2 Devaluation

In 2014 in the center of the neighborhood at the southern edge of Ürümchi, there was a restaurant with a big red sign. In Chinese, the six-foot-tall characters read "PORK" (Ch: *DA ROU*). The sign was an anti-Islamic political and economic statement; it told everyone in the neighborhood that Han migrant-settlers had arrived and that they would not respect the Native knowledge and values of the Muslims who called this space their homeland. This Uyghur-majority neighborhood, known as Dawan, was one of the centers of violence during the protests on July 5, 2009. A large number of the Han settlers who were killed or injured during the violence came from this neighborhood. In the years that followed, many Han settlers moved from this neighborhood to Han-dominated districts of the city to the north (Tynen 2019b). Those who remained were often defiantly anti-Uyghur. They territorialized their space with Han markers,

signaling that they were there to stay. The six-foot-tall sign was a statement regarding the type of "quality" or "cultural capital" (Ch: *suzhi*; Uy: *sapa*) that was protected by the surveillance system which overlaid the city. In Ürümchi, Han rural-to-urban migrants received more institutional support than even affluent and highly educated Uyghurs in the city. As the evaluative process of terror capitalism swung into motion, state authorities and surveillance companies began to support low-income Han migrants' productive and reproductive work by imposing more comprehensive material and digital enclosures around Uyghur migrants.

In this neighborhood, if Uyghurs entered Han shops they were often either ignored or ordered to leave. At times Han proprietors would hold out their right hands, palm down, fingers pointed to the ground, and flick their wrists upward while barking "Out! Out!" (Ch: *Chu! Chu!*) in staccato bursts.[1] Or they would simply look past Uyghur customers, ignoring their questions, refusing to take their money. One Uyghur inhabitant of the community recalled a dispute he had with a Han gas-station attendant in the neighborhood. While he was waiting to have his ID checked so he could drive his car into the gas station, a Han taxi driver cut in line in front of him. When he protested, the Han gas-station attendant threatened to call the nearby police contractors. He told the Uyghur customer, "I'm not afraid of you. You should be afraid of me! I could have you arrested whenever I want." In the mind of this Uyghur rural-to-urban migrant, this encounter drove home the point that, in this city, Han lives were valued. Han desires took precedence. The police, the schools, the hospitals, the banks, the stores, all catered to Han desires and needs.

At the same time, over the course of the People's War on Terror, the same techno-political system prevented Uyghurs from advertising their products as halal. It used digital media surveillance parameters and informants to prevent Uyghur children from studying their mother tongue. Under threat of detention, they enforced family planning rules for Uyghurs while encouraging growth in the Han population (Cliff 2016a). As part of the counterterrorism strategy, they prevented Uyghurs from selling imported goods from Muslim-majority countries and instead emphasized Chinese domestic products. These institutions assured that pork could be consumed without reprisal, and that low-income Han migrants could use their faces and social connections to pass through checkpoints at the entrances of gated communities and institutions while unauthorized Uyghurs could not. The People's War on Terror became a euphemism for Han inclusion as "the people" conducting "the war" and Uyghur exclusion as the objects of terror. The war, combined with processes of Uyghur enclosure and dispossession, produced a powerful "state effect"

(T. Mitchell 1999; Yeh 2013) in which state power was ceded to Han settlers and implemented through the private and public institutions that supported them. Through a process of reevaluation, the work of low-income Han migrants accrued value on behalf of the nation while Uyghur migrants were evaluated as precriminals.

IN THE FIRST HALF of this chapter, I examined how low-income Han male and female migrants cultivated value in the city. In the second half, I consider how Uyghur male migrants attempted to perform similar kinds of social reproduction and economic labor. Comparing these two populations of recent Han and Uyghur migrants is important because it shows how social reproduction was evaluated and racialized to produce divergent forms of enclosure and opening. The experiences and perspectives of these two groups—whose household registration was located outside of the city—are shown in relief through comparison to a small minority of wealthy Uyghur bureaucrats, an emerging class of Han who were employed by state ministries and large corporations, and Han "Xinjiang locals" who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s (whose perspectives are reflected in chapter 5). While low-income Uyghurs often found themselves enclosed and subtracted from urban society, recent, low-income Han migrants often described their life paths as opening in new directions. Chinese-language and Han cultural forms of achieved personal quality were valued by the technopolitical system, while land-based Uyghur forms of achieved quality were often framed as "backward" (Ch: *luohou*) or "dangerous" (Ch: *weixian*). This chapter shows that the privileging of Han and Chinese values was often obfuscated by the state, which contributed to the institutionalization of bias and a lack of interethnic empathy among recent Han migrants that older generations of Han migrants saw as important. This process further accelerated as the society moved deeper into a mode of terror capitalism through the deep penetration of surveillance technologies. The privileging of Han values and desires also contributed to a widespread disruption in Uyghur social reproduction.

Yet, while their autonomous presence was diminished by the mid-2010s, Uyghur lives continued to matter when they could be used in the service of Han desires and security in the city. Uyghur bodies were useful in fulfilling the desires of the tourist gaze for happy, dancing exotic others in the safety of large Han-owned banquet halls in the Uyghur districts. They were even useful as exploitable low-wage employees in the Han-owned tourist bazaar spaces as examples of subordinated "interethnic harmony" (Ch: *minzu hexie*) created by the reeducation system. They were useful as embodied sources of data for the state capital–funded surveillance and security companies of the city; their

presence provided jobs for police contractors, political teachers, construction workers, and bureaucrats of all types. They provided justification for the mass internment camps that were built around the city. In general though, Uyghurs, particularly low-income, rural-origin migrant men, were unwanted in the city except for their utility as the objects of terror capitalism and as low-level policing contractors and informants.

Through this evaluative process, the labor of reproducing Native foodways, commodities, and styles was also devalued as low-skill or backward forms of work by urban authorities and upper-class Uyghurs and Han migrants. As described later in this book, the work of performing Islamic contemporaneity by participating in religious economies was outlawed by the state. Instead, many migrants were forced to return to their rural villages and towns hoping to work as contingent wage laborers in state-funded infrastructure and industrial agriculture projects and escape the internment camp system that targeted out-of-place young Uyghur men. Han migrants with similar levels of formal education, on the other hand, found numerous ways to stay and flourish in the city.

Uyghurs responded to this ethno-racial exclusion in a variety of ways. They saw Han settlers as inhabiting an obvious, but often unacknowledged, social privilege. In their minds, Han settlers acted as proxies for a colonial state that wanted to take all they could from Uyghurs; they were always watching Uyghurs with suspicion. Uyghurs felt as though they constantly had to prove their loyalty to the state by acting in ingratiating ways toward their Han neighbors. Even more affluent Uyghurs, who were trained in Chinese-language schools and were able to find jobs in government institutions, felt pressured to demonstrate their loyalty to the state and publicly agree with their Han colleagues when they discussed the "backwardness" of Uyghur migrants. Yet, no matter how "open" (Ch: *kaifang*) or sycophantic they acted in relation to their Han neighbors, they were rarely able to pass as Han.

On the other hand, recent Han migrants often said it was their patriotic duty to report Uyghurs they deemed suspicious. They naturalized their privilege as a product of their appearance, language ability, and social connections. It became a normative expression of their Han citizenship in the Chinese nation. By participating in the social enclosure of Uyghurs who they saw as "low quality" (Ch: *suzhi di*), they positioned themselves as "high quality" (Ch: *suzhi gao*), valued members of society. Unlike in cities in Eastern China, recent rural-to-urban Han migrants enjoyed a sense of prestige and distinction relative to the Native inhabitants of the city they had come to occupy.

As Zang Xiaowei (2011, 155) notes, Han nonstate workers in Ürümchi earned on average 52 percent more than Uyghurs in the city. Across the region as a

whole, inequality in income was at around 28 percent (Liu and Peters 2017, 270). This produced more pronounced overall rates of inequality "than anywhere else in the People's Republic of China" (Millward 2021, 366), more even than other sites of ethnic diversity and extreme poverty in China—such as Tibet, Yunnan, Guizhou, Qinghai, and Gansu—where Han in-migration rates were lower. The income gap between the rural population of mostly Uyghurs and the urban population dominated by Han migrants was a staggering 30 percentage points higher than the national average (Cao 2010, 968). Nowhere in the country was inequality so closely tied to ethno-racial difference.

Ultimately, though, despite the impossibility of achieving value as "high quality" urban citizens, in the early stages of this evaluative process many young Uyghur migrants still strove to find ways to perform their contemporaneity. Like their Han neighbors, they too wanted to achieve a quality of life that resonated with desires that had been elicited through processes of dispossession. The desire to achieve qualities of contemporaneity gave this structure and propulsion. These qualities, which they referred to in Uyghur as *sapa*, in some ways resonated with understandings of modernist, cultivated distinction or achieved quality that Han urbanites referred to in Chinese as *suzhi*. As described in chapter 3, they too attempted to buy forms of distinction by dressing in certain ways and adopting urbane styles. Nearly everyone I spoke with wanted to find a life path that helped them achieve a higher quality of life, by which they meant a life without poverty and a life that promised future autonomy. They had dreams that involved cultivating themselves as success stories. Yet, despite these resonances across ethno-racial divides, what counted as quality was often pointed toward different sources—one toward a "Native" (Uy: *yerlik*) and Islamic contemporaneity, the other toward a Chinese contemporaneity. Because of this, their distinctive qualities were valued differently by both state authorities and migrants. The main way that these two forms of quality differed was in the degree to which low-income young Uyghur migrants saw their traditional knowledge as having a great deal of value; recent Han migrants, on the other hand, saw nonurban and Uyghur forms of knowledge as having little value.

