanghai: Shanghai shengxiang chubanshe, 1998) (ISRC CN-A26-98-328–00/A.J6). For more details on Wang Luobin, see Rachel Harris, "Wang Luobin: 'folksong king of the northwest' or song thief?: copyright, representation and Chinese 'folksongs'," in Kevin Latham and Stuart Thompson (eds.), *Consuming China: Approaches to Cultural Change in Contemporary China* (Curzon Press, forthcoming).

22. For a recent solo cassette album of Kelimu, see *Kelimu: guxiang de he* (*Kelimu: Homeland Rivers*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shengxiang chubanshe, 1997) (ISRC CN-E04-97-395-00/A.J6). For more details on the training of Uyghur artists in state-run song and dance troupes, see Colin Mackerras, "Uygur performing arts in contemporary China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 101 (1985), pp. 68–77.

the sense of threat among the Han majority who also became increasingly aware of the growing violence in Xinjiang.[23] Some Han Chinese started to complain that Uyghurs "carry knives with them wherever they go." In 1996, one friend declined to join me for a meal in the Xinjiang Village on the ground that "it is very unsafe over there."

Uyghurs arrived in Beijing like millions of other internal migrants from all over China but they were more easily identified as outsiders because of their different appearance and their almost exclusive association with the selling of shish-kebab. Thus, to begin with, they became an easy target and a focal point for the general dislike and suspicion that urbanites started to feel towards all the outsiders (*waidiren*) that flooded their cities and in their eyes threatened their modernity and stability.[24] Like several other groups of newcomers, Uyghurs also formed exclusive communities and made no effort to change or assimilate, a fact which made them even more visible and disturbing. The fact that most Uyghurs could speak only very poor Chinese added considerably to their denigration and the hostility that many Han Chinese started to feel towards them.

If that was not enough, the Xinjiang Village of Weigongcun became according to many people a centre of criminal activity. In addition to drug dealing,[25] the area around the Village became known for gangs of young pickpockets. One Han woman who lives nearby told me in 2001 that she was attacked several times by youngsters from Xinjiang. A Uyghur student who worked in the Village confirmed that there were indeed gangs of Uyghur children thieves brought from Xinjiang especially for this purpose. He told me that because many Han Chinese now consider all Uyghurs to be thieves he sometimes travels back to his university dormitories by cab to avoid being blamed for pick-pocketing on the bus. As if to summarize the contradictory nature of the new inter-ethnic interaction in Beijing, this informant also noted with obvious pleasure that despite the popularity of Xinjiang restaurants among Han Chinese, "Hans would never dare to enter alone a restaurant in which there are only Uyghurs."[26]

The new reality of the mid-1990s combined with the general liberalization in the media resulted in additions to the politically-correct orthodox representations of Uyghurs and Xinjiang. The most conspicuous addition

23. For Beijing residents the violence in Xinjiang seemed closer than ever when an explosion rocked a bus in the capital during rush-hour on 7 March 1997. At least for a while reports pointed to similarity between this explosion and three bombings of buses in Xinjiang by East Turkestan separatists which occurred on 25 February. See, for instance, Seth Faison, "10 people hurt in an explosion on Beijing bus," *The New York Times*, 8 March 1997, pp. 1, 4.

24. See, for instance, Zhang, "Contesting crime, order, and migrant spaces in Beijing," pp. 205–213; Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*, pp. 151–160.

25. Every time I entered the Village I was offered "hashish" quite openly. One of my Uyghur informants who worked in the Village told me that heroin was also offered for sale there and added that Uyghurs sell it to Han Chinese as a kind of "revenge."

26. Though many of the facts and much of the negative image that I describe here also apply to "villages" of Han migrants, the most famous among which in Beijing is the Zhejiang Village, it is my impression that the Han attitude is significantly more negative towards Uyghurs and their villages.

was the new image of the shish-kebab vendor which emerged in the late 1990s and became a laughing-stock and a synonym for being a Uyghur. Uyghurs in Beijing noted with obvious anger that even people on the street would sometimes point at them and remark mockingly "*mai yangrouchuan(r)*," meaning "a shish-kebab vendor." Other additions to the orthodox representation of Uyghurs are explored in the following sections.

Uyghurs Contesting their Orthodox Representation in the Heart of China

The large Xinjiang restaurants that started to appear in Beijing in the mid-1990s are in many ways the antithesis of the smoky, portable shish-kebab stands that flooded the city at the beginning of the decade. Big, luxurious and expensive, the fact that they host well-to-do Chinese and many foreigners, and their commercial success all make their sheer existence a challenge to the common poor image of Uyghurs being backward and uncivilized, dirty and lazy, and generally incapable. But the challenge is not confined to size and luxurious appearance alone, as many of these restaurants, some of which are owned by Uyghurs who are not only rich but also highly educated, are clearly used in a conscious effort to change the orthodox representation of Uyghurs in China.

When I asked one Uyghur restaurant owner named Bahar (a pseudonym) what she thinks about Wang Luobin and Kelimu she replied: "Wang Luobin is a petty thief (*xiaotou*). He stole our songs and told everyone they were his.[27] [And as for Kelimu], he uglyfied (*chouhua*) Uyghur culture. He sings and dances like a clown. He is so feminine …" This criticism was quite common among young Uyghurs in Beijing and one Uyghur student has even gone as far as to label Wang Luobin a "rapist" (in English). According to Rachel Harris the situation is quite similar in Xinjiang. Harris reports that while Wang Luobin's songs were heard in the mid-1990s in many places in Xinjiang and even on trains and airplanes going to the region they were conspicuously absent from Uyghur neighbourhoods and bazaars. What is particularly important about Bahar and her criticism in Beijing, however, is that now, as the owner of a large Xinjiang restaurant in China's political, cultural and economic centre she is able to bring the contending sensibilities and voices of many Uyghurs to the attention of many Chinese and foreigners and also to offer an alternative.