Discourses of Quality in Contemporary China

Like cities in other parts of China, in 2014 Ürümchi had an emerging middle class. Much of the wealth of the city was centered around Han state and corporate employees, along with a small minority of Chinese-trained (Ch: *minkaohan*) state-affiliated Uyghurs—less than 10 percent of the total population, who

worked in natural resource development and the securitization of Uyghur society (Smith Finley 2007, 2018; Grose 2014; Tobin 2015). Built into this Chinese pursuit of the middle-class good life was the industrial exploitation of a reserve army of millions of Han migrant laborers needed to build it. The anthropologist Pun Ngai (2005) argues that the "floating population" (Ch: *liudong renkou*) of *dagongmei* and *dagongzai* (working girls [little sisters] and working boys [little fellows]), names the contours of a yet unformed working class that is emerging in China's economic reforms. In Ürümchi, these laboring Han bodies whose raw energy was building China's New Silk Road were young, rural-to-urban migrant settlers.

This new labor subject emerged from what Pun Ngai (2005) refers to as a "triple displacement": (1) the erasure of socialist class discourse; (2) the introduction of wage labor in the service of the ever-expanding "race to the bottom" of labor and cost efficiency that accompanies global capitalism; and (3) the maintenance of patriarchal systems. This displacement produces a "boundary struggle" between the work of social reproduction on the part of Chinese women and men and market forces that enclose them as individual workers apart from their families (see Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). Working in dynamic relation to the legacy of social-class structures, institutions, and infrastructures of Maoist China, these social strata profoundly transformed the spacing of social landscapes in urban China. The operative function of this process, combined with the intransigence of Maoist-legacy rural-urban apartheid and the erasure of class discourse, had the effect of eating into family and community life—forcing young rural Han people to move into contingent work in the city.

The securitization of Xinjiang introduced an additional new element into this equation of negative evaluation, exploitation, and expropriation: rural, Turkic Muslim bodies as the object of devaluation and control at the hands of Han migrant-settlers and state institutions. In Ürümchi, new social strata such as the emerging middle class and a flexible migrant Han working class were in effect being formed around the enclosure of Uyghurs. One of the conversion devices that naturalized this ethno-racial antagonism was the life narrative of Han suzhi as a form of individually achieved cultural capital.

As Andrew Kipnis (2011) has shown, *suzhi* (achieved quality) first emerged as a replacement for the word *zhiliang* (ascribed quality) in state assessments of populations in the early 1980s. This device as used by schools, health care providers, and employers transformed people into populations of individualized "human resource investments" (2011, 65).[2] As Ann Anagnost has argued, this turn toward a discourse of suzhi "marks a significant departure from earlier forms of subjectivity in the sense that the worker is understood as an entrepreneur

who invests in his or her own self-development" (2013, 26n11). This implies that individuals must adopt practices recognized as holding value that in turn can be exchanged for positions and practices that hold ever greater exchange value within the market economy (see also Yan 2008).[3]

As Li Zhang has noted, since the mass migration from the countryside to the city began in the early 1980s, Han migrants have often been denied formal political recognition as "an amorphous flow of undifferentiated laborers without histories" (2001, 31). In contrast to earlier waves of urban-to-rural migrants who were directed to strategic locations by the state during the first thirty years of the state, the Chinese state media often represent market-oriented migrants "not as living individuals with their own desires, dreams and intentions, but as flocks of raw labor that can be used or expelled at any time" (31). Yet, as Anagnost explains, evaluating the bodies, perceptions, and affects of migrants as "low quality" "justifies the extraction of surplus value" while at the same time legitimating "new regimes of social differentiation" (2004, 193). As a result, young migrants pursue life projects hoping to accrue suzhi and associated social value by participating in the capitalist economy of production and consumption. Furthermore, as Yan Hairong (2008) has shown, relationships between migrants and urbanites that appear to be durable can be made disposable with sudden, arbitrary attachments of "low suzhi" to the bodies of migrants. For example, low-income Han migrant nannies in Beijing often feel bonded to the affluent families who employ them, yet a small misstep can result in an immediate severing of a deep relationship. Because migrant workers are seen as having little quality, in mainstream Chinese contexts they can be treated as disposable. In the context of Ürümchi, however, Han migrant status is much more secure because, as shown in previous chapters, Han bodies and metrics are needed to "clear the social atmosphere" as part of the techno-political dispossession of Uyghurs.

In their study of the Chinese and Italian transnational garment industry, Lisa Rofel and Sylvia Yanagisako (2018) find that studying transnational capitalism through a feminist analytic reveals a dynamic process of revaluation. Drawing on their case study of Italian and Han negotiations of labor power and value in the Chinese manufacturing of commodities infused with Italianness, their research points out that the production of capitalist value is "always a process of negotiation" (2018, 15). At the colonial frontier of the nation, this process of negotiation veers away from the dynamism of evaluation within an asymmetrical yet "unstable field of power" (2018, 38) within a recognized labor market, toward forms of domination and expropriation shaped by state capital, state power, and ethno-racialization. Unlike in Han-majority areas, the location of

most studies of labor value in China,[4] in the Uyghur region the most extreme forms of exploitation are associated not with Han migrants but with rural-origin Uyghurs. At this ethno-racial frontier of capitalist accumulation, the field of power hardens in an ongoing evaluative process that naturalizes Han cultural values and state authority. This economic and social reproductive formation centers less on a dynamic reevaluative process where multisited power relations are leveraged in negotiation, than a process in which Uyghur social quality and labor power is devalued, while the value of Han migrant-settler labor and social reproduction appreciates.

The perceptions and affects of achieved value or quality can be measured only relative to the positions of others within a field of power. Suzhi within the political frame of a village is not the same thing as suzhi in an urban setting; neither is the experience of suzhi in rural Sichuan Province the same as that of a person from Sichuan living in Tibet. As Emily Yeh has demonstrated in her account of the construction of a "Little Sichuan" by Han migrant vegetable farmers on the outskirts of Lhasa, it is "essential to see status and value as determined not only by ethnicity and the rural/urban spatial divide, but also by the *suzhi* coding of the territory of the nation-state in relation to development" (2013, 116). Following Yan Hairong's 2008 argument of the tautology of development indexed to suzhi (low quality is the result of low development / low development is the result of low quality), Yeh shows that the national topography of Chinese value is oriented toward the eastern seaboard as the site of sophistication while the western frontier is evaluated as lacking the infrastructure, style, and distinction of modernity. Han migrant-settlers in Ürümchi likewise recognize the sophistication of eastern Chinese cities, but they also recognize the relative ease with which they find a good life in Ürümchi.

Migration to the west rather than the east follows different lines of capital accumulation. Yeh makes clear that migrants from Sichuan to Tibet feel as though they "accumulate no *suzhi*" (2013, 117) which they can bring back with them to their village settings. In fact, they feel there is an inherent danger in "suffering" too long in underdeveloped and minority-populated areas. It is as if the extreme lack of suzhi might rub off on them: darkening their skin, damaging their ability to affect others. In this instance, there is a sharp disconnect between achieved quality and monetary value, since frontier migration to Tibet brings a good deal of wealth and prestige to rural areas in Sichuan through remittances. Unlike migrants to eastern cities, migrants to the west have high success rates in earning significant incomes. In both Xinjiang and Tibet, this migration was in fact motivated by both the sending communities and national state subsidies for western frontier development.[5] As Yeh notes,

"The material force and consequence of the national discourse of quality and development means that the 'marginal and precarious legal status' of migrants does not have the same effect in Lhasa as in other provinces" (2013, 120). Migrants to the frontier instead see themselves as agents of development, or in the case of Xinjiang, as "constructors" (Ch: *jianshezhe*) of the nation (Cliff 2016b). As they told Yeh, "What we did there was a huge benefit for Tibet" (Yeh 2013, 122). They saw their work as simultaneously actualizing the vision of the state that had been communicated to them discursively and through economic incentives. By slipping suzhi and development into a framework of national progress, patriotic duty, and a sacrificial life-project among low-suzhi minorities, migrants thus come to see the benefits they accrue as justified even as they resent the "misallocation" of resources that drew them away from their homes toward low-suzhi frontier settlements in the first place (Yeh 2013, 118). They may feel that the resources of the nation would have been better spent in improving living conditions in rural Eastern China, yet despite these feelings of ambivalence toward the priorities of the nation, many of them are proud of their sacrifice for the nation. The bounded solidity of "the effect of the state" was channeled through public and private institutions, ranging from banks to police, and manifested through their labor and ethos (T. Mitchell 1999; Fischer 2013; Yeh 2013).

As Tom Cliff (2016b) has argued, drawing on fieldwork in the smaller Xinjiang oil city of Korla, the main goals of the current administration in Xinjiang are to integrate the frontier with the rest of China and placate the Han population of Xinjiang. Unlike Tibet, the majority of Han in Xinjiang are long-term settlers in the Maoist-legacy People's Construction and Production Corps or state-subsidized small-business entrepreneurs. Since the 1990s millions of additional vegetable farmers, cotton pickers, coal miners, and road builders have arrived, and because of the scale of resource extraction industries and infrastructures in Xinjiang many of them have also become long-term settlers. These two populations—the Corps, who came in the 1950s and 1960s, and economic migrants, who came in the 1990s and 2000s—form the dual core of the Xinjiang Han population. As the Han migration continues its capillary spread across Xinjiang, a process of devaluing Uyghurs has resulted in a considerable amount of leverage for Han migrant-settlers, particularly from the second wave of market-oriented settlers. This is especially the case for Han settlers who have found a place for themselves in Ürümchi. In an emerging city that is actively cleansing large populations of unwanted Uyghurs, employment opportunities abound. In fact, for urban migrant-settlers, the rhetoric of sacrifice or building the nation that Cliff and Yeh noted among Han migrants in smaller

frontier cities such as Korla and Lhasa seemed to slip out of view. The construction of the effective reality of state power disappeared from view, even as, for Uyghurs, it appeared as a privately contracted colonial Leviathan.

Low-Income Han Migrant Quality and Social Reproduction

No one typified the achieved quality of low-income Han settler-migrants more than the Sichuan migrant singer Luo Lin. Through his outlaw folk-rock persona, and his claim to the stage name Dao Lang, the Chinese transliteration of a Uyghur Sufi tradition and community near Kashgar, he channeled an aspirational pioneer ethos of many migrant workers in Northwest China (see Smith Finley 2015). An immensely talented performer, he has proven himself to be very adept at evaluating an alien environment inhabited by dispossessed people. Since a majority of his fans, like himself, are hardworking migrants from elsewhere—Anhui, Gansu, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Hebei, and Shandong, just to name a few common natal homes—Luo Lin centers his songs on stories of hard-earned economic success inscribed over Xinjiang's landscape. Migrant workers in the oil fields, coal mining, and booming construction industries were represented as "constructors" of the nation (Cliff 2016b). Luo Lin's songs often produced an evaluation of this work from a particular Han male angle: offering migrant workers numerous pathways for claiming the Xinjiang atmosphere and simultaneously accruing greater social value. As he sings in the music video of one of his Xinjiang migrant anthems of discovery and declaration, "Under the Northern Sky" (Ch: *beifang de tiankong xia*) while standing in front of a giant "Open up the West" windfarm south of Ürümchi: "I'm standing under the northern sky / I think of you, far away at the ends of the earth / The world seems bigger than I thought / But here will always be our home."[6] The Dao Lang persona he constructed was widely seen by recent Han migrants from both wealthy and impoverished economic classes as a heroic example of a patriotic cultural entrepreneur, surveying the social field and transforming it into a legible, enclosed object. Over the past two decades as he has risen to iconic status in Xinjiang, his song lyrics have been suffused with images of a landscape rich in resources, exotic Muslim women, and subjugated Uyghur men.

Many of the low-income Han migrant-settlers I interviewed demonstrated a similar sense of the political and cultural leverage they possessed as patriotic Han subjects. The ability to exploit this leverage—using a kind of location-specific Han privilege, Chinese language, and social connections to find economic opportunities—was often experienced as a kind of ease. By simply showing up,

they were able to participate in the economy of the city as self-fashioning subjects. As one Han migrant, Du Jie, who owned a small shop near the giant "PORK" sign in the Dawan neighborhood told me:

> I can definitely imagine living here for the rest of my life and just going back to my hometown now and then. It is so much easier to find jobs and they pay way better than in Anhui. It wasn't a big adjustment at all when I moved here. I have several businesses that I am doing at the same time. It would be impossible to do that if I was back in Anhui.

She came to Ürümchi with her husband when he was hired to work on a construction project along with other people from her home village in Anhui. After that contract was completed, they used the money he had earned to stay and open a shop that catered to Han migrant construction workers in nearby housing and security infrastructure projects. Once the shop was up and running, it was easy to hire other migrants to run it, and they soon opened another shop. Because it was in a Uyghur-majority neighborhood, Du Jie said the police and local neighborhood watch unit (Ch: *shequ*) were supportive and made the process of leasing space seem simple. Du Jie admitted that there were minor inconveniences that came from the security systems such as having to register a new phone or ID and attending political education meetings. But she said, "All of that isn't for us. It is for them [Uyghurs]. The neighborhood unit asks us to report any suspicious activity, so they can track it with the cameras. If they do anything to us, the police will respond right away. Most of the time they don't bother us and ask for ID cards or phones on the street, like they do for the Uyghurs."

Although most of the dozens of Han migrants I spoke with still had affinities with their home provinces, they said that in some ways it was easier for them to perform regional variations of Hanness in Ürümchi than in their home villages. In Ürümchi they had more wealth, and there were fewer class distinctions in groupings of migrants from other provinces. For example, according to Du Jie and her coworkers, in Ürümchi, Anhui people were often inclined to help other Anhui people find jobs and resources even if they were strangers. Their shared place of origin was enough to link them in a common cause. According to them, this sort of comradery was quite rare in Anhui itself. In the frontier city, many of the things they needed to perform their identities was available to them and the differences in status they experienced back in their hometown were flattened out. They also found themselves exposed to new variations of Han cuisine and style and their tastes began to reflect this diversity. Most of the Han people were from somewhere else, so they cast

less judgment on other Han. Of course, often unstated was the way they were unified in opposition to the threat of Uyghur resentment of their possessions (Tynen 2019b). As in colonial experiments elsewhere, the frontier was a space of social mobility within a shared nationalist cause.[7]

Another woman from Henan, Lin Mingbai, exemplified the ease and contentment of Han migrant life in a city that supported Han migrants. In her experience when she and her husband came, along with other people in her village, in the early 2000s during the infrastructure construction boom that accompanied the "Open up the West" campaign, life in Xinjiang was already much better than life in Henan. She said:

> I'm from Henan. I came here fifteen years ago. Back in Henan we had less than 5 mu [2.5 acres]. We raised wheat, but we barely made enough to eat. There are so many people in Henan.[8] It is impossible to find any real opportunities there. That's why we came here. But I still think like a Henan person. Sometimes we go back to Henan over the Spring Festival, but sometimes we can't. It's too far and sometimes we can't afford it.

When I asked her to compare her life in Ürümchi to her life in Henan, Lin Mingbai said:

> One of the biggest differences I found between life in the countryside in Henan and life here in the city in Xinjiang is that food is so much more convenient. I don't miss cultivating at all. It took so much time to prepare anything in Henan. Here, everything is convenient. You can just buy what you need and make food right away. We can find everything we need to make Henan food. We had three kids after we came here; they all have jobs. My husband also works as a home repairman. *Wulumuqi* [Uy: Ürümchi] is developing so fast that we can always find work. I've never had a job myself, but I always find a way to make money. For the past two years, I've been selling small supplies of things in the market. Lately I've been making around fifty yuan per day. Our place is small and costs too much [500 yuan], but it is enough for us.

As scholarship on rural poverty in Henan has shown (Anagnost 2006), many Han farmers in the province struggle with basic food security in the context of state-directed capitalism. Since extreme poverty was the baseline for many of these Han migrants, the work that this woman was able to find in Ürümchi seemed to her to be more than adequate. Lin Mingbai also said that since her relatives in Henan had WeChat like she did she could stay in touch with them on a regular basis. Furthermore, her social reproduction was valued by the po-

litical system. Unlike the challenges migrants face in other urban locations in China (L. Zhang 2010), she said her children had been accepted by good schools that were subsidized by the government. This social reproductive support is even more remarkable because she and her husband had flouted the relevant family planning laws, which had demanded they have only one child instead of three. She said, "They will have a much better life than we had. I never regret coming to Xinjiang for one minute."

Another young man from Henan, Zhu Maodun, who was working as a real estate agent for a commodity housing development in the Han-majority New City district of Ürümchi, told me something similar. For him and his wife, coming to Xinjiang was the best thing they had ever done in their lives. It allowed Zhu Maodun entrée to a neighborhood that would have been impossible to enter in Henan and it allowed him to imagine achieving a high-quality standard of living despite only having a high school degree. He said:

> Everyone who lives here in this housing development works for state-owned enterprises [or large corporations]. Their "quality" [Ch: *suzhi*] is really high. This place is built for convenience. It is only fifteen minutes to the high-speed rail station. We have the largest Carrefour in Wulumuqi [Uy: Ürümchi]. It is only five minutes away and we are connected to all of the major roads. In a year or two we will also be connected with the subway. Every housing district in the development has its own English-Chinese kindergarten. Also, there are nearby parks for you to relax and exercise. You can go fishing. Everything is very convenient. It is a young community with access to all of the best schools.