In Bahar's restaurant there are two musical ensembles, one of "traditional Uyghur music" and one of "modern Uyghur music." Though actually performing a mixture of modernized versions of traditional pieces and traditional-style pieces that are totally modern creations, the importance of the first ensemble is in introducing the audience to what many Uyghurs nevertheless consider the "real traditional Uyghur music" as opposed to the sinicized tunes that Wang Luobin and others introduced. Many of the performers come from the state-run "nationalities

27. On the controversy over Wang Luobin's Xinjiang songs see Harris, "Wang Luobin."

song and dance troupes" (*minzu gewutuan*) of Xinjiang which specialize in performing traditional-style music with traditional instruments. Though quite active in Xinjiang these troupes and their music are nevertheless completely unknown to most Chinese.[28]

The importance of the other type of music performed in Bahar's restaurant lies first and foremost in its being modern. Many Han Chinese are surprised to learn that there is such a thing as modern Uyghur music, believing that Xinjiang is a totally traditional place. Bahar introduced me to Askar, a famous Uyghur film actor-turned-musician who used to perform modern Uyghur music in her restaurant. Askar came to Beijing from Xinjiang in the early 1990s after starring in Xinjiang in three locally produced films about his home region. He plays heavy-metal that incorporates elements from traditional Uyghur music and calls himself and his band Grey Wolf (*Hui lang* in Chinese) after the pan-Turkic nationalistic symbol which Uyghurs consider to be their legendary ancestor. Askar sings in both Mandarin Chinese and Uyghur, and is considered to be the first Uyghur rocker. Many of his songs concern the situation in Xinjiang and express discontent and anger. Below are excerpts from an interview that I conducted with him in Beijing on 20 February 2001:

> People here don't know what Xinjiang is like. They think that it is nothing but a big desert, that there are no buildings … Even university students here are surprised when they see me, hear my music, and hear that I am a Uyghur. They should go and do some research to learn what Xinjiang is like, what Uyghurs are like … Now there are many young Uyghur people like me, modern, thinking, with independent thought. People should not think that all Uyghurs sell shish-kebab or melons on the street. The most important thing for me is to show not only to Chinese but to the whole world that there is such a people called Uyghurs and that it is a great people.

When I asked Askar what he thinks about Wang Luobin and Kelimu he replied: "I don't like Wang Luobin. He became very popular around the time in which I started to get famous and everyone was listening to him. Wang Luobin is Han and his songs are not real Uyghur music." At this point Askar started to hum mockingly the tune of one of Wang Luobin's songs, suggesting that it is tamed and saccharin. When talking about Kelimu, he started to imitate and parody the famous performer's body movements and suggested with obvious dislike that he is like a woman. He then added:

> Kelimu is an instrument (*gongju*) of the Communist Party. He does whatever the Party tells him to do … It is like the Cultural Revolution. People were told to run to one direction and so they did. Then they were told to run to the opposite direction so everyone ran to the opposite direction. There was no thinking (*sixiang*). Kelimu is this kind of a person … People don't know the truth about Xinjiang, how poor and miserable are Uyghur peasants. Official reports about Xinjiang don't tell the truth and on TV people always see happy peasants in cotton fields, the Tianshan mountains,

28. Mackerras, "Uygur performing arts in contemporary China," pp. 68–75. This information also derives from an interview that I conducted with Omär (a pseudonym), a musician in Bahar's restaurant who is a member of one such troupe.

grasslands, horses, and melons. Kelimu and other Uyghur musicians who work for the government only sing songs of praise about unity. But I tell the truth, I'm real.

Below are excerpts from two famous songs by Askar. The first is sung in Uyghur and the second in Chinese. Both appear on a VCD (video CD) album entitled in both Chinese and English *Hui lang/Grey Wolf*, which the artist released in 1998. On the cover of this album Askar appears playing the *dap* (a traditional Uyghur hand-held drum), on the background of which a subtitle reads in Chinese: "Askar, the pride of the people of Xinjiang (*Aisika'er, Xinjiangren de jiao'ao*)"[29]:

Daolang[30]
(lyrics, music and performance by Askar)

Let us enjoy and be happy
Sing about youth and freedom
Don't let darkness take over the world
Don't let the world change you
Don't let darkness take over you
Let us start singing …

When will the sun rise
When will the demons leave
When will the eyes be enlightened
When will the flowers open

Look at these comrades
They speak with sweet words
Let us not wait any longer
Let us start singing …

Here I start[31]

Wife
(*Laopo* in Chinese, lyrics, music and performance by Askar)

You make me forget who I am …
Please don't come to awaken me
Your educating me has already been completed
I ask you not to help me anymore
I don't want to become your wife …

29. See Aisika'er/Askar, *Hui lang/Grey Wolf: Xinjiangren de jiao'ao* (Guangxi: Jin fenghuang yinxiang chubanshe, 1998) (ISRC CN-F35-98-306 00/V.J6). This album is a VCD version of Askar's first cassette album from 1996 which carries the same title. According to Askar this album sold in Xinjiang alone 370,000 copies, 70,000 in legal copies and the rest in pirated versions. This figure is a clear indication of significant popularity if we keep in mind that 100,000 legal copies are considered "not bad" even by the standards of mainstream pop musicians. For more information on Askar, and for the soundtrack of few of his songs, see http://www.zoommusic.com.hk.

30. *Daolang* is a name of traditional Uyghur dance rhythm which Askar uses in this song.

31. The clip of this song is accompanied with Chinese subtitles but the translation into Chinese omits much of the subversive content that the song communicates in Uyghur. The lyrics of the song were translated for me into Chinese by a Uyghur student who asked to remain anonymous.