Continuing, he discussed the way the security system in the housing development was state of the art. Each resident could use a card to open the perimeter gate. Eventually, in 2017, all neighborhoods throughout the city would rely on face scans in order to enter housing complexes, fully segmenting unwanted migrants away from vast areas of the city. At this point though, Zhu Maodun already felt fully protected by the policing contractor checkpoints and camera systems.

Because of the ease with which the Ürümchi economy supported Han social reproduction, he too felt that his son would receive a better education and life opportunities if he grew up as a Xinjiang person. He said:

> I came here in 2012 with my wife. Both of us are just making money for our families. We have a one-year-old son who is at home with my parents. Eventually we will bring him to live with us here. We have no land back in Henan so there is no work for us there.

Zhu Maodun felt that if his son grew up in this atmosphere, he would understand that anything is possible if he just worked hard enough. "He may," he added, "even have an opportunity to travel to the United States someday." This perspective of Ürümchi as a space of economic opportunity at the frontier of the nation that in turn could lead to an even better life abroad was echoed not only by other lower-income Han migrants but also by many upper-class Han people in the city.

Zhu Maodun said that because he was good at navigating the Chinese-language internet and using WeChat, it was easy for him to find work immediately after he came to the city. He quickly built an online social network through other migrants from Henan and his work as a real estate agent. Every day he collected contacts through online advertising. His ease in finding a job and a position as a formally recognized productive worker made the further work of cultivating his "achieved" quality through leisure performance and consumption a possibility. He bought new clothes and an iPhone to fit his new persona as a real estate agent. The state capital, which both directly and indirectly funded the housing development and associated security infrastructure, provided him with a feeling of security. In this location at the frontier of the nation, it empowered him and made him productive.

Zhu Maodun said that succeeding as a knowledge worker was much easier than in the metropoles in Eastern China:

> Xinjiang is better than Beijing and Shanghai because the income levels are high but the rent is still low. So in the end we can make more here than in the east. I'm also not willing to do construction, because it is such hard work. I'm good at using the internet and cell phones so I would rather work in that market selling things. I've only been doing this job for two months, but I really like it. They give us a base salary of 2,000 and then if we sell a house they will give us a commission of .5 percent. I know it is too low but this is China. So I can do this job and then do other jobs on the side as well. My wife also works in real estate but as a waitress for a big real estate office. I like Wulumuqi [Uy: Ürümchi]. The *atmosphere* really suits me. Everyone in the city comes from somewhere else, so it is easy to be accepted. If I had a chance I would definitely settle here; there are so many more opportunities for us here than in Henan. Of course, I miss my family in Henan, but this is a place where I feel like I could really *begin to live*. (my emphasis)

The "atmosphere" that was cleared by the techno-political system and made available to Han migrant self-fashioning in technology-enabled work,

resonated with Zhu Maodun's naturalized social standing. Ürümchi, under the sign of terror capitalism, marked a location where he could "begin to live." He could find multiple jobs in the knowledge economy and through hard work move into a better social position. What is remarkable in what he said was his lack of awareness of how his success in the city was mediated by his Han identification and knowledge. As in nearly all conversations I had with Han migrants, there was no acknowledgment that their "good life" was contingent on Uyghur dispossession in general and the enclosure of Uyghur migrants. Instead, they saw their success as a deserved product of their hard work, self-cultivation, and sacrifice.

Although numerous Han low-income migrants I interviewed recognized that the type of quality they were accruing in Ürümchi was less valuable than what might be possible in bigger cities such as Beijing or Shanghai, they saw their lives in Xinjiang as radically better than the lives of their relatives in rural Eastern China. This perspective stands in contrast to the Han migrants from Sichuan that Emily Yeh (2013) interviewed in Tibet. In many ways, low-income Han migrants in Ürümchi saw their identities being disaggregated from their place of origin into a more general Chinese national future. They were pioneers at the frontier of the "Chinese nation" (Ch: *zhonghua minzu*) project. For them, the difference in quality between bigger cities and Ürümchi was largely one of perception. Migrants—particularly those who, like Zhu Maodun, lived in Han-majority areas in the city—said the actual threat of Uyghur "terror" (Ch: *kongbu*) was wildly exaggerated. They felt safe because the state police and police contractor presence was so strong. Many of them noted that the security apparatus also offered Han workers secure employment regardless of their educational background. Furthermore, they could live their lives without interacting with a single Uyghur.

A migrant from Hunan who worked as a cook in a Hunanese restaurant said:

> All of my family is from a town near Changsha so I really do need to go back periodically. I don't see the differences between Changsha and Ürümchi as purely quality issues. Changsha is a bit bigger, but it is also a bit more closed. Here, everyone is from somewhere else and the government has put a lot of money into developing the area. The future is very bright here.

While in mainstream Chinese discourse outside of the region, Xinjiang was represented as "backward" (Ch: *luohou*) and "dangerous" (Ch: *weixian*) and therefore lacking the quality of eastern cities, Han migrants said they rarely experienced this. In fact, many noted that the general sense of lack that was associated

with Ürümchi was beneficial, because underdeveloped and dangerous locations could be made the recipients of massive injections of state capital. Although migrant settlers in Xinjiang may be evaluated as having low suzhi from the perspective of middle-class urbanites in the east, at the frontier of the nation migrants often came to feel as though they had power to control their own futures and, by extension, the futures of others.

In the context of Xinjiang, the attitudes and cultural artifacts of low-income recent migrants had an effect on corporate and state workers who came to build out resource extraction and the techno-political system as well. For instance, wealthy Han people I met who worked in those industries told me that Dao Lang was their favorite musician too. In fact, I first heard of him from an economist on the way to a fancy dinner at a four-star hotel on the northwest corner of the People's Square in downtown Ürümchi. We had been discussing our taste in cars. The economist, who worked in Private Public Partnership development in the infrastructure sector, said she found the Hummer to be the best car because it was so powerful and in a place like Xinjiang power was important. Then, as though the army vehicle reminded her of migrant attitudes, she asked me if I had ever heard of Dao Lang. She said she thought he was the best Xinjiang singer. "He really expresses the Xinjiang atmosphere," she said. Later, during the dinner with an investment banker who commuted between Ürümchi and Beijing, she brought him up again. The banker too attested to his fondness of Dao Lang's musical stylings. He said that, after coming to Xinjiang, listening to Dao Lang just made sense. He liked his "flavor" (Ch: *weidao*). For him, Xinjiang, as a social atmosphere cleared for the expression of Han-centric suzhi, was best expressed through Dao Lang's staging of a Han migrant expropriation of Uyghur symbolic, embodied, and material space.

Uyghur Quality and Social Reproduction

A discourse of market-oriented achieved quality has also been taken up in Uyghur society. In a series of extended interviews I conducted with him in 2014 and 2015, the Uyghur public intellectual, poet, and filmmaker Tahir Hamut described Uyghur conceptualizations of achieved quality as follows:

> In many ways the idea of quality seems to be a human universal. It is associated with education, ability, taste, and refinement. For Uyghurs, the role of these qualities has been valued for a long time, but we know the most about it from the 1920s onward when a kind of "achieved quality" [Uy: *sapa*] really became a highly coveted value. Although there

were actually very few intellectuals relative to the whole population of Uyghurs, compared to other minorities and even Han, Uyghurs had quite a lot of quality.

Tahir was referring to the period when the Jadid school of Islamic modernists from other parts of South and Central Asia and the Middle East began to introduce new forms of modernist, scientific learning in Uyghur society. As a result, there was an efflorescence in Uyghur-language education. This new form of quality, achieved through education, produced an intellectual class and new forms of cultural knowledge. It also shaped the formation of the first Turkic Islamic Republic of East Turkestan (1933–34) centered around a nascent Islamic nationalism. In the 1940s, as Uyghurs began to learn about socialist experiments in nation building, these earlier forms of cultural knowledge were put to work in service to the second East Turkestan Republic (1944–49). Tahir said, though, that since the arrival of the Communist Party in 1949, Uyghur cultural development had been largely blocked by Maoist multiculturalism and the propaganda state. He said, "During the Maoist years we really had very little control over what we produced [culturally]. We did not have the freedom to study or to cultivate ourselves."

This began to change during the 1980s when, as in spaces around the nation, there was a turn toward individual cultivation through market-oriented production and a new fashioning of aspiring subjects through consumption, much as Anagnost (2013) and others have noted among Han populations. As a result, throughout the 1990s there was a resurgence in Uyghur knowledge production by aspiring entrepreneurs that began to produce new forms of cultural quality, even though it lacked some of the market support to truly flourish as it did in Eastern China. Then, in the mid-2000s a new form of censorship and regulation began to block the more autonomous forms of yerlik culture work. As Tahir put it:

> Part of the issue is the way media production has been regulated over the past decades. From the early 1990s until 2004, we were able to produce a lot of media: films, music, comedies on very cheap VCDs. In 2005 there was a sharp crackdown on selling Uyghur-language media. After 2009 it became even more tightly controlled. The government wanted to prevent the circulation of anything that did not serve Han values. Now, it is hard to find non-state mass media, particularly in the south. Even previously approved Uyghur-language television and movies have been censored. There are no movie theaters in the south. Instead, we are fed state propaganda all the time.