These songs do not say anything directly about Uyghur nationalism but young Uyghurs in Beijing interpreted them quite uniformly as expressions of dissent against Han colonialism and as calls for the independence or more autonomy of Xinjiang. According to the same people the demons in "Daolang" are Han Chinese and the song expresses the wish of Uyghurs that they will leave Xinjiang. In "comrades," I was told, the song also refers to the Han, and particularly to government officials. The "sweet words" refer to the official discourse about Han Chinese helping the local backward minority people of Xinjiang to develop. The spiritual and material "help" of the Chinese is overtly rejected in "Wife," a song that was interpreted as an allegory of the refusal of the Uyghurs to become subjugated by the Han. "Wife" offers another example of how gender and ethnic politics are intertwined in China. In this song and particularly in the statement "I don't want to become your wife" Askar seems to be engaged in a metaphoric dialogue with Wang Luobin and his famous Xinjiang songs with their cute and voiceless minority female objects who wait to be conquered. The use of heavy-metal music in "Wife" makes its message all the more powerful because of the universal association of this style with masculinity and defiance.[32] In choosing to perform in this style Askar seems to react against the "femininity" of Kelimu's performance, the saccharin and tame flavour of Wang Luobin's songs, and the general feminization of Xinjiang in Chinese culture.

Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing have been playing a crucial role in introducing modern Uyghur musicians and their music into mainstream culture. They provide financial support, venues for performances and exposure, and they also encourage these musicians to assert their Uyghur identity through their artistic activity. As of February 2001 Askar has never been invited to perform on China's Central TV (CCTV) but he became quite famous in Beijing at least in part because of his performances at Bahar's restaurant.[33] Moreover, it was through this venue that he gained three invitations to participate in international musical festivals abroad, in Japan (in 1996), in the Philippines (in 1998) and in Hungary (in 1999).[34] In these festivals, ironically perhaps, he was formally In these festivals, ironically perhaps, he was formally representing China, but he was also able to fulfil his goal to let people all over the world know that "there is such a great people called Uyghurs." In our interview the Uyghur rocker recalled with obvious joy that the placard above the stage in Hungary read: "Askar, Uyghur, China," and that the words and the order in which they appeared caused one Chinese official who attended the concert to feel very uncomfortable.

32. For a discussion of the close connection between rock music, masculinity and defiance in China, see Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978–1997* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), ch. 3.

33. The restaurant owner told me that he does not perform there any more because his music is "too loud" and "it does not fit the atmosphere."

34. Personal interview with Askar, 20 February 2001.

The alternative Uyghur identity that Xinjiang restaurants in Beijiang construct is not confined to performances, and here even smaller restaurants that cannot afford artistic performances turn into alternative museums of Uyghur culture and history. In addition to the usual pictures and photographs of Uyghur women picking grapes, young people dancing in traditional-style costumes and traditional musical instruments, some restaurant owners also present other objects with which most Chinese are completely unfamiliar. One example, found in several restaurants, is big posters of Mähmud Qäshqäri and Yusup Khass Hajib, two historical figures that the Uyghurs consider as their cultural heroes. These two posters have been widely distributed in Xinjiang since the mid-1980s but very few people outside Xinjiang have ever seen them or know anything about the figures that appear in them.[35] Both are Turkic scholars who lived in the eleventh century and produced the two earliest literary monuments of Turkic Islam.[36] They present a picture of the Uyghurs as a people with a long history of literary achievements and scholastic tradition. This aspect is stressed visually in both posters: Mähmud Qäshqäri is shown surrounded by books and reading and writing a scroll and Yusup Khass Hajib is shown holding a book.

But no less important, Mähmud Qäshqäri and Yusup Khass Hajib lived in a period in which Turkic dynasties started to dominate the Muslim world politically and established independent states in Central Asia. The style of the paintings is completely Western (standard oil painting), the figures have Caucasian facial features, they are dressed in Islamic gowns and head covers, and they are shown on the background of a Western and Central Asian Islamic architectural landscape surrounded by typical objects of that culture. In obvious contrast to the official Chinese versions which stress that Xinjiang has been an inseparable part of China since antiquity,[37] these posters link the Uyghurs to a whole different world and to another history and civilization. Since the otherness that Uyghurs in Beijing work so hard to assert stands at the basis of the Uyghur demand for independence or increased autonomy from China, this assertion may be read as an effort aiming at delegitimizing the Chinese claims for sovereignty over Xinjiang.

Another significant artifact in one of the large Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing was a medium-sized vertical scroll with an excerpt from Abdurehim Ötkür's famous book *The Awakening Land* (*Oyghanghan zemin*).

35. Photos of the two posters are found in Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, pp. 140, 154.

36. The two texts were translated, edited and commented on by Robert Dankoff. See Maḥmūd al-Kāšrarī, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects* (*Dīwān Luγāt at-Turk*), in three parts, edited and translated in collaboration with James Kelly (Harvard University Office of the University Publisher, 1982, 1984, 1985), and Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Hājib, *Wisdom of Royal Glory* (*Kutadgu Bilig*): *A Turko-Islamic Mirror for Princes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).

37. On the official Chinese history of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs and on contending histories, see Linda Benson, "Contested history: issues in the historiography of Inner Asia's Uighurs," in Michael Gervers and Wayne Schlepp (eds.), *Cultural Contact, History and Ethnicity in Inner Asia* (Toronto: Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 1996), pp. 115–131; Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, pp. 121–175; Gardner Bovingdon, "The history of the history of Xinjiang," *Twentieth Century China*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2001), pp. 95–139.