As he thought about this further, Tahir said that there were three main factors that made Uyghurs appear to lack achieved quality from the perspective of Han migrant-settlers in the city. He said these factors centered around a generalized lack of media autonomy outside of the brief window between 2012 and 2014 when WeChat enabled a flourishing of Uyghur culture. Because Uyghurs lack space to produce and stage representations of the types of distinction they desire, negative stereotypes of Uyghurs as backward and potentially dangerous have pervaded Chinese popular culture. To a greater extent than Han migrants in the city, particularly after the People's War on Terror began, Uyghur migrants were prevented from pursuing their desires through the cultivation and performance of the self.[9] Instead, Uyghur desires were often perceived by state authorities, corporate workers, and Han migrants as too Uyghur and too Islamic and not Chinese enough. This is why, in most cases, the only positive images of Uyghurs that were staged by local authorities for public consumption were those of happy, dancing, exotic others performing their permitted difference for the benefit of tourists.

Tahir said that this lack of freedom, combined with traditional forms of knowledge, gave Uyghur ideas of quality a different trajectory and expression. He said:

> Because of their traditions, rural-origin Uyghurs are less interested in [Chinese-style] development than Han people. For them, the old ways of doing things, the courtyard houses they grew up with, they see as having more quality than new apartments and urban living. Maybe they want to have modern conveniences, but they want them to be set up in a traditional style.

As an example of this, he described the way many Uyghur migrants found the quality of the aesthetics of the handful of Turkish-themed Uyghur restaurants in the city tremendously appealing. He said this was because such restaurants reimagined Uyghur cuisines and modes of comportment as urban and contemporary, Islamic and Turkic—rather than Chinese or Western and therefore non-Islamic. Uyghurs could still sit on rugs around low tables in hierarchies of honor and respect, eating traditional Uyghur dishes and drinking Uyghur tea, but it was also worldly and cosmopolitan because of the attire of the white-gloved waiters and the shape of the Turkish teacups. Native modes of comportment, surrounded by ornate plaster (Uy: *kısek*) niches, inlaid wood casings, and mosaics of yerlik craftwork, along with live traditional music and free Wi-Fi, created an atmosphere of urban contemporaneity that wealthy

Uyghurs were willing to pay a great deal to enjoy and at which lower-income Uyghurs marveled. These were spaces of comfort and people watching, not for tourist consumption. They created contemporary Uyghur worlds for Uyghurs to consume.

Tahir and other Uyghur-culture workers I interviewed identified the sources of Uyghur ideas of quality as coming from different places, from rural traditions and aspiring toward Turkish, Islamic, and urban contemporaneity. But they also said that, in many ways, ideas of quality were simply a function of the economy, which increasingly centered around the internet and smartphones. As Tahir noted, a consumer lifestyle was beginning to have a large effect on Uyghur migrant life. He said:

> Now, people are becoming more and more self-centered. They feel like a high quality of life just means that everything should be convenient. If people have a nice house, car, and family then they feel content and feel like they have high quality.

Although the structural inequalities of life in the city had a sharp effect on the ability of Uyghur migrants to achieve the quality of life they hoped for, WeChat and other online platforms gave them some means to display their distinction. Everyone could post images of themselves in the lobbies of opulent restaurants built for Uyghur bureaucrats or in glass-enclosed shopping malls. Yet, despite the promise of online urban personas, over time their social media use and location in the city became the target of digital surveillance. From the perspective of the small minority of Uyghurs who were able to obtain urban household registration through their work in government institutions—likely less than 5 percent of the Uyghur population (Tohti 2015)—Uyghur migrants, particularly those without formal education, often appeared to have low levels of quality. Han settlers in the city and urban authorities often evaluated Uyghur migrants in similar ways, which resulted in widespread job discrimination. This process of devaluation came to a head in 2014 when the state began instituting the social enclosure I described in chapter 1.

A list of "75 signs of religious extremism behaviors" was circulated by regional political bureaus outlining what was deemed "normal" or "regular" (Ch: *zhengchang*) behavior and "abnormal" (Ch: *yichang*) behavior (United Front 2014). The "manifestations" (Ch: *biaoxian*) ranged from "preventing the circulation of 'normal' commodities on the grounds that they are not halal" to "defacing the great portraits" of famous Chinese political leaders and wearing "abnormal" clothes. Item 43 on the list was of particular importance to the

system of material and digital enclosure. It stated that, "resisting government propaganda and education by smashing TV sets, anything related to damaging broadcasting equipment or refusing to watch 'normal' movies and TV networks" were a sign of precriminal extremism. Likewise, "attacking development and management measures"—such as the Aid Xinjiang system, which was responsible for many of the monitored, unfree labor programs—protests against the West–East pipeline and infrastructure program that drove the extraction economy, or complaining about the rural household registration and associated passbook system were also signs of extremism (United Front 2014). Number 48 on the list outlawed gathering in prayer rooms and "disturbing the public order." Number 53 deemed international money transfers by Muslims illegal. Numbers 67–73 outlawed using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), data sharing devices, WeChat, and other social media to discuss religious topics—something that literally millions of Uyghurs were doing when they were deemed "abnormal" (Ch: *yichang*). Under those programmatic guidelines—the basis of the algorithms that would come to assess and control Uyghur life—simply existing as a young, underdocumented, undereducated, underemployed male migrant placed a Uyghur in the category of suspicion. These forms of evaluation resulted in enclosure, not only of rural-origin migrants but of Uyghur social reproduction itself.

Devalued Native Work in the City

The term *Indigenous* is a contested term in China (Elliott 2015). There are several interrelated reasons for this. The most general reason for this contestation is its rejection by state authorities as a concept that threatens the sovereignty of the state in China and, by extension, the right of the majority to possess minority land and labor. If minoritized, land-based people—such as Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Tibetans, who speak different languages, have different faith practices, and in most cases, possess non-Han ethno-racial phenotypes—were permitted to identify themselves as Indigenous, it would be more difficult for Chinese authorities and Han settlers to justify their claims to their ancestral lands and control over their social reproduction. The second reason for this contestation comes from exiled communities, and some scholars, who view the term *Indigenous* as signifying a primitive "backwardness," the antithesis of state modernity typified by claims to desired ethno-states of Tibet and East Turkestan.[10] It is important to note here that although many diasporan Uyghurs, particularly from an older generation, do see the nation-state form of East Turkestan as an ultimate political goal, some Uyghur scholars and community leaders both in

China and the diaspora imagine more inclusive, less state-centric resolutions to colonial domination. A third, and perhaps most nuanced, reason for rejecting the term *Indigenous*, comes from close examination of the way minoritized groups, particularly those in Southwest China, have embraced the permitted differences allowed by the state. In some cases, peoples like the Miao, Yi, and others have been able to use state funding of minority cultural production to drive their economies and shape their dance and music traditions, efforts that allow them to maintain a measure of autonomy (Schein 2000; Wilcox 2018). In general, people from these groups have not sought to position themselves within internationalist Indigenous movements (Yeh 2007a; Roche and Wang 2021). For instance, the scholar Yu Luo (2017) has shown that regional elites in Guizhou have adopted a Chinese term *yuanshengtai*, which valorizes features similar to indigeneity to describe the "cultural distinctiveness and environmental stewardship of ethnic, rural peoples" of the region, but do not use the banned Chinese terms for the Indigenous (Ch: *yuan zhumin*) which is widely used by Indigenous peoples in Taiwan (Simon 2020).

However, despite these reasons for not identifying as Indigenous, increasingly a younger generation of ethnic minority scholars have begun to take up indigeneity as a political identity that responds to global decolonial movements (Hathaway 2010). This is particularly the case among a new generation of Inner Asia scholars.[11] Unlike most Southwest China minorities, who use Chinese as their first language and who can pass as Han, for these groups—often described as "hard" (Ch: *ying*), "raw" (Ch: *sheng*) or "unopen" (Ch: *bu kaifang*) minorities in state and mainstream discourse—ethnicity has been increasingly racialized (Harrell 2001; M. Hansen 2007; Oakes 2012). As their lands and difference become a site of increased struggle for economic control, state authorities and majority populations have come to recognize minority claims to difference as a deficit and threat, rather than an asset. Scholarship on indigeneity, decolonization, and antiracism has given these scholars new ways of understanding storytelling and oral tradition, sacred landscapes, and epistemic violence. It has also given them ways of seeing both the utility and failure of state-centered approaches to identity.

Building on the work of this emergent generation of scholars—Dawa Lokyitsang (Tibetan), Amy Anderson (Uyghur), Michael Anderson (Uyghur), Guldana Salimjan (Kazakh), Nurdoukht Khudonazarova Taghdumbashi (Sarikoli) and others—and the way I saw Uyghurs in Ürümchi draw simultaneously on yerlik identifications and global social movements, including their reading of antiracist and decolonial theory and methods (Anwar and Byler 2021), has pushed me to think about Uyghur Native identifications as a particular expression of

indigeneity that is both inside and outside internationalist decolonial movements. As I noted in the previous chapter, identifying as "of the land" is a self-consciously political act of claiming belonging to autonomous sacred traditions rooted in the land and routed through the global Muslim community. As I have shown elsewhere (Byler 2018d), singing and listening to Uyghur music and embodying traditional knowledge in general, provided Uyghur migrants in the city a way of refusing structural violence. It gave them a feeling of rootedness in "timeless" yet changing tradition (Byler 2018d, 20). In previous chapters and in what follows I use the term *Native* or *yerlik* to describe these traditions. In using this term, rather than Indigenous, I am signaling that Uyghur identifications, while not fully commensurable to Indigenous identifications as taken up in spaces where decolonial politics are formally recognized, should be seen as proximate to those of Indigenous peoples elsewhere. I am also following many of my ethnographic subjects and Native colleagues in refusing state-centered definitions of Uyghur identity and instead engaging in a minor—understood as informal and nonnormative—internationalist decolonial politics.

One of the most dominant forms of Uyghur Native knowledge was produced through heritage trades. Uyghurs from rural locations have a long tradition of cultivating skilled craftwork through "master–apprentice" (Uy: *ustaz–shagirt*) relationships between senior craftsmen and young men. For centuries, the trades of the metalsmith, wood-carver, apothecary, barber, butcher, and baker have been cultivated in this manner. As I described in the previous chapter, these Native traditions are connected to particular places and embodied knowledge traditions that are rooted in the landscape of the Uyghur region. Over the past few decades, these forms of social reproduction not only maintained a contemporaneity in Uyghur everyday Nativeness and a sharply gendered division of labor but they also enabled families who were not able to support their children's formal education to guarantee a secure life path for their sons. After years of unwaged labor, apprentices were often given opportunities to become masters of a trade and owners of their own businesses. In the 1990s and 2000s, these businesses offered a point of entry into the broader market economy. The evaluation process that accompanied the formation of terror capitalism across the Uyghur homeland enacted a subtraction of this Native reproduction.

One exemplary staging of this process of devaluation is the Uyghur short story "Iron Will . . ." (Uy: *jeni tömür . . .*) by Eset Emet. The 2006 story centers around the life narrative of a young Uyghur man who works as an unpaid apprentice to a butcher in the Uyghur district of Ürümchi. The story is told from

the perspective of an urban Uyghur schoolteacher who encounters the young man on the street near his apartment building. The teacher sees the young man as representative of a large population of Uyghur teenagers who work in a variety of traditional Uyghur trades ranging from baking to Uyghur medicine. As the teacher develops a relationship with the young man, he comes to understand that the young man's parents had struggled to feed him and he had failed to thrive in school. In desperation his parents had sent him to the city to work as an apprentice to a butcher. In the city, the young "iron willed" man found himself in a series of abusive relationships with the master butcher who took him on as an apprentice and with gangs of other young men he was forced to rely on after he left the butcher shop. In the end, the young man was forced into a life of crime by other young men in the city.

The story turns on a particular encounter between the narrator and the young man in which the narrator attempts to give him a tip of 20 yuan ($3) for carrying half a sheep from the butcher shop to his apartment building. The young man refuses the money, which makes the narrator wonder:

> Why did this young man not take the money? Was it because his future had been destroyed by problems with money? Or did he sense a trick behind the gift? Was it that he was trying to protect his dignity?

As part of my research method, I discussed this fictive encounter and the protagonist's questions with the Uyghur migrants I interviewed. They said that the perceptions and suspicions that were staged in the short story revealed the way their social role was evaluated by others. Many apprentices saw their work as bakers, barbers, and cooks as an honorable form of labor but felt as though others in the city saw them as "backward" (Uy: *qalaq*) and prone to criminality. Because of the economic conditions in which they worked and the way their labor was devalued by Han migrants, urban elites, and state police, they were often forced to find ways to live in the informal economy as hustlers and small-scale thieves. As shown in the final chapter of this book, many low-income Uyghur migrants found a sense of belonging in mosque communities that, in turn, shaped their relationship to Islamic piety and the evaluative gaze of the techno-political systems.

When I told this story to young migrant apprentices, or asked them to read it with me during my interviews with them, they often said that the young protagonist in the story did not take the money because he wanted to be treated like an equal, not like a "no quality" (Uy: *sapasi yok*) beggar. They said the narrator could have offered him a loan, but giving him a gift was a sign of disrespect. The apprentices I spoke with said that the story gave them the impression

that apprentices who work in Native trades are illiterate and poor. It made them feel as though they should be treated as objects of pity. Reading it gave them the sense that the author thought they had no agency over their life stories. This sounded wrong to them. They said that the story sounded like it was written by someone who did not know what it was like to actually be an apprentice.

In fact, the author of the story, Eset Emet, was himself an upper-class Uyghur intellectual who had a relatively secure position in a government institution. He, like many of the other Uyghur intellectuals I interviewed, had something of a negative view of the quality of Uyghur "travelers" (Uy: *musapir*) or low-income migrants. He felt that young people like the butcher apprentice he wrote about in the story should be in school cultivating Chinese market valued qualities in the city by studying science, Chinese-language, and technical skills. He felt that it was at least in part a lack of discipline and the lack of education of their parents that had led these young men to this life path. Eset also recognized that poverty was endemic in rural Uyghur communities, but he felt that his own life history as someone who came from a rural background proved that, despite all odds, Uyghur young people could succeed in the Chinese city. What he may have failed to realize is that he came of age during a period in which Uyghurs attaining higher education was quite rare and that his role in the state multiculturalism project was largely responsible for the relative security he was able to find. The slightly paternalistic tone of his short story reflected this unacknowledged relative privilege.

Nevertheless, the attention he paid to low-income migrants was admirable when compared to the outright hostility with which some Uyghur elites regarded low-income Uyghur travelers. For instance, one Uyghur official, a member of a small wealthy elite who worked within the governance structure, told me:

> Uyghurs from the [rural] South think that things should just come to them without having to work for them. They think that they somehow deserve to be handed everything just because they're Uyghur. Also, now many of them think that the traditional roles of the past should be done away with. They don't have any respect for people in power. They think everyone's opinion should just be considered as equal. But actually we Uyghurs are different than the Americans or Turkish people they see [online] in the movies. We have a long tradition of respecting our parents and respecting those who are older and wiser. You have to earn the right to be successful.

Continuing in this openly condescending manner, the official said that the new forms of religious piety that migrants were practicing were a fundamental threat to both the Uyghur way of life and all the success he had achieved by working within the Chinese system.

He and a small number of other Uyghur officials I interviewed believed that it was their own intellect and hard work that had given them the power and security they enjoyed as Uyghur elites. They felt that the security of their lives was threatened by all the strangers who had arrived from the countryside since the early 2000s. Another Uyghur official told me:

> Among the Uyghurs in Ürümchi, only about 20 percent of us are locals [people with urban household registration].[12] The rest come from other places. Some of them work hard and are trying to make a better life for their children. When I see people doing that—driving a black [unauthorized] cab or something like that—I feel really happy. But a lot of them really don't know what to do with themselves. They have no goals and no plans. They just don't want to live in the countryside, so they come here. They don't realize it, but they are the ones who give Uyghurs the reputation of having low suzhi.

Although we had been talking in Uyghur, in the last sentence the official code-switched in an interesting way. Rather than using the Uyghur term for achieved quality, *sapa*, he used the Chinese term *suzhi*. For him, achieved quality was measured in Chinese, not in Uyghur.[13]

The young Uyghur migrants who arrived in the city and worked as apprentices in Uyghur trades had a more nuanced view of colonization. They did not believe that they were the sole cause of their own devaluation. They said they did have goals for their lives. Although they often saw their lack of Chinese training as a source of disadvantage, they did not believe that this meant they were low-quality workers or that they lacked knowledge in other domains. Several told me that they had actually chosen their life work as the best option available to them. The problem was not with their work but with the social enclosures and field of power around them. To their thinking, if the state would support their work and the knowledge they possessed in relation to their craft, the respect from broader society would follow. In order to demonstrate in more depth how these structural forces affect the life paths of young low-income Uyghur migrants, I turn now to an account of a young apprentice named Yusup.

Yusup first came to the city when he was fourteen. He said his family sent him to the city because "life was very hard, and my family couldn't afford to send me to school. My family has only eight *mu* (1.25 acres), which means we can hardly make enough to survive." Yusup said that his older brother had also been sentenced in 2008 to twelve years in prison, which was part of the reason why his parents took him out of school and sent him to the city. After his brother was convicted for killing another Uyghur young man in a knife fight, his parents felt as though a new life in a distant city would help to guarantee Yusup's future success. His parents sent him to Ürümchi to live with a baker who was originally from a nearby village. Initially, Yusup said he was excited to travel to the city; he did not like school and city life seemed exciting. But this changed very quickly.