Abdurehim Ötkür, who spent decades in prison for his nationalistic activities and who died of cancer in 1995, is one of the most famous and respected contemporary Uyghur intellectual writers. *The Awakening Land* is the name of the second and third of three historical novels which tell the story of the Uyghur nationalistic struggle prior to 1949.[38] The scroll was written in Uyghur in black ink in Arabic script under a picture of a red rising sun which obviously stood for the awakening. Below is a translation of the excerpt:

> History is not a simple series of errors but a course of struggle. In the history of Qumul [(Hami)] the thunderstorm that you started awakened every corner of this land. Now no one can put this awakening land back to sleep again. This is because the owners of this awakening land, millions of people, know clearly who they are, who are their friends and who are their enemies, and they have already seen its future. They believe that the price of the countless sacrifices of fresh blood will definitely bring a bright future. Your descendents will never forget you. One day history will definitely declare its justice with bright colours and flashing lights.[39]

Although not publicly, the meanings of Abdurehim Ötkür's novels are hotly contested. Chinese officials allowed the publication of his books apparently because they deal with the period prior to 1949. As such the Uyghur struggle described could be interpreted as aimed against the Nationalists and may even imply that the CCP are liberators. But nobody is really so naive and one can assume that allowing the publication of Abdurehim Ötkür's books was no more than a compromise that the Party consciously made to show good will or to avoid increased tension. After all, despite their enormous popularity in Xinjiang the books have never been translated into Chinese.[40] As for Uyghurs, they did not make the distinction between the past and the present; as far as they were concerned the situation has not changed and the Uyghurs are still oppressed by the Chinese today as they were before 1949.

The excerpt from *The Awakening Land* translated above illustrates once again how some Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing are engaged in agenda that extend well beyond the selling of food and exotic performances. The scroll communicates to non-Uyghurs, who cannot read it, through its sheer script, which asserts both civility and difference. But perhaps more than anything else found in the Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing, Abdurehim Ötkür's words ultimately address Uyghur customers and as such they suggest another important aspect of the Xinjiang

38. *Traces, The Awakening Land I*, and *The Awakening Land II* were published in 1985, 1986, and 1994 respectively by the Xinjiang People's Publishing House in Urumchi. See Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 187.

39. The excerpt was translated for me by a Uyghur student who asked to remain anonymous.

40. For Abdurehim Ötkür's own account regarding the publication of his books, see Colin Mackerras, *China's Minority Cultures: Identities and Integration since 1912* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 192.

restaurants phenomenon. These restaurants enable Uyghurs who live in Beijing to represent Uyghur culture not only to others but also to themselves and thereby to remind themselves who they are. They provide Uyghurs who live in Beijing with an exclusive space free from official control in which they can meet and talk to one another freely in Uyghur, eat Uyghur food and perform Uyghur dances. Moreover, with objects like the excerpt from *The Awakening Land* and performances like that of Askar these restaurants also bestow a strong sense of mission and purpose on their Uyghur customers' presence and life in Beijing.

Afanti: Unity Among Nationalities with New Uyghur Characteristics

One Xinjiang restaurant, which perhaps not incidentally is the most famous and popular in the city, offers another option for alternative representation, thereby revealing the complexity of the whole Xinjiang restaurant phenomenon and the fact that this phenomenon in itself is a source of negotiation among Uyghurs. The restaurant is called "Afanti," after the Uyghur folk hero Nasruddin Khoja who is known for his shrewd jokes and whose figure has been popularized in recent decades all over China.[41] It has a capacity of over 400, and is situated in one of the capital's old alleys not far away from downtown Beijing and the foreign embassies area. In recent years Afanti has become one of Beijing's top attractions: it has been reported on in various media both in and outside China and has been visited by high ranking Chinese and foreign government officials, managers of international firms, and other famous figures. The restaurant achieved such enormous commercial success that its owners have established an impressive company which now runs, in addition to the restaurant, travel, media and computer services, a large Latin café with a capacity of 1,500, and an art gallery.

The Afanti company, named in English "A Fun Ti Culture & Art Co. Ltd.,"[42] promotes itself through an impressive website that provides information on its various commercial and cultural activities, personnel, and the full text of more than 20 major articles about the restaurant published in China and abroad.[43] The main message is that the purpose of the Afanti Xinjiang restaurant is "to break down barriers of nationality, race and class and to create a warm atmosphere of equality and harmony." At first glance this may seem identical to the orthodox official motto of unity and harmony among China's nationalities, but it contextualizes the idea of unity and harmony within a broad cosmopolitan framework rather than within the narrower official framework of Chinese nationalism. This cosmopolitan framework is closely related to the fact that 80 per cent of the restaurant's customers are foreigners.

41. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 139. "Afanti" is the Chinese version of "Apandi" in Uyghur ("effendi" in Turkic), which in common use means "Sir."

42. Note that the owners of the company do not follow the standard pinyin transliteration system when they write the company's name in English but instead use a transliteration that obviously aims at making more sense of the name for English speaking customers.

43. See www.Afunti.com.cn.

Afanti's message is linked with the personal story of its owners. Unlike the owners of the restaurants discussed above it is run by a mixed couple, a Uyghur woman named Sadat Amat and her Han husband, Fan Jun. The relationship between the two has been compared in one article to the story of Romeo and Juliet,[44] a comparison that suggests something of the inter-ethnic tensions involved in their marriage, which was strongly objected to not only by Sadat Amat's family but also by the Xinjiang government. The objection of the latter was due to the fact that Sadat Amat is the daughter of the former provost of the Central University of Nationalities and her uncle is the former head of the Xinjiang government. The formal reason for the objection was the fact that Fan Jun was not a Muslim, but it obviously also reflected the general increasing antagonism of Uyghurs towards intermarriage with Han Chinese.[45] In 1998 the couple eventually got married but only after Fan Jun agreed to convert to Islam and to accept a Uyghur name which the Xinjiang government bestowed on him.[46]