> It was very hard work. I had to get up at three in the morning and start mixing the naan dough. Since I was just training, I only received ten yuan per month, a place to sleep, and just enough to eat. I was the only one being trained. The rest were adults. I really had nothing. After one year of this, I left. I felt like my work was not treated like a *real job*. It was a kind of slavery. I had no choice. If I didn't work, they would beat me and I would be given nothing to eat. (my emphasis)

The "real job" that Yusup wanted was a job that was valued in the wage market and gave him the time and space to cultivate his own sense of self. After he left his first apprenticeship, he found that the jobs available to him were hard to hold on to. He first tried selling bread from a tray that he held over his head in the bazaar, but this job only paid around 20 yuan per day and meant that he had to sleep in an all-night internet café. He then found a job as a dishwasher in a Uyghur restaurant. But this job only paid him 500 yuan per month and hardly covered his living expenses. Yusup said:

> Then my parents found me another bakery to work at—but that was the same as the first one. They didn't pay me. And when I demanded that I get paid, they beat me. All the other workers were bigger than me so there was nothing I could do.

Eventually, he found a job as a security guard, but once again he had a similar problem. His boss refused to pay him. His employer said that room and board was enough for someone as lowskilled and "low quality" (Uy: *sapasi töven*) as Yusup. Later, Yusup found a bit of success working as a hustler or "hard worker"

(Uy: *ishlemchi*) selling consumer goods such as belts and shoes. He said that this was the best job he had during his time in the city. "If the belts sold well you could make money quickly. Once I made over 200 in one day. I sold all kinds of stuff in those years. There was nothing I wouldn't try." But his success was often short-lived. On numerous occasions, he was cheated out of profits by suppliers or he simply ran out of products to sell.

Yusup's contingent labor was not enough. He felt as though everyone still saw him as an uneducated baker's apprentice who had no real skills in the contemporary city. His position in life was a product of his family's circumstances. He said:

> My brother quit school when he was in the third or fourth grade too. He really can't read Uyghur well. My parents are the same. They didn't have a chance to go to school either. It's not that they don't like school, it just wasn't possible. They needed to work in order to eat. In the countryside things are boring. There is no future. I want a good job, a wife, and children. It would be hard to find those things in the countryside.

At the same time though, Yusup said: "You are invisible here." He felt as though only other apprentices and "hard workers" (Uy: *ishlemchiler*) saw him as a person who had any value. The lack of opportunity in his home village, what he referred to as "boredom" combined with extreme poverty and the extreme intensity of rural policing, made returning to rural life seem like an impossibility.

One afternoon he met a relative whose father owned a hotel in the city and had previously given him a job as a security guard. We went together in the relative's car to a park to eat kebabs. In this context Yusup seemed to be in his element. He was placed in charge of preparing the meat. The others in the group seemed to really respect his knowledge when it came to preparing food. But after we ate, he lapsed back into what was perceived as "backward" (Uy: *qalaq*) behavior by his relatives. He asked his cousin to let him see his new iPhone. He spent forty-five minutes looking at pictures and videos stored on the phone, something that was not possible on his own cheap Huawei phone. Eventually, the cousin asked for the phone back and said he was bored. It seemed as though the only reason he had invited Yusup to the picnic was so that he could cook for him and his guests.

In many encounters with more affluent Uyghurs and Han migrants, Yusup was unacknowledged or treated as a secondary consideration. Others, even if they were younger than he was, constantly overshadowed him. Often they treated him as though he was not there. When this happened he became more despondent and withdrawn, behavior that had the effect of further amplifying

his lack of belonging, his illiteracy, and his lack of quality. More affluent Uyghurs told me that they thought Yusup might be "crazy" (Uy: *sarang*), because he was always hanging around when other people were talking, listening in on their conversations.

Yusup was aware of this rejection. He knew that others thought that he had "no quality" (Uy: *sapasi yoq*), but he did not know how to escape this perception. He felt as though the narrative of his life was stuck. He said that in the city everyone seemed to "evaluate" (Uy: *baha berme yoq*) each other based on their style, on the things they owned or posted on WeChat, not on the knowledge they possessed when it came to baking bread or butchering a sheep. This perception was part of what contributed to the cycle of poverty that often further alienated apprentices. When I told him the story of "Iron Will . . . ," he said immediately that the real issue at stake between the two main characters was that the author did not understand the true value of Native traditions. Yusup said:

> The story is wrong about the work the boy is doing. The boy does not hate his work itself, he hates his poverty and the disdain he feels from rich Uyghurs and police and the pity he feels from teachers. He just wants to be valued for the knowledge he has of his trade.

In his own life though, the only way Yusup saw to climb out of the low-quality position he found himself in was to attempt to achieve a marketable persona. Although he wished that his work in heritage trades was valued, he was forced instead to find a low-wage job in the service sector. In order to project contemporary quality, Yusup and many other apprentices spent a high percentage of their income on clothes and smartphones. Yusup said:

> I spend between 200 and 300 yuan per month on clothes. Since I am a man, I don't wash them myself. I just buy new ones. I know it is expensive, but I don't have any choice. I have to look good. I also bought my Android [phone] one year ago for 500 yuan. It is important because I can use it to watch videos if I have Wi-Fi. My parents have no idea about WeChat. They can't even write a text message. All they can do is speak.

Having traditional knowledge was not enough. To survive in the city, one had to look cosmopolitan and be able to access the knowledge economy. Not doing so was in fact often read by more affluent Uyghurs and Han migrants as a sign of not being contemporary and as potentially suspicious. Everyday Native work was devalued, while performing quality as self-fashioning consumerist subjects was seen as a way of performing a permitted Uyghur masculine contemporaneity. It also drew young migrants like Yusup into social

networks with pious Uyghurs, implicating him by association in forms of religious extremism.

Narratives like "Iron Will . . ." staged a sense of social identification and desire aggregation for the apprentices I interviewed in 2015. In a way that was similar to how recent Han migrants evaluated their suzhi in comparison to the singer Dao Lang, low-income Uyghur migrants could identify which aspects of the narrative matched their experiences and where it failed to capture the underlying structural problems that shaped their own life paths. This interpenetration of representation and experience was helpful in understanding the evaluative process that was happening to them. In correlation with the rise of terror capitalism, Uyghur migrants saw a sharp decrease in the value of their work in the city. While Native work had previously offered the existential security that came from the production of basic necessities, in the new economy and security regime their work was increasingly devalued.

One day near the end of the year I spent getting to know Yusup in 2015, we met up with another apprentice who was Yusup's closest friend, his "life and liver friend" (Uy: *jan-jiger dost*), Ibrahim.[14] Together we walked in the bazaar and ate *samsa* (baked dumplings stuffed with meat). Yusup and Ibrahim told me about how they both had made samsa in the past. They described how the ratio of fat to meat had to be just right, and how it had to be mixed with onion and cumin. They showed me how to eat a samsa when it was very hot by starting with a small bite in the corner. They took great pleasure in showing me all of this and in the food itself.

As we were talking, they both remarked on how so many "hard workers" (Uy: *ishlemchiler*) who used to be on the streets had left the city. The bazaars they used to walk in seemed empty to them now. Yusup said the "green card" passbook system, discussed in chapter 1, that had forced all Uyghurs with rural household registration to return to their hometowns was a very bad policy. He said it was obvious that the enclosure system and the People's War on Terror in general was meant to target Uyghur migrants, many of whom were hard workers like him and Ibrahim. He said:

> [The passbook system] destroys people's livelihoods and makes life here in the city much harder for everyone. One year ago, before this new policy started, there were no gates on the small streets. You could walk anywhere you wanted without worrying too much. Now, there are so many places where they check us. The [Uyghurs] who live on these small streets are good people. They work hard and are very respectful toward each other. Actually, these people are the true "Natives" [*yerlik*] to this

place. They truly have "achieved quality" [*sapa*]. I feel comfortable and as though I am really alive when I am around them.

Yusup said the enclosure system that was directed at Uyghur migrants made him more fearful than anything else. The value he possessed as a carrier of Uyghur traditions was on the brink of being erased. Since he did not have a passbook himself, he said he knew that if he was caught at a checkpoint, he could be arrested or sent back to his home village, especially if the police were able to connect him to his brother who was in prison. "My work, my family, my society, all of these things make me stressed," he said. "No one helps me in any way. It feels like everyone just takes and takes from me."

A few weeks later, Yusup told me that police contractors had caught Ibrahim at a checkpoint and forced him to go back to his home village near Kashgar. Yusup said:

> I don't know if he will be able to come back or not. It's a lot of trouble for us now. This year is definitely worse than the last. In terms of our lives, things are getting worse and worse. So now I am completely alone. Actually, I am not completely alone because you are still here. Maybe one really good friend is better than a hundred normal friends. This is my own proverb [Uy: *maqla-temsil*]. A real friend is someone who spends time with you all the time and is there when you need him to be. A real friend follows you wherever you go; they share everything with you.

Of course, when he said this, Yusup knew that I would soon return to the United States. He knew that I would no longer be able to loan him money to help him pay his rent or buy clothes. He knew that his status as a migrant without a passbook or the skill set for a high-paying job in the urban economy would catch up with him. He knew he was being rejected by the city and urban society. But like the protagonist in "Iron Will . . . ," he refused to accept charity; he would only accept loans from friends who he felt respected him. He also refused to have his "iron will" severed from his person and his authority as a Uyghur excised from his sense of self even as he tried and was blocked from moving into service sector jobs.

A few weeks after Ibrahim was forced to leave, Yusup told me he had lost his current job as a waiter in a Uyghur restaurant. He said his boss said he could no longer risk hiring workers without passbooks. "I haven't told my family back in my village. I can only tell my friends. My life is so difficult," he said with a sigh.

> Very few Uyghurs are really true friends. Usually they just try to act as though they are real friends, but as soon as you have nothing to offer or you

need something from them then they will just turn their back on you. They make me beg them for money. They never seem to genuinely care about me. It is as if I am just a nuisance to them; like they are spitting on me [he spat violently on the sidewalk]. They don't treat me as if I am a real person.

For Yusup, the system of attempting to achieve cultural capital by developing marketable skills and personas seemed like a cruel joke. He felt as though urbanites mocked traditional craftspeople like him.

Other people who work like me, who are genuinely good people, treat me much better than them. They are like my true family. It is strange. We come from completely different places but they are much closer to me than my own family.

Yusup said that, despite these friendships, he felt as though the walls were closing in on him. In order to escape being caught without a passbook and the possibility of being detained, he felt as though he had to return to his village. This prospect filled him with a great deal of dread because he felt that he would no longer have the security of the social role he felt as a yerlik worker in the urban food industry.

If I was back in my village, I would just be a "loafer" [Uy: *bikarchi*]. I wouldn't have to worry about food or shelter or any of those basic things. But I also wouldn't have work or freedom to think. Everything would be about my family and the political education there. I might even be sent behind the "black gate" [a euphemism for the nascent reeducation camp system]. Here, I had freedom to think and work. I always had enough to eat. I had enough money to buy new clothes. I had a good life in the city. I used to feel as though I had a future. If I go back to my village, I will never feel this way.

Increasingly, Yusup felt the future of his life story slipping away. He began to speak of the present in the past tense—in the language of narrative endings and giving up. The daily routines of work began to fade; the possibilities of Uyghur social reproduction itself seemed to reach an impasse. Yusup and many others had come to the city hoping to find a space for social autonomy that was missing in the tightly policed countryside. Now, that too seemed foreclosed. It was as if traditional work, and the broader social reproduction associated with it, was being suspended. In the short story "Iron Will . . . ," the apprentice eventually leaves his job at the butcher shop and enters a life of crime as a pickpocket. Because of the passbook system, Yusup did not even

have this option. He felt himself being forced to leave his trade because the digital enclosure system was now deeming him out of place. All the unpaid labor as an apprentice, the loneliness of a teenager far away from home, meant nothing in the eyes of the state and urban society. He was being told that the village was his place and, if he did not accept this, that the prison system was his only other option.

Several weeks later, Yusup returned to his village. Unlike some other migrants, he was not arrested upon his return, though he was interrogated by the village police. The police did not give him a passbook, so he was no longer permitted to leave his home county. But he did find temporary work on a construction site in the county seat a dozen kilometers from his home. Yusup said he hoped to find work in the bazaar, but no one was willing to pay him and he did not have enough money to start his own bakery or samsa place.

In April 2017, I lost contact with Yusup. His WeChat account was deleted. Over the next few months, more than a million Uyghurs were sent to political reeducation camps throughout the Uyghur homeland.[15] It is likely that Yusup was also sent into this system. He was a young underemployed adult male who had many migrant friends on WeChat who were involved in online pious Islamic practice; this alone was likely enough to warrant his detention.

Conclusion

The drastic enclosure and subtraction of traditional craftwork among low-income yerlik apprentices in Ürümchi in 2015 demonstrate a process of devaluation associated with Nativeness in contemporary Chinese Central Asia. Increasingly, Uyghurs were directed away from yerlik work—which was seen as backward or low quality—toward the production and consumption of what were referred to as "normal" (Ch: *zhengchang*) Chinese products. Not only was Uyghur work being deemphasized, but the importation of halal products from Turkey, Malaysia, and other Muslim-majority nations was sharply curtailed. Both yerlik or Native products and halal international products became viewed as a potential marker of Uyghur ethnic pride or Islamic piety. Both of these markers were described in official discourse as "ethnic separatism" and "religious extremism" and associated with "violent terrorism." The work of young Uyghur apprentices was thus both devalued within the urban economy and, increasingly, excluded from the city.

The short story "Iron Will . . ." stages this diminishment by showing how a form of "achieved" Uyghur "quality" (Uy: *sapa*) failed to be converted into social value. Instead, the qualities that were valued in the city cohered to people

with Han ethno-racial identifications. Among Uyghurs, only qualities associated with state-directed culture work—expressed as a particular form of multiculturalism—and counterterror policing appeared to achieve a valued social status. The story demonstrates the perspective of a concerned schoolteacher who pities an apprentice but does not overtly value his work as part of the reproduction of Native lifeways. This failure to see the apprentice's work as the work of reproducing Uyghur everyday life, rather than the work of the poor and uneducated, was the main form of rejection that Yusup and other apprentices offered in response to the story. In rejecting this element of the story, they were also rejecting the role of the author and narrator as their benefactor. Instead, they wanted to claim authorship of their own life stories and the qualities they possessed as migrants. As this chapter has demonstrated, their stories appeared to be limited by their disappearance into the reeducation camp system and restrictions on movement imposed by the more general digital and material enclosure. Their story, like their work as yerlik craftsmen, became the target of subtraction from social life.

At the same time, Han migrants saw their perceived qualities welcomed and amplified. Han workers involved in the cultural production of regional food cuisine or Han markers such as "PORK" saw their businesses bolstered by the institutions of the state. Uyghur bodies provided a "low quality" (Ch: *suzhi di*) object of revulsion and disdain to which Han presentations of self were indexed as valued. As a result, the life narratives of Han migrants seemed to open new chapters when they arrived in the city. At the same time, the way their flourishing was indexed to Uyghur dispossession was rarely recognized. Instead, Han migrants often saw their own hard work and their own investments in themselves as the cause of their success. If they did think about the diminishment of Uyghur social life, it was often seen as deserving of diminishment because Uyghurs were backward or dangerous. Uyghurs were often seen as not having achieved the quality necessary for life in the city. As a result, the enclosing of their social reproduction and economic production in the city was justified and the opening of a Han-centric process of capital accumulation was accelerated.

The definition of suzhi as "achieved" quality conveys the meritocratic illusion of a cultural good being equally available to any person. In fact, cultural quality is always linked to other less mutable categories such as class, gender, sex, ability, and, of course, race or ethnicity. Achieved quality, when it is naturalized as a universal standard of value, masks the way mechanisms of governance, historical legacies, and transnational modes of evaluation shape cultural values. Suzhi is not just a product but also a major force of economic growth and hard work. Not only does it produce and organize desire in particular ways; it

also creates surplus value. This value is often expressed as confidence, distinction, and the production of further desire in the individual. It also reproduces hierarchies of power in ways that are unacknowledged. Often this value added to a life is not the result of personal striving. Sometimes improved social status comes to people simply because of the presentation of their body and the way that body is recognized by state and private institutions. Those impelled by an achieved quality economy to work hard may never be able to achieve what comes easily to a differently positioned person. Suzhi is mediated by linguistic regimes, popular culture, educational policy, national security, and interpersonal distinction to name only a few of its catalysts. It also mediates development plans for the frontier Chinese city and the life projects that compose it.

A Han language instructor told me his "Chinese dream" for his life in Ürümchi was made up of all the stereotypical things he, and Chinese society in general, "lacked": submissive wives, dutiful children, luxury cars, and giant houses. He said his desire was to have "a Japanese wife, Korean children, a German car, and an American house." His desires, it seemed, took consistency through their aggregation throughout a transnational social field. As I spoke further with this Xinjiang University instructor, he said that "everyone knew" that Germans and Americans had the highest quality cars and houses. He had seen this form of conspicuous consumption in movies, he said. The achieved quality of Japanese wives and Korean children was likewise something he had seen through permitted Chinese mass media. He acknowledged that this kind of thinking was simplistic and perpetuated certain stereotypes, but he said that he really did think that these imagined ideals worked as standards that many Han migrants hoped to achieve. For him, suzhi had as much to do with intersubjective competition for economic achievement and survival as it did with personal and familial social reproduction. Because the achieved aspect of the suzhi discourse of quality often masks the class or ethno-racial position of the self, it can also be used to solidify historical legacies and validate forms of social violence.