The Afanti restaurant conforms in many ways to the orthodox representation of Uyghur culture. Like Bahar's restaurant, Afanti has two musical ensembles, one traditional and one modern, but its traditional ensemble performs all the famous Han-produced "Xinjiang folksongs" which Bahar considers an anathema. The same conformity also applies to the modern ensemble, named Afanti after the restaurant, which performs rock music combined with flamenco and Uyghur musical elements. The band was established in 1997 to serve as the restaurant's home band and since then it has become quite famous in Beijing.[47] Though predominantly Uyghur (three members), it also has one Kazakh member, one Hui member and one Han member, this embodying the principle of the unity of and harmony among China's different nationalities. This diversity and its politically-correct meaning is strongly emphasized in Afanti's website, in the pamphlet attached to the band's recent CD album,[48] in their performances, and in the many articles that were written on the restaurant and/or its band.[49] The conformity reveals itself also in the band's songs. In contrast to Askar, most of Afanti's songs are love songs which would be considered light rock.[50] Moreover, in some of them the band obviously assumes Han subjectivity and perpetuates Han discourse. This is most obvious in "Loulan Girl" ("Loulan guniang"), their most famous song after which their album was named, in which one finds not only the usual trivialization of Uyghurs and their culture but also the typical feminization noted earlier.

44. John Krich, "A nightspot for sheepish grins: Beijing's Muslim restaurants bring separatists together," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 27–29 April 2001, p. W5.

45. For an example of how strong is the antagonism, see Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 155.

46. Krich, "A nightspot for sheepish grins."

47. "Shi minzu de ye shi shijie de" ("It's national and it's also global"), *Yinyue shenghuo bao* (*Musical Life*), 22 March 2001. The full article is reprinted in Afanti's website.

48. *Loulan guniang* (*Loulan Girl*)/*Loulan Beauty* (Minzu chubanshe, 2000) (ISRC CN-M06–00–306–00/A.J6). This CD can be purchased only at the Afanti restaurant.

49. For another article, see, for instance, Mu Qian, "Band gets you up on table," *China Daily*, 16 May 2001 (in www.chinadaily.com.cn).

50. One notable exception is the song in Chinese "Searching" ("Xunzhao"), in which they sing about faith and searching for God, and mention Alla ("Anla" in Chinese) several times.

"Loulan Girl" is about a famous mummy of a young woman with Indo-European facial features unearthed in Taklamakan desert. This and other similar mummies have been dated from two to six thousand years old and have been conceived by many Uyghurs to be a proof of their non-Chinese origins and of the long and independent history of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, providing legitimacy to their demand for independence from China.[51] Such ideas were expressed overtly in a book named *The Uyghurs* (*Uyghurlar*) by the famous Uyghur writer Turghun Almas, which was published in 1990. This challenging historiography led officials to ban the book one week after it was published and to place the author under house arrest.[52] The famous mummy became a poignant symbol known among Uyghurs as Krorän Mother (*Krorän ana* in Uyghur, "Krorän" being the Uyghur name for what the Chinese call "Loulan") or The Beauty of Krorän (*Krorän güzili* in Uyghur). Han Chinese, however, were also fast to co-opt the mummy into the general Chinese culture. Consistent with the long tradition of naming places in Xinjiang in Chinese,[53] and of representing Uyghurs as beautiful young women, the mummy turned in their hands into Loulan Girl (*Loulan guniang*) and Loulan Bride (*Loulan xinniang*).

The Afanti Band conforms to the orthodox representation of Xinjiang and Uyghurs not only in adopting the name Loulan Girl but also in adopting the whole discourse of (Han) men chasing (Uyghur) girls. This is best illustrated in one line in their song where they sing in Chinese "Loulan Girl … marry me," which immediately invokes Wang Luobin's lyrics with their Han Chinese desire to marry/incorporate the feminized Uyghur other. Thus what Uyghurs consider to be a potent icon of a primordial and mythic ancestor is turned in Afanti's song into a trivialized mundane object of male desire. At least in this regard the Afanti Band provides an example of a group of non-Han elite which Stevan Harrell has characterized as a "small coterie of urban intellectuals who are much more part of the general Chinese culture than are the people they are representing."[54]

What has been described so far gives the impression that Afanti is a classic case of co-optation, not to say another typical case of Han (in this case Fan Jun, the Han owner of the Afanti company who created the band) appropriating minority culture to advance their economic interests in a decade in which ethnicity in China has turned into a commodity. The media reports in Chinese on Afanti enhance this impression by the fact

51. The actual age of the mummies is a subject of much debate. See Victor H. Mair (ed.), *The Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Peoples of Eastern Central Asia* (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of Man and The University of Pennsylvania Museum Publications, 1998). For an article that discusses the appropriation of the mummies by Uyghur nationalists, see Justin Jon Rudelson. "The Xinjiang mummies and foreign angels: art, archaeology and Uyghur Muslim nationalism in Chinese Central Asia," in Gervers and Schlepp, *Cultural Contact, History and Ethnicity in Inner Asia*, pp. 168–183.

52. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 159.

53. See, for instance, Laura Newby, "The Chinese literary conquest of Xinjiang," *Modern China*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1999), p. 455.

54. Stevan Harrell, "Introduction," in Brown, *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, p. 14.

that they always interview Fan Jun and present him as an economic genius while paying relatively little attention to the Uyghur element in Afanti and particularly to Sadat Amat who always remains voiceless. Uyghurs in Beijing perceived Afanti in a similar vein. One Uyghur intellectual, for instance, told me that people in Xinjiang consider Sadat Amat a traitor who betrayed her own people because she married a Han man and suggested that she would probably have no Uyghur friends back in Xinjiang. Another Uyghur told me that he would never go to Afanti for the same reason. There were other Uyghurs who commented with obvious bitterness that Afanti is so successful only because one of its owners is Han.

Whether Afanti's success has to do with the ethnic identity of Fan Jun is not clear. It is obvious, however, that its success is partially at least due to official approval and that this approval is a result of the politically-correct message that the owners of Afanti have adopted. The fact that several high-ranking officials have visited the place is a significant indicator of state approval. Another is the invitation of the Afanti Band to participate in China's Central Television's Spring Festival Party, one of China's most tightly controlled televised events. Clearly, Afanti serves the interests of the state because it presents an idyllic picture of a cosmopolitan, tolerant, pluralistic, and a really multi-ethnic China.

Nevertheless, even in the case of Afanti there is also embodied a challenge to the orthodox representation of Xinjiang and Uyghurs in China. Hints to this challenge are found even at the level of overt discourse. In one article, for example, Fan Jun suggests that Afanti's most important function, in addition to advancing the unity between all peoples, is to offer mainland China "a window to Uyghur life." He then also expresses his hope that his company could dispel lingering negative stereotypes of Xinjiang people.[55] Significantly enough these ideas, and the whole story about the tense interaction that preceded the inter-ethnic marriage between Sadat Amat and Fan Jun, are almost totally absent from articles in Chinese, but they do appear at least in one article in English suggesting something of Fan Jun's sensibilities and probably also of the agency of his Uyghur wife and her influential family.[56] On the more practical level, taking the Afanti Band as the most powerful illustration, it is reasonable to argue that despite their politically-correct nature it has nevertheless been possible to remove Uyghurs and their culture from China's margins to its centre and to carve out a respectful niche for Uyghurs in Beijing's popular music scene and in China's modernity. Everything that is said above about their "Loulan Girl" notwithstanding, the group nevertheless simultaneously defies much of the typical image associated with minority performing artists in China. The music they play links them to modernity and to the West by incorporating elements of

55. Krich, "A nightspot for sheepish grins."

56. In several articles in Chinese nevertheless Fan Jun is quoted saying that "a restaurant is a media" ("*canting shi yi ge meiti*"), an important statement that concurs with my own argument in the opening to this essay.

rock and the Western classical guitar. The virtuoso performance of some of the group members on the latter in particular has drawn a lot of respect in Beijing, a respect which derives also from the fact that in their performances, in sharp contrast to Kelimu for example, the group members seldom speak, smile or move, thereby fitting into the image of "serious" musicians.

But probably most important, Afanti has shown that Uyghurs, like Han, can produce independent art, as opposed to officially sponsored praise and gratitude songs for the state or the Party, that they do not always have to sing loyalty songs about the unity of all nationalities in China, and that they can compete equally with Han Chinese and gain wide recognition without the traditional help of the state, which always works to secure representation artificially for minorities in official events but at the same time perpetuates their inferior image as traditional and backward people who cannot do without state support.[57] All these, combined with the fact that they still insist on singing most of their songs in Uyghur, certainly help, no less than Askar's performances, to dispel at least part of the common derogatory image of Uyghurs in Chinese culture.

Conclusions and Implications for Uyghur Nationalism

This article suggests that Uyghurs who migrated to Beijing have not given up their ethnic identity despite the distance from their homeland and the fact that they have chosen to live in a Han-dominated metropolis, and despite the fact that some of them do business with Han Chinese and rely heavily on their patronization. One would expect that the economic prosperity or potential for prosperity of Uyghur businesspeople and artists who try to cater to Han audience should lull their ethno-nationalistic consciousness.[58] But perhaps it is not surprising that this does not seem to be the case, because, after all, it is their ethnicity that many of them offer for sale. Unexpectedly, however, in many cases antagonism and nationalistic aspirations were also very strong. Students, teachers and graduates of the Central University of Nationalities and other universities in Beijing were not only highly conscious of their ethnic identity but extremely antagonist towards the Chinese state, a finding not reported in studies of other minority groups in China.[59]

57. Afanti's ability to compete equally with Han Chinese is best illustrated in the fact that their performances are not limited to the Afanti restaurant but also extend to other venues which have nothing to do with Uyghur or any other minority culture. One place where the band has been performing regularly in recent years is the Jam House, a popular pub in the Sanlitun cosmopolitan area where many of the customers are Westerners.

58. Such assumption can almost be considered a conventional wisdom. For an example supporting this logic which specifically pertains to Uyghurs, see Rudelson's discussion of Uyghurs in Turpan who according to him see themselves as part of China because of their developed commercial relations with Han Chinese, *Oasis Identities*, pp. 9, 68. I should note here that the the Uyghurs from Turpan that I met in Beijing were no less antagonist to the Chinese state and Han Chinese than Uyghurs from other places in Xinjiang.

59. See, for instance, Mette Halskov Hansen's discussion of the Dai and the Naxi in *Lessons in Being Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China*

My article focused on the Uyghur cultural and economic elite in Beijing. These people have obviously chosen to participate in the system, as shown by their willingness and ability to speak Chinese. Unlike Uyghur commoners in Ganjiakou and Weigongcun, with whom I could hardly speak but whose Chinese was just good enough to declare several times that Uyghurs have weapons which they will use against China once it is attacked by another country, the elite members were conspicuously less militant. But they were not less committed to the Uyghur cause and perhaps much more effective in advancing this cause precisely because they were not only present in Beijing like the former but also participated in the system. This has given them a powerful public voice that extends well beyond Xinjiang into mainstream Chinese culture and even beyond China.

The agenda and aspirations of Uyghurs are not homogenous. Whereas the Afanti restaurant and its personnel obviously advance the option of peaceful integration, or alternatively some kind of real multiculturalism which would allow more room for a decent Uyghur representation in Chinese culture, other restaurants and their personnel articulate a strong desire for independence or increased autonomy from China. For the time being, however, the agents of both orientations are engaged in a similar struggle to speak for themselves in the most general public sphere and to gain more equality and recognition. For most Chinese such recognition would naturally mean something along the agenda of Afanti, that is, more respect and better image and representation in mainstream culture, leading in the long run to more equality on one hand, and on the other hand to either more autonomy or more integration. But where most foreigners are concerned such recognition would probably mean more sympathy for Uyghur independence or at least more autonomy, and here the implications for Uyghur nationalism become clear.

International recognition is an essential ingredient for any nationalistic movement and the lack of such recognition has always characterized the Uyghur cause, at least until recently. The geo-political location of Xinjiang, in Central Asia and until a decade ago in between two communist giants (USSR and China), has historically limited its exposure to foreigners, especially Westerners. Another obstacle has been the language.[60] And though in the last decade or so Xinjiang has become significantly less isolated, as foreign (and internal) tourism to the region started to flourish,[61] still, exposure to the region through tourism has been relatively limited both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In Beijing, by contrast, the Uyghur elite has been able to reach out not only to a much larger audience but also to a more powerful one, which could more directly

footnote continued

(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), and Katherine Palmer Kaup's discussion of the Zhuang in *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp. 129–138.

60. Of course, much of this also applies to Tibet. The question why Tibetans have been more successful than Uyghurs in eliciting international sympathy for their cause is beyond the scope of this study but some factors are the lack of a charismatic Uyghur leadership, lack of effective organization, and also that Islam is not very popular in the West.

61. For an article on tourism in Xinjiang in the early 1990s, see Stanley W. Toops, "Tourism in Xinjiang: practice and place," in Lew and Yu, *Tourism in China*, pp. 179–202.

influence the future of the Uyghur people. Several of the most famous Xinjiang restaurants in Beijing are located in or near the most international parts of the capital (Afanti, Red Rose and Alamuhan are probably the best examples), making them accessible every night to hundreds of foreign embassy officials, foreign ministry workers, university students, scholars and journalists, all of whom are the kind of people who exert influence on the public opinion and foreign policies of their countries. Encounters are not limited to artistic shows but also include direct verbal interaction between the parties, in which Uyghurs often do not hesitate to speak out. Some even suggested that back in Xinjiang, because of the tense situation there, they would not have dared to spend so much time with a foreigner, because they would immediately be taken to interrogation.[62] The ability to have free personal verbal interaction with foreigners, then, is another important privilege that Uyghurs are offered in Beijing. But no less important is the fact that ironically the interaction is usually made possible only because the two parties have some competence in Chinese, which implies that in addition to their presence in Beijing the Uyghur elite's knowledge of Chinese is another important asset in terms of their ability to reach out to the world.

The following remarks made by Mämätjan (a pseudonym), the owner of one of Beijing's large Xinjiang restaurants, provide another vivid example of a typical contending voice: "Chinese media never tell the truth about Xinjiang. The Chinese want to eliminate the Uyghurs and Uyghur culture and they would do anything to hide them from the world." To support his argument, Mämätjan referred to the demolition of the Xinjiang Villages and the deportation back to Xinjiang of many Uyghurs who used to live there, suggesting that these measures were taken because authorities began to fear the enormous popularity of these Villages among foreigners and wanted to prevent Uyghurs from "telling foreigners the truth about Xinjiang." This interpretation could not be taken as a fact but it certainly reveals a lot about Mämätjan's intentions and the conceptual framework with which he operates his restaurant. Interaction with foreigners, particularly Westerners, with their interest in Uyghur culture and their liberal ideologies, may also directly influence Uyghurs in various ways. One way would be to empower them and strengthen their sense of identity by causing them to believe in the worth of their own culture. Another possible influence would be to increase Uyghur determination to struggle for independence or increased autonomy. The attention of foreigners may also affect Han Chinese, causing them to replace their traditional denigrating attitude towards the Uyghurs and their culture with more appreciation.[63]

The distance from Xinjiang enables Uyghurs to have a different kind of interaction not only with foreigners but also with Han Chinese.

62. It is important to note that the interaction between foreigners and Uyghurs in Beijing often starts in a restaurant and then extends beyond it. Several musicians who perform regularly in one Xinjiang restaurant told me that sometimes they are invited to foreign embassies to perform. Afanti's website notes that their musicians are also invited regularly by foreign embassies.

63. An example of typical Han denigration towards the Uyghurs and their culture was related to me by an associate who visited the house of a Han couple in Urumchi in the early

Uyghurs told me that in Beijing they can also speak more freely about Xinjiang with Han Chinese. Some commented that their Han colleagues believed Uyghurs live happily in Xinjiang and were quite surprised to learn "the truth." None of my informants reported any sympathy for Uyghur suffering among their Han associates, but continuous inter-ethnic interaction may elicit sympathy in the long run, and this may lead in the future to some change in public opinion and in policy.

The presence and activities of the Uyghur intellectual and economic elite in Beijing may also affect Uyghur nationalism in another way. Justin Rudelson has suggested that strong local identities and loyalties, which centre around different oases in Xinjiang, hinder the creation of pan-Uyghur identity and the rise of one Uyghur national culture.[64] Beijing offers some solution to this problem because of its distance from Xinjiang and the fact that it is a Han territory where there are also many foreigners. Since every identity is a "relational alterity"[65] being a Kashgarlik (a Uyghur from Kashgar), for example, or a Turpanlik (a Uyghur from Turpan)[66] loses in Beijing much of its meaning as opposed to being a "Uyghur." The context of strong different ethnicity in Beijing could also be responsible for much of the general sharpened ethnic consciousness that I observed among Uyghurs in Beijing.[67] For Xinjiang restaurant personnel, it is likely that both the general sharpened consciousness and the sense of being a "Uyghur" rather than a person of a particular locality in Xinjiang are also connected with their daily business of representing "Uyghur culture" to others.

The above discussion suggests that Uyghurs in Beijing do not just maintain a pre-existent identity which they bring with them from Xinjiang but are involved in reconstructing a new identity. The most important characteristic of this reconstruction is its being a more modern version of Uyghur identity. One example of Beijing's contribution to the rise of a more modern (and more unified) Uyghur identity is provided by Askar and his rock music. In our interview, Xinjiang's first rocker told me that he moved to Beijing because he felt that only there he could develop

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1990s. The two were sincerely surprised by his decision to visit Xinjiang and particularly by his interest in Uyghur culture, suggesting to him that Uyghurs are extremely backward and that therefore there is nothing in Xinjiang worthy of his interest.

64. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 45.

65. I borrow the term "relational alterity" from Dru C. Gladney, "Nations transgressing nation-states: constructing Dungan, Uyghur and Kazakh identities across China, Central Asia and Turkey," in Atabki and O'kane, *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, p. 318. I find Gladney's following statement particularly instructive here: "The project … becomes not any essentialized attempt at a final definition of the meanings of … [identities] (i.e. what is a Uyghur?), but an examination of the conditions of relationality (i.e. when is someone a Uyghur?)."

66. For a discussion of divisions and local identities among Uyghurs, see Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, chs. 2–4.

67. I use the word "sharpened" because quite a few informants suggested that while in Xinjiang they knew little about their tradition and culture and only after living in Beijing for several years did they gradually experience a kind of transformation and started to "look for [their] roots" and to become really conscious of their ethnicity.

artistically. The important thing about rock is that it is not only a modern idiom but also inseparable from a whole Western ethos and ideology of authenticity, freedom, protest and rebellion. In other words, Beijing ironically provided Askar not only with a knowledge of a particular modern musical style but also with a powerful ideology of resistance and the means to express it and to inspire others. Askar's main audience are young urban Uyghurs in Xinjiang who consider him an icon.[68] In his musical activity Askar thus also demonstrates how the new Uyghur identity and representation that the Uyghur elite construct in Beijing is brought back to influence their fellow people in Xinjiang.[69]

Finally, a few words are in order here on the role of popular culture in the construction and expression of Uyghur identity and nationalism. In his recent article, "The history of the history of Xinjiang," Gardner Bovingdon shows how since 1949 the Chinese government has created a history for Xinjiang that makes it an inseparable part of China since antiquity. This historiographical project, according to him, has been a "subtle strategy of 'ideological incorporation' " that the CCP used in addition to more overt strategies, like the use of military force, to consolidate its hold in Xinjiang.[70] Bovingdon also points out that just before 1949 there still existed in China a lively discourse on the history and political status of Xinjiang in the context of which top Chinese officials and generals publicly suggested that China's relationship with Xinjiang had been colonial and even mentioned the possibility of independence for the region.[71] He argues that "that discourse [however,] was effectively shut down in 1949, and dissenting voices were silenced."[72] Indeed, the case of the ban on Turghun Almas' writings provides a vivid illustration of this silencing.

Yet in the conclusion to his essay Bovingdon observes that despite official efforts at ideological incorporation in the field of historiography, in sharp contrast to Han Chinese the "Uyghurs remain defiantly unpersuaded [and regard the official histories] as tissues of lies."[73] The question then is *why* and *how* the Uyghurs remain defiantly unpersuaded despite the "effective silencing"? Here the role of popular culture, a topic very much neglected in the study of Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, becomes clear. My article has shown how the Han and the CCP has been using popular culture to integrate Xinjiang into China. But it has also shown how popular culture is also being used by Uyghurs to resist the attempts to "psychologically integrate"[74] them. The books and articles of Turghun Almas were banned, but the knowledge and ideology which they contained are now disseminated through cheap cassettes and CDs, video

68. As at February 2001 Askar travelled regularly to Xinjiang also to visit his wife and two children who still lived there.

69. Elsewhere I have elaborated on the role of rock music in inspiring the students in the context of the pro-democracy movement of 1989. See my *China's New Voices*, ch. 1.

70. Bovingdon, "The history of the history of Xinjiang," p. 97.

71. *Ibid.* pp. 112–14.

72. *Ibid.* p. 97.

73. *Ibid.* p. 124.

74. Benson, "Contested history," p. 116.

clips, album covers, performances and posters all over Xinjiang and beyond. The same applies to Abdurehim Ötkür's books, which though not totally banned have also suffered occasional bans.[75] His famous poem "Traces," which opens the first of his three novels, has been transformed into several songs, and this peom and other parts of his books appear now on posters.[76] The importance of such popular forms is in their ability to bypass official media and to evade censorship more easily. No less important, such popular forms, which do not require a knowledge of reading, are also important in disseminating knowledge and ideologies that originate among the literary elite among millions of less educated Uyghurs. It remains to be seen how successful the Uyghur elite will be in inspiring and awakening their fellow people. It also remains to be seen how successful will be their struggle in Beijing to change the orthodox representation of Uyghurs in China, to gain internal and international recognition, and ultimately, to improve the general status of their people and of Xinjiang.

75. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 164.

76. The poem "Traces" ("lz" in Uyghur) is imbued with ethno-nationalistic messages and is extremely famous among Uyghur intellectuals, some of whom even know it by heart. For an English translation, see Edward Allworth and Gulamettin Pahta, "A gentle, new allegory by an older Uyghur author," *Doğu Türkistan'in Sesi* (*Voice of Eastern Turkistan*), Vol. 5, No. 17 (1988), pp. 19–20